

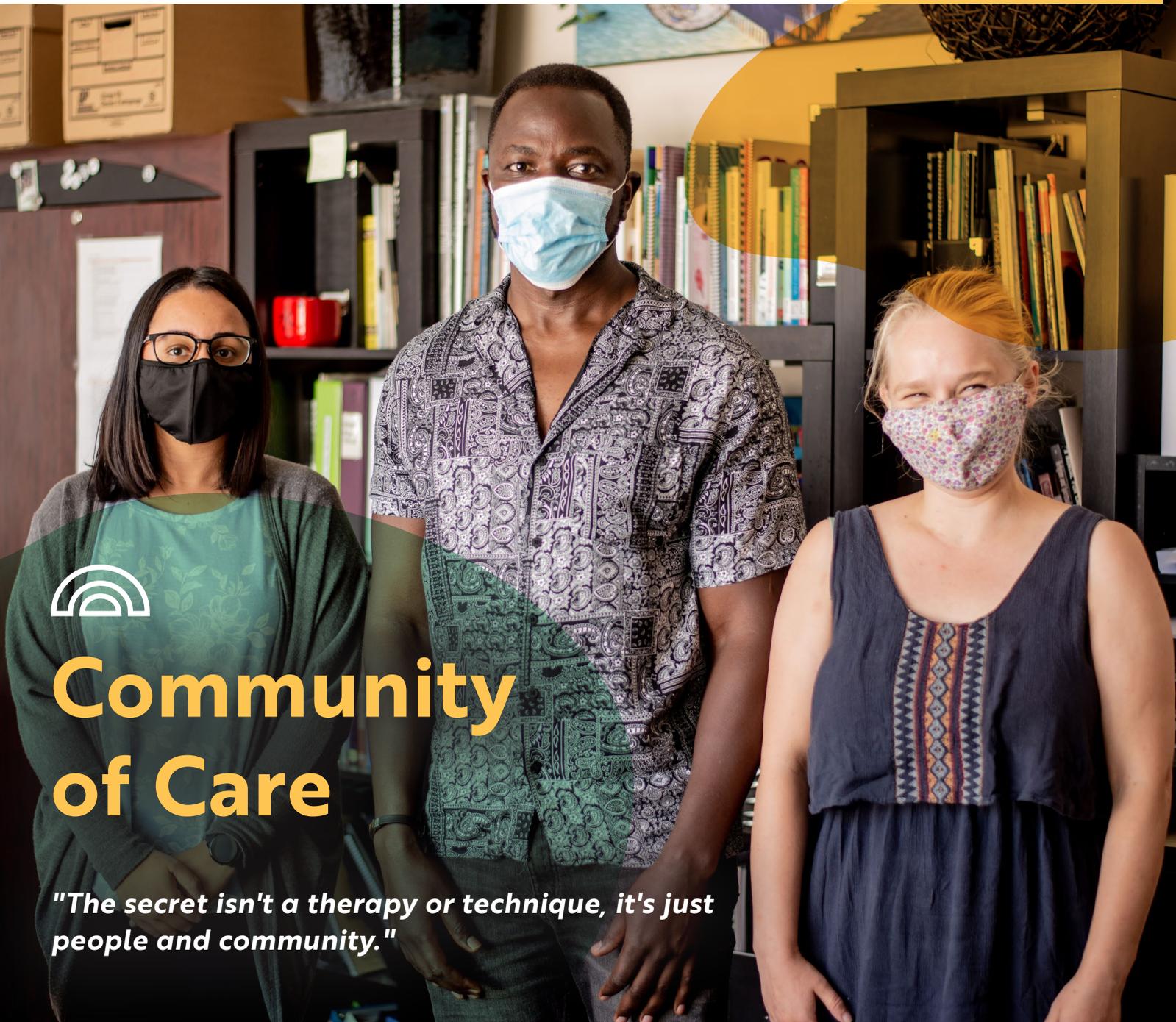


Stories

2020/2021

*Stories of people
helping people*

Archway Community Services Magazine



Community of Care

*"The secret isn't a therapy or technique, it's just
people and community."*

OUR MISSION:

Archway Community Services fosters community wellbeing and social justice through positive action and leadership.

OUR VISION:

Justice, opportunities and equitable access for all.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We acknowledge that we gather on the traditional unceded territory of the Stō:lō people. Stō:lō territory extends from the mouth of the Fraser River to Boston Bar. Locally, this includes the Matsqui First Nation and Sumas First Nation. We give them thanks for sharing their land and resources with us.

We acknowledge and are grateful to the City of Abbotsford for their permissive tax exemption. This exemption helps Archway to continue forwarding its mission of 'fostering community well-being and social justice through positive action and leadership' within Abbotsford.

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Letter from the Executive Director



As we consciously and cautiously round the bend on one-and-a-half years of COVID restrictions and preventive measures, let's reflect on the ways that Archway has lived out our commitment to "justice, opportunities and equitable access for all."

Fear and anxiety led to heightened mental health concerns for youth, women dealing with intimate partner violence and many other populations. Older adults suffered isolation and loneliness, and Canada faced disturbing truths about the atrocities perpetuated against Indigenous children in residential schools.

Archway has pivoted – including virtual and hybrid services – to support these high vulnerability groups with new initiatives. For example, our Best for Babies South Asian program and Community Connections jointly created an online parenting life skills series for South Asian parents resulting in heightened mental wellness as practical parenting skills were gained and relationships with children were strengthened. The STRIDE program developed skills training for older workers and Archway has developed online events and resources (such as commemoration of National Indigenous Peoples Day) in support of Indigenous communities.

While pandemic restrictions have significantly limited the option of in-person services, we've adapted by providing physically distanced services to meet community needs. This includes the Social Prescribing program which connects seniors to a variety of non-clinical

support services, walking groups, nutrition programs, and mental health services. Our Family Education program has been hosting a physically distanced Indigenous parenting education program with a Stó:lō elder to provide culturally appropriate training. They have also prepared for the eventual return to normal by creating a welcoming space for Indigenous children with First Nations art and books in their child care room. The Food Bank and the South Asian Community Resource Office (SACRO) opened up a new food satellite site to offer culturally relevant and appropriate food to South Asian and Syrian clients.

Thank you - our staff, volunteers, donors, funders and members - for your incredible support throughout the pandemic to those experiencing the greatest risks. The transition to post-COVID operations will be guided by Archway's ever-present desire to provide the shelter of an "arch" and walk along the "way" with members of our communities who are particularly vulnerable.

Eager to keep you updated on the next opportunities for innovation and partnership,

- Rod Santiago

ROD SANTIAGO
Executive Director

Letter from the Board President



One of my favourite stories growing up as a kid was the book my mom read to me about *The Little Engine That Could*. I'm sure you know the story about the little locomotive that pulled a heavy train of cars up a steep mountain seemingly against all odds!

"I think I can, I think I can," repeats the little locomotive as it crests the mountain and delivers its cargo of food and toys to the awaiting children. For generations now, the story has instilled in children the values of compassion, optimism and determination.

I make mention of this story because it reminds me of the remarkable accomplishments of Archway Community Services during the ongoing pandemic. Allow me to salute every employee across the organization and every dedicated volunteer for being the "little engines that could." Thank you for finding ways to keep the lights on and doors open for those in our community who depend on us! Thank you for your compassion, optimism and determination.

The Board of Directors, for its part, continued the stewarding of the agency in its governance role. We participated in the CARF review and gratefully acknowledge the generous accolades bestowed on the agency by the review

team. The resulting recommendations will continue to strengthen Archway's service to the community.

Further, the Board participated in the annual financial audit by KPMG which confirmed that the agency is in a sound financial position based on its internal controls, assets and holdings. We continued our work on risk management from a Board perspective. The enterprise risk assessment that began in 2019 continued with our consultants at Realize Strategies. Consequently, the Board continues to review and revise policies that will help mitigate risk across the organization.

The Strategic Plan continues to be the focus of our work as a Board. We receive quarterly reports from staff on the progress being made in the areas of Mental Wellness, Seniors and Indigenous Inclusion. Board members participate with staff in the Indigenous Circle that moves our understanding of the impact of colonization forward and helps inform the Board of its role in responding to the needs on our local Indigenous communities.

I am happy to say that the Board continued its good work in community relations after disappointments in 2020. In June, the Board's annual fundraising golf tournament raised

\$70,000 despite the uncertainty of the public health orders of the day. It was a brave undertaking, but we forged ahead because we, too, like the little engine that could, persevered and got it done! Thank you to the Board, staff, generous donors and community members for supporting the event in a variety of ways!!

On a final note of hope, we are also happy to announce that the Board will once again host the annual Community Builders Awards this fall. We are delighted to fulfill our role in celebrating the individuals in our community who support the mission of the agency by providing justice, opportunities and equitable access for all, including little engines.

- Steve Carlton

STEVE CARLTON
Board President

Providing Youth Mental Health Services

in Challenging Times

Foundry

The afternoon hours were always full of motion at the Foundry Abbotsford Centre – youth, their caregivers and staff all coming and going to access a variety of services.

But when COVID-19 began, the clinic grew strangely quiet as services moved online. Foundry began offering counselling, peer support and primary health care through phone and video calls.

“This switch meant greater accessibility for some youth whose anxiety, lack of transportation or not having a supportive caregiver had previously been a barrier,” said Sharon, the Foundry Manager.

