

ACWS

ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

2025-2026 Annual Report

Land Acknowledgement

ACWS acknowledges the traditional lands upon which we live, work, and play . We recognize that all Albertans are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history so that we can learn from the past, be aware of the present, and create a just and caring future. ACWS celebrates and values the resiliency, successes, and teachings that Indigenous people have shown us, as well as the unique contributions of every Albertan.

ACWS is located on Treaty 6 land in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, which is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree and an ancient gathering place of many Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. These lands have also been home to, and a central trading place of, the Blackfoot, Nakota, Assiniboine, Dene, the Métis people of western Canada, and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

We honour the courage and strength of Indigenous women. We honour them as life givers and care givers as we honour and learn from their continuing achievements, their consistent strength, and their remarkable endurance.

Our members serve all nations and all peoples. They are located on Treaty 6, 7, and 8 lands across this province which include the five Métis territories of Alberta.

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About ACWS

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) is the provincial network organization of domestic violence shelters in Alberta. We bring four decades of experience and knowledge to serve over 40 members operating over 60 shelters across the province for women, their children, and seniors facing domestic abuse. We bring Alberta's shelter sector together—supporting our members and advancing our shared work to end domestic violence through bold advocacy, collective data, research and evaluation, frontline training, and province-wide coordination and collaboration.

Our Vision

We believe in a world free from violence and abuse.

Our Mission

Our mission is to support ACWS members and work together to end domestic violence and abuse.

Our Values

Women's Equality and Empowerment
Imbalance in power relations excludes women from decision-making across all aspects of our society. With a focus on women's strengths, we promote their rights, needs, and the value of their lived experience. We seek to create women-centred service provision which promotes equality, improves outcomes for women (and their families), reduces long-term costs and builds stronger communities.

Inclusivity
We recognize and pro-actively affirm the dignity of all, regardless of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income, and sexual orientation.

Meaningful Relationships and Partnerships
We value and seek out meaningful relationships and partnerships to further our vision and increase understanding in a changing society. These relationships take effort by all and are key to both understanding the causes of violence and making changes to end it.

Stewardship
We are stewards of the many resources gifted to us by women, of past, present and future generations. We commit to appropriate management of the human and financial resources and sustainability of ACWS and the support of our members, while also caring for the earth by restoring and protecting it.

Message from the President

This past year has been one of continued thoughtful growth and progress for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS). As a Board, we have remained committed to our core responsibilities: providing strong governance, setting strategic direction, and ensuring responsible stewardship of the organization as it continues to evolve in both impact and influence.

A key focus this year has been on our strategic planning. Through this important and intentional work and conversation, we have taken steps to clarify priorities, strengthen our long-term vision, and ensure that ACWS remains responsive to the changing needs of the sector. This process has also supported meaningful improvements in governance practices, reinforcing accountability and enhancing the effectiveness of Board operations.

We have also continued to invest in Board development and organizational capacity. By strengthening our internal structures and supporting the team behind ACWS, we are helping to build a more resilient and stable organization—one that is well-positioned to meet both current challenges and future opportunities.

Collaboration has remained central to our work. We have deepened our relationships with government, funders, members, and community partners, recognizing that progress in our sector depends on strong, coordinated efforts. Through these partnerships, ACWS continues to play an important role in advancing collective responses to domestic and gender-based violence across Alberta. At the same time, we have been mindful of the broader context in which our members operate. The challenges facing the sector remain significant, and the work being done by shelters across the province is both complex and critical. The Board is confident that ACWS is positioned to continue supporting its members, amplifying their voices, and strengthening the systems that serve those in need.



Finally, we have made meaningful strides in raising the profile of ACWS, ensuring that the organization's leadership, expertise, and impact are recognized more widely.
This increased visibility supports advocacy efforts and reinforces the vital role that our members play in communities across Alberta.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the staff, members, and partners of ACWS for their ongoing commitment and leadership.

Together, we are building a stronger, more responsive organization—one that is well-equipped to continue this important work in the years ahead.

Sandy Vander Ziel
President
ACWS Board of Directors



Board of Directors, 2025-2026

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is led by a volunteer Board of Directors committed to ending family violence and fostering a safer Alberta.

- Sandy Vander Ziel, President
- Jerri Taylor, Vice President
- Keaton Harris, Treasurer
- Jennifer Kwan, Secretary
- Ashleigh Griffiths
- Becky Wells
- Jill Young
- Sadaf Raja
- Stacy Surowaniec
- Wilda Listener

A heartfelt thank you to Stacy Surowaniec as she concludes her time on the Board. We appreciate your dedication and support, and are grateful for your service.

Message from Our Executive Director



2025-2026 has been a year of growth, momentum, and meaningful change for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. It reinforced something our members demonstrate every day: lasting change is never created by one organization, one program, or one voice. It begins with connection—and grows through people working together toward a shared mission.

Across Alberta, our members continued responding to the complex and evolving needs of women, children, seniors, and families experiencing domestic and family violence. They did so while navigating rising demand, limited resources, increasingly complex needs, and significant pressures on shelter capacity. Their leadership, innovation, and unwavering commitment to survivors remained at the heart of our work.

