



THE ACRES:
A PROSPECTIVE COST-
BENEFIT REPORT



Introduction

The Acres is a project that is being proposed by a variety of community organisations, including Lady Flower Gardens (LFG), in hopes to provide more opportunities for marginalized groups to develop skills, build meaningful relationships, and experience a sense of community.¹ *The Acres* will occupy a five-acre section within the Marquis neighbourhood, a newly proposed community in northeast Edmonton.² Three acres will consist of a variety of affordable housing options and wrap-around supports for individual wellness, such as healthcare services and detox centres. The remaining land will be designated as a large garden that will provide the foundation for urban agriculture and serve as an engaging environment for people of all backgrounds to interact and build community.

There is growing literature on the benefits of community gardening in low-income neighbourhoods and its role in promoting positive health outcomes. Community gardens have also been shown to generate collective efficacy in promoting social capital and well-being through the increase in neighbourhood social interactions.⁴ Gardening also eliminates food insecurity and encourages healthy living by increasing nutritious food consumption with little to no expenses.⁵ Additionally, community gardens promote environmental sustainability, while also providing opportunities for skills development to disadvantaged individuals through community grassroots support.⁶

A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) is pertinent to determine the feasibility of this project and can be used to project future impacts. From deciding what crops to plant to determining whether more staff will be needed, a CBA will be valuable to analyse these decisions.⁷ Additionally, a CBA will take into account the potential costs and benefits associated with *The Acres* that can be

used to identify intangible costs, such as improved safety of staffs and client satisfaction, which may be difficult to measure.⁷

Section 1: The Cost of Poverty

Poverty remains as a main barrier to accessing basic needs such as food, housing, and essential health services. These barriers are bolstered by other life challenges that vulnerable populations may experience. For instance, low-income individuals are at a higher risk of developing substance-use disorders due to increased stress and feelings of hopelessness, as well as a lack of access to social support and healthcare services. Untreated addiction also provides an incentive for people to participate in criminal behaviours.⁸

In recent statistics, there is an increased trend of homicide rates and opioid-related offenses in Alberta, amongst other provinces in Canada.⁹ For the people behind these statistics, opioid toxicity death rates have remained high in Western Canada – likely due to increased feelings of isolation, stress, and limited availability of services for people who use substances.¹⁰ To reduce the crime rates and drug-related harms in our community we must begin addressing the root causes of community vulnerability and crime, such as poverty, discrimination, and a lack of social support. Individuals who are forced into the life of crime will need an opportunity to find a sense of belonging, a purpose in life, and have their voices heard within the community. Allocating funding for community initiatives to help prevent at-risk individuals from engaging in criminal activity may be an alternative strategy to reduce violent crimes as well as create a safe environment for everyone.

Although current research is still insufficient to make strong, causal relationships between crime reduction and community gardens, there are studies that indicate the benefits of urban green space support and its potential to promote safer communities with reduced community crime and violence.¹¹ By increasing neighborhood stability and reducing disparities that are exacerbated by poverty and homelessness, crime rates will eventually start to decline.

Individuals with serious mental health illnesses who struggle with homelessness and housing instability tend to have poorer health outcomes, which leads to higher utilization of healthcare services and criminal justice resources.³ The costs, as well as the consequences, associated with poverty and homelessness require a much larger scale than direct spending on community-based alternatives, as will be explored in section three of this report. Rather than alleviating the symptoms of poverty, long-term investments will be required to end the cycle of poverty.¹²

By investing in community programs that are committed to providing resources, such as affordable housing for the vulnerable population, it will not only contribute to greater productivity and individual wellness, but it can also play a role in promoting community safety through increased measures that seek to reduce the risks of crimes from occurring. As a result, there will be lower poverty rates, reduced strain in the healthcare system, as well as increased cohesion within the community.¹²

Section 2: *The Acres*: Aims and Community Partners

LFG has developed ongoing partnerships between key community players, such as: The Mustard Seed, Boyle Street Community Services, Alberta Health Services, Recovery Acres Rehabilitation Centre, and students from the University of Alberta Community Service Learning Program.¹³ These partnerships will aid in the proposal of *The Acres* concept to developers for a sustainable community with the desired wrap-around supports for individuals, such as: housing, detox or transitional spaces, vocational training, employment opportunities, agricultural spaces promoting food security and community engagement, and various therapeutic supports (ie: art studio, animal therapy, church, community kitchen, etc).

