

# 2021 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



Stitching the Divide ...

# Piece by Piece, We Worked to Close the Gaps

In 2020, the adult foundational learning sector pivoted to respond to the emergent and urgent needs of the adults learning in their programs. This included the complexity and implications of remote/online program delivery.

This past year we had a little more time to reflect on the Covid-related inequities that widened the gaps for adults who tried to stay in learning. It has sometimes felt like the very fabric of our world is coming apart. In our field, we shifted from a patchwork of rapid responses to a more intentional stitching together across the gaps through collaboration, networking, sharing resources and knowledge, and finding ways to address individual, organizational and systemic inequities. Like creating a quilt together, we identified and we gathered those pieces of long-standing and emerging wise practices, and we stitched them together to strengthen pathways for adults who are returning to learning. A quilt reflects our shared vision for creating a place of belonging, of comfort, of warmth, and even of beauty in the face of the difficulties.

Important threads in stitching the adult foundational learning sector together were the amazing practitioners pulled out all the stops to find learners who are isolated. They went to great lengths to seek out and support learners for whom online learning was not possible or overwhelming. They adapted programs, provided training in the technology needed for remote/online learning, and followed up with learners in new ways to problem solve and ensure they felt connected. Organizations have had to navigate how to invite and engage learners into their programs with ever evolving protocols. The result was that the goals and intentions of adult learners who sought support and belonging were honoured, and groups were kept safe. This speaks to the dignity and respect that Calgary's foundational learning community holds for adult learners.

The work of Calgary Learns can be likened to the backing of a well-made quilt. A sturdy backing holds a quilt together; for us, the strength of this backing reflects best practices, current research, and the value of shared knowledge from the front line. Through grant supports, advocacy, coaching and professional development, we worked alongside organizations in the community. Our advocacy work was particularly focused on addressing the ways the divides encountered by learners widened in 2021, especially the digital divide.

So much can be accomplished when we share our collective wisdom and experiences. In this spirit, we are so pleased to present our Report To the Community to you.



Nancy Purdy, Executive Director



Barbara Burggraf, Board President

“ Our work, our belief in the value of our work, becomes our beautiful quilt; many colours, many textures, representing innovations, resilience, connections, inclusion and diversity, shared leadership, accountability and collaboration. ”

# Calgary Learns Highlights

Calgary Learns engages the adult foundational learning community in two distinct and complementary ways: first, as the steward of CALP grants for Calgary, we provide grants to programs; second through the offering of relevant professional development, which supports strong program delivery.

From January to December 2021, the work of Calgary Learns was seen in the scope and focus of grants awarded, as well as the professional development, mentoring and coaching, and special projects which responded to the needs of the sector.

“ I’ve realized that I am capable of far more than I expected.”  
- Adult Learner

Connecting the learning  
community:  
21 newsletters

5 funding calls  
\$1,486,673 in grants to  
27 programs and  
5 initiatives\*

\*2020-2021 funding cycle

“ Having had negative experiences with the education system when he was young, the learner now talks about his literacy journey with pride: You know, before this class, I never read a book in my life!. The learner has now read three novellas... and one biography.” - Practitioner

Projects:

- Digital Divide / IT
- Literacy & Poverty
- Stepping Into Community Handbook

49 Professional  
Development Workshops  
with 500+ attendees

“ I like this kind of ongoing, discussion opportunity. It encourages deeper thinking and reflection, not focused directly on delivery but on the reasons behind why we do things and how we do things. I appreciate this opportunity very much!”  
- Practitioner

# Calgary Learns' Impact

In this second year of remote/blended delivery, we saw programs build on the wisdom gleaned from the tough “trial by fire” experiences of the previous year. Calgary Learns’ funded programs came alongside adult learners by problem solving computer and wifi access, incorporating digital skills into the learning, and going above and beyond to follow up with individual learners outside of class time. This served to build the supportive relationships needed for these adults to be encouraged and stay engaged in their learning.

In the Calgary Learns 2020-2021 funding year, **\$1,486,673** in grants were provided to support:

- **27 programs and 5 initiatives**
- **13,240 hours of instruction and tutoring**
- **1,610 adults to engage in foundational learning programs**

These programs will have a lasting impact long after the final day of classes. Offering quality learning opportunities during the pandemic ensured ever-widening divides do not isolate adult foundational learners further. Indeed, learners this year reported that they gained the skills and confidence to participate more fully in their lives.

