

# STORIES

2016 / 2017

## TWO OF A KIND

*Community Connections develops a unique friendship.*

## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

*Marnia's Garden Project begins to grow.*

## A WOMAN ON A MISSION

*Willa's dedication to the Senior's Program creates new opportunities.*

**COVER FEATURE:**

*Recycling Makes a Difference*

*The stories of People Helping People  
with Abbotsford Community Services*

Abbotsford  
**Community  
& Services**  
*People Helping People*

## STORIES MAGAZINE

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### OUR MISSION

Abbotsford Community Services strives to be an agency that fosters community well-being and social justice through positive action and leadership.

### OUR VISION

Justice, opportunities and equitable access for all.

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Over the last several years, we've seen Abbotsford Community Services develop in ways we had previously only dreamed possible. More than investing in our established long-term programs, we've introduced innovative new projects to Abbotsford. Low-barrier housing, a multi-faceted youth hub, and the AbbotsfordWorks employment centre have all shifted from vision to reality. It has certainly been a pleasure to take part in these community-changing initiatives.

An area my fellow board members and I have focused on this year is advocating for the broad range of services offered by ACS. With the organization touching on so many parts of the community, some of our programming is often seen as independent. But like any family, we are stronger when we are one. Recognizing programs such as the Abbotsford Food Bank or the Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program as proud members of our ACS family is a great benefit for Abbotsford residents. By doing so, every community member can see the scope of resources available to them if, or when, they need them. We want our neighbours to know that if you are in need of help, ACS is here for you. From seniors to families, youth to newcomers, there is something for everyone.

This year, I've looked back on my years of serving on the ACS Board of Directors. Time and again, I've been honored to hear the impact of ACS services on the lives of community members first hand. I've heard how pregnant mothers have overcome

addiction to become the best parent they can be. I've shared in the joy of newcomers to Canada as they receive job offers in their chosen profession. I've seen Food Bank clients get back on their feet and earn gainful employment - and independence. Year after year, the tireless effort ACS puts forth to better the Fraser Valley is incredible. I can't wait to hear of the impact some of our newest initiatives have on the lives of those taking part.

We've heard many times what a generous and giving community Abbotsford is. For years, community and business members have donated their time, money and services to help those less fortunate. With every bit of support that comes through, the ACS Board is humbled. It is truly the work done behind the scenes from our partners and supporters that makes our community a special place.

Going forward, my hope is that ACS continues to help make Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley the best place to live and raise a family. In collaboration with community partners, I look forward to seeing Abbotsford Community Services work toward achieving the very best.

**Serge Blanchette**

*President, Board of Directors  
Abbotsford Community Services*



# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Y**ou are likely to hear me – and others at Abbotsford Community Services – speak about the value of offering more than 90 diverse, yet strongly interlinked programs and services to individuals and families in community.

Whether in search of parenting courses or addictions counselling, interpretation & translation services or a Starfish backpack, job search skills or English language development, rent subsidies or anger management training, Monday lunchtime bingo or an alternative to gang involvement... if you're wondering where you can turn to for help, the answer is as close by as Abbotsford Community Services.

Yet we're not only about providing a broad range of services. We're also about responding to the question "What difference did it make?"

In our most recent year:

- 85% of children and youth aged 6-18 with developmental disabilities in the STAR Club program stated they found it easier to make friends after participating;
- 16,092 metric tonnes of Abbotsford and Mission household recycling was diverted from going to the local landfill through the Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program;
- 92% of 702 Abbotsford and Mission clients reported that contact with Specialized Victims Assistance Program made the criminal justice system experience easier;

- 62 of 88 appeals and reconsiderations submitted on behalf of clients of the Farmworker's Legal Advocacy Program were successfully resolved in the client's favour;
- 88% of 45 foster parents/caregivers in the Caregiver Support Program identified greater ability to handle the acting out behaviours of the children in their care;
- 4,050 income tax and government forms were completed and submitted for low-income community members;
- 76% of 699 clients reported an improvement in the relationships in their lives since working with the Youth Resource Centre (YRC);
- 545 individuals were helped to secure and maintain employment through AbbotsfordWORKS, including 155 single parents through the Single Parent Employment Initiative.

This is just a sample of the wide range of positive and lasting community impacts resulting this year from the 90+ programs and services offered at Abbotsford Community Services.

ACS: Justice, opportunities and equitable access for all. For more examples of other program impacts, check out our 2016-2017 Annual Report, available September 21, 2017.

