

# Community Links

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# COMMUNITY LINKS OVERVIEW

2016/2017



CommunityLinks

*Strong Individuals Strong Families Strong Communities*

*Strong Individuals*

*Strong Families*

*Strong Communities*

**Our Mission...**

**Community Links strengthens individuals, families, and communities of North Rocky View by providing them with and connecting them to services, supports and resources.**



Collaboration Diversity Integrity Quality Respect Inclusivity



## Partnerships and Collaborations

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- Airdrie and District Victim Assistance Society
- Airdrie and District Youth Justice Committee
- Airdrie Chamber of Commerce
- Airdrie Christmas Hamper Program
- Airdrie Food Bank
- Airdrie Fest Community Planning Committee
- Airdrie Housing Ltd.
- Airdrie Lioness Club
- Airdrie Over 50 Club
- Airdrie Public Library
- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta's Promise
- Beiseker Community School
- Beiseker Fire Department
- Beiseker Golden Years Town and Country Club
- Beiseker Preschool
- Bert Church High School
- Bethany Care Centre
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Bow Valley College
- Boys and Girls Club of Airdrie
- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society – Diversity Services
- Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse (CCASA)
- Calgary Housing Ltd.

- Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter
- Canada Revenue Agency
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart
- City of Airdrie
- Community Spirit
- Correctional Services
- CREB Charitable Foundation
- Crossfield Lions Club
- Crossfield Lodge
- Crossfield United Church
- Diamond Jubilee Manor
- Distress Centre
- Dr. Whillan's Manor
- Eastside Family Counselling Center
- Fletcher Village
- Go Girl and Extreme FX Planning Committees
- Golden Key Club
- Good Shepherd Elementary & Junior High School
- Grace Baptist Church
- Healthy Families (Children's Cottage Society)
- HomeFront
- Irricana Youth Centre (CRIB)
- Kathryn Community School
- Kids Up Front
- KIK Seniors
- Luxstone Manor
- Masterpiece Cedarwood Station
- National Family Week Steering Committee
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch

- PEACE Committee
- RCMP – Airdrie and Beiseker
- Rocky View Schools
- Rocky View Schools Community Learning
- Rotary Club of Airdrie
- Rural Addiction and Mental Health Services
- Salvation Army Camp
- Sheriff King
- St. Francis of Assisi Anglican Church
- Stepping Stones to Mental Health
- Supplies for Success
- Town of Crossfield
- Town of Irricana
- University of Calgary – Faculty of Nursing
- University of Calgary – Faculty of Social Work
- United Way – Ambassador of the Way
- Village of Beiseker
- Volunteer Airdrie
- Volunteer Alberta
- Volunteer Manager’s Group
- Welcome Wagon
- Welcoming Airdrie Committee
- WG Murdoch School
- Wheatland Shelter
- Winning Edge Awards Planning Committee
- Youth Friendly Airdrie
- 55+ Interagency Group

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## Board Members

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**Chris Harper, Chair and Treasurer**

I returned to the Community Links Board to continue to give back to the community. I have enjoyed the hard work and dedication shown by the staff and have seen the organization grow over the years as the needs of stakeholders have evolved. In good times and challenging times, organizations like Community Links are vital to ensure communities remain strong and vibrant.



**Maria Eligon, Vice Chair**

I joined the Board of Community Links in 2012 to give back to the Community. In all areas of my career experience, I have developed a versatile, transferrable skill set with carefully nurtured business values.



**Diane Hill, Secretary**

I want to support the work that is being done within the Community Links for residents of all ages, which is why I became a Board member in 2012. I bring an ability to balance and understand the needs of staff, children and families with the realities of budgets and program expectations.



**Rob Anderson, Director**

During my time as MLA for Airdrie, I came to rely on Community Links to assist me with dozens of vulnerable constituents. This is a great organization and I hope my background in law and politics can assist Community Links to continue their critical work in our community.



**Ashley Jellema, Director**

I joined the Community Links Board, in order to take the opportunity to use my experience to give back to our community. I come from an extensive background in the not for profit sector starting out as an in home family therapist and then leading into leadership. My international background includes the delivery development and implementation of evidence based models of therapy for positive outcomes working with children, youth, families and women.



**Greg Waglund, Director**

I joined the Board in 2016, as I have been inspired by the work of Community Links and the important function it serves in this community. I am pleased to be joining the Board of Directors and look forward to working with the staff and volunteers to help build a strong support for this great organization.



**Dirk Bannister, Director**

I joined the Community Links Board this year to support the Programs and Services provided by Community Links. My strong background in Service Clubs and FCSS programming will help me to help Community Links make Airdrie a great place to live.

## Chris Harper, Chairperson

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It was another busy year for the agency especially with Community Links starting its long awaited movement to Journey to One location at the Town Centre in Airdrie. Preparation to have all programs and services, staff and volunteers in one space will take place over the next year. Our focus will continue to be providing high quality programming which will in turn strengthen the community.

Our journey began on August 21, 2007 when Airdrie Family Services Society (began in 1982) and the North Rocky View Community Resource Centre (began in 2001) entered into a letter of intent to forge a collective strategy to unite and define the mutual obligation of one agency – Community Links. This positive, strategic and high-impact decision demonstrated a proactive attitude towards the rapidly growing communities we serve.

With an employee base of fifty-four strong individuals, over two-hundred volunteers, geography of strong communities and a history of strong results, Community Links continues to make a difference for residents of North Rocky View Region for 35 years.

We are very thankful for the continued support from communities, partners, funders, donors, and volunteers. The success of Community Links is attributed to the commitment and dedication of everyone and it is truly appreciated.

Chris Harper

Board Chair

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## Brenda Hume, Executive Director

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Our 2016 - 2017 Annual Report highlights statistics, testimonials and stories which are a testament of our continuing work towards our Vision of *Strong Individuals Strong Families Strong Communities.*

We are forever grateful for the continued support from our dedicated Board, staff and volunteers. Their commitment, time, expertise and sense of caring in supporting the communities of Airdrie, Beiseker, Irricana, Crossfield and surrounding North Rocky View County is commendable.

We are also sincerely appreciative of the amazing support we have received from our funders, investors, partners and community members.

Some of the facts that we are proud to report for April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017 are:

- Supported 11,767 individuals (18% children 0 – 6, 17% children/youth 7 - 18, 55% adults and 10% seniors) through various programs and services. (Over an eight year period we have worked with an average of 11,000 individuals annually);
- Worked with 7900 families;
- Connected residents over 14,743 times with various additional supports;
- Provided 27,431 referrals to individuals for additional support which is an increase of 40% over last year of 19,561 referrals;
- Community Links is a resource and support for 16% of Airdrie's growing population. This statistic aligns with previous year's average of the agency serving between 17 – 22% of Airdrie's population.

- According to our surveys, our programming has contributed to positively impacting residents by increasing self-esteem and confidence, coping and problem-solving skills, decreasing social isolation, increasing hope, social inclusion, personal knowledge and skills such as parenting as well as increasing the public awareness of other resources and issues that affect our community.
- 265 volunteers provided 8,287.75 hours of support to the agency;
- 38% of staff have been with the agency over 5 years, this speaks to the dedication that staff have towards the agency.

The continued challenges impacting the agency include:

- Raising awareness with current and potential funders and investors of the necessity of secure alternate funding to meet current and emergent needs of programming, increased operating costs and the need to meet competitive wage scales for staff retention.
- Increased fundraising efforts prove to be challenging when balancing already heavy workloads among staff and Board.
- Our agency would benefit from multi-year funding to increase and strengthen staff retention through COLA increases to create long term stability, reduce staff turnover, sustainability and longevity of well qualified staff to meet the community's needs in an optimal manner.

Although there are a number of challenges, we continue to be proud to serve North Rocky View communities and we are pleased to help make a positive difference for residents of all ages.

We look forward to continuing to provide a variety of excellent programs and services!

Brenda Hume

Executive Director

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Community Links is financially stable and sustainable and receives financial support through diverse sources including corporations, government, individuals and fund raising activities.

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Community Links financial sustainability is largely due to the generous support from funders, supporters, investors and in-kind donations from the community. Fundraising continues to be an integral part of our daily life due to rising operating costs. The following provides an overview of the efforts and supports we have been part of over the last year.

### **Agency Events**

Community Links hosted our two signature events again in 2016 and both were extremely successful. We continue to be thankful to the support of the local community who makes these events a success year after year.

- **Roll to the Hole – August 2016**  
Sponsored by: McKee Homes and The Cooperators (Rockyview Insurance Services)
- **Wine Down – November 2016**  
Sponsored by: Fortis Alberta

### **Third Party Events**

We are very fortunate to benefit from a number of events hosted by local businesses or groups that select Community Links to receive the proceeds from these events. Thanks to these amazing events, we were able to receive \$114,409.57 to support the programs and services provided by Community Links.

- Atlas Chiropractic Grand Opening – May 2016
- Scotiabank Run – May 2016
- Beiseker Show 'n Shine – June 2016
- Airdrie Oilmen's Association Bikes 'n Bulls – August 2016
- Rotary Golf Tournament – Sept 2016
- Zone Francophone Airdrie – November 2016
- Shopper's Drug Mart "Growing Women's Health" Campaign – Fall 2016
- St. Martin de Porres Human Foosball Tournament – March 2017

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### ***Saying Thank You***

We appreciate everyone who supports our agency and to show our thanks we host annual events to recognize our donors. In February 2017, we hosted an appreciation event in Beiseker to recognize those individuals and businesses who support our agency in the Beiseker Area. The event provided us with an opportunity to say "Thank you" as well as to share the successes we've experienced over the past year.

