

Regina's Non-Profit Voices: *Addressing Funding Gaps*

Findings from the September 17, 2024 Conversation

The Purpose of this Conversation:

On September 17, 2024, the Community Foundation hosted a facilitated conversation among non-profit representatives in Regina and surrounding area that were identified for doing community work related to the focus areas identified in the **'Growing Futures: Vital Signs Report 2023.'** Participants were asked to identify common challenges and solutions, together. Below are details regarding the **'Growing Futures: Vital Signs Report 2023'** and who was included in the conversation that led to the findings.

Background to the Growing Futures: Vital Signs 2023 Focus Areas:

The **'Growing Futures: Vital Signs Report 2023'** was published by the Community Foundation and focuses on a Saskatchewan region recovering from a global pandemic and adapting to an increased cost of living. The report investigates the ways these challenges are impacting our community.

This gives readers a snapshot of data about south Saskatchewan and its most pressing needs and challenges. It is a starting point to act and find solutions to the identified challenges. The following focus areas were identified in the report:

- Supporting Safe and Affordable Housing
- Increasing Food Security
- Improving Mental Health Services for Substance Use and Suicide Prevention
- Sustaining Community Infrastructure
- Community Funding Gaps

Read the full **'Growing Futures: Vital Signs Report 2023'** at www.GrowingFuturesReport.ca

Who was Included in the Conversation:

The following organizations provided input through a survey ahead of the meeting and/or were represented in-person at the September 17, 2024 facilitated conversation.

- AIDS Program South Saskatchewan
- Astonished!
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- The Caring Place
- Carmichael Outreach
- The Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan
- Family Service Regina
- John Howard Society of Saskatchewan
- Luther College Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Studies Network
- North Central Family Centre
- OSI-CAN (Operational Stress Injury Canada)
- Phoenix Residential Society
- Rainbow Youth Centre
- REACH Regina
- REALM
- Regina Food Bank
- Regina Food for Learning
- Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP)
- Regina Transition House
- Regina Work Prep Centre
- South Saskatchewan Community Foundation
- Street Culture Project
- Caring Hearts (*Survey Only)
- The Circle Project (*Survey Only)
- InfiNATE Initiatives (*Survey Only)
- Regina Street Team (*Survey Only)

25 organizations provided feedback, revealing the following:

Organizations who are addressing Vital Signs focus areas:

- 14 organizations work toward Supporting Safe and Affordable Housing;
- 13 organizations work toward Increasing Food Security;
- 14 organizations work toward Improving Mental Health Services for Substance Use;
- 13 organizations work toward Improving Mental Health Services for Suicide Prevention;
- 9 organizations work toward Sustaining Community Infrastructure
- 25 organizations are experiencing Community Funding Gaps
- 5 organizations do not specifically address the Vital Signs focus areas

23 Organizations collaborate with other organizations to deliver services:

- 17 collaborate consistently
- 3 collaborate three to six times per year
- 2 collaborate once or twice per year
- 2 collaborate infrequently

Issues and challenges that organizations are facing:

Key Takeaway

- **Funding Competition:**
 - o Heightened competition for grants restricts resources for established programs and can create barriers to collaboration.
- **Funding Priority Misalignment:**
 - o Insufficient investment, along with funding requirements that are too restrictive, limit an organization's ability to innovate and expand community services.
- **Staff Retention and Capacity:**
 - o Difficulty in hiring and retaining staff due to inadequate compensation, high workload stress, and program funding that does not cover basic operational costs.

What are community organizations saying?

- **There is a lack of capacity and increased demand for organizations to community services:**
 - o Long waitlists for services
 - o Lack of funding and loss of funding makes it increasingly difficult to keep up with demand
 - o Rising food costs and increased demand
 - o A need to expand harm reduction services
 - o Youth need more access to mental health and suicide prevention supports

- Timely housing and mental health support for people would help change the landscape of the Vital Signs focus areas
- **Government income supports are misaligned with community needs:**
 - Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS) is not providing enough income for individuals
 - A clear disconnect between government funding and the actual circumstances encountered on the ground
 - Suicide and overdose losses are high, yet no provincial funding exists to support counselling and groups
 - The gap between policy and practice is widening. More support and understanding is needed from our government partners
- **Organizations are having difficulties attracting and retaining staff, paying staff adequately, and reducing work environment stressors:**
 - The job market is limited, and financial strain is affecting our ability to deliver services
 - Staff are not able to meet their basic needs
 - Increased stressors are taking a toll on staff
- **Safe and affordable housing is unattainable for those in need:**
 - Lack of affordable, safe, and supportive housing for women
 - Safe and affordable long-term housing, especially for women experiencing interpersonal violence
- **Underrepresented groups must not be forgotten about when addressing pressing community needs:**
 - Individuals with sight loss are being overlooked (isolation, poverty for people with sight loss, education, and unemployment)
 - A need to include vulnerable and underrepresented groups
- **While many organizations do collaborate, efforts to collaborate can be strengthened:**
 - Therapy in community VS therapy in a clinic – better collaboration
 - There is a need for collaboration and communication amongst the non-profit sector

