



VECOVA™

# COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

Real People, Real Results.

2023/24





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# MESSAGE FROM KELLY HOLMES- BINNS

To our dedicated community,

I want to start off by thanking each and every one of you. You made 2023/24 a year to remember at Vecova. Thanks to your generosity and support, our Giving Tuesday was a tremendous success. It not only provided critical funds for our programs, but also gave us valuable insight into how our community and stakeholders are feeling as we continue to navigate life after the pandemic. Your participation truly showed us the resilience of our community, and shone a spotlight on the issues that are concerning you the most.

I've had the pleasure of meeting several individuals and families who have been connected to Vecova for many years. It is clear that together, we **are** making a big impact. I feel so grateful to see all of the wonderful supporters willing to share their stories, act as ambassadors and advocates, and give what they can to help us keep our doors open and programs running. These moments fuel our work and tell us we are on the right path, together we are creating a world where everyone belongs, is valued, and has the opportunity to thrive.

As many of you know, advocacy is close to my heart. I have been actively working to raise awareness and promote the needs of our community throughout our city, province and country. Vecova's programs were significantly impacted by the pandemic, we had to reduce staffing and delay some of the in-person programs we offer. We are continuing to work hard to rebuild our organization and your support has enabled us to adapt and continue providing the essential services people rely on. Thank you.

One key area we are looking to expand is affordable housing for those who need accessible and supportive homes. Some of our consumers have lived in Vecova's housing for more than 40 years, we understand their needs and they understand ours. We have seen the consumers in our care learn and grow alongside us through the good times and the not-as-good times. We hope you have enjoyed seeing some of their art and hearing their stories throughout 2023/24. We will continue to share their wonderful artwork and accomplishments with you so you can see the ongoing impacts of your gifts.

With Alberta's aging population, the demands for Vecova's services are growing. We know how to ensure everyone in our care has the resources they need to live the best life possible. We expect more and more people will need our help, and we are committed to meeting this challenge head-on. I look forward to continuing to work with you to make great things happen for our community.

Thank you again for your time, your stories and your support. Together, we really are making a more inclusive society for us all.

Kelly Holmes-Binns

Chief Executive Officer



# THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT AT VECOVA

This year, we have made significant progress towards increasing our voice and presence in the community. We have a unique story to tell and you are an important part of it.

At Vecova, we are working to create a world where individuals with disabilities are empowered, included, and given the opportunities they deserve to lead fulfilling lives. Achieving this goal would not be possible without the generous gifts from each of our supporters. With your support, we are breaking down barriers and building a more inclusive society.

**What we know from our supporters is they believe in the work we do, they see the results and impact we have in the lives of our consumers, and they have said we need to do more.**

It's true. We need to do more to advocate for people with disabilities and ensure we are sustainable for the future. An important factor in our success is listening and strengthening our relationships with you. There's nothing more we enjoy than hearing from you and when you agree to sit down with us for a cup of coffee or attend one of our events to celebrate achievements together, that is where we shine. We will be continuing to meet with donors to get their feedback and to make sure you are well-informed and feel 100% confident with your support for Vecova.

As we look to the future, we are committed to maintaining the momentum and expanding our impact even further. One area we want to focus on in our department is to help people plan for the future.

Writing a will and thinking about your legacy can feel overwhelming. When you are someone living with a disability or you help to care for a family member with a disability, it can be especially daunting as you try and think through who will care for your loved ones if you are unable to care for them anymore. We want to make sure everyone in our community has the resources they need to plan for the future, and people know how to ensure their wishes are clear. More importantly, we want to help you ensure that the people you care for will have a home, care and support throughout their lifetime. We want to work together on this and make sure we understand your needs as you plan for the future.



Your ongoing support is crucial as we launch new initiatives, care for more individuals in need, and continue to advocate for an inclusive society as well as the rights of people with disabilities. After all, “Disabled” is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time, and usually not by choice. Together, we can make our vision a reality, creating a more compassionate and equitable world for everyone.

Thank you for your unwavering loyalty and incredible generosity.

Dean Dodge  
Chief Development Officer

# Q&A WITH GEORGIA LYKIDIS

## Georgia's Insights: Learning and Leading at Vecova

### Why is Vecova special to you, what made you want to join the Board?

When my son was an infant, I tried taking him to the city pools with no success. Vecova's pool was a blessing and helped me as a mother to get out of the house and do something that we both enjoyed in a welcoming, warm environment. I always felt like Vecova was a hidden gem in our city, it gave me some very special moments with my son and I instantly feel a sense of family and happiness when I am here.

### What inspires you to donate and continue to give to Vecova?

The integrated services that Vecova gives to people with all abilities are so unique: they offer life-changing programs and services for everything from Housing services, Employment Services and Overall Wellness Programs and Supports. It is amazing really.

### How has serving on the board influenced your perspectives on our community?

Serving on the board has helped me see how much people in our community rely on Vecova at different stages in their lives and for a variety of needs. One in five Albertans identify as having a disability. Making our society more inclusive benefits all of us.

### Do you have a favourite moment/story about your time on the Board at Vecova?

I am still fairly new to the Board, I joined less than a year ago but so far working the Casino Fundraiser with the Vecova staff and volunteers and getting to know them was one of my favourite moments. It really enforced that Vecova has great people that genuinely care about the wellbeing of everyone. I would tell you more but you know what they say "what happens at the Casino, stays at the Casino"

### Is there a story from Vecova that stands out to you about how donor support helped a specific person or area at Vecova?

Lorita W's story\* really touched me. Lorita and her son Rodney were having a really difficult time finding housing and the right supports. As a mother you always want your child to be safe, to be happy and have every opportunity to thrive. Vecova has given this to Lorita, and that is priceless.



### What excites you the most about the work we do together at Vecova?

I love how Vecova has so much to offer individuals in our community. It has it all: Social gatherings for people that would normally struggle to find accepting places to come together, Mental Health Support, Education for its consumers and their families such as seminars on dementia and how to care for your loved ones, how to care for yourself, how to care for others, it has something for people of all ages.

### Has working on Vecova's board impacted your personal or professional life in any way?

It has really opened my eyes and given me more insight on how many people don't know about the resources that are available to support them and their families. It has also made me realize how many challenges persons with disabilities face on a daily basis, there are so many things I took for granted that I see with a different lens now.

# Q&A WITH GEORGIA LYKIDIS

## VECOVA BOARD MEMBER SINCE 2023

### What are your hopes for the future of Vecova?

I hope we can focus on increasing our programs and services so that more people are able to thrive because Vecova is there when they need us and we are able to give them the support they need.

