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Apply now! Scan the QR code to get started today.



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Message from the CEO

Creating Change, Building Opportunity

HAVE YOU EVER walked away from a conversation thinking, That's not quite what I meant — and then spent the next hour replaying it in your head?

That was me after the City of Edmonton's first Affordable Housing Symposium last year.

I was invited to join a panel alongside representatives from different levels of government to discuss housing challenges in Edmonton as Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) explores how our tools — grants, relationships, partnerships, convening power — can support solutions to our city's needs.

I'll admit, I felt out of place. While ECF is the largest non-governmental funder of Edmonton's charitable sector, we operate at a much smaller scale than government.

Government funding is essential. Many services depend on it. But, after a full day of bold ideas, creative thinking and big conversations about durable solutions, when we turned to funding we went right back to the usual questions: What grants are available, and how do we access them?

It felt like we were back where we started.

Housing is complex and government funding is necessary. But so is health care, education and the arts — all publicly funded, and all facing the same strain. Governments are stretched everywhere. The current model can't carry it all, making it critical to activate philanthropy and private capital alongside public investment.

So where does a community foundation fit?

We're not a developer. We're not a government. We don't financially benefit from projects we support. And that's precisely our value.

As a neutral, community-based partner, ECF can:

- Bring flexible capital to smooth funding gaps
- De-risk early ideas so others can invest
- Convene non-profits, private sector, donors and government
- Blend philanthropy and investment in new ways
- Take patient, long-term approaches
- Pilot alternative models without pressure for short-term financial return
- Focus on long-term community benefit rather than project-by-project gain



Photo supplied

Because we don't profit from the outcome, we can focus on what strengthens the system and benefits Edmonton as a whole.

Increasing access to affordable housing strengthens entire communities, improves family stability, supports healthier and more inclusive neighbourhoods, boosts local economic resilience, and helps create safer, more connected places to live.

Edmonton has the people, the expertise and the will to think differently about this challenge. And sometimes what's needed isn't just more funding, it's a different way of working together. If we can bring the right partners together to unlock new ideas and resources, then even a small player like ECF can help move a big challenge forward.

Tina Thomas
Chief Executive Officer
Edmonton Community Foundation



INDEPENDENCE THROUGH COOKING



- Autistic adults get hands-on experience with the life skills they need to thrive 



By **JUSTIN BELL**
Photos **MAT SIMPSON**

THE SMELL OF boiling potatoes wafts through the air, an important part of *pâté chinois*, a French-Canadian dish similar to shepherd's pie.

Hair nets and aprons are in place for the dozen or so participants as they begin to make banana muffins, multi-tasking while they wait for the potatoes to soften. They are taking part in a new cooking class offered by the Autism Independent Living Association (AiLA), teaching life skills to autistic adults thanks to a \$15,000 Community Grant from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

The association's main focus is on developing intentional, supportive housing for autistic adults. But the organization has identified other supports and services its membership is looking for, often related to skills they need to successfully live on their own.

One of those skills is cooking, helping autistic adults learn to make nutritious meals and develop cooking skills while keeping an eye on their budget. AiLA President Leanne Carr said interest for the classes has been strong.

"Within 24 hours we had almost all of our spaces full," she says. "Even on our social media every time we post about it we've had an increase in the responses, so we're very excited."

Participants make simple recipes, learn how to make vegetarian and gluten-free substitutions as well as ways to save money at the grocery store. Students also learn how to adjust meals to accommodate allergies, preferences and food aversions, as some autistic adults have sensory concerns that can make them sensitive to food textures, sensations and spices.

The students take home the food they cook and the recipes at the end of the day, but the cooking and baking skills are the most important part. Everything from measuring and knife skills to safety tips and how to use a stove and oven is included in the course.

The classes are taught at The Kitchen on the second floor of the Stanley A. Milner Library, a 2,100-square-foot teaching space with state-of-the-art equipment.

Carr says they anticipated using part of the ECF grant to rent space for the classes, either from a commercial kitchen or a community hall. However, ECF was also able to connect them with the Edmonton Public Library (EPL), and they were able to secure the space for free.

"Our role as a community foundation goes beyond simply cutting cheques," says Cassandra Lundell, Manager, Grants at ECF. "Because of our relationships across Edmonton's charitable sector, we're often able to connect organizations in ways that strengthen their work. Bringing AiLA and the EPL together is a great example of how collaboration can stretch resources

further and create better outcomes for the people these programs are meant to serve."

The partnership with EPL also helped open the door to support from the Edmonton Food Bank, which is providing much of the food for the program. This has lowered costs significantly, allowing the initial six classes to expand to eight or more, while also helping cover transportation costs such as parking or taxi fares.

With the EPL space, AiLA would like to turn the classes into an ongoing program.

That permanent basis would mean continuing classes, but also more opportunities for AiLA's clients to connect with one another and share learnings. Carr says she's hoping to start a cooking club or group for autistic adults, allowing them to share tips and tricks and socialize around a shared interest.

As an autism-led organization, AiLA emphasizes listening to the needs and experiences of their members — like AiLA Director at Large, Janae Mercier, who saw the need for the cooking class. She brought the idea to her fellow board members, with the goal of learning some new recipes and becoming more independent.

