

SUMMER 2024

Focus on the  
Jerry Forbes Centre

# PORTFOLIO



What happens when you put a bunch of non-profit organizations in one building, in a space that has been especially designed to fit their day-to-day needs? Somewhere with offices, meeting spaces, shared equipment, a warehouse and room for large gatherings?

*Magic, that's what happens.*

Because once an organization, large or small, is no longer worrying about where they are going to store stuff between festivals, where they will hold their

board retreat, or whether the rent is suddenly going to double, they can focus on their mission to deliver good in the community and for the people they serve. They can learn from colleagues working in the same space, collaborating to be even more effective.

SEF is a long-time investor in the Jerry Forbes Centre for Community Spirit, and thought it would be fun to take a closer look at the Centre through the eyes of some of the organizations who work there. To share some of that magic. □



## Money on a mission.

Put simply, the Social Enterprise Fund (SEF) is a loan fund. We invest in social entrepreneurs who want to make things better in the community and in the world. We provide patient capital at reasonable rates to help put dreams to work.



## Better Together

### The Jerry Forbes Centre, six years in

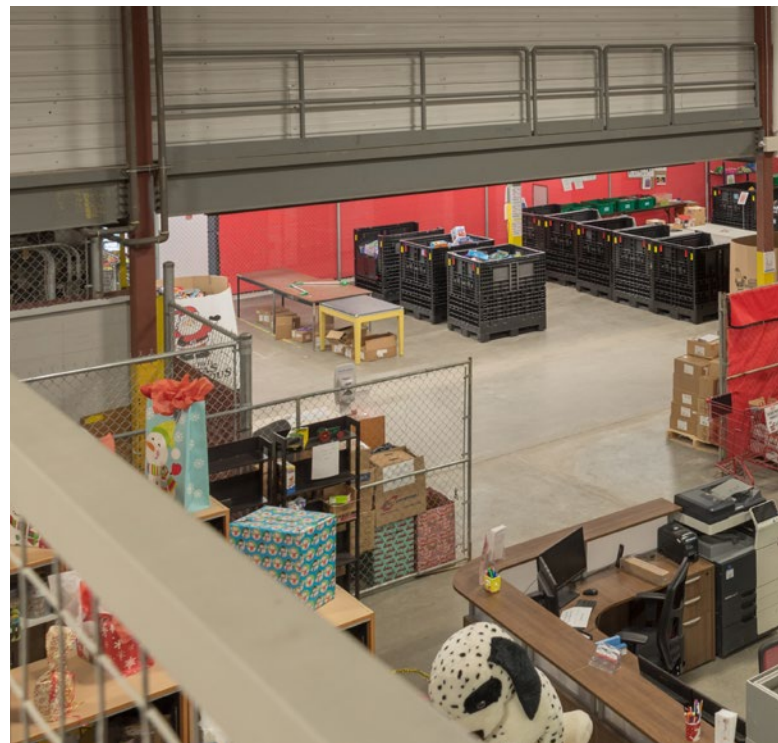
When the Jerry Forbes Centre for Community Spirit opened its doors in the fall of 2018, there were a lot of unknowns. The concept was promising, but largely untested: to create an affordable, practical and collaborative space specifically for non-profits and charities, so that they could benefit from shared resources and lower costs.

Then, the pandemic hit.

"We had almost a two-and-a-half, three-year blip where everybody was in survival mode," says Diana Davis, executive director at the Centre. The pandemic, she says, hit the non-profit sector particularly hard, as demand for services increased while in many instances, funding decreased.

Yet through the challenges, Davis remained determined to see the Centre establish itself at the core of Edmonton's non-profit industry.

"These things take time. You have to plant the seeds and then it might take a year or two for them to grow," she says. "Now, we're finally starting to see that."





Today, the Centre is a hub of activity. It's at full capacity, with 25 charities and non-profits based out of the 93,000-square foot office and warehouse space.

"There are days where you bump into people all over the place because there's a couple hundred people between what's going on in the mezzanine and who's here working or volunteering, which is wonderful," says Davis.

"It's such an incredible feeling to have that amount of people flow through here."

More than 300 people work at the Centre either part- or full-time. From that small-but-mighty base, the tenants of the Centre have an incredible impact: more than 500,000 Albertans are reached through the programs and services provided by the organizations housed there.

The Centre is named for the long-time station manager of Edmonton's 630 CHED radio station, who was a passionate community advocate and volunteer. It's housed in a former

fabric warehouse, just east of Edmonton's downtown core, which was refurbished and purpose-built to create a collaborative workspace for non-profits. The goal was to create an affordable and professional space for charitable and community-focused organizations to work out of, with expenses to be collected on a cost-recovery basis only, to cover services like property maintenance, utilities and administration.

