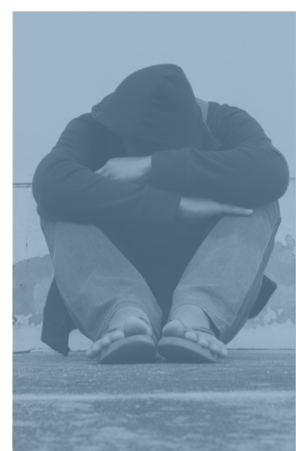


# 2023 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

TOGETHER IN  
SHELTER,  
STRENGTH &  
JUSTICE



**JohnHoward**  
THE COLD LAKE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Cold Lake John Howard Society acknowledges that we operate on Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/ Anishinaabe, and Inuit. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada who enrich our community. We continue to explore our relationship to the land and reflect on what it means to be Treaty people.

We are dedicated to addressing Indigenous homelessness through our partnerships which benefit Indigenous clients, as well as clients facing barriers due to their ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

There is much work to be done to close these gaps and move towards reconciliation. We are committed to providing support and resources to ensure that everyone in our city has a safe place to call home.

# LETTER FROM OUR BOARD

I'd like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to all of you for joining us at Cold Lake John Howard Society's Annual Meeting. It's a pleasure to come together to reflect on the work we've done over the past year, to celebrate our successes, and to look forward to the journey ahead.

This year has been a remarkable one for us. As many of you know, we've been fortunate to open our new shelter space, generously provided by the City of Cold Lake. This new facility has allowed us to expand our capacity to serve the most vulnerable members of our community-those who are experiencing homelessness and who need shelter and support, especially during the coldest months of the year.

While our new space is a huge step forward, it's important to recognize that, as we move into this new chapter, we are still very much a part of an ongoing learning process. The challenges we face-from the complexities of mental health and addiction to the persistent issue of NIMBYism(Not In My Backyard)-are ever present. These are not easy issues to tackle, but they are issues that we are committed to addressing with compassion, understanding, and the support of our community.

This year we've worked tirelessly to strengthen our programming, improve our outreach, and ensure that our services meet the immediate needs of those we serve, while also working to connect them with longer term support. We've also seen the generosity of the Cold Lake community, which continues to stand with us in our mission. Whether through donations, volunteer hours, or simply by offering words of encouragement, your support has made a world of difference.

But there is still much to be done. We are committed to breaking down the barriers that often prevent individuals from accessing the support they need, and that means continuing to advocate for the homeless and for those living with mental health and addictions challenges. We know that the issues are complex, and we are learning every day how best to serve our community. As we continue this work, we are grateful for your continued support, both financially and through your advocacy.

As we look to the future, we are excited about the opportunity to grow, to learn from our experiences, and to expand our impact in Cold lake and beyond.. Our mission remains as critical as ever: to protect and provide for the vulnerable, and to build a community where everyone has a safe and warm place to call home.

In closing, I want to thank each and every one of you-the board, staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners-for your unwavering committment to our mission. Your hard work and dedication are what makes this organization not just a shelter, but a beacon of hope for those in need. We cannot do this work without you, and we are deeply grateful for all that you do.

Thank you for your continued support. Together, we will build a stronger, more compassionate community for those who need it most.

Sincerely,

*Candice Sutterfield*   *Diane Gillian*   *Colleen Sheets*

President

Director

Director

*Lyla Allan*   *Jamie Yuen*   *Wendy Daniels-Cox*

Secretary

Director

Director

*Chantelle Dery-Wicht*

Director



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 operating season marked a significant milestone for our Emergency Winter Shelter as we entered our second consecutive year of providing a low-barrier, safe space for rural community members facing homelessness or housing insecurity. Operating year round starting January 19, 2023, this season saw the shelter open for the longest period yet, reflecting the rising need for services amidst worsening economic challenges and a pervasive rural opioid and drug crisis.

**Each night, the shelter served as a lifeline for individuals seeking refuge from harsh winter conditions, offering not only a warm place to rest but also a hot meal, connection with dedicated staff, and opportunities to access support services. This season, we supported 264 unique individuals, with an average nightly occupancy of 11.7 guests, and reached our capacity of 20 beds on 40 nights, underscoring the pressing need for expanded resources.**

In rural communities like ours, the opioid crisis is acutely felt, impacting individuals and families who lack access to robust healthcare, mental health support, and substance use resources. This year's shelter operations were marked by an increase in individuals experiencing opioid and substance-related challenges. Staff reported a 30% rise in requests for information on harm reduction and substance use support, highlighting an urgent need for integrated health services in rural areas to support individuals in crisis.

