



# Annual Report

**HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR  
2023-24 YEAR**

## Who We Are



Connective is here for everyone — at every stage, in any circumstance.

For over 90 years, we have been committed to supporting people and communities. As we've expanded our reach, our range of innovative and person-centered programming has expanded in tandem.

Today, we are privileged to operate on ancestral, traditional, and unceded Indigenous territories in regions across BC and in the Yukon, and to offer a broad range of housing, employment, justice, outreach, and community services.

We are proud of the role we play in responding to underserved and evolving needs, and in finding ways for people to overcome barriers and achieve greater independence.

### OUR VISION

A safe, healthy, and inclusive community for all.

### OUR MISSION

We strengthen communities by supporting people experiencing barriers so they can achieve greater independence.

### OUR VALUES

Our values guide us in all our interactions both within and outside of our organization.

**Inclusive:** We foster a culture where everyone can feel accepted and valued.

**Accountable:** We focus on meaningful outcomes, take responsibility for our actions, and honour our commitments with integrity.

**Person-Centered:** We adapt our approach to the individual and are empathetic and compassionate in all our interactions.

**Collaborative:** We engage proactively and seek shared understanding through curious and open communication.

**Determined:** We are innovative, courageous, and resilient in the face of challenges.

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## Land Acknowledgement

Connective is honoured to support people and communities across several ancestral, traditional, and unceded Indigenous territories in BC and the Yukon.

### Interior Okanagan

The unceded territories of the tk’əm’lups tə sə’xwεpəmχ (Tk’emplups te Secwepemc) Nations.

### Lower Mainland & Fraser Valley

The unceded territories of the qíćəý(Katzie), q’wá:ńłəń (Kwantlen), kwikwəłəm (Kwikwetlem), máthxwi (Matsqui), x’wəθk’əýəm (Musqueam), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), se’mya’mé (Semiahmoo), Skwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō, Sema:th (Sumas), scəwáθən məsteyəx’w (Tsawwassen) and səlilwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

### Northern BC

The traditional territories of the Lheidli T’enneh Nation.

### Yukon

The traditional lands of the Kwanlin Dūn First Nation, Ta’an Kwäch’ān Council, and other Yukon First Nations.

### Vancouver Island

The traditional territories of the snu’neiməx’w (Snuneymuxw) Nations.

As visitors on these lands, we do not take lightly the privilege and responsibility of providing culturally appropriate services. We commit to incorporating the wisdom and expertise of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, service users, and community groups in all that we do, to ensure our programs and services meet the needs of all those we serve.

## Our Year in Numbers

Our impact across all six Connective regions during the 2023-24 Fiscal Year.



**6,000+**  
Persons Served



**950+**  
Staff



**36%**  
Indigenous Persons Served



**60+**  
Programs



**75%, 23%, 2%**  
Men, Women, and Non-binary  
Gender Identities Served



**750+**  
Housing Units

## Serving More People in More Places

Fraser Valley

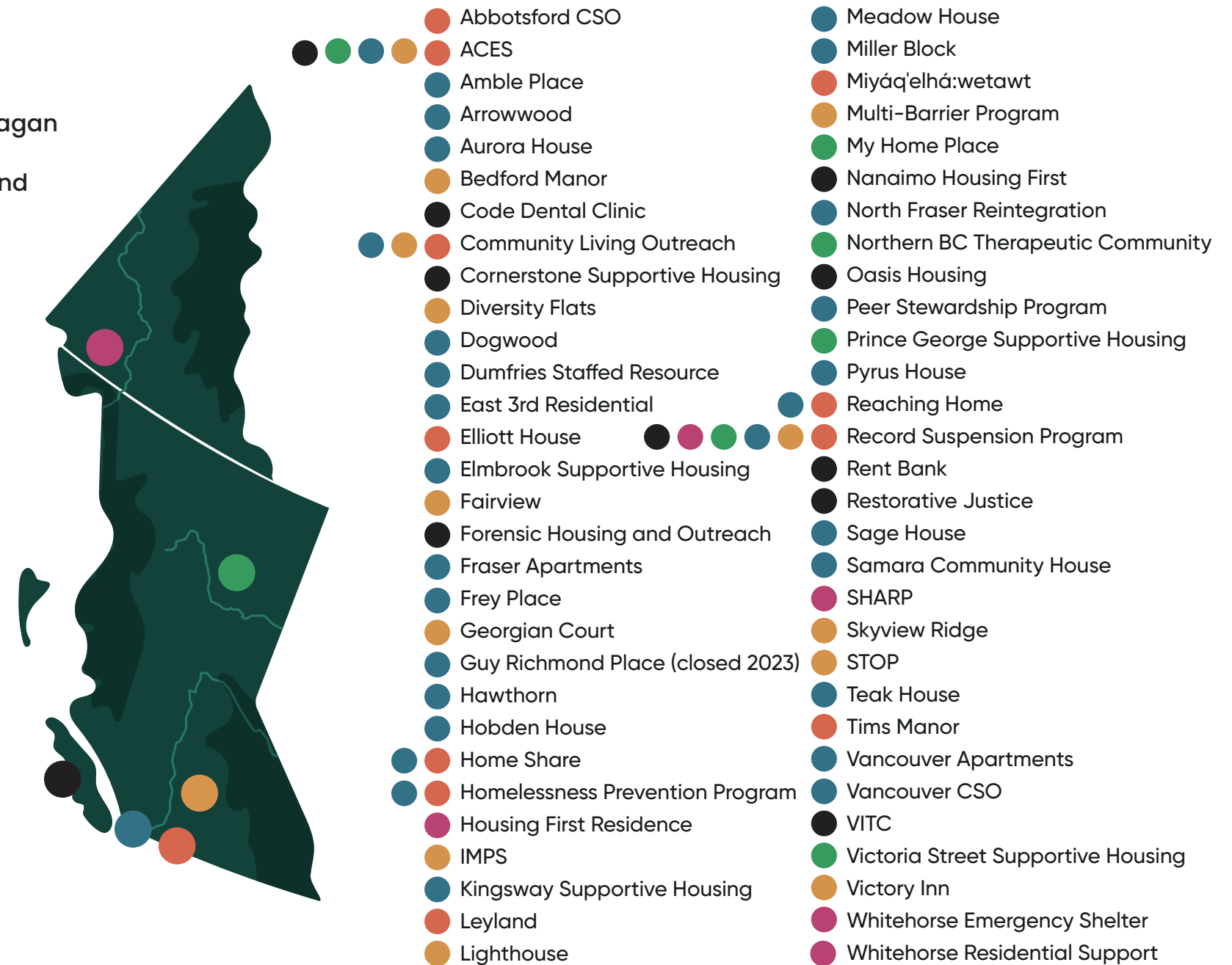
Interior Okanagan

Lower Mainland

Northern BC

Yukon

Vancouver  
Island



## A Message from our CEO & Board Chair

### CONNECTIVE



**Mark Miller**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER

A simple, stylized handwritten signature of Mark Miller.

To look back on this past year is to confront the stark contrasts that define human services work – profound moments and inspiring achievements that sit flush alongside intractable challenges and mounting pressures.

**“Creating a better future for our communities takes time, patience, and a willingness to be tested in increasingly complex ways.”**

While adding 165+ new staff and more than 500 units to our range of offerings across the housing spectrum, we faced regular reminders that creating a better future for our communities takes time, patience, and a willingness to be tested in increasingly complex ways.

Though we have never shied away from this truth, the past year saw it manifest in acutely painful ways – with threats to staff safety, challenges to our presence in communities, and structural barriers that hindered our progress.

**“We are proud of our decisions to go where we are needed most”**

As we’ve continued to grapple with the devastating impacts of the toxic drug crisis, an unpredictable climate, and an unstable economy, we have also found that a rise in polarization has made our work all the more difficult. This is true across our sector and beyond, as organizations and governments alike are called on to adapt and respond to the changing needs of communities.

For our part, Connective has risen to the occasion in the way we always have – by showing up, expertise and humility in hand, ready and committed to doing what needs to be done.