Our Outcome Measurements and Evaluation (OME’s) tell the story:

## **92% of learners reported using skills learned during the program outside of class**

“ Learning to read has been life changing for me. I can do things like read labels, road signs, and directions. I have more confidence. I want to read more books. My instructor and I work as a team. I feel it’s about two human beings working together. As a black man, I love this program. I feel I didn’t fit into the education system when I was a kid. We are reading a book together about Nelson Mandela!” - Adult Learner

## **96% of learners increased their confidence by participating in the program, as reported by learners and/or practitioners**

“ When I first made the decision [to begin this adult learning program], I had all sorts of misgivings and fears - there was so much energy around past mistakes front of mind. But I am working towards bigger goals for the first time in my life and that feels extraordinary.” - Adult Learner

## **94% of learners reported on meeting or making progress towards their learning goal(s)**

“I learned that once I overcame the fear I actually wanted to know more. It’s like a lightbulb goes on now... that I am practising more and referring more to the printouts that we were handed in class.” - Adult Learner

## **97% of learners reported that their learning was in a safe and welcoming space.**

“I have support from so many people who obviously care about me. They have made me believe I can be part of a classroom when before I felt incapable of learning.” - Adult Learner

# Professional Development

At Calgary Learns we work to foster and support a community of opportunity. We know that adults who are marginalized are not left behind because of lack of potential but rather because of lack of opportunity.

Calgary Learns works hard to support CALP grant practitioners and hold adult learners at the centre by offering professional development (PD) covering traditional, as well as emergent, themes. PD has been delivered through webinars, workshops, community conversations, and hosted presentations. With several of our offerings we chose to go deep, not wide, learning together through a series of curated sessions around a single topic. We have learned with and from each other, pulling in local, regional, provincial and national knowledge holders.

Working online for a second year created the opportunity for practitioners from across the Province to easily access professional development opportunities.

What practitioners said was the most valuable:

“ Sharing tools, practices, approaches and resources.”

“ Learning more about other programs to build pathways and close service gaps for adults looking to strengthen their life/work/learning skills.”

“ The opportunity to come together as a diverse provider community to talk about challenges and opportunities for learners/clients.”

“ To share information about the impact of the pandemic on our organizations, program delivery and the adults who access services.”

# Digital Divide

“..COVID-19 is an efficient illuminator of our society’s strengths and weaknesses; its progress accelerates in spaces of inequality and injustice.”

- Dr. Suzanne Smythe, Calgary Learns 2021 AGM keynote speaker

To respond to the challenges of the digital divide, Calgary Learns brought together a small group of adult foundational learning practitioners in the Pivot to Remote Learning Community of Practice. Over the course of a year, ending in June, 2021, insights were gleaned about delivering programs when in-person was not an option. The full report can be found on our website [www.calgarylearns.com](http://www.calgarylearns.com)

Because of this work, the Province identified a need to engage practitioners in the field to determine the impact of the digital divide on Alberta’s Community Adult Learning Program (CALP) adult foundation learning community. They approached Calgary Learns to conduct the Digital Divide Project, a research in practice study. The goal of this project is to capture and share best practices for remote delivery learned throughout this forced shift. The recommendations, gathered through consultation with CALP practitioners, are intended to inform Advanced Education on the policies and decision-making needed to begin to address the digital divide. A practical resource that reflects the collective best practices in the field will be shared in the spring of 2022.

The top barriers identified for learners across the Province were consistent.

## **Barriers facing adult foundational learners in accessing online, remote, and blended learning:**

1. Lack of access to affordable, reliable, broadband internet services
2. Lack reliable access to a digital device suitable for learning
3. Lack of digital skills and confidence to engage in online, remote, or blended learning

“ I’ve had people sitting in their cars that were running on empty in the dead of winter outside establishments that offer free wifi to connect with me.”

While these barriers may seem straightforward to address, our research shows they are complex and interconnected. The key concepts involved are:

1. Digital inclusion, digital literacy, and accessibility
2. Social and economic conditions, and the impact of the pandemic on learners and practitioners
3. Professional development and the increased time demands of online learning
4. Emergency learning, post-pandemic learning, and reimagining CALP programs

“ It just plain costs more to offer training in order to meet the needs of online learners. It takes more time to prepare the materials, more time to support the learners, and more time for instructors to be trained, as well as teach the material.”

