

Calgary Herald

Service helping city for 100 years

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: Colleen De Neve, Calgary Herald / Robin McClelland is a client of Calgary Family Services, which will celebrate its centennial this fall.;

More than a year ago, Robin McClelland's emergency surgery revealed she had uterine cancer. But her wound wouldn't heal and the drugs caused dangerous side-effects, including depression. It was during these medical trials that McClelland found Calgary Family Services -- a nonprofit agency offering medical and emotional supports to Calgarians.

Home care nurses and caregivers helped treat her wound and connected her to counselling for her depression. When they visited McClelland's senior's complex and found it a hostile environment, staff arranged for her to move to safer housing.

"There's no doubt they saved my life, not only physically by tending an open wound, but by stepping in to handle the depression and getting me out of an abusive housing situation," said McClelland, 66.

Her story is a common example of how the Calgary Family Services's holistic approach tries to offer support in all aspects of someone's life, said Calgary Family Services CEO Sue Mallon. Over the years, social workers and caregivers have created programs to help address some of obstacles their clients face.

"We're not growing for the sake of growth. We're trying to work within the community, asking ourselves, How can we help wherever we can?" Mallon said of the organization celebrating a century of service this week.

This lend-a-hand attitude can be traced to the early days of Calgary Family Services, which was launched a century ago by Rev. David McKillop and his wife Ethel. The missionary couple and their two sons were heading west in 1910 when they found poverty in Calgary and settled here.

The pair established the Calgary Gospel Mission, opened the Calgary Old Folks Home and brought together several charitable organizations under the umbrella group Associated Charities. David McKillop, 83, is in awe of his grandparents, especially his grandmother Ethel, who assumed control of the Associated Charities during the First World War. He was sent to live with his grandmother in Calgary at 11 years of age and never forgot his introduction to the determined and pious woman.

"There was a lady standing on a soapbox, which was a sturdy wooden platform, and she was explaining the Gospel to the people on the corner and inviting them over to the mission to feed them. That was my

first memory of her," said the grandson, who now lives in Glendale, Ariz.

Ethel McKillop wasn't afraid of being creative to get support for the most vulnerable. During the Depression, she helped launch a "vegetable matinee" in 1937 where children could attend a movie at the Palace Theatre for a food donation, said Kathryn Moench, Calgary Family Services researcher. At least 1,600 young people turned up.

From 1912 to 1941 the Calgary Herald raised \$243,660 through the Herald Sunshine Society to support the agency's work and distribute Christmas food hampers to needy families. Today's Calgary Family Services is as vast as its origins. The non-profit offers senior home care, programs to reach at-risk youths, parenting workshops, emergency child care and counselling.

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