**Jayne Allen**  
BOARD CHAIR

A handwritten signature of Jayne Allen in a cursive script.

From our earliest days we have expressed a desire to step beyond the bounds of the city in which our story began; to write new chapters in new communities and, in partnership with local agencies, bring our considerable resources to bear in places that have remained overlooked or underserved.

The issues that we tackle today, from justice and housing to employment and community wellbeing, are systemic. They do not recognize municipal boundaries or confine themselves to one geography. Likewise, neither do we. We are proud of our decisions to go where we are needed most and respond to communities and funders that ask for our support. It has, and will continue to be, a core part of who we are.

**“We continue to find ways to give our staff opportunities to grow with us”**

One such example this past year was our expansion into affordable housing, which saw Connective secure 334 units across nine apartment buildings in three new service areas on Vancouver Island. This allows us to protect affordable rental rates and, in turn, the tenants who rely on them. In the face of rampant redevelopment and skyrocketing rents, this opportunity is now more important than ever. Alongside this, we were proud to assume operation of a recovery-oriented program outside Prince George, and a supportive housing program in Dawson Creek.

As Connective grows, we continue to find ways to give our staff opportunities to grow with us. Restructuring our executive level functions allowed us to welcome existing leaders into advanced roles, and experienced staff into leadership roles for the first time. All the while, ensuring that our organizational structure and processes remain efficient and aligned with the goals in our newly released 2024-27 Strategic Framework.



All this captures but a fraction of the year we’ve had. From new programs and partnerships to hosting our second annual Leadership Gathering and receiving the Non-Profit Employer of Choice Award for the second year running, there is much to be proud of from these last twelve months.

It continues to be an honour to work with this organization and this incredible team. A sincere thank you to our service users, staff, volunteers, partners, donors, funders, and dedicated Board of Directors. The content of this report, and the profound impact it represents in communities across BC and Yukon, would not be possible without you.

Here’s to the next chapter in our story, and to the pursuit of a safe, healthy, and inclusive community for all.

## A Message from our CEO & Board Chair

### CONNECTIVE KAMLOOPS



**Lindsay Lord**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Reflecting on another remarkable year at Connective Kamloops, it's hard to overstate the pride and gratitude that comes when thinking about the progress and achievements that have defined these last twelve months.

Though we had projected and planned for significant growth in 2023-24, we were delighted to again surpass even those ambitious expectations. Together, our service users, staff, and community partners propelled us further than ever before.

A big component of our success was meeting all the goals and activities in our strategic plan. Notably, we increased the number of people we serve, invested in innovative housing developments, and enhanced our organizational sustainability. Collaboration has always been at the core of our work and now, more than ever, our relationship with other Connective regions has allowed us to draw on one another's expertise and resources, magnifying our impact.

A significant highlight of our year was the overwhelming community endorsement we received for our new affordable housing development. Over 100 letters of support from businesses and community members accompanied our rezoning application. This not only helped advance this project, but validated the extensive community engagement and relationship building we've invested in the last few years.

One of our longstanding goals has been to achieve CARF accreditation, and this year, we made significant strides toward this important milestone. While we put the final pieces into place, our commitment to excellence in service delivery and organizational effectiveness remains unwavering.

Looking ahead, we are excited about potential partnerships and opportunities to expand our diverse housing portfolio. We are eager to continue providing stable housing for individuals and families, ensuring everyone has a place to call home.

The future of Connective Kamloops is bright, and the future of Kamloops itself, even brighter. We can't wait to continue playing an essential role in how it develops.



**Alan Hawkins**  
BOARD CHAIR

## A Message from our Executive Director & Board Chair

### CONNECTIVE NANAIMO



**Andrew Ferguson**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For Connective Nanaimo, 2023-24 brought excitement, opportunity, and challenge. It was deeply affirming and inspiring to see the ways that our service users and staff responded, displaying resilience and enthusiasm at every turn.

One of our most substantial and long-awaited milestones was the opening of Cornerstone Supportive Housing. This initiative marks our first foray into supportive housing, a dream nearly six years in the making. We were proud to welcome our first residents on May 1, 2024, and we cannot wait to watch the Cornerstone community evolve in years to come.

In addition to Cornerstone, we also began to support seniors experiencing homelessness through our project at Lakeside Courts. Here, seven older adults have successfully transitioned into supportive living environments that will help them maintain housing stability and improve their quality of life. Together, these programs represent a vital expansion of our services at a time when housing in Nanaimo is sorely needed.

In December, Connective Nanaimo also navigated a change in leadership. After a productive and impactful tenure, our Executive Director, John Horn, moved on to new endeavors. We are grateful for his contributions and guidance over the years and thrilled to have his continued involvement as a member of our Board of Directors.

As we welcomed John to the Board, we also bid farewell to a longstanding member, Chris Churchill. For more than 12 years, Chris has been a tireless advocate for justice and equality and will continue to do so in this next chapter of his career – as a judge. We congratulate Chris on this remarkable achievement, thank him for his unwavering commitment, and honour the legacy he leaves behind.

The complex challenges facing us continue to evolve, but so do the tools, knowledge, and resources at our disposal. We are eager to continue deploying these in service to our community and look forward to all that 2024-25 has in store!



**Susan Clift**  
BOARD CHAIR

## Complex Community Challenges

As the overdose crisis continues to wreak havoc in communities across BC and the Yukon, we remember those who have died and acknowledge the grief of those left behind.

Now in its eighth year, BC's toxic drug crisis claimed another 2,511 lives in 2023 – the highest ever reported.

**According to the BC Coroners service, illicit drug toxicity is now the leading cause of death for 10 to 59-year-olds, surpassing homicides, suicides, accidents, and natural diseases, combined.**

In the Yukon, the relative scale of the crisis – and its impact on families, friends, and communities – is just as severe. There, 23 individuals lost their lives to toxic drugs.

Though we have seen some important strides toward treating substance use as a public health emergency, and not a criminal one, there is much more to be done. Reversing course on this tragedy requires that we recognize and address the complex factors that underlie substance use and dependence – everything from pain and trauma to mental and physical health challenges. Anything less means continuing to fail those most at risk.

At Connective, our staff found new ways to respond to this crisis in 2023–34 including:

**In Vancouver**, our ACES program partnered with Into Action, a recovery house for men with substance use challenges. Training was provided for participants to become peer workers, and in turn, support others on their recovery journey.

## TOXIC DRUG CRISIS



**At 405 Alexander**, the emergency shelter in Whitehorse, Emergency Medical Services began offering onsite drug testing for residents and guests.

**In the Fraser Valley**, Home Share staff acted quickly to secure additional, one-time outreach funding to support an individual through a period of crisis that involved heavy substance use.

**At the Northern BC Therapeutic Community**, after assuming program operation, staff instituted a range of harm reduction policies where there had been none previously.

## Learning from Tragedy

While the devastating consequences of the toxic drug crisis have dominated headlines in recent years, it has been rarer to hear about the comparable dangers of alcohol. In Canada's northern regions, alcohol use – often a symptom of the ongoing impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma – is particularly prevalent.

Nowhere was the impact of this parallel crisis thrown into sharper relief than during the Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of four service users at 405 Alexander, where alcohol was a primary contributing factor.



## YUKON CORONER'S INQUEST

The Inquest provided a vital opportunity to honour lives lost, learn from tragedy, and improve service delivery. Connective is grateful to all those who offered their time, expertise, and insight, shaping both the process and its outcomes. In particular, the families, friends, and communities of the deceased, all of whom displayed profound strength in reliving the details of these tragic events, so others could benefit from the lessons learned.

As an organization committed to growth and accountability, we are determined to make the most of all that has been brought forward. Connective affirms and endorses all the jury's recommendations, and we are confident that implementing these changes will enable us to more effectively support those who rely on 405 Alexander's services.

**Since the Inquest concluded and recommendations were released, Connective has been hard at work mapping out a plan for short-, medium-, and longer-term program changes.**

We will continue working with our partners at the Council of Yukon First Nations, and funders at the Yukon Government, to ensure we are making timely progress.