Our Annual Report offers insights into the past season's challenges and successes, sharing data and feedback gathered throughout the operating period. It also outlines our strategic partnerships with local healthcare providers, addiction support groups, and municipal leaders, who play an essential role in helping us bridge service gaps in the community. Our team remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering compassion, safety, and dignity for those we serve and continues to advocate for increased mental health and addiction resources tailored to the rural context.

Thanks to the invaluable support of our donors, funders, and community partners, we look ahead to further developing this essential program, strengthening our outreach initiatives, and addressing the intersection of rural homelessness and the drug crisis. Together, we strive to build a resilient support network that addresses the unique challenges faced by unhoused and housing-insecure individuals in our community.

*Leona Heisler*

Program Manager



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## Vision

The Cold Lake John Howard Society provides support for members of the community through increased awareness of Social Justice, Crime Prevention and Public Safety Education.

## Mission

To create a safe environment for community members to envision members to envision and attain healthy lives through education and advocacy.



## Core Values

The core values of CLJHS are the values of the John Howard Society of Alberta and the following stated values. These values guide the work that we do in the community and the manner in which we work together amongst ourselves and with others. They are the foundation upon which we form our positions on criminal issues, work together as a staff and Board Members, and serve the communities: accountability, community responsibility, compassion, dignity, equity, freedom, human potential, individuality, integrity, respect and safety.

**“We all have the power to solve homelessness for somebody”**

# WHO WE ARE

Cold Lake John Howard Society is a dedicated homeless shelter and charitable organization serving the Cold Lake community under the Alberta Societies Act. Governed by a community-based Board of Directors, we work with local stakeholders, community members, and partner organizations to provide essential services to individuals and families facing homelessness or housing insecurity.

Our team of 11 committed professionals includes outreach workers, overnight awake staff, cooks, cleaners, and a program manager, each playing a vital role in delivering compassionate and comprehensive support. Together, we operate a range of programs designed to meet immediate needs while fostering longer-term stability and self-sufficiency. These programs include our emergency mat shelter, community kitchen, laundry and shower facilities, and a court support program, all of which provide practical assistance and restore dignity for those we serve.

At Cold Lake John Howard, we believe in a holistic approach to support, addressing the diverse challenges that our clients face by connecting them to resources, offering advocacy, and promoting a safe, inclusive environment. Our outreach team is committed to meeting individuals where they are—whether it's providing on-the-ground assistance in the community or connecting people to necessary health and social services.

We are guided by values of dignity, inclusivity, and truth and reconciliation, recognizing the importance of cultural safety and responsiveness, especially for Indigenous individuals who are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Our staff members bring compassion, dedication, and professionalism to each interaction, ensuring that every person who walks through our doors feels respected, valued, and supported on their journey toward housing stability.



## OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Leona Heisler, Program Manager

Candice Sutterfield, President

Open Vice-President

Open Treasurer

Lyla Allan, Secretary

Diane Gillian, Director

Jamie Yuen, Director,

Wendy Cox Director

Colleen Sheets Director

Chantelle Dery-Wicht Director

# WHAT WERE THE IDENTIFIED NEEDS?

Since the closure of our previous facility in April 2022, our Board and community members have dedicated themselves tirelessly to reopening a shelter space that Cold Lake's most vulnerable residents can rely on. This commitment is born from a profound recognition of the urgent need for a safe, warm haven for those experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity in our community. For many of our clients, the Mat Program isn't just a place to sleep—it's a lifeline that offers warmth, dignity, and the essential care that every human being deserves.

Cold Lake faces some of the harshest winter weather in Alberta, with temperatures often plunging below -30 to -39 degrees Celsius. In these conditions, a warm shelter isn't just comforting; it's a matter of survival. The chilling reality is that without a safe place to go, individuals experiencing homelessness are exposed to life-threatening risks every winter. The Cold Lake John Howard Society's Mat Program was re-envisioned to answer this urgent need, creating a sanctuary where those in crisis can find immediate relief from the cold and a sense of security.

The new facility, which opened its doors on January 19, 2023, is a testament to what our community can accomplish together. Here, both men and women are welcomed into an environment where they can enjoy a hot meal, access shower and laundry facilities, and most importantly, rest in a safe, warm place. For many, this may be the only chance they have each day to feel the comfort of warmth and the dignity of a hot meal and clean clothes.

Beyond addressing immediate needs, the Mat Program has also identified the critical importance of connecting our clients to broader health, housing, and social resources. Cold Lake's unhoused population often faces complex barriers, from physical and mental health struggles to a lack of support networks. With each person who enters our doors, we strive to provide not only comfort but hope and connection to services that can guide them toward stability. Our dedicated staff works closely with each individual, helping them access housing resources, healthcare, and mental health support, empowering them to take steps toward a brighter future.

