



THE FCSS STORY

A community is a village, a town, a city, a neighbourhood. A community is also more powerful than geography: it's people who are connected to one another.

In Alberta, we value community. But what is it worth?

It's easy to guess what our emergency rooms are worth, or our drug treatment programs, our prisons: many billions of dollars. And it's easy to care about stories of overcrowded hospitals, crime and modern illness because they're intense and dramatic. Our leaders respond to crises every day.

Nearly 50 years ago, a group of courageous Albertans sought a better way, more economical and more human. If we could build a provincial system that relied on local knowledge and leadership, the quirks and strengths of local cultures, maybe we could do what no other jurisdiction had tried: inspire our neighbours, families and colleagues to prevent crises, community by community.

That system, known today as Family and Community Support Services, is one of Alberta's most important inventions. Our province's mythologies are often about individuals. But our truest and finest stories are about individuals coming together.

We don't hear about preventing disease, preventing drug and alcohol abuse, preventing crime, preventing loneliness and isolation, because when it works - and in Alberta it works like nowhere else - it's the opposite of intense and dramatic. Avoiding a crisis isn't news.

But it is enormously worthy. It is worth even more investment, because our unique partnership between the provincial government, municipalities, service organizations and volunteers creates prosperity by preventing pain and problems.

If we don't see it on the news, we do see it in new mom groups in Jasper, in youth programs in Calgary, in seniors brain fit classes in Edmonton, in ice cream socials in Fort Macleod.

A crucial and powerful thing happens when you tell people in your town, in your city, that they matter.

They believe you.



This is how Alberta builds communities - real communities, not streets of houses to which people retreat after a day's work, as they age, as they struggle silently to raise children and make ends meet. People helping people - community - is one of Alberta's most valuable assets.

Alberta's FCSS builds this province by transforming government money - provincial and municipal - into social profit. Many municipalities pay more money into FCSS than any agreement requires because they see the power in putting decisions about social well-being in the hands of local leaders and organizers, where they belong.

It is often quiet work. We're often unseen. It is not easy. But without social prosperity, economic prosperity is temporary, at best.

The Alberta narrative is often about how we shine when crisis hits. The Edmonton tornado, the Slave Lake fire, the southern Alberta floods. FCSS is about crisis, too. We're just at a different point on the timeline. We avert them. The disasters we encounter are smaller and more personal but no less relevant.

FCSS creates connections through the programs and information we provide. We connect isolated seniors to cheerful volunteers bearing hot meals. We connect post-partum moms to another sort of family. We connect desperate people to agencies with expertise, suicidal teens to counsellors, abused partners to programs that give them confidence to leave a relationship and rebuild.

Even more importantly, we're a spark in every community, encouraging people and partners to come together to figure out their needs. When one person feels safe and healthy, they contribute to a stronger family. When families are strong, they're a bigger part of their community. And when communities are healthy, they're motivated to give - of their time, of their compassion - to support individuals.

Think about a pre-school program. It shouldn't just be about space, nap time and sing alongs. When done right, when done the FCSS way, it's the best early childhood education in the world - the best investment we can possibly make. It makes a difference for low-income families, who have more money to spend on fresh food and kids' sports. It inspires neighbours and agency partners to be thoughtful about local needs as they help shape the program together.



Every child who isn't stimulated as a toddler, who doesn't feel safe in grade school, who discovers drugs and alcohol in high school, who battles suicidal thoughts after dropping out, costs Albertans more - economically, socially, culturally.

It is hard to link outcomes and metrics and specific cost-savings to a single child. But we can measure the impact in other ways.

When Albertans are connected to one another - a new immigrant family to the people next door, teens to mentors, seniors to children, volunteers to volunteers, the hungry to those with the means to share, when kids have places to play, to love and to learn - this is impact. It's different in every village, town, city and neighbourhood in Alberta but we're united by a single goal. This is the business of FCSS.

We like to think of ourselves as builders. We build Albertans.