"For me personally, as a woman with autism, it's important to learn how to cook. I love eating out at restaurants but the food is always better when it's cooked at home," says Mercier. "I would like to learn to be more independent in the area of cooking since my parents are getting older."

Of course, cooking and baking can be good fun, too. The recipes Mercier said she's most looking forward to? Fajitas and pizza. *ecf*





SCHOLASTIC PRIDE

Shane Scott helps open doors for 2SLGBTQIA+ students



Growing up, Shane Scott knew first-hand how isolating it could feel to be a queer youth. Coming out during high school, he faced bullying and homophobia but also found resilience in advocacy, helping establish his school’s first Gay-Straight Alliance and later serving as Vice President Academic of his university’s students’ union. Scholarships and bursaries helped make those opportunities possible, planting the seed for Shane’s own vision: an endowment fund that would give back to the community that shaped him.

“While I faced my share of challenges, I was also fortunate to have people that believed in me and programs to enable my own development. That kind of support changed my life and inspired me to find ways to pay it forward,” he says.

Established at Edmonton Community Foundation, the Shane Scott Pride Fund is dedicated to breaking down barriers for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Today, many queer youth still face disproportionate levels of discrimination, financial hardship and even homelessness. By providing scholarships, Shane’s fund eases the financial burden of post-secondary education while sending a powerful message of affirmation: you belong, your future matters and you are not alone.

“The Pride Fund is about giving back and making sure queer youth have every opportunity to learn and grow. When 2SLGBTQIA+ students are able to better themselves, the world around them becomes better too.”

FUNDING IN FOCUS

Early Childhood Development gets a \$1.85 million boost from Edmonton Community Foundation. These are five of 17 projects that received \$100,000 through the initiative.



Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

Funding will help grow off-site Land-Based Teachings and Oral Storytelling sessions that spark learning and cultural connection for children and youth. It will also support a new staff member to help bring these experiences to life.



Bissell Centre

This project will add a full-time Behavioural Support Worker to Bissell’s child-care program, giving children with high-support needs extra care and attention. Funding also supports program materials and evaluation, while helping families navigate vital supports.



International Child and Family Centre

This project will welcome a Wellness Mentor who helps newcomer families find their way through childcare and community supports. The role also opens doors for future early learning professionals through volunteer and hands-on learning opportunities.



Kids Included

Launch of the Edmonton Early Years Hub, bringing organizations together to better connect and strengthen early childhood supports for children, families and educators. The funding backs project leadership, a new website, coordination and evaluation grounded in quality and inclusion.



Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre

Expanding on the success of Brain Builders, this funding will help families nurture healthy early development. The investment will support staff and the creation of fresh resources and materials, plus the evaluation of the program to ensure it continues to grow and thrive.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Words of gratitude from the organizations you help empower



“Thank you so much for funding our archives! Because you support our ‘Sharing Community Memories’ project, we can continue crucial archival work while we look for sustainable funding for the Spruce Grove Archives.”

Sharon Acheson
Volunteer, Archives Committee with Spruce Grove and District Agricultural Society

“ECF’s generous support brings so much energy and excitement to advance our Reconciliation Through Education program in Treaty 6 Schools. We are incredibly grateful for your partnership and can’t wait to see the positive impact this will create for youth and educators in the community.”

Brooke Macklin
Business Development Coordinator, Impact Society for Children & Families in Turmoil

“Hearing that our grant application was successful was wonderful news! Access to upgraded laptops and AAC devices will have a profound impact on the Autistic individuals and families we support — strengthening communication and creating more accessible experiences across our programs.”

Meghan Phillips
Development Officer, Centre for Autism Services Alberta



LISTEN UP!

What does it mean to carry a refugee story across generations? Join Linda Hoang for this episode exploring the Vietnamese Canadian experience in Edmonton and to reflect on the 50th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon.

Scan to listen to
The Well Endowed Podcast





SOCIAL SEEN

ECF in the community



On February 7, members of Edmonton's Vietnamese community welcomed the Year of the Horse at the Edmonton Viets Association's Tết Lunar New Year celebration. ECF was proud to sponsor this wonderful event.

Members of ECF's Philanthropy and Donor Engagement team joined staff at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for a behind-the-scenes tour — pictured here with the da Vinci surgical robot — highlighting innovations in surgery and the hospital's wide-ranging impact across specialized care.



Christelle Agahozo, Student Awards Associate, and Sherilyn Trompetter, Manager, Equity Advancement, represented ECF at the Black History Month Initiative Fund event on February 2 at City Hall. The event celebrated this year's funding recipients alongside community partners.



Andrew Paul, Murray Billett and Noel Xavier celebrate the 87th screening of ECF's documentary, *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story*, at Coco Cabaret in Puerto Vallarta on February 18.



SMALL STORIES, BIG IMPACT

Allan Undheim, Vice President of Community Impact at ECF, and Elaine Jones, Youth Services Manager at Edmonton Public Library, celebrate the arrival of 5,000 new children's books at the Stanley Milner Library. Funded by a \$100,000 ECF grant, the books will support early literacy for families across Edmonton.

