



Children thrive in a stable and safe home



Connections offers strengths-based parenting skills education and family support that help adults who have a developmental disability, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or brain injury be successful parents.

FOR 28 YEARS, CONNECTIONS HAS BEEN 'A SOFT PLACE TO LAND' FOR PARENTS WHO LOVE THEIR CHILDREN LIKE ANYONE ELSE, BUT FACE BARRIERS TO BEING SUCCESSFUL PARENTS. Connections is a place where all families feel welcome, and parents tell us it is the first time in their lives someone listened to them.

For the families we support, there are two reasons parenting is even harder than for most of us. All of our families live in poverty with most living on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). The parents also have cognitive challenges, ranging from different learning styles to developmental disabilities or brain injury.

Connections helps parents develop their parenting skills at every stage of a child's development, through to adulthood. We also link families to resources and provide supports that help families maintain a stable home.

We are constantly surprised by people's commitment to being the best parent they can be – their resilience, their capability, their resourcefulness. We've all learned so much, and continue to learn every day, and we are immensely grateful for the opportunity to be a part of our families' lives.

Connections is an extended family – a welcome place for the families we support, our team members, our volunteers, referring agencies, funders and supporters: you are family.

Erin Waite | Agency Director | June 2018



Lauren Raymore, Connections' founder, honoured by the province

IT WAS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR TO HAVE FAMILY AND TEAM MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS ATTEND THE AWARD CEREMONY. The Premier's Council for the Status of Persons with Disabilities awarded Lauren Raymore, Founder and Program Director, with the Gary McPherson Leadership Award in September 2017.

Lauren began Connections at her kitchen table when she saw adults with developmental disabilities choosing to have intimate relationships, get married, and have children. But she also saw their babies taken at birth, with no consideration to whether or not the parents could parent. Lauren started helping these parents by supporting them to be successful.

A model of supports evolved responding to the individual parents' needs and learning style, going into the home to provide parenting skills education in a hands-on way, identifying parents' strengths and natural supports, and then accessing available community resources to fill the gaps.

Children's Mental Health Consultant, Evelyn Wotherspoon, is a supporter of the Connections model Lauren continues to steward. "By helping these families thrive, and by her untiring, relentless, and ever optimistic advocacy, Lauren and Connections have changed community attitudes, profoundly influencing systems such as child welfare and family courts to imagine the possibility of successful outcomes for cognitively disabled parents and their children."

"BRAND NEW ME" IS A WORKSHOP THAT FOCUSES ON CONFIDENCE. A VISIT TO MAKING CHANGES FOR A NEW WARDROBE IS THE HIGHLIGHT. THANKS TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN MINISTRY FOR FUNDING.



