

## Getting to the Root of the Problem: Improving Mental Health in Vulnerable Communities



Photo Courtesy: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

Minoush Rafie (above left) Coordinator of the West Central Community Resource Centre, says it takes time and trust for people to feel comfortable opening up, especially about mental health concerns.

*"If you don't address the root of the problem, it will just get worse."*

Minoush Rafie, Coordinator of Closer to Home's West Central Community Resource Centre, has seen firsthand the impact of mental illness on children and parents in the communities we serve. Over the past 20 years, she has built close relationships with community members, listening to them and learning what they need in order to be successful.

*"It takes time for people to feel comfortable opening up,"* she says. Being a consistent presence in the community has been key to building those relationships, and will strengthen the impact of new funding aimed at improving mental health in communities at high risk or with higher prevalence of mental health issues.

Local schools have been turning to Closer to Home, trying to find ways to help students they have identified as being at risk of mental illness, while some families are reaching out for help themselves, wanting to solve their challenges but not knowing where to turn for support.

Minoush recalls a family who experienced severe trauma prior to coming to Canada, and who are now experiencing mental health concerns with each family member. Back home, the children witnessed brutal violence against their parents.

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## Top 4 Tips From Our Foster Parents

**Check it out! Our Closer to Home Foster Parents gave us their best advice on fostering:**

- 1.** "Be compassionate with these kids, who don't have their parents at their side, and give them so much love because that's what they are hungry for."
- 2.** "Don't be afraid to fail. Closer to Home provides great training and support. [Closer to Home] has a reputation for doing thorough training and being very supportive with difficult kids. They won't let you fall on your face."
- 3.** "You never have to feel alone in the process. Closer to Home provides 24/7 on-call support."
- 4.** "Take things slow. Meet the child where they are at and go forward in baby steps. The rewards are sometimes not immediate - do not take that personally. Celebrate the joys."

Interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent? Call us at (403) 543-0550. Or, visit [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com).

Their father was killed, and they escaped to Canada with their mother. Mom is struggling to cope with her own trauma and doesn't know how to help her children heal and move forward. They have been in and out of the hospital with mental health concerns, and Mom worries about her children constantly.

While not every family's story is this extreme, many families are struggling with a lack of mental health resources, stigma and little awareness of how to ask for help. Some families worry they could be at risk of losing their children or their housing if they admit to struggling with mental health concerns.

Closer to Home has been working with vulnerable families in Calgary and Airdrie for nearly 25 years, and we are eager to expand our mental health services thanks to new funding from the City of Calgary, and with donations from community members like you, through the support of the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund.

By bringing services closer to home – in schools, in housing complexes and in communities – we are making it easier for families to access the supports they need. Working in collaboration with other agencies and providers such as Calgary Police Service, Calgary Housing Company and the City of Calgary, our goal is to:

1. Increase community knowledge about mental health and improve access to timely resources, so that families know what they can do to improve their situation. Research shows that intervening early – before issues turn into crises – is more effective and can have a significant impact on positive outcomes and help prevent future mental health concerns.
2. Build skills among parents and children including problem solving, emotional regulation and how to ask for help. If families have the tools to cope with their challenges – or at least know where to turn for help children and communities will be safer.
3. Improve social supports for community members dealing with or at risk of mental health concerns. By teaching children and parents how to build healthy relationships, they will be better able to develop a support network to turn to in times of need, improving their ability to cope with life's speedbumps.

In response to the identified needs of community members, Closer to Home continues to develop innovative solutions and strategies to promote mental wellness for vulnerable children, youth and families.

"Working collaboratively with others in the community, we are happy to offer leadership to address these challenges," says Arlene Oostenbrink, Associate Director of Programs at Closer to Home.

Whether families are dealing with extreme trauma or everyday life issues, by building their skills and addressing the root cause of mental health concerns, families will be able to cope with their challenges before they become too overwhelming to solve.

## MOST NEEDED DONATIONS



**Closer to Home is in need of some new items to support the children, youth and families we serve.**

- Baby supplies for newborns (diapers, wipes, formula and baby bottles)
- Clothes for newborns
- Cribs
- Small carpets for kids to play on
- Toy cars, planes for 2-3 year olds
- Winter clothes (hats, mitts and socks for toddlers, youth and adults)
- Bedding (twin and queen)
- Bed-in-a-bag sets
- Hygiene/toiletry items (shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, toothbrush, soap)
- Recreational passes (movies, bowling, trampoline, swimming, sports, Zoo)
- Gift cards for grocery stores (Walmart, Superstore, Costco)

Should you have any of these items, please contact Jessica at (403) 543-0550, Ext. 250 or [jmelnychuk@closerhome.com](mailto:jmelnychuk@closerhome.com).