**Rod Santiago**  
*Executive Director*  
*Abbotsford Community Services*



# TWO OF A KIND





*Andrea Loewen is the coordinator for Abbotsford Community Services' Community Connections program. The program offers workshops and courses related to newcomer settlement. These include parenting and computer skills courses as well as a popular conversational English group called Conversation Circles. One of the program's initiatives is particularly unique: it aims to connect newcomers to Canada with volunteer "friends." These special volunteers support newcomers as they adjust to their new life and home. By being there, the volunteers add a social support component to a sometimes daunting, and often lonely, endeavour.*

*She shared an idea with me. "Rebecca," she began, "I think I have a unique story for you." Andrea hesitated. "But I'm not sure how to describe it." Intrigued, I urged Andrea to go on. She began to detail a solid friendship that originated from Community Connections: Sandy, a local volunteer, and Veronique, a relative newcomer to Canada.*

*Over the years, described Andrea, the two have become the best of friends despite not sharing the same language, background, or life experiences. She noted that while she wasn't the one to originally connect them, their relationship is a shining example of what the program aims to do.*

*A testament to the success of the program, I was eager to learn more.*

# IT'S

a sunny day and I'm ready to meet with Andrea, Sandy, and Veronique. Knowing Sandy and Veronique are close friends, I picture walking into an animated conversation taking place over coffee. I imagine the enjoyment of sitting with a pal, sharing the story of how you've met and the serendipitous circumstances that brought you there. Surely, if Andrea could feel the palpable bond, I thought, I'd be able to share in it, too.

I am surprised when I walk into a still room. Side by side, Sandy and Veronique sit quietly. And while smiling at each other, neither are saying much of anything. Sandy, soft spoken and kind, introduces herself with a smile. Veronique, still learning conversational English, does the same.

I'm instantly interested in their friendship. I ask Veronique to share a little bit about herself. I learn Veronique is originally from Kinshasa, the capital and the largest city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Before coming to Canada, she lived in South Africa. Veronique has six children – all girls – dispersed around the globe. In 2005, Veronique settled in Abbotsford with one of her daughters and became a proud citizen in 2009.

In the same vein, I turn to Sandy and asked how she became involved with Abbotsford Community Services. I asked how long she had been volunteering, and when the two met. Sandy shares that she's always had an interest in helping others, especially those in need of a friendly face. Sandy began volunteering with Community Connections in 2011, matching with Veronique in 2012.

Clearly the rest, as they say, is history.

As the conversation continues, I learn Sandy and Veronique's favorite pastimes are quite common for folks around the Valley: they both love to shop and check out local goings-on. Additionally, they share a common faith and enjoy participating in church activities and functions. Together, they also participate in Community Connections' Conversation Circles.

I pause for a moment. I contemplate how two women who speak different languages, and grew up roughly 13,000 kilometers away from each other, could become so close. On the surface, it seems that a formal pairing shouldn't create best friends. But it's clear the two are confidants and their relationship is comfortable and safe.

## FRIENDSHIP IS SOMETHING THAT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ESTABLISHES WELL.

Ever more curious, I ask Sandy what her favorite thing about Veronique is. Sandy explains how much she enjoys the connection of their faith and how much she cares for Veronique's entire family. She is thankful for Veronique and for the opportunity to be a friend and have one in return. For the chance, Sandy offers, to extend kindness when others may not.

I pose the same question to Veronique and, a bit complex, it is lost in translation. Thankfully, Community Connections offers a solution. Two years ago, a Congolese woman named Sephora had attended Conversation Circles. Naturally, she and Veronique hit it off but when Sephora stopped attending the group, she and Veronique lost touch. Andrea, however,

had not. She mentioned reaching out to Sephora to see if she could translate for us as she spoke some of the same languages as Veronique. With 264 dialects spoken in the Congo, I learn Veronique speaks a total of six languages: the four national languages of the Congo (Tshiluba, Lingála, Kiswahili, and Kikongo); along with some French and English. Andrea calls her connection, explains the situation, and Sephora happily agrees to translate.

With Sephora on the line, our group conversation comes to life. Veronique and Sephora begin a frenzied, excited conversation. As a group, we are buoyed and giddy by the sudden animation. Admittedly, I am relieved when I realize Sephora is asking Veronique's favorite thing about Sandy; the thing she values most about their friendship. Veronique becomes pensive. She shares her answer with Sephora, and Sephora relays it to us: "She is my sister."

It's a bold statement. Sandy's face illuminates. Sephora goes on to explain: "Veronique says she has four sisters and one brother, and Sandy is her Canadian sister." Sadly, Sephora explains how much Veronique misses her sister but Sandy's friendship – the comfort she brings, her positive attitude, her consistency, and the fun they have – reminds her of the relationships she had back home.

I begin to understand what Andrea meant by what a unique and special friendship Sandy and Veronique share. Despite the odds, the language barriers, and the differences, Community Connections has made a remarkable impact on two wonderful women. It challenges my own experience of making friends and what friendship actually requires.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone who is new to Canada— where the people around you don't understand your language, the



## FRIENDSHIP

*It just seems to happen, right? For many people, it's automatic. You make friends at school, work, or volunteering. You might share a faith or hobby, or even a mutual friend. You often find yourself within a network of others, in relationships of varying degrees of closeness. At the very least, shared experiences somehow bring people together. From there, these relationships build years of history.*

*But what if they didn't? What if your closest friend stemmed from little more than needing a friend or the desire to be a friend? Could it work?*



**For more information  
about Community  
Connections call  
604-217-3055**



▪ Veronique, left, and Sandy have been friends for 5 years. The two met through Community Connections.

day-to-day tasks are different, and you don't know a single soul. You're facing new experiences, and occasionally challenges, every day on your own. It would be great to have someone in your corner, wouldn't it? A friend to support you through all the new things you're experiencing. To have a friend stand behind you saying, "You've got this." Without a doubt, having one would affect your fulfillment, your happiness, and your life.