Throughout the year, ACWS continued strengthening its role as a trusted provincial association. We created opportunities for members to connect, learn from one another, guide our priorities, and bring forward the realities facing shelters and survivors. From Fort McMurray to Pincher Creek, our members represent different communities, sizes, and service models, but they are united by a shared commitment to safety, dignity, and lives free from violence and abuse.

We advanced significant initiatives, including research demonstrating how access to a safe ride can determine whether a survivor reaches shelter, attends court, or secures housing. Through HUGG—the Healing, Understanding, and Growth Guide—we continued building a survivor-centred approach to case management and outcome measurement. Lift Her Up brought women leaders together to strengthen safety, respect, and inclusion in political life. Together, these initiatives demonstrate how strong research, meaningful collaboration, and practical solutions can improve systems for survivors of gender based violence.

Advocacy also remained central to our work. We strengthened relationships across government, business, community, and the social-serving sector to ensure members' experiences informed decisions. We advocated for sustainable investment, transparent funding, safe and affordable housing, accessible transportation, and coordinated responses that recognize shelters cannot address domestic violence alone.

This year, we also refreshed the ACWS brand to better reflect who we are today: modern, strong, inclusive, and forward-looking. Our new identity represents growth, resilience, and people gathering around a shared table.

Message from Our Executive Director

Behind every accomplishment in this report is an extraordinary ACWS team. Their expertise, creativity, care, and commitment make this work possible. They have managed complex provincial projects, supported members through uncertainty, strengthened partnerships, delivered training and events, advanced research and advocacy, and improved the systems that keep our organization strong. They continually step forward, solve problems, support one another, and find ways to deliver meaningful work—even when the demands are significant. I could not be prouder of this team or more grateful for the energy and heart they bring to ACWS every day.



Together, we also strengthened the organization behind the work by improving internal systems, clarifying roles, and enhancing governance and financial oversight. Much of this work happens quietly, but it ensures ACWS remains accountable, resilient, and ready to respond to members' needs.

I am deeply grateful to our Board of Directors for their leadership and stewardship, to our funders and partners for investing in this work, and, most importantly, to our members for their trust, honesty, expertise, and willingness to lead alongside us.

There is still much work ahead. Too many survivors cannot access safety, housing, transportation, and support when they need it. Yet this year also gave us many reasons for hope. We have seen what becomes possible when members share their knowledge, survivors help shape solutions, governments listen, and communities step forward.

As we look ahead, ACWS will remain courageous in its advocacy, thoughtful in its stewardship, and unwavering in its commitment to members. Together, ACWS and its members are building an Alberta where every home and community is free from violence and abuse—and where every action creates a ripple that extends far beyond us.

Catherine (Cat) Champagne
Executive Director
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Board Governance Committee Report

During the 2025-2026 year, the Board Governance Committee continued its efforts to strengthen the Board's governance and leadership, including reviewing 10 policies and updating 9 policies. The Committee executed a successful recruitment campaign for public directors for 2025, receiving twelve applications for available positions. The Committee also oversaw the addition of non-Board members to existing Board committees, welcoming the diverse knowledge, skills, and experiences that each member brought to their committee. Notably, the Committee supported a Board Retreat in February 2026 to discuss the organization's purpose and identity, governance boundaries, and membership code of conduct. The Committee also supported engagement with members, staff, and stakeholders to inform the development of a new strategic plan.

In the upcoming year, the Committee will build on the work done this year to complete and socialize the new strategic plan, recommend updates to the organization's bylaws for membership approval at the 2026 AGM, continue to review and strengthen governance policies, and build a Board evaluation and development plan.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my fellow committee members, ACWS, and the Board of Directors, for their time and dedication this year. Your commitment to strong governance has made a meaningful difference and I am deeply appreciative of the time and expertise you bring to this work.

Jennifer Kwan
Board Secretary, Chair of the Board Governance Committee
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Members of the Board Governance Committee 2025-2026

Jennifer Kwan, Committee Chair

Jennifer Braun

Nicolas Constantin

Robyne Garton

Stacy Surowaniec

Beba Svigir

Becky Wells

Rene Ziorio

Finance, Audit, and Risk Management Committee and Treasurer's Report

The Finance, Audit and Risk Management (FARM) Committee continued to provide oversight and strategic guidance to support the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' long-term financial sustainability, sound governance, and effective risk management.

Throughout the year, the Committee focused on strengthening organizational accountability by advancing risk management planning, refining financial and governance policies, and reviewing the Committee's Terms of Reference to ensure greater clarity of roles and responsibilities. These efforts support ACWS' ongoing commitment to strong governance and continuous organizational improvement. As part of business as usual, the committee reviewed financial reports including monitoring organizational performance against budget, reviewed financial policies and controls, and supported the annual audit process to ensure transparency and accountability.

The Committee was pleased to welcome several new members. Their diverse professional backgrounds and expertise have strengthened the Committee's ability to provide thoughtful financial oversight, identify emerging risks, and support informed decision-making. We are grateful for the dedication and volunteer leadership of all Committee members.