### What are some challenges you foresee in Vecova's future and how can our supporters help?

There are many organizations out there that are doing good work and asking for donations. It can be tough to pick and choose where to give, and with rising costs - people can't support every charity that needs help. Donating to Vecova is a wise investment, donor dollars cover areas that many people with disabilities experience barriers to, such as housing, employment, and wellness. We never know when we will need help ourselves, making sure our community has a place like Vecova that is well-prepared and ready is one less thing for us all to worry about.

### What would you say to someone considering becoming a donor or a member of the board for Vecova?

The more you hear about the wonderful things Vecova does, the more you will want to be a donor or a board member. They touch on areas many organizations do not have the specific skill sets to help. As an example: Vecova works with individuals with complex needs. This is a specialized skill set. Vecova has the tools, and the people to support its clients in all areas of their lives. If you are thinking you want to get involved, make the call or send the email, reach out and let them know, it really is worth it.

## Thank you our 2023/24 Board Members

Michelle McKenna  
Board Chair

Robert McKercher  
Vice Chair

Crystal Mylik  
Secretary

Donald Dart  
Treasurer

Nancy Toombs

Georgia Lykidis

Kyle Bakx

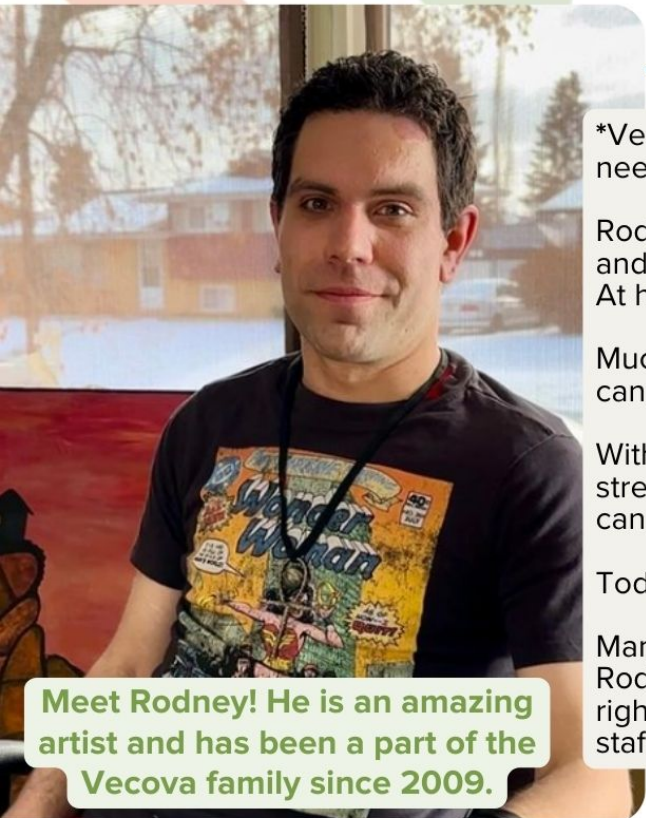
Karin Finley

Sean Crump

Sylvie Tran

Neil Mackie

Tracy Graham



### \*Lorita's Story

\*Vecova **saved** my son Rodney by providing the housing and care he needs to be successful, I am so grateful for their help.

Rodney has faced homelessness, mental illness, cognitive impairment and very difficult behaviours that make him extremely difficult to house. At home, I was at risk of violence often and knew I needed help.

Much of the housing available would reject him for his behaviors. He cannot read or do simple math, how could he ever function on his own?

Without **advocacy**, he would be one of the many faces you see on our streets. Food, clothing and shelter need to be secure before anyone can thrive.

Today Rodney's home is filled with boundless artistry that wows us all.

Many of our homeless need help and support to survive, just like Rodney did. Let's support organizations like Vecova, they provide the right housing with the right supports in place and have properly trained staff to take care of those who need them the most.

Meet Rodney! He is an amazing artist and has been a part of the Vecova family since 2009.

# Housing

## Supporting Stability, How Vecova cares for people requiring extra care

Vecova has been a leader in addressing the housing challenges faced by people with disabilities in Alberta for over 50 years. The availability of accessible, affordable housing has profound implications for the safety and quality of life for everyone in our community. For Vecova, that also means ensuring our housing services are set up for success and can effectively deliver the supports our consumers need. Shelter costs have increased 8.5% between 2022 and 2023, leaving many service providers feeling that their housing services were at moderate to high risk of closure.

Individuals with disabilities are more likely to experience housing instability, this issue is intensified by the rising living costs and lack of suitable housing solutions that cater to their unique needs. It is becoming harder and harder for families to find safe spaces to care for their loved ones with a disability. This is where Vecova comes in.

*“Since the beginning, my wife and I noticed the remarkable support and care provided for our son by the housing team at Bishops Manor. They provide a positive and safe home environment along with camaraderie experiences. At Vecova, his abilities don’t hold him back. They support our son’s love for skiing, curling and golfing as well as making meaningful connections with other residents. The Vecova team’s dedication has transformed all of our lives and we are forever GRATEFUL“*

*-John and Ann*



Meet Donna! She is in our Cluster model and loves living close to the Calgary Zoo

## Expanding How We Support Consumers In Their Homes

Vecova has a proven track record of successfully providing care and support for people in their own homes, and as we see Alberta’s population aging, we know it is time to add an “Aging in Place” program that is affordable, well-managed and tailored to suit each consumer. We will model this program with the same holistic approach that supports the consumers in our housing services today. The goal will be to help people maintain their independence and quality of life as they age.

### Did you know?

*According to the Alberta Council of Disability Services, 30% of individuals with cognitive disabilities spent 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, compared to 20% for the majority of the Canadian population.*

**Vecova’s Housing Services THANKS all of our donors who chose to supported Housing Initiatives on Giving Tuesday 2023**



# Housing

## Supporting Stability, a look at Alberta’s Disability Services Sector

### The January 2024 Alberta Council of Disabilities (ACDS) Sector Scanner Survey Indicated:

- Inflation and shelter costs were the top emerging concerns in 2023. Inflation in Alberta increased 2.5% from November 2022 to 2023. Over the same time, shelter costs increased 8.5%.
- 51% of service providers felt their housing services were at high or moderate risk of cancellation due to increasing costs.
- 57% of service providers had individuals in their services who were having difficulties making rental or mortgage payments.