A survey was sent out to Lady Flower Gardens participants, where nine key themes were identified: housing, employment, food security, transportation, community, land use, justice, youth, and indigenous awareness.¹³ It is important to note that *The Acres* has placed an emphasis on providing housing that is permanent and based on a mixed-income model of housing. The purpose of this is to integrate *The Acres* community with the general public and immediate population of The Marquis community, rather than keeping residents isolated. With this model, there is room for family connections, sober-living facilities, housing co-ops, lease-to-own opportunities, and subsidised housing.

As mentioned, *The Acres* is projected to create a positive and sustainable environment for marginalised individuals, including those who are experiencing houselessness, addictions, mental health concerns, and other marginalising factors. *The Acres* aims to reduce the instance of houselessness and decrease the amount of crime and incarceration stemming from issues associated with relapse after individuals are released from institutional environments, such as rehabilitation centres, psychiatric hospitals, or prison.¹³ Within their Community Engagement

proposal, Lady Flower Gardens highlights the need for collaboration with third-party stakeholders and partnering agencies in an “effort to support mental health and wellness and food sovereignty”¹³, where individuals with complex histories and needs are provided support through experiential learning and the therapeutic community approach. According to De Leon and Unterrainer (2020), the approach of therapeutic communities (TCs) can be summed up into the phrase: “community as method”¹⁴; otherwise stated as: “the purposive use of the community to teach individuals to use the community to change themselves”.¹⁴

Within Therapeutic Communities, especially those involving addiction, it has been found that individuals are able to obtain optimal levels of educational and therapeutic impact on their self-regulation and social literacy when engaged in diverse elements of the community.¹⁴ In a study by Davidson and Young (2019), it was found that TCs had the best outcomes for individuals with substance use disorders, and especially those that become part of the prison system in the United States.¹⁵ Although TCs within the prison system yielded high rates of success, individuals often regressed post-release due to the lack of available and accessible wrap-around supports within their community.¹⁵ *The Acres* would act as a stepping stone in the “post-release” stage to drive continuous self-growth and efficacy within individuals leaving these types of institutions or programs.

Many therapeutic community models in Canada can be found within rehabilitation centres or the prison system, but it can be argued that there is a gap in accessible therapeutic community services that are outside of these facilities and integrated into society. One successful example of an integrated therapeutic community in Canada is the John Howard Society of British Columbia (JHSBC). The JHSBC provides justice services, transitional and supportive housing, homelessness prevention initiatives, employment and education initiatives, and community

living services to those who have been part of the justice system, struggling with addictions, or those with complex mental health needs.⁴ Across British Columbia, the JHSBC has served over 9000 people from 2019 to 2020 and has 888 housing units throughout the province.¹⁶ In 2020/2021, the JHSBC of the Thompson Region reported over 1000 people served through over 25 programs and services, over 70 rental subsidies to provide support for those at risk of homelessness, and 312 housing units including supportive, transitional, and permanent housing.¹⁷ Through their employment programs the JHSBC Thompson Region saw 80% of program participants successfully hired after completing employment programming, an increase in community partnerships, and a 25% increase in program participants compared to the previous year.¹⁷ The idea of *The Acres* has many overlapping qualities found within the John Howard Society models, but it will be unique in that the housing and services will be concentrated into the 5-acre parcel of the Marquis community.

Section 3: Financial Inputs and Outputs

In order to begin considering the investment required for a project like *The Acres*, the context for this kind of project must first be understood. Edmonton's poverty is not simply a laziness or a job market problem. The kind of poverty that exists among vulnerable people in the modern day is multifaceted and complicated – it involves health status, social status, and societal factors.¹⁸⁻²⁰ Complex questions require complex solutions. As referenced in John Silver's book *Solving Poverty*¹⁹:

“There are no quick fixes. Solutions require investment on a large scale, consistently year after year[...] [S]trategies to combat complex inner city poverty require a holistic approach [...]. Unidimensional efforts must give way to

comprehensive strategic initiatives that are more than an array of discrete and disconnected projects. Successful anti-poverty efforts must be holistic, and compromise a strategy.” p. 131.¹⁹