The annual Donor Appreciation Event that is usually held in the Spring, will be postponed in 2017 to the Fall. This will allow us to celebrate the opening of our new space, as well as to celebrate our 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We look forward to a great event, which will also be combined with our Volunteer Appreciation for this year.

Thank You

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## **Community Development – Outreach and Support**

### ***Highlights***

#### **Airdrie Participant Support Program (APSP)**

In July 2016, Community Links accepted a contract to provide assessment services for the City of Airdrie's Participant Support Program. The APSP is a single application process for low-income City of Airdrie and Rocky View County residents applying for subsidized City of Airdrie programming. Residents who qualify for this program receive 50 percent off the purchase of a Genesis Place pass or registered programs, 50 percent off with Airdrie Transit, as well as a free Airdrie Library membership. As a result of this new partnership with Community Links, anyone who applies for the program now has the opportunity to meet with an Intake Worker who can assess their situation and refer them to other programs and supports. Of the 201 people who applied for APSP between July 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017, Community Links staff referred them to 423 additional supports.

#### **Community Volunteer Income Tax Program**

Community Links continues to be a partner with the Canada Revenue Agency to facilitate the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. For the 2016 Income Tax season, the program was supported by the Intake Services team at Community Links. This allowed anyone accessing the program to meet with an Intake Worker who could assess whether there were other programs and services that they may be able to connect with. As a result of this connection, people were referred to programs such as the Airdrie Participant Support Program, Jumpstart, Kidsport and both federal and provincial government programs (i.e. pensions). A total of 180 Income Tax returns had been completed through the program by March 31, 2017.

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### **Seniors Supports**

The Senior Services team has created some additional efficiencies over the past year which has resulted in positive changes related to client service delivery.

- Having more staff trained to support the unique needs of seniors has allowed for the delivery of services in a more timely manner and effective case management.
- Cross-training of staff has helped to support the Intake Services Team with assessing needs in this demographic.
- The designation of a daily on-call Senior Services Worker provides more immediate phone and walk-in supports to our senior clientele, those who support seniors, and other Service Providers.

### **Toy and Resource Library**

When children come into the Toy Library for the first time they often stop on the spot because they are awestruck by the vastness of toys. There is a lot of emotion in the Toy Library from the little boy who was literally jumping up and down with excitement to the temper tantrums when Mom says it is time to leave. It is definitely a favorite spot for a number of our young clients. Families like the Toy and Resource Library because it fills all their requirements: an outing, no cost, guaranteed enjoyment for all the kids due to the variety of toys and games and no pressure to leave. We try to create a space where families feel welcomed and supported. In the past, staff have played with an older child while Mom has nursed a baby in a more quiet section of the Library. If the babies want out of their stroller, staff will offer to hold the babies while Mom spends one-on-one time with the sibling. This alleviates a lot of stress for the parent and ensures a pleasant experience for the family.

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### **Going Forward**

#### **Creating Community for Positive Parenting**

Community Links has been asked to partner with two other community agencies to create a support group for parents of children in high school who have disabilities. We expect to facilitate the group multiple times per year and see considerable involvement of parents who are in need of supports and services in the North Rocky View area. This group will provide an informal peer support setting but also offer information sessions based on the group's unique and changing needs of raising teenagers with varying disabilities. We look forward to supporting this group with our partner agencies – Stepping Stones to Mental Health and Viewpoints (part of Closer to Home) – during the upcoming year.

#### **Presentations at Rocky View Employment Services**

Given the increase of individuals in our community experiencing unemployment, Community Links has a unique opportunity to partner with Rocky View Employment Services. An Intake Worker from Community Links has been asked to speak at the Employment Services 55+ class to discuss programs and supports available to them. This class is focused on helping older adults learn how to thrive in Alberta's evolving employment sector. The first presentation took place at the end of March 2017 and is planned for every six weeks, as each new participant begins the program. Our goal at Community Links is to continue with this partnership in order to support older adults as they navigate unemployment, job hunting and learning to live on minimal income. We hope that this will also become an excellent opportunity to educate community members on the next steps of retirement; teaching about pensions and what they are entitled to receive.

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### **Committee Highlights**

#### **Beiseker Interagency Committee**

The Beiseker and Area Interagency Committee has been meeting quarterly over the last five years. Many Service Providers attend each meeting with any new Providers experiencing a welcoming environment to share what is happening in their agency or organization. A highlight from the past year is a sense of community among the Service Providers. They are connecting outside the group, offering support and help with the many activities and programs offered in the rural communities. Organizations are bringing in other groups to share their expertise with their clients which in turn grows their opportunity to receive the resources they need.

#### **Pregnancy and Beyond:**

In 2016 we saw growth in all three Pregnancy and Beyond Groups. In Airdrie, we outgrew our space in the **St. Francis of Assisi** Church, and approached the new Victory Church for larger space. After hearing how the moms and children of Pregnancy and Beyond are supported, they welcomed us with open arms, offering us their space to use at no cost. Several of the Airdrie groups this year had more than 25 moms in attendance and over 30 children. To further facilitate this growth, we worked with Community Links Volunteer Services to recruit more volunteers to provide child care, and now have a consistent group of volunteers who work side by side with the Respite Workers to provide amazing care to the kids while moms are in group.

In Irricana, we noted a trend that there were moms and kids from both Irricana and Beiseker attending group. The moms from Beiseker were faced with the challenge of often not having transportation to get to group. After discussing it with participants, we decided to move the group to the Community Links Beiseker Office to remove the transportation barrier. This move also facilitated moms and kids connecting with the supports available in the area. Some participants were hesitant to seek out new supports, however, by having a group that they were already comfortable with run out of the Beiseker Community Links office, they are now more comfortable to access more Community Links Services and Programing, as well as the Beiseker Library located downstairs in the same building.



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**Welcoming Airdrie:**

Welcoming Airdrie was very fortunate to receive a one-time FCSS Special Project grant in the fall of 2016 for their Welcoming Neighborhoods pilot project. The purpose of the project was to establish grassroots support networks within a selected neighborhood in Airdrie (Sagewood). This project was based on the Abundant Community model which believes that "if assets are connected, and neighbors formed new groups and associations, the rise in neighborliness would improve public safety and health, increase inclusion, boost the local economy and create new opportunities for neighborhood children and seniors" (Hopes, 2015, p.1). Although the funding was not able to be continued past the project end date of December 31, 2016, there were lots of positive outcomes of this project, including a successful Community Event at CW Perry School and the creation of informal groupings of community residents who share common interests. Community Links was part of the advisory committee for this project and also acted as Fiscal Agent.



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### **Stories**

Sue\* came to Community Links when her employer noticed she was struggling with her health. She was in such desperate need of assistance that her employer brought her to Community Links to connect with us. After working for this employer for more than 15 years, they indicated that they were not ready to give up on her just yet, despite the fact that Sue had begun regularly missing work. It was Sue's hope that if she could financially receive some assistance, then she could minimize her work hours to a more manageable amount per week.

During Sue's first meeting with an Intake Worker she shared that she had some physical health concerns and that stress in her relationships with her husband and friends was increasing her symptoms. Sue stated that she had no supports or anyone she could talk to.

It quickly became apparent that Sue was likely entitled to some financial assistance through AISH. In addition to her physical health concerns, she also presents as a lower cognitively functioning adult: she admits she struggles to understand her environment and cannot work certain jobs due to her severe learning disability.

The Intake Worker supported Sue's choice to apply for AISH and helped her to navigate the application process. Although Sue struggled to understand what she needed to do, she knew it needed to get done and relied on Community Links when necessary to help her through the process. Sue communicated her need for support which led the intake worker to refer her to our Wrap Around worker. Since being connected with Wrap Around, Sue has expressed that she feels supported and encouraged to sort through her problems.

Since Sue's initial contact, she has now connected with Senior's Outreach and Drop-In Counselling through Community Links as well as the Airdrie Food Bank, Alberta Works, AISH and has learned what she is entitled to through her work benefits. She advocated for her needs and now states she feels like she has support. Sue has become a regular client at Community Links and frequently connects with Wrap Around and Intake Services to help her with her on-going needs.

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***Stories Continued...***

Elisa\* called Community Links and was referred to meet the Intake Worker in Crossfield. When she came in the Intake Worker completed an assessment and discovered Elisa was living in hostile conditions with abusive family members. As a result her mental health deteriorated, she was unable to work and thus was threatened with eviction. The Intake Worker offered continuous emotional support and over several sessions completed and faxed an application for AISH, supplied Elisa with basic needs items such as mittens, warm clothing and shampoo, and provided a Food Bank referral. Over a couple of months the Intake Worker and Elisa worked together to advocate to be approved for AISH and find new accommodations. This allowed her to move out of her abusive living situation and be self-sufficient where her mental health could recover. Elisa has expressed her deep appreciation and happiness for what her life looks like now, thanks in part to the support she received through Community Links.