The reopening of the Mat Program has brought a renewed sense of hope for Cold Lake's vulnerable residents and a reminder to the entire community that no one should be left out in the cold. We are grateful for the collective efforts that have made it possible to offer this vital service, and we remain committed to the safety, dignity, and well-being of every person we serve. Together, we can make a difference, one warm bed, one meal, and one act of compassion at a time.



# REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS OR TRANSIENT INDIVIDUALS SITUATIONS



## Addictions (meth, alcohol, gambling, cocaine, heroin, opioids)

- Easily accessible in any community, city, or Indigenous community
- Meth is the most popular due to it being cheap to produce and cheap to buy
- Needs many support systems/ agencies
- Detox is difficult to get into when an individual wants to go
- Rehabilitation Centres have a long wait list and are difficult to get into



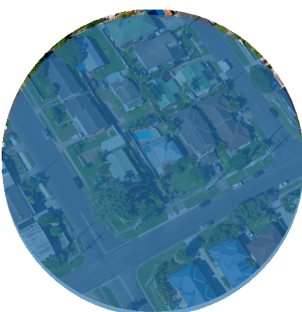
## Mental Health (Counselling, Assessments, Institutions)

- Most individuals accessing services have many sorts of mental health issues
- Some have repeatedly been in and out of institutions for years
- St Therese's hospital in St Paul is difficult to access-some need referrals or other reason of assessments-assessments are expensive to have completed
- Some need to have regular scheduled medications and some don't have coverage for their medications so don't take what they have been prescribed
- Individuals don't seek medical/mental health attention when needed as they are reluctant to see a doctor



## Stable Income or Income

- 90% of individuals don't have any type of identification
- Process to acquire identification is stressful for the individual
- Need to prove-Canadian citizenship, Alberta resident which most cannot because they don't have an actual address-most use our facility address to get their identification and their necessary mail
- Most individuals are on Income supports, emergency income supports, or AISH
- Individuals don't qualify for support if they don't have a bank account and you need identification to get a bank account



## Housing

- Housing market is high, economy is high
- Income supports is not enough to cover the costs of rentals in this area
- There is a wait list for subsidized housing
- A lot of rentals are requiring other qualifications that they don't fit-criminal record checks, damage deposits, furnishings, ect
- Stigma of the individual when the renter sees the individual for a viewing

# WHAT ARE THE SERVICES?

Since reopening our doors on January 19, 2023, our new facility has become a critical source of support and stability for individuals experiencing housing or food insecurity in Cold Lake. Our comprehensive services are designed to address not only immediate needs but also the underlying challenges of homelessness, poverty, mental health, addiction, and social isolation, creating a lifeline for those most in need in our community.

The cornerstone of our facility is the Mat Program, which operates every night from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., offering a safe, warm place for those without stable housing to sleep. In addition to shelter, we address the growing food insecurity in our community by providing three nutritious meals daily, ensuring that guests are well-fed and supported as they navigate challenging circumstances.

Our commitment extends into the day with our Outreach Program, open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., which provides breakfast and lunch alongside crucial support services. This program is a lifeline for individuals grappling with the multifaceted impacts of homelessness, poverty, mental health struggles, addiction, abuse, and social isolation. Staff work closely with individuals to connect them to resources and referrals for housing, healthcare, counselling, and addiction support, creating a foundation for empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Together, these services offer not only practical aid but a sense of dignity, hope, and connection for those in need. Our facility has become a safe space where individuals can find warmth, nourishment, and support, meeting both immediate needs and fostering resilience. Through compassionate care and a commitment to holistic support, we strive to uplift the most vulnerable in our community and help them take steps toward a brighter, more stable future.

**79% OF ALL CLIENTS SERVED RESIDE IN AND AROUND THE COMMUNITY OF COLD LAKE**

# Outreach Program

The Cold Lake John Howard Society's Outreach Program is a vital support system for individuals facing the complex challenges of homelessness, poverty, mental health, addiction, abuse, and social isolation. Operating daily from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., the Outreach Program not only provides a safe space but also offers critical services, including breakfast and lunch, to ensure that individuals' basic needs are met as they begin to address their unique barriers.

Our outreach staff work one-on-one with individuals to help them develop basic life management skills, set realistic goals, and connect with resources to support their health and well-being. We recognize that each person's journey is different, and we tailor our support to meet the immediate needs and long-term aspirations of each individual, whether it's finding stable housing, addressing health concerns, or building skills for independence.