New and innovative solutions that non-profit organizations are working towards:

Key Takeaway

- There are many new and expanding programs to address community needs and opportunities for partnership and collaboration do exist. However, the capacity needed to collaborate, deliver service, and invest in operational needs are lacking due to limited funding and resources.

What are community organizations saying?

- **There are many new and expanding programs to address needs:**
 - o New programs to address harm reduction and food insecurity
 - o Expanding to provide the first third stage shelter in Saskatchewan
 - o Choice model food distribution
 - o New models for supported housing, mental health support, and food security – but funding is needed
 - o Recently opened a new supporting housing program that holds 17 spaces with intent to expand in the future
 - o Developing a new approach to social work and outreach work on the streets of Regina
 - o Healing with Horses Reset Program – equine therapy for veterans
 - o A web-based app to report found needles and safely remove them while identifying hot spots for where support is needed
- **Opportunities for partnership and collaboration exist:**
 - o Creating unique volunteer support networks to help capacity and flexibility to address needs
 - o Suicide, grief, and trauma support partnership with White Raven Healing Lodge
 - o Community therapy initiative to provide therapy to Regina’s inner-city communities
 - o Community Connect Regina, Rapid Access Counselling (for adults, children, youth, suicide prevention, and domestic violence support)
 - o Partnering with other organizations to provide transitional housing for women being reintegrated into the community
- **Capacity to deliver services and investment in infrastructure is needed:**
 - o Actively working on new ideas for future long-term sustainable funding – investing in new infrastructure
 - o There’s a need to address our limited storage capacity
 - o Pursuing additional adult housing opportunities to support those living with homelessness and involved with the justice system

Funding and resource gaps that limit an organization’s ability to innovate.

Key Takeaway

- Non-profits face challenges providing crucial services because they do not have enough long-term, stable, operational funding. Many organizations struggle to pay for basic costs including staff and overhead because most money they receive is restricted to specific projects, not for their overall needs. As the demand for services grows, they need more flexible and long-term funding options to succeed.

What are community organizations saying?

- **More long-term operational funding is needed for stability and to increase meaningful progress towards the community's needs. Overhead costs and staff costs are crucial to success:**
 - o We need operational funds for staffing to increase our capacity to offer crucial wrap around supports
 - o There are funding gaps for everything we would like to do. Food security greatly impacts the visitors to our needle exchange
 - o There are often gaps finding funding for operations, including salaries and overhead costs
 - o There is no funding available and no capacity to fund the funding and develop the resources
 - o Limited resources in terms of workforce and funding
 - o A lot of funding is project based – infrastructure and administrative costs are consistently underfunded
 - o Adequate funding for administrative and operational expenses are often overlooked in grants, despite being critical costs for success
 - o Many grants are project-specific and don't cover the full spectrum of operational needs, limiting innovation and expansion
 - o We need more funding to expand and operate 24 hours a day. Transportation, salary, and overhead funding is also needed
 - o We have no core funding and rely on grants and donations to operate, yet demand for service is rapidly increasing
 - o We are seeking a larger facility to accommodate growing demand but are facing challenges due to a lack of consistent funding. A significant number of potential funders prioritize food purchases with minimal administrative expenses
 - o We consistently face challenges in securing funding for essential operational costs, including staff and rent
 - o Need more funding to hire and retain quality employees and maintain long-term relationships
 - o The ability to pay program staff needed to help people create and sustain their personal support networks
 - o All funding resources are a challenge. Long-term change requires long-term funding, sustainable staffing, collaborating, and really listening to staff and participants
- **Grant competition is rising, and it is increasingly more difficult to be approved for grant funding:**
 - o We are desperately applying to various grants but are not gaining much traction
 - o Insufficient grant funding – the competition for grants is intense
- **Funding opportunities are often not aligned with non-profit identified needs:**
 - o Challenges in sustaining long-term projects – short-term funding cycles make it difficult to plan and execute effectively
 - o Government funding often prioritizes new and innovative ideas which can make it harder for established programs support