### The ACDS asked service providers about the greatest housing challenges for persons with disabilities:

Have any of the individuals accessing service with your organization experienced any of the following forms of housing insecurity or homelessness over the past year? (n=63)

Housing Insecurity or Homelessness	Percentage of Respondents
Difficulty / Inability to Make Rental or Mortgage Payments	57%
Foreclosure or Eviction	33%
Multiple Moves or Forced Moves	40%
Overcrowding	10%
Inferior Housing Quality (inadequate plumbing or heat, leaks, holes, etc.)	38%
Neighbourhood Instability (high rates of crime, poor city services, noise, etc.)	40%
Hidden homelessness (unhoused and living with family or friends due to having nowhere else to live)	35%
Homelessness (unhoused and living in a homeless shelter, on the street, etc.)	22%
Finding or affording childcare	2%

We remain committed to advocating for affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities. This means we will continue working with other agencies and service providers to develop collaborative solutions - while expanding the number of spaces we have available to house those in need of special care.

Expanding the spaces we have available means less wait time and more opportunities for people with disabilities to find stable housing. As with everything we do, our ultimate goal is to create a more inclusive and supportive community, where less people with special needs are homeless and instead have the resources they need to live fulfilling and independent lives.

**122**  
CONSUMERS LIVING IN  
VECOVA HOUSING

**300**  
EMPLOYEES WHO SUPPORT  
HOUSING SERVICES

**121,545**  
MEALS PRACTITIONERS SUPPORT  
CONSUMERS TO PREPARE

**748**  
MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS OUR  
CONSUMERS ATTENDED THANKS TO  
OUR PRACTITIONERS

**11**  
HOMES THAT VECOVA OWNS  
AND/OR OPERATES



Meet Michael! He has been with Vecova for over 20 years and is an avid Calgary Flames fan! He also just won 2 gold medals at the Alberta Special Olympic Games in 5 pin bowling.

# Mental Health Services

## Supporting Healthier Futures, Vecova's Mental Health Programs for Consumers and Caregivers

Vecova's Mental Health Services have seen tremendous growth and success over the past year. In particular, we have seen more consistent engagement and enrollments in our Dementia Caregiver Group, Creative Coping Group and our Planned Approaches program.

We have seen a significant increase in enrollments for the Creative Coping Group in particular, which tells us we need to find the resources to open more spaces for this program. There is consistently a waitlist of people hoping to enroll in the program so they can work with a therapist to explore art activities that help them gain insight into their emotions and develop new coping strategies.

We are also noticing a unique and supportive community forming in the Dementia Wellness caregiver group. As participants in the Dementia Wellness Program enjoy time in their program, their caregivers gather together to do activities that support their mental health and well-being. Over the past 2 years, the Caregiver Program has seen consistent participation, with some caregivers returning to support others even after their loved ones are no longer in the Dementia Wellness Program, demonstrating the deep impact the group support is having on them.

**Mental Health Services THANKS the Petro Canada CareMakers Foundation for their generous support in our Caregiver program**



“The highlight for me has been the visual arts provided in our Caregivers Group. I can let go of my worries, focus on the moment and de-stress. Whether painting or drawing, using visual art has improved my mental wellness and made me want to learn more. As a caregiver of someone with dementia, I really look forward to these sessions.”

**42%**

OF CANADIANS WISH THEY HAD EASIER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

**234**

ADULTS USED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING AT VECOVA

**100**

PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES WAITING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT VECOVA

**16**

MONTH AVERAGE WAIT ON THE WAITLIST

**600**

PROFESSIONALS PROVIDED WITH VECOVA EDUCATIONAL AND BEHAVIOUR CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES

# Employment

## Supporting Inclusive Workplaces, How Vecova Promotes Employment for Youth and Adults of all Abilities

### More than just a job

Providing inclusive workspaces is not just about providing someone with work, it's about creating a space where people feel valued and like they belong. People with disabilities still face significant barriers to employment, including societal expectations of perfection and lack of accessible opportunities. For youth with disabilities, fitting into a society where they are bombarded with doctored images of achievements and pressure on social media that anything less than "perfect" is mocked and publicly degraded, it can be particularly challenging to just find the confidence to apply for work.

**In 2023, the employment rate for people with disabilities was 59%, compared to 80% for those without disabilities.**

Vecova's Employment Services are bridging that gap. We offer employment training, job placement services and ongoing support to ensure employers and the employees we place with them have everything they need to succeed. The stories we hear from our clients speak volumes. The Job Coaches are always thrilled to see the smiles as our consumers secure employment, gain independence and have a new sense of purpose.

### Donor Support Builds Inclusion

According to the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, 27.5% Alberta's population aged 15 and over were persons with disabilities (PWD). The unemployment rate for PWD aged 25-64 was 8.9% compared to 7.9% for people without a disability. PWD's also have an employment rate that is 10.9 percentage points lower than that of people without a disability.



**Meet Diana! She was one of frontrunners to be awarded a White Hat award for her work at the Calgary International Airport**

**"Without Vecova, I struggled to find work. With Vecova I can live confidently because I have something that is mine"**  
*-Bottle Depot Employee*

**Employment Services THANKS**  
the **Calgary Foundation** and the **RBC Foundation**  
for their support

**135**

**IMMIGRANT WOMEN SUPPORTED TO BUILD EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT**

**60**

**YOUTH SUPPORTED THROUGH EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

**50%**

**SUCCESS RATE OF YOUTH BEING HIRED TO STAY ON WITH THE SAME COMPANY AFTER THEIR WORK EXPERIENCE IS COMPLETE**

**40**

**ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES CURRENTLY SUPPORTED TO WORK IN THEIR COMMUNITIES**

**21**

**PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN VECOVA'S BOTTLE RECYCLING PROGRAM**

# Wayfinder Program

## Supporting Community Connections, Vecova's Wayfinder Program in Action

**According to Google, the DEFINITION OF A WAYFINDER:** a person navigating to a particular location

**VS**

**VECOVA's DEFINITION OF A WAYFINDER:** helping a person navigate the community to build meaningful connections

**88**

CONSUMERS SERVED  
IN WAYFINDER

**20**

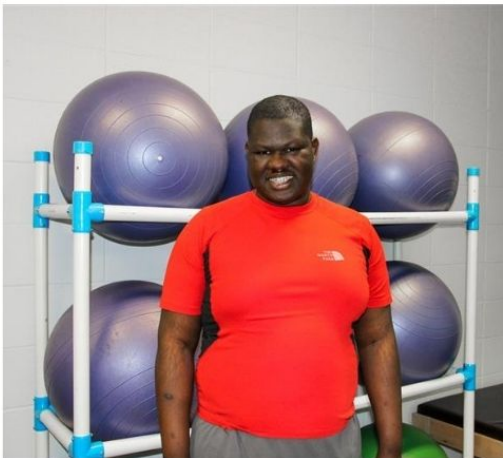
CONSUMERS ENJOYING NEW  
VOLUNTEER POSITIONS IN  
OUR COMMUNITY

**148**

CONSUMERS SUPPORTED  
TO PARTICIPATE IN THEIR  
COMMUNITIES

### From Timid to Triumphant: Mach's Wayfinder Story

Mach joined the Wayfinder Program at Vecova in April 2020. He was a shy and timid young man who lacked self-confidence and was not engaging with the community around him. As we got to know Mach, we learned that he had an unfilled goal, he wanted to improve his physical health.