## Digital Divide (continued)

Going forward, it will be important to develop strategies and solutions that attend to these key concepts. Doing so will reduce the digital divide, advance digital inclusion, and increase access to high-quality online, remote, and blended learning opportunities for all members of the CALP community.

### Calgary Learns' Immediate Response

With the Digital Divide project focusing on a forward-looking strategic response to the new reality, there remained immediate challenges for online program delivery. In addition to the existing obstacles faced by adult foundational learners, a new barrier to learning emerged. Adults who did not have access to a computer were prevented from participating in programs that supported their learning goals. While many did their best with phones, their learning experience was not at all ideal. Given this reality, Calgary Learns approached the Province for permission to use some of our granting dollars for a special IT Call for Applications. This call enabled our funded programs to purchase devices to loan to participants.

Eight of the Calgary Learns funded programs applied for this grant and 66 computers were purchased (including mouse and laptop cases). We are grateful to Advanced Education for their quick approval of this special grant which falls outside of our normal granting parameters.

“ I grew up in a house that didn't have much technology at all. ... We lived below the poverty level and I always liked the opportunities to use the computers when I was at school when I was young. When I learned about the Never Too Late program in my adult years, I wasn't very optimistic about my chances to be accepted in because my wife and I don't have a computer at home ... I wouldn't be able to participate if [the coordinator] hadn't told me that there was a laptop lending library for me to access. She even helped us all on the first night of class to navigate how to use our laptops and zoom.

It has all felt very supportive. I'm really anxious, so I haven't turned my camera on yet, but everyone is so helpful and nice to me when I ask questions from behind my dark screen. I'm just really grateful. And I promise I'll give it back.”

- Adult Learner

# Literacy and Poverty Project

From Statistics Canada:

- Literacy skill level and household income are positively related.
- In an information-based economy, people who struggle with literacy have a hard time getting a job or making more than a minimum wage. Likewise, higher literacy and numeracy skills are associated with greater employment levels and higher earnings.
- As many as 4.3 million people are living with poverty. Though evidence suggests that raising literacy rates is one of the best ways to change this, literacy often plays a limited role in coordinated strategies to eliminate poverty.

- *Frontier College. (2017). Poverty reduction through improved literacy [position paper]*

With concern about the reality that literacy and poverty are so connected, Calgary Learns initiated and coordinated our Literacy and Poverty project from 2019-2021. We invited leaders from the poverty reduction sector and adult foundational learner-serving organizations to, as a group, attend to the relationships between the adult literacy and the poverty reduction. Our aim was to increase collective knowledge about the work of both systems, surfacing new possibilities to support and engage with each other to address poverty, and creating new pathways and opportunities.

Literacy and poverty are complex issues. Both the adult literacy/ foundational sector and the poverty reduction sector work with adults who have complex and varied needs. Both sectors understand the importance of a comprehensive response in support of Calgarians with low literacy who face structural and systemic barriers to accessing services, challenges with employment and employability, housing insecurity, food insecurity, intergenerational trauma, mental or physical health challenges, and an overall lack of resources. To address this challenge effectively, we must create pathways for the sectors to collaborate.

Strategic partnerships and alignment have the potential to create lasting changes in both the adult literacy/foundational learning and poverty reduction sectors. In order to support the building and strengthening of strong intersectoral community connections, the handbook [Stepping Into Community](#). This practical resource supports practitioners and has been shared throughout the provincial CALP community and in Calgary's poverty sector.

The project wrapped up mid-year, and Calgary Learns continues our intentional work in this space through the following ways:

1. Our grants support foundational learning opportunities for adults with financial barriers.
2. Importantly, we are also committed to continuing to champion Calgary's Poverty Reduction Strategy, [Enough for All 2.0](#). This strategy recognizes adult literacy and foundational learning as one of the 10 key Levers of Change to reduce poverty.
3. We began recruitment for our next project, Equity for All, which is a literacy audit for poverty-serving organizations. It is funded by The Downtown Rotary Club and will be delivered in 2022.

We know with certainty that offering marginalized Calgarians ways to build their strength in literacy will lead to opportunities they can embrace with confidence.

“Poverty is entrenched through poverty of opportunity.