Through our partnerships with local agencies, we are able to offer comprehensive support beyond the walls of our facility. For example, Alberta Health Services (AHS) Community Health Nurses visit when possible to provide essential services such as STD testing, flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, and treatment for minor health issues. We also collaborate with Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) during tax season to assist individuals in completing their taxes, helping them meet legal obligations and access potential refunds and credits. Furthermore, Community Learning has offered in-house workshops to develop skills and confidence, while the Dragonfly Sexual Violence and Assault Centre has provided staff training.

Outreach staff advocate on behalf of individuals to help them secure personal identification, income support, and access to detox and treatment programs. They also support employment readiness through resume building and job application assistance and help individuals apply for subsidized housing. Recognizing the severity of mental health and substance use issues among our guests, many of whom experience Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and histories of trauma, our team is dedicated to providing compassionate support that respects each person's dignity and resilience.

In addition to personal support, we provide practical tools to empower individuals on their journey toward stability. Access to computers and phones during outreach hours enables guests to search for housing, complete necessary forms, and attend virtual health or mental health appointments. Our laundry facilities are also available to maintain personal hygiene, which is often a fundamental need for dignity and self-care.

# Community Kitchen Program

Our shelter has become a vital resource for individuals facing food insecurity in Cold Lake, serving three daily meals at no cost to those in need. Breakfast is served from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and dinner from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. These meals are open to anyone experiencing food insecurity, offering a reliable source of nourishment in a supportive and welcoming environment. By providing consistent access to nutritious food, we hope to alleviate some of the daily struggles individuals face when they lack the resources to buy enough healthy food.

# 1189

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF  
MEALS SERVED MONTHLY**



Household food insecurity—defined as a lack of funds to purchase adequate, nutritious food—is a growing crisis in Alberta. According to recent reports from Canada Food Banks (2022), more than one in four Albertans experience food insecurity, one of the highest rates in the country. This statistic reflects the deepening impact of economic challenges on families and individuals across the province, particularly in smaller communities like Cold Lake, where access to affordable food and essential resources may be limited.

Our shelter's meal program has been made possible through the generosity of local partners and community members. The Cold Lake Food Bank has been instrumental in providing a steady supply of food, allowing us to prepare balanced meals each day. Additional support from grants and donations from compassionate residents have enabled us to meet this growing need, ensuring that no one in our community goes hungry. These contributions highlight the power of community support and the difference we can make when we work together to address urgent needs.

For many who come to our shelter, these meals provide more than just physical nourishment; they offer a sense of stability and connection. Mealtimes allow individuals to gather in a communal setting, where they can share a warm meal, engage with others, and feel valued as members of the community. This shared experience is particularly important for those who may feel isolated due to their circumstances, providing them with a moment of respite and dignity. As food insecurity continues to rise, we remain committed to providing consistent, nutritious meals to all who need them, whether they are shelter guests or members of the broader community facing hardship. Our goal is to foster a compassionate and inclusive environment where individuals can not only receive a meal but also find hope, support, and a sense of belonging. With ongoing support from our community, we can ensure that our shelter remains a place of sustenance and kindness for those who need it most.



# Court Support Program

The Court Support Program is the latest addition to our services, established in early 2023 in response to a growing need among our clients for assistance navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system. Many of our clients find themselves caught in a revolving cycle of citations, infractions, and incarcerations, which not only disrupts their lives but also creates barriers to essential supports. Legal entanglements can disqualify them from accessing critical forms of assistance, such as housing subsidies or employment opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of instability and poverty. Our program was created to break this cycle by offering compassionate and effective support through each step of the court process.

The Court Support Program is specifically designed to help clients address and resolve outstanding legal matters, allowing them to move forward with their lives. Unlike services available to victims of crime or those navigating civil court, there are very few resources dedicated to assisting vulnerable individuals facing criminal charges. This gap is especially significant for those struggling with mental health challenges, substance use issues, and trauma histories, who often feel overwhelmed and powerless when trying to understand or interact with the legal system.

For many of our clients, the legal process is intimidating, confusing, and time-consuming. The layers of court appearances, paperwork, and legal terminology are challenging to navigate for anyone, let alone individuals dealing with substantial mental, emotional, and social hurdles. Without guidance, they may miss important court dates, fail to comply with requirements, or misunderstand their legal obligations—actions that can lead to further penalties or incarceration.

Our Court Support Program offers hands-on assistance to help clients prepare for and attend court sessions, understand their rights and responsibilities, and fulfill legal requirements. Outreach staff accompany clients to court, providing a reassuring presence, advocating on their behalf, and assisting them in communicating effectively with legal personnel. Our team also helps clients organize essential documents, understand court orders, and comply with any mandated actions, such as fines or community service.