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**Challenges:**

**Increasing need for seniors supports**

We are starting to see an increased need for seniors supports as the population ages. As noted in the Government of Alberta's *Aging Population Policy Framework (November 2010)*, "Over the next few decades, the average age of Alberta's population is expected to increase. Alberta has over 370,000 seniors – residents who are 65 years of age or older – or roughly, one in 10 Albertans. In less than 20 years the number of seniors in Alberta will double. Population projections estimate that by 2031, one in five Albertans will be a senior." As this demographic continues to grow, so will the need for staff to meet this increased need. We were very fortunate to receive funding through the United Way for a Senior Outreach Worker and look forward to this staff member joining our team in 2017.

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## **Community Development – Volunteer Program**

### ***Highlights***

#### **Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)**

Due to the program's continued growth in the 2016 tax year, the CVITP was re-designed. Clients are now requested to go through the Intake process where they can be assessed for other risk factors and provided with additional information, referrals and supports. Several volunteers were on site to meet with clients and file taxes immediately and other volunteers provide a pick up and drop off service, filing taxes from their home computer. The revised program provided a more effective delivery of the services to clients as well as distributing the program more evenly among staff members.

#### **Child Care Volunteers**

The continued growth of the Pregnancy and Beyond Group created an increased need for child care volunteers. Recruitment was launched in February 2017 through Volunteer Airdrie and social media, and a huge response resulted. The end result is that 7 new individuals have been screened and accepted as child care volunteers to provide child care support for this growing group.

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### ***Going Forward***

#### **Volunteer for Toy and Resource Library**

We hope to recruit a consistent volunteer to provide support on a regular basis for the Toy and Resource Library. With the agency's extended hours on Thursdays, there is always a half day (morning or evening) where additional support is required. Although this has been covered by other staff, it is helpful to have a trained volunteer who can provide coverage support for Thursdays as well as vacation days for the Librarian.

### ***Challenges in this past year***

#### ***Friendly Visiting Program***

The demand for Friendly Visiting volunteers has grown substantially in the past year. Several volunteers have resigned from volunteering due to life changes such as moving out of the province. This has left the program in need of volunteers not only for the new clients but also to re-match former clients with a new volunteer. We continue to recruit volunteers for this program.

#### ***Limited Volunteer Opportunities***

The large number of community members wishing to volunteer continues to be the case in the past year. On average, the Coordinator of Volunteer Services receives 10 requests each month from individuals wishing to volunteer. Potential volunteers are matched to our volunteer opportunities according to their skills and preference. If the opportunities we have available at Community Links are not a fit for the volunteers, we refer them to other agencies, such as: Volunteer Airdrie, Soap for Hope, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Airdrie Boys and Girls Club and the Airdrie Food Bank. We continue to work with our partner agencies in the City to ensure that volunteers are being matched with the programs that are best suited to them, as well as the agencies.

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**Best Practices**

The Coordinator of Volunteer Services continues to seek out opportunities to consult with other professionals in the field to discuss best practices. This can happen informally through coffee meetings or more formally, through training opportunities offered by Volunteer Airdrie or Propellus. Ensuring that our agency stays apprised of the current trends in the Volunteer Services sector is important and requires ongoing attention.



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## **Family Resource Services**

### **Highlights**

#### **ECD Programs**

FRS offered a total of 838 program sessions. This includes 40 specific ECD Programs and 51 Parent Education Programs. In addition to this, 7 special programs were offered with 283 people in attendance. These programs met the needs of 2,632 unique individuals who accessed programs an incredible total of 12,605 times! My sincerest thank you to this dedicated, knowledgeable and hardworking team.

#### **Best Practices**

We have been fortunate to be connected to some "ZOOM" training through Parent Link. We really appreciate this new technology as it allows us to access training without the time needed and cost of travelling. This allows much more of the staff to participate and benefit from the training and networking.

#### **C.O.W. BUS**

Again in partnership with APL and RVS Adult Learning, we were able to offer the C.O.W. (Classroom on Wheels) Bus for the last time. This is a project in partnership with the Center for Family Literacy. The bus is no longer mechanically sound, so the project funding is being diverted to other projects.

#### **Family Child Care Program**

The Family Child Care (FCC) Program was excited to complete their annual accreditation review and received their Year 2 seal. We had a new consultant start and she is fitting in very well with the team and with the Providers. The FCC team continues to offer workshops for Providers. This year, Providers were also invited to attend regularly scheduled programs. The FCC team has been able to attend conferences and trainings throughout the year and are active members of the AFCCA (Alberta Family Child Care Association). The team reports that they LOVE their new office space. It provides them a comfortable, professional workspace as well as an area to meet with families and Providers. There are currently 31 Day Home Providers and 116 children in the program. The FCC team continues to recruit and interview potential Providers.



**Parent Consultation**

Parent Consultation intakes saw 190 individuals. Presenting issues continue to be more complex and challenging. Issues minor, common parenting issues as well as blended families, separation and divorce and even domestic violence elements. We now have some ability to work with CFS to connect families to Triple P Level 4 one-on-one in home training and Level 5 training.

**P.L.A.Y. Program**

With the renovations near completion, we are looking at resuming the regular P.L.A.Y. Program in the fall with the capacity back to 30 people per program. This had to be reduced to 20 because the room was smaller due to needed temporary storage. Parents have expressed that they love the new space and are looking forward to having more ability to access the program again.

**Rural**

We worked with Kathryn School to offer a Family Fun Day in April that highlighted developmental areas children need to succeed in school. It was a huge success, with 50 people in attendance.

**Traveling Tales and Tunes**

We continue to expand our partnership with the Airdrie Public Library (APL) and Rocky View Schools (RVS) Adult Learning to deliver the Travelling Tales and Tunes Program. We are very excited to add one more school to our program. We offer this program at five schools, a senior's residence and a Church in Airdrie as well as our partnership with the libraries in Beiseker and Irricana.

**Welcome to Parenthood**

We have completed our participation in Welcome to Parenthood, a Research project developed by the University of Calgary and Alberta Human Services. Being one of only 11 Parent Link Centres to participate in this project has been both exciting and challenging. The aim of this study was to understand how to increase parental awareness and use of the brain story (the importance of the developing brain from birth to five years) and community resources. Our initial target for parent recruitment was 25 families. At the end of the project we had recruited 49 families, 10 volunteer mentors and 39 mentors that were previously connected to the families.

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## **Going Forward**

### **Partnerships**

As part of our program delivery plan this past year, we worked to offer more programming in schools. This has proved to be successful both in Airdrie in in the surrounding communities. We will be working to enhance these connections in the coming year.

We will work to enhance our connections with Preschools, Playschools and private Child Care Providers to offer more professional development opportunities in the area of child development, early brain development and child behaviour guidance skills.

### **Evaluation**

As always, our team will review challenges and successes in the programs through a review of participant survey results in order to determine what is working and where there may be areas that need to be enhanced.

We are excited to be working with the City of Airdrie to streamline the reporting process, create a Theory of Change and revise our Program Logic Models. We plan to do a data collection audit this summer.

### **Expansion of Programming**

To respond to participant requests, we are exploring the possibility of expanding the ages for the Thursday evening program to Grade 3 (8 or 9 years old).

We will be offering a Brining Baby Home Program in partnership with Counselling. We will also be adding a Social Thinking Vol. 2 which is an extension of Social Thinking Vol. 1 which was offered this past year.

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### **Challenges**

We continue to align roles and responsibilities within staff to meet current and future participant needs.

Providing leadership opportunities and training for staff when financial resources are available is also important to strengthen the team and agency as a whole.

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### **Stories**

One of the roles that Early Childhood Development Programs have with families is to provide a connection for parents to community resources as early as possible in their parenting careers. Parent Coaches and other parents can act as mentors to help the parent to access supports and the resources they may want and need to enhance their family well-being.

In one instance, a Parent Coach noticed that the baby attending with the parent was not following objects with her eyes and that she was quite lethargic. The mother reported that the baby had not gained the weight that would have been expected for typical development. These can all be indications of what professionals refer to as “failure to thrive”. The Parent Coach recommended that the parent contact her family physician immediately.

The mother was very comfortable in the program and was able to share with other mothers and the Parent Coach that she was having trouble with nursing but did not want to “give up” or supplement with formula. She felt that to be a good mother, she needed to breast feed exclusively. The other parents and Parent Coach encouraged the mother to supplement nursing with formula and supported the mother with stories about having difficulties nursing their own children and supplementing with formula.

As a result of the support and encouragement the parent received, both mother and baby are doing very well now. The Parent Coach stated that she observed the baby is showing obvious signs of well-being. She is alert, interacting (playing) with the mother and other adults, responding to stimulation, watching and following with her eyes, and gaining weight. The mother has admitted that she felt she was close to having Post-Partum Depression because of her inability to nurse her child so that the child was getting all the nutrition she required. The mother expressed she has regained her confidence and now realizes that it is very normal to experience challenges with breast feeding.

The mother has expressed her gratitude for her “community of other mothers” who have encouraged and supported her and “helped her to feel like a wonderful and successful parent”.

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## **Counselling Department**

### ***Highlights***

#### **Wisdom Circle Workshop**

Community Links facilitated a one day Wisdom Circle Workshop on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 and another one on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Between the two groups we saw a total of 17 Women 50 + years of age. The workshops encourage women to share their experiences and learn from one another as they work through the psycho/educational themes. As a result of attending the workshop, women became more empowered, felt more supported, valued and optimistic about their future. The group provides an opportunity for women ages 50 + to get together to improve their quality of life.