That's the beauty of Community Connections. It fosters what many in Canada take for granted – dear friends standing by you through thick and thin. Without a social connection program like Community Connections, it can be challenging for newcomers to find necessary social supports. The program helps newcomers make friends, contacts, and in the case of Sandy and Veronique, even family.

One might still wonder how complete strangers from completely different backgrounds, paired up and asked to be friendly could actually become close friends.

But the answer to that is simple: Ask what, deep down, connects you to the people you hold dearest. It's the trust, the safety, and the unwavering support they provide you in your life, and you provide in return. It's not where, or even how, you met them. It's the connection fostered over time.

Friendship is something that Community Connections establishes well. Like Sandy and Veronique, the program boasts many connections that have become meaningful and are still thriving years later. Having that one person can make all the difference and help make a new home, home. ▪



▪ Ryan with his daughter on a family vacation.

# A BAND OF BROTHERS

**J**ust before Ryan's twenty-first birthday, he became the father of a baby girl. "I was a very young dad," recalls Ryan. "It's kind of a lonely life when you're that young. None of my friends had kids, so not a lot of people understood what it was like."

Feeling alone and in need of connection with other men in the same situation, a friend mentioned a recreational hockey drop-in hosted by Abbotsford Community Services as part of the Abby Dads program. This league, designed for dads like Ryan, aimed to connect dads with each other while having a little fun. "I love hockey, but more importantly, I loved that I was spending all this time with other dads and guys who actually get it," Ryan reminisced. "I wasn't the only one in my early twenties with a kid, and a girlfriend, and just completely over my head. We'd play hockey for two hours, then we'd all go over to Tim Horton's and sit and talk as long as we wanted. It was a really great experience."

Over the next ten years, with five of those spent parenting 3 children on his own, Ryan chose to participate in a various parenting programs through Abbotsford Community Services.

But it wasn't until Dad Chat, a weekly gathering of local fathers as part of the Abby Dads program, that Ryan found his place. For two hours every Wednesday night, the program invites dads to share what's going on in their lives and provide support to other dads. "When I came the first time, I didn't even know that it was what I needed. It was exactly what I'd been missing."

## THE MISSING PIECE

For Ryan, and other dads like him, Dad Chat is a safe place to form an emotional connection to others experiencing the same feelings as they navigate the often difficult journey of fatherhood; feelings that leave young fathers overwhelmed when it comes to parenting and relationships. "We suddenly grow up and we're men," Ryan notes. "We're expected to be emotionally available, more well-rounded for our partners and for our kids, but it's just not inherent to all of us. We're doing our best to learn it, and for some guys it's not easy and it's pretty uncomfortable at times." The self-reflection can cause discomfort and uncertainty for many participants; however, the honesty expected at Dad Chat empowers dads to become the confident, self-assured fathers they want to be.

“We set the bar high, but it’s simply not okay to stay where you’re at,” admits Dad Chat facilitator Reg Unrau, as he explained that a little tough love can be expected during the Wednesday night gatherings. Reg reminds the participants that it’s up to them whether they want to grow, and explains that while it can certainly be a tough road, ultimately the point of the group is to support each other when

relaxed environment and then I can go home and be a calmer, better person.” With a bit of excitement, Ryan adds that for the first time, he’s taken on being a mentor for others: “I’ve never thought of myself as somebody who has it all together, but when I go there, I feel a sense of responsibility and duty to help these guys. It’s important to remind them that it gets better.”

These days, Dad Chat pulls an impressive attendance. While Dad Chat started with humble beginnings, there are new attendees every week. The comradery found in Dad Chat has even inspired many members to meet on their own time - several dads bring their kids to weekend breakfasts as they find the Wednesday meetings just aren’t enough. However, while volunteer initiatives like the breakfasts are valuable to dads, warns Reg, they often aren’t sustainable.