Despite a year marked by funding uncertainty and a changing operating environment, ACWS remained focused on responsible financial stewardship. Through careful financial management and regular monitoring, the organization continued to invest in programs, services, advocacy, research, and capacity-building initiatives supporting women's shelters across Alberta. The 2026 fiscal year concluded with a deficit of $44,848, with total revenues of $2,387,859 and expenses of $2,432,707 respectively.

ACWS' demonstrated a year of change and growth through many notable financial and organizational achievements, including:

- **Investing organizational reserves into an Endowment Fund with the Edmonton Community Foundation to support the long-term financial sustainability of ACWS.**
- **Securing funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) to support the continued development, implementation, and dissemination of the HUGG training and resources for member shelters and community partners.**
- **Achieving increased success through the year-end giving campaign, strengthening philanthropic support and diversifying ACWS' revenue sources.**
- **A brand refresh which modernized ACWS's look-and-feel, clarified purpose, and created a unified presence to reflect the strength, inclusivity and direction of the organization today.**

Finance, Audit, and Risk Management Committee and Treasurer's Report

Looking ahead, the FARM Committee will continue its work to strengthen ACWS' financial sustainability and enterprise risk management.These initiatives include collaborating with the Board's Ad Hoc Risk Management Committee to further develop organizational risk processes, supporting long-term financial planning, and ensuring governance practices continue to evolve alongside the organization's strategic priorities.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the Board of Directors, ACWS leadership and staff, and my fellow Committee members for their commitment to sound financial stewardship and their continued dedication to advancing ACWS' mission.

Keaton Harris
Board Treasurer, Chair of the FARM Committee
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee 2025-2026

Keaton Harris, Committee Chair

Ashleigh Griffiths

Ola Ifidon

Wilda Listener

Jerri Taylor

Michele Taylor

Jill Young

2026 Audited Financial Statements

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ACWS







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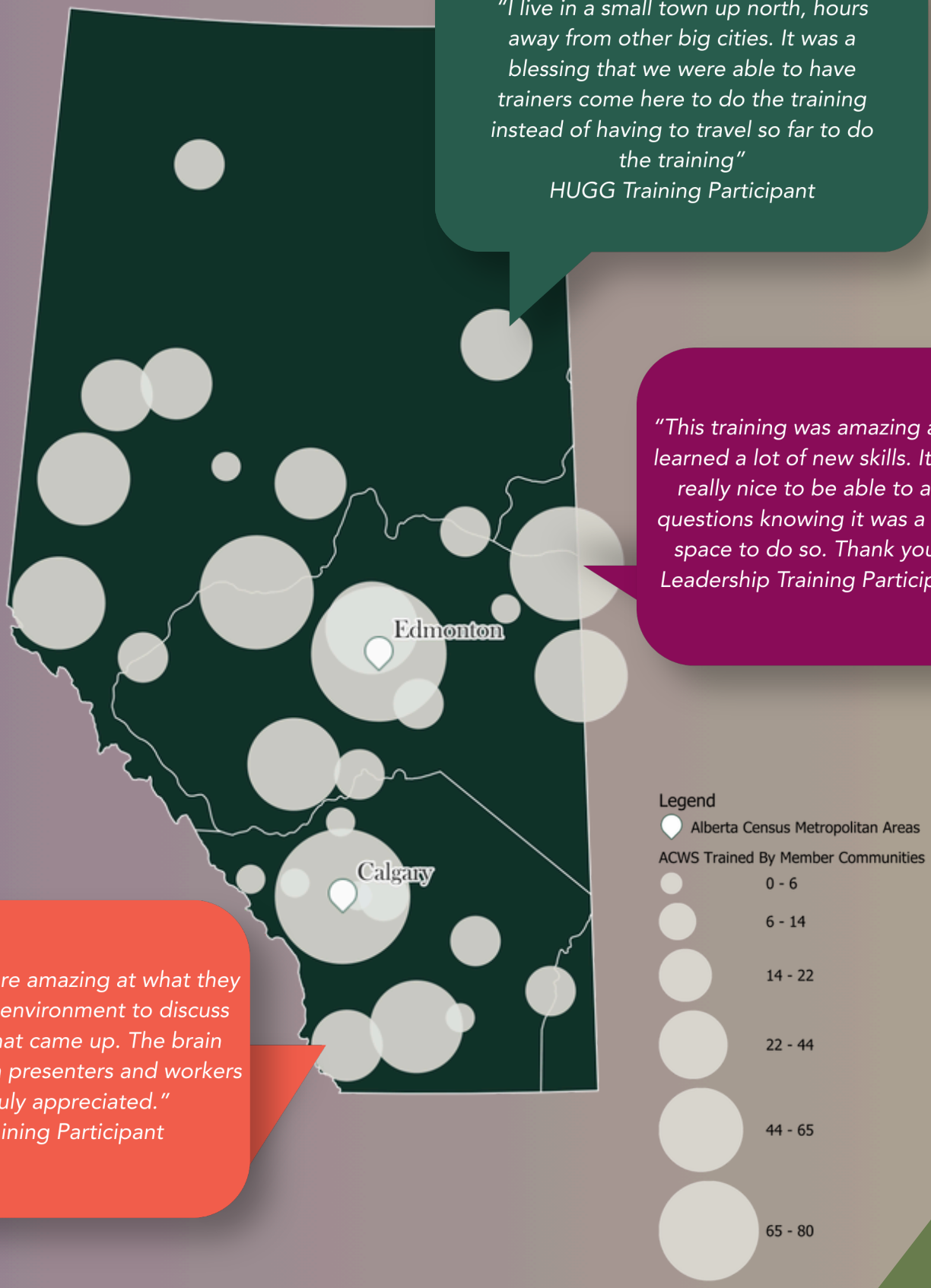
Action