#### **Wraparound Workshop for Participants**

From November – December 2016 Community Links facilitated a five week co-ed educational wraparound group that helped six participants to build knowledge and skills such as: Healthy Relationships, Natural Supports, Future Goal Planning, Continued Care Planning and Family (of choice) Day; as well as improving quality of life, enhancing self-esteem, and developing a positive outlook on the future. As a result of attending, group participants shared that they felt they had hope, new skills and support in being able to make plans for their future. The Wraparound group gives participants the opportunity to improve the quality of their life.

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**Being part of a focus group in Airdrie helping to determine the needs for a woman's shelter in Airdrie.**

In 2016/2017 Community Links participated in focus groups and meetings to determine the needs for a woman's shelter in Airdrie. An independent study requested by the City of Airdrie was completed and presented to the City of Airdrie Council members stating the need from more resources to manage family and domestic violence and to have a women's shelter. As a result of the study there will be ongoing meetings to determine the best strategies to use in managing family and domestic violence in the City of Airdrie. The results of the study will contribute to improving the quality of life for individuals experiencing family and domestic violence.

**Relationship Improvements for Couples continues to be a success**

In January 2017 Community Links facilitated a two day Tools for Relationship Improvement workshop for 10 participants designed to help them increase awareness of their issues and to build communication tools needed to manage their relationship more effectively. As a result of attending the workshop participants shared that they learned more about their issues, felt listened to, enlightened, learned new relationship skills and improved their relationship. The Tools for Relationship Improvement gives couples an opportunity to improve the quality of their relationship.

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### **Going Forward**

#### **Creating a Trauma group for teens**

Community Links identified a need for a trauma group for teens based on all of the work we do with teens in our community. The teen's trauma group is for teens between the ages of 13-17 who are survivors of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The focus of the group will be on providing a circle of safety, using expressive arts and tools for thriving, demonstrating relaxation techniques, learn thought stopping and a feelings survival skills. By attending the group, teens will begin rebuilding their lives, learn skills to setting boundaries, building armor skills and learn ongoing healing from the effects of trauma.

#### **Develop a Tools for Relationships Improvement for Domestic Violence Couples**

Community Links identified the need for a Tools for Relationship Improvement Group for domestic violence couples based on the work our agency does in the Journey of Change Treatment Programs as well as the individual Counselling done with clients experiencing family and domestic violence. Some couples reconnect with one another after they have completed treatment, but still do not have the skills they require to be able to work through their issues as a couple who have dealt with domestic violence. The group will focus on helping couples to stay safe while working towards improving their relationship after one of both partners have gone through treatment. The group will give couples an opportunity to continue with their relationship in a safe manner while still working on their relationship.

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### **Stories**

The Counsellor met with a middle aged woman who was emotionally overwhelmed and in crisis around abuse and threats by her husband of many years. The Counsellor met with the client for several sessions and provided support by first working towards de-escalating the crisis and targeting emotional regulation and stability. By providing a safe non-threatening/stable environment, the client began to understand her role within the conflict and soon enrolled in the Women's Journey of Change support group and accessed spiritual support within the faith community. This client began to embrace her self-worth and value as a person and learned to set firm but fair boundaries with her husband. She has set expectations of her husband to seek marriage and individual counselling in hopes of ending the abuse. To date he is exploring these options. Presently, she is safe, and emotionally stable, as she is living outside the home (with concrete planning of separation should reconciliation by her husband not be an option.) When entering therapy the client experienced the chaotic cycle of abuse that led her to be overwhelmed with emotion and a view of little to no self-worth. Through therapy she was empowered to view herself outside the chaotic abusive and controlling environment, as a person of value and worth. This in turn helped draw her talents and abilities to take steps in setting boundaries with her husband and others, enabling her to plan for safe and fulfilling relationships with her children.



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***Stories Continued...***

This client is a male who was involved in domestic violence with his wife and have a child within this relationship. He began attending the men's Journey of Change Group. He was open and shared issues relating to maladaptive patterns within their relationship. During group therapy he down played how substance abuse was a contributing factor to their relational struggles. Part way through the group sessions the client requested working with a therapist on an individual basis. During this time the therapist recognized the resistance in discussing substance abuse as being an influential/contributing factor within struggles in relationship. While patiently working with this client he later accepted ownership and responsibility of being dependent on alcohol and how patterns of extreme abuse contributed to negative behaviors which included anger and rage towards those close to him. He admitted that he was resistant to accepting this fact for fear of facing the reality of its influence in having to address it through action. Although he had been in treatment in the past where he simply went through the motions to participate, he now faced the brokenness in his life and was spurred to take action to address it. He sought medical help and later enrolled in a rehab treatment program. Helping this client with overcoming his fear of admitting to his alcohol dependency and the trauma it contributed to in his relationships led him to embrace/face his brokenness and seek help and support through treatment.

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### **Testimonial**

I moved to Alberta years ago...it was crucial for me to escape from a controlling and abusive ex-partner. We had met in High School. I thought he was the most charming and interesting person I had ever met. He was funny, witty, social and confident. That all soon came to a screaming halt after we moved in together. I began to see another side of him. At first he began to be verbally abuse me and at times physically abusive me. I tolerated his behaviour for months until one day I woke up and decided I had enough and ended the relationship. I decided at that point to move to Alberta and moved in with a close friend of mine. I convinced myself that I did not want to date for some time and I didn't for several years. I immersed myself in my career. Until, one day my good friend informed me she had a co-worker who was looking to meet somebody. My friend took it upon herself to inform this person she had friend and just maybe she would be willing to go on a double-date. So after much convincing...off I went on a date. By all accounts he was handsome and worldly and he seemed very genuine. I found rather quickly this couldn't be further from the truth. We had dated for a few months and his behaviour began to change and he would act rather strange. For instance, he informed me he followed because, he thought I was seeing other people and told me that if I didn't stop it he would kill himself. I didn't think he was serious at first. I remember telling him this was getting insane. He continued to harass me and make threats to me. Needless to say, my ex-partner was finally arrested and incarcerated. I remember thinking to myself what is wrong with me? How could I possibly let someone like this into my life again? I thought to myself I need counselling. Airdrie and Area Victim Services put me in touch with Community Links in Airdrie, soon after I was talking with a Domestic Violence Counsellor. The Counsellor was great, I told him I felt as if I have let myself down again. I remember telling my Counsellor I thought my ex would get better and at times I thought he was however, that was far from the reality. I spent the next few months in counselling and after it was all said and done I was able to see through the clouds and gain a truer sense of myself. I am grateful agencies like Community Links. If not for the support that I received, I am not sure I would be a survivor of domestic violence, I would have probably continued as a victim of domestic violence.

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### **Challenges**

Sustainable funding is necessary in ensuring Counselling Services remain effective and deliver programming that meets the client's needs.

Managing high caseloads and long waitlists

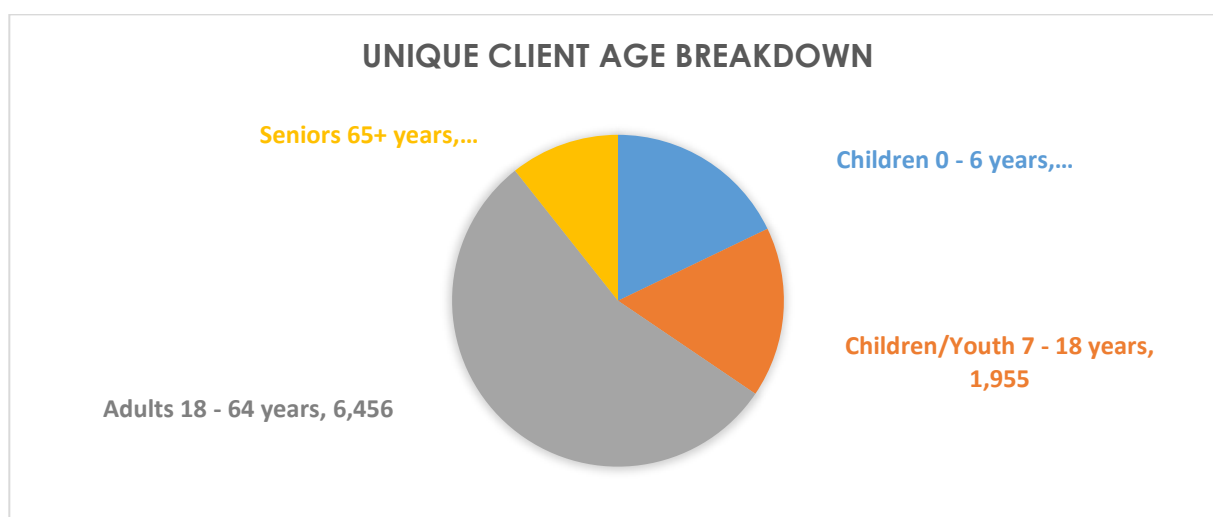
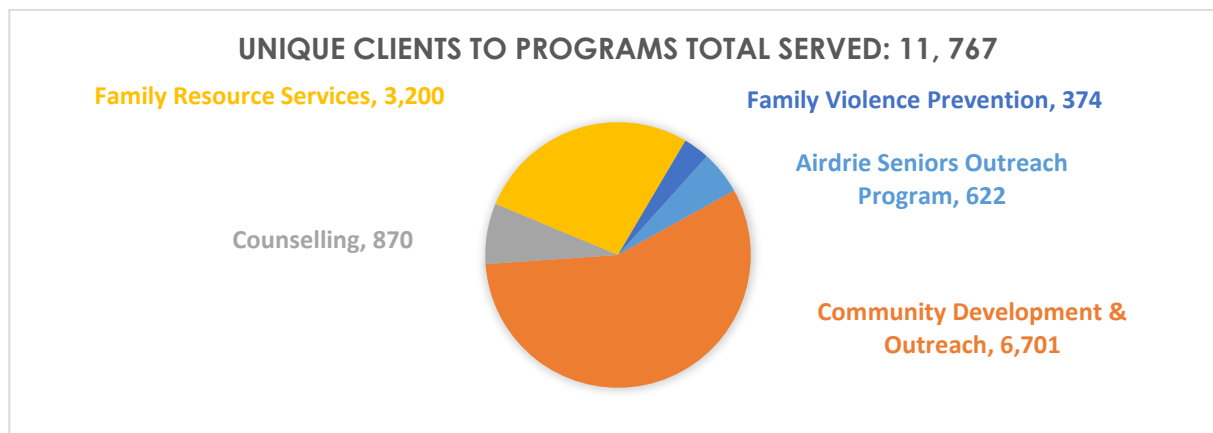