STAY IN THE LOOP

Want more stories and news from Edmonton's charitable sector? Scan to sign up for our monthly newsletter.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Noteworthy dates and deadlines

It's student awards season at ECF! This means tens of thousands of dollars are waiting to help hundreds of future leaders in our community pursue their post-secondary goals. Explore all of our student awards at ecf.ca/student-awards!

May 1

Applications open

Charmaine Letourneau Scholarships

Up to \$7,000 to support post-secondary education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Albertans.

May 15

Applications close

Alexandra M. Munn Scholarships John & Andrea Wallin Awards

Up to \$2,000 for students demonstrating financial need and outstanding talent in classical music performance (vocal and/or instrumental).

Applications close

Hilltop Awards and Bursaries

Up to \$6,000 for students pursuing post-secondary education with a track record of community involvement.

May 31

Applications close

Don and Norine Lowry Awards for Women of Excellence

Up to \$6,000 for women pursuing education in water, power, engineering, health care (MD, Nursing), business (finance, marketing), technology (IT) or safety related fields.

Jun. 1

Applications open

Al Mauer Awards

Up to \$3,000 for permanent public service employees pursuing a program of study leading to a recognized certificate, diploma, undergraduate or graduate degree, or professional designation.

Applications close

Edmonton Refugee and Emerging Communities Awards

Up to \$3,000 for students from emerging communities who are pursuing recognized undergraduate, professional or applied degrees, a diploma, or certificate.

Jun. 30

Applications close

Nancy Fairley Scholarship

Up to \$3,000 for students who are completing their final year of a full International Baccalaureate program to support costs for post-secondary education.



BREATHE EASIER

Joining forces to promote air quality awareness and equity

By **BEN FREELAND** Photos **ERIC BELIVEAU**

MOST OF US only think about the air we breathe in response to a crisis, whether it's wildfire smoke choking the skies or a smog advisory on our phones. But air quality — both indoors and out — are worth thinking about year-round, according to Alberta Lung, an organization that has been at the forefront of improving lung health in Alberta for decades.

“We tend to take air quality for granted, except when the sky is orange,” says Jamie Happy, Health Promotion Coordinator at Alberta Lung. “But our lungs are like sponges. Everything we breathe in has a cumulative impact — not just on our lungs, but our overall health.”

With the support of a \$40,000 grant from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), Alberta Lung is leading a public awareness initiative aimed at empowering Edmontonians, particularly equity-deserving communities, to take action on air quality issues.

“Clean air is fundamental to community well-being,” Melisa Zapisocky, Grants Associate at ECF says. “This initiative is about more than information — it's about equity and empowerment. Alberta Lung is equipping Edmontonians with practical tools to safeguard their health, and that strengthens our entire community. In my household, we've

built a DIY air purifier that we use when it's smoky outside, and it's made a huge difference to our health and quality of life.”

THE INVISIBLE RISK

Radon is a colourless and odourless radioactive gas that can't be detected without a specific test. It is the leading cause of lung cancer in Canadians after cigarette smoking. The gas typically enters homes through cracks in the foundation, especially a concern in winter when people seal up their homes. In Canada, lung cancer is both the leading cause of cancer-related deaths and one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers.

Canada has some of the highest levels of radon and those levels are rising as a result of thawing permafrost, which previously acted as a natural containment layer. Modern building practices also play a role. Unfortunately, Alberta currently lacks a provincial radon mitigation program — a gap Alberta Lung is working to fill through education and accessible testing initiatives.

Thanks to the ECF grant, Alberta Lung has expanded its Radon Kit Lending Program in partnership with the Edmonton Public Library (EPL), making short-term radon testing monitors available for free. This project will also help inform both the organization's education programs and a children's asthma and lung disease education event in spring 2026.

"The demand has been incredible; we've had long waitlists," says Happy of the lending program. "Thanks to ECF's support, we're reducing that wait and reaching more people, including through content translated into multiple languages."

OUTREACH THAT MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

In addition to testing, Alberta Lung is using ECF funding to support educational programming in underserved communities. This includes DIY air purifier workshops that teach people how to make effective home air filters using low-cost materials like a box fan and a high efficiency air filter — an especially useful tool during wildfire season or in homes without HVAC systems.

"We really want people to feel empowered, not overwhelmed," says Happy. "You don't need a high-end HEPA purifier to improve your air. A simple DIY option can work just as well and that's important from a health equity standpoint."

Alberta Lung is also conducting webinars, hosting community events and partnering with rural

municipalities to spread awareness about air quality risks and solutions.

"Pulmonary Fibrosis means wildfire smoke really irritates my nose, throat and lungs," says one program participant. "The DIY air purifier and air quality monitoring education project helps keep me safe indoors and outside."

Says another participant, "I'm a teacher, and the clean air challenge, air quality and DIY purifier guide are an easy way to give my students actionable information."

HEALTH EQUITY AT THE FOREFRONT

ECF aims to strengthen Edmonton's community by encouraging innovation, visionary thinking and leadership. This means identifying trends and priority needs in our city and providing the right resources to the right people, projects and places with a view to empowering Edmontonians.

Alberta Lung's air quality advocacy, as much about equity as it is about public health, clearly fits within ECF's mandate.

"Exposure to poor air quality disproportionately impacts those in lower-income housing, those with pre-existing health conditions and non-English-speaking communities," says Happy. "By funding programs that remove barriers, whether that's cost, access or language, ECF is helping make this work inclusive and effective."