### WE NEED YOU

Because Abby Dads and its father-centred programs, including Dad Chat, are seeing such tremendous success in bringing dads to a pivotal place in their lives, we need your support to help keep it going and to continue empowering dads across the community. This program is truly impactful - and we’re committed to supporting it as one of our areas of greatest need. When you choose to support Abbotsford Community Services, selecting Area of Greatest Need will ensure you’re helping dads like Ryan find their place, encouraging them to become better dads, better partners - and better brothers to each other. ■

**“THE RESULTS  
ARE GOOD.  
THE GUYS GROW.”**

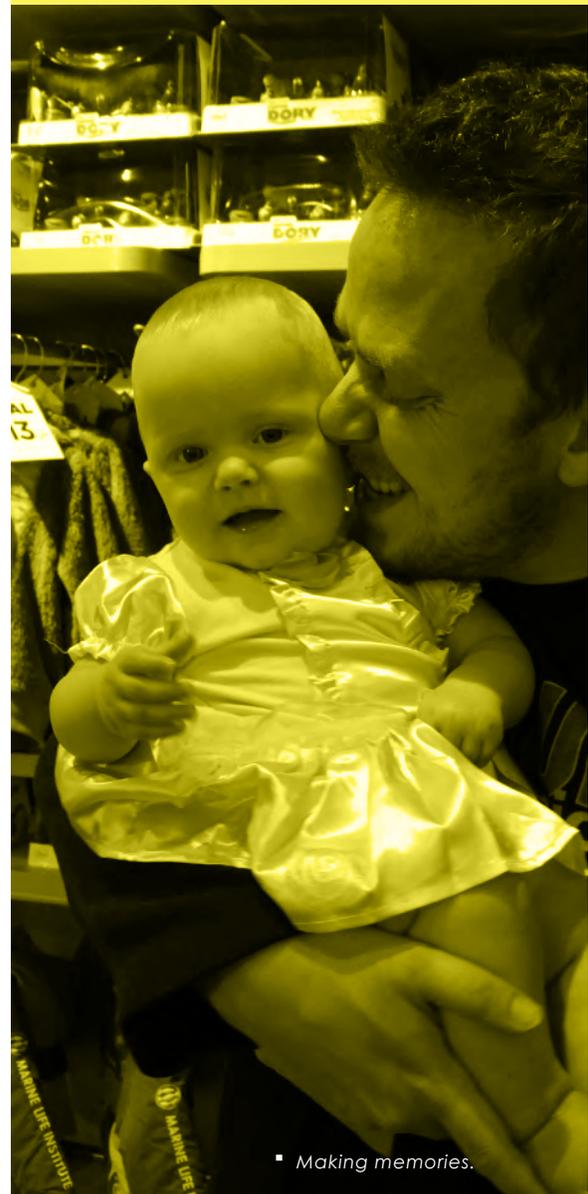
things get rough. The balance of honesty and self-reflection, coupled with unwavering peer support, is what makes the program a success. “The results are what they are,” Reg points out. “And the results are good. The guys grow. And they get better relationships with their kids and their partners.”

### THE NEXT CHAPTER

For Ryan, now happily married and settled into the role of “Dad,” the group acts as a sounding board to help set his week right. “My wife is super supportive, but as much as my wife is understanding and emotionally available, there are just certain things she can’t and won’t understand - and vice versa. Going to Dad Chat, I can explain my week in an open and



Donations to our area of greatest need help support programs like Abby Dads.  
[www.abbotsfordcommunityservices.com](http://www.abbotsfordcommunityservices.com)



▪ Making memories.

# TAIL WAGGING SUCCESS!

Ever since Nancy was a small child, she loved animals. “Growing up we always had pets, or things that followed us home,” she says. “I made sure my children grew up with dogs, and cats, and birds! We’ve had a few different critters over the years. I’ve rescued injured animals found on the side of the road. One time, I even rescued a seagull with a broken wing. I simply love all animals, big and small.”

After being laid off from her job at a dog-grooming salon, Nancy felt discouraged and fragile. She went to AbbotsfordWORKS, WorkBC Employment Service Centre where she was assigned a case manager. After working with her case manager, Nancy was referred to Community Futures Self Employment Program, which is offered through AbbotsfordWORKS in partnership with Community Futures and Abbotsford Community Services. Though the notion of self-employment made Nancy nervous, she decided to attend an orientation and market research workshop. By the end of it, she was convinced this was the right step for her and took a leap of faith!

Ultimately, the program supported her in realizing a life-long dream. In the spring of 2014 she opened Nancy’s Dog Grooming. “I



▪ Nancy with one of her beloved clients.

couldn’t have done it without the Self Employment Program, everything about it was fabulous!”

Nancy renovated her garage into a luxurious spa for dogs, and once she opened up shop, “wonderful people and their beloved furry companions” started pounding down her door. Today, she is tremendously happy and is fully booked. She says she will never look back.

The Community Futures Self Employment Program is a strategic combination of one-on-one assistance, workshops, mentoring, and specialty counselling. Its primary objective is to help individuals make well-thought-out, lasting transitions

from unemployment or under-employment to self-employment.

People who are currently collecting Employment Insurance or have participated in the EI program over the last three years, as well as those who have a disability are all eligible to participate in Community Futures Self Employment Program. The program helps approximately 50 individuals start small or micro businesses annually and has had an 80 percent success rate.