While implementing these recommendations and keeping the community abreast of major milestones, Connective will continue to advocate for additional programming and services for people in the Yukon. 405 Alexander is just one piece of a larger system of care and support, one that must be expanded if we are to meet the needs of all people. In particular, those of Yukon First Nations, who continue to disproportionately experience multiple, complex barriers.

## Complex Community Challenges

From food to housing and everything in between, the rising cost of living continues to hit hard at the pockets of those already struggling, putting access to daily necessities out of reach for many.

Canada's housing market has yet to recover from pandemic-era impacts, and still today, many Canadians are struggling to find a home they can afford. Renters face a similar uphill battle, with vacancy rates lower and rental costs higher than ever. The result is an increasing number of people experiencing homelessness – a 32% increase between 2020–23 in BC, and a 30% increase between 2021–23 in Yukon.

Meanwhile, costs in other areas continue to put individuals and families at risk. While grocery prices have slowed their aggressive upward spiral, Canada's Food Price Report is still forecasting a \$701 increase to the average family's annual food bill – that the increase is more moderate is hardly a relief.

## AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

At Connective, our staff continue to respond to this crisis:

In Vancouver, our **Community Service Office** created a weekly affordable housing list to support those looking for market rental housing. The program also partnered with United Way's Period Promise to provide free menstrual products to low-income individuals.

**Kingsway Supportive Housing** secured a grant through the Greater Vancouver Food Bank to develop and expand their breakfast program, helping address food security concerns.

Whitehorse's **Housing First** introduced a snack program to ensure all residents had equal access to food.

Staff at **Tims Manor/Miyáq'elhá:wetawt** built a partnership with the Archway Food Bank for monthly food box deliveries, helping to mitigate rising affordability concerns.

## Responding to Food Insecurity

When individuals have access to affordable and nutritious food, they are healthier, more productive, and better able to focus on other aspects of life. Without it, they are at greater risk for poor health and the development of various chronic conditions.

Yet, across Canada, food insecurity is a serious public health problem; one that has only worsened in recent years. Spending more to buy less is a reality for an increasing number of Canadians, especially in the north.

The most recent data available from PROOF, a leading voice on household food insecurity, showed that in 2017–18, 16.9% of Yukon households were food insecure. Post-pandemic, this number has surely grown.

Staff at 405 Alexander have long been committed to addressing this challenge. Since assuming operation of the program in the fall of 2022, Connective has served nearly 200,000 on-site meals and takeaway dinners.

**“The work we do is hard at times, but very rewarding. We are proud to do our part to combat food insecurity in our community.”**

–Bridgeen, Kitchen Worker, Connective

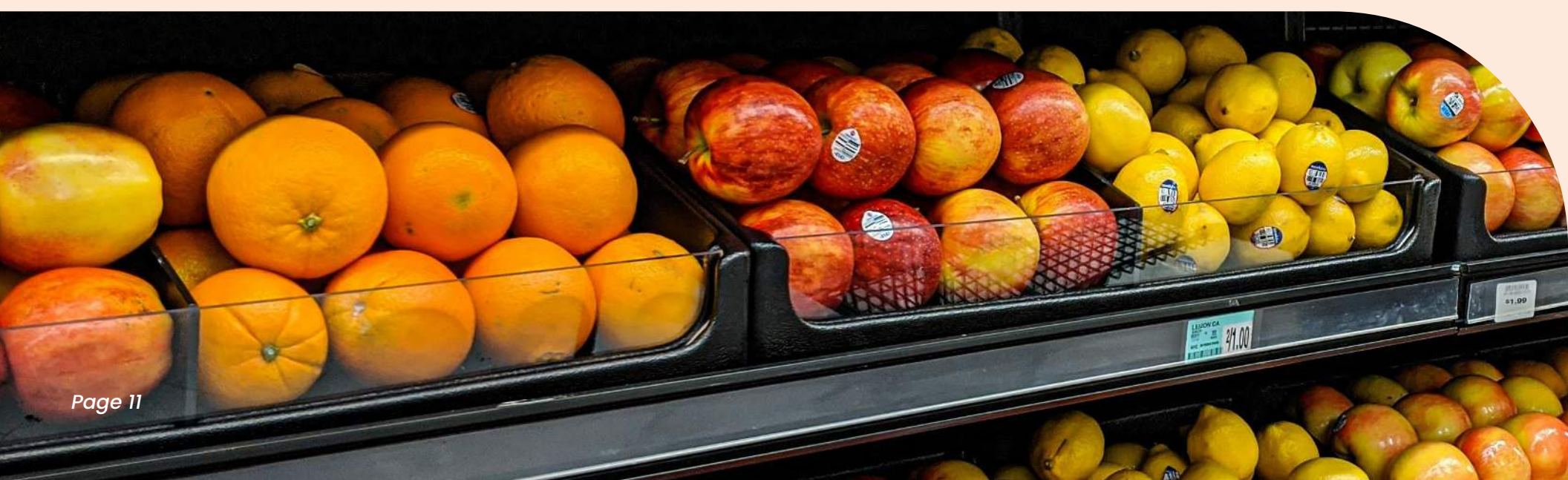
In winter 2024, we were excited to broaden our support of local food security. Thanks to funding from the Government of Yukon's Downtown Safety Plan Initiative, Connective prepared roughly 470 additional meals per week. These were then distributed at two locations in town, in partnership with the Safe at Home Society and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

## 405 ALEXANDER'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



For Kate Mechan, Executive Director of Safe at Home, these sorts of partnerships are essential to navigating complex challenges. “There is no magic bullet to addressing the crises facing many of our community members. We have witnessed greater success and stronger impact when we partner, leaning on each other's skillsets and resources to have a broader reach.”

Connective was extremely grateful for this opportunity to provide individuals with a hot meal during Whitehorse's coldest days, while also decentralizing some of the services typically concentrated at 405 Alexander.



## Expanding Our Reach

While continuing to provide essential services to existing programs, we were also honoured to announce or begin operating several new ones, just some of which are highlighted in the pages that follow.

### AURORA HOUSE

Last summer, with support from Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services (VACFSS), Connective opened Aurora House – a specialized residential support program for an Indigenous youth living with developmental disabilities.

Reflecting on nearly one year of operation, Aurora's Program Manager admits it hasn't been easy. A series of family tragedies meant that forward momentum has been hard to come by. "When she first moved in, things looked great...but then, every time we started to make progress, another trauma would happen."

Staff worked hard to maintain wraparound supports, a sense of safety, and a measure of predictability. Their efforts bore fruit – "She's graduating, she's in a safe environment, her needs are looked after, and we haven't really had any critical incident reports."

Now looking ahead to brighter days, the program's name feels particularly appropriate.

**Aurora:** Sunrise, or, the first appearance of light in the morning. With that light – warmth, vibrancy, and hope.

## INDIVIDUALIZED HOUSING PROGRAMS



### AMBLE PLACE

In December of 2023, Connective was pleased to open an emergency placement pilot program. Funded by Community Living BC (CLBC), it offers short-term stays to individuals seeking support and stability while more permanent accommodation is arranged.

The program's name, Amble, represents walking at your own pace, down your own path. Since opening, staff have worked closely with two residents on the activities of daily living, including skill development and community engagement.

Though only open for a short while, Bree, Amble's Manager, is already seeing promise.

**"Our first resident, he's thriving at Amble. He really is. We've had no incident reports; he's building relationships with staff; he's learning life skills that he didn't have before...his confidence has seen such a big impact."**

The short-term nature of the program means that it's already time for him to move on. "I'm not really looking forward to that," says Bree, "but, I am looking forward to helping make sure that he finds the best possible home."



### DUMFRIES STAFFED RESOURCE

Earlier this year, Connective and VACFSS partnered on another supportive home. It offers an Indigenous youth a safe space to work on their life skills while navigating the often-complex transition between youth (MCFD) and adult (CLBC) services.

Through person-centered, goal-based programming, the resident has focused on academics, budgeting, emotional regulation, and more. With the help of a consultant, staff also created an Indigenous-based safety and behavioural plan. Based on the Medicine Wheel, it looks at health and wellness through a holistic lens, incorporating not just physical wellness but also emotional, mental, and spiritual. This has helped the team better understand and meet the resident's needs.