“Providing services virtually required some creativity. For example, if baking was the group activity of the day, the youth would get the materials needed delivered to them and then join online,” Sharon added.

While virtual services lowered the barriers for some youth, they quickly realized that they weren’t seeing the same volume of clients as in normal times. Even for the generation most comfortable with technology, it turned out that they wanted and needed in-person services.

“As soon as we opened to in-person service, spots filled up quickly. We did a soft launch in August 2020 with COVID protocols in place, and we’ve been operating in-person at 70-80 percent capacity,” said Laurel, the Service Delivery Coordinator.

Addressing Complex Issues and Needs

Foundry staff have noticed that isolation has added to the complexity of some youth’s experiences when it comes to mental health struggles.

Youth seek support for a variety of issues – anxiety, depression, stress, life in general. With COVID, there is also

isolation and grief and the uncertainty of COVID added onto what was being experienced by youth accessing Foundry.

“So, the complexity of the issues facing youth coming to us now is much higher. Whether it’s been exacerbated by COVID, or it was the straw that broke the camel’s back we’ll never really know. We’re helping more complex youth – we always have, but not to the numbers that we’ve seen,” Sharon said.

To respond to the complex needs, staff worked to find funding to expand their services. Through short-term grants, Foundry was able to increase counselling and peer support hours to provide added support to the youth and their caregivers.

Another demographic that Foundry is looking to offer more support to is young adults from ages 19 to 24.

“We’ve always have seen a gap in services for young adults in long-term

counselling or trauma-type counselling because once you turn 19, there just aren’t enough services within the community to support you. And their mental health is going through a bit of a structural change. So we’re struggling to keep up with their referrals as well,” said Laurel.

Addressing Needs Holistically

Youth often hear about Foundry through a friend, teacher, caregiver. They can access primary healthcare, walk-in counselling, peer support and many other services without needing a referral. If they aren’t sure what services would best address their needs, a navigator walks them through their options and can help connect the dots between Foundry services and the services the 14 partnering programs provide.

Navigators help figure out what the big picture is for the youth beyond a single service to address their needs holistically.

“It’s often not just health needs that youth have, but social service needs too. It’s hard to work on an issue like mental health if they don’t have housing or enough food. There’s an Archway Food Bank satellite location in our building and we offer help obtaining income assistance,” said Sharon.

“We also work directly with our partner organizations to get youth the full range of service they need in a timely manner.”

The Right Door

“Coming to Foundry is always the right door. Even though we may not necessarily have a service that’s going to help you that day, we may be able to connect you with relevant service and do that warm referral for you,” said Laurel.

“If you’re a caregiver and don’t know what to do to help your child, Foundry

is the right place for support. We hope they feel that when they come here.

“We’ve all struggled with some form of mental health, and it takes a lot of work to keep our mental wellness balanced. We’re working to reduce the stigma around mental wellness and want everyone to know that you’re not alone.”

Although the mental wellness and health needs of youth are complex, Foundry is here to support them in a holistic and integrated way.

Counsellor Afarin, Manager Sharon, and Youth and Family Empowerment Coordinator, Nicole.

Basic Life Skills Training (BLT)

The first time youth enter the colourful space that houses the Basic Life Skills Training (BLT) program, they can immediately sense that it's going to be different from other mental health services they've experienced. From the graffiti-style artwork covering the walls to a music studio, the space looks nothing like a traditional therapist's office.

BLT has chosen to swap standard counselling practices with what they call "music therapy, community and connection." Staff have all confessed that it's more involved, but it's paying off. Going the unconventional route has turned out to be exactly what kids like Justin need to overcome some of their struggles.

"I've been coming here since I was like 13, almost five years ago now. And I just love this place. I've struggled with other counselling approaches before but here, I just feel like they actually understand me and where I'm coming from," said Justin.



Basic Life Skills Training (BLT) Centre.

"I was a little shy when I came here, but I could tell it was going to be awesome. They're just friendly and smiling all the time, plus all the plants and everything."

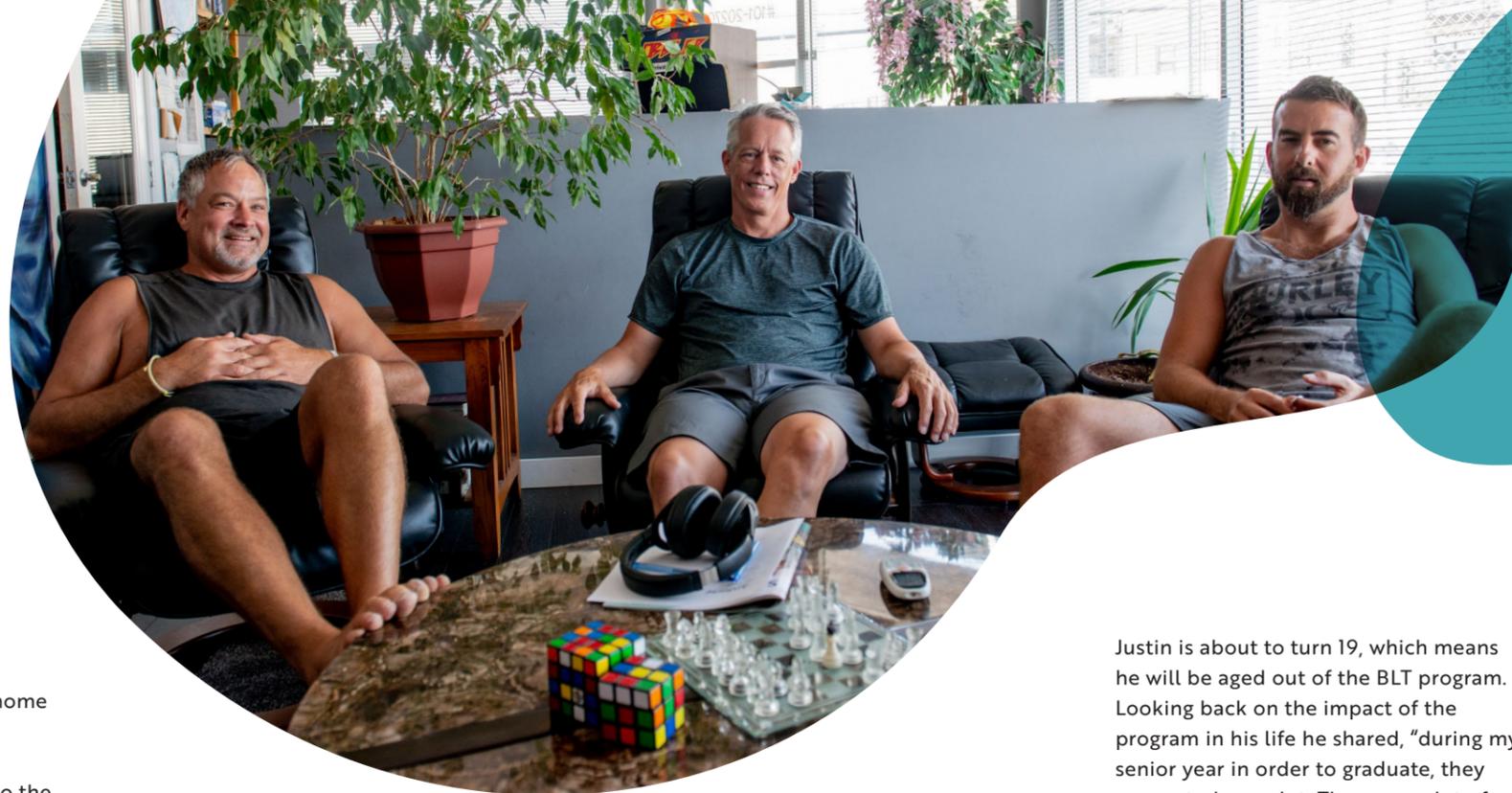
He also pointed how he enjoyed being able to strike a balance between talking about things that he enjoys, along with any struggles that he might be going through at home or with connections in his life.

Ethan, a youth that's been coming to the center for two years said, "there's a lot of good musical equipment here and good people to hang out with good activities. What keeps me coming back is that here you've got people to talk to, so that's always good."

"You'd be surprised how hard that is to find these days. Someone to just straight up, just talk about your week or whatever you're doing. And here there are a lot of good stories to hear and tell," Ethan continued.

One of Ethan's favourite activities with the group was going white water rafting. The group regularly takes the youth outdoors for both their physical and mental health.

The program's budget hasn't changed much in 20 years, so some of the outings and extras are covered by the "happy fund." Since 2019, an anonymous donor has provided an ongoing discretionary fund. Staff can use the donated money to support participants who have aged



BLT Staff: Kerry, Rob, and James.

out of the foster care system and may need furniture or small appliance. It also allows staff to take the participants out for lunch or pay for necessities like auto insurance so youth can attend or bed bug removal.

Staff members Kerry, Rob and James work as a team with shared caseloads to help teenagers overcome their mental health and life struggles. They currently have capacity for up to 30 teens from Langley to Surrey.

"Our referrals all come from the Langley Child Mental Health Team, who are the gatekeepers. We work with kids that would generally not engage in traditional therapies like one-on-one sessions because they don't feel comfortable," said James.

Another component of the program is mentorship. Current and past clients are welcome to drop in, which leads to the alumni interacting with current youth.

"The secret isn't a therapy or a technique, it's just people and community. It's about having a safe place where you can hang out and feel safe."