AbbotsfordWORKS believes every person is capable of finding meaningful employment and every employer deserves to have the right employee in order to be profitable. In addition to

# WELCOME, HEARTHSTONE



*AbbotsfordWORKS believes every person is capable of finding meaningful employment and every employer deserves to have the right employee in order to be profitable.*

the Self Employment Program, AbbotsfordWORKS provides assistance with resume writing, effective job searches, and workshops on topics like: Career Decision Making, Employability Life Skills, and many more. Other programs offered include Wage Subsidy, Specialized Services for Immigrants, Multiple Barriers, People with Disabilities, Youth and Women, and Apprenticeship, just to name a few.

AbbotsfordWORKS has three locations to serve the Abbotsford community with fully equipped resource rooms. All services and programs are free for job seekers although some programs have eligibility requirements. AbbotsfordWORKS also has programs for employers like the Wage Subsidy Program and Job Fair opportunities. To learn more, please visit [abbotsfordworks.com](http://abbotsfordworks.com) or stop by one of the locations. ■

Opening its doors on March 1st, 2017, Hearthstone Place is a low-barrier, 30 bed housing initiative that supports men and women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Unlike a temporary emergency shelter bed, this program provides a stable home for an optimal period of between 18 to 24 months. The focus during this time period is on addressing personal barriers, which may include addiction and/or mental health, with the ultimate goal of reintegration into the community and into long-term stable independent housing.

The Supportive Housing project is a partnership between the City of Abbotsford, the Provincial Government and Abbotsford Community Services (ACS). Through our many collaborative community partnerships we provide both basic in-house support 24/7 as well as referrals for community programming and support which may include: connection to outreach workers, mental health workers, social workers, counselors, nurses and other skilled professionals to address the specific needs of the residents. ■

# RECYCLING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**A**s a social service agency, Abbotsford Community Services strives to take positive action by advocating for justice, opportunities, and equitable access for all. It is more than a vision, it is what they do. They make a difference in their community and the lives of its residents. The Abbotsford Community Services' Recycling Program, Abbotsford Mission Recycling, carries on with this tradition. Their role is not only to process recyclables and divert waste from the landfill; it is also to provide meaningful employment that promotes continuous learning and personal success.



▪ Nancy, line leader.

The Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program began in the early 1970's as one of the first recycling programs in BC. It started as a program to provide meaningful employment to the traditionally hard-to-employ and, although it has grown into a much larger operation - with partnerships between the City of Abbotsford and District of Mission - it continues to advocate for this today.

For the Recycling Program, inclusivity is important. The Program's leadership is open-minded and, as an equal opportunity employer, offers permanent employment to approximately fifty individuals from all segments of the community, including those who have historically had a hard time keeping a job - people with physical, mental and developmental disabilities as well as other life challenges.

Lisa Sullivan, Director of Recycling, explains that they hire for strengths - not just a resume. "We see the skills of our employees and we work toward encouraging and developing the areas they're good at."

The management team also encourages employees to advance by offering training and support, which allows staff, like long-time

employee Nancy, to move up the ranks when the time is right. Nancy says that she has never felt as supported by management as she does at Recycling; "I've moved up from sweeping floors to becoming a line leader." Laura Midan, the Program's Office Manager says that "as a management team, we recognize that our staff may have some limitations, so we are mindful when assigning new tasks to ensure a focus on staff assets." They want to give their employees the best chance at success to reach their potential. Nancy mentions that some days can be challenging, but that she feels every challenge makes her stronger: "At the end of the day, I feel enjoyment. I feel the more you help, the more comes back to you. It has for me."

At the facility, the recyclables, brought in by truck, are placed onto a conveyor belt and hand-sorted by Abbotsford Community Services employees, like Nancy. Once sorted, the materials are either baled or loaded loose into shipping containers and sent to market. In addition to the processing facility and drop-off locations, the Recycling Program also offers an extensive public awareness program.

If it sounds like there is a lot going on at the facility, it's because there is. In a year, the Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program can divert over 15,000 metric tonnes of recyclables from the landfill and engage with over 6,500 community members through their Education Program. At the heart of this operation, however, are the



*“ WE DO  
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LIVES HERE.”*

people that work there. “I really feel valued and love working with different people every day,” says Nancy. This is the reason why Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program is much more than a recycling depot.

Just ask line-worker Stuart, who has been working at the facility for the past six months and shares a similar experience. Previously, Stuart struggled with mental health barriers that affected attempts at securing a job. Since starting with the Program, he has found meaningful employment, stability in his home life, and a new work family: “I came here and fit right in,” he explains. “It’s such a family here. We have a lot of people who have trouble, including myself, and we welcome everyone with open arms.” Stuart points out that working at the facility has helped him find new friends, be more social, and become an all-around better person. “It’s all due to some recycling,” he says. “We do more than recycle plastic. We recycle lives here.”

To Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program, providing life-changing employment opportunities is imperative to a strong workplace and an even stronger community.\*

\* Stuart finds his place.