Despite some initial trepidation, they have "started to settle in a bit more and understand that staff are...there to keep them safe and support them." That change is a welcome one.

**"Any single moment...where the service user gives me a smile or is able to ask for what they need, or communicate something, it makes every moment of crisis or escalation worth it. That's what we do this for!"**



## Expanding Our Reach



In late 2023, Connective was proud to assume operation of an existing program in Dawson Creek, BC, marking our first time offering services in the community.

Open since May 2021 and known locally as My Home Place, this supportive housing program provides a permanent home and 24/7 support to 32 adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Residents have access to meal programs, life and employment skills training, health and wellness resources, and staff support for overcoming barriers and achieving self-identified goals.



When the program's previous operator decided to step away, Connective was selected by BC Housing to fill the impending gap and avoid service disruption. Throughout the transition we worked closely with the former operator and are excited to continue building on the strong foundation they established.

After assuming operation, we were pleased to introduce a new Indigenous Liaison Worker to the program. In addition to assisting tenants with medical appointments and advocating on their behalf with service providers, the Liaison's primary role is to integrate Indigenous culture into the program and offer culturally appropriate supports to its Indigenous residents.



We are grateful for the chance to leverage our expertise in service to Dawson Creek, and to continue providing this essential service at a time when housing instability is at an all-time high.

## MY HOME PLACE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MY HOME PLACE'S PROGRAM MANAGER

What impact do you witness this program having on residents?

My Home Place has proven to have a profoundly positive impact on residents. Initially, some individuals had challenges during the first few months, struggling to adjust to their new homes. By the third month, I saw significant positive transformations as they stabilized and settled into their homes, and into the supportive environment. Many of our residents, who previously struggled to maintain their housing in the community, have lived here for a year, two years, and even longer.

What is your favourite part of working with the program?

My favorite part of working at My Home Place is the fulfilment that I have knowing that I am making a positive impact and difference in the lives of our residents. In the years that I have worked at My Home Place, I have developed meaningful connections with the residents and witnessed their progress...and this has been rewarding.

What are you excited for in the months ahead, now that the transition to Connective is completed?

I am excited about our plan to expand mental health supports, job and life skills training opportunities, and educational resources...We have just hired a Program Coordinator and an Indigenous Liaison Worker to help facilitate these expansions.

Soon we will also be posting for a Mental Health Case Manager. The successful candidate will provide personalized support to residents by assessing their mental health needs, developing care plans, and connecting them with appropriate resources and services.



## Expanding Our Reach

As the housing crisis continues in communities nationwide, there is an urgent need for accessible housing options with wraparound support services. This is no different in Nanaimo, where frontline service providers estimate that 600+ people experience homelessness every year.

That's why, in May of this year, Connective Nanaimo was so proud to open the doors and welcome the first residents to Cornerstone, a 51-unit supportive housing building.

While this project was over two years in the making, its completion marks the realization of a much longer-held dream for Connective Nanaimo.

"We have wanted to operate a supportive housing building for probably close to six years now," reveals Anne-Marie, Connective Nanaimo's Director of Housing.

**"It has been a fantastic experience working with BC Housing and collaborating with the builders to make it happen. As always, there have been a few learning opportunities, but it's something we've been really passionate about for some time."**

Alongside a permanent place to live, residents receive a range of 24/7 support services, including two meals per day, life and employment skills training, health and wellness support, and referrals to addiction recovery services.

## CORNERSTONE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



**"We are deeply honoured to assist in ensuring people experiencing homelessness in our community have access to safe and secure housing."**

–Susan Clift, Board Chair, Connective Nanaimo

Each fully furnished unit is 350 square feet and contains its own washroom and kitchenette. With its central location, residents also have access to a range of local amenities and resources to help them achieve their goals.

For Anne-Marie, as exciting as it has been to welcome tenants home, the true excitement is in the opportunity that lies ahead.

"We aren't in the business of warehousing people – we want to ask, what can we do to create a more supportive, more successful tenancy for folks? What do they want, now that they're housed? There's always an opportunity to improve on what has come before, so we're looking at what others have done and what we want to do."

## GETTING TO KNOW: MARLO

After an eviction left her without a place to call home, Marlo bounced between living on the street and in various encampments around Nanaimo.

Touring her new unit at Cornerstone, the next step on her journey toward independence, Marlo expressed gratitude to Connective for the opportunity. "When I got into the compound, I was so excited, so happy." Now, she feels she can start planning for her future.

For Marlo, that means getting back into construction.

**"I've always been a worker and I plan on getting back to work. Probably back into construction...I loved it, I was in it for 20 years and there was nothing that I couldn't do...and I'm good at it," Marlo says. After a pause, she continues, "Maybe even counselling, working with street people, getting more attention to the people who still need help."**

Marlo's story helps demonstrate the impact that stable, appropriate housing can have on avoiding crisis, overcoming barriers, and pursuing personal independence.

We're excited to see what Marlo, and everyone else at Cornerstone Supportive Housing, accomplishes next!

## Meeting Diverse Needs



## SUBSTANCE USE RECOVERY



Although Connective's approach has long been grounded in low-barrier and harm reduction-based philosophies, we have also understood the importance of alternative services catered to those ready for clean and sober living.

It's why we were honoured and excited when, in 2023, BC Housing invited us to fill an urgent service gap and assume operation of a men's substance use recovery centre. Located on a sprawling 150+ acre property 30KM south-west of Prince George, on the unceded territories of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nations, this program represents a new way for Connective to meet service users on their own terms and work with them to achieve their goals.

Historically, the program offered men an ideal setting, away from the stressors of the world, to build community while focusing on recovery from substance use. Participants were given the opportunity to reconnect with nature and engage in agricultural activities – caring for animals, harvesting, beekeeping, and more – all while reclaiming and rebuilding their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

This last year, a series of complications meant that Connective has gradually transitioned existing residents and been unable to accept new ones. While challenging, we continue to work closely with our partners and are eager to accept new service users and explore long-term opportunities to sustain this much needed resource in northern BC.

## Providing Culturally Appropriate Supports

## GEORGIAN COURT

This past year, Georgian Court, one of Connective's community-based residential facilities, expanded and enhanced its supports for Indigenous residents. These improvements provided greater opportunities for residents to (re)connect with their culture and roots.

Although the program has always had support from an Elder, providing readily available opportunities for residents was challenging. Now, Elder Sandy provides consistent, onsite cultural support to any resident that expresses interest.

Residents can access a variety of cultural activities, teachings, and sharing circles, five days a week. Elder Sandy also offers individual sessions and leads a program called Healing the Inner Child, which walks residents through a four-chapter curriculum, including First Nations Community and Living, Protocols, Medicine, and Traditional Foods.

Joseph\* arrived at Georgian Court in July 2022. The road that led him there included many challenges, including juvenile substance use, an acquired brain injury, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

After settling into the program, Joseph was eager to take advantage of the resources available at Georgian Court, including the Indigenous supports. He worked closely with Elders Sandy and Hank, taking regular part in beading, smudging, drum-making, and sweats. In his free time, Joseph could often be found collecting and splitting firewood for use at the sweat grounds and preparing the area for future ceremonies.

He made considerable progress during his time at Georgian Court, and recently, secured employment as a member of a community clean-up crew, helping to keep Kamloops beautiful.

*\* Names have been changed to protect anonymity*

In addition to these on-site supports, monthly sweats are also led off site, by Elder Hank. Residents contribute to these ceremonies by collecting 'Grandfather Rocks' – the igneous stones used to generate the steam that fuels the sweats.

For Connective Kamloops, it was crucial to make these services more readily available. Providing Indigenous based programming is paramount as it offers a connection to culture and community.



## Convening Multi-Sectoral Dialogues

As a long-standing nonprofit service provider, we are all too familiar with the evolving ways that communities across BC and in the Yukon are struggling with severe social and health crises. From toxic drugs to homelessness and untreated mental health disorders, now more than ever, there is a need to evolve service delivery models, better coordinate efforts across sectors, and ultimately, improve the experience of those facing complex challenges.

