



COVID-19 YOUR GIFT AT WORK

Our annual Fall Gift at Work report is a chance to update you on the impact that your support has on the individuals and families we serve.

This year, as COVID-19 disrupted the lives of all Calgarians, we needed to make some changes to how we approached our work. The support you gave was instrumental to our capacity to evolve. Thank you! Together, and despite all the uncertainty, we were and still are building strong families.

We hope you realize that what you've made possible is about so much more than the resources you've given to support our work. There is no question that your generosity has been essential this year. We are beyond grateful that you trust us with your hard-earned resources, but your support is more than that.

How you partner with us matters. Our ability to pivot, adapting to meet Calgarians' rapidly changing needs is a result of trust you've placed in us this year and years past. By choosing to strengthen families through us, connect with us, and work alongside us, you've shaped Catholic Family Service. Because of you, we are a flexible organization willing to examine and learn from our successes and, just as importantly, our shortcomings.

When it became clear in the spring that the impact on Calgarians would tax our services and systems well beyond their typical load, we set out to evaluate our response. We knew that understanding what changes we were making and how effective they were or not would allow us to adapt intelligently throughout the pandemic and in the days that follow.

This Gift at Work is different from those you've seen in the past. It shares highlights from an evaluation report produced at the end of July. COVID is not over, and we're still learning, but we're proud to share how you've helped build strong families in a pandemic.

Thank you for what you make possible!



Byron Chan, Co-CEO



Jessica Cope Williams, Co-CEO



Stability in an Unpredictable World

In any crisis, be it personal or global, when families reach out to Catholic Family Service, they need an organization that is calm and ready to support them. That means the health and well-being of our staff has an impact on our capacity to serve Calgarians. You've helped shape our understanding of this connection.

We know many of you, and why you give. We know you expect that anyone, including one of our employees, who comes to us for support, should find welcome and a reverence for their humanity. When we set out to evaluate our response to COVID-19, we made sure to look at both sides. We made sure the changes were effectively responding to Calgarians' needs. We also assessed how our response was affecting staff and whether we were providing adequate support.

The following pages include highlights from our evaluation. You can read a more in-depth summary of the results on our website, www.cfs-ab.org/why-it-matters/reports/#covid



"COVID has caused me to see the family even more strongly as a unit. It has highlighted how circumstances affecting one family member don't affect them in isolation. I have a clearer idea of my role in building up the family."

- Staff Member

You're Supporting Calgarians Through Immense Challenges

The pandemic continues to impact all of us, but we know the impact is not evenly distributed. Some Calgarians have been inconvenienced, while others have had their lives torn apart.

When families reached out to us for support, it was essential to understand how their needs were changing. We noticed that the social, emotional, and economic impacts of COVID were amplifying the existing challenges they faced. The most common needs we saw were related to basic needs, social connections, and parental resilience.

Your commitment to building strong families has supported CFS to develop programs and services that meet many of these needs. Through our teams' flexibility and innovation, we adapted most of our existing supports.

Our in-person supports became online counselling, Mindfulness Mondays, Instagram Live sessions, online family groups, and groups on social media. Through these, we responded to the need for social connection and parental resilience.

Concrete supports were more challenging. Providing access to food, medications, and other supplies is not within our core set of service offerings. We made a plan and asked you for help. Thank you for helping us establish "diaper depots" across the city so Louise Dean Centre clients could access diapers, groceries, gift cards and other essential items.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology became an essential part of pandemic life. All of our services, along with almost every other service in the city, moved online. The internet became a vital link between staff and families as we ran Catholic Family Service from more than seventy home offices.

There were incredible benefits to this online shift, but it wasn't perfect. Technology is expensive, and one of the barriers we encountered was accessing hardware and strong internet connections. Many of our clients did not have the tools to connect with services, school, family, and friends. When you supported us to provide laptops to clients, you gave them a connection. You helped break down barriers of isolation and offered them a link to the outside world that was crucial to their mental health and resilience. Thank you.

In the summer of 2019, a team at Catholic Family Service developed policies, procedures, and training for Rapid Access Counselling. Having these ready enabled us to shift entirely to video counselling in just over a day. We shared our knowledge and offered training and consultation sessions to other agencies. PolicyWise invited us to deliver two webinars, which were attended by 400 people.



