

Donors hear how Catholic Social Services helped woman rebuild and recover after crash

Amanda Burt was a teenage girl in Red Deer with her whole life ahead of her. But in an instant, her life changed forever.

A three-quarter-ton truck smashed into her vehicle and left the 16-year-old with severe brain damage – unable to speak, walk or even remember who she was. Five years later, with the help of the Acquired Brain Injury Program at Catholic Social Services, she's been given the chance to rebuild her life.

"The Amanda that everyone knew – the girl my dad coached in hockey, the girl whose hair my mom would braid, my big brother's little annoying sister – she died that day," Burt said Jan. 23 as this year's Sign of Hope campaign, which raises funds for CSS, came to end.

"But there was another girl who was born that day, created in the rubble and given this beautiful opportunity to know myself again and recreate the memories I lost. I realize now that the best thing that could have happened to me, did happen to me. I survived."



Troy Davies

Her story illustrates the transformative work of CSS. Their Sign of Hope campaign received more than 8,000 donations and raised \$2.1 million this year. It's a slight decrease from the \$2.2 million raised each of the past three

years, but programs and services will not be affected.

“I’d be here all day if I were to detail how every one of those ripples of hope and those dollars will touch people’s lives,” said CEO Troy Davies. “As one example, this money means that three women’s shelters will continue to provide a safe place for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.”

The Sign of Hope campaign, which runs from September-December, will completely fund twenty CSS programs.

It was a tough year for the Sign of Hope campaign, given the continued struggles of Alberta’s economy. Edmonton now has the highest unemployment rate of any major Canadian city at eight per cent.

This year, CSS brought back their “Friends of Sign of Hope” initiative which encourages people to ask their co-workers and friends to donate to Sign of Hope. As well, CSS employees themselves donated \$70,000.

The Acquired Brain Injury Program changed Burt’s life. Since CSS began helping her four years ago, Burt has regained her memory and can again speak and walk. She is now enrolled in Red Deer College’s open studies program, a goal that once seemed impossible.

“The services that I received altered the course of my recovery drastically,” she said. “The last four years have been a crazy ride, full of so much pain and so much transformation. CSS helped me get to the point in my recovery where it was even possible to take every next step, both mentally and physical. I’m able to feel normal and have the confidence to interact with the world.

“For that, I am forever grateful.”



Debbie Binfet

After hearing her impassioned story, Davies says Burt embodies the mission of Catholic Social Services.

“It’s a breathtakingly beautiful story, and she touched well over a hundred hearts here,” he said.

“Our donors have been very generous despite the financial challenges a lot of people in this province are facing. It’s stories like this that really show them the impact of the money they donate and the value of the work they’ve contributed to.”

Long-time donor Debbie Binfet has contributed to CSS for the past 27 years, and hearing Burt’s story inspires her to continue to donate.

“When Amanda said she had died the night of that accident, but now she has rebuilt her life – I was in tears,” said Binfet. “If she didn’t have that opportunity with CSS, she would not have been able to make a statement like that. In whatever small way I can help, it’s amazing to feel a part of that.”