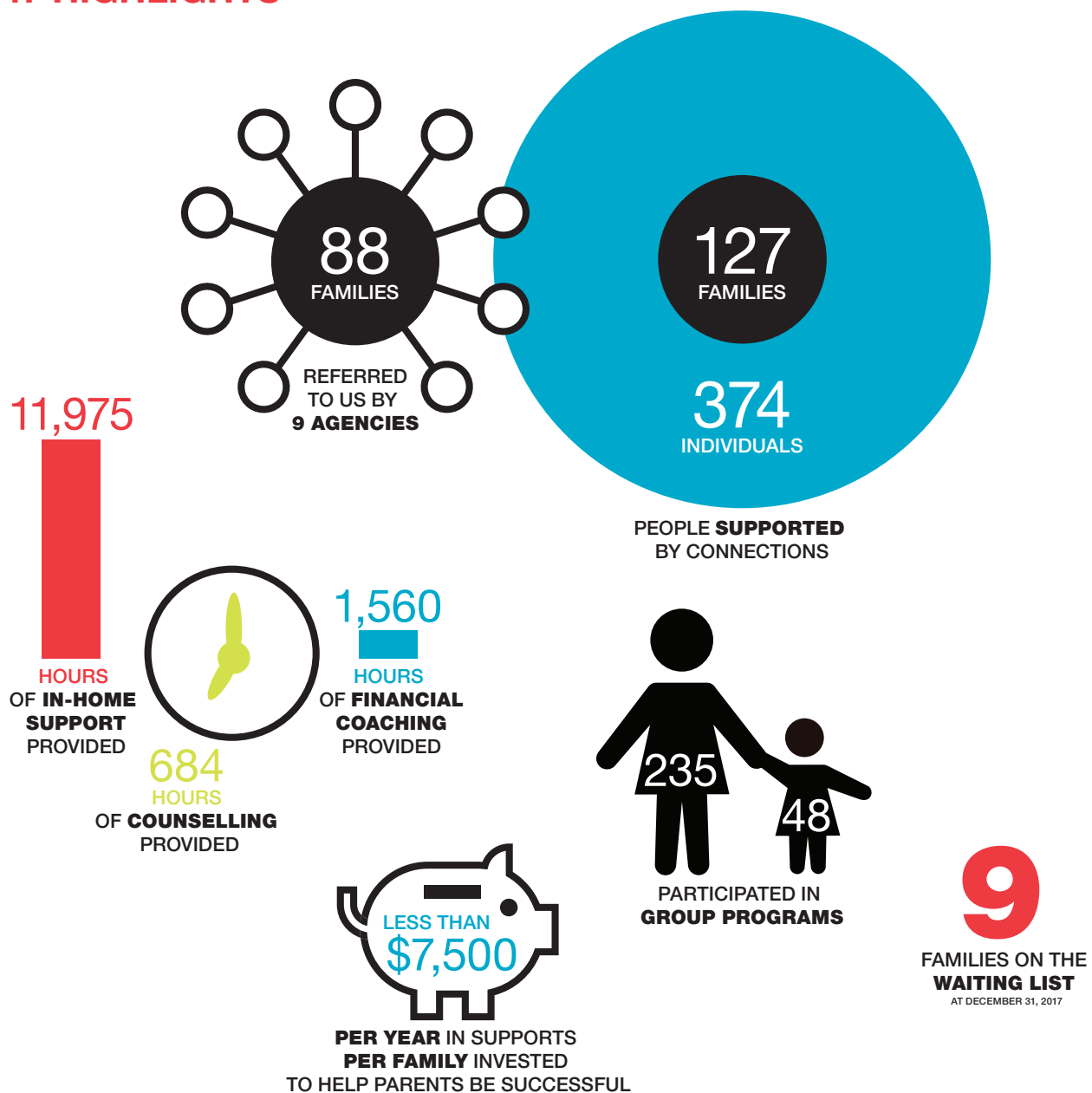
"PARENTS TRUST LAUREN AND CONNECTIONS AND THROUGH THAT TRUST, THEY BUILD THEIR CONFIDENCE TO ENSURE THEIR CHILDREN ARE SAFE AND WELL NURTURED."

Corinna Fitch | Maternity Child Social Worker

Keeping families together is our most important achievement

89% of families referred to Connections with open Children's Services Intervention files, saw *their files closed* during the year and remained connected to their children, either through full or shared custody arrangements.