– BLT Outreach Counsellor Rob

"When they walk in, they see younger kids and they talk to them because they've been through it all and they understand. They can also tell them the system and what works, and so on. So, it works because it's following the natural course. When you follow what's real and true, it just works itself out," Rob explained.

Having a safe place to hang out can help youth avoid getting into trouble. Justin recognized this and said, "if I was hanging out with my friends, we'd be doing something stupid."

Justin is about to turn 19, which means he will be aged out of the BLT program. Looking back on the impact of the program in his life he shared, "during my senior year in order to graduate, they supported me a lot. There are a lot of bad things that happen but some good things as well. And I feel like if I didn't come here every week, my life would not be as good as it is."

Mental Wellness During COVID

James and Kerry have worked at Archway for over 15 years and have noticed an increase in suicides, addiction issues and mental health struggles over the last year and half.

Kerry recalled an incident when a youth asked what the name of the center was. When he told her, she looked at him and without missing a beat said, "there's nothing basic about keeping someone alive."

In further conversation, it came out that she had lost both her parents to suicide within four years of each other.

Clients also note the increased struggles. "It's a problem that everyone has to deal with now, it's more common than you think," Ethan said quietly.

"It's like when you hang around other people, you start to realize like, wow, cause when you're on your own and

isolated, it's like, you don't know, you think it's just you."

As an essential service, BLT remained open during COVID with safety precautions. They shifted to more visits outside, whether it was pulling up chairs outside the building or going on walks with youth. They tried to avoid too many virtual meetings as they believe in the importance of in-person connection.



Rob in the music studio with a BLT youth.

During a formal accreditation review process, the surveyors noted that BLT "offers almost magical healing for troubled youth" and "genuine unconditional acceptance."

"The secret isn't a therapy or a technique, it's just people and community. It's about having a safe place where you can hang out and feel safe," Rob concluded.

Youth Resource Centre (YRC)

When the pandemic first began, Sam was laid off and her schooling went virtual. Living on her own became a whole lot lonelier than before. Without a routine and limited social interaction, Sam struggled more and more to even make it out of bed. Check-in calls and walks with her YRC youth worker helped to stay connected to people, have some sort of routine and figure out how to stay safe physically and mentally.

As youth navigate changing bodies, roles, and responsibilities, they are under more stress which can exacerbate existing mental health challenges. Archway staff who support youth have noticed that COVID has acted as an accelerator in an already difficult life period and waitlists for some mental health services for youth have gotten "incredibly long."

One of the Archway programs serving youth and their caregivers is the Archway Youth Resource Centre (YRC). The YRC provides a variety of services including outreach support, crisis intervention, school support, independent living programs, parenting supports and life skills classes.

Over COVID, YRC staff kept pivoting as they figured out how to best connect with youth and support them through new challenges.

"Youth were already spending too much time online before COVID, and now

their screen time has gone even higher," shared Wanda, a YRC Team Lead.

"All these virtual meetings mean youth always have a mirror on themselves where they can judge themselves. And so for youth who are already struggling and trying to figure out their identities and where they belong and how to cope and regulate their own emotions it becomes very, very difficult.

"People can have a hard time being alone with themselves and will seek out other people, but that's not always in their best interest. We've seen that more time online exposed some youth to grooming by predators," said Simone, the Manager of Youth Services.

How Parents Can Help

Simone shares that depression or anxiety may not always look as expected.

"Being really angry, unapproachable and rude can be just as much a sign of somebody being highly anxious and feeling depressed."

"Some youth are able to cope in a school setting but once they are home may turn into a different person. It's hard to understand, but this means they feel safe enough to let out their emotions."

Wanda shared that "the best thing that a parent can do to support their teenager is to work on their own emotional intelligence. Then they can come alongside their youth and coregulate. It's important to realize that a child's behaviour is not about you which can help you from reacting negatively."

"A lot of parents know they don't want to parent like they have been parented, but they actually don't know how to do it differently because they've never experienced it," said Simone.

"So they're doing absolutely the best they can, but they have their own challenges. If their kids have challenges, then the pressure's all around and you can have a recipe for disaster."

" My parents and my youth worker are my cheerleaders now."

– YRC Youth Client

Programs for youth often work with the whole family and YRC provides parenting groups where caregivers can find support and information."

The Importance of Relationships

A formal study of the impact of one YRC program confirmed the importance of the relationships that youth have with their support worker.

"We know that the relationship is the key and the catalyst to anything else that happens. It may take a long time to see any sort of change, but we're planting seeds every time we connect," said Simone.

Youth workers regularly checked in on youth through texting, phone calls and visits which gave youth a small sense of routine, as routines went out the door during the beginning of COVID.

Maintaining these connections was possible for existing clients but extremely difficult with new clients. As youth workers build relationships, they usually offer rides to youth or will buy them meals but were unable to do this during some periods of COVID guidelines.

"That was a huge barrier to service and a huge barrier to connection. But our youth workers did get very creative in finding ways to connect to youth," said Wanda.

They showed up to their homes to meet outside, went on walks and met inside

while physically distanced. Staff taught healthy relationship classes online, met one-to-one virtually and hosted social groups where they played games and gave youth a chance to socialize.

Substance Abuse

Some youth use substances to cope with mental health conditions and YRC staff saw an increase in use and overdoses over COVID. Restricted international borders have contributed to a toxic drug supply leading to the loss of several YRC clients and their family members.

As staff struggled to process the deaths themselves, they were supporting other clients who were friends with the client. "The amount of trauma that youth have gone through is absolutely mind-boggling," said Wanda.

Knowing their work was quite literally about life and death, staff made safety plans with youth, gave out Naloxone kits and referrals to addiction service.

To help cope with overdoses and other crises, staff have regular opportunities to debrief and try to focus on the successes of clients moving forward in small steps.

"It's been a struggle; we have to contextualize and remind ourselves that this is bigger than ourselves. We can't save everyone but we're going to try to be that difference for every youth we're connected to," said Wanda.

Wanda encourages her staff that "youth are really, really resilient and given the right supports and resources, that they can make it through almost anything." ■

Youth Resource Team – Cynthia, Beth, Jennifer, Simone, Anthony, Lisa, Michael, Kat, and Becca.



Food as the Ultimate Community Builder

Addressing access to food is the driving vision at the Archway Food Bank. Along with food hampers, the Food Bank also provides access to baby supplies, menstruation products, dental care, Christmas gifts, and food delivery services for adults 60+ and who have mobility and/or accessibility restrictions, and who may be homebound.

"We have long recognized that food is the ultimate community builder," shared Neil, the Director of Advocacy and Social Equity. "As support from our community has grown over the years, we have been able to expand the food security work we do based on the needs that we see."

The primary goal of the Food Bank is to ensure access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food while empowering individuals to make healthy food choices.

In addition to meeting people's immediate needs, and in partnership with other Archway programs, staff are currently working to help address the systemic issues attached to food insecurity. It's been recognized that this is a complex goal and one which

is best achieved through coordination, community partnership, focused advocacy and a deep understanding of client needs.

Strengthening the System

In order to make the Food Bank as welcoming and accessible as possible, when people first visit, only a few questions are asked - including verifying that they live in Abbotsford.

"We recognize that asking for help can be a challenging thing to do and we don't want to add any barriers to accessing food," said Rebecca, the Food Bank supervisor. "After meeting that immediate need, we ask individuals to register and then we can work alongside them to help identify additional supports and services that are available to them."

"We are looking at ways we can make access to food more readily available. It's about making connections, tapping into programs at Archway that can help or collaborating with other agencies in the community. Rather than duplicating services, it's about working together to strengthen the food system," said Matt, a Food Bank employee.

Community Partnerships

While the primary goal of the Food Bank is to ensure access to food, there is recognition that food insecurity does not occur in a vacuum and is also experienced in conjunction with other unmet needs. Community partners have made it possible for the Food Bank to meet some of these practical needs.

One need that has often come up is not having a working vehicle which is a barrier to maintaining employment or being able to bring children to school. A partnership between Northview Community Church and local businesses like Hub Motors and Lordco Auto Parts resulted in assistance with car repairs, maintenance and securing discounted parts and labour.

"It was just kind of a chain effect, where people were helping across the board," said Matt.

In partnership with Archway's Multicultural Department, the Seva Food Pantry was launched in November 2020 to help ensure that culturally appropriate food is available to South Asian and multi-ethnic groups.



Above: The Food Bank team on St. Patrick's Day. Right: Manpreet and a volunteer with some of the culturally appropriate food donations in the Seva Food Pantry



It was initially funded in part from the government of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund, Abbotsford Community Foundation, Khalsa Credit Union, Maximum Collision and the Patrika Newspaper. Today, funding for this Food Bank program is widespread and includes numerous community partners and individuals. The Seva Food Pantry is currently providing over 45 households with monthly hampers containing lentils, chickpeas, basmati rice and cooking oil and more.

"We have long seen a need in the communities we serve but clients weren't always comfortable with accessing a food bank," said Manpreet Sarai, the supervisor of the South Asian Community Resource Office.

"Now we work with volunteers to deliver the culturally appropriate hampers directly to the clients and have food available in our office for emergency support."

"The Abbotsford community is consistently one of the most generous cities in all of Canada, and we're so thankful that so many have chosen to support our community members who access the Food Bank," said Neil.

"Our partnerships and group of monthly donors is growing, and their consistent support allows us to be even more impactful in reducing food insecurity."