Over the last few years, Mach has been a regular in our Strength and Conditioning room, working closely with his dedicated practitioner learning the basics of exercise, diet and healthy living. What started as a simple health plan, soon fueled a passion in Mach and doors began to open for him.

Together, they embarked on a fitness journey that was about to give Mach opportunities that would allow him to grow his confidence and love for fitness. In June 2023 Mach got the opportunity to volunteer at his local YMCA to clean exercise equipment. He was thrilled, he would now get to work in a new gym and meet new people that also love fitness.

Through his dedication to weekly workouts, his volunteer role, and his new healthier lifestyle, Mach has made incredible strides in his physical health and in his confidence. He has noticed that his clothes fit better, he has more motivation and energy, and his face is noticeably slimmer...but what we see is that Mach's self-worth is shining brighter than ever.

Mach is a vibrant example of the positive change that dedication and support from Vecova's Wayfinder program can bring. Thank you to the YMCA for giving Mach this volunteer opportunity and a special thanks to all the dedicated practitioners that continue to help him achieve his goals.

# Wayfinder: Supporting our Community

## How Wayfinder Practitioners are changing the world around us

The Wayfinder Program at Vecova is a vital, community-based initiative designed to improve the lives of adults living with disabilities, ranging from 18-89 years old. We designed this program to ensure people with disabilities can develop meaningful friendships and connections within their communities. It is essential all people have the opportunity for human interactions like this as it contributes to our overall well-being and social integration. All of the activities in the Wayfinder Program are tailored to the individual's stage of life and personal interests, fostering a sense of belonging, acceptance and purpose.

Participants in this program use AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) funds to cover their activities, promoting independence and personal choice. As organizations have had to raise admissions and fees for programs, finding affordable activities is becoming increasingly difficult. Luckily, our practitioners have very specialized skillsets and have been able to keep navigating a path forward for their consumers despite some financial barriers. With support from community partners like Telus Spark and The Cookbook Co Cooks, our practitioners can offer financially viable options to our consumers.

The practitioners at Vecova are some of the most committed and caring individuals in our community. The success of the Wayfinders Program relies heavily on these dedicated workers. Our practitioners have a deep understanding of disabilities, and the barriers and challenges our participants encounter. They are trained how to teach participants goal setting, how to achieve those goals, and ensure their safety and medical needs are being met in the process. They are adaptable in creating the need of a participant on that day and help guide organizations how they can successfully include our consumers. They are often working behind the scenes, providing support and encouragement, overcoming obstacles and advocating for the participants in their care. This job can feel thankless at times, yet the impact of our practitioners is profound. By bringing participants to join in activities, our practitioners are shaping perceptions and organizational practices of the world around us, everyday.

Looking ahead, the future is very exciting for the Wayfinders Program. We will be continuing to expand our networks and collaborate with more organizations to offer new opportunities and a broader range of programming for our participants. With increased donor support and deeper connections with our partners, we can keep extending our services to a greater number of families and individuals, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate, no matter what their financial situation may be. Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive community where everyone belongs.



According to Statistics Canada: In Alberta, the disability rate among adults was reported to be 27.5% in 2022, an increase of 5.8 percentage points from 2017

**Meet Chase! Chase is a Wayfinder consumer who was able to attend cooking classes and learn new skills.**

# Bottle Depot and Bottle Pick up

## Supporting Community, One Bottle at a Time

### *Vecova's Growing Social Enterprise*

Vecova's Bottle Depot and Bottle Pick-Up Service is Calgary's only non-profit bottle depot. We can proudly say that 70% of our staff are people with disabilities. With a legacy of recycling since 1973, Vecova continues to expand its impact in Calgary and the surrounding area.

This year, we saw new partnerships with ReCork, Call2Recycle, Technotrash, the City of Calgary Waste and Recycling division, and the Alberta Recycling Management Authority. These partnerships meant we could expand our services and accept electronics, reading and prescription glasses, textiles, batteries, and corks. This resulted in 9,828 non bottle returns in 2023/24. We are excited to continue working with partners to broaden our work and commitment to sustainability.

### **Vecova's Bottle Depot Wins!**

We were honoured to receive the Beverage Container Management Board (BCMB) Team Recognition Award, celebrating the outstanding teamwork and excellent service provided by our staff in Bottle Depot. Adding to that excitement, we also received the Applaud a Depot Award (ABDA), which recognizes both good service and community impact. Receiving these awards were such a thrill for our staff, and they validated the hard work and enthusiasm they bring to our facility every day.

### **Driving Change Through Sustainable Growth**

Recognizing the ongoing need for sustainable waste management and support for persons with disabilities, we are setting up to triple our bottle pick-up program in 2024/25. To make this happen, we will be launching new recruitment programs and increasing our community reach. We aim to make recycling more accessible for everyone.

In addition to expanding our bottle pick-up services, we are currently in the process of establishing a new partnership with Goodwill which will allow us to recycle textiles and home goods as well. This initiative will promote more waste reduction and allow us to create new employment opportunities for our community.

In order to make these expansions happen we will also be investing in new vehicles to improve the reliability and reach of our recycling services. Together, we can make a greener, cleaner and more sustainable future for us all.



**Meet Jason! He has worked at the bottle depot for 25 years!**

**71,513**

NUMBER OF PEOPLE  
WHO USED THE BOTTLE  
DEPOT THIS YEAR

**13,565,869**

TOTAL CONTAINERS  
PROCESSED AT OUR DEPOT

**78**

SCHOOLS, CLUBS BUSINESSES  
AND ORGANIZATIONS SERVED

**15,000**

HOURS WORKED BY PEOPLE  
WITH BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

**4,500**

RESIDENCES SIGNED UP WITH  
OUR BOTTLE PICK UP SERVICE

# Aquatics, Health and Fitness

## Supporting Wellness, How Vecova Promotes Wellness for People of ALL Abilities

Our donors helped Aquatics Health and Fitness (AHF) have many successes in the 2023/24 fiscal year, including record breaking summer camp enrollment, expansion of our First Aid Program and we were able to launch new programs like the Mixed Ability Sport Program, Adult Adapted Aquatics Classes and Adapted Strength and Conditioning Classes.