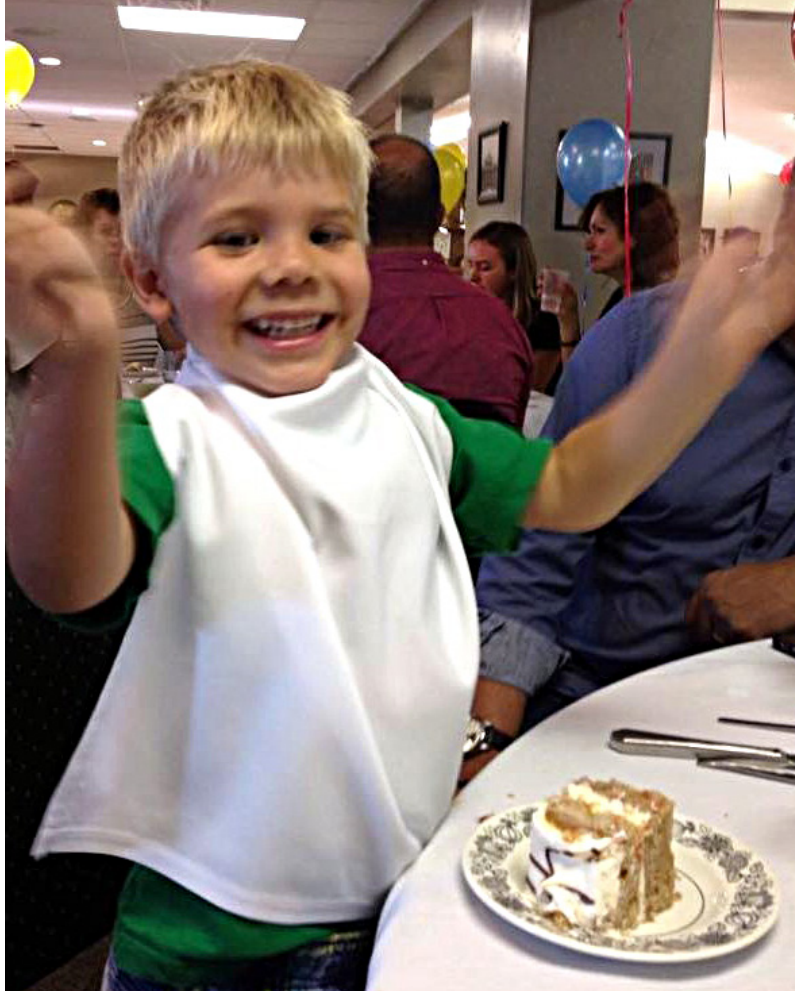
2017 HIGHLIGHTS





“CONNECTIONS HELPS US BUILD RELATIONSHIPS. WE LOVE THE EXTRAS LIKE THE CHRISTMAS PARTY, PICNIC AND OTHER EVENTS.”

A parent



Sunday Dinner is an important family tradition

FOR MANY OF US, THE WORDS “FAMILY DINNER” ARE FILLED WITH EMOTIONS AND MEMORIES. And while the family dinner experience may look very different in Zambia than it does in Cochrane, the traditional family dinner is always a window on culture, values, tastes and tradition.

When our families break bread together we connect. And it turns out that our belief that family dinner makes our families stronger has been proven in research.

It’s because joys and challenges around family dinners are shared by all of us that Connections chose the Sunday Family Dinner as its fundraiser. Just like Sunday dinner is a tradition in many households and through the generations, Sunday Family Dinner is a Connections tradition.

The support we get from the community – from those who join us for Sunday Family Dinner – helps us help more families. You, along with all of the families we support, are family.

“Without Connections, Child Welfare would be in our lives again.” A Parent

Connections' Parenting Assessments are recognized by Alberta's Legal Aid Family Law office for providing a better understanding of the family's capacity to parent successfully.



Connections' family includes a team of professionals

WHILE WE ALL RECOGNIZE THAT PARENTING IS HARD, THE TRUTH IS WE HAVE A LOT OF FUN AT CONNECTIONS. There is something magical about a group of people, with an immense capacity for care, a broad range of skills and experience, all working together with the same goals. At Connections, our world is full of challenges and difficult decisions. But it is also full of laughter and joy.

Each week, which often includes chaos and crises, we hear from a family or from a referring agency about how important the Connections team is to families and the community. One parent told us “Tracy is a perfect match for me. She is wonderful and has helped me in areas I never thought possible. She has held me together. When I have Tracy supporting me in meetings, I feel more heard and validated. I don't know where I would be without Tracy and Connections.”

“CONNECTIONS HELPED ME ACCESS A READING PROGRAM AND A SPEECH THERAPIST FOR MY DAUGHTER. SHE WENT WITH ME TO MEETINGS AT MY DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL AND HELPED ME GET THE HELP SHE NEEDED. I HAD HELP TO TALK WITH TEACHERS SO THEY WOULD UNDERSTAND ME. CONNECTIONS LISTENED TO WHAT I NEEDED.”

A parent

City of Calgary's FCSS program brought our Financial Coach role into being. Their funding results in more children growing up in a stable home, raised by the people who love them most: their mom and dad.

Parents with disabilities love their kids like everyone else

Connections' families are participating in an international research project headed by Dr. David McConnell at University of Alberta. With our families' input, the gaps in services and supports will be identified. We're aiming for social services that better support parents to be successful and families to stay together.

37

PEOPLE APPLIED FOR AND

22

or 59%

RECEIVED A DISABILITY TAX CREDIT.

26

PEOPLE OPENED A REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLAN (RDSP)

\$6,497

DEPOSITED INTO RDSP'S BY CONNECTIONS CLIENTS

\$3,825

TOTAL GRANTS RECEIVED

AND

\$134,938

WAS DEPOSITED IN GOVERNMENT BONDS



Financial Coaching makes a difference

CONNECTIONS ADDED A FINANCIAL COACH IN 2017 BECAUSE PARENTING SKILLS AREN'T ENOUGH WHEN THE REAL ISSUE IS POVERTY. Tax planning support provided in 2017, resulted in 83 tax returns filed and \$33,417 received by families in tax refunds. There were 11 individuals who received a cumulative total of \$104,204 for prior years' benefits they had never received. Average monthly benefits added were \$265, which can be the difference in covering basic needs for the month.

Families were excited to participate in the CASH (Creating a Stable Home) Club. A total of \$2,229 was put into savings and then was leveraged into an additional \$6,687 through a 3-to-1 matched savings.

What does a good parent look like?