Delivery Services

A recent grant from Food Banks Canada allowed the Archway Food Bank to invest in pallet jacks, enabling their drivers to deliver food to clients with increased efficiency. There are also plans to add another refrigerated truck to their existing lineup, allowing them to reach even more people across the city.

Their delivery service brings food to the elderly and others who cannot leave their homes, especially during COVID-19. Before the pandemic, 30-40 households

"Thank you so much for the real food that I can really use it. This helps me with the very part-time job I do as a Temporary Foreign Worker and supports me, my mom and child during this crisis as my mom doesn't eat English food like pasta and soups."

– SEVA Food Pantry Recipient



were receiving deliveries each month. Now, staff are delivering to around 160 households a month.

This increase would never have been possible without the generosity of the community and partners.

Sharing Food with Other Organizations

In addition to satellite food banks across the city, donated food is also shared with other organizations.

"If an organization has a food component to their programming, there's a good chance that they are receiving at least some of their food from Archway," said Matt.

"This way more people have access to the food than we would normally be able to reach. We're supporting organizations that are already on the ground doing the work they do well through their existing relationships with different populations."

Rushia Klassen, the Women's Pastor at the Central Heights Women's Centre shared, "the impact of partnering with the Food Bank has been incredible as we don't have the resources to purchase these fresh food items for the many families we interact with weekly."

"Dropping off a box of food at a door allows us to listen, care and respond to the other needs in a family's journey. This is a connection time

Top: Chris and Robert trying to find room for the all the donations. Right: Matt with some of the donations.



during a difficult season that has been meaningful and powerful."

Dental Clinic

Dr. Fiona* used to go overseas for volunteer work but now she volunteers weekly at the Food Bank Dental Clinic.

"I decided that there's a big need locally, so why not to do it here? And there's so much personal satisfaction that comes with giving my time this way," she said.

Dr. Fiona is one of the two dentists currently volunteering at the free dental clinic.

There used to be 10 dentists taking shifts, but some have left the community, taken a step back due to COVID or had other commitments come up.

Before COVID, the demand for the Food Bank Dental Clinic was already high, with a waitlist of up to a year. And it has doubled since then.



Dental Clinic Coordinator, Lala.

"So, I'm doing my best, sending people who have coverage to partnering dental offices, and working with those that don't have insurance," said Lala, the Dental Clinic Coordinator.

"Unfortunately, one trend that I notice is more and more seniors applying to get into the clinic. Many types of benefits coverage only go up to 65 and once an individual goes on Old Age Pension, they

usually lose their coverage. It's heart-breaking to see seniors who have been working all their lives not being able to afford to pay over \$3,000 for dentures."

While the waitlist for preventative and routine dental care is long, if there is ever a dental emergency, Lala can call on local dentists who provide the work pro bono because of the relationship they have built over the years.

Reflecting on her decade at the Food Bank, Lala shares "I wish people knew that people who come to the Food Bank are strong and are trying the best that they can. There are no certain types of people that are in this situation, people just fall through challenging times. Some people need us temporarily, others a bit longer, but they all just need this extra support."

Looking to the Future

"As demand for food support increases, we aim to meet our community clients support needs. Working alongside individuals who use the Food Bank, support providers, donors and

partners, we will continue to build and strengthen cross-referral relationships with social service agencies and community support providers. New partnerships will be explored to help ensure that food support is more readily available to specific target groups and that our capacity to provide culturally appropriate food and fresh food is increased," said Neil.

Another dream is expanding their building to be able to provide more services in a purpose-built space. "We've long outgrown our current building and are looking at options for renovating, rebuilding or even relocating," said Neil.

"It feels like an impossible dream, but we know that our community is behind us. Our community has always risen to the challenge as we've seen demonstrated during the pandemic and for more than 30 years." ■



John using the pallet jack purchased with a grant from Food Banks Canada.

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION SERVICES

Syrian Refugees Thriving & Giving Back



Aziza working at the store during COVID.

When Syrian refugee Mohammad Ali and his family arrived in Canada they needed help with housing, settling into the community and starting school in a new country. Now less than four years later, the family is thriving in their new community and Ali (as his family refers to him) is the co-owner of Al Noor Halal Meat and Grocery Store, along with Khaled, another Syrian man.

"Here we are four years later. We started a business, and we are now moving to a bigger place. And we've got plans to start more businesses in the future. We're growing step-by-step," said Ali.

"This is not only for us, but we're also doing this for the Canadian community too. This store that we will be opening soon is going to have at least six job opportunities. We are planning to grow expand and make the community grow too," he continued excitedly.

The Lofti family consisting of Ali, his parents, four siblings and a cousin arrived in 2017. Along with 4,400 other refugees they were able to emigrate to BC through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).

An initial round of 22 families arrived in Abbotsford in 2016 and then other

families gradually followed as their refugee claims were processed.

"The government brought in many families that were distributed between provinces, and Abbotsford was one of the cities in BC that received families. They sent bigger families to Abbotsford because they believed that the housing was cheaper here and possibly more spacious.

"When the families first arrived, they went directly to Sandman Hotel to access RAP services, and from there, they started the process of settling in," said May, a case worker with the Moving Ahead Program (MAP).

Community Support

With around 60 families to resettle, Archway staff and the community rallied to make sure that their basic and more complex needs were met.

"I wish that people would have a better understanding of the diverse cultures coming to Canada. They are building Canada."

– MAP Supervisor Anas

Volunteers from the Archway Community Connections Program took clients on tours to show them how to shop at grocery stores and get around their new city.

"The generosity of Canadians was amazing. They shared what they had including furniture, clothing and there were even cars donated!" said May. "We helped them transfer the registration to their new vehicles and obtain BC driver's licenses.

Reflecting back, Ali shared, "We appreciate the Canadian government support so much. It means a lot to us, but at the same time, we didn't want to make it permanent. We want to depend on ourselves."

The family also expressed gratitude towards the Syrian and Canadian communities at large for standing with them, especially in the beginning.

"When we opened the store, you would see people from multiple cultures just show up and buy stuff. They did not

really need it, nor did they even know what some of it was. They just wanted to put the money into our business to show support. We truly thank everyone for their support," said Aziza, Ali's sister.

"We are in a good place. Archway was also supporting us very well. They were telling everybody that we have an Arabic store that they should visit. When we went to our English classes, the teachers were telling people about our store and that we are successful," she continued.

While their business was not majorly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic it has made connecting to their community harder.

"Socializing is just extremely hard. Especially for an Eastern culture. Eating together and having big weddings and other events are usually a weekly event. All those have just been gone for like year and a half now," Ali expressed.

Initial Settlement Challenges

One of the challenges that quickly became apparent was the difficulty in finding adequate housing despite housing in Abbotsford being considered relatively more spacious.

"A typical Canadian home has two or three bedrooms, which wasn't enough for the large family units we were assisting. Everything happened suddenly and finding affordable and accessible housing consumed a lot of our time," said May.

Thanks to the staff's hard work and the generosity of landlords, the first 22 families were all settled within two to three months and out of their cramped hotel accommodations.



MAP staff members: May, Cindy, Anas, Sukhwinderjit, Manjot, and Wameed (clockwise from top left).

Another challenge was the health of the refugees and finding family doctors for consistent care.

"There were a lot of health issues and even emergency ER visits in the beginning," shared May. "Some of it was stress related. After all they went through, from the Syrian war to living as refugees to emigrating to a new country, it's understandable."

Language Support

To help the integration process, adults started English lessons through the Archway Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program.

All school-age children were registered with the school district and immediately started attending school. The Abbotsford School District took care of bussing and other supports to remove barriers to education.

Years of war and living in refugee camps had disrupted their education and the students worked hard to catch up to their Canadian peers.

“Eventually, the children were the ones helping the parents. They are usually fast, resilient, and adapting very well,” said May.

Youth attended after-school programming through the Archway Immigrant Youth Services program where they continued learning the language and building relationships with other refugees and immigrants.

When the Lotfi family arrived, they had limited English skills and relied on their father Mahmoud to translate.

“But now we are the ones helping him. You cannot do much without knowing the language so it’s the number one challenge for refugees,” Ali shared.

Giving Back to the Community

When families first arrived, they used the Archway Food Bank but found that some of the food wasn’t culturally appropriate.

“In our culture, especially Islam culture, we can’t eat things like pork or

food with alcohol. Families would return them to the Food Bank rather than letting them go to waste.”

To respect their dietary needs, the Food Bank began preparing hampers with Halal (meaning ‘permissible’ in Arabic) foods. Nowadays, Ali’s grocery store provides some of the Halal food products given out.

Another way that the Al Noor store supports the community is by providing orders for the Abbotsford Mosque to give out to the families in need. They have supported over 90 families to date.

Final Reflections

After five years, most of the families don’t need continued support because they are independent. “Either they’re working, or their children are working, and their English is improving daily,” May shared.

When asked what he wished that people knew about refugees, Anas the Supervisor of the MAP program concluded by saying:

“People have misconceptions about refugees and immigrants from the news and films. I wish that people would have a better understanding of the diverse cultures coming to Canada. They are building Canada. They are working with us to build Canada and their children will be the engineers and the doctors and leaders of the coming generations. So, we should all be welcoming.” ■

Store owners Khaled and Ali with Ali’s father Mahmoud.

HEALTH SERVICES

Tackling the Opioid Crisis in Abbotsford

// Like gasoline on an open fire” is how the team at the Archway Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) Centre describe the effects of COVID on the opiate crisis.