" I'VE almost been around the world. Most recent was a slow cruise out of New Orleans to Honduras, Belize, and then to Mexico," recalls Willa Mann, longtime Abbotsford Community Services volunteer. "But I've been to the Antarctic, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, China..." She trails off as she recounts some of her most memorable voyages and the friends she's made along the way.

Willa nods to herself, affirming her love for travel. She recalls her first solo journey: "My husband died in 2001. In 2002 I went back east to see family and friends, because I'm originally from Montreal. I said to my daughter, 'I've got to find a vacation.' The first cruise I took was from Los Angeles to Puerto Vallarta and back. And now I cruise once a year."

If the recollection sounds courageous, it's because it is. And it accurately depicts the lionhearted Willa. "I have a habit of jumping into things and not thinking about it," she admits. But it's her free spirit that helped bring Willa to Abbotsford Community Services. For the past fifteen years, she's volunteered in the seniors' department with Meals on Wheels and Lunch with the Bunch. For Meals on Wheels, Willa delivers meals to those unable to leave home. Her visit, she notes, comes with a side of companionship to those without nearby family or friends. At Lunch with the Bunch, Willa provides transportation for those without a reliable ride. And as if she wasn't busy enough at home, she even marries her love for travel and volunteering. Annually, while visiting her brother in Arizona, she spends time with the American-led United Service Organizations.



▪ Long-time volunteer Willa.

Willa says her openness to trying new things – whether traveling, moving cross-country, or volunteering – keeps her motivated and social. Staying social, Willa stresses, is vital to seniors living happy, satisfying lives.

It's a consideration that might not cross the minds of many. Certainly, socialization in other stages of life are natural bridges to happiness and fulfillment. With children, for instance, socializing with others is an integral part of development, instilling a lifelong appreciation of connection with others. As an adult, social activities and hobbies help ease the stress of budding careers and growing families. But for many seniors, as they've long settled into retirement and their children have grown, opportunities for socialization aren't as abundant as they once were.

# ON MISSION



A 2012 study by Statistics Canada looked into the link between social participation and the well-being of seniors. The study found that

*“ Willa says her openness to trying new things – whether traveling, moving cross-country, or volunteering – keeps her motivated and social.”*

social activities are not only enjoyable but a component of successful aging. Engaged seniors have a sharper mind, have a reduced

risk of depression, and report feeling healthier overall. Abbotsford Community Services’ Lunch with the Bunch provides that very opportunity: a consistent, weekly gathering of seniors from across the community, chatting and sharing a meal. Every week, the program boasts something new or interesting to explore in a lively environment, such as live music, guest speakers, and even dancing. Volunteers like Willa pick up participants from their home and escort them back after the afternoon’s event. Willa explains this service effectively removes a barrier so often faced by seniors: a means of safe, reliable transportation, especially for those who may be affected by dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

It doesn’t take long for anyone to notice that for Willa, a natural conversationalist and

spirited bingo caller, being social comes easily. But she is careful to note that she consciously “re-invents” herself as she moves into new stages of life: first as a retired homemaker, then as a widow, and now as an adventurer and

***“Be flexible, be open. Go out and try new things... Be there to see if you can help people. Give it a try.”***

dedicated volunteer. She says this attitude helps her stay adaptable and flexible to the changes life brings. Nancy Deba, program coordinator for Lunch with the Bunch and Meals on Wheels, adds to Willa’s sentiment. “None of us realize until we get to that age how important family and connection is.” “Some of us have lived in a little bubble for many years. When something happens to that bubble, you’re sort of lost. Willa is one of these people who made the effort to rebuild. And it wasn’t easy - it wasn’t easy to start all over.” While it’s true globetrotting and a

full volunteer schedule may not be for everyone, an effort to develop in a new stage of life is beneficial. Taking advantage of social opportunities, like Lunch with the Bunch, provides that locally.

Nancy has worked alongside Willa over the years. She’s quick to appreciate Willa’s dedication to seniors’ programs and clients: “She’s invaluable,” Nancy says. “I have a few volunteers like Willa. They’re like family to me.” She lets on just how dedicated Willa is to including others: even during the holidays when many are busy with their own family and friends, Willa goes the extra mile. Bashfully, Willa elaborates: every year at Thanksgiving and Christmas, she and her daughter open the door of their family home. Clients-turned-friends, who may not have any family, are invited for a holiday dinner. “My daughter is very good,” Willa adds. “She’ll say, ‘Well, who do you want to come over for Thanksgiving?’ We invite a few people and I pick them up and bring them over.”

Without a doubt, Willa is a woman on a mission. Naturally one might wonder what’s next on the horizon and what Willa’s plans for retirement may be. “Retirement? This is retirement!” she quips good-naturedly. Nancy shares in a laugh. Willa clarifies that, not to fret, she does indulge in some downtime. In fact, Nancy and Willa bond weekly over their

love of movies. Together, they scan the local newspaper to see what’s playing at the cinema and Willa plans a Saturday matinee.