Looking ahead, Alberta Lung hopes to expand its mitigation efforts, including the development of grant programs to assist homeowners who test high for radon but face financial barriers to making necessary repairs.

"This collaboration with ECF truly speaks to a shared commitment to community well-being," says Happy. "Together, we're building healthier environments — one home, one person, one breath at a time." *ecf*

5 ways

TO IMPROVE INDOOR AIR QUALITY

- 1 Test for Radon:** Order a radon test kit at [HomeRadonTest.ca](https://www.HomeRadonTest.ca) or borrow one from your local EPL branch.
- 2 Ventilate While Cleaning or Cooking:** Open windows and use exhaust fans to reduce the buildup of fumes from cleaning supplies or cooking.
- 3 Switch to Low-Toxin Products:** Use unscented, bleach-free and ammonia-free cleaning products whenever possible.
- 4 Use a MERV-13 Filter:** Whether it's a furnace filter or a DIY purifier, a MERV-13 rating ensures better particulate capture without breaking the bank.
- 5 Make a DIY Air Purifier:** All you need is a box fan and a filter. Instructions are available at [ablung.ca](https://www.ablung.ca).

Learn more:

Visit [ablung.ca](https://www.ablung.ca) to access air quality resources, radon testing information, and upcoming workshops.



A LIFE OF SERVICE A LEGACY OF CARE



From small acts of compassion to a lasting endowment in his name, the Rahemtulla family is building a living legacy that reflects the values Rahim shared so freely



Images Supplied

By **ECF STAFF**

RAHIM RAHEMTULLA BELIEVED that giving should be rooted in care for others. “From a young age, he found ways to serve his community — it was instinctive,” his mother, Gulnar, says.

On winter mornings, Rahim could be found shovelling sidewalks. In Grade 7, he launched Snow Angels at Crestwood School, rallying friends to help even more neighbours throughout the winter. They volunteered all season and always refused payment. In recognition of his leadership, from launching Snow Angels to serving as student council president, Crestwood School established the Rahim Rahemtulla Student Council Award.

In Grade 10, Rahim’s friend Amanda Versluys ran for student council at Archbishop MacDonald High School but was not elected. The following year, when she hesitated to run again, Rahim encouraged her to persevere. With his support, she campaigned once more and won. “He had a big heart and genuinely cared about people,” Versluys recalls.

Years later, Versluys’ younger brother, Thomas, who is autistic and non-verbal, was heartbroken when their front porch lion statues were stolen. When Rahim heard, he surprised Thomas with two new replica statues.

He would always keep Subway gift cards on hand, distributing them to those in need.

These moments reflect a pattern that defined Rahim’s life: an instinct to notice others and step in, often without being asked.

Rahim’s commitment to service was deeply rooted in his family’s long tradition of giving. “Giving back is something our families have done for generations,” his father, Aziz, explains. Rahim’s grandparents contributed to their communities by building student housing, schools and sports clubs, as well as supporting social work initiatives.

After Rahim’s passing, the family sought a way to honour those values not just in memory, but through lasting action. To ensure Rahim’s commitment to service would continue in perpetuity, the Rahemtulla family established the Rahim Jivanjee Rahemtulla Endowment Fund at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

“Families often come to us wanting to transform grief into lasting good,” says Matt Mandrusiak, Manager, Philanthropy at ECF. “The Rahemtulla endowment is a meaningful way to carry Rahim’s legacy forward for generations.”

In its first year, the endowment provided meals to more than 6,000 people across Edmonton.



Families received hot food through Hope Mission, youth enjoyed hot dinners at Tegler House and children were supplied with school lunches through Kids in Action. During Ramadan, it supported IslamicFamily (formerly Islamic Family and Social Services Association) by providing healthy groceries to families observing the holy month. The endowment also supports the Crestwood Student Council, giving students the resources to respond to emerging challenges and continue Rahim’s legacy of service.

One of the earliest initiatives supported by the fund was Rahim’s Khair, a collaboration with the University of Alberta and the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative. The initiative addressed culturally appropriate food security for refugee and immigrant families. Through bulk-purchase co-ops and community kitchen workshops, Rahim’s Khair highlighted dignity, shared humanity and the principles of food justice.

As the fund has grown, the family has become increasingly aware of both the depth of need in Edmonton and the potential for sustained, meaningful impact. They are now seeking a long-term charitable partner to develop a dedicated program in Rahim’s honour, one that reflects the values that guided his life.

“The next chapter is one of stewardship — finding a partner who can carry Rahim’s values forward in a way that is thoughtful, enduring and true to his spirit,” says his sister, Noor.

For the Rahemtulla family, the goal is clear: to ensure that Rahim continues to shape the communities he loved. **Charitable organizations interested in exploring a collaboration are invited to contact ECF at info@ecf.ca.** *ecf*

FORGING AHEAD

How one organization helps women get into the trades

By **ALYSSA NOEL**



Carla Madra

★ **WHEN NATALIE BAK** first moved to Alberta in 2008, she hoped to find a career in the trades, but no one would give her a shot.

“No one wanted to hire a 19-year-old girl with zero experience, especially when the economy had dipped,” she says.