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## Community Links Overview

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### April 1, 2016 – March 31, 2017 – Community Links Statistics

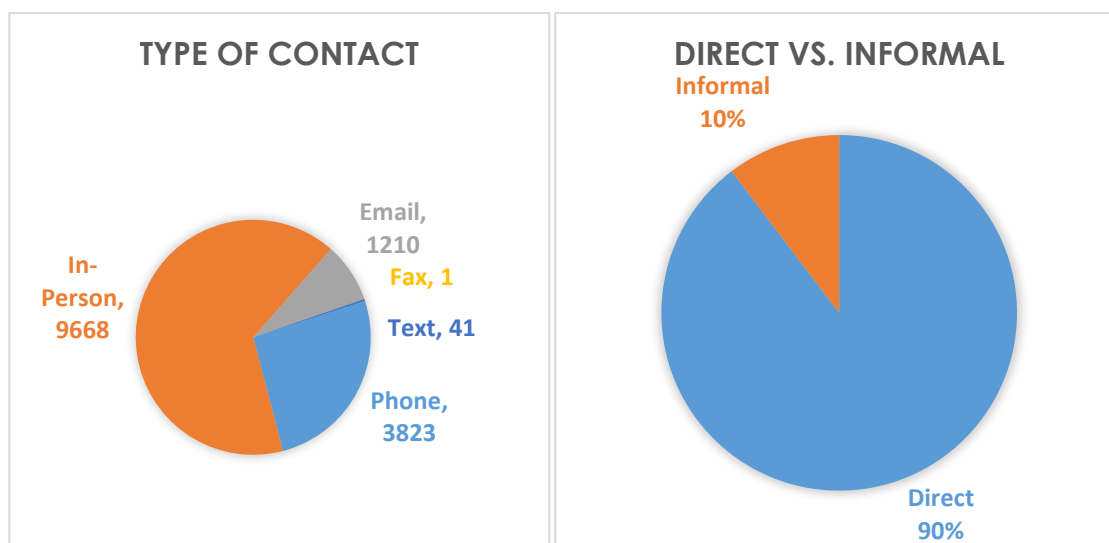


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## Community Links Overview

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### April 1, 2016 – March 31, 2017 – Community Links Statistics



Direct – Individuals or families who are identifiable and engage with Community Links staff, receiving service from one of our core areas.

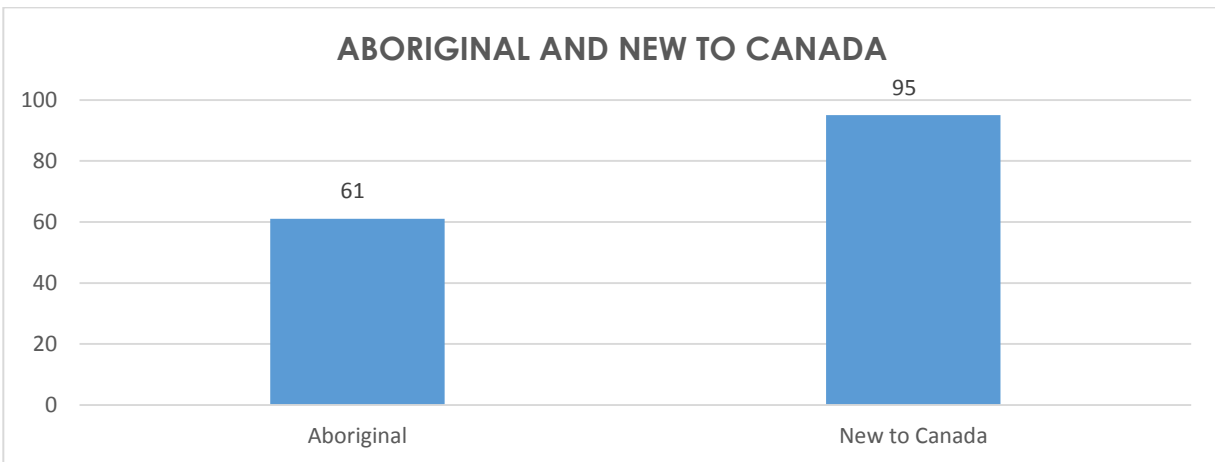
Informal – Individuals who are not identifiable (anonymous) and receive basic information from Community Links.