When asked for words of wisdom to share with prospective volunteers, Willa delivers a gem: “Be flexible, be open. Go out and try new things, because you don’t know if you’ll like it. Be there to see if you can help people. Give it a try.” Nancy agrees and adds, “If you don’t like it, try something else,” and Willa nods. It’s surely good advice for life in general.

Thanks, Willa, for your years of inspiration and dedication. Here’s to many more. ▀



Are you interested in volunteering with Abbotsford Community Services? Visit [abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/volunteer](http://abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/volunteer) for more information.

Looking for seniors’ programming in your community? Check out [abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/seniors](http://abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/seniors) for information on Lunch with the Bunch, Meals on Wheels, and more.



*“Currently, the living wage for the Fraser Valley is \$15.90 an hour – a wage many in Abbotsford struggle to earn.”*

▪ Krystal and her happy family.

## LIVING WAGE

**K**rystal nearly lost her son Nollan every year for the first four years of his young life, due to illness. “Nollan has stage four chronic kidney disease with polyuria. His current kidney function is only 34%,” she explained.

For years, while watching her child suffer through chronic illness, Krystal longed to be a nurse. But between caring for her young family on her own and working long hours for minimum wage, going back to school didn’t seem possible. By the time Nollan was four, exhaustion, escalating stress levels, and the inability to make ends meet culminated. Krystal knew she needed to make a change.

Krystal had been visiting the Abbotsford Food Bank for nearly two years when she connected with the Everest Program, a pilot project designed to assist people in finding life resources beyond emergency food support. Through Everest, Krystal was able to determine what she needed to finally achieve her dream of being a nurse. While it wasn’t easy, and with many sacrifices along the way, Krystal was determined to change paths. “To know that I could support my family in a way I’d never been able to, I had to do it,” she recalled.

Sadly, experiences like Krystal’s are not unique. More and more, Abbotsford families are facing poverty: entering into the workforce and making every effort but still struggling to get by. These families are the working poor, tirelessly working to break the cycle of poverty for themselves, their families, and their communities. With a living wage, working people can stay above the poverty line while meeting their basic needs without

having to use income assistance programs. Currently, the living wage for the Fraser Valley is \$15.90 an hour – a wage many in Abbotsford struggle to earn.

“Life before making a living wage was quite difficult,” Krystal said, “I could only ever get a low-paying job. It barely paid rent, let alone bills, groceries, and anything else kids need.” She added it was tough giving up a full-time job to go to school – but the reality of supporting her family on \$10.85 an hour simply wasn’t feasible. Now a nurse and earning above the living wage threshold, Krystal can provide for her family, giving her youngest the care he desperately needs.

Abbotsford Community Services actively works to reduce poverty and homelessness in our community and we believe every step toward providing and earning a living wage is important. We can all work together to understand poverty and how to alleviate it in our communities. ▪



Learn more about the importance of a living wage at: [abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/livingwage](https://abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/livingwage)



# Putting Down Roots

**IT'S** a vignette that many in Abbotsford might take for granted. Droplets glimmering across a freshly watered garden, soaking up the morning sun. In it sits the result of hours of nurturing provided by a meticulous caretaker: produce nearly ready for harvest. It's the garden of your earliest memories – the sweetest, juiciest strawberries and the reddest, plumpest tomatoes.

In a juxtaposition you can only find in a modern-day city, this

particular garden is flanked by concrete buildings and multiple cars, catching the eye of passersby and those waiting for transit. A simple turn of the head takes onlookers from an emerald gem filled with berries and greens, to the heart of downtown Abbotsford. Despite the urban location, it's here the Abbotsford Community Services Garden Project calls home.

It's a labour of love for Marina Gibson, owner of Day 1 Urban Farm and chief Garden Project volunteer, as she manages and

tends to the plot daily for the duration of the growing season. The resident advisor to all things agriculture for Abbotsford Community Services, Marina speaks passionately about the need for green space among urban development. So much so that this past spring, she devoted an entire TedX Talk to it: Easily Digested: What Urban Farming Brings to the Table.

Early on in her lecture, she poses the question to her listeners: "How would you feel if tomorrow you went to the grocery store and

▪ *Marina in her happy place.*

the shelves were mostly empty?” She prompts the audience to think of the harsh realities of security – and not just that there isn’t enough on the table to go around, either: simply that there isn’t any at all. With city sprawl decreasing the number of essential pollinators like bees, Marina stresses that people simply won’t have access to the foods they love as many common crops are pollinator dependent and support meat and dairy production.

It’s a sentiment many agricultural activists try to drive home time and again, though it often fails to make life impact. But it’s here she excels as she unleashes an all-too-real example of food security on her hungry, rapt TedX audience: “In a few minutes, we’re going to be breaking for lunch. And I heard a lot of you clapping and cheering for pizza earlier this morning. So imagine your meal without bees.” Effortlessly and citing dwindling crops, Marina strips away the availability of ingredients needed to make the favorite food of many Canadians. Quickly, the promised lunch no longer exists.