But one day a radio ad caught her ear. A non-profit organization called Women Building Futures (WBF) was accepting applicants for its program that helped women enter the trades.

“I took the day off work from my regular job and went in for an info session. I got to see the scope of what they had to offer,” she remembers.

She decided to try the 17-week program, Journey to Trades, that provided insight into a range of career paths — from electrical to carpentry and plumbing — and came away with a passion for welding.

Now, 18 years later, she’s a Red Seal welder.

“I look back at all the adventures, all the experiences that I had, all the different places that I’ve been — I’ve gotten to travel all over Western Canada, welding,” she says. “I’ve gotten to go up in the Northwest Territories, up in the tundra, at a diamond mine. It’s been amazing.”

The program Bak attended is just one of many ways WBF helps women build their careers.

“We help women transition to careers in the trades and transportation,” says WBF CEO Carla Madra. “We work with the women who are coming in from the application stage, ensuring that they have the wraparound supports that they need to get through programs — so everything from child-care plans, transportation plans, sustainable living arrangements. And then we also have a food pantry to support women who are challenged from a food security perspective.”

Since 1998, more than 3,000 women have participated in its programs. Many of them have gone on to have viable careers in the trades, benefitting both themselves and their families.

“One of our graduates was talking about the fact that she was actually able to take her children on vacation,” Madra says. “It’s the start of their path

“I’ve gotten to go up in the Northwest Territories, up in the tundra, at a diamond mine. It’s been amazing.”

— Natalie Bak

to greater security and a greater ability to provide for your family and contribute to your community.”

In Alberta’s construction industry, women only account for about five per cent of tradespeople. Considering an estimated 40 per cent of tradespeople will need to be replaced across North America in the next decade, opportunities abound.

One of the ways WBF funds programming is through its endowment at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF). The JudyLynn Archer Fund was established by WBF’s founding CEO and president, and covers tuition and housing costs for women in the program. In 2017, Archer donated \$100,000 to the fund, along with matching donations from two oil companies, North West Refining and Canadian Natural Resources Limited, for a total \$300,000 to kick it off. These initial gifts were invested and every year a portion of the value of the fund is provided to WBF as a grant, while the balance of the fund continues to grow in perpetuity.

“Endowments create lasting, dependable support that organizations can count on year after year,” says Matt Mandrusiak, Manager, Philanthropy at ECF. “By building funds like the JudyLynn Archer Fund, Women Building Futures can move beyond the uncertainty of short-term granting cycles and plan for the long term — ensuring women have opportunities not just today, but for generations to come.”

When the fund launched, Archer said it was in memory of her great-aunt. “Throughout my years at Women Building Futures, I witnessed miracles that women achieved when they set their minds to it. This endowment fund is my way of honouring my great-aunt by paying it forward,” she said at the time.

Over the years, funding from ECF has been instrumental to WBF’s work.

“We’re very grateful for the ECF,” Madra says. “They bring a lot of value to our community and we’re happy to be a recipient of their good work.”

Even after graduation, WBF continues offering support to graduates. For her part, Bak was able to receive funding for additional training programs, like earning a rope access ticket, a requirement for conducting work while suspended by ropes.

“I’ve also been given opportunities to go be part of really cool events and panels,” Bak adds. “I get to connect with people and it just broadens my network.” *ecf*

Photos supplied



Natalie Bak



Improving the Odds

A new documentary makes the case for more diversity on the stem cell registry

By **RENATO PAGNANI**
Photos **COOPER & O'HARA**

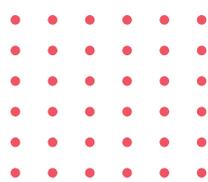
Sandro Silva remembers the yellow envelope. It arrived at his home in late 2022, a few weeks after he received a phone call asking him to donate stem cells to a two-year-old boy named Ezra Marfo, who was suffering from an aggressive form of acute myeloid leukemia. Silva, a filmmaker and a new father himself, couldn't donate because he was over the age of 35, the limit for donors in Canada. The letter brought tragic news; it announced that Ezra was gone. It also included a phone number for Ezra's father, Jacob.

"I just burst into tears," Silva recalls. "I was looking at my own

boy, and I felt so sad. I knew I had to do something."

That something eventually became *The Perfect Match*, a documentary produced by Dona Ana Films, which he co-founded with his partner, Sheena Rossiter. Slated for release this spring, it was created with the intention of being the visual engine for the Ezra Marfo Cancer Foundation (EMCF), an Edmonton-born organization that is quite literally trying to rewrite the genetic odds for Black Canadians battling leukemia and other blood disease disorders including sickle cell disease.

To understand why Ezra spent 475 days in the hospital before



losing his battle, you must understand the math of survival. Stem cell matches rely heavily on genetic ancestry. Donors and patients need to share specific human leukocyte antigens (HLA) for a transplant to work, so patients are likely to share the same ethnic background as their potential donors. While a Caucasian patient has a roughly 80 to 90 per cent chance of finding a match on the registry, a Black patient's chances are significantly lower because of a massive representation gap — African, Caribbean and Black

registrants make up just two per cent of the stem cell registry.