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## Community Links Overview

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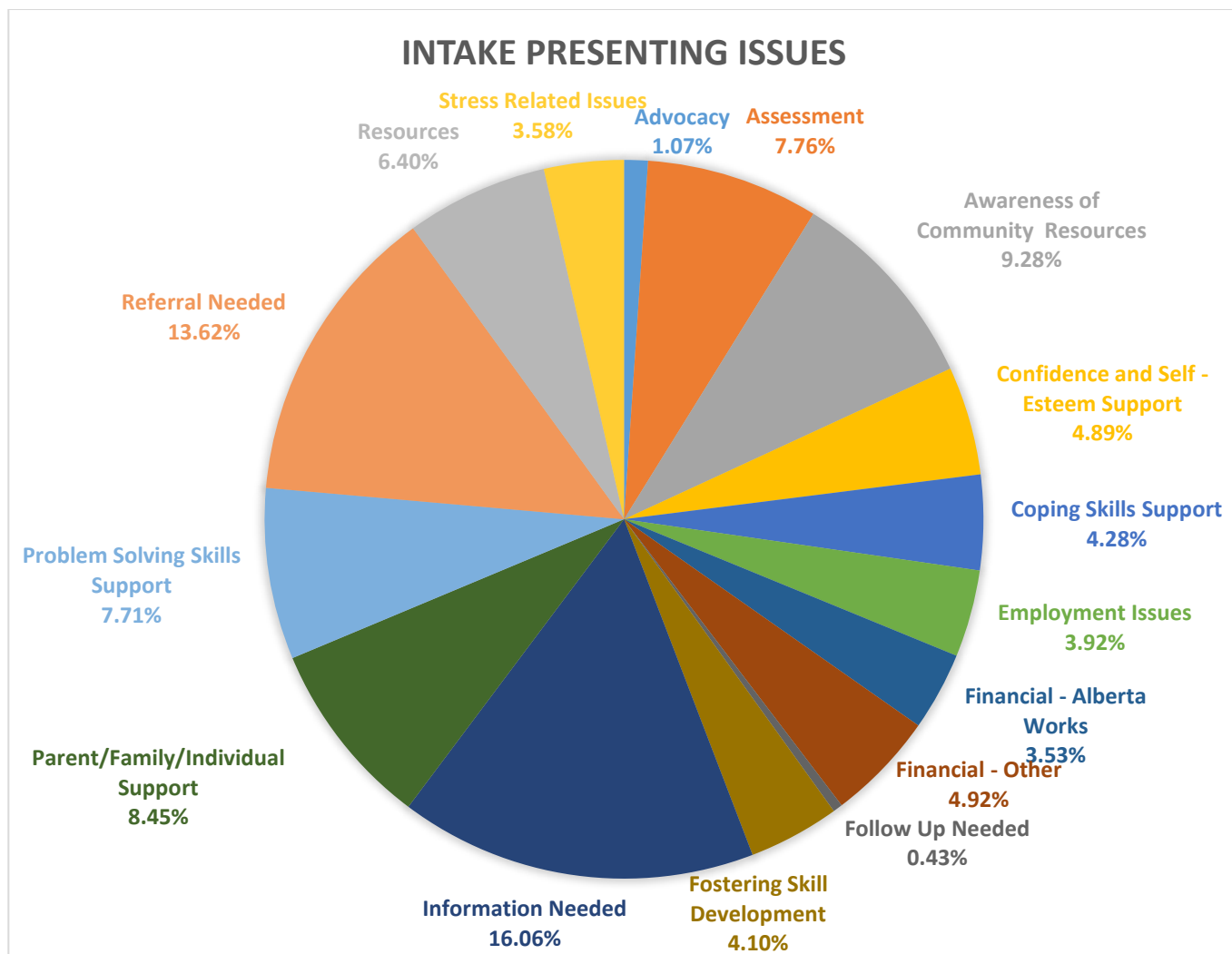
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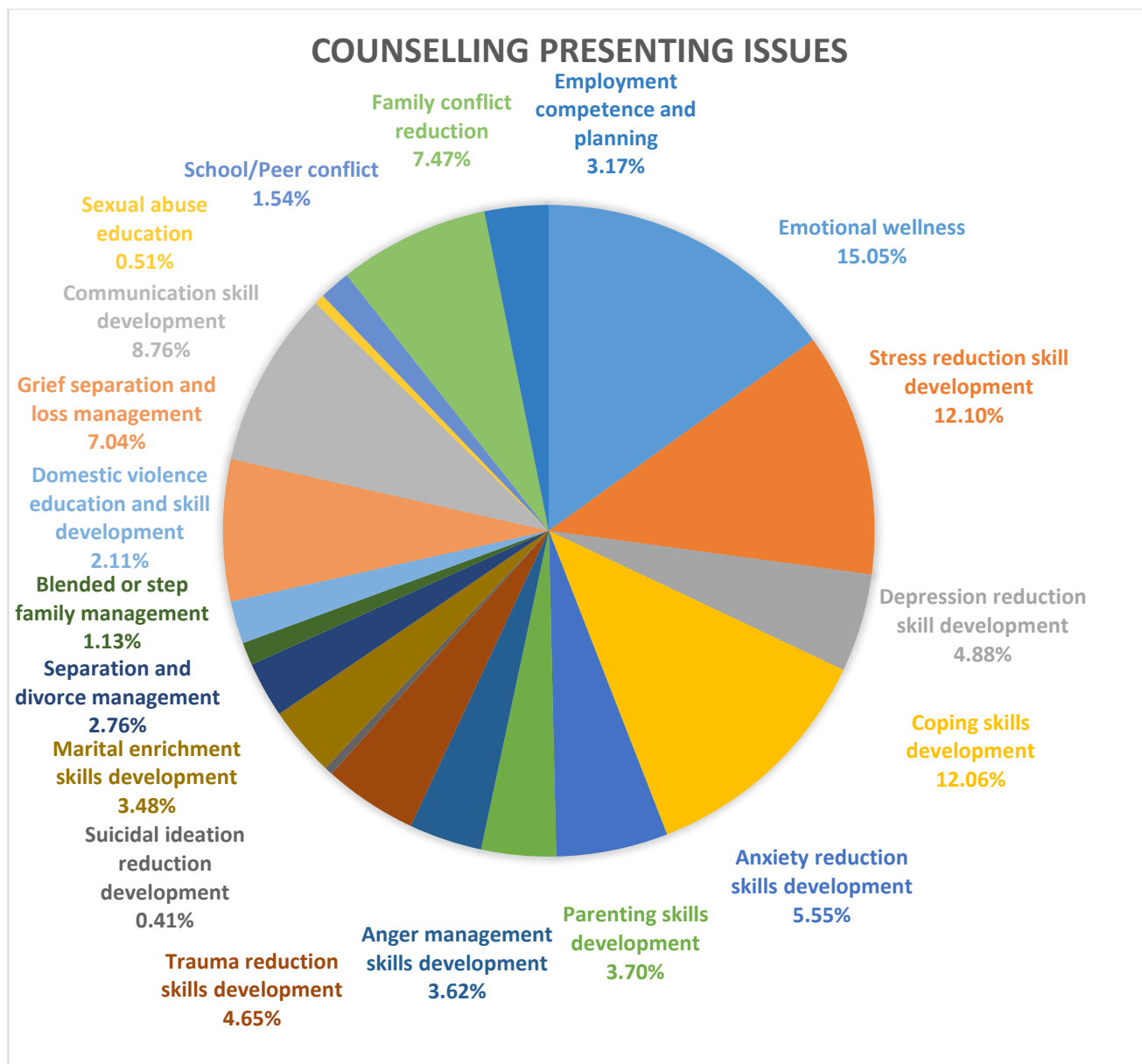
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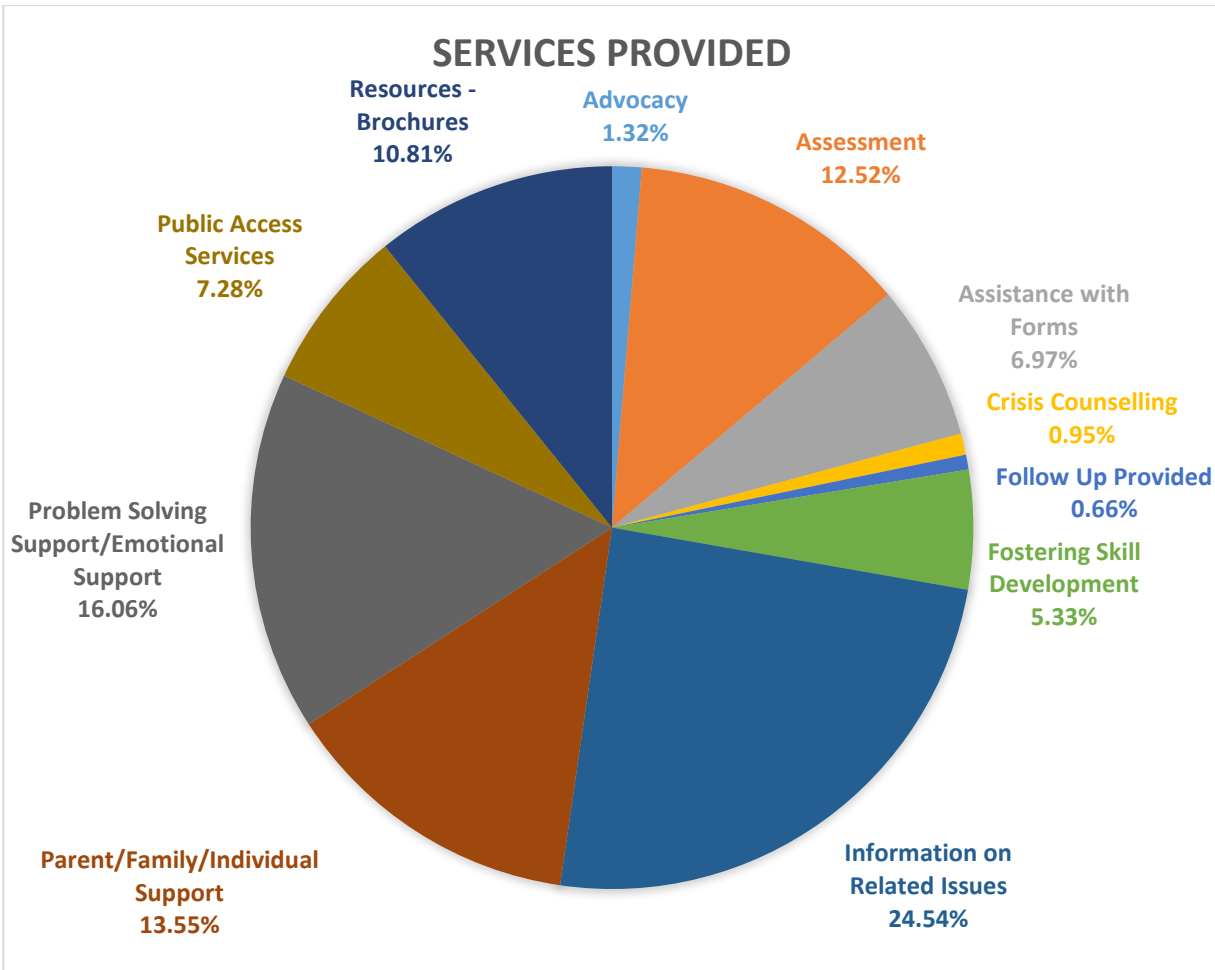