It's with this in mind that in October 2023, invited participants from across the justice, health, and social sectors came together for Connective's second Leadership Gathering.

### 2ND ANNUAL LEADERSHIP GATHERING



2 Days | 70 Participants | 6 Recommendations

There, representatives from government, non-profits, and Indigenous-serving organizations, as well as frontline staff, individuals with lived experience, and academic and medical experts embraced vulnerability and committed to finding new ways of working together.

**"Yesterday's systems are no longer equipped to meet today's challenges. They just aren't designed for what they're dealing with now."**

Through a moderated process of idea creation, critique, and revision, attendees developed six concrete, practical, and targeted recommendations for improving system-to-system transitions.

**"Our systems tend to be designed for people in one category. But they travel across systems, and the knowledge of that person isn't travelling with them."**

Inspiring as it was to witness the creation of these ideas, we also knew that the discussion extended beyond those we were fortunate enough to have convened. We knew we had to broaden the conversation.

That's why, in December 2023, we were excited to publish our Leadership Gathering Summary Report and begin an extensive outreach campaign to encourage action on the six recommendations.

### LEADERSHIP GATHERING RECOMMENDATIONS

The following two recommendations received the highest level of support:

- Establish cross-sectoral hubs to coordinate access to services, strategic resource use, and information-sharing
- Convene an inter-ministerial Summit on Systems of Service and Care to identify limitations in current statutory, funding, and information-sharing frameworks

Please read our Leadership Gathering report to learn more and view all six recommendations.

[connective.ca/leadership-gathering](https://connective.ca/leadership-gathering)



## Overcoming Barriers to Housing

Like their neighbours on the mainland, residents of Vancouver Island have struggled with the challenges of Canada's housing crisis. In Nanaimo, a particular trend is older adults unable to afford housing. "We're seeing people 70-plus living in shelters. Many older adults can't afford to go into assisted- or semi-assisted living...even if meals are included, it's still not enough," reports Anne-Marie, Connective Nanaimo's Director of Housing.

### Perseverance Pays Off

In August of 2022, \*Norman had been experiencing homelessness for five years, and was balancing several mental health and substance use challenges. Looking to make a change, he came to Connective Nanaimo for support.

For nine long months, Norman met weekly with his case manager. Together, they applied to a wide range of affordable, supportive, and market housing options. Through repeated setbacks and rejections, and despite the toll that living outdoors at 60+ was taking, Norman never gave up hope.

Eventually, Connective Nanaimo's housing team was able to work with a landlord to secure affordable housing. Today, Norman receives ongoing case management, is stable in his home, and has set his sights on a new goal – finding employment.

*\*Names have been changed to protect anonymity*



## PARTNERSHIPS IN NANAIMO

**"We're seeing people 70-plus living in shelters. Many older adults can't afford to go into assisted- or semi-assisted living"**

In response to these and other issues, the team focuses on lowering barriers to housing accessibility. This year, a lot of that effort went into building and leveraging local property management relationships. Through these efforts, Connective developed a partnership to take over tenancy of three rental properties. "This allowed us to sublet exclusively to our service users, while also providing subsidies that allow for affordable rental rates."

This arrangement helps combat high rents, low vacancies, and a competitive market – all of which further disadvantage those already facing barriers to housing. In addition to affordability benefits, it allows prospective residents to "bypass the process of applications and interviews...especially important for those that aren't typically considered 'market rentable'."

## Overcoming Barriers to Employment



This past year, Connective Kamloops began offering a new opportunity to individuals facing barriers to employment. Focusing on areas of high labour market demand, the Multi-Barrier Program aims to equip participants with the job readiness and industry skills training needed to succeed.

Responding to an urgent, identified need, participants completed specialized training with BC Ambulance. "The partnerships began at a job fair in Kamloops, with our employment coordinator seeing emergency services recruiting and hearing of their need for ambulance workers," explained Tammi, Connective Kamloops' Director of Health, Housing and Employment.

## KAMLOOPS MULTI-BARRIER PROGRAM

From there, the team connected with the province to understand what was impacting their applicant pool. "They had a lot of people expressing interest, but often without the required qualifications."

**"We see that people have a sense of pride. We hear from others or family that, 'This person looks different. They walk different, they talk different, they hold their head up a little bit higher.' You can't put a dollar amount on that."**

Equipped with this understanding, the Multi-Barrier Program supported 10 individuals through training and testing, helping them cover fees, acquire their Class 4 license (a common barrier for many), and more. Five of the trainees were hired to work as ambulance technicians, while the other five took adjacent work paths, including as medics for fire response. By and large, trainees will be working "in remote Indigenous communities, bridging a gap in existing levels of critical emergency response care," says Heather, Kamloops' Employment Coordinator.

This also marked the first time that the government licensing certification test for paramedics was hosted in Kamloops. Typically, "the exams are always held in Vernon, Kelowna, or Vancouver," explains Heather. For many aspiring medical professionals, testing meant significant travel. "We got one in Kamloops, which was a big deal to the ambulance and first aid industry."

## Responding to Homelessness in Prince George

Recognizing that far too many British Columbians are experiencing homelessness or precarious housing, the Government of BC launched its 'Belonging in BC' Homelessness Plan. Backed by significant investment from the 2022-23 budget, the plan equips BC Housing to work with service providers to offer people living outdoors and in encampments new shelter and housing options. These programs are made possible through Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH) funding.



## HEARTH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

As part of this new funding stream, Connective was selected to operate a new supportive housing program on Victoria Street in Prince George. Between one 60-unit building, which welcomed residents this spring, and one secondary, 36-unit building opening later this year, the site will house 96 individuals.

In addition to providing a secure place to live, the program will offer 24/7 wraparound support services tailored to the needs and goals of each resident. Connective staff will provide meal programs, life and employment skills training, health and wellness support, and access to an onsite Indigenous Liaison Worker who will provide culturally appropriate programming and referrals.

**“What I’m looking forward to as the program develops is seeing the change in folks who have been sheltering outdoors for a long time. We have folks here who have been without a home for many years, some as many as a decade. It is so amazing to see the change in their physical and emotional health once they start to feel at home!”**

- Angie, Program Manager

Connective is proud to take a leading role in responding to underserved and evolving needs and pleased to have another opportunity to serve the community in Prince George.

Connective currently has other HEARTH projects applications in place, targeting additional areas of the province, and is eagerly awaiting their results! We look forward to sharing more when the time comes.

## Remote Service Delivery

In August 2023, staff of Connective’s Acquiring Community-Based Employment Skills (ACES) program embarked north from Prince George on an eight-hour, 570KM journey along rough logging roads, to the small community of Kwadacha First Nation.

After arriving safely and settling into their camp for a much-needed rest, the team spent several days delivering employment training courses and silviculture certifications to 10 adults and 11 youth. Participants covered everything from fire suppression to first aid and power saw training.