Through this program, we aim to empower clients to regain control over their legal circumstances and work towards clearing obstacles that stand in the way of stability. By breaking down barriers to justice, our Court Support Program helps individuals address the issues that hold them back, giving them a chance to step out of the cycle of legal troubles and take meaningful steps toward a brighter future. We believe that everyone deserves fair access to justice and the opportunity to rebuild their lives, and our Court Support Program is here to make that possible.



**Referrals To Mental Health  
Diversion or Restorative Justice  
Programs**



**Connecting Clients  
with Legal-Aid or  
Lawyers**



**Emotional Support During  
Court**



**Advocating on Behalf  
of Clients**



**Communicating On The Behalf of  
Clients if Unavailable**

# Emergency Mat Program

The Mat Program is a crucial resource for Cold Lake's most vulnerable, offering nightly emergency shelter for individuals who have nowhere else to turn. Each evening, guests are welcomed into a supportive and inclusive environment where they can receive a hot meal, access a bed with a blanket, and obtain warm, dry clothing. This simple yet essential support provides not only physical warmth and safety but also a sense of dignity and humanity.

With consistent, year-round funding, we've been able to expand our services beyond emergency shelter. Guests now have access to warm showers and laundry facilities, offering the comfort of personal hygiene, which is often inaccessible for those experiencing homelessness. Our shelter has become a vital refuge from the elements, a place where individuals can step out of the cold, take care of themselves, and feel part of a caring community.

Food insecurity has emerged as a significant issue in the area, and we have witnessed a growing number of individuals who come to the Mat Program simply for a hot meal and a chance to connect with others. These guests may not always need shelter, but they seek the warmth of a shared meal and the comfort of social interaction. For many, this is a lifeline that not only feeds their bodies but also uplifts their spirits, as they find connection in a community that values and supports them.

# 9.8

**AVERAGE OF  
CLIENTS PER NIGHT**



The Mat Program also plays an essential role in the discharge planning of local healthcare and social service providers. We receive numerous referrals from the Cold Lake Health Centre, Bonnyville Health Centre, Emergency Income Supports, Bonnyville Rehab Centre, and St. Therese Health Centre. For individuals leaving emergency departments without a residence to return to, our shelter becomes the safe, immediate option where they can recover and regroup. Likewise, we've seen a steady increase in referrals from the RCMP in Cold Lake and surrounding areas, as well as an influx of guests from nearby communities like Bonnyville and nearby Saskatchewan.

Our shelter is increasingly accommodating seniors and individuals with mental health challenges, reflecting a broader crisis in accessible mental health and elder care services. Many of our guests come with complex needs that extend beyond shelter, and we strive to provide them with the care and respect they deserve. By offering a safe environment and connecting them to additional resources when possible, we aim to support these individuals on their journey toward stability.

The Mat Program is more than just a place to sleep; it's a cornerstone of Cold Lake's support network for those facing hardship. Each night, we provide not only physical warmth and sustenance but also a foundation of compassion and dignity that helps individuals begin to rebuild their lives. With continued community and funding support, we can ensure that this critical resource remains available to anyone who needs it, offering safety, care, and hope for a better future.

# JohnHoward

THE COLD LAKE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

79%



of all clients served  
reside in the lakeland

65%



were male  
identifying

35%



were female  
identifying

86%



self identify with  
an Indigenous  
background

50%



self identify with a  
mental health  
concern

99%



self identify  
experiencing  
substance misuse

145

unique individuals served  
through outreach or emergency  
mat program

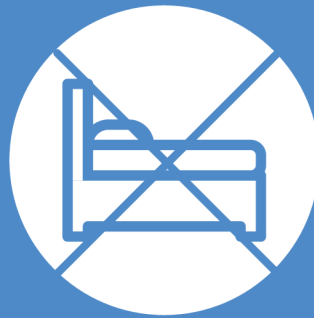
1 in 4

Albertans experience household food  
insecurity (Canada Food Banks, 2022)

In 2021, Alberta accounted for  
15% of Canada's emergency  
shelter beds, reflecting the  
province's significant share of  
the national homeless  
population (Gov. of Can, 2021)

9.8

guests per night on average



40

nights at capacity (20 beds)

1571

Average Meals Served Per Month



Data from Alberta  
Justice indicates a  
concerning rise in  
deaths among  
homeless individuals in  
Edmonton, increasing  
from 37 in 2019 to 302 in  
2023 (CBC)

# Funders and Donors



# In-Kind Donations



THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



# Community Collaboration



*A sincere thank you to all funders, donors and volunteers*



# JHHS

## JohnHoward

THE COLD LAKE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

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