“We have become much busier since COVID began. Our referrals, self-referrals, and intakes have increased in both the OAT Centre and in the Abbotsford Addictions Centre,” said Lesley, the supervisor of both Archway programs.

“People are more depressed; have fewer funds and they can’t see their families and friends. They’re craving connection and there are so many things that they cannot do. They’re stressed over the uncertainty and lack of control or information.”

“Everyone has different ways of coping; some people turned to comfort foods, some spend hours endlessly scrolling on social media, some drank more or in some cases turned or returned to substances – legal and otherwise.”

Overdose Crisis

While COVID dominates the news headlines, 1,716 people in British Columbians died from illicit drug overdoses compared to 954 deaths from COVID in 2020.

“Both are tragic situations requiring different approaches and resources,” said Lesley. “Overdose deaths, because of the shame attached, are often underreported and not acknowledged as tragic. They are sometimes viewed as ‘deserved’ or a ‘likely outcome of a

poor lifestyle choice’. As well, the stigma around substance use often leaves families and loved ones who have lost someone to overdose, embarrassed and unwilling to seek out the support they need,” said Lesley.

Since the opioid overdose related deaths were first declared a public health emergency in April 2016, over 7,000 individuals in BC have lost their lives, including over 2,300 in Fraser Health alone. The OAT Centre in Abbotsford was set up in November 2017 to provide a local option for treatment.

Additionally, during this time, public health agencies distributed naloxone kits, offered drug checking and worked to integrate harm reduction and overdose prevention into medical services and supportive housing models.

“With our collective efforts and enhanced substance use and harm reduction services, we were starting to see a significant reduction in the number of people dying from overdoses. Now, in the midst of the global pandemic, we know it has become more difficult for those who use drugs to stay safe due to

Staff members Kelli, Margaret and Loretta.

increasing social isolation and a more toxic and unpredictable drug supply," shared the Fraser Health President and CEO, Victoria Lee.

"The pandemic has reduced access to some health care services, trusted social relationships and the daily routines that keep us healthy and safe. Last year, we recorded the highest number of overdose deaths in any year since the emergency was declared, and a corresponding decrease in the use of supervised consumption services, drug checking services and other modes of support."

As people were more isolated, they were using alone rather than with a friend or group. If they experienced an overdose, there was no one to call for help or administer Naloxone. In the first five months of 2021, 56% of illicit drug toxicity deaths in BC occurred within private residences.

Another contributing factor to the increase in deaths was the border closures which restricted some drug trafficking leading to an increase in toxic or tainted drugs.

"Someone who thinks they're using heroin could actually be given fentanyl mixed with benzos. This can lead to them going to sleep and never waking up," said Lesley. "Or they are being given carfentanyl, which is a thousand times stronger than regular fentanyl."

Fentanyl itself is over 50 times more potent than morphine and the BC Coroner's service report showed that it was detected in over 80% of the illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2020.

The problem of tainted drugs is so common that the OAT Centre runs a urine drug screen analysis to determine which drugs people are consuming before helping them detox.

The Toll of Death on Mental Health

Losing clients to overdoses or other health conditions is an unfortunate reality in the centre's work. Too often, their list of upcoming patient appointments shows a name in red, their code to mark that the client has passed away.

"It just hurts because these are people we talk to on a weekly basis, if not more, and it really has a big impact," said Loretta, the OAT Medical Office Assistant.

One of the hardest cases for Loretta was Jimmy*, a 68 year-old whom she labeled as sweet and gentle. He was a long-term methadone user for pain management. Over COVID she helped him set up an email and referred him to other services so that he would stay connected.

"He called me all the time and told me everything he was doing. Then he came one day and said going in for surgery.

Supervisor Lesley.

After that I did not hear from him for a while, only to find out that he had passed away," Loretta recounted.

As they work through the impact of overdoses and relapses, staff rely on each other to talk through their experiences.

"If I had one wish for our programs, it would be to have better support and more access to counselling for the counselors and the employees around what they have to deal with," Lesley stated.

Causes of Substance Use

The causes of substance use and addiction are complex and interconnected. Lesley referenced author and physician Gabor Maté who teaches that we should not ask "why the addiction?" but rather ask "why the pain?" It is becoming increasingly understood that substance use often exists as self-medication for pain - physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual.

Some people with a substance use disorder have an undiagnosed mental health condition. Once their mental health condition is being addressed, they may no longer need to use substances.

Mental health and substance use often go hand-in-hand. Previously it was assumed that the substance use altered



From April 2020 to March 31st, 2021, the OAT Centre saw 133 patients who were treated with Suboxone, Methadone, or Kadian.

*Real name withheld

the brain chemistry but now studies are showing that people prone to addiction already have disruptions in areas of their brain. Genetic, developmental, behavioral, social, and environmental factors can all contribute to making someone more prone to using substances and becoming addicted to them.

"This place is amazing. So helpful. I'm doing better than I imagined and I owe it all to them." – OAT Centre Client

"Addiction happens. There are several reasons why someone may end up addicted but at the end of the day, it happens. And it crosses all barriers - age, race, socio-economic situation, profession, upbringing," said Lesley.

"I have a few clients that were on oxys (oxycodone) because of surgeries or back injuries through work. When their prescription ended, the pain was still there. Suddenly someone says to them, 'well, I can get you oxys.' And you can guess how this story goes," said Lesley.

"Not all people that get hooked on oxys and opioids are people that are looking to get high. It is often because they are in pain. So, you can't judge."

Overcoming Substance Use

Why an individual ends up seeking help also depends on the person. Some of these reasons include being tired of their life and wanting a different way or aging which brings about fragility and health problems. And sometimes people find something worth living for like a child, relationship or new-found purpose.

"People are often in a low of their life. They've either had a couple of friends pass away because of an overdose, or they have obviously had something traumatic that has brought them into our centre to ask for help. Something has jarred them into seeking help," shared Loretta.

"Once someone starts treatment, we can go from seeing them barely being able to stay awake to being alert and starting to look like themselves within three days," shared Margaret.

Treating the physical dependency with a safe alternative is only the first step and staff encourage clients to seek support in understanding what purpose the substance use serves in their life and how they can find safer ways to cope. The stability that prescribed medication can bring can allow clients the space to process the trauma in their past.

It is not uncommon for stress, a return to an old environment or fresh trauma to lead to relapses or setbacks in treatment.

"You know, sometimes you'll have people go through 15 treatment centres and then suddenly, they are able to stay clean," Lesley said.

"When you asked them about what was different this time, they'll say, 'I just made a decision.'

"It's all up in here," she continued, gesturing to her head. "This is why we have to keep trying to help as there is always hope."

A Welcoming Face

Knowing just how much their patients may have lost due to their substance use - family, jobs, housing - the OAT team strives to create a welcoming culture and treating patients graciously.

"There is still such a stigma attached to substance use, but we treat it like any other health condition," said Lesley. "Removing the stigma attached to substance use is critical because so many people would rather risk their lives than seek help."

Even something as simple as locking the front door during COVID and asking clients to ring a doorbell can be a barrier. "Because if we miss the buzzer, it reaffirms to them that nobody is paying attention to them. And we stand to lose them," Lesley elaborated.

"The shame that people feel around substance use can prevent them from seeking help and we know that just getting through our front door can be a huge step."

Looking Ahead

As the opioid crisis shows no signs of stopping, the centre is advocating for increased funding to hire more doctors, counsellors and medical office assistants. Currently three part-time physicians provide medical appointments four days a week leading to a waitlist for services.

"We have the tools to help people choose a different path but need more qualified professionals to deliver services," said Lesley.

While the scale of the opioid and overdose crisis can be overwhelming, the OAT team focuses on serving each person who walks through their door.

"If I can make a difference for just one person and their family, it's worth it," said Margaret. ■



Going the Extra Mile

to Connect with Vulnerable Older Adults

Social Prescribing Program

When Helen was denied entry across the border from Seattle to Abbotsford due to COVID-19 restrictions, she couldn't imagine how she could continue to assist her 92-year-old mother Vera with a variety of essential tasks as she advanced in age.

"Emotionally drained and worried, I did a Google search for 'help', and came across the Archway homepage," Helen said.



"I called and I explained my problems and after a brief hold, an angel answered in the form of Jada! With her knowledge of the resources available, combined with her kindness and a passion to help, we were able to move mountains. We arranged a Zoom meeting with my mother's

orthopedic surgeon in Vancouver, my mother in Abbotsford, and me in Seattle."

As the Seniors Community Connector in the Social Prescribing Program, Jada connects seniors to services to help them delay frailty and reduce their loss of independence. Jada arranged all transportation needs and the x-rays before the virtual meeting, plus transportation to Vancouver for injections in Vera's arthritic knee to allow her to walk independently. Later transportation to a COVID vaccine appointment was also coordinated through the Archway Community Van program.

"I am deeply thankful to her; and my mother is beside herself in disbelief at what we accomplished which would have been zero if it was not for Jada's help," Helen said.

While this has been an experience where technology bridged the gap for

a vulnerable senior, it has not been the only reality.

Better at Home

The digital divide has been one of the biggest challenges faced by some seniors of Better at Home (BAH). A phone survey highlighted some of the feelings of disconnect and isolation experienced by participants during the pandemic. As life moved increasingly online, it was evident that some seniors were struggling with barriers to technology including being low-income, afraid of technology, or lacking interest in the digital world.

As Karen, the Better at Home Coordinator, reflected on the results of the phone survey, the question remained; "How do we overcome these barriers and provide supports so that seniors remain connected and engaged in their community?"