AHF is proud to offer a diverse range of programs designed to meet the needs of individuals of all ages and abilities. These programs are tailored to ensure everyone has the opportunity to engage in wellness activities in an inclusive and supportive environment.

We now offer 12 adapted programs on land and 4 in the water- with over 1,600 participants of all ages and abilities, an increase of 66%.

Testimonials like the one below tell us that we are on the right path with our programming and most importantly, we are creating inclusion every step of the way.

As AHF forges ahead, we are looking to establish new partnerships with other facilities in the community with a focus on training, instilling the confidence and skills necessary to deliver programs tailored to suit people with disabilities.

“Every other Recreation Centre in Calgary accommodates us and tolerates us because that’s what’s required of them; that is the law.

But

**Vecova welcomes us.**

**Vecova embraces us.**

**Vecova wants us there.**

We feel like we belong here and are part of a community and that is absolutely priceless.”

- Parent of a child in Vecova’s Adapted Recreation program

**31,447**

DROP-IN ADMISSIONS

**11,611**

PARTICIPANTS IN AHF REGISTERED PROGRAMS

**70**

REGISTRANTS IN A FIRST AID PROGRAM

Meet Harrison! He has attended our summer camps for the last 3 years and starts his countdown to Vecova’s Camps in January!



AHF THANKS the **Calgary Flames Foundation** and **Shaw Birdies for Kids** for their support in our **Children and Youth Adapted Recreation** programs as well as **Jumpstart**. We also want to thank the Government of Alberta for their support on our new Mixed Ability Program through their **Community Initiatives Program**.

# Dementia Wellness Program

## Supporting Hope, How Vecova impacts Dementia Care in Alberta

Dementia is a growing concern in Alberta, affecting thousands of families every year. According to the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and the Northwest Territories, there are over 46,000 Albertans living with dementia today. It is predicted that number will increase to over 225,000 Albertans living with dementia over the next 20 years based on our aging population and population growth. Vecova is helping support people living with dementia and their caregivers by offering specialized programs to help them live the best lives possible.

### The Dementia Wellness Program

The Dementia Wellness Program at Vecova is designed to provide comprehensive support and enrichment for individuals living with dementia. Our program focuses on physical fitness, cognitive exercises, music therapy and socialization to enhance the quality of life for participants. Each session is carefully planned to include a variety of activities that interest and stimulate the current participants in the program and runs two days a week from 12:30-3:30pm.

Participants and their families have shared testimonials about the profound impact of the program:

*The dementia program at Vecova has been extraordinary for my father who has Alzheimer's disease with dementia. The staff are incredibly friendly, helpful, well-educated, and I couldn't ask for a better space to take my father twice a week. The variety of intellectual conversation, socialization, participant to staff ratio, and the music and physical movement is like nothing else in the city! I would recommend this program to anyone. It would be a shame for it not to continue." – Erin M*

*"There has been recent research confirming the intuitive belief that the progression of Alzheimer's disease can be delayed by physical fitness activity, brain exercises, and socialization, in addition to diet management and some supplements. Andrea has been a participant of the VECOVA Wellness Program for over two years and looks forward to each session because it provides a valuable part of her weekly regimen of physical fitness activities, brain exercising and socialization, in creative fun ways, by a caring staff." – Geoff C and Andrea S*

**46,000+**

ALBERTANS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

**35**

PARTICIPANTS THAT HAVE BENEFITTED FROM THE DEMENTIA WELLNESS PROGRAM THIS YEAR

**46**

PEOPLE ENROLLED IN CAREGIVERS SUPPORT PROGRAMS



Meet Andrea! She has been in our Dementia Wellness Program since the day it started, over 2 years ago



# Our People

## Supporting Consumers with Commitment and Compassion



**“Without Vecova, I wouldn't have a home or a job or friends. It's really awesome”**  
- Jessica, Bottle Depot employee for 2 Years

**Our people.** Our employees are the heart and soul of Vecova. Everyday they are tirelessly working to bring our vision to life and create a more inclusive community. They ensure people feel welcome, feel heard, feel understood and that we are delivering the best possible services we can to ensure our consumers are receiving support and programs tailored to their individual needs.

We are very aware of the financial challenges facing our workforce. With nearly half of all Canadians living paycheque to paycheque, growing costs are putting immense pressure on the Community Disability Workforce. We are so grateful to have loyal, caring staff who are committed to the care of others and make our world a better place. With support from donors and government support for increased staff funding, we were able to retain the majority of our staff (85%) and hire new people to fill vacancies in 2023/24 so we can keep doing what we do best - taking care of the people who need us.

### Did you know?

Our employees can now be found in Calgary, Cochrane, Airdrie, Canmore, Banff and Lake Louise

Vecova **THANKS** Cobs Bread University District for your continued support of our consumers and employees through the donations of end-of-day bread. These gifts help to feed the people in our care and those caring for them. **THANK YOU!**

**IN ALBERTA**

**92%**

OF SERVICE PROVIDERS REPORTED THAT INFLATION WAS ONE OF THE TOP ISSUES AFFECTING THEIR WORKFORCE

**77%**

PROVINCIAL AVERAGE OF CDS STAFF RETENTION

**AT VECOVA**

**270**

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES

**323**

PART TIME EMPLOYEES

**85%**

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

# Vecova's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Statement

Vecova is committed to **diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility** for everyone.

We welcome this **journey of continual learning** with our dedicated employees and community.

We strive to **operate with an open mind** and seek the contributions of people with diverse backgrounds.

We believe this only strengthens our workplace culture and ability to **advance our mission**.

We work to **inspire and inform the community** to be inclusive - from our daily work supporting individuals in the community and in living environments, to our social enterprise and employment programs.

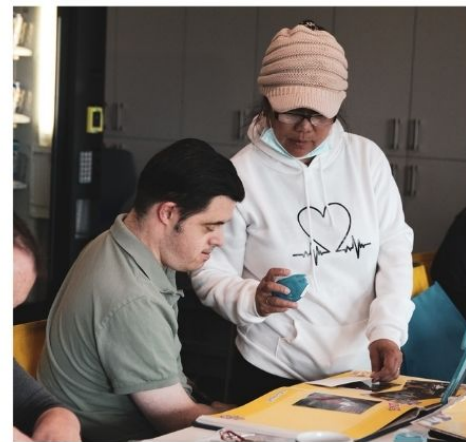
**Join us in building a future** for people of all abilities where everyone is **valued, belongs, and thrives**.