ACWS brought training to <u>every community</u> served by an ACWS member shelter.

"I live in a small town up north, hours away from other big cities. It was a blessing that we were able to have trainers come here to do the training instead of having to travel so far to do the training"
HUGG Training Participant

"This training was amazing and I learned a lot of new skills. It was really nice to be able to ask questions knowing it was a safe space to do so. Thank you!"
Leadership Training Participant



"The presenters are amazing at what they do. It was a safe environment to discuss any questions that came up. The brain storming between presenters and workers was also truly appreciated."
HUGG Training Participant

TAILORED CAPACITY BUILDING

In October 2025, ACWS introduced a tailored capacity-building approach designed to respond directly to the learning needs and priorities identified by individual member organizations.

When a member organization is interested in tailored training, ACWS works directly with the organization to understand its specific needs, priorities, and areas where staff or leadership are seeking additional support. Based on these conversations, ACWS develops a proposed training overview that reflects the organization's identified priorities and intended audience. Once the organization confirms that the proposed direction aligns with its needs, the training is developed and facilitated either in person or virtually.

If a member organization is interested in existing tailored training that has already been developed by ACWS and aligns with its identified needs, ACWS can work with the organization to determine whether the existing training is a suitable fit. Where appropriate, the existing training is delivered to the organization's identified audience, with adjustments made as needed to reflect the organization's context, priorities, or delivery format.

Trainings were grounded in domestic violence and trauma-informed practice and reflected the realities of shelter environments. Sessions emphasized practical, interactive, and skills-based learning tailored to the needs of member organizations.

AFTER ATTENDING CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING, SHELTER LEADERS REPORTED FEELING MORE CONFIDENT TO CARRY OUT THEIR DAY-TO-DAY WORK.

By the Numbers

October 2025-March 2026



71

PARTICIPANTS



7

TAILORED TRAININGS



4

MEMBER SHELTERS

A Ride Can Save a Life

In March 2026, ACWS released *A Ride Can Save A Life: Transporting Survivors in Rural Alberta to Safety and Healing*. Based on the information and stories collected through ACWS' Transportation Project, this report highlights the transportation barriers survivors in rural communities face and the ways shelters across the province are working every day to help people reach safety and healing.

Through the Transportation Project, ACWS administered the distribution of over $113,900 from the Ministry of Children and Family Services to shelters in remote and rural Alberta that was used to provide safe and accessible transportation to 2,087 adults and 1,343 children over 14 months.

> **"WE GOT HER OUT OF A SITUATION WHERE SHE COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED… WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT THE TRANSPORTATION PROJECT."**
>
> **– ANONYMOUS SHELTER**

COMMUNITY SHOWCASE

We hosted our first ACWS Community Showcase in November 2025. This event provided an opportunity for our partners, supporters, and community to learn more about ACWS and what we do. The event saw 44 attendees and showcased our refreshed branding, Lift Her Up, the Rural Transportation Project, and other ACWS programs and initiatives.















Lift Her UP

This year, ACWS redeveloped and redesigned its curriculum for elected officials and their staff. Based on the ongoing Lift Her Up campaign to challenge violence against women and elevate female leaders, the training is designed to equip leaders to recognize and respond to harassment and abuse.

As part of the reimagined Lift Her Up project, ACWS hosted two roundtables for women in political leadership and elected official roles, political staff, and political science students. Facilitated by The Honourable Iris Evans, The Honourable Anne McLellan, and our executive director, Cat Champagne, these events saw a total of 37 attendees come together to share their lived experiences as women working in the public sphere and identify opportunities to address harmful behaviours to build a safer, more inclusive workplace.

INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE (IPSV) TRAINING

In July and August of 2025 ACWS staff traveled to 6 communities across Alberta to deliver 7 sessions of the IPSV Response Course Curriculum to support frontline support workers in rural communities across Alberta to better respond to and support survivors of intimate partner sexual violence throughout the province.

IPSV is a serious problem that deeply impacts survivors and communities. Research from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (AASAS) estimates that 43% of Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime[1] and Statistics Canada data found that over 1 in 10 women in Canada who had ever been in an intimate partner relationship have experienced IPSV.[2] Some of those survivors will access services thorough a local sexual assault center or domestic violence shelter.