Recognizing that participants reported being more comfortable with



Senior Services Team: Daniel, Karen, Jada, John, Josh.

"You have been amazing...I can't do a lot of things for myself anymore, so all your help and services have been so helpful. My daughter was so worried for me, but I reassured her not to worry because I have you to help me."

– Senior Services Client

telephone and mail communication, BAH partnered with Abbotsford Peer Support for Seniors volunteers, who now make around 100 friendly-visiting phone calls and wellness check-ins a month to BAH clients. BAH began mailing monthly community resources to participants of the program as well to keep them informed and engaged in their community.

Karen also noted that intake phone calls have become longer. When phone intakes used to take about 10 minutes, now she estimates the time has almost doubled. "We are a fast-paced society, so I like to slow down and provide the older adult the time they deserve. When we show interest, even if it is a phone call, it becomes a conversation and a means to feel connected." And she is not alone in expressing this sentiment.

"Our phone call check-ins have gotten longer because our clients need that social human interaction," shared Jada.

Seniors Income Tax

Another Senior Services program, Seniors Income Tax, provided hybrid services during the tax season of 2021 to meet the needs of clients. The free

program helped over 400 low-income seniors in Abbotsford file their taxes.

"We hosted in-person drop-off appointments for clients unable to access virtual platforms, while a phone option was available for those hesitant or unable to leave their homes," shared Josh, the Senior Services Supervisor.

"During COVID-19 it's been challenging to provide services since virtual options are not always sufficient in meeting client needs. We found that many of our clients preferred meeting volunteers in-person, especially with the concerns of scams around tax season. Having a volunteer available to walk clients through their paperwork offered peace of mind as well," he continued.

"Seniors who have relied on seeing others in-person were suddenly being asked to change how they access services, socialize and stay connected with their community. It would not be realistic of us to expect that change so quickly. We needed to be aware of excluding vulnerable people when prioritizing virtual services without first addressing the barriers."

Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels provides both fresh and frozen healthy meal options to individuals who are unable to

shop or prepare meals themselves, often promoting independence and supporting clients to stay in their homes longer.

"The bulk of the clientele tends to be seniors, but our clientele also includes people who don't have a lot of support from friends and family, people with disabilities, and others whose schedules don't leave room for preparing food," said Daniel, the Meals on Wheels Coordinator.

"For many, social isolation is a huge factor, and our volunteers are able check-in with the clients when delivering meals."

Meals on Wheels saw an increase in clients from March to December 2020. There were challenges at times, including the demand for meals and a shortage of volunteers, but Meals on Wheels persevered to serve their clients. Donations from the community and the Archway Food Bank continue to help cover the cost for those unable to afford meal costs.

"We're grateful to our partners like Save-On Foods on Sumas. They donate items before their best of date which allows us to provide our clients with extra food items," Daniel said.

While COVID-19 has brought new challenges, the Senior Services team has remained committed to enriching the lives of seniors through relationship-building and advocacy.

"Working in the human services field you just have that compassion. We become advocates for seniors. When they are sharing their grief or their life situation with us, we become advocates for that person," Karen shared on behalf of the Senior Services team. ■



Far left: Client Vera. Above: Meals on Wheels volunteer Louise.

Helping Job Seekers Navigate the Changing Economy

2020 was a tough year in the job market as many people across the globe lost their jobs for various COVID-related reasons. The lack of events and foreign tourism decimated some industries while entirely new careers were created.

To continue equipping job seekers with the tools to find meaningful work in the changing economy Archway employment programs had to get creative as they assisted newcomers, people with disabilities and older adults.

We caught up with some of the programs to get a snapshot look at their operations over the COVID and how the staff and their clients adjusted.



Career Paths for Skilled Immigrants client Sana teaching an Immigrant Job Shop class.

Employing People in Community (EPIC)

About the Program

Employing People in the Community (EPIC) empowers individuals with diverse abilities to secure and maintain meaningful and sustainable employment, while fostering their independence in their community. They provide extensive, individualized job support and ensure that all employment needs are addressed for both the job seeker and the employer.

During COVID

Heather, the manager of Archway Community Living programs shares that, "many of our clients found themselves laid off at the beginning of COVID, leaving them feeling disheartened."

In March 2020, due to the challenges of meeting in-person, staff assisted job seekers in using video conferencing.

During a weekly Jobs Club individuals engage with their peers with employment discussions and interactive activities. These group sessions are regularly attended and assist in keeping everyone feel connected. Some EPIC alumni, who also found themselves unexpectedly without work, enjoyed being included in our group sessions, although they have since been re-hired.

Job seekers have been encouraged to attend virtual individual meetings and/or outside meetings with their Employment Specialist to work on their resumes, hone their interview skills and follow-up on any job postings which may be of interest. Staff have spent time getting to know each person even better, understanding their preferences regarding alternate types of employment

to encourage them to consider new job opportunities.

In February 2021, the EPIC Program was awarded a Work Experience Grant through the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction which provided five individuals an opportunity to participate in a 12-week paid work experience program. Their job sites included Cora's Restaurant, Staples, No Frills, VSSL- Outdoor Utility Tools and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) thrift store. The placements went well and two of the job seekers were able to secure permanent employment.

As the job market is heating up again, the EPIC team is looking forward to assisting job seekers to secure employment. Some individuals and their families who were cautious due to COVID-19 have recently indicated that they are feeling more comfortable to ride the local transit, utilize HandyDART and to venture into their community to explore employment options.

"Our job seekers really enjoy being part of a worksite team and being able to contribute in meaningful ways. We want people to understand that the hopes, fears, goals and wishes of our participants are the same as every person seeking employment," said Heather.

Staff and clients are looking forward to meeting in-person for weekly Job Club Meetings and being able to spend time with each other for quarterly special events, such as a dinner and movie night, and their Christmas Party.

While some businesses have been cautious about the number of employees on-site and have been slower to commit to hiring new staff due to changing Covid-19 restrictions, Heather is optimistic that they will embrace the benefits of an inclusive workplace.

"It is our goal to recruit inclusive employers who are interested in hiring skilled individuals, who happen to have a diverse ability. Our job seekers are dependable, reliable, and motivated. In addition, they have access to a support person, if needed, to assist them to learn specific job duties. We value the relationships we build with our community businesses and are confident that the services we provide will be beneficial for many, once given the opportunity to enhance their team."



EPIC participant Inderpal who was hired after his work experience program.

Career Paths for Skilled Immigrants (CPSI)

About the Program

The Career Paths for Skilled Immigrants (CPSI) program supports newcomers in finding meaningful employment related to the experience and education they bring from their previous country. Clients get personalized career development guidance and support in navigating the Canadian labour market.

New clients complete a career assessment which allows them to identify their short-term and long-term career goals as well as recognize potential barriers to their goal employment. Then a career consultant will work with them on developing an individualized action plan. This includes job search actions and professional

skill enhancements to meet the requirements of the industry or sector they are seeking to enter in Canada. Participants also have access to financial support for their skill upgrades, credential evaluations, exams and certifications.

The program provides both employment skill workshops and one-on-one career coaching, such as labour market information, job search strategy, job post analysis, resume enhancement, mock interviews, and more. The program also organizes industry networking events that help clients to connect with industry experts and employers. Furthermore, the program explores job leads, practicum and mentorship opportunities for clients.

"It takes time to break into the professional fields when you lack local professional network and experience," explains Mei, the program coordinator.

"Some organizations can be hesitant to hire new immigrants, but many start to realize the breadth of skills and experience available in this unique talent pool with very highly motivated, capable and hardworking professionals."

"Skilled immigrants bring valuable experience to Canada and if their expertise and experience can be utilized, it's a win for everyone."

During COVID

In 2020, the number of new permanent residents was 47% lower than in 2019 due to shutdowns, lack of flights and

paperwork delays. Despite the lower immigration levels, the CPSI program stayed busy and started offering virtual workshops and individual meetings to keep everyone safe.

Now with the lifting of COVID restriction, the program has started offering one-on-one in-person appointments while providing group services such as workshops and networking events online.

"I couldn't have asked for more. I will forever be grateful to the Career Paths team."

-Sana, (ELL Teacher at Archway since July 2021)

Sachan's Success Story

"Archway became my first friend in Canada when I immigrated in November 2020.

"I must confess that I had some really tough and frustrating times looking for a job. I am greatly thankful to Mei, Jessie and Archway in general to help me with my banking certification. Jessie was super quick in terms of getting the certification tuition reimbursed in record time which helped in reducing my stress even more. Because of this certification, Mei literally redesigned my resume and cover letter!"

"I started getting calls for an interview. Apart from all the sessions and job fairs that you both helped me attend,

I am deeply touched by the individual sessions for preparing me for interviews.

"I am joining CIBC bank (my first job in Canada) on June 14th and I want to start the journey by thanking Mary, Jessie and Mei for being my support all this while and being my first friends in Canada. This wouldn't have been possible without your support and efforts."

- Sachan, who has been working at CIBC as Financial Service Representative since June 2021.

Sana's Success Story

"I came to Canada last year, full of hopes that I will continue my successful teaching career here. However, it wasn't long before I realized I will have to start from zero and I had no idea how to do that. I felt lost and my self-confidence dwindled.

"Desperate, I started searching online for agencies that would guide through the process. That is when I came across Archway. I registered with them but didn't expect much help mainly because of the impression I had of employment

agencies back home. However, I was completely taken aback when the Career Paths team followed up with my application rather enthusiastically and started an individualized action plan that was set in motion immediately.

