

Extra efforts prompted by postal strike help raise \$2.25 million for Sign of Hope

Despite a nationwide mail strike and a struggling Alberta economy, Catholic Social Services finished their 2018 Sign of Hope campaign with \$2.25 million.

While it fell short of the goal of \$2.4 million, it was similar to the \$2.2 million raised in 2017 and 2016.

The Sign of Hope campaign funds a variety of CSS initiatives and programs throughout the province, including counselling, health services and immigrant and refugee support.

In Edmonton, this includes palliative care to homeless through St. Joseph's Auxiliary Hospital and Alpha ministry's work helping men recover from addiction. Catholic Social Services is also supported by parishes in the Archdiocese of Edmonton through the annual Together We Serve appeal.



Amelia Ellis

In the midst of an economic downturn, these programs are particularly needed now, said Amelia Ellis, vice-president of development and community relations with CSS.

"We are hearing that there are a lot of charities and causes having difficulties in terms of the number of people they are trying to serve right now," she said. "We're all trying to meet an increase in need from communities."

Because so much of Sign of Hope's fundraising is done through mailing, the Canada Post strike created a major stumbling block during the 2018 campaign.

The strike began in October of last year, lasting until Canada Post employees were ordered back to work towards the end of November. CSS countered this by

doing an email solicitation campaign that ran through December.

A large spike in online donations immediately followed each email blast, said Laura Ruddock, a spokesperson for CSS.

As well, members of the Sign of Hope committee worked through the Christmas holiday season, personally calling past donors to ensure as much as possible could be raised. Ellis says it created one of their most successful Decembers on record.

“We were very grateful for their eagerness and efforts,” said Ellis.

“It was hard to know what would be possible given the mail strike, but our friends at Sign of Hope committee really came together very quickly in the fall and helped us tremendously.”

Looking ahead to 2019, CSS will be taking a closer look at its database of previous donors to determine the goal for this year’s Sign of Hope campaign.

Ellis said the agency will also looking at specific ways to target different groups and potential donors, and will introduce new efforts to elevate the public profile of the Sign of Hope campaign.

“In the last few years there’s been more competition with other charities, so we’re looking at more fundraising campaigns that involve media and advertising,” she said. “In the past we just approached people through direct mail, and now were looking for more volunteers to meet with groups directly.”

Ellis says the fundraising goal for their 2019 Sign of Hope campaign will be decided in the near future.