PARENTS WE MEET HAVE OFTEN HAD THEIR PARENTING SKILLS ASSESSED. The test is a written form that says more about reading skills than parenting yet concludes the parent does not have the capacity to keep their child safe. Connections responded to this problem by developing a Parenting Assessment that is more thorough and includes observing the parent and child together. Our assessment is based on 'best practices' research.

Connections has conducted a number of these assessment which have been used in court and resulted in the family staying together with the supports that result in a stable home. We are proud of our pioneering work and advocacy that are having an impact on parenting with a disability in Alberta.

Connections families feel heard

100%

OF OUR CLIENTS REPORTED FEELING SUPPORTED BY CONNECTIONS.

89%

OF PARTICIPANTS ALSO REPORTED FEELING ACCEPTED

84%

FEEL THEIR VIEWS WERE LISTENED TO

AND

89%

HAVE TRUST IN THE STAFF

"CONNECTIONS HELPS ME OUT AND BREAKS IT DOWN SO THAT I UNDERSTAND"

What's the best thing about Connections?

"THE BEST THING HAS BEEN THAT I GET THE HELP AND SUPPORT I NEED. I ALSO GET THE CONFIDENCE I NEED, COMFORT — SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHEN I HAVE QUESTIONS."

When asked to describe the 'best' thing about Connections, answers included: feeling supported and listened to by staff; receiving help and resources to improve their families' lives; and participating in activities, where there is the opportunity to meet new friends.

81%

OF PARTICIPANTS INDICATED THEY HAD MADE A NEW FRIEND OR SUPPORTER THROUGH CONNECTIONS.

We connect with our referrers...

"TO HAVE THE BEST OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IS TAKEN. CONNECTIONS HELPS OTHER STAKEHOLDERS UNDERSTAND PEOPLE'S CAPACITY AND DISSOLVES BARRIERS FOR PARENTS WITH DISABILITIES."

And with Family Law professionals

"PARENTING ASSESSMENTS THAT ADDRESS WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE AND IMPROVING SKILLS GO A LONG WAY TO DEMONSTRATE THE PARENTING POTENTIAL. IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE HOURS FOR OBSERVATION AND TESTING FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY, NOT JUST IQ. THESE ARE FAR MORE IMPORTANT MEASURES THAN IQ ALONE."



Financial Summary

| (\$000) | 2017 | 2016 | % change |
|---|----------|----------|----------|
| Revenue fee for service, donations, casino | \$ 1,061 | \$ 1,009 | 5 |
| Frontline team members salaries/benefits | 576 | 525 | 10 |
| Management, finance, administration, salaries/benefits | 167 | 115 | 45 |
| Total salaries/benefits | \$ 743 | \$ 642 | 16 |
| Program supplies | 75 | 47 | 59 |
| Office/program space rent | 54 | 51 | 6 |
| Administration Audit, insurance, phones, IT, etc. | 70 | 88 | (20) |
| Net income | \$ 119 | \$ 198 | (40) |

Mission

Connections supports parents with cognitive challenges to maintain a safe and nurturing home for their children.

Vision

People with cognitive challenges make choices and decisions for their lives, including being parents, and have the support they need to be successful

How can I help?

Bring your family to the Connections' Sunday Family Dinner fundraiser in October

Donate a Silent Auction item for the fundraiser

Volunteer at a casino

Knit or crochet baby blankets for our new moms

Donate books of Transit tickets to help our families get to and from programs

Sponsor a family for \$7,500 per year (twice weekly in-home visits, counselling, group program participation, Christmas party and summer picnic participation)

Thanks to our volunteer Board of Directors

Ian Gray-Donald | Chair
Neil James | Treasurer
Michelle Wolfe | Secretary
Carrie Beckett | on leave
Mary Chalupka
Karla Côté
Carla Hopfner
Maya Kambeitz
Thy Nguyen
Lissa Samantaraya-Shivji
Erin Waite | Agency Director

Lauren Raymore | Program Director and Founder is an ex officio member.

A special thank you to Michelle Wolfe who is stepping down from the Board at the 2018 Annual Meeting. Michelle has provided 9 years of voluntary service and dedication to Connections, and was an officer as Board Secretary for her entire term.



**Connections
Counselling and
Consulting Foundation**

**510, 1716 16th Avenue
NW, Calgary, AB
T2M 0L7**

403 209.1100 T

Connections is a registered charity BN#890700347RR0001

2017 Audited Financial Statements are provided on the website, along with additional resources and information.

Connections' external auditor's Impact Report can be found on the website.