"The Archway team took me by the hand and walked me through every step of the job search process, from upgrading qualifications to landing a job. I couldn't have asked for more. I will forever be grateful to the Career Paths team. Their dedication and sincerity are actually very inspiring."

- Sana, who has been working at Archway as ELL Teacher since July 2021.

▼ Staff Ranni and Dawn with IJS participant.

Immigrant Job Shop

About the Program

The Immigrant Job Shop (IJS) program began in April 2021 to help immigrants gain workplace skills for roles in the customer service or retail industry. Clients receive four weeks of English classes, life skills training with a focus on communication in the workforce, employment skills as well as five University of the Fraser Valley classes. Participants also receive four weeks of on-the-job training through practicum placements.

"I had the best experience in my course. Archway is the best place to meet everyone's needs."

— Ramanveer (IJS Program Client)

"Our course gives clients the confidence to apply for jobs, interview well and ultimately succeed in their career," said program supervisor, Ranni.

"With courses related to emergency first aid, digital tools and office applications, their resumes become more attractive to potential employers."

During COVID

IJS was run in small groups to stay within COVID guidelines. Students alternated between in-person workshops with UFV instructors and virtual employment workshops online. To ensure the program was accessible to those without access to technology, the team secured laptops for students and helped with digital literacy skills as needed.

Participants in the first cohort were given practicum placements at a local hotel, seniors facility, retail store and in the accounting department of a manufacturer. After completing their practicum placements in August 2021, all four participants were hired on permanently. ■



Life Coaching

Offering a Supportive Workplace

In addition to employment support programs, Archway employs over 400 people in part-time and full-time positions. More than 50 of these employees work at the Abbotsford Mission Recycling Program.

Recycling director Laura spends her days working alongside her management team supporting their crew which includes office staff, an education coordinator, machine operators, drop-off attendants and line workers.

"When our recycling program began in 1970, its primary purpose was to offer employment opportunities to people who had barriers to traditional employment. Over 50 years later, offering a supportive and flexible workplace remains a key component of our program," said Laura.



"When somebody comes to work for us, we make accommodations for them. We offer strength-based employment which focuses on tasks that we know will build their capacity."

Many staff identify as having barriers to employment, which includes mental, physical, and developmental disabilities. Some of the other barriers are language skills, hearing impairments, or being limited by a stroke.

"We have some newcomers to the country where maybe their English level isn't high enough to work on another jobsite, but we work with them using a variety of methods to ensure their understanding of job tasks."

"Another example would be a single parent who needs to be able to have the flexibility of shift work and working a specific time. We have also supported some staff through addiction issues and overcoming mental health challenges. I often refer to the work that we do with our team as life coaching."

"One staff member works eight hours a week over four days on the sort line and organizing batteries at the front drop-off. He can't work more than two consecutive hours, so we work around hours that allow him to contribute. This

schedule also allows him to qualify for disability benefits."

A Supportive Environment

Laura enthusiastically shares, "my team is fantastic. From the person who works two hours a day, to somebody who works 48 hours a week, they all bring something so valuable to our team."

"Our staff are also so supportive of each other. Despite being from all walks of life, they know that they are always there for each other."

"We don't focus on our disabilities or what brought us here. I think that it's because they all know that most of us have had struggles that we've had to overcome."

"Between the tonnes of recycling we process each day and the life coaching, my work can be quite challenging but seeing the difference that we are able to make motivates me."

"If anyone is hesitant to employ people that may have a barrier to employment, I'd like to share the staff are very dedicated."

"Once you have trained them and they're confident and empowered, they are so loyal and they want to continue to work



Line workers sort through curbside recycling.

for you. Despite some tough working conditions, we have some long-standing employees - 10, 20, and 25 years!"

Staying Open During Uncertain Times

The Abbotsford Depot only closes four days a year and despite COVID restrictions and closures of other organizations, the program never missed a day.

"Our staff are also so supportive of each other. Despite being from all walks of life, they know that they are always there for each other."

— Recycling Director Laura

"We've been able to stay operational through COVID because we implemented quite a few rules quite quickly, including masks before they were mandated."

"We also had diligent cleaning and sanitizing because we have up to 60 people coming and going each day. After every break, so eight times a day, our lunchroom and other high touchpoints were cleaned. Furthermore, we hired our external janitor who used to clean once a week for us. She now comes every single day at shift change to do an hour of cleaning."

"Other measures included directional arrows on floors, and an additional lunchroom space in another trailer so that we could spread staff out."

"Our efforts proved successful as we did not have any community transmissions on our job sites."

"We so appreciate the staff's willingness to work within the guidelines to keep us all safe and the program operational."

Workplace Hazards

While the team is safely navigating the pandemic, there are other hazards on the job.

"There are so many hazards that are unnecessary including batteries that can start fires or biohazard waste like diapers. Over a 6 month period, line workers will fill a 5-gallon pail with wrongfully discarded needles. The

volume is quite astounding, and I can't quite grasp why it happens. I don't know if it's just an awareness thing or a laziness thing, or it's thinking that a machine is behind the process."

While the curbside pick-up of recycling bins has now been automated, all recycling is still hand-sorted.

"Our employees are amazing at sorting but contamination slows down the process and can pose risks to our team and machinery."

Despite all the challenges, Laura still loves her job after 10 years.

"I see the good that comes from the team that we have built. I see how people have grown, how their skills have improved, and how some of them have moved from couch surfing and near homelessness to having a stable place to hang their hat. And it is things like that that really get me excited." ■

A Spike in Racism Incident Reports

Staff Deepak, Muhi and Natalia.

“There is a fear because change is hard. When we have to reflect and look within it can be difficult to open up and dismantle what your thoughts and behavior have been.”

— Diversity Education Facilitator Deepak

Paulette* has four especially vivid memories of experiencing racism and has flashbacks anytime there’s a traumatic event being reported. There was no escaping news of racism as the Black Lives Matter movement started gaining traction in May 2020 and the flashbacks were becoming a regular occurrence.

She sought help through the Archway Diversity Education program. In addition to providing workshops and consulting on policy, the program takes reports and supports victims of racism and discrimination.

“We’ve definitely seen an increase in incident reports of racism and discrimination. With the Black Lives Matter movement and more people being vocal, individuals were searching for how to make those reports. Within a month, we saw the same number of reports that we would have had in an entire year,” said Alison, the supervisor

of the Archway Diversity Education program at the time.

Not all the incidents had happened that month but like Paulette, there were some where a person was feeling retraumatized. Diversity Education has stayed busy with people wanting to share their story and community members wondering how they could support victims moving forward.

Some clients wanted referrals to the BC Human Rights Clinic before filing a complaint with Tribunal Court, while others wanted to alert an organization or employer of what had happened in their business. And others just wanted to know that there were some like-minded folks, especially if it happened in the community.

“It’s difficult to get the community aware that you can report such incidents. We’ll get more people making reports if we do a press release, but that awareness only last so long,” Alison said.

Reports are shared anonymously with the Fraser Valley Human Dignity Coalition which gives members a window into issues affecting marginalized groups. The reports provide data to enable staff and the coalition to continue advocating for remedies in collaboration with government officials.

Rising Racism

Racism and discrimination are all too prevalent. Youth and adults alike were making reports, and incidents were recorded at institutional and individual levels.

“Institutional and systemic racism are much harder to help people address because victims are usually advised to go through a human rights process, but it can take months. And they will sometimes not even get to reap the benefits of the reporting. But reports are still worth making because they can help affect change in policy,” Alison said.

Anti-Asian Attacks

Anti-Asian racism reports were also more frequent because of COVID-19. Some people of Asian descent were being asked, “Why aren’t you wearing a mask?” even while outdoors. And this was during the early days of the pandemic when wearing a mask wasn’t yet being encouraged.

“Abbotsford is such a diverse city and I didn’t personally hear anything regarding hate crimes related to COVID among our clients. Some did however experience racially motivated labeling and insults when visiting other cities,” said Vivian, a Chinese Settlement Worker with the Archway Immigrant Settlement Program.

According to the Joo, a Korean Settlement Worker at Archway, the Korean Consulate encouraged seniors and women not to walk alone if possible.

“Most of the Korean immigrants were sad, angry and hopeless, myself

included. But it was also a good time to reflect on the unconscious biases we all hold to avoid perpetuating the same harm. In my opinion, it’s key to be aware so that you don’t cause harm too,” Joo said.

Diversity and Inclusion Workshops

In addition to individual support, Diversity Education conducts workshops on various topics around diversity and inclusion.

“Some people have definitely woken up to their privilege during this time. We’ve seen an increase in organizations utilizing our consulting and educating services to educate their staff and create inclusive policies,” said Deepak Purewal, one of the workshop facilitators.

“There are many Abbotsford businesses that are working hard and reflecting on their policies in order to become more inclusive and diverse organizations. They are interested in finding out how they can celebrate different cultures without engaging in cultural appropriation.

“It’s been encouraging for me on a personal level, because even though I grew up in Abbotsford, I never really visited certain parts because I didn’t feel like I belonged as someone of South Asian descent.

“And now when we are doing presentations and we are seeing how hard these businesses are working, a shift’s happening in my mind, and I feel like I’m becoming a part of the bigger community and I’m included,” continued Deepak.