“I am a Black person from West Africa,” explains Jacob Marfo, Ezra’s father and founder of the EMCF. “I will never be a match for a Caucasian person. If we don’t have diversity on the registry, people are left waiting for matches that don’t exist.”

When Ezra was diagnosed with leukemia, Jacob criss-crossed Canada, from Calgary to Ottawa, desperately searching for a “10 out of 10” match. It never came. Jacob eventually donated his own stem cells — a “7 out

of 10” match — but without a perfect genetic twin, the graft-versus-host complications were too much for Ezra’s small body.

A heavy story, but Silva wasn’t a stranger to those. They had already established a creative connection with the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) as editors for 2024’s *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story*, a documentary that explores the landmark case of a gay Alberta instructor whose firing led the Supreme Court to affirm sexual orientation as a protected ground in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But *The Perfect Match* was different.

Before moving to Canada, he practiced law in Brazil. Silva’s legal background helped him navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth of Health Canada and Canadian Blood Services, but the filmmaking required something deeper: empathy. “Documentaries are about trust,” Silva says. “I told Jacob, ‘I don’t have resources, but I have a passion. Let’s do this together.’”

The film doesn’t shy away from the pain. It captures the time Ezra spent at the Stollery Children’s Hospital and the Alberta Children’s Hospital in Calgary, highlighting moments where he was administered adult-strength chemo and required five intravenous lines. But it also emphasizes his resilience, showing how even though he was in extreme pain he would still run around his crib — after he had to relearn how to walk — laughing and singing his favourite song, “Jesus Loves Me.”

While the film tells the story of what was lost, the EMCF is focused on what can be saved. This is where ECF’s support has been transformative.

“A diverse stem cell registry saves lives, and reaching under-represented donors requires trust and real community connection,” says Christelle Agahozo, Student Awards Associate at ECF. “As a mother of a Black child, I’m deeply grateful for the EMCF’s work to expand access and equity, giving more children a real chance at healing and hope.” ▶





In 2024, EMCF received a \$12,500 BIPOC Grant to launch *Empowering Black Futures*, a mentorship initiative with the University of Alberta Black Students' Association. The goal is to build a new generation of leaders who understand that health-care advocacy is a form of community service.

But perhaps the most visible shift in EMCF's strategy is Hoops2Save. Supported by a \$42,000 ECF Community Grant in 2025, the program uses basketball as a "joyful" gateway to health education.

"We realized we need to meet people where they are," explains Jacob. "In the gym, having fun, we can talk about the holistic improvement of our community." On the court, a simple cheek swab — which takes only 20-30 seconds — feels more like teamwork than a medical procedure.

It's a two-pronged battle: helping increase the number of Black donors on the stem cell registry, and the systemic changes that also need to be made to health-care policy. Jacob has taken his fight to Parliament Hill, working with senators to remove discriminatory barriers that prevent Black Canadians from donating blood due to outdated

policies regarding malaria.

"Canadian Blood Services needs the Black community, and the Black community needs them to be the bank of stem cells for us," Jacob says. "We need to build that trust."

As the documentary prepares for its spring release, both Jacob and Silva see it as a turning point. For Silva, the project aims to change his community as much as his portfolio. For Jacob, success isn't measured in film festival awards, but in the names added to the registry.

"Success means everyone who sees this documentary decides to help," Jacob says. "Whether they scan a QR code or volunteer, they are becoming an 'Ezra' — a helper."

In Edmonton, a city with a strong ecosystem of support, the story of a two-year-old boy has grown into a national conversation about equity and hope. Ezra Frimpong Marfo only lived for two years, but through a filmmaker's lens and a father's foundation, he's still helping others. *ecf*

"A diverse stem cell registry saves lives, and reaching underrepresented donors requires trust and real community connection."

— Christelle Agahozo

***The Perfect Match* will premiere at Northwest Fest on April 11, 2026 at the Metro Cinema in the Garneau Theatre. Visit northwestfest.ca for tickets and details.**

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By ANDREW PAUL

Birds of a Feather



The Beaverhill Bird Observatory and
Edmonton Community Foundation flock
together to safeguard Alberta's birds for
generations to come



Photo COOPER & O'HARA

Assistant biologist
John Van Arragon

PICTURE A CRISP fall evening east of Edmonton. The leaves have mostly dropped, and at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO), the last few nets of the season are being set.

Assistant Biologist John Van Arragon moves quietly through the dimming light, checking the fine nylon mesh strung between two poles. The net is nearly invisible unless you're looking for it. "People walk into them all the time," he says with a grin.

But people aren't what Van Arragon and his team hope to catch. Tonight, they're waiting for one last visitor before the season ends: a northern saw-whet owl. These tiny creatures are about the size of a pop can and are Canada's most abundant owl.

To improve their chances of catching one, the team plays a recording of a female call through a small speaker. When a saw-whet flutters into the net, the process is careful and quick. The owl is gently untangled, placed in a cloth bag and carried back to the research station to be fitted with a tiny aluminum band engraved with a unique ID number that will reveal its journey if ever recaptured, whether here or thousands of kilometres away.

Over time, those simple bands tell a much larger story. "Migratory birds are like the canaries in the coal mine," Van Arragon says. "They tell us what's happening in our environment. Climate change, habitat loss, pollution. Birds feel those impacts first."