For literacy to be a tool in the fight against poverty, it needs to make opportunities available to those who need them most.”

- *Frontier College. (2017). Poverty reduction through improved literacy [position paper]*

# 2020 - 2021 Funded Programs / Organizational Members

## ADULT LITERACY

- Calgary John Howard Society – Literacy and Learning Program (LLP)
- CanLearn Society for Persons with Learning Difficulties – Learning Unlocked
- Catholic Family Service – Never Too Late (GED)
- Further Education Society of Alberta – Reading and Writing Circles

## NUMERACY

- Further Education Society of Alberta – First Steps to Financial Literacy

## BASIC DIGITAL SKILLS

- Calgary John Howard Society – Basic Digital Literacy Skills
- Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society – Computer Training for Community Engagement
- Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society – Computer Training for Integration for Refugees
- The Immigrant Education Society – Computer Access for Literacy Learners

## SKILLS FOR LEARNING

- Calgary John Howard Society – Treatment, Knowledge, Opportunity (TKO)
- carya – Foundational Life Skills Program

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING (ELL)

- Calgary Chinese Community Service Association – Stepping Stones
- Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association – Pebbles in the Sand
- The Immigrant Education Society – Reading Room

## COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

- Calgary John Howard Society – Learning Enhanced Employment Program
- Families Matter Society – Family Life Education
- Further Education Society of Alberta – New Beginnings: Parenting After Violence
- Inside Out Theatre – Community Drama Program
- The Alex – Pre-Employment Program
- Deaf and Hear Alberta – Bursary Program

## INDIGENOUS SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

- Aboriginal Futures Career and Training Centre – Indigenous Workplace Wellness Circle
- Closer to Home – Knowledge to Move Our Lives Forward
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary – SAGE
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary – Blackfoot Language and Literacy Program
- Miskanawah – Cree Language Program

## INITIATIVE PROJECTS

- Canadian Zalmi Society – Community Computer Literacy Program
- CanLearn Society for Persons with Learning Difficulties – Biliteracy Project
- Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association – Everyday English for Seniors
- Prospect Human Services – Increasing Digital Literacy
- The Alex – Lifeline to Literacy
- Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth – Indigenous Literacy Assessment
- CanLearn Society for Persons with Learning Difficulties – Community Access to Literacy Learning Program
- CanLearn Society for Persons with Learning Difficulties – CAN Math Initiative

For more information about our funded programs, please visit <https://www.calgarylearns.com/funding/funded-programs/>

# Financials

Statement of Financial Position December 31, 2021		
	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current Assets	2,304,162	1,881,026
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>2,304,162</b>	<b>1,881,026</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>		
Current Liabilities	2,027,031	1,629,722
Net Assets	277,131	251,304
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>2,304,162</b>	<b>1,881,026</b>
Statement of Operations for the year ended December 31, 2021		
	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Alberta Advanced Education grants	2,632,047	2,170,705
Other Income	18,183	15,268
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>2,650,230</b>	<b>2,185,973</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
CALP Grant expenditures	1,952,156	1,635,817
Other Grant expenditures	50,687	3,415
General & Administrative	621,560	532,873
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>2,624,403</b>	<b>2,172,105</b>
<b>EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES</b>	<b>25,827</b>	<b>13,868</b>
A copy of the complete 2021 audited financial statements is available through the Calgary Learns office.		

# Thank You!

To our **funders**, whose generous contributions benefit adult learners in Calgary.



To our **staff, board members and volunteers**, whose dedication is greatly appreciated.

## Staff

- Nancy Purdy
  - Executive Director
- Kristine Gaston
  - Grants Liaison
- Lisa L'Hirondelle
  - Indigenous Education Liaison
- Nicky Peeters
  - Community Relations & Operations Coordinator
- Heidi Grogan
  - Foundational Learning Specialist
- Berniece Gowan
  - Literacy Specialist
- Gabe Brown
  - Professional Development Coordinator
- Hilary Taylor
  - Bookkeeper

## Board / Individual Members

- M. Allen
- B. Burggraf
- S. Craig Courtice
- H. Groen
- K. Medhurst
- C. Sauter
- E. Tait
- H. Watts
- J. Wilkinson

## Other Volunteers

- Funding proposal review teams
- RDS IT Consulting Inc.

