



Helping parents be the best they can be

Connections had an excellent year in 2016, and the first half of 2017 is shaping up to be exceptional.

As a non profit agency, we're not likely to ever feel perfectly stable. After all, we're dependent on the support of others. A non profit agency can feel like a game of Jenga. But like Jenga, each piece is strong. Our **team is incredibly talented**, resourceful, and consistently on our clients' side. We have the **solid support** of a government contract. And we have a **model of supports** that is proving effective over and over again.

It is our research-proven support to families — support that is consistent and extends over the long-term — that proves to be the most cost-effective way for parents with disabilities to maintain stable and nurturing homes for their children.

This is a model that delivers. Our investment is approximately \$8,750 per year in time and other supports, visiting the family from one to three times each week. As families become more stable, we'll reduce our role but still be available in a crisis. We stay in families' lives for as long as they want us. And so, from the start of our in-home supports, until their child is 18 years old, we will invest **less than \$200,000**.

While that may sound like a big investment, it is a fraction of the alternative. Parents without our support are highly likely to lose custody of their child. The cost for that alternative is significantly higher, because of Children's Services intervention, court costs, then paying a family to foster the baby until a permanent home is found — which could be many years. The cost of removing a child from their parents over that same 18 years could be **more than \$750,000**.

Perhaps more important than comparing cost is the contrast in outcomes: Alberta's foster care system has poor outcomes, with a high rate of fatalities. It is both proven and common sense that it is best when children can stay with the people who love them most.

At Connections, we believe that while not all parents with cognitive challenges can be successful parents, they deserve the opportunity to try.

Highlights!

- ◆ Moved to new office & program space - bright, clean and welcoming - Nov. 2016
— grant for move, cupboards, new phones
- ◆ Brought on a Financial Coach; new funding from FCSS (City of Calgary) - Jan. 2017
- ◆ Strengthened funding from Disability Services, AB Government - Apr. 2017
- ◆ Added Controller/finance expertise to staff and improved systems

How you can help...

1. Come to our Sunday **FAMILY DINNER** on **October 22**
 2. **Donate Walmart or Superstore** gift cards, **Transit passes** or cash — all extra support for our families.
 3. Sponsor our **Groups Program** (Christmas party, play groups, potlucks, healthy relationships counselling group, and more.)
[Registered charity BN # 890700347RR0001](#)
- Contact:** Erin Waite, Agency Director - 403 209-1100
erinw@connections counselling.ab.ca



Connections' Group Program was given a boost with our new office. More families are spending more time with us. Attendance is up!

Introducing an innovative, Financial Coach program

Through 2016, Connections developed and found funding for a Financial Coach. Almost all of the families we support live in poverty; and it is poverty rather than cognitive challenges that threatens their parenting success.

We are grateful to The City of Calgary's '**Family and Community Support Services**' for funding this new and important work.

We could not have envisioned how successful our Financial Coach, Doug, could be.

In April, he was able to help **69 families file income taxes**, with \$14,300 in refunds identified. There were nine children in families for whom a Disability Tax Credit was put in place, translating to \$2,730 in annual benefits per family. (A family living on AISH at \$1,588 per month would receive an additional \$227, or a 14% increase, in cash to cover expenses.)

Grants from **First Calgary Financial** and **ATB Financial** are funding a matched savings program, underway in June 2017. Families will learn budgeting and improve their financial literacy. They'll also set a monthly savings goal and then be matched 3:1. Providing a generous match provides a tangible reward, as well as the satisfaction that comes with better understanding money.

Some families are building emergency savings, some are focused on furniture for their child's room, and others are saving for back-to-school clothes and supplies.

The idea behind adding a Financial Coach came from our own In-Home team who saw the need for a dedicated resource. Now, our In-Home team members can't imagine our families without this focused support, that gives families an even better chance for success and combines well with our parenting skills education and resourcing.

Why we do what we do:

Parents with cognitive challenges:

1. Love and care for children like any parents do.
2. Want their children to grow and be happy.
3. Often have skills and are exceptionally resourceful.
4. Want to have choices and a say in the support they receive and how that support is provided — like any of us would.

Consistently delivering results

- ◆ **129 families (412 individuals)** supported in 2016, up 27% from 2015
- ◆ **101 active families** at year-end
- ◆ **14 families had open child intervention files** when they came to Connections in 2016; **12 files closed** in 2016 (**86% success**)
- ◆ **28 families on waiting list** in 2016
- ◆ **43 families without funding** were supported to be successful
- ◆ **10,965 hours of In-Home support** in 2016
- ◆ **470 hours of Counselling** in 2016
- ◆ **285 adults/123 children** attended Group Programs
- ◆ **12 family events** hosted in 2016
- ◆ Groups for Mom/Tots, Nursery Rhymes, Healthy Relationships, Cooking/Nutrition, Outdoor Play, Parenting Teens, Yoga, Potlucks, Dads, RDSPs, Pet Club.