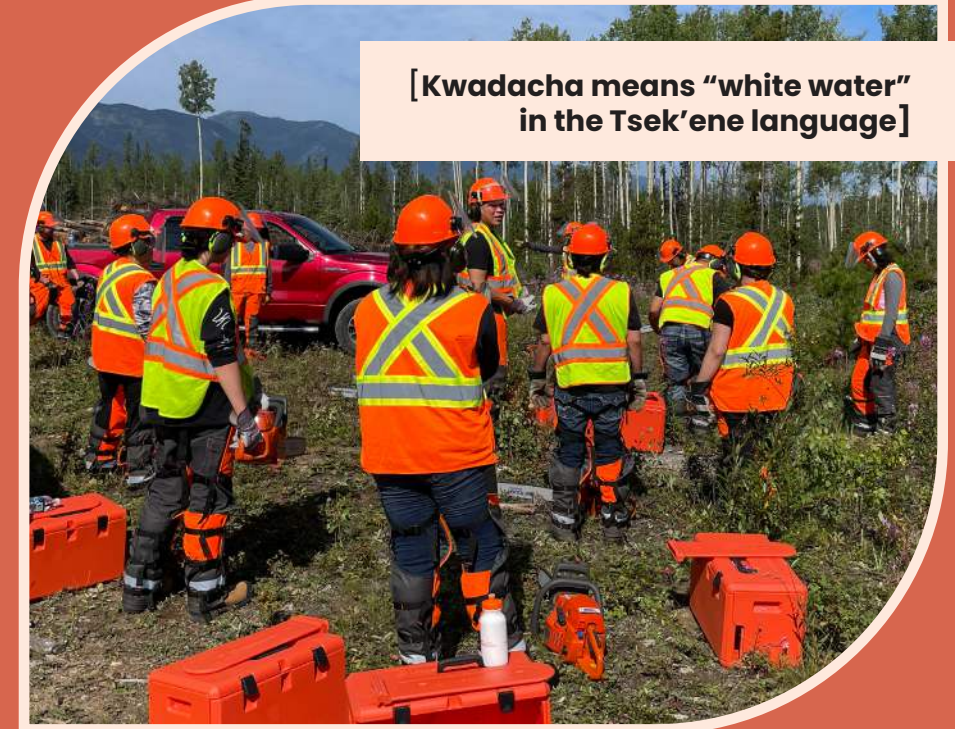
Silviculture (“the art and science of establishing and caring for natural landscapes and forests”) is a popular training topic for remote communities, and one Danielle and her team deliver often. “It’s great for any work out in the bush...a lot of communities build their own fire teams to protect the community from wildfire.”

Making the ACES program accessible is an important way of opening doors, developing skills, and building local capacity. “For Kwadacha First Nation, and others like it that are very remote, training opportunities are often few and far between.” The response to the program often reflects this. “A lot of them felt really empowered. You could see big smiles on their faces...It was just really positive.”

After the training was complete, most of the participants were hired by the local Band. “That was awesome. It was very impactful for the community.”

Looking ahead, the team is eager to continue bringing employment opportunities to communities in Northern BC.

## TRAINING IN KWADACHA FIRST NATION



**[Kwadacha means “white water” in the Tsek’ene language]**

**“Every time we go to remote communities, I just feel so honoured to be invited...I once heard this speaker, Doctor Dustin Louie, talking about how real interactions start when you go to communities. That felt so fitting. It’s such a different experience to be a part of it...You’re building skills and teaching new things, and at the same time, you’re being taught new things.”**

- Danielle, Program Manager

## Building Community & Supporting Reintegration



Nanaimo's Forensic Housing and Outreach Program offers support to individuals who are navigating mental illness and involvement with the justice system. Staff work to facilitate transition back into community, while encouraging healthy lifestyle choices and promoting social responsibility.

This past year, staff made a concerted effort to build community and camaraderie among program participants, organizing monthly group events and activities for them to enjoy. Though this had been a longstanding goal, "there were several logistical challenges to consistently organizing something like this."

## FORENSIC HOUSING & OUTREACH

Joel, Program Manager, explained that it took time to build up service user interest, ensure outings would have adequate staff-to-client ratios, and find ways to help make events feasible for everyone interested. "Some of our clients, particularly those who are street-entrenched, aren't always in the right place to participate...they don't always have the capacity to follow through with that kind of commitment."

Conditions aligned this year, and monthly events included baseball and hockey games, bowling, movies, museum and wildlife visits, group lunches, and nature walks. The impact has been extremely positive, with excellent feedback from almost all participants. For many, these events became their most social time of the month.

"The guys really became accustomed to it. A lot of them have had very little social interaction for a long time...But they'd come out, they'd see the same people again and after a few months, they got to know each other. They'd regularly be asking, 'OK, what's our next thing we're doing?'"

One of the main goals of the program is for community reintegration, and socializing is an important aspect of that. These regular social events provided a sense of normalcy, "and ultimately, that leads to community safety."

**"Usually, I'm a little bit more on the stoic side... I'm not usually emotional, but talking about these things, I can definitely feel it. It is really positive. I think these guys will always remember it, the things we did over the past year."**

## Community Outreach

Every year, our Vancouver Community Services Office (VCSO) fulfills thousands of requests for support – everything from help with taxes and ID to housing and service referrals.

Despite the number of people who utilize VCSO's drop-in services, "one limitation is that we don't go into the community. We are this fixed object that people can come to, but they might not know exists."

For Keaton, VCSO's Program Coordinator, this limitation was one reason launching a Peer Steward team in Mount Pleasant last May was so appealing. As part of Vancouver's 'Better Together' pilot project, Connective's 10 peer stewards initiated 2,433 community interactions, made 1,216 service referrals, handed out 3,004 harm reduction supplies, responded to one overdose, and collected 81 substance use supplies for proper disposal.

For one participant, this was a chance to give back to the community and extend the kind of hand that might've helped him, back when he needed it.

**"There was never anyone who reached out in the way that we do. So, it's good, being able to offer that. I wanted to show people there is a positive path to getting better."**

In three-hour shifts, four or five days per week, groups of two peer stewards canvassed the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood and connected with folks on the street, with businesses, and with community members.

## PEER STEWARDSHIP PILOT

**"On a typical day, we go out and we find people, and we just say hello. We introduce ourselves, ask if they need harm reduction supplies, or if they're interested in community resources."**

Keaton knows these conversations, and the relatability that peers bring, is important. "They can provide insight and build connections in a way that others perhaps couldn't."

The peer stewards have found that "most people are responsive. They really appreciate it...Nobody just wakes up one day and thinks, I want to be on the street – everybody wants to get out of it. We give them a little bit of direction...It's good to have a job where you feel like you're contributing and trying to do your part. It's rewarding."



## Person-Centeredness in Action



This past year, staff at Vancouver Apartments (VA) faced a difficult question: **What happens when being person-centered means saying farewell?**

As a residential program, VA provides a baseline level of support – with cooking, cleaning, navigating emotions, and going on community outings. While still extensive, “it’s not clinical – that’s an important distinction,” explains Melina, VA’s Program Manager.

## VANCOUVER APARTMENTS SAYS FAREWELL

“We knew that Pierre was aging out of Vancouver Apartments...that a day would come where he would have to be transitioned to another facility.” The question of when, however, was less clear. “It was progressive,” says Rebecca, Senior Manager. “You start to see pinpoints of concern, and then gradually it snowballs.”

As Pierre’s care needs became more complex, they began exceeding the level of support that staff were able to provide.

While navigating these changes, the team did everything they could for Pierre. “We asked all sorts of questions...Do we bring in more staffing? Can we get creative with our funding? How can we change the stairs or renovate the bathroom so that he can age in place? It was a constant effort. But it just wasn’t viable in the end,” explains Rebecca. Eventually, the team knew it was time.

With this decision made, Melina faced a new hurdle. “I’ve noticed that some staff, they’ve taken it as...‘If I had done more, been more vigilant over the years, maybe it wouldn’t have gotten to this point. Maybe he could still stay here.’”

These sentiments are challenging, and show how staff, “care so much about the people that we serve. But there’s only so much that we can do and only so much that we can take on.”

Staff advocated on Pierre’s behalf and found him a more suitable, long-term home that meets his changing needs. It’s hard to say goodbye, but “that’s person-centered care. Even if it means that we’re no longer the right fit.”

## Overcoming Recruitment Challenges

Bedford Manor is an assisted living facility in the heart of downtown Kamloops, providing residents with a safe place to call home and the assistance they need to maintain independence.

During and post pandemic, Bedford Manor was hit hard by recruitment challenges. “There was such a fluctuation in the workforce”, explains Chris, Kamloops’ Senior Manager of People & Culture. “There were overall challenges for a while, but where things really stuck was in the healthcare field.”

Whether from a hesitancy to enter ‘front-line’ positions during a global pandemic, the result of burnout and high turnover, or the appeal of virtual employment options, “these positions were no longer attractive.”

At its worst, Chris and his team were struggling with “a whole rash of open [Health Care Aide] positions...we had to pay contract nurses to come in and do all these different roles.” Today, thanks to BC’s Health Care Access Program (HCAP), and partnerships with Thompson Rivers University and Sprott Shaw College, things look very different.

HCAP allows applicants with little to no experience in health care to get hired and receive paid training and subsidized education as part of their employment. It offers an easy start to a long-term, rewarding career.

