Kootenai Community Centre Society Quarterly Newsletter

A Message from the Executive Director

A Season of Gratitude, Community and Hope

As we move into the beautiful colours and changing pace of fall, I find myself reflecting on the incredible strength, compassion and generosity that exists within our Creston Valley community.

At the Kootenai Community Centre Society, every season brings new challenges, new opportunities and, most importantly, new reasons to be grateful. Our work is centred on people—children and families, women and children experiencing violence, individuals facing financial hardship, and community members who need a little extra support to find stability and connection. While the needs in our community continue to grow, so does our determination to meet them.

This past year has reminded us that community services are not simply programs or buildings—they are relationships. They are the staff member who takes the time to listen, the volunteer who gives generously, the community partner who opens a door, and the neighbour who recognizes that someone else may be struggling and chooses to help.

We continue to see significant demand for our childcare programs, particularly for before- and after-school care. Families are working hard, children need safe and inclusive places to learn and grow, and access to reliable childcare is essential to the strength of our local community. We remain committed to finding solutions that will allow us to serve more families and reduce the wait for care.

Our work supporting women and children affected by violence also remains critically important. In a rural community, accessing services can come with unique barriers—transportation, isolation, financial limitations, privacy concerns and limited local resources. Our team continues to provide compassionate, practical and confidential support to those navigating some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

We are also continuing our efforts to address poverty and the many challenges that accompany financial insecurity. Sometimes, a relatively small intervention—a connection to a benefit, assistance navigating a system, or simply having someone available to listen—can make an enormous difference in someone's ability to move forward.

We are also excited to share an important new development for Kootenai Community Centre Society. KCCS has been approved as a designated employer under the West Kootenai Rural Community Immigration Pilot (RCIP). This is an exciting opportunity for our organization and our community. As a designated employer, KCCS will be able to participate in an initiative designed to help rural communities attract and retain skilled workers, strengthening our local workforce and supporting the long-term sustainability of essential community services.

For an organization like ours, where dedicated and qualified staff are at the heart of everything we do, this designation is particularly meaningful. It provides another avenue to help build a strong, diverse and committed workforce while contributing to the continued growth and vitality of the Creston Valley. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate and look forward to seeing how this initiative can benefit both KCCS and our broader community.

None of this work happens in isolation.

I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to our dedicated staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, funders, donors, community partners and supporters. Your belief in our organization allows us to continue responding to needs as they emerge and, when possible, to look ahead and work toward longer-term solutions.

As an organization, we know that we cannot solve every challenge facing our community. But we can continue to show up. We can listen. We can advocate. We can collaborate. And we can keep working toward a community where every person has the opportunity to feel safe, supported and connected.

Fall is a season of transition, and perhaps that makes it a fitting time to look both backward and forward—to appreciate how far we have come while recognizing the work that remains ahead.

Thank you for continuing to stand alongside the Kootenai Community Centre Society and, more importantly, alongside the people and families we serve.

From all of us at KCCS, we wish you and your families a safe, healthy and wonderful fall season.

With gratitude,

Stephannie Dunn
Executive Director
Kootenai Community Centre Society

Ending the Violence

Spring and summer have been busy, as always, for the ETV staff at KCCS. These seasons bring a different set of challenges with resources becoming scarce due to vacation time and children being out of school. These challenges do not stop the consistent need for assistance and advocacy and we are always available to offer support. Irvine House (Safe Home), has been full every night over the past few months and Lela's place (2nd Stage), also remains at capacity. Our Outreach Program continues to expand as the need for resources continues to grow and word about our organic and creative approach to these needs continues to spread.

As we are all aware, daily life has become increasingly expensive. Groceries, rent, gas and utility fees are steadily rising in price which has resulted in hardship for many of our clients. This has turned our focus toward the resources we have access to that will alleviate some of these burdens. We are providing food support through grocery cards and through the foodbank. We continue to access rental subsidies and assist in getting emergency funds from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction on the basis of hardship. We are always grateful to those who donate to us. Our clients are able to access clothes and other household items for no cost which also helps to alleviate financial stress.

On that note, we all continue to network with other agencies to access as many available resources as possible. This is often a creative process that involves the ability to think outside the box in order to offer the best support plan to clients based on their individual needs. We remain closely linked to Valley Community Services, Police Victims Services, RISE Women's Legal and other local agencies. We have also fostered relationships with other organizations and women's centres outside of Creston and with individuals willing to volunteer their expertise in everything from haircuts, to nature adventures, to financial planning.