Vecova **THANKS** the Government of Canada's **Community Services Recovery Fund** for funding our DEIA journey

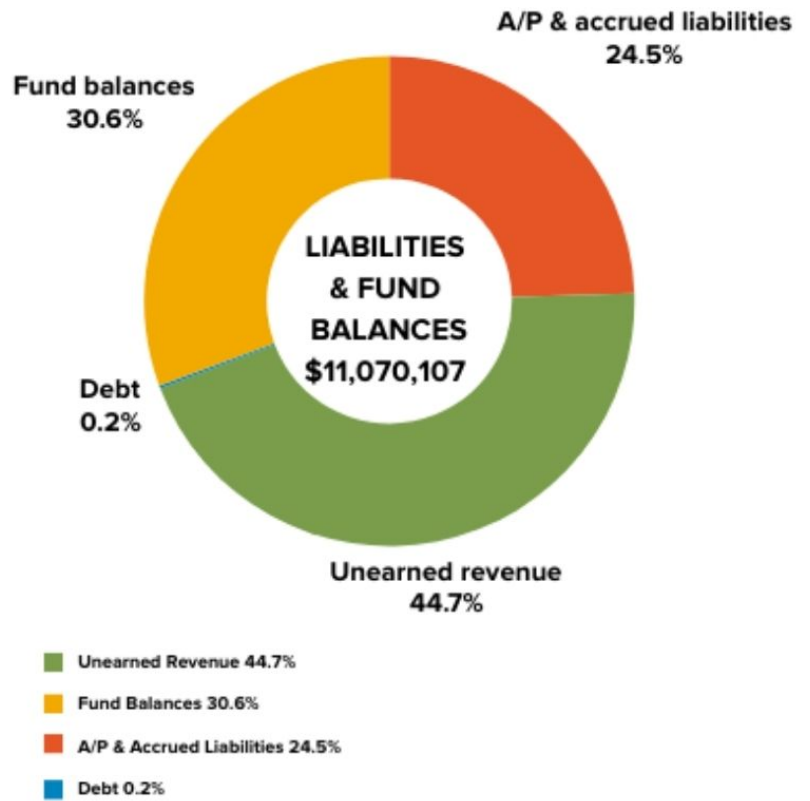
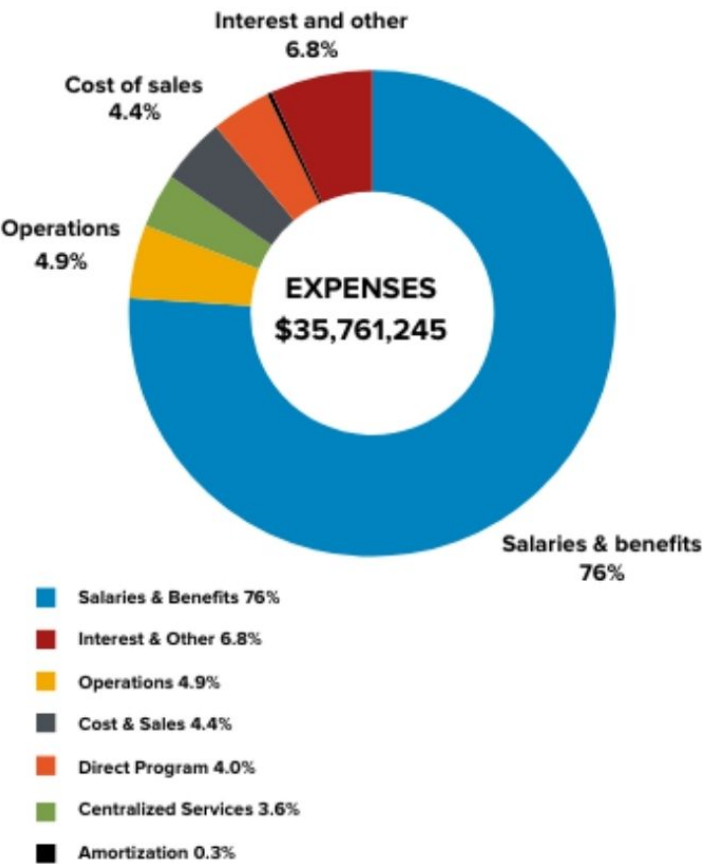
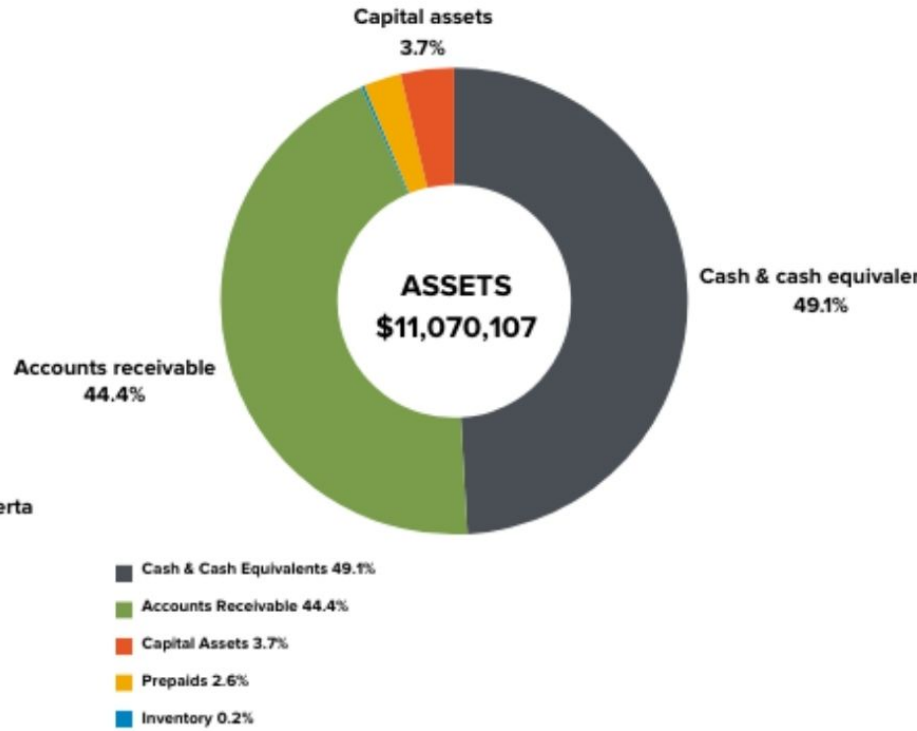
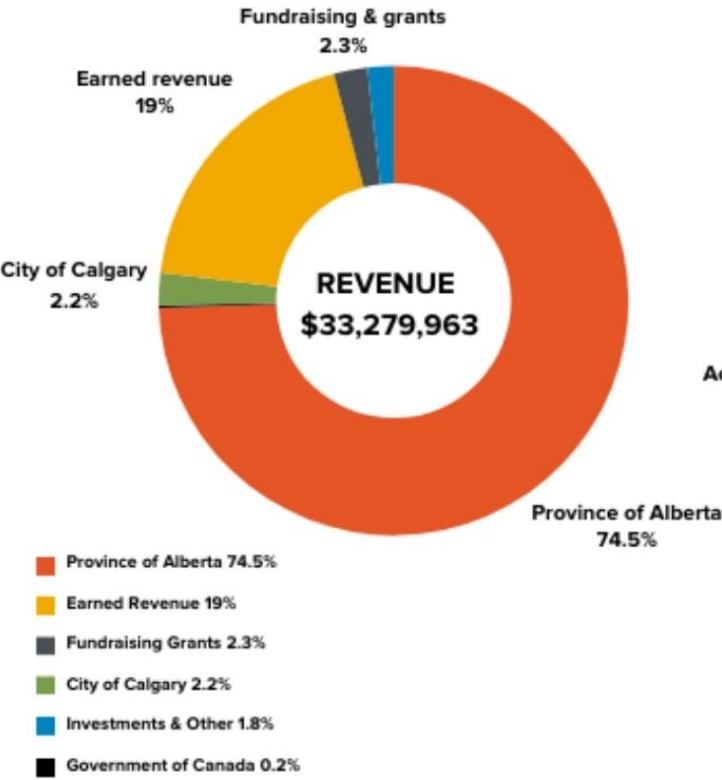
# Support in Action