- Many grants are niche – because our agency serves a broad and diverse population, it can be difficult to find grant alignment
- Often, funders with large pots of money want programs to fit their already laid out frameworks – this encourages organizations to drift from their mission to please funder requests and expectations
- **Demand for services is increasing at a fast pace:**
 - Demand is increasing specifically for grief and trauma related needs
 - We need additional funds to be able to start new projects and meet needs
 - With an increase in housing, mental health, and food security, other priorities are being missed – including people with disabilities
 - People are strapped for time and human resources, which does not leave capacity for bigger picture collaborations
- **High cost of living with lack of access to adequate government support makes it difficult to support families and individuals in need:**
 - Lack of access to harm reduction and overdose prevention, lack of access to mental health and addictions care, and lack of income. Low rates that individuals receive from SIS/SAID don't cover the cost of affordable housing
 - Ministry of Social Services rates for those living on social assistance were too low before inflation began several years ago, now people are struggling more and falling into poverty unable to leave the cycle. Rates need to be adjusted higher
 - We have called numerous government bodies trying to find out how to access mental health funding with no answers

How funders and supporters can make a bigger impact.

Key Takeaway

- **Provide Unrestricted Operational Funding:**
 - Cover necessary administrative and staffing costs in addition to program funding. This core funding for an organization is essential to the sustainability, efficiency, and success of non-profits.
- **Understand the True Costs of Delivering Services:**
 - The true costs of delivering programs and services include operations such as staffing, facilities, equipment, and administrative needs. Reach out to an organization to understand the full scope of their needs.
- **Collaborate with Non-Profits and Amongst Funders:**
 - Get input from non-profits when creating funding opportunities to make sure funder requests align with community need. Funders can also collaborate together to pool funds and make larger impacts.

What are community organizations saying?

- **Flexible unrestricted operational funding is crucial to community impact:**
 - o Fund true costs
 - o Let the organization decide where and what we need to do with the money for our programs
 - o It shouldn't be overhead costs VS direct client supports. Why can't it be both?
 - o Programs don't run themselves
 - o Unrestricted funds, the ability to put the money where we need, even if it is on less glamorous things
 - o Administrative expenses are a real thing
 - o Operational funding support is crucial
 - o Reliable unrestricted funding is important. Trust us to deliver
 - o Flexible funding allows the experts to deliver meaningful programming
 - o The need is high and growing. Funders must understand that funding needs to support administration and pay for food. Administrative costs are necessary to run programs
 - o Take a business-minded approach when thinking about how this sector needs to function. We need revenue we can rely on and plan with.
 - o Staff run the programs and are necessary to ensure that programs continue.
 - o Administration costs are important to include in funding and are necessary to run programs
 - o Address and understand the continuum of care – where each organization sits on the continuum
- **Take the time to understand non-profit community needs and align funder requests closer to community needs:**
 - o People think they know about our organization, but I would like to speak one-on-one about our mission to develop a better understanding
 - o Develop a fund to support the mental health of front-line service providers
 - o Understand community requirements and provide related funding that includes all other expenses (admin, etc.)
 - o Spend a day with our finance team and review our true operational needs and gaps
 - o Expand your lens. The community is large and diverse. New problems will arise – and circle back – if we are only funding select community issues
 - o Be open to funding projects for demographics that are niche and important, but less popular in grant applications, such as the disability sector, mood disorder outpatients, etc.
 - o Huge reporting requirements take us away from our goals
- **Non-profit staff need to be paid adequately to retain staff and deliver effective services:**
 - o In order to really help the helpers, we need to be able to pay and support them better than we are. We need your help!
 - o The need for staff retention is real too. Self-care sometimes looks like paying staff what they are worth
 - o Fund us appropriately so we can provide services and pay our staff equitably

What common challenges are we facing?

- **Sustainable and collaborative funding opportunities:**
 - o Sustainable funding
 - o Funding competition hurts collaboration
 - o Funding can be politically motivated and does not necessarily reach where non-profit organizations know it is needed most
 - o Funding opportunities often chase current trends or popular causes – constant shifts to where funding is distributed and can leave proven effective core programs behind
 - o Infrastructure needs are under-funded
 - o Funding shortage
 - o Lack of unrestricted funds
 - o Inconsistent funding (unreliable funding that fluctuates year after year – especially competitive grants)
- **Sustainable staffing and administrative needs:**
 - o Administration capacity for grants
 - o Staff retention is difficult
 - o Work-life balance for staff is important to retain staff
 - o Limited access to resources
- **Challenges are intersecting and complex, and more coordination is needed to address them:**
 - o Lack of co-ordination between organization
 - o We all address intersecting challenges
 - o High-stakes and crisis situations without proper supports
 - o Service gaps exist for crisis support
 - o Inequities and complexities (complex challenges take complex solutions)
 - o Solutions need to look at the continuum of care

How collective resources and collaboration can lead to bigger impact.