Through the support of the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, ACWS worked alongside subject matter experts from AASAS and Indigenous Psychological Services (IPS) to identify gaps and develop specialized training to support service providers in responding to and supporting survivors of IPSV. This IPSV training was developed to take into consideration the many unique barriers that exist for both survivors and the organizations that support them in rural communities across the provinces.

[1] Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. (2020). Summary of Key Findings: Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Childhood Sexual Abuse in Alberta. Prevalence-of-Sexual-Assault-Childhood-Sexual-Abuse-Summary-of-Key-Findings_FINAL.pdf

[2] Cotter, A. (2021). Intimate Partner Violence in Canada, 2018: An Overview. Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00003-eng.htm

By the Numbers

104 people from women's shelters, sexual assault centres, domestic and family violence outreach programs, and other organizations across the human services who work with survivors and perpetrators of IPSV were trained

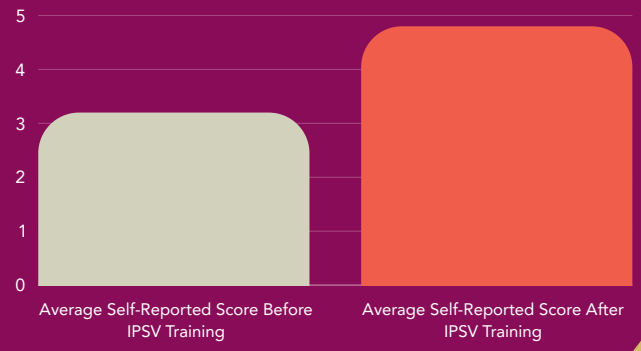
20 rural communities & service providers were reached through seven training sessions held in six host communities

Increased service providers self-reported knowledge of IPSV from an average score of **3.2 to 4.8 out of 5**

Provided valuable space for connection, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among for service providers working across Alberta, helping to build relationships and connections between communities.

After attending IPSV training service reported feeling better prepared to work with survivors of IPSV to identify risk factors.

Comparison of the average self-reported preparedness to and identify risk factors with IPSV survivors from training participants who completed a pre and post training survey.



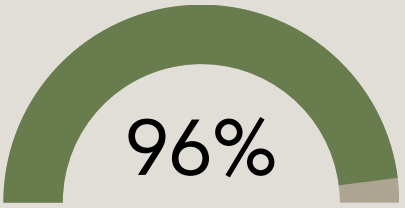
MEET THE HUGG!

Meet the Healing, Understanding, and Growth Guide, or the HUGG! The HUGG is ACWS' new case management and outcome measurement tool. The HUGG was designed to support survivors and service providers in working together to build pathways for survivors to move forward in healing and growth.

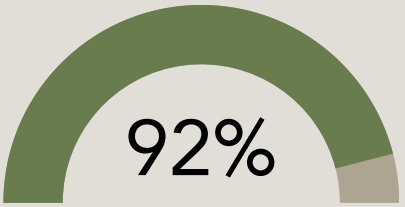
ACWS developed the HUGG in consultation with domestic violence shelters and community partners, using a strengths-based, trauma and violence-informed, and survivor-centered framework. One of the core strengths of the HUGG is that it can be practically applied to increase the skills and confidence of frontline staff, while simultaneously supporting effective case management and collecting powerful impact data about program outcomes.

Thanks to a grant from Women and Gender Equality Canada, in 2026, ACWS was able to bring the HUGG directly to our member shelters across the province, providing HUGG training right in their communities. Between February 1 and March 31, the ACWS HUGG team traveled 3900 km to train 59 frontline service providers from 8 family violence shelters across Alberta. That's the equivalent of driving from Calgary to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico!

> **"PHENOMENAL SYSTEM, I LOVE THAT THE MINDS THAT CREATED THE HUGG SYSTEM ARE THE SAME INDIVIDUALS FACILITATING IT. THE PASSION AND BELIEF OF THE PROGRAM WAS EVIDENT."**
> **– HUGG TRAINING PARTICIPANT**



of participants reported that HUGG training increased their confidence in carrying out their day-to-day work



of participants reported that they felt either "very" or "extremely" prepared to do case management and survivor-centered care after attending HUGG training







OUTCOME TRACKER SUPPORT

In the 2025/26 fiscal year, ACWS continued to provide invaluable support to our members using the ACWS common database, Outcome Tracker.

This support includes: launching the updated Outcome Tracker Basic and Administrative User Manuals and distributed them to member shelters digitally and via the ACWS Members' Hub; distributing an updated data dictionary for ACWS members; and providing 173 instances and 122 hours of direct database troubleshooting, customization, and training via emails and one-on-one vide call appointments to frontline staff and Outcome Tracker administrators from 27 member shelters.

ACWS additionally offered a total of 11 online monthly trainings to member shelters on a range of topics such as, orientation to OT for frontline staff and OT Admins, data entry best practices, querying, and database customization. 57 staff from member organizations attended these trainings. 100% of participants who completed an evaluation indicated that the training provided them with practical skills they can apply to their daily work.