## Donor-Powered Projects Fuel Progress

- ▶ We are getting a new website! Thanks to our partnership with Relish New Brand Experience, we will be launching an improved website this year.
- ▶ With support from the Canadian Red Cross, our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility journey continued by creating a statement (above), providing staff training, employee recognition events and the future completion of a new resource guide.
- ▶ Thanks to the Rotary Club of Calgary Stampede Park, we will be opening one of Calgary's first Snoezelen Rooms. This will offer a multi-sensory environment designed to reduce agitation and anxiety, while engaging and stimulating reactions to encourage communication. Snoezelen Rooms are a successful therapy tool for various disabilities including autism and dementia.
- ▶ We successfully raised \$58,002.51 on Giving Tuesday with much of those funds allocated for Housing Services. We didn't only raise financial support that day, we also raised awareness about our Housing Programs and saw how concerned and committed our community is to helping those in need of support.
- ▶ Thanks to the City of Calgary Home Care Program, we were able to offer Scrapbooking and Music Therapy sessions at two of our residences, ensuring these activities were accessible and convenient for our residents.



# Financial Information



# Dance Dreams: Stories of Rhythm and Joy

## James Silcock – A Dance Journey from Passion to Performance

James Silcock is a long-standing consumer at Vecova and receives Wayfinder, Employment and Housing Services support. One of James' talents and passions has always been dancing. Staff have enjoyed supporting James for many years with attending dance classes, rehearsals and local shows.

The opportunities to perform at local events with the NaAC's (National Access Arts Center) Dance Ensemble have continued to increase in the past years and provide James with a unique platform to display his talent.

In January 2024, James had the opportunity to travel to Montreal with the NaAC Dance Ensemble and perform in their *ICONIC+* performance piece at Tangente. *ICONIC+* is an artistic-led collection of solos, duos and group work that incorporates a wide range of dance, performance styles and collaboration driven by the ensemble's members' creative voices. From January 10th-22nd, they had rehearsals, prepared costumes and props, and then the lights went up and they took the stage for 4 evening performances which were met with great applause and success.

James' trip would not have been possible alone, with the help of his Supportive Roommate Nelson, he was able to have the experience of a lifetime. We are so grateful Nelson could be there every step of the way to help James stay on top of his rehearsals and performances. They gave everyone a show to remember.

Supportive Roommates like Nelson provide much more than a home; they create a nurturing environment where people with disabilities feel safe, valued, and a part of their family unit. Supportive Roommates support all aspects of a consumer's life from building independence around daily skills (cleaning, cooking, budgeting, personal care routines) to sustaining social connections and advocating for their rights. They also play a key role in helping our consumers reach for the stars and achieve their goals, just like James is doing.

NaAC's Dance Ensemble's *ICONIC+* performance has continued to gain attention and commendations. They now have an invitation to perform in Banff this year, and James has also been invited to perform in South Korea this summer! We truly have a superstar among us!



## Linda Mikel – Footloose and Fabulous

Each week a fun-loving group of our more mature-aged consumers gather at the Bowness Legion for some good old-fashioned fun and dancing. Late last year (2023), Linda was chatting with a legion member (not in our program) and she mentioned she loves dancing. He charmingly asked if she would join him on the dance floor, and she gladly accepted. Ever since that day, he has met her at the Bowness Legion and asked her to dance every single week.

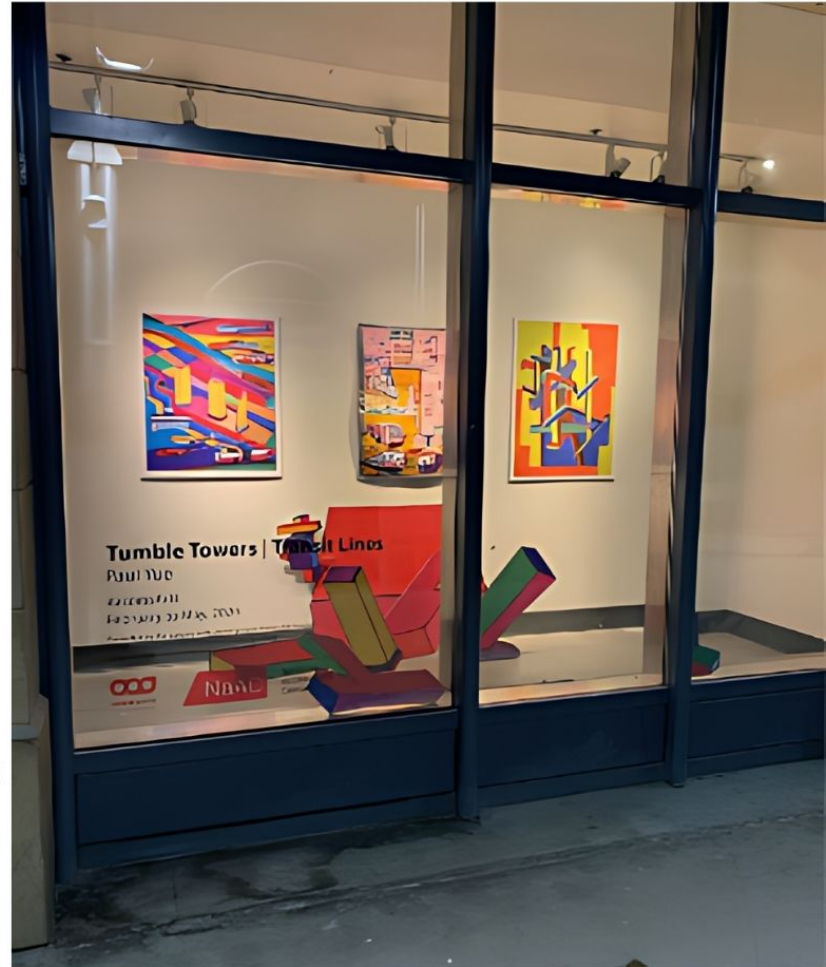
This weekly waltz (it is really more of a boogie) has become the highlight of her week. Linda lights up with joy every time her dance partner extends his hand and together they head out to the dance floor.