For more than 40 years, the BBO has been documenting those changes. Located near Tofield in the Beaverhill Natural Area, the non-profit has recorded more than 270 bird species that move through the region's wetlands and forests. It's one of Canada's longest-running migration monitoring stations, and one of the few that invites the public to witness the science up close.

That spirit of openness is what motivated Geoff Holroyd, BBO's Board Chair, to co-initiate the organization in 1984. "Our mantra is experience, awareness, conservation," he says. "We want people to see the science in action, to hold a bird in their hands and to understand why these ecosystems matter."

Beyond its research, BBO runs BirdSmart, which is one of Alberta's most extensive environmental education programs. Each winter their team of ▶



Photo COOPER & O'HARA



“They tell us what’s happening in our environment. Climate change, habitat loss, pollution. Birds feel those impacts first.”

— John Van Arragon

biologists visits schools across the province with live owls and hawks that can’t be released back into the wild. “Last year we gave nearly 350 presentations,” Holroyd says. “That’s more than 10,000 students learning about birds, habitat and conservation and maybe seeing an owl or hawk up close for the first time in their lives.”

But keeping programs like BirdSmart running year-round takes more than passion. It takes stability. That’s where Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) comes in.

The biggest challenge for the BBO is operational funding, explains Holroyd. Project grants are helpful, but few funders cover core staff and administration who keep the lights on and the science moving.

Through ECF’s Environmental Operating Grants, BBO is in its second of three years of receiving sustained support to fund key staff positions, like its head biologist. The organization also participates in ECF’s Endowment Matching Program for Environmental Organizations (EMPEO), which matches contributions to its family of five endowment funds. “We started with a small investment,” Holroyd says. “Now, thanks to EMPEO, we’ve built a serious endowment that will support the observatory in perpetuity.”

ECF has helped BBO grow in practical ways — from funding accessibility upgrades like a wheelchair-friendly washroom to supporting educational programming and outreach.

“Our role is to be a reliable partner for organizations with a vision for the long term,” says Noel Xavier, ECF’s VP, Philanthropy and Donor Engagement. “Through flexible

grants and endowment development tools, we help charities strengthen their financial infrastructure so they can focus on their mission, not just annual budgets.”

As the night deepens, the team checks another net. The stars are out now and a soft rustle in the darkness signals that an owl has been caught. It’s banded, weighed, measured and released to continue its long migration.

From the second floor of the banding station, Van Arragon reflects on how people can help birds closer to home. “One of the best things is to prevent window strikes,” he says. “Adding visible markings to your windows can save lives. And keep your cats indoors. Outdoor cats are the number one cause of bird deaths in Canada.”

He also urges people to think about habitat conservation, whether through advocacy or land stewardship. “It’s all connected,” he says. “Every action we take helps.”

For Holroyd, the science is essential but connection is what sustains conservation. “The data we collect is important,” he says. “But what really makes a difference is getting people to care.” *ecf*



Image Supplied

Built to Give

At Mosaic, giving back is built into the blueprint — a culture where franchisees shape its charitable impact

By CAITLIN HART Photos BLUEFISH STUDIOS

In 1992, Bill Knight was selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door and attending NAIT in the evenings, living in a small two-bedroom apartment with his wife and young son. But he knew he wanted to build something of his own and help his family flourish.

By the end of 1999, he had founded B&B Demolition. When he sold that company, 17 years later, it was the largest interior demolition business in Western Canada. Not bad for someone who admits he “knew nothing about business” when he founded his first company.

Today, he’s still an entrepreneur. The Mosaic Family of Companies is one of Canada’s fastest-growing home improvement franchising companies and this organization is a family affair.

“I was very fortunate to have the opportunity, from eight years old, to watch what it takes to own and run a business,” says Steven Knight, Bill’s son and business partner. Together with Bill’s wife, Grace Knight, Mosaic has flourished, serving homeowners across Canada through their 54 franchises.

Mosaic is a home-service franchise incubator. Working with homeowners across the country to improve their homes and get their time back, their brands and franchisees assist with everything from cleaning, to painting, to fencing and holiday decorating. The ethos of the company was built around uplifting the community and helping others, right from the beginning. The Knights have long run a Charity Day program through Mosaic, which donates 5 per cent of all sales across all of the company’s franchises on the last Thursday of each month to a charity nominated by staff and franchisees.

“It’s important that companies get involved, but I also believe it’s really important that people within the company get involved,” Bill says. This kind of buy-in from staff and franchisees is central to their giving, involving the whole company in the philanthropic spirit that the Knight family values. ▶

As the program grew, the Knights realized they needed help to manage the growing volume. That's where Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) came in.

ECF helped the Knights establish the Mosaic Home Service Community Fund. It serves as the company's charitable arm, directing those Charity Day funds to the organizations that need them. It's a model that they hope will inspire other businesses.

"When philanthropy is woven into a company's culture, it strengthens teams and deepens community impact," says Matt Mandrusiak, ECF's Manager, Philanthropy. "We handle the structure and administration behind the scenes, making it easy for businesses to involve their staff in giving — and to build an endowment that will support their community for years to come."

ECF helps Mosaic steward these funds, directing grants to 11 different charities each year. The fund has contributed to local, national and international charities, supporting housing, health care and arts organizations, to name a few.