**Keep the conversation going to help others know they aren't alone.**

**Share your mental health story on social media– using #TheRootOfIt and tag us at @CloserToHomeYYC.**

## Your Support Makes a Long-Term Impact

Our very own Dean Mullin, Board Director, once said;

**"...when someone has been helped, they pay it back many times over."**

Thanks to your ongoing support of our year-round programs and services, families who were once in need really do have an opportunity to pay it forward. Whether it's our Adopt-a-Family initiative that helped over 340 families including 1,400 people this past Christmas, our In-Home Support programs, or any of our other services, our hope is to see that the families we serve are eventually in a position to give back. Reciprocity comes back through new skills, resources and information families have to feel successful and confident.



Take Nancy\* for example, a new Canadian who learned small business skills in our Women's Group program and then gave back to Closer to Home by volunteering her time in another program. Or, Jake\*, a youth who lived in one of our group homes, who learned to be an advocate for himself and others, and recently called us up to nominate his neighbour's struggling family to receive gifts and grocery support from Adopt-a-Family. Or, Melissa\*, a former program participant who learned about her Indigenous culture and skills to care for her young children and later, was successful at finding employment at Closer to Home so she can help others like herself. Or, Judy\*, a donor who was supported as a child by an agency like Closer to Home when her Dad was unable to care for them, and is now giving back by adopting a family every Christmas as a reminder to herself that life can be fragile.



*Karen Olivier  
Chief Executive Officer*

These are the stories from this past year. They illustrate the impact you make long-term when you invest in Closer to Home and when you believe in the strengths of families in our community. We couldn't do this work without you.

Life certainly has its ups and downs. If you are experiencing a challenge in your life, please call us. We are here to help.

*\*Names Changed to protect privacy*



## CELEBRATE FAMILY DAY

At Closer to Home, family means everything. Family means hope, home and a sense of belonging.

Keeping families together is the focus of everything we do. Help us celebrate and support families this Family Day. Tell us your favourite family memories and make a gift at [closerhome.com/familyday](https://closerhome.com/familyday) or by flipping to page 4.

**#CELEBRATEFAMILY**



## Join Our Team

### FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER

In this full-time position, the Family Support Worker works with families who seek resources, information and services through the West Central Community Resource Centre (WCCRC) and its many programs, with focus on the families participating in the Home Again Program. Home Again provides timely access to housing and ongoing supports to maintain housing for homeless families referred to the program.

The individual in this role will also provide early intervention and prevention support services to families and individuals accessing the Resource Centre by assisting with problem solving, parenting skills, child developmental needs, budgeting, advocacy, and other skills that will increase the family's ability to deal with issues they face.

### AWAKE OVERNIGHT STAFF

This part-time or full-time position, in Calgary or Airdrie, works closely with a team of professionals to support our Community Teaching Homes. The Awake Overnight Staff's primary responsibility is to provide awake and proactive overnight supervision in our programs for children and youth ranging in age from 6 to 18 years and to ensure their safety and security. This includes, but is not limited to, implementing and documenting hourly room checks, investigating any unusual night time activity in the house and contacting on-call or supervisory staff as needed to assist with any emergencies. You will also be required to complete administrative tasks and household tasks (such as cleaning and food prep) as needed.

For detailed information or to check out more career and volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com).

## We are Thankful for YOU!

ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE.  
TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH.

- Helen Keller



Thank you to all our donors and volunteers who supported Closer to Home in the last year.

Your kindness and generosity has helped families overcome challenges and given them hope during difficult times. Thank you for joining hands with us, empowering these families and sending a positive message that we are collectively here to help when needed the most.

Please visit [www.closertohome.com/blog](http://www.closertohome.com/blog) to find the full list of donors and supporters from October 1 to December 31, 2018.

YES, I WANT TO #CELEBRATEFAMILY THIS FAMILY DAY!



I would like to make a **MONTHLY GIFT** of:

☐ \$100/mth ☐ \$25/mth ☐ \$10/mth ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_/mth

OR, here is my **SINGLE GIFT** of:

☐ \$500 ☐ \$200 ☐ \$75 ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_

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☐ Please sign me up to receive the CTH quarterly newsletter by email instead of mail.

#### Method of Payment:

☐ My cheque made payable to "Closer to Home Community Services" is enclosed.

☐ I would prefer to use my credit card.

We will call you to process your donation through CanadaHelps. Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I would like to remain anonymous, please do not recognize my name in the Donor Recognition section of CTH publications such as this quarterly newsletter.

#### Please return your completed form to:

3507A 17 Ave SW Calgary, Alberta T3E 0B6  
Or fax your completed form to (403) 246-6406

You can also make your contribution online at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com) just click the DONATE button.

Questions? Contact us at (403) 543-0550 Ext. 250