Key Takeaway

- **Pooling Resources for Collective Impact:**
 - o Non-profits can benefit from shared resources, training, skill development, professional services, outcome reporting, and program costs. A shared workspace could also increase capacity, efficiencies, and reduce operational costs.
- **Community Foundation Acting as a Connector:**
 - o The Community Foundation can act as an ongoing connector by facilitating partnerships, bringing non-profit organizations together for collaborative opportunities, and guide collaborative resources and funding.

- **Collective Advocacy:**
 - o Non-profits can work together to advocate for broader systemic changes, equitable funding practices, and policies. The Community Foundation can coordinate and amplify non-profit sector voices in a non-partisan manner.

What are community organizations saying?

- **Finding opportunities for organizations to collaborate and share costs, resources, information, and training:**
 - o Examples: Staff, training, grant writing, marketing, lawyer costs, professional services
 - o Example: Sharing casual staff pools, pooling training together, joint skill development
 - o Pooling programs and costs to address existing service gaps
 - o Professional on-call support for all organizations to pay for together to respond to crisis
 - o Shared Equipment Repository (lending out equipment) - could be managed by Luther College
 - o Collective impact (tracking impact collectively)
 - o Inter-agency work
 - o Resource sharing
 - o Information sharing
 - o Physical proximity (shared workspaces or near workspaces)
 - o Advocacy - We need to lobby as a group
 - o Reduce duplication of tasks and services where possible
 - o For data collection purposes
 - o Joint efforts to use AI to help with service navigation
- **More transparency and collaboration between funders and non-profit organizations:**
 - o Collaboration with those who invest in the services (funder/gov't collaboration with funding goals/requirements)
 - o Transparency from all parties (example: gov't funding often feels like it is done in silos then is always a surprise to the service providers – surprising decisions, anticipation, tough to plan for, creates misalignment of goals, etc.)
 - o Broken systems, red tape and barriers to care
 - o Policies are handcuffing people they are supposed to be for
 - o Siloed services
 - o Private businesses collaborating amongst each other – collective impact
 - o More creative control of opportunities in the hands of non-profits
- **Funders can find innovative ways to approach community support and investment to help non-profits increase community impact:**
 - o Lack of unrestricted funds
 - o Collaboration should be funded
 - o Equity loans to non-profit organizations
 - o Wrap Around Funding (operations, capital, and program funding)
 - o Land Trust – help organizations become self-sustainable through this
 - o More flexibility and less barriers for social enterprises

What is needed to solve or support these collaborations and solutions? (From funders, stakeholders, and the Community Foundation.)

- Help from the Community Foundation
- We need an ongoing connector to help community-based organizations use our resources more efficiently by working together
- Find ways to support organizations with unrestricted funding
- Facilitate connections
- Be a connector
- Focused facilitated Executive Director meetings – scheduled meetings with a tangible goal
- Unrestricted funds

How the Community Foundation can act and respond.

The Community Foundation can coordinate and facilitate leadership meetings for specific action items, collaborations, and focus areas:

- Example: coordinate and lead food security meetings with organizations with applicable organizations
- The Community Foundation can gather data from grant applications and proposals, then invite those doing work in specific areas to discover potential role in collaboration
 - o Help eliminate duplication of services where it is not needed
 - o More opportunities for organizations to foster collaborative impact and outcomes

The Community Foundation to establish and/or identify partners for aggregated funds, or pooled funds, for larger collaborative impact through donor collaboration:

- Work with businesses to pool funds and efforts together towards aligned causes
- Work with current Community Foundation fundholders to potentially pool funds, bringing separate efforts together towards aligned causes

Link and connect organizations to common causes during the grant application intake process:

- Identify organizations who are doing new or existing programs and initiatives
- If organizations are applying for a new program, ask them to identify why they are starting the program
- Connect new applicants to similar organizations, or coordinated Community Foundation meetings, to explore their roles with other organizations who are working towards aligned goals and initiatives

The Community Foundation can educate and advocate with funders and charities:

- Example: Screening the 'Uncharitable' movie to charities and the broader public can help shift perceptions of operational costs and how to support the charitable sector, increase support for trust-based giving, and unrestricted funding

- Funder and business education and advocacy
- Funder and business collaboration efforts
- Resource mapping of the area
- Service pathway mapping
- Gather a collective voice for the charitable sector – be a neutral third party to amplify the voice of the sector
- The Community Foundation can lead a collective voice for government relations and lobbying
 - o Example: Saskatchewan Income Support VS increased cost of living = a negative service impact - it is very difficult to help those who can't afford basic needs of life
 - o Community Foundation can act as a consultant to lobby and guide from a neutral non-partisan perspective