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## Community Links Overview

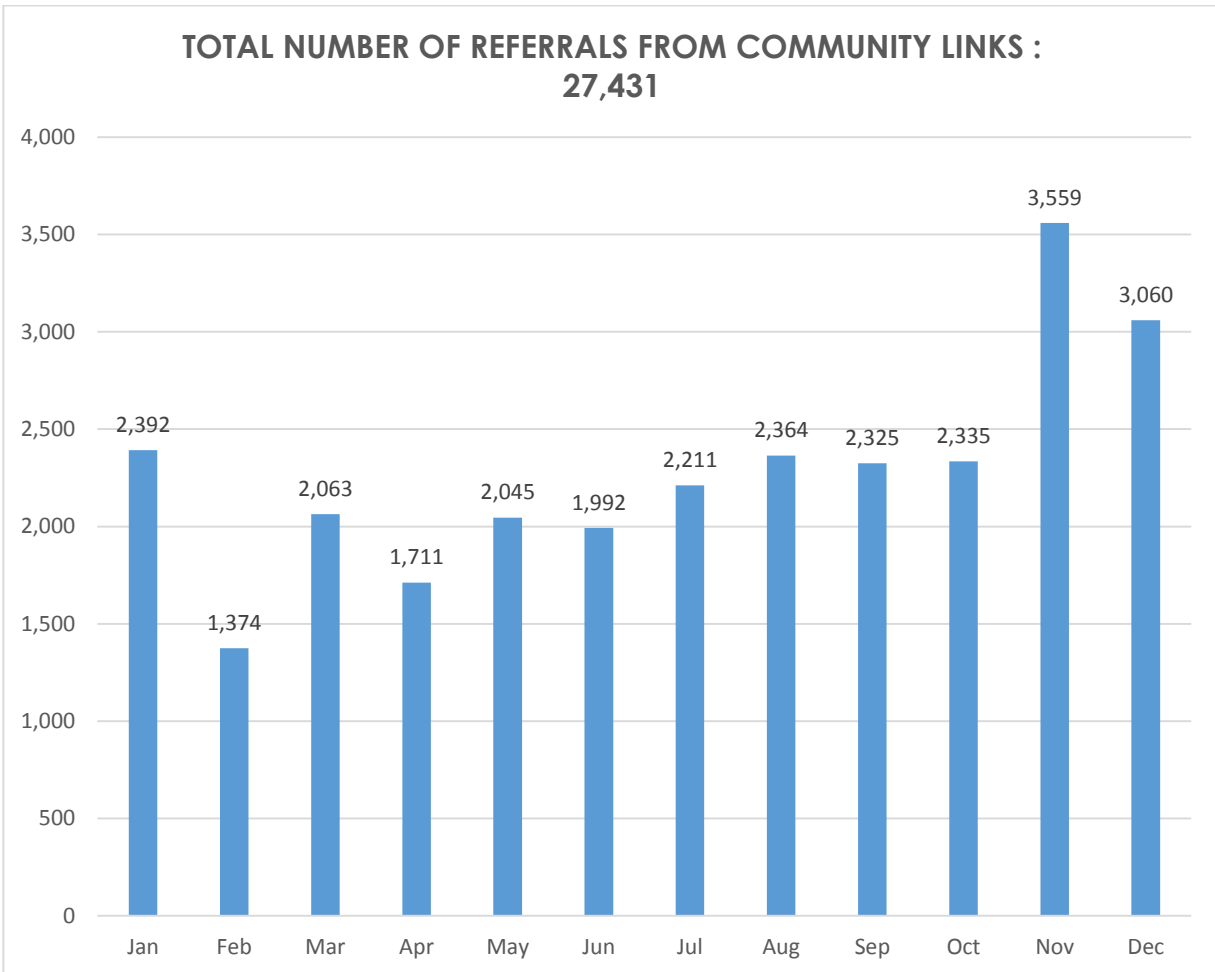
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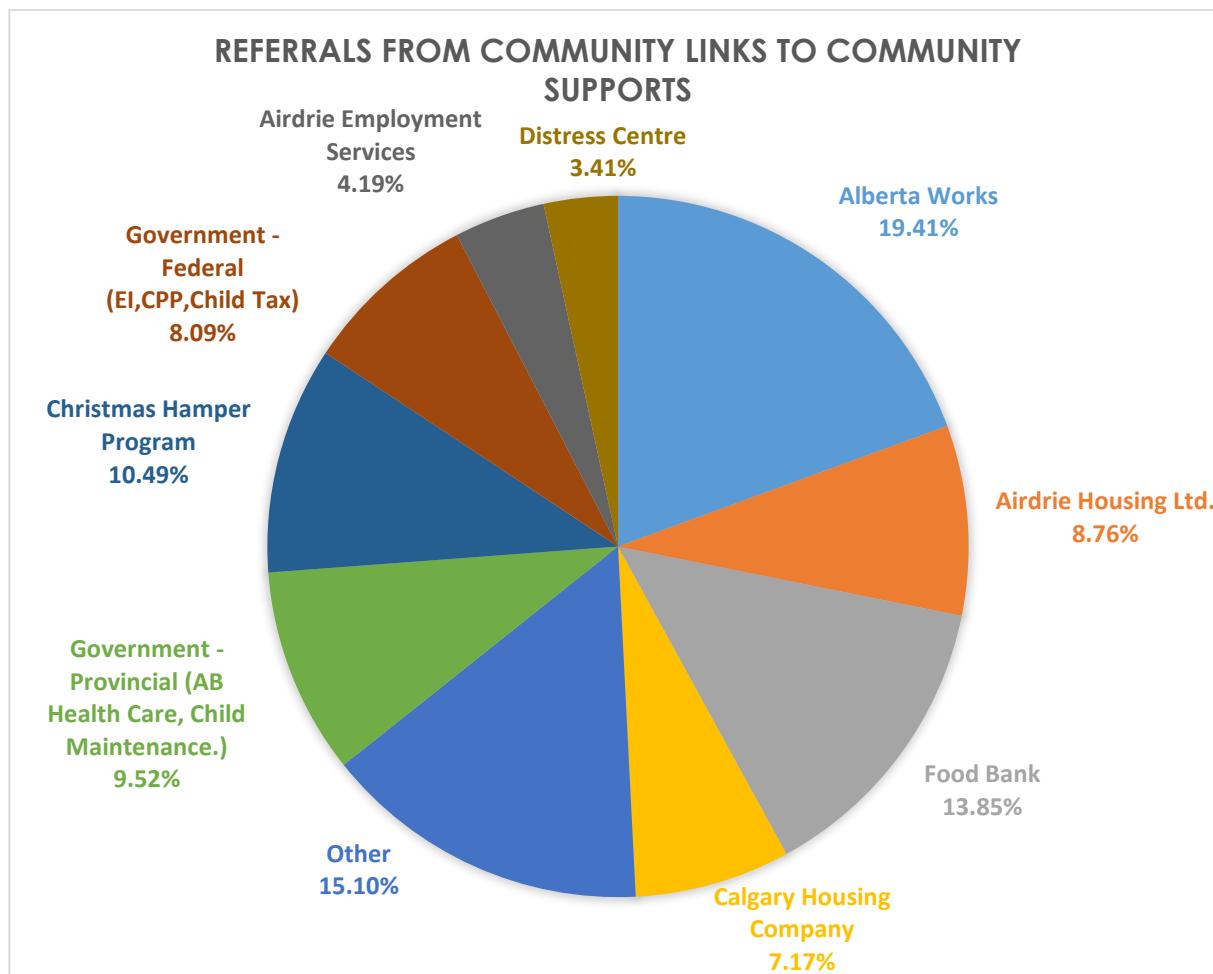
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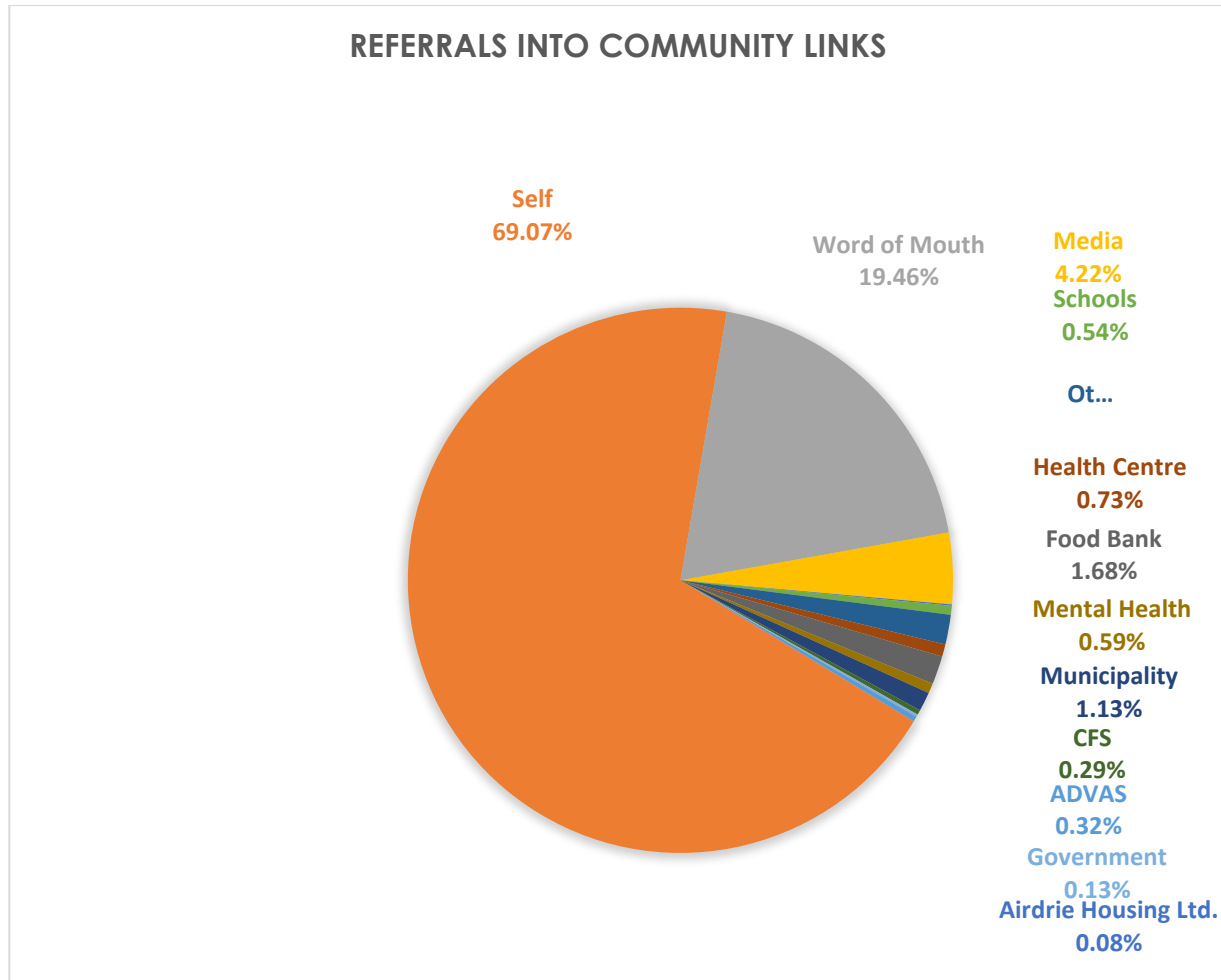
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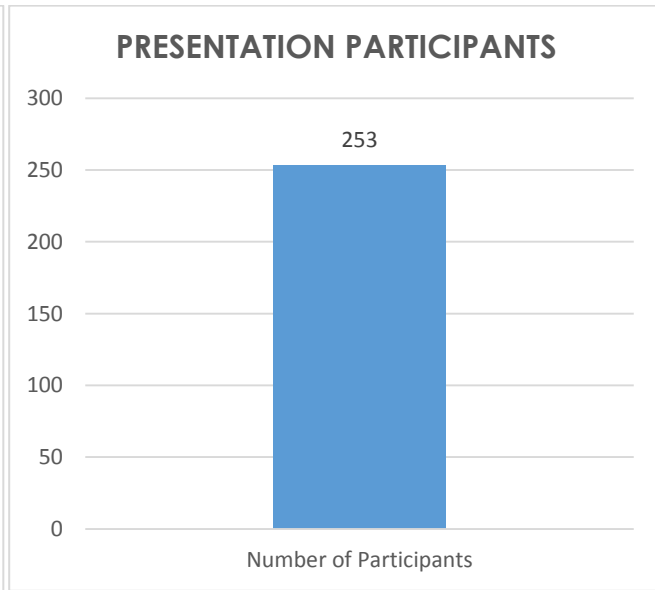
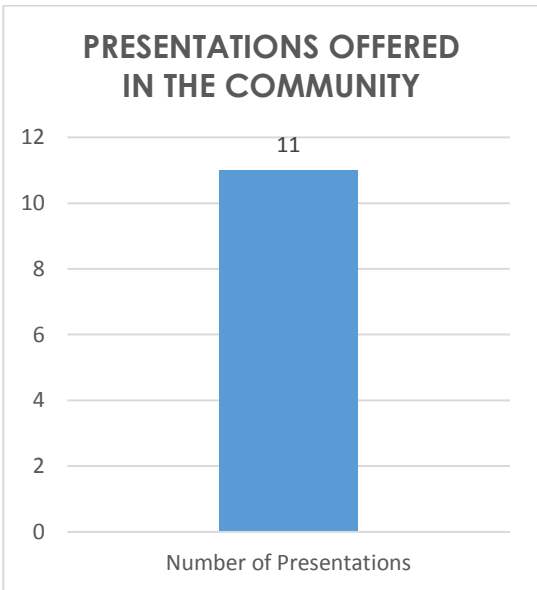
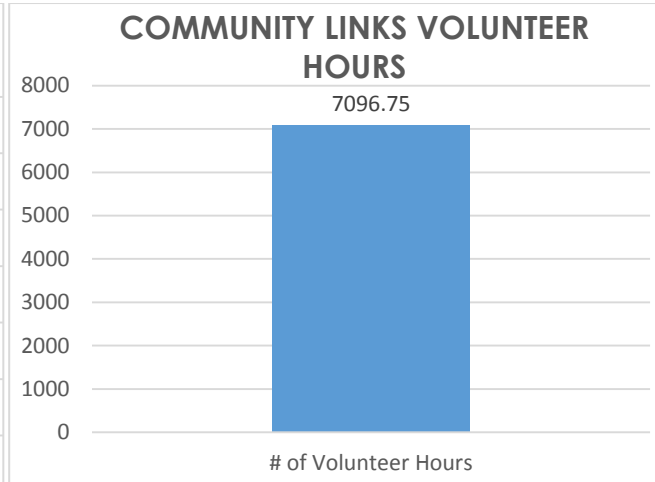
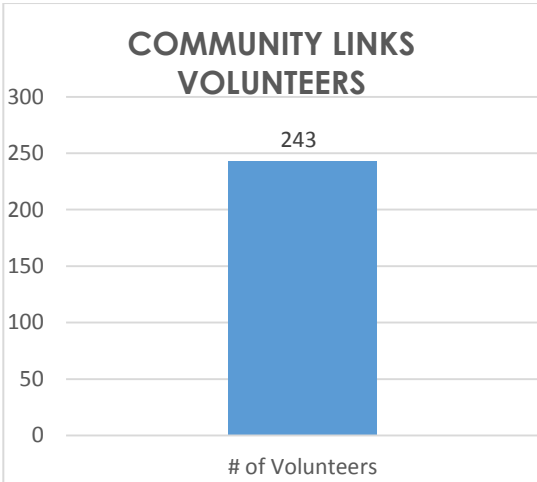