"It's fiscally very responsible if you're asking the non-profit sector to be diverting the majority of their funds directly towards supporting the community. That's what collaborative spaces do, and that's what we're doing here," says Davis.

The Centre is run by the Jerry Forbes Centre Foundation, which owns the building outright thanks to government support and financing from SEF. The Foundation, Davis explains, is like 'a charity for charities'. Their mandate is to take care of the essentials for their non-profit tenants, so that those groups

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can focus on what they do best.

"We're supporting all these other non-profits so that they can then direct more of their resources to the community," she says.

Before moving into the Centre, many tenants were paying 40 to 60 per cent more for their office and storage space. Some were working out of basements, others out of cramped offices with paid parking and storage units scattered across the city. Moving to the Jerry Forbes Centre meant a one-stop shop with lower costs, and greater convenience.

"This is a model that, if it's paid for, is very viable. It's based on shared costs. If you can share it with five different people or ten, then you're going to be saving money. It's just a no brainer," says Holly Pshyk, marketing and fund development director at the Centre.

Over the past couple of years, as organizations have moved past the crunch time of the pandemic, the Centre has blossomed in its role as a ►



collaborative space. The building was designed to promote collaboration, with shared coffee areas, open seating and plenty of meeting rooms. “We always say, ‘Proximity promotes collaboration.’” says Davis. “You can’t go by the same person 10 times, five times a week and not eventually get to know who they are. You just can’t,” says Davis.

One of the biggest unexpected benefits of the collaborative space, explains Pszyk, has come from tenants simply getting to know each other. Through regular social events, monthly lunch-and-learns, and professional development activities, tenants have plenty of opportunities to network and learn about the groups they share space with.

“We actually can all be ambassadors and advocate for each other,” she says. “The more we know about our neighbours and options down the hall, the better able we are once we’re out in the community to advocate for them.”

Whether it’s lending out office space to different organizations who have busy seasons at different times of the year, or passing along useful knowledge and contacts to help overcome operational challenges, the groups have found ways to grow together. In a sense, the building is like an all-inclusive

resort, where all the details and amenities are taken care of. All tenants need to do is show up to work.

“We really want them to show up in the morning and you’ve taken away so many of the stresses and barriers that would draw their attention and time away from the programs and services that the community is counting on them for,” says Pszyk.

“Our whole mandate is to say to these organizations, ‘You don’t worry about that. You show up and get down to work to make Edmonton a stronger, healthier, happier place.’”

In addition to the 25 organizations who call the Centre home, there are also community spaces — like a classroom, meeting rooms, and even a newly-developed space for podcasting — available for rent at a low cost for charities. The spaces proved invaluable during the pandemic, when groups needed access to technologically equipped rooms with adequate room for social distancing.

Although the Centre has been open for several years, the building is still a work in progress, with spaces being developed and refined based on tenants’ needs.

“One of the beautiful things about it here is that we will just continue to evolve and change as the needs and the feedback comes in,” says Davis. □





# Much More than Storage

## Paralympic Sports Association

Although the Paralympic Sports Association (PSA) is a largely volunteer-driven organization, with only three full-time staff, the group's operations require a great deal of physical space. From ice hockey sledges, to snowshoes, handcycles and other adaptive sports equipment, the Association has a lot of gear to store.

That need is exactly what led Executive Director Katrina Maximchuk to the Jerry Forbes Centre in 2022. During the pandemic, the group left its location in central Edmonton, and like many organizations, moved to working from home. But that was only a viable option for so long.

"I had the photocopier in my boot room, and all of the storage in my garage, snowshoes and sledges and hand cycles," laughs Maximchuk. "My husband was very patient, but to a point."



She approached the Jerry Forbes Centre, at first looking only for storage space. When she learned that there was also an office space available, she very quickly realized it was an opportunity she couldn't pass up.

"The total cost here — for the storage and an office space — was about two thirds of just the parking pass when we paid for staff parking at our previous location," she says.

Today, the PSA is among the newer tenants in the Jerry Forbes Centre, having moved in in April 2022. Even in that short time, Maximchuk has come to appreciate many of the unique features that make the Centre so valuable for non-profits.

One of the greatest benefits, she says, has been professional and organizational development through activities organized by the Centre's director of marketing and fund development, Holly Pshyk. By organizing sessions on topics of interest to multiple members, the group takes advantage of economies of scale, building their own knowledge in the most efficient way possible.