"Philanthropy and charitable giving is cornerstone to not just our business but our family. It's something that we've always firmly believed in," says Steven. "The community gives you the resources that you need to be successful. It's important to us that we repay that whenever we can."

While they started small — the first Charity Day cheque was only \$228 — the company's growth has led to even bigger grants, now in the thousands, sometimes even tens of thousands. To date, they have given close to a quarter of a million dollars through the Charity Day program.

Continuing their commitment to giving back, the Knights also started the Knight Family Fund through ECF.

Through both the endowed and non-endowed funds, the Knight family fosters a philanthropic spirit amongst their staff and the broader community — serving the place they live now and for the future.

"The goal with the endowed fund," explains Bill, "is to take a percentage of what we raise and make sure it continues to grow forever. That's really the legacy piece of Mosaic and the legacy of the Knight family that we just love to see continue to grow."

Bill notes that setting up the endowment was easier than he had assumed.

"It was simple, it was cost effective and it's something we speak about today with pride," Steven adds. "It's really not as hard as you think it might be. And the only thing that I would do differently is start earlier." *ecf*





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Building more than homes

How Edmonton Community Foundation and the Social Enterprise Fund are mobilizing capital and partnerships to accelerate affordable housing in Edmonton

By **ECF STAFF**

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS one of Edmonton's most urgent and complex challenges.

According to the City of Edmonton's 2023-2026 Affordable Housing Strategy, over 46,155 households, or nearly one in eight, are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. Behind that number are families struggling to make ends meet: people choosing between rent and groceries, and children growing up in overcrowded spaces.

Housing is more than shelter. It is the foundation for stability, opportunity and belonging. Without it, outcomes in health, education and employment are compromised. While governments at every level are investing in solutions, the scale of the need calls for coordinated, cross-sector action and new tools to accelerate progress.

That is where Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) Affordable Housing Initiatives come in. By aligning grants with social financing through the Social Enterprise Fund (SEF), supporting coordinated fundraising and land activation through the Edmonton Community Development Company (ECDC), ECF is building a comprehensive approach to increase supply and strengthen the affordable housing sector.

Between 2026 and 2028, the plan aims to support affordable housing for 5,000 Edmontonians.

But how will this work in practice, and what role will SEF play in helping move the dial? We sat down with Ryan Young, Executive Director of SEF and ECDC, to learn more. >



Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF): How and why did SEF identify affordable housing as a priority?

Ryan Young (RY): Affordable housing sits at the intersection of so many social issues. When people don't have stable housing, everything else becomes harder — employment, education, health. We saw a clear gap where social financing could help unlock stalled projects. This is an area where thoughtful, strategic capital can fill critical gaps and help viable projects move forward. It's not just about waiting for change but rather structuring the right financing at the right time to shift trajectories for families and for the city.

ECF: What role will SEF play in the affordable housing space?

RY: We see two roles. First, we're a convener, bringing together sector leaders, developers, funders and governments to align efforts. Second, we're a financier. We'll deploy capital strategically at critical stages to help viable projects move forward.

ECF: What kind of projects will SEF support?

RY: We're focused on three things: Increasing the supply of affordable housing, unlocking new opportunities for private and philanthropic involvement, and implementing new financing models. This will allow us to focus on two pressure points — pre-development and construction. Early-stage funding for things like feasibility work, design, permitting and approvals can be hard to secure, even for strong projects. That's where we can step in by providing thoughtful, gap-filling capital that helps projects move forward. We're also interested in innovative partnerships that leverage private capital and the knowledge of experienced builders, developers and community partners to strengthen deals and increase the number of homes that get delivered.



Ryan Young

ECF: How are you defining affordable housing?

RY: For us, it means permanent, long-term housing — not temporary or transitional units. We're focused on developments that will remain affordable and accessible for the people and families who need them most.

ECF: What does success look like?

RY: Success is more units built, acquired or retained, with more capital flowing into the sector. But ultimately, it's about people and families who have a safe, stable place to call home. It is our goal to house 5,000 people over the next few years.

ECF: What are the next steps?

RY: We have already been investing in affordable housing for some time and continue to approve opportunities as they arise. We are working with many partners in the non-profit sector, developers, builders and different levels of government to create an even bigger impact. It's an exciting step forward in mobilizing capital and partnerships to accelerate affordable housing in Edmonton. And there will be more to come. *ecf*



Together, we grow a greener future.

ECF is proud to partner with environmental organizations committed to protecting our planet.

Through the Endowment Matching Program for Environmental Organizations (EMPEO), eligible charities can grow their impact and create lasting change.

Deadline to
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donations is
Dec 15, 2026.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Contribute up to \$50,000 per year to a new or existing endowment fund at ECF.
- ECF will match eligible contributions up to 1-to-1 for 2026, with pro rata matching if contributions exceed available funds.
- Matched funds are credited to a permanent EMPEO endowment fund for your organization, supporting environmental work in Edmonton and northern Alberta.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- Your organization's primary mandate must focus on environmental work, including renewable energy, conservation, climate change, environmental education and more.
- You must be a registered charity and have received an ECF discretionary grant since 2020.
- The net income from the fund must support environmental initiatives in Edmonton and northern Alberta.



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