And when it comes to ‘aha’ moments, most workshop participants resonated with the module called ‘The Four Levels of Witnessing’, which are part of Anti-racism Response Training. This helps them identify how they can support a victim of discrimination and

many shared that this made them feel confident that they could intervene in the future.

“I wish that there was less fear around how to respond to incidents and how to address internal biases. There is a fear because change is hard. When we have to reflect and look within it can be difficult to open up and dismantle what your thoughts and behavior have been,” Deepak shared.

“I’m really encouraged by what we’re seeing and know that anti-racism work creates better and stronger communities for everyone.” ■



Levels of Support

The Diversity Education program offers support to victims and witnesses of racism and discrimination. They’ve identified three levels of assistance they offer:

Support – Support includes being there for the person, listening and letting them know that their story is being heard. They also answer questions that the victim or witness might have, and they do their best to give options going forward.

Resources – The resources are used mostly by witnesses. The program lends out resources and directs bystanders to organizations like the Human Rights Commission Clinic and the BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner.

Referrals – Victims can receive recommendations if there is a program or service they would benefit from. For example, one individual mentioned an experience with sexual abuse, and they were connected to a sexual abuse counselor. Another referral may be to a peer who has experience something similar, particularly within workplaces.

It Takes a Village

Parenting Through a Pandemic, PTSD, and Cancer

When Jenelle was seven months pregnant with her first child, her husband, Dave, went on medical leave due to post-traumatic stress disorder. He withdrew as he worked through the trauma he had experienced working as a 911 dispatcher.

"It was really, really hard on our family," shared Jenelle. "It left me to carry a lot as he had checked out and wasn't really present as I was about to have our first baby."

During the final months of her pregnancy and newborn days, Jenelle relied on her village for support which included other moms she had met at the Archway Best for Babies group and staff like Liz, the group coordinator.

"I'll never forget the first time I met Liz," shared Jenelle. "She literally gave the shoes off her feet to another pregnant mom who had showed up to the group barefoot because her feet were so swollen, she couldn't fit any of her shoes."

"It was such a testament to the kind of people the Best for Babies staff are. It showed their kindness and how caring

and compassionate you can be for other people."

Dave was able to get treatment and in time was able to be fully present for Jenelle and their son. He started attending the group weekly and when it was time to graduate, he joined on as a volunteer, snuggling babies for therapy and a positive role model of a healthy father. Together, Dave and Jenelle used their experiences to mentor other parents going through the journey of pregnancy and parenthood.

"We're pretty open and honest and want to help others," shared Jenelle. "We can encourage them that sometimes life is really tough, but you will move on."

Best for Babies

Best for Babies is a pregnancy outreach program that offers support during pregnancy and six months post-partum. Parents learn about prenatal and infant nutrition and have conversations on shared experiences and struggles.

"Pregnancy and parenting are so romanticized. I wish that all of us as new parents understood how hard it can be," shared Tania, the supervisor of Best for Babies and the Family Centre. "It doesn't

all come naturally and there's so much we don't know."

"Having a group of parents at similar stages allows parents to learn what's normal, offer potential solutions to common issues and just provide the sense that they are not alone."

"Pregnancy and parenting are so romanticized. I wish that all of us as new parents understood how hard it can be."

— Best for Babies Supervisor Tania

Jenelle added, "when you have kids the same ages, there's more to talk about and you bond more. I never felt like there were any expectations in the group. Just show up, be yourself, and you will get something out of it."



Best for Babies participants Dave, Jenelle, and their boys.

Parents are provided prenatal vitamins, grocery store gift cards, prenatal education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to navigate resources in community. The staff partner with the Archway Abby Dads program to provide a father support worker to expectant parents.

Staff help families with baby essentials and pass along donations of diapers, formula and clothing.

"We have limited funding so all the extra items we give our participants is thanks to the generosity of our community. Generous donors help us extend our reach and this makes such a difference for families that need support with essentials," shared Tania.

"Some parents aren't sure about attending a group at first and feel anxious about making connections. We support them with the basics like food, diapers and other necessities as we work toward building a relationship where they feel safe sharing their journey."

A participant not comfortable attending groups shared, "I am super shy and still struggling with certain things, but the fact alone that the staff regularly still check in with me, even if I don't answer the text as I just mentally don't know how to, is absolutely amazing!"

After parents graduate from the Best for Babies program they can transition to the Family Centre groups which offers drop-in groups for families with children up to age six.

Parenting During COVID

During most of COVID, the groups met online. The online groups improved the accessibility for some parents while others found it challenging.

"It's hard to concentrate when you've got kids running around. Some people feel hesitant for others to see their personal space or feel they don't have the supports needed to be online," stated Tania. "Our program is so relationship-based and we had to recreate an entire way of being and serving to maintain the connections."

For others, the online group allowed them a sense of community during an isolated time. One mom who moved to Alberta was able to continue attending



Staff members Tania, Liz, Cindy, Ritu, and Monica.

groups while she built a network in her new province.

While the groups were largely online except for a few outdoor activities, staff showed up each day and coordinated deliveries and pick-ups of baby essentials. For parents lacking access to food and not comfortable leaving the house, they coordinated deliveries of Archway Food Bank hampers.

The rising cost of living and housing is a constant challenge for most group participants. "It's not just lower-income families, we also see middle-income families in crisis, and they don't qualify for a lot of supports," said Tania.

Without the home visits from nurses over COVID and family, some parents didn't have the support needed to breastfeed which then added the cost of formula to their tight budgets.

"When you're paying \$1600 a month for a basement suite, it doesn't leave a lot of

room for the expenses of raising a child," said Tania.

As the pandemic continued, staff noticed more relationship conflict as couples were largely confined to their homes. An unfortunate mix of isolation, financial difficulties, general COVID anxiety along with changing parental responsibilities meant a lot more support and referrals were needed.

Another COVID challenge was the missed socialization for many "pandemic babies" and their parents.

"We look forward to returning to in-person groups so these children can play together, take risks outside of their home environment, and develop their language and social skills in a comfortable, safe setting with others," said Tania.

One child cried and clung to mom the first few times meeting Liz, one of the few strangers she had seen in her life.

"She didn't scream at me last week, so we're making progress," laughs Liz.

South Asian Programming

Best for Babies runs three types of groups. One for those expecting, another for new parents and one in Punjabi for South Asian parents.

"While so many aspects of parenting are universal, South Asian communities often live with several generations, which can bring unique generational clashes," shared Monica, the South Asian Best for Babies group facilitator.

"There are also many benefits to living communally and we found that some of our South Asian parents had an easier time accessing the online groups because they had other caregivers in their home which allowed them to focus on the conversations."

While attendance at the other classes dropped, the South Asian groups saw

almost twice as many parents as normal joining online.

Other reasons parents shared for attending online was improved accessibility when they might not have a car or licence. They appreciated getting useful information in the comfort of their homes and felt more comfortable attending a culturally specific program.

One participant shared, "I joined last week, and it made me so happy. I have never looked at the clock since I got pregnant and had my baby. But now I can't stop looking at my clock and waiting for 10am when the group starts."

Another participant, who immigrated from India three years ago shared that she learned things she didn't know including what postpartum depression was and that "this knowledge helped me to understand it's normal and I'm not the only one. We've been given diapers and gift cards and I wish this program went to five years. It's not a program, it's like our second family."

The group usually meets at the Gurdwara temple and is exploring virtual and in-person groups in the fall.

Despite the last year and a half of upheaval and constantly changing guidelines, Tania says there were some positive things that came out of COVID and "If we can live through this, we can live through anything!"

Jenelle's 2nd Pregnancy

Jenelle's second pregnancy was marred by the pandemic and a devastating cancer diagnosis for her husband while five months pregnant.

After having surgery, Dave beat cancer and they welcomed their second son

in June 2020. Only two weeks after the birth, Dave's cancer returned. As he underwent chemo and radiation for seven weeks, Archway staff brought meals and supported them.

Jenelle shared, "I love that Archway is an open door, even through COVID. I can't tell you how many days there were that I had dropped my husband off at the hospital and I had nowhere for me and my baby to go. It was winter with tight pandemic restrictions so we couldn't be outside or enter a friend's home and I could only spend so much time walking around stores.

"It's a beautiful thing what community can be. Through all of our crazy last few years, I wasn't alone."

— Best for Babies participant Jenelle

"Liz and Cindy always welcomed me to sit in the Family Centre room. Some days I would just cry at utter disbelief of what I was going through, and other days I would help them go through donations while picking out a thing or two that I still needed for my baby."

Jenelle and Dave were able to get some diapers, wipes and many other essential baby items that they needed especially when they were in a financial rut from the medical challenges.

"The fact that I could always go there made my husband's cancer journey so much more bearable and it helped me

stay strong for my two sons who needed me to carry them through this."

Dave is now in remission, in a new career and the family is again using their experiences to support other parents.

"We don't want a pity party. I want to be able to share 'this brought me through, this was really encouraging for me and now this is something I can do for you.'"

Jenelle journaled throughout the pandemic as a form of therapy and is now working on a book on their experiences. The title is still undecided but the message she wants to share is that "you need a community, a village. It's a beautiful thing what community can be. Through all of our crazy last few years, I wasn't alone. We couldn't have gotten through what we did without our circle and our faith."

"Overall, the Family Centre and Best for Babies has been life-changing. We have learned about grace and compassion, we have met lifelong friends, and we have learned how to better ourselves as parents while having grace on ourselves for only knowing what we know. ■



Cindy facilitating a Best for Babies online group.



Stories of people helping people