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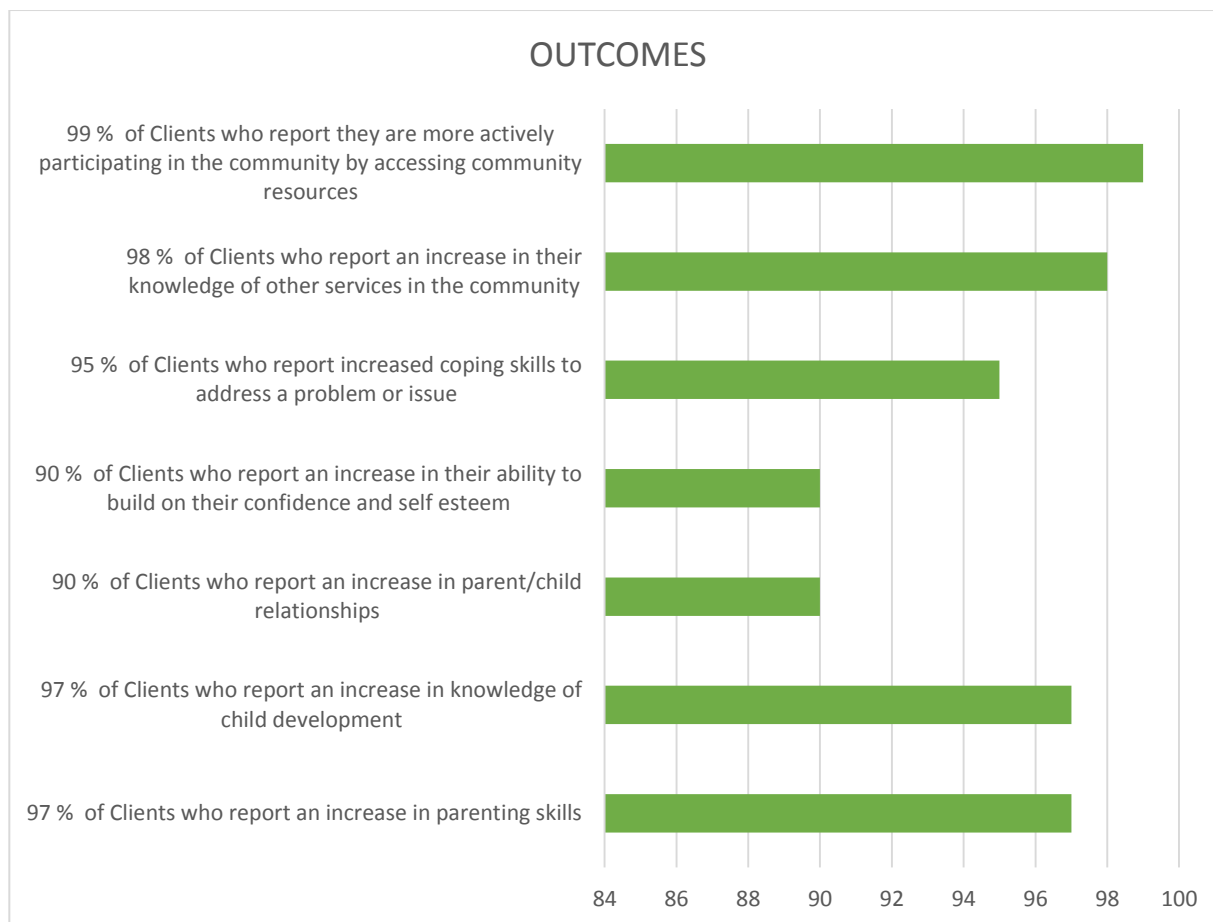
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## Community Links Overview

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## Funders

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- Alberta Children and Youth Services
- Alberta Health Services Safe Communities Innovation Fund
- Calgary and Area Child and Family Services
- City of Airdrie Family and Community Support Services
- Corporate and Community Donations
- Crossfield Family and Community Support Services
- Rocky View County Family and Community Support Services
- United Way of Calgary and Area and Donor Option
- Beiseker and District Family and Community Support Services
- Irricana Family and Community Support Services
- Alberta Culture & Tourism
- Rotary Club of Airdrie



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