

Life-changing impacts of Catholic Social Services to be celebrated 'At the Mac'

After a five-year hiatus, Catholic Social Services (CSS) is bringing back *At the Mac*.

The signature event, set for Aug. 22, will showcase the initiatives and possibilities created through the agency's Sign of Hope campaign.

Sign of Hope funds a variety of programs related to counselling, addiction recovery, health services, immigrant and refugee support, and other forms of community outreach. More than 21,000 people were helped by these programs in 2018 alone.



Troy Davies, CEO of Catholic Social Services

"It's a wonderful tradition that we're looking forward to bringing back," said CEO Troy Davies. "We hope people will leave the night with a greater knowledge of the significant impact Catholic Social Services has in helping the most vulnerable in our society, and in making Edmonton a stronger community."

Held in the Empire Ballroom of Edmonton's Fairmont Hotel MacDonald, *At the Mac* is expected to bring in as many as 350 people.

The annual event, first titled *Evening at the Mac*, began in 1992. It was put on a hiatus five years ago as CSS prioritized other projects and events. But after consultations with stakeholders and donors from within the agency and across the province, Davies said it's time reignite the event as part of a new five-year strategic plan.

"It's one of the things that came up time and time again – how much people loved the *At the Mac* event and how much they wanted us to bring it back," he said. "With this new strategic plan and its emphasis on strengthening community

relationships, we believe this is a wonderful time to reintroduce the event to our catalogue.”

The late-afternoon function will feature speeches from clients and employees, and individual booths will offer information about each service CSS provides. Tim Spelliscy, who was part of the Sign of Hope committee that first created Evening at the Mac, will host the event.

“I want people to know what Catholic Social Services does for their communities, how they help newcomers build their lives and give them hope like they did for me.”

– former refugee Sadiya Mohammad

Sadiya Mohammad, who knows first-hand the drastic and life-changing impact CSS can make in someone’s life, will be sharing her story.

In October 2013, Mohammad arrived in Edmonton as a refugee from Jordan with her two daughters. From the moment she stepped into the airport, Catholic Social Services was there to help. From finding housing to accessing a family doctor, enrolling her children in school, and eventually giving her a full-time job, CSS played a foundational role in welcoming Mohammad into Canadian life.



Sadiya Mohammad, Settlement Counsellor with CSS(Supplied/Catholic Social Services)

“My relationship with Catholic Social Services – it’s not just as an employee, a client, my salary and all of this. It’s a relationship like a mother to her daughter,” she said. “When I came to Canada, I didn’t know anybody, but I was welcomed with open arms. Now I feel like everybody here is my family.”

Because of her abilities in speaking Arabic, Italian, English and Tigrinya, Mohammad started volunteering with CSS in 2015. She became a full-time settlement counsellor with the agency last September. In that role, she helps refugees and newcomers settle into Canadian society in much the same way CSS helped her six years ago. It’s a job that often makes her feel like an ambassador on behalf of Canada.

What she ultimately hopes to express is her gratitude to CSS. As well, she can show by her own story how the agency helps and supports communities.

“I want people to know what Catholic Social Services does for their communities, how they help newcomers build their lives and give them hope like they did for me,” said Mohammad. “I just want to take the opportunity to say ‘Thank you.’ I don’t know how to explain it more than those words: Thank you.”

CSS is the social services arm of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, founded in 1961 by Father Bill Irwin with a mission to help disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community whose needs were not being met. It receives some support from parishes – over \$310,000 in 2018 – through the archdiocesan *Together We Serve* appeal.

With the return of the Hotel MacDonald event, CSS will take the opportunity to bring some early attention to their own fall appeal. The campaign for donations, which runs from autumn to the end of December, supports CSS programs that receive no government funding.

“Every year Catholic Social Services relies heavily on its donors,” Davies said. “Some of our programs for women and children fleeing domestic abuse, programs for people living with HIV and AIDs, men battling addictions, our faith and form counselling services, our elderly abuse supports – all of those programs rely totally on the generosity of our donors.

“Those programs are critical to many people in our society, and this is an opportunity to help pave the way and ensure there is support for those efforts.”

For tickets or additional information on At the Mac, visit cssalberta.ca/atthemac.