

# Catholic Social Services launches \$2M 'critical' fundraising campaign

For more than four decades, Frank has been unemployed, underemployed or housing-challenged.

A recovering alcohol and drug addict, Frank has been clean for more than 11 of his 56 years, and he has his own apartment in Edmonton. However, to keep his personal demons at bay, Frank relies on Welcome Home – a Catholic Social Services program that has been helping him make social connections.

“You go out and do things to socialize, because otherwise I’d go back to not being human, to being anti-social, and that’s not a good thing,” said Frank, who has participated in Welcome Home for seven years.

It’s so important to Frank that he agreed to be the face of Catholic Social Services’ Sign of Hope fundraising campaign – an effort to raise \$2-million to meet the increased demand for services and programs created by the COVID-19 pandemic even amid the economic and social upheaval.

Raising that money is critical, says Troy Davies, chief executive officer of CSS.

“I think we can do it. Our donors have proven that they’re exceedingly loyal. I think they know the need that’s out there. People know that these are especially tough times, especially for the marginalized and the vulnerable,” Davies said.

“We know this will be a monumental task. Our world has changed. Albertans are hurting. The economy is struggling. And the community needs are greater than ever before.”

Most CSS programs don’t receive government funding. Twenty programs, including Welcome Home, are funded entirely by donations. A shortfall may mean reduced services or, at worst, closures, Davies said.



**Chief executive officer Troy Davies said he's confident donors will help CSS meet its fundraising target.** Matthew Bodnarek, Grandin Media

The fall campaign, launched Sept. 22, runs until Dec. 31. It's the biggest annual fundraising push for CSS.

"We've got to find a way to keep serving and serve more if possible. It's like we've got a moral obligation to do it because there are people who deeply dependent upon us," Davies said.

"With COVID-19, we're all in the same storm but we're in different boats. There are some people's boats that are pretty unsteady and a few holes in the boats and a lot of those folks are the clients we deal with. They get rocked by the pandemic perhaps a little bit more than others with more means or more access to resources or more robust networks."

Davies said it also speaks to themes identified by the bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and principles of Catholic social teaching.

"If we're made in the image and likeness of God, to me that almost makes us icons of God," Davies said.

"We're the face of God to others. And when people are mistreated, and

their inherent dignity isn't honoured, if these are sons and daughters of God, that in essence amounts to a desecration."

Davies recalled that the early weeks of the pandemic, CSS had to adapt as the need for services and programs increased.

"We had to pivot really quickly. There were some programs where we had to stop some of the volunteer take. There are some programs where we had to slow our intake of clients."

Calls to its Elder Abuse Resources and Supports Program have risen by 32 per cent over last year.

"More seniors are feeling lonely and isolated, while also struggling to pay bills, access food, and buy basic necessities," Davies said. "Our staff in this area have been going above and beyond, securing food hampers, grocery shopping, picking up and delivering prescriptions, and doing anything and everything else they can to ensure those most vulnerable to COVID-19's serious health outcomes are protected and cared for."

There has also been increased demand for mental health services. In Edmonton, demand for Mercy Counselling – which provides subsidized mental health services – has increased by 14 per cent. In Red Deer, demand is up 17 per cent. The number of clients needing subsidized counselling has increased by 34 per cent, and those who can't pay at all is up 67 per cent.

Parenting in Two Cultures, a class CSS offers for newcomers to Canada, has expanded and is offering more classes in more languages. Enrolment has increased as much as 60 per cent since March.

Some services, such as Mercy Counselling, went online instead of in-person.

The year-old Morning Star program, a Red Deer drop-in centre for vulnerable women, is still open.

"It's inspiring to listen to some of those ladies talk about what Morning Star has meant to them during COVID-19, things like 'I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for Morningstar' or 'Other places have shut their doors, but you guys are still here' or 'I give thanks for you guys every day,'" Davies said.

Welcome Home, the program that helps Frank, saw nearly a 10 per cent increase in clients at the start of the pandemic. CSS says it has about 100 volunteers and a 96-per-cent success rate. But in the early days of the pandemic it had to shut down completely. Now it's restarting with social distancing protocols.

Appealing to donors, Frank said the biggest misconception people have about the homeless and jobless is that they are not "human". [Regular people] don't understand it at all because they haven't lived it.

“Give them [the homeless] a chance. Find out what they need. Disregard the rules and get that for them or help them achieve it. And then they can go from there,” Frank said.

Born in Germany to a military father, Frank – who declined to give his last name – grew up in Alberta.

He moved to Edmonton 30 years ago on the advice of social services, after losing his job as a mill custodian in Hinton. Estranged from his family, Frank always had a roof over his head, even if it was a shelter.

Frank said aid agencies helped him get an apartment and CSS helped him keep social connections.

“My worst day was every day, because you didn’t know if you were going to eat that day. You didn’t know whether you were going to have a roof over your head that day. You just did not know. My best day is today because I’m still alive. I have a roof over my head. I’ve got food,” Frank said.

Asked about his future plans, Frank said “it’s to survive long enough to get to tomorrow.”

Speaking at the launch of the Sign of Hope campaign was his way of giving back to CSS.

“That is my job. That is what I’m doing to repay what I’ve got, which is worth a lot more than \$2 million.”

Davies said he’s confident donors will help CSS meet its target. Earlier this year, CSS set a special \$100,000 COVID-9 appeal. Donors donated \$150,000. It will be the end of January when they will know if they have achieved their goal.