DANGER ASSESSMENT COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

ACWS, along with a few member volunteers from the Danger Assessment Train-the-Trainer Community of Practice, established a working group to review the Community of Practice and consider how its direction could be adapted to better meet the needs of participating members. Through this process, a need was identified for a dedicated space focused on frontline staff and their practice.

In response, ACWS developed the Danger Assessment Frontline Community of Practice to run alongside the DA Train-the-Trainer CoP. The first DA Frontline CoP was hosted in February 2026, creating a dedicated space for frontline staff to connect with peers, share practice-based knowledge and experiences, and continue learning related to the Danger Assessment. The development of the DA Frontline CoP expanded opportunities for engagement by creating a space specifically responsive to frontline roles and practice.

REIMAGINING EVALUATION

In 2025, the ACWS research and evaluation team undertook a comprehensive reimagining and redesign of the ACWS evaluation process. As a result of this work, ACWS has built an innovative evaluation infrastructure that will allow us to more efficiently and effectively respond to member and community training needs and understand the impact and outcomes of ACWS' educational opportunities and training programs. This work positions ACWS on the cutting edge of community-centered evaluation.

5TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS (5WCWS)

In September 2025, ACWS presented the initial findings of our No Survivor Turned Away research project at the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters (5WCWS), in Sydney, Australia, in front of a packed audience. 5WCWS brough together more than 1000 delegates from over 100 countries to contribute to a worldwide systemic approach to ending violence against women and their children.

The research ACWS presented at 5WCWS is the result of a long-standing priority established by the ACWS Data Committee to conduct in-depth research on unmet service needs, and specifically on the number of unique individuals who ask to come into a shelter but cannot be admitted. Our No Survivor Turned Away research project is among the first in the world to successfully measure the number of unique individuals unable to be admitted to a large number of shelters across an extended geographic area. Our presentation about this research at 5WCWS solidified ACWS' position as a global leader in community-centered research about family violence.









REFER HER & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

In 2025, ACWS partnered with Women's Shelters Canada to bring our Domestic Violence and the Workplace curriculum to our sister organizations across Canada. In April 2025, ACWS facilitators traveled to Ottawa to lead three days of intensive and invigorating training that helped prepare facilitators across Canada to deliver Domestic Violence and the Workplace training to organizations in their communities. Coming out of that training, Women's Shelters Canada launched their national Refer Her campaign, encouraging organizations across Canada to address the problem of domestic violence in their workplaces, and to engage in training.

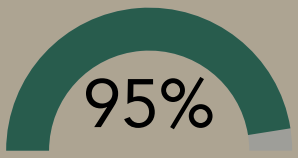
CHRA CONGRESS

In May 2025, ACWS was invited to present the results of our research on the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic at the Annual Congress of the Canadian Housing Renewal Association. The CHRA congress brought together hundreds of community organizers, social service providers, policymakers and researchers, and helped to build the national profile of ACWS' research and data program.

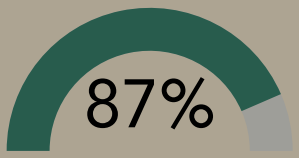
ACWS ONLINE COURSES

675 people enrolled in more than 1000 LMS courses

The Case Management Foundations Course and standalone Modules were enrolled in **657 times**



of people who completed Case Management Foundations or a module would recommend the training to a colleague.



of people who completed Case Management Foundations or a module felt that the training helped them prepare to better support their clients.

GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA LIVED EXPERTISE EDUCATIONAL SESSION

In the spring of 2025, ACWS undertook a comprehensive feedback process with our Survivor Advisory Committee to gather information on their experiences of accessing and navigating systems of care. In April 2025, ACWS partnered with the Prevention of Family Violence and Abuse (PFVA) branch of the Government of Alberta to host a half-day educational session where ACWS presented our analysis of the feedback from survivors and members of our Survivor Advisory Committee spoke directly to PFVA about their experiences accessing systems of care.

SURVIVOR PANEL AT DIVERSE VOICES

In the fall of 2025, ACWS partnered with Diverse Voices to host a Lived Expertise Keynote Panel during the 2025 Diverse Voices Family Violence Conference. ACWS worked with our Survivor Advisory Committee to determine the content and the speakers of the panel. On November 7, 2025, four members of the ACWS Survivor Advisory Committee spoke at the Diverse Voices panel and shared their insights with hundreds of conference participants.

THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT FOR MEMBER SHELTER STAFF

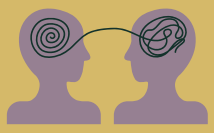
ACWS provides access to confidential therapeutic support services at no cost for staff working within member shelters. The service is available to staff in any role - including leadership, frontline, administration, and other positions, with no set limit on the number of sessions they may access by phone or video counselling sessions.

From September 2025 to March 2026, 96 therapeutic sessions were provided and 10 new referrals were received, with staff from 12 member shelters accessing therapeutic support.