# Limitless Creativity Fuels Diversity in Art

## Paul Yue – A Versatile Visionary

Paul's artistic journey is a testament to resilience, passion, and the transformative power of creativity. Over the course of seven years at the National Arts Centre, he has fearlessly explored various forms of art, pushed the boundaries of his own creativity and discovered new mediums of expression. From the vibrant strokes of acrylic to the rich textures of oil painting, Paul has immersed himself in a world of colour and imagination. Each brushstroke tells a story, each canvas a reflection of his innermost thoughts and emotions. But amidst this diverse palette of artistic endeavours, there was one craft that was calling out to him but he had yet to learn - crocheting.

When he began to learn crochet, he found a new beauty in the intricate patterns and delicate stitches, transforming yarn into captivating works of art. Drawing inspiration from the world around him, he delved into the realm of 3D art, creating mesmerizing pieces that seemed to leap off the canvas. His ability to manipulate perspective and dimension captivates audiences and has earned him recognition as a true master of his craft in the art community.



Today, Paul's artistic journey serves as an inspiration to artists of all abilities. His willingness to embrace new challenges and push beyond his comfort zone is a reminder that creativity knows no bounds and has no limitations. Whether it's through painting, drawing, or crocheting, Paul continues to explore the limitless possibilities of artistic expression, establishing his legacy in world of art.

This year, Paul Yue's *Tumble Towers / Transit Lines* was publicly displayed in the Open Windows Gallery in cooperation with Calgary Arts Development and NaAC, allowing everyone to enjoy his work.

Aside from being an avid artist, Paul spends his time with his ILS staff. He loves meeting at Starbucks, then heading off to enjoy browsing local shops for good deals.

Currently, Paul's main goal is socialization, and he is hoping to find the right partner that he can spend the rest of his life with. Vecova ILS staff continue to work with Paul to engage in social activities in his community as he seeks new relationships and shares his world through his art.

# BRIDGING GAPS & BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY



With the help of our supporters, Vecova continues to be a pioneering organization that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals and families through a range of innovative services and programs. Like many Albertans, we have felt the impacts of rising inflation and shifting government priorities throughout 2023/24.

Amid significant challenges in employment, disability services, affordable housing needs, mental and physical health support, and environmental sustainability, Vecova's comprehensive approach is making a difference in Alberta. Our province also faces the need for increased support for an aging population—this includes more people with disabilities and families living with members who have various forms of dementia. Additionally, we are seeing a growing demand for mental health support and wellness programs to ensure the well-being of all residents.

In 2023/24, we focused on enhancing our staffing to build new community relationships, improving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices, and expanding our recycling services and wellness programs. Our aim is to expand programs Albertans need most and open new doors for people to enroll while keeping our fees affordable, so everyone has the opportunity to participate. Our investment is already yielding returns, with successful collaborative grant applications and increased staff satisfaction and commitment.

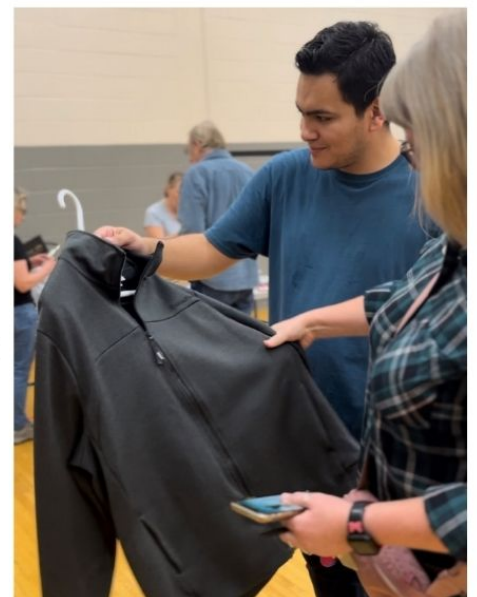
Another area of concern has been the affordable housing crisis in Alberta. Understanding that stable housing is fundamental to well-being, we continue to work with local housing agencies and do our best to provide affordable housing solutions for people with disabilities. As the costs of taking care of a family member with a disability has increased, so has the list of people needing the care that Vecova provides.

## Community Thrives at Vecova's Garage Sales Over 600 Shoppers Find Affordable items to Ease Inflation Worries

Over 600 people attended Vecova's 2023/24 garage sales, featuring unique items, clothes and gifts at affordable prices, helping families to ease inflation stress. All items were generously donated by the Calgary Airport Authority, who also employs multiple Vecova consumers.

In total, \$10,345.40 was raised with all proceeds supporting our recycling services program, which employs Albertans with disabilities and keeps recycling materials off the streets and out of our landfills. We deeply value our ongoing partnership with the Calgary Airport Authority and look forward to our work together in the upcoming year.

We are thrilled to continue to hosting garage sales for our wonderful community. Whether you're on the hunt for hidden gems, great deals, clothes for your kids or just some family fun, we've got you covered. Watch your email and our social media channels for future events and join us for more unique finds at affordable prices in 2024. See you there!



# Thank you to our donors

We want to send a special thank you to the incredible people, foundations, agencies and businesses that have stood by us over the years. Donor support is crucial in helping us fulfill our vision and create a more inclusive community. The donors on this list have also been our champions, advocating for greater awareness and understanding of the work that we do. Their contributions over the years have helped us to expand programs, buy necessary specialized equipment, offset program fees, reach more people and have kept us moving forward. **THANK YOU!**

The ongoing support of our donors means the world to us and the communities we serve. Your generous and consistent donations have a profound impact on our mission. It is through sustained support that we have been able to successfully provide essential services and make positive improvements in the lives of those who need it most. Thanks to you, we can continue the momentum needed for real change, and build a better future for people of all abilities together. Your kindness, dedication and generosity are a vital part of our journey.

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