"We most recently had a workshop around strategic plans and operationalizing them. It was a phenomenal opportunity, and something I couldn't have afforded to do had it not been for all of us being able to attend that together," explains Maximchuk, adding that not only is the cost of attending these kinds of sessions often prohibitive, sometimes it's difficult to even know where to start.

"To put the time in to know who I need to look for to be able to get information on a subject, and then pursue it... it just all adds up, right? So the fact that Holly is out there doing it both on behalf of the Centre but then for the people in the Centre as well, it's so encouraging."

The relationships Maximchuk has built with other organizations have also been a huge draw. Being within the Centre has allowed for more convenient connections and opportunities to collaborate.

"In the non-profit world, we talk a lot about silos, and then nobody is doing anything about them. But here, we're actively encouraging people to step out of them and make partnerships and work together," she says, adding that some of the groups have even talked about collaborating to hold a donor recognition event.

"To put one of those events on by yourself is a tremendous task, but if you put three or four organizations together to do something like that, it just makes the load so much lighter." □

# Embracing Their Place

## Canadian Hard of Hearing Association — Edmonton Branch

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) was one of the first tenants to move into the Jerry Forbes Centre when its doors opened in 2018.

Like many of the organizations housed in the building, CHHA is staffed by a small team: just one full-time and one half-time staff member. But that small team supports a large population: it's estimated that between 10 and 15 per cent of the Canadian population lives with some form of hearing loss.

"We work with people who are hard of hearing, for the most part. We do work with the deaf as well, but our focus is those who are hard of hearing, so people who are hearing, but not hearing right," explains Cindy Gordon, executive director of the association.

Before moving into the Centre, CHHA shared a space in central Edmonton with an agency that served deaf and hard of hearing people. The alignment between the organizations made sense, but financially the location was a challenge.

"It was a good fit in terms of our services, but even just paying our portion in downtown Edmonton was a crazy price. It just drained every last dollar, so we were kind of at our wits end," says Gordon.

"When I heard about the Jerry Forbes Centre, I just said, 'We need to get on this. If it's this kind of collaborative space, with furniture provided, with everything included, that's a huge savings.'"

Being in the Centre has meant more than a cost savings for CHHA. It's also helped to build awareness of the Association and its work across northern Alberta.

"Our reputation has increased tenfold because of being here. Now we're in an actual building, an actual professional space, so as Jerry Forbes' name is getting out there, and there's an understanding that we're part of it, it's really helped," she says.

Since moving in, Gordon has fully embraced the idea that proximity

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promotes collaboration with other organizations. Throughout her tenure at CHHA, she has become well-versed in the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's regulations around gaming and raffles, since these provide additional revenue streams for the organization. So when she learned that another person at the Centre was struggling to navigate the process, she passed along the contact information and knowledge she had to help move things forward.

"Those kinds of connections wouldn't happen if we weren't in the same space. And it's not like it's one-sided, I get the same kind of support back from others too," she says.

Within the Centre, groups often share opportunities to help one another with fundraising or volunteer events. Although participation is optional, Gordon sees it as an obvious choice to lend a hand.

"They need help, we'll help set up. We'll work on it. Clean up. Whatever's needed," she says.

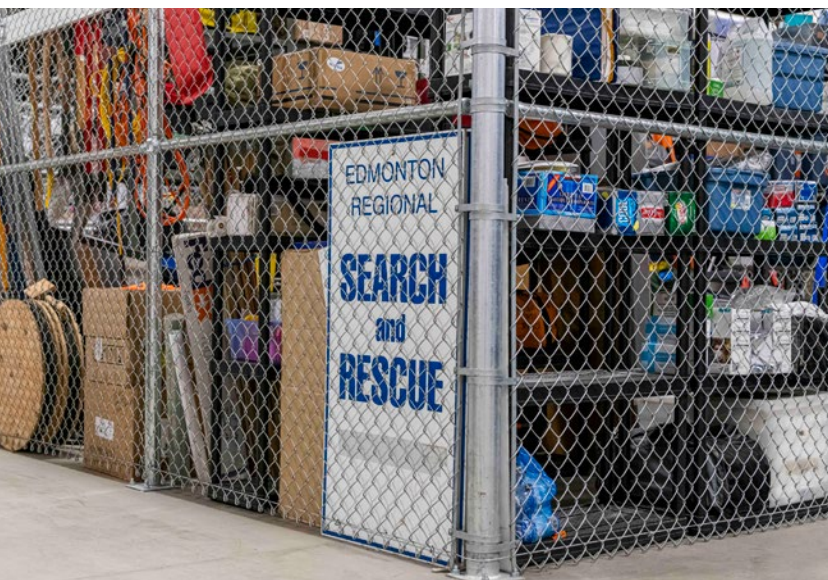
"There's a real sense of just wanting to help each other out."