Staff sought support for a range of workplace and personal concerns, including compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout, workplace stress and conflict, difficult or traumatic experiences, emotional regulation, boundaries, grief and loss, and personal life challenges. Staff may also access the service proactively as a space to reflect, process experiences, and regain clarity.

By the Numbers

September 2025-March 2026



96

THERAPEUTIC SESSIONS



10

NEW REFERRALS



12

MEMBER SHELTERS

"THEIR APPROACH IS COMPASSIONATE AND PERSON-CENTRED IN EVERY ASPECT. THIS SERVICE OFFERS A TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO RESET IN THE MIDST OF A FRANTIC OR HECTIC DAY AND FIND CALM - AN OASIS FOR WEARY AND MENTALLY EXHAUSTED FRONTLINE WORKERS. IT'S HELPING TO PREVENT BURNOUT - A HUGE PRIORITY IN THESE UNIQUE WORKPLACES."

– CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

Our







Members



Together, We Are Stronger

ACWS was founded on the principle that together, we are stronger. **Together, ACWS and its members work to create an Alberta free from violence.** Over forty voices strong, our members operate over sixty shelters that support survivors and their families in communities province wide.

Our members continued to be there for Albertans experiencing domestic and family violence - offering safety, support, and a path forward when it was needed most. They met survivors where they were at, responding with compassion to needs that are increasingly complex and everchanging. They did this with limited resources, while facing uncertainties and significant pressures on shelter capacity. Despite these challenges, our members continue to find new ways to respond, adapt, and ensure survivors are not left without support.
Their leadership, innovation, and deep commitment to the people and families they serve remained at the heart of our collective work.

We are proud to share a few of the projects, people, accomplishments, and stories from our members that inspired us this year - and remind us why this work matters so deeply.

To our members, thank you for the trust you put in us to support you and advocate alongside you for shelters and survivors.
We look forward to continuing to walk this path together.

FULL MEMBERS 2025-2026

- Brooks and District Women's Safe Shelter Society
- Camrose Women's Shelter Society
- Capella Centre Alberta
- Catholic Social Services
- Central Alberta Outreach Society
- Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter Society
- Chestermere Women's Crisis Society
- Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society
- Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd.
- Fairview and District Women's Centre Association
- Grande Cache Transition House Society
- Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association
- Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation
- Maskan Family Association
- Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society
- Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association
- Mountain View Emergency Shelter Society
- Nisa Foundation
- Northern Haven Support Society
- Northwest Alberta Resource Society
- Peace River Regional Women's Shelter Society
- Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- Ruth's House Society
- SPARK Foundation of Lloydminster
- Sage Seniors Association
- Stepping Stones Crisis Society
- Stoney Tribal Administration
- Sucker Creek Women's Emergency Shelter
- Taber Safe Haven Women's Shelter Society
- The Brenda Strafford Foundation Ltd. Heart Home Network
- True North
- Unison Society
- Waypoints Community Services Association
- Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre Society
- Wings of Providence Society Ltd.
- YWCA of Banff
- YWCA of Lethbridge & District
- Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society
- Cochrane's Women's Emergency Shelter Society
- Hope Haven Society
- Radiance Family Society
- Rowan House Society
- Strathcona Shelter Society Ltd.









INVESTING IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society, Medicine Hat

With support provided through a CMHC low interest loan for $7.6M with $1.5 being forgivable, the Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society was able to complete their long-awaited renovation and expansion project on schedule while they continued to solicit funds to repay the loan. This investment has transformed their emergency shelter, allowing them to address critical infrastructure needs and create accessible, barrier-free spaces and main-floor services. These enhancements are especially meaningful for women arriving at our shelter with severe injuries because of domestic violence, ensuring they can access the support they need safely and with dignity.

The renovated shelter, which can now accommodate up to 30 individuals, offers a warm, welcoming environment that provides comfort, safety, and hope for individuals and families during some of the most challenging times in their lives

"WE ARE PROUD TO CONTINUE STRENGTHENING OUR ABILITY TO SERVE WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND WE THANK CMHC FOR ITS PARTNERSHIP IN HELPING US CREATE A SAFER, MORE INCLUSIVE, AND MORE RESILIENT SHELTER FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST."
NATASHA CARVALHO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MEDICINE HAT WOMEN'S SHELTER SOCIETY



INSPIRING YOUTH

Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation, Morinville

The Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation recently completed another successful year of the Inspire Program at Four Winds Public School.

Designed for youth in Grades 7 to 12, Inspire is part of JMMF's prevention and education work. The program gives students the knowledge, empathy, and skills to recognize harmful behaviours, build healthy relationships, and respond safely. By starting these conversations early, Inspire works to prevent gender-based violence before it starts.

For the 2026 to 2027 school year, JMMF will expand Inspire to a high school in Morinville, allowing the program to reach more young people.











CELEBRATING 40 YEARS SUPPORTING FAMILIES

WINGS, Edmonton

In 2026, Wings (Wings of Providence Society) celebrated 40 years of helping women and children rebuild their lives after family violence. Since opening its doors in 1986, Wings has supported more than 6,000 women and children on their journey to safety, healing, and lasting independence.