“What this did is create a brand-new stream of individuals who – where before, maybe the financial demands were too high, maybe they couldn’t take time off from work to get an education – it got rid of those barriers.”

## BEDFORD MANOR & BC’S HCAP PROGRAM

“The training has given me new opportunities and a new career I am proud to be involved in.”

– Lucy, Health Care Aide

The program has directly impacted recruitment efforts and is a great showcase for the transformative power of innovation and collaboration.

“In the year and a half since we’ve been running the HCAP program, we are now fully staffed. The impact is huge. It has been great for staff who were overstretched, great for people served...just positives all the way through.”





## Service User Story

By overcoming recruitment challenges and establishing a more consistent source of staffing, the HCAP program has allowed Connective Kamloops to better support service users like Lorne – a resident and artist living at Bedford Manor.



## LORNE, BEDFORD MANOR

### Lorne's Story

Though art hasn't always featured prominently in Lorne's life, he has long enjoyed it as a source of calm and tranquility. In high school, Lorne began his artistic journey with pencil drawing, but it didn't stick. Finding the range of greys afforded by graphite simply, "too dull," he pivoted to more colourful pursuits.

Though art mostly took a back seat to life during his early-adult years, Lorne began to feel its pull once more. In his 40's, Lorne tentatively began to paint. He had no formal instruction and was worried he'd "never be able to paint anything that was half decent." Putting his reservations aside, Lorne persevered. With the help of instructional books and the sagely wisdom of TV artist Bob Ross, he quickly found his groove and has never looked back. 43 years later, now living at Bedford Manor, Lorne is still going strong.

These days, many of his paintings draw on his experiences travelling through BC, NWT, and YT, and inspiration from the photos he took along the way. Though he has sold many of his paintings, Lorne has always painted "for the enjoyment of it." Over the years he has given away much of his work, and recently, has found a new way to freely share his art.

Every month, Lorne contributes a painting to Bedford Manor's monthly newsletter. The residents look forward to seeing his work, and it makes Lorne feel good, too. It's a nice way to contribute to the place he calls home. Lorne is deeply appreciative of program staff, who "help him with anything he needs," and of the building's location, which provides easy access to local essentials. For Lorne, Bedford Manor is "a good fit" – staff and residents are inclined to agree.

## Advocacy as Harm Reduction

Tims Manor and Elliott House are two of Connective's Community Residential Facilities (CRFs). This past year, Adam and Shiv, respective Program Managers, both had the chance to advocate for service users who had breached their substance use release conditions. Their advocacy allowed residents to learn from their slipup, stay in community, and continue making progress.

CRFs, by their nature, have a strict set of conditions and guidelines for service providers and their residents. There normally isn't "space to talk about things like harm reduction – it's either you're following the rules or you're not," explains Adam. "Even when there are people that want to find that middle ground, the system itself is not designed to let them focus on it."

Over time, however, Adam & Shiv have been able to shift that. "We're lucky," says Shiv, "we have good rapport with the parole officers. That's the benefit of working with the same people for over a decade." Adam agrees, "because of that relationship building, we have space to do some advocacy." It's certainly not a given, however.

Without missing a beat, Shiv expands, "It does help that we have that seat at the table, but even with that, we still definitely need to advocate...And sometimes, we're limited in what we can advocate for."

When staff are successful in working with parole officers to explore alternatives, it can have a significant benefit. "We may look at treatment; restrictions on accessing certain locations; requirements to attend X amount of AA meetings, etc."

## TIMS MANOR & ELLIOTT HOUSE



These outcomes are a far cry from what many new residents may first expect – often, those still guarded from time in institutions are "expecting staff to be...looking for a reason to get them in trouble," says Adam. Luckily, "a lot of times the buy-in takes place pretty quickly. They see that, what we say we're about – we're actually about." Shiv has seen this shift firsthand; "Any client that I have really fought for...they are very, very, thankful."

Ultimately, "it takes work to do that advocacy," says Adam, "but that's Connective's job – to try to find the people that need help and put the work in to help them."

## A FOND FAREWELL TO GRP

**1996**  
GRP opens its doors, initially, as a provincial electronic monitoring halfway house in Surrey.

**1997**  
GRP moves from Surrey to Vancouver.

**1999**  
GRP's contract is transferred from the BC government to Correctional Service Canada, becoming a CRF.

**2023**  
After 27 years of service, GRP closes its doors.

## Closing One Chapter...

While much of this last year was filled with new and exciting opportunities, we were also forced to confront the harsher realities of our work – what happens when programs close.

After exploring all possible alternatives, in 2023 we were forced to make the difficult decision to close Guy Richmond Place (GRP), one of our Vancouver-based Community Residential Facilities (CRFs).

It's never easy to close a chapter in our organization's history and as one of our longest standing programs, this was especially true of GRP. First opening its doors in 1996, GRP has an extensive and storied history; one shaped by countless service users, staff, and community partners.

After decades of service, the building had begun to show its age. Although we had been able to manage structural challenges for some time, expert consultations made clear that the building had reached the end of its operational life.

Despite exhaustive and innovative efforts from Connective's leadership team, we were ultimately unable to make alternative arrangements for the program or secure the permits necessary for extensive renovations.

As the program wound down, closing its doors for one last time on August 10, 2023, we worked tirelessly to ensure a smooth transition for both residents and staff alike.

GRP's impact and legacy will live on – in the residents who called it home, in the staff who shaped it, and in the lessons and learnings that have influenced the last three decades of Connective programs.

## ...and Opening Another

Today Connective is proud to operate in six regions across BC and in the Yukon, but decades ago, our story began in Vancouver. Although 2023 saw us bid farewell to one important piece of that history, it also allowed us to invest in a new one.

Together with our Board of Directors, Connective's leadership team completed the acquisition of 3310 Fraser Street – the building neighbouring our existing Vancouver Community Services Office.

This purchase represents a long-term investment, providing us with a permanent (65+ years) home for generations of service users, programs, and staff to come.

It secures our presence in East Vancouver, contributes to organizational sustainability, and magnifies our potential for impact in the city.

Although the exact plans for the space are still to come (the building is currently tenanted and will be for the near future), we are diligently exploring how to maximize its potential. There is tremendous excitement in that unknown.

The inherent flexibility of this opportunity allows for any number of varied and purpose-built solutions across the programming and housing spectrum, all centralized in an excellent location at the heart of a rapidly evolving neighbourhood.

We are excited to explore this world of new opportunities, and to share updates with our community along the way.

## FRASER ST. PROPERTY ACQUISITION



New Property

Vancouver Community Services Office



## Celebrating & Supporting Our Staff

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST YEAR

Connective staff lead the way in creating safe, healthy, and inclusive communities for all. They give life to our programs, provide direct support to our service users, and challenge one another to continuously improve.

In this past year, while navigating a challenging economic environment, mitigating the impacts of the opioid crisis, and providing outstanding continuity of care to our service users, our teams also assumed operation of multiple new programs, renewed our CARF accreditation, strengthened internal systems and processes, and so much more.

#### Non-Profit Employer of Choice Award

For the second consecutive year, Connective was honoured to receive the Nonprofit Employer of Choice (NEOC) Award. This national recognition underscores our ability to create a robust, compelling, employee-centric experience – one we will continue to nurture as we recruit top talent to our expanding teams.

#### Living Wage Employer Status

For the 4th year in a row, Connective was recertified as a Living Wage Employer. As we continue to grapple with rising costs, we know that paying a living wage is not only right, but an investment in the long-term health of our teams, our organization, and our ability to affect change through our programs.

#### Implementing the High-Performance Index

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, Connective was pleased to partner with SupportingLines Institute to administer our annual staff feedback survey. SupportingLines has done extensive research and built a powerful survey focused on identifying strengths and opportunities, achieving goals, and directly improving the employee experience.

#### Enhancing Our Complaint Procedure

With the growth of our Connective community, it is imperative that we continue nurturing a healthy work environment. Last year, we introduced a new complaint form and a simplified escalation pathway to enhance the structure, efficiency, and effectiveness of our existing procedures.