This belief strongly aligns with Edmonton organisation Homeward Trust’s goals of seeking to “[reduce] silos” and implement “effective system coordination” (p. 43).²¹ Like Silver, they note the inefficient and ineffective program implementation and limited success that comes with fragmented funding and incomplete implementation strategies. The kind of holistic care that is referenced above can be provided via wrap-around supports. The specific services that are offered as part of a community’s wrap-around supports are dependent on each group’s needs, but they could include supports such as job training, medical care, or drug treatment programs.^{21,22} The importance of services surrounding an individual is for both the completeness of care and for program accessibility. Although many services currently exist to aid vulnerable populations, easily accessing an array of supports is challenging. In contrast, accessible, multi-dimensional services can offer a direct connection to supportive services to both initiate and maintain support networks.²³ Once services are collated into a single location, there is a clear pathway to get access to needed supports.

Social support is expensive; however, the cost of doing nothing or responding reactively is not inexpensive either. Alberta Secretariat’s 2009 Plan for Alberta, which aimed to take action on ending homelessness, indicated that the highest needs individuals experiencing homelessness can cost up to \$100 000 per person annually.²⁰ This report argued that high needs individuals place a large burden on government-provided services through direct costs, such as emergency shelter use, and indirect costs like hospitalisation, policing, and incarceration.²⁰ In breaking down this projected cost, a number of variables must be investigated. Although data is challenging to

pinpoint about exact healthcare costs related to these populations, one 2016 study references research that suggests that only 1% of the population, many of whom are living with poverty, mental health, and addiction challenges, makes up approximately 30% of healthcare spending.²⁴ Vulnerable families also contribute to these expenditures via the child welfare system. As children are removed from their homes and taken into government care due to parental challenges or housing concerns, public money must be spent. For many of these same individuals, the justice system then becomes involved through court appearances, police involvement, and incarceration.²⁵

Government investment in both provision of housing and in social supports is an effective way to target houselessness and aid vulnerable people. The aforementioned 2009 Plan for Alberta estimated that the cost of ending houselessness over ten years would be \$7.1 billion less expensive than maintenance of the “status quo.”²⁰ In 2013, when Alberta was 3 years into this plan, there were already major reductions in public service usage by targeted individuals. There was a 72% decrease in emergency medical services, a 69% decrease in emergency room visits, and a 72% decrease in hospital visits. This same report also saw improvements in justice system interactions such as an 88% decrease of days spent in jail, and 66% fewer interactions with police.²¹

On a smaller scale, Latimer et al.’s secondary report provides further clarity on the cost of housing with comprehensive support in the Canadian cities of Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Montreal between the years of 2009-2011. This document identifies the cost of the current system’s ‘treatment as usual’ approach for a group of houseless adults with mental illnesses and compares it to the cost of a housing first intervention with intensive case management. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a decisive improvement seen following access to the latter program.²⁶

However, this improvement comes at a price. The cost of implementing this kind of program was estimated to be a net \$7868 per person annually.²⁶ On paper, the intervention of housing first with case management was identified as costing \$14 496 per person per year. However, since individuals in this program were accessing the aforementioned “treatment as usual” services far less, the report noted that almost half of that \$14 496 price tag would be covered by the savings that were generated when decreasing this population’s reliance on other reactive social services.²⁶ With all of this in mind, Latimer et al. found that the total cost for this program was approximately \$40 per user per day.²⁶

In the above referenced report about housing with case management, there was also an increase in the number of days that these targeted individuals were capable of remaining in stable housing; on average those who accessed the program remained in stable housing 140.34 days longer than those who had not accessed this program.²⁶ This kind of stability translates into a more predictable living situation that involves less mental strain and a greater ability to adapt to other challenging circumstances.^{20,21} Presumably, it also means fewer evictions. Even just the process of removing a tenant from subsidised housing is costly. The capital region housing corporation reported approximate costs of \$6000 when managing an eviction relating to “turning-over” a suite.²¹ There are also the indirect costs of eviction, including the potential for further challenges in