As a small organization, CHHA has also benefited from the social aspects of co-locating with other non-profit organizations. Many of the tenants within the building have fewer than 10 staff, so being in the Centre means having access to an alternative form of social network — a feature that can be extremely helpful for staff retention.

"It's lonely, being a small organization. You're not going to have a Christmas party when you're a one-and-a-half person office," she says. "But when you're here, and you have other people to have a pizza lunch together, that's an important thing."

Ultimately, Gordon explains, the Centre is much more than just four walls with shared costs and resources.

"It isn't just a space. It's really our home." □







## Saving Dollars, Making Sense

### ABC Head Start Society

For nearly four decades, ABC Head Start Society has been giving vulnerable children in Edmonton the support they need to succeed when they start school. It offers programming similar to that found in a traditional preschool, but with added support from educational assistants, speech language pathologists, and other specialists.

“We were founded as a response to public health nurses recognizing that many kids coming from lower socioeconomic families were starting school behind their peers,” says April MacDonald Killins, executive director for the Society.

“We work with families and help kids own their superpowers to conquer hardships and live their best life.”

ABC Head Start operates six locations across Edmonton, but since 2018, its headquarters have been based out of the

Jerry Forbes Centre. Prior to that, the Society was based out of a commercial building in downtown Edmonton — where rent, parking and other costs were much higher.

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**“Being in a place like Jerry Forbes increases that reach, because we’re all connecting and we’re all building a referral network together.”**

— April MacDonald Killins

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“Having the opportunity again to take up a big footprint of space in a place that is really only based on operating costs, and not somebody trying to make a profit margin off of our rent, has been a really good move,” says MacDonald Killins.

With a staff of about 100, ABC Head Start is one of the larger organizations housed in the Jerry Forbes Centre. Since moving in in 2018, the Society has saved nearly \$200,000 in operating costs — money which they’ve then been able to reinvest directly into community programming.

“We’ve been able to direct all that funding back to the kids, where it’s needed,” says MacDonald Killins.

The funds have allowed ABC Head Start to build capacity to serve children with increasingly complex needs. Some of the savings were used to train staff on Safe Management, a non-violent crisis intervention strategy for children in the early years, as well as the Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support (SCERTS) model tailored to children with autism.

In addition to the cost savings found ►



after moving into the Centre, MacDonald Killins says the move has also helped the society build relationships and align services with other community organizations, like the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, which operates the Lorelei-Beaumaris Community League, where one of ABC Head Start's locations is based.

Another organization in the Jerry Forbes Centre that ABC Head Start works with is Community Options — a non-profit which offers similar programming to support vulnerable preschool-aged children. The difference, however, is how those services are delivered. ABC Head Start offers services that are free-of-charge to low-income families through its six locations, while Community Options offers services in a child's existing daycare or preschool.

"There's really good synergy there because some kids are going to benefit more from a centre-based environment and other kids are going to benefit more from staying put at their daycare and having fewer transitions through the day," explains MacDonald Killins. "So we do a lot of referrals back and forth."

These relationships have been strengthened thanks to the proximity of working in the Jerry Forbes Centre. The benefit has been great for ABC Head Start, but MacDonald Killins sees the growing relationships as having benefit for all the groups housed in the Centre.

"A lot of these organizations are so small, they're one or two or three employees, and they're doing all of this advocacy work and they're hosting events, doing workshops. But how much people know about each of us is based on a marketing budget and how we reach people," says MacDonald Killins.

"Being in a place like Jerry Forbes increases that reach, because we're all connecting and we're all building a referral network together." □

## Partnerships make impact investing possible

Social enterprises, like any small businesses, require access to capital to grow. Given their sometimes unusual structure or business sphere, social enterprises often face challenges finding the financing they need through traditional sources. SEF acts as a patient lender, working with these enterprises to meet their financing needs, whether through a big or small loan. Loans are repayable with interest — and in this way, the funds can go on to assist other social entrepreneurs.

SEF was established in 2008 through a unique collaboration between the Edmonton Community Foundation and the City of Edmonton. Other contributors to the fund have included the United Way, the Alberta Real Estate Foundation and several private contributors. So far, the fund has invested over \$90M in 110 projects and counting. More than \$45 million has been paid back, ready to do more good in the community as new loans.

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