You Stand With Our Team

Our people are our greatest assets. Research shows that healthy, rested, and connected employees are more effective, creative, and committed to their work. To deliver the best for families, we need to take care of our team. You have told us that our people matter and you've helped foster a workplace where employees matter.

Over the past seven months, how our workdays look has changed a lot. Many of our roles look quite different. Our priorities changed. Many of our annual patterns evaporated, leaving big questions—what do you do after you cancel a major event like the UP Gala?

When the ground you're walking on feels like it changes daily, it exacerbates fear and uncertainty. And that's just at work. Our staff were not insulated from the pandemic's impact on their homes and families. Your commitment to building strong families has always reinforced that we need to support our team's wellness. This became especially true as we worked harder to support other families in need.

We scheduled agency town halls every three weeks to maintain connection between leadership and frontline staff. We increased the frequency of meetings and supervisor check-ins, which staff said kept them informed and connected, bridging the physical distance between us. In many cases, meetings naturally adopted a short social check-in—a sort of 'digital watercooler' where staff supported each other.

Many of the questions and anxieties that surface during a pandemic don't have easy answers. We committed to being honest and transparent about organizational realities. Staff shared that while those conversations were hard, the openness helped alleviate some of their anxiety.

Thank you for valuing our team.

The most frequent staff response to our survey question about what leadership should keep doing was providing transparent, regular communication.



During the pandemic, our appointment no-show rate dropped to between 3 and 10 percent. Pre-pandemic, our no-show rate averaged 15 to 25 percent.



"My advice is to continue to make decisions based on values and strategic vision/mission. Take good care of your people (staff) as they are the heroes doing the hard work every day with clients."

- Board Member

COLLABORATION IN A CRISIS

You've enthusiastically embraced many of the projects made possible through our collaborations. The agencies we work with are an essential part of our COVID response. We're grateful for the ways we've been able to continue working together.

As a part of our ambition to become sector leaders in collaboration, we know that relationship management is crucial. During our evaluation, one observation we've discussed with partners is how the crisis amplified the similarities and differences of our relationships. We're still thinking about this and working through how that knowledge could improve our approach to collaborative relationships. Essentially, what makes a collaboration resilient to a crisis?

We Never Stop Learning

Evaluating our response during the early stages of COVID proved to be a wealth of insight and knowledge. As the pandemic continues, we're using what we've learned to inform the changes we're making, and learning still more from our evolving response.

Technology is a great example. We're excited about how we can leverage it more effectively in an ongoing role at Catholic Family Service. Updating older manual processes can reduce some administrative burdens and improve efficiencies. Integrating technology into our programs provides opportunities to connect with families in their home environments and nearly eliminate barriers caused by distance and mobility limitations. Still, we now know more about the barriers technology represents, and that any expanded use needs to address client access. We're also looking forward to bringing a better balance with more in-person connections.

The increased and prolonged pressure on our processes and systems also exposed some accountability gaps. As an example, staff identified client survey completion as a significant challenge. It's easy to see how the intensity of a crisis can make a survey feel like a low priority. However, those surveys help us measure impact and demonstrate sector-leading outcomes. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we are finding new and creative ways to facilitate survey completion with clients. Implementation of these strategies will remain a priority moving forward.

We know that not every organization is free to share so openly about their successes AND the areas they want to improve. This is just one more way you support us to be better in all that we do. Thank you for celebrating with us the things we do well (and there is a lot to celebrate!), and thank you for giving us space to talk about the things we want to do better.

Reflection and learning are core to stewarding your gifts responsibly and to building strong families. Thank you for supporting us.

For a more detailed summary of our COVID-19 Response Evaluation, please visit www.cfs-ab.org/why-it-matters/reports/#covid



250, 707 10 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0B3
Tel: 403.233.2360
Email: info@cfs-ab.org
www.cfs-ab.org | [@CFS_Calgary](https://twitter.com/CFS_Calgary)



The Unlocking Potential (UP) Foundation is the fundraising arm of Catholic Family Service of Calgary. UP ensures the sustainability of innovative programs that build strong families and have a positive impact on future generations.