#### Mental Health Leadership Group

This group was formed in Fall 2023 and worked to support the mental and emotional health of Connective staff. Learning activities included training staff to respond to inappropriate behaviours, address discrimination, provide trauma-informed practice, and practice low-impact debriefing.

#### Connective's Learning Hub

In 2022-23 we launched the Connective Learning Hub, a powerful internal tool for professional development. This past year, we were excited to add 40 additional courses including:

- Inclusive Leadership
- Business Continuity Planning 101
- Mental Health 101
- Mental Health Continuum Model
- Psychological Safety
- Connective Language Guide

#### Self-Care Support Groups

Our self-care support groups were a pilot project introduced in Fall 2023. They consisted of three group sessions with a Canadian-certified counsellor, for both BC and Yukon employee cohorts. Response to the sessions were extremely positive, and we are eager to explore similar opportunities in the coming year.

#### Restructuring our OSH Committees

To better respond to Connective's continued growth, we restructured and reimagined our Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) Committee. Working with OSH members and the Workers Safety and Compensation Boards in BC and Yukon, we settled on design that sees 11 new committees (nine in BC and two in Yukon) to support safety and health objectives across the organization.



**195** New Employees  
added to our team

**112** Promotions  
awarded to our staff

**600+** High Fives  
given through our internal  
recognition program

## Fostering Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion



At Connective, we believe that the diverse characteristics of individuals enrich our communities, and strive to create spaces where those differences are welcomed, valued, and celebrated. We recognize this process is ongoing, and we are committed to continuously improving.

This past year, we were excited to continue our DEI journey.

### Org-Wide Updates:

- Enhanced our recruitment process by updating job postings with inclusive language to improve accessibility, remove barriers, and add the physical requirements of each position.
- Launched AI screening to minimize unconscious bias when processing large volumes of resumes during the initial screening process.

- Reformulated Connective's DEI team/department leads group and worked to develop strategic goals aimed at embedding DEI principles across the organization.
- Conducted monthly meetings with the DEI Committee to address key DEI topics and provide ongoing education and training opportunities.
- Posted regularly to Workvivo, our internal communication platform, highlighting relevant DEI observances such as Ramadan, Pride, and Earth Day. These aimed to promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity within our workplace.

### Program Updates:

- **Elmbrook:** Secured an Indigenous Elder to visit on a bi-monthly basis. This has been a goal since the program's opening, but one that was challenging to achieve.

- **Miyáq' elhá:wetawt:** Successfully completed the process to become a Section 84 destination for Indigenous service users applying for Section 84 releases. Service users also regularly attended local cultural nights and provided donations of traditional crafts, including regalia, to families.
- **Federal Reintegration:** Began visiting 'Pathways,' Indigenous Healing Units in several institutions to work specifically with Indigenous service users.
- **My Home Place:** Hosted regular social, cultural, and Indigenous programs for residents, such as traditional dance performances, storytelling, and cultural workshops.
- **Tri-cities Outreach:** Identified and addressed a gap in providing a safe space for women by starting a monthly life skill and relationship building group.

- **Home Share:** Enrolled several managers into American Sign Language classes to better understand and connect with persons served.
- **Community Living Society Abbotsford:** Accommodated folks with physical limitations at 100% of program events.
- **Hawthorn:** Connected with an Elder to learn about Indigenous practices and invited them to smudge a home share that an Indigenous service user was moving into.
- **Pyrus House:** Created a monthly "This is me, this is what I eat" activity as a way for diverse staff (from Canada, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Cambodia, Japan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Afghanistan, and Egypt) to come together during staff meetings and showcase their culture.

## Launching Our New Strategic Framework

Meeting the needs of our communities is a continual process of keeping one eye on the present, and one eye looking toward all that lies ahead. Nowhere was this clearer than during last year's review and revision of Connective's Strategic Framework.

We engage in this comprehensive process every three years. It's how we ensure that we are continuing to meet the evolving needs of our communities in ways that are carefully considered, that leverage our unique strengths and expertise, and that allow us to sustainably maintain our high standard of care.

Extensive consultations with our staff teams, service users, Board Members, Indigenous Advisory Committee, and a select audience of key partners, brought together a broad range of experiences, perspectives, and feedback. All of these were instrumental in shaping our finalized Strategic Framework for 2024-27, the north star that will keep Connective focused and moving in the same direction – toward safe, healthy, and inclusive communities.

After extensive work, we are proud of where we arrived and eager for everything that is to come.

### ENGAGE

- Influence and facilitate **multi-sector collaboration**
- Attract the **best skills and experience**
- **Advance truth and reconciliation** through inviting Indigenous perspectives to inform our work

### SERVE

- **Improve outcomes** for more people facing systemic barriers
- Find **innovative and responsive ways to meet needs** in underserved communities
- Add to the **continuum of housing**

### SUSTAIN

- **Proactively invest** in our people and infrastructure
- Progress **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** best practices
- Improve **employee experience** with a focus on creating and maintaining a high-performance culture
- Enhance **health and safety practices** to recognize the growing complexities of our sector

## Investing in People & Communities

At Connective, all our decisions are driven by our mission – to support community members experiencing barriers. This last financial year has been a period of strategic growth, increased community impact, and strengthened resilience.

We are deeply grateful to our funders, partners, and donors, whose contributions have been pivotal in enabling us to bring more services to more people in more places.

Heading into 2024-25, Connective maintains a strong financial position with a solid foundation of assets, leaving us well equipped to invest in new initiatives while comfortably sustaining our critical existing work.

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST YEAR

- Implementing a new financial system that allows for improved efficiency and more comprehensive reporting
- Inviting bids for FY2024 auditing services, working with our Board of Directors to select the experts at BDO Canada
- Investing in our team, and the sustainability of Connective's Finance department, with the introduction of VP of Finance and Financial Controller roles
- Continuing to enhance our long-term financial health through strategic property management decisions
- Expanding on our financial planning processes and budgeting \$97M in operating and \$40M in capital expenses for FY2025

## Looking Ahead

### CONNECTIVE IN 2024-25

Over the last few years, Connective's reach has more than doubled. We've been profoundly grateful for all opportunities that have come our way, and honoured to serve more people, through increasingly varied programs and services, in more regions across BC and Yukon than ever before.

We're proud to play a leading role in responding to underserved and evolving community needs, and our ambitious strategic framework will help ensure that we remain at the forefront of innovative social service delivery in the years ahead.

As we move into 2024-25, there's plenty to be excited about. Several of the programs announced recently and detailed in this report will begin operation, and several more we've yet to announce will do the same. We will continue leveraging our resources and expertise; creating space for collaboration and thought leadership; and advocating on behalf of our service users and communities.

#### **In 2024-25, our teams are excited to:**

- Build connections with and offer ACES employment training to additional Northern BC First Nations, including Tsay Keh Dene Nation, Binche Whut'en, and Nadleh Whut'en.

- Manage the Supported Rent Supplement Program to offer 120 more rental subsidies in the Prince George region.
- Install an overdose prevention site at Elmbrook Supportive Housing, to offer residents and their guests a supervised space to use substances.
- Institute strip testing for identified substances at Ontario Street Supportive Housing, to enhance residents' access to harm reduction resources.
- Locate a viable new office space for Surrey Outreach, one that better meets the accessibility needs of current and potential service users.
- Fully integrate the Mental Health Case Manager role into the team at My Home Place to provide comprehensive mental health support for residents.
- Expand Home Share emergency placement and respite provider options, as well as expanding into new regions (such as North/West Vancouver, and Richmond).
- Reshape Miyáq'elhá:wetawt's cultural programming into a yearly, repeatable model based on traditional Indigenous teachings.

The achievements and updates shared throughout this report, just a small fraction of the many we had the pleasure of being part of this past year, would not be possible without the collective efforts of our service users, staff teams, Board of Directors, Home Share providers, volunteers, community partners, and funders. Thanks to all of you for your role in working toward our vision of a safe, healthy, and inclusive community for all.


We can't wait to see what comes with this next chapter in our story!



## Connect with us

 [info@connective.ca](mailto:info@connective.ca)

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