This past year marked a significant evolution with the launch of the Family Wellness and Empowerment Program (FWEP), a unified service model that expanded comprehensive, trauma-informed supports across all 50 housing units. For the first time in Wings' history, every family has equitable access to the full range of programming, including full-day childcare and wraparound supports tailored to their needs.

Wings also strengthened the continuum of care through new partnerships with Edmonton-area shelters and affordable housing providers, helping families transition from crisis to long-term stability.

Today, Wings provides 50 safe, fully furnished homes where women and children have the time, safety, and support to heal and build independent futures. While family violence remains one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children, Wings continues to make a lasting impact, supporting more than 300 women and children each year, with 98% not returning to unsafe situations after leaving the program.

IT IS NOT A GAME!

Catholic Social Services, Edmonton



Recognizing a significant gap in resources for children exposed to strangulation, CSS Lurana Shelter and Morag McLean, RN, developed an innovative educational program, It Is Not a Game! in collaboration with ACWS. The program includes a colouring book, graphic novel, and Helper Guide designed to help shelter staff engage children in age-appropriate conversations about strangulation and its impacts and then to safety plan for potential strangulation threats in the future.

The need for this program emerged amid increasing exposure to strangulation assaults through pornography, gaming, movies, and social media, as well as the reality that some children witness or experience strangulation within their families. These experiences can have significant emotional and developmental impacts, yet professionals have had few resources to help them address the topic safely with the children and their parent.

Before the program was developed, staff reported feeling uncomfortable and uncertain about discussing strangulation with child clients. They lacked specialized training and appropriate resources to support meaningful, trauma-informed conversations. At the same time, we observed that mothers often minimized or denied their children's exposure to strangulation and were reluctant to report incidents due to concerns about potential consequences.

These observations highlighted the need for practical, accessible, and developmentally appropriate tools that would enable shelter staff to safely address strangulation with children while supporting both children and their caregivers. Since the program was launched at Lurana, it has helped staff support numerous mothers and children in navigating these challenging but important conversations.

This project was made possible through the generous support of IODE Alberta.

Download the full resources for free on our website at acws.ca/it-is-not-a-game or scan the QR code!

CREATING CONNECTION OVER SPRING BREAK

Discovery House, Calgary

Last spring, Discovery House opened its doors to children and youth for a special Spring Break Camp designed to bring connection, calm, and joy into a week that can otherwise feel unstructured for families recovering from family violence. In partnership with CanLearn Society, children explored mindfulness, breathing, stress management, sensory tools, and self-regulation through fun, hands-on activities in a small and supportive group setting. Each day offered more than programming: it offered snacks, laughter, meaningful crafts, new friendships, and caring adults who helped children feel safe enough to participate, try new things, and shine.

One of the most meaningful parts of the program was the addition of transportation for community-based clients. By arranging bussing through Dreams Transportation, Discovery House helped remove a major barrier for families whose children may not otherwise have been able to attend. Children were picked up and brought safely to the shelter, where they could take part in the CanLearn group alongside their peers, and then returned home afterward. This simple but powerful support made the program more accessible, strengthened connection between community and shelter-based families, and showed what becomes possible when thoughtful partnerships are built around the real needs of children and caregivers.



CELEBRATING A LASTING IMPACT

Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association, Rocky Mountain House

This year, Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association's Executive Director, Cindy Easton, announced her retirement after 15 years of passionate dedication to MRWSA and our shared commitment to end domestic violence in our communities and our province. A staunch advocate and powerful leader, Cindy leaves a lasting impact on MRWSA, ACWS, and the domestic violence sector.

"For Cindy's retirement party, we had a little fun with some of her common sayings. Some words are inspirational; some are expressing her frustration as professionally funny as possible. As I start my path as leadership of MRWSA, I'll keep them tucked in my back pocket as reminders of why women like Cindy and I do the work in this field.

We may have made farce of her MANY sayings that night, but two really stand out as a philosophy I want to carry on. Cindy often signs off on an email or letter with "In Solidarity" or "In Gratitude". She is a true feminist, who believes ALL people deserve safety and happiness. I think she wants us to read these phrases to remind everyone that "I walk beside you, and our collective voices will continue the work to end violence against women and children. We don't need to walk alone, and I can't do this without you." The last 6 years with Cindy as a mentor have changed me as a whole, professionally and privately. The office is a little quieter, but the "layers of an onion" and "eating elephants" will be discussed for many years to come.

Congratulations on 15 years of service and your retirement!"
Carolyn Lavallee,
Incoming Executive Director of MRWSA

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Domestic violence is not one woman's problem, or just one family's.
It is everyone's problem, and it needs an everyone solution.
Be a part of the solution.

Make a Donation and Support ACWS Today!

The work we do each day to support our members and advocate for survivors of gender-based violence would not be possible without your support.

When you donate to ACWS, you are investing in a stronger shelter sector and supporting frontline training, province-wide advocacy, and collective research.

We need the help of the community to continue to do this work, to do more of it, to do it better.

We need you.

ACWS.CA/DONATE



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