Shelley and Emily are both trained and sitting on the Situation Table. Several situations have been brought to the table and KCCS has been a part of the solution process for some of these.

In May, Emily and Shelley were privileged to attend a 1-day training in Cranbrook which was accessed through networking at a prior training. We received the invite to Criminal Harassment and the Limits of Resilience from Victims Services Cranbrook. All staff attended a 3-day training, Reducing Barriers, which KCCS brought to Creston. Both Trainings were informative and provided practical and interesting content. We are already using the knowledge gained at these trainings in our everyday work.

Teddy Bear Day Care

Summer at Teddy Bear Day Care was filled with sunshine, water play, creativity, and lots of fun! The children enjoyed spending time outdoors whenever the air quality allowed. On days when wildfire smoke made it unsafe for our little ones to be outside, we brought the fun indoors with art activities, playdough, and plenty of puzzles. Puzzles were especially popular with our five-year-olds!

During our final week of summer vacation, we celebrated our children who will be heading off to kindergarten with a farewell pizza party. The celebration included a bouncy castle and a dance party, making it a wonderful and memorable way to say goodbye and wish them well on their next adventure. We are so proud of each of them and will miss having them at Teddy Bear!

As we welcome a new group of children to Teddy Bear Day Care, we are enjoying watching them begin this exciting new chapter. They are learning to say goodbye to their parents, settle into their new surroundings, and make new friends. There are lots of new faces, new experiences, and new friendships blossoming!
It's a very exciting time of year for everyone at Teddy Bear Day Care, and we look forward to a wonderful year ahead!

Grizzly Bear out of School Care

Grizzly had a busy summer filled with lots of crafts, waterpark days, and fun activities. We said goodbye to our summer student Amber at the end of August. She was very patient and always eager to teach the children new skills. Some of the children are now able to create very intricate rainbow loom accessories, with minimal assistance--Bravo!!

We are currently in the midst of kindergarten transition. This is a busy time for families with children just entering into school! We have 19 new kindergarten children attending Grizzly now, along with a handful of new older students joining our program as well. To date, there are over 100 children enrolled in the program!!

We are quite hopeful to expand Grizzly Bear Out of School Care in the very near future. We have a lengthy waitlist and are desperate for more space. Hopefully the next news letter will be all about our expansion ☺

Access to Benefits (ABP)

The Access to Benefits (ABP) Program is growing—and so is its impact! Over the past two months, we have seen an exponential increase in clients seeking support with housing assistance, the Canada Dental Care Benefit, Income Assistance, PPMB, Persons with Disabilities (PWD), the Disability Tax Credit, and many other essential benefits.

Our outreach is also reaching beyond Creston, with services now supporting residents in Kingsgate and Bountiful. By bringing assistance directly into rural communities, we are helping remove barriers such as transportation, limited services, technology, and lack of information.

The ABP Program currently operates Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Creston Library in the Green Room. With demand continuing to grow, we are expanding our services into Boswell, Yahk, and hopefully Crawford Bay, making support more accessible to those who cannot easily travel to Creston. Starting October 1st and continuing every second Thursday we will be at the Yakh Kingsgate Community Hall conference room from 10:00am – 2:00pm. Thursday Oct.8th and continuing every second Thursday we will be at the Boswell Memorial Hall meeting room from 10:00am-2:00pm

The response from our clients has been overwhelmingly positive. By helping people access the benefits they are entitled to, ABP is supporting greater financial stability, independence, dignity, and quality of life throughout the Creston Valley.

Take Back the Night (TBTN)

This year we are modifying our Take Back the Night event. We have decided to go with a simplistic approach as we have been short staffed and incredibly busy over the last calendar year. Putting on the event, while rewarding, demands an incredible amount of planning and organizing and we do not have the capacity this year. However, we recognize the importance of the event and we hope to resume it next year.

KCCS is devoted to bringing awareness to gender based violence. In lieu of an event this year we intend to bring light to this devastating epidemic in other ways such as putting up posters, handing out pamphlets and reminding our community that this is real, ongoing and very prevalent in our small community as well as in the entire world. We are planning to recognize the mission of Take Back the Night, on a smaller scale, on September 25th.