Success Stories

Blossoming out of isolation - the impact of long-term support

When you spend your entire life hiding your disability, you get good at it. And the best way to hide it is, well, to hide.

The impact of this 'solution' is an isolated life, and a loss of the capability to be part of a community. This significantly impairs parenting effectiveness, too.

A Connections' Mom has been with us for over a decade, living an isolated life. Initially, it was months before she opened her door to let a Connections In-Home team member in her house. We never thought we'd see the day when she'd join a Group at Connections. This year, this Mom is coming to many of our workshops and potlucks. She's also become employed for the first time in decades.

Why? Because she wants to be a good role model for her teenaged children.



Life-long support leads to permanent improvements

We have 28 years of history with families involved at Connections for most of that time.

A terrific indicator of success is the number of children in our families who **graduate from high school**, many continuing on to post-secondary.

For most of our families, these children are **the first to graduate**. Think of the potential for these families!

Our Financial Coach program will allow us to support the young people in our families as they enter adulthood. With a stable upbringing and resources they need, they have every opportunity and boundless potential.

"Chain of Support"

Connections' In-Home team of social workers are diverse, experienced and steeped in knowledge and resources. Sometimes the work we do is difficult and sometimes it is sad.

For our team to support families, consistently and reliably, they need the support of the agency.

Our In-Home team members know that they have full support of the agency as they work in families' homes, offering support, advice and advocacy. **Our agency doesn't have a "chain of command," we have a "chain of support."**

Challenges and opportunities were the theme for 2016

With our focus on being a 'chain of support,' rather than a 'chain of command,' Connections needs to be solid. After all, we can't be consistently 'there' for our families, and model stability and reliability, if our agency isn't on solid footing.

But there is a very human response that we see from funders and government-funded social services: to look for a cure and quick fixes, and to value 'innovation' over consistent quality.

Yet for most social issues, there isn't a quick fix. Innovation may or may not be an attribute of value.

Connections' focus is on stability and parenting skills. If parents can manage a stable home, with the basics consistently provided, then their children can *thrive!*

It's equally true that for our agency to make long-term commitments to support parents, we need to be a healthy organization, at their side.

In 2016, that reality was made crystal clear when we lost our oldest source of funding that was also a reliable, multi-year contract. We were disappointed by the funder's move away from Calgarians with disabilities.

But with that loss came clarity: why stability is crucial for an agency that helps families be stable.

We are pleased that we now have new funding, a newly strengthened contract, and are focused on the agency's wellbeing so we can be the 'chain of support' we need to be.



People who refer families to Connections value support that is life-long and hands-on.

“Connections adds value to our community by challenging stereotypes and paradigms that really do need to shift. Their greatest gift is that they show peoples’ *abilities* rather than what they can’t do. I feel privileged to work with them.”



“They are so incredible at creating inclusion going beyond the caregiver/ counsellor-client relationship. Their parents actually create many of the groups – Connections is very client-driven. I find this to be unique to Connections.”



◆ Connections invested in an office move in 2016. Now we can better support a growing number of families.

2017 Initiatives

- ◆ “Brand New Me” women’s empowerment workshop funded by “Status of Women” Ministry, Alberta Government
- ◆ Partnering with “Making Changes” and “Calgary Sexual Health Centre”
- ◆ Evaluation project to better quantify our outcomes
- ◆ IT, systems, and communications summer projects
- ◆ 3-year accreditation process in November
- ◆ 3rd Annual **Sunday Family Dinner fundraiser** on October 22nd



Richard Pepler has been our Family Christmas Party Santa forever.

Summary Financial Results

(\$000)	2016	2015	% chg.
Revenue (fee for service, donations, casino)	\$1,009.0	\$892.7	13
Frontline team members salaries/benefits	523.6	512.5	2
Management, finance, admin. salaries/benefits	115.0	90.5	27
Total salaries/benefits	638.6	603.0	6
Program supplies	46.9	42.1	11
Office/program space rent	37.5	28.4	32
Administration (Audit, insurance, bank fees, etc.)	88.1	71.6	23
Net income	\$197.9	\$147.6	34

Thanks to volunteer Board of Directors: Ian Gray-Donald (Chair), Loralie Johnson (Treasurer), Michelle Wolfe (Secretary), Carrie Beckett, Mary Chalupka, Karla Côté, Carla Hopfner, Neil James, Maya Kambeitz, Thy Nguyen, Lissa Samantaraya-Shivji, and Erin Waite (Agency Director). Lauren Raymore (Program Director and Founder) is an ex officio member.

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Connections is a registered charity BN #890700347RR0001

2016 Audited Financial Statements are provided on the website, along with additional resources and information.

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