But for her, and luckily for pizza lovers across the city, hope is not lost. Growing produce in the city doesn’t just bring fresh food to the consumer, Marina adds, it also makes a positive environmental impact. Even the smallest urban garden can help to reclaim needed agricultural space, reduce greenhouse

gasses, take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, and act as a refueling station for bees so they can continue to go about their daily routine.

Now two years on, the Garden Project – and Marina – have hit their stride: sales are strong, educational workshops are well attended, and local businesses continue to show interest in partnering. But she still sees



“TO PLANT A GARDEN IS TO BELIEVE IN TOMORROW.”



plenty of room for growth. “We are working toward becoming financially self-sustaining,” she says. “Our vision is to increase our capacity to offer skills development and employment opportunities.”

She’s often asked if it is difficult to promote the need for more agricultural initiatives in the heart of the Fraser Valley. After all, to many, Abbotsford is still known as the “City in the Country.” With such a moniker, one would assume farming – even of the backyard variety – is second nature for residents.

Marina explains her experience has shown the opposite. With more people moving to the suburbs, or even long-time residents finding themselves in the city’s centre, the community is excited by the idea of urban farming and the relative ease of building their own garden. With a chuckle, she details a regular distraction: “Most people are so enthusiastic to learn more about the garden when they see it that they want to stop and chat.” The desire, support, and eagerness of those stopping to share their own stories or thoughts is vital to the future of the Garden Project and urban farming in general.

When asked about the future of the Garden Project, it’s clear Marina has a wish list: bigger, better, and bolder for years to come. In fact, a small sign in the garden declares the Garden Project’s unofficial mantra: “To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.” One thing is for certain – the Garden Project is putting down roots on a small parcel of land in the heart of Abbotsford. ▪



For more information on urban farming and the Garden Project, visit [abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/thegardenproject](http://abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/thegardenproject).



# FOUNDRY A



*Foundry is a province-wide network of health and social service centres removing barriers and increasing access to care for children and youth aged 12 to 24. Opening in April 2018, Foundry Abbotsford, which is a collaboration of 14 agencies and spearheaded by Abbotsford Community Services, will provide a one-stop shop for primary care, mental health, substance use, social services, and youth and family peer supports.*

## TRANSFORMING HOW YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ACCESS HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES WITHIN BC

**A**bbotsford is one of 5 new sites approved for Foundry around BC and based on a successful pilot program at the Granville Youth Health Centre, BC's first integrated health and social service centre for youth and young adults.

### EVOLUTION OF SERVICES

Abbotsford has been serving youth through the Abbotsford Youth Health Centres (AYHC). AYHC has steadily grown to include nurses, family practice residents, an intake worker, an advocacy support worker, an Aboriginal support worker, nurse practitioners, a psychiatrist, a gynecologist/endocrinologist, food security, clothing, furniture, housing support, yoga classes and more!

The evolution of the centre into Foundry will enable youth to come to one location for variety of needs and receive the support they are looking for. Nine agencies have agreed to co-locate into the centre, allowing youth to access a variety of resources in a timely and supportive manner and will allow for the centre to efficiently respond to inquiries and referrals. The addition of a Youth and Family Navigation and Empowerment Coordinator and Peer Support workers to the centre will allow for youth and families to more easily navigate the system.

### YOU CAN HELP

Renovations are underway to develop a welcoming, accessible space for our youth at Foundry Abbotsford. We could use some help in making this remarkable project a reality. If you'd like to donate, please visit [abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/donate](http://abbotsfordcommunityservices.com/donate) and select "Foundry Youth Hub" from the list of projects to support. ▀



# BBOTSFORD

## STATISTICS & PERSPECTIVES



*"I'm tired of having to tell my story over and over. I need a place where people will listen and be able to help with anything."*



**Abbotsford Regional Hospital has the highest emergency admissions per capita for child and youth mental health in the Fraser Health region. Of these, the most commonly reported concerns are Depression, Anxiety Disorder, and Attention/Hyperactivity Disorder. Additionally, 8% of these males and 25 % of females reported self-harm in the past year.**



*One in ten local students reported not accessing medical care they felt they needed due to concern for privacy, hoping or thinking the problem would go away, feeling fearful of what they would be told, and not knowing where to go for help.*



**About 300,000 of our youth in BC – one in four – need mental health or substance use services. 130,000 sought help through the health system in 2012/13 and of those, as few as 25% received the care they needed.**

## FOUNDRY KEY FEATURES

- Youth-focused program for those aged 12 to 24.
- Integrated: physical, mental health, substance use, and social services.
- Youth-friendly locations with accessible operating hours.
- Youth and family participation included in the design of the program.
- Strong community/ school connection: people know where to go and what to expect, and be connected with higher level services.
- Broad reach: rural/ remote, age, culture, First Nations, LGBTQ.

Photos: Unsplash and AdobeStock



[AbbotsfordCommunityServices.com](http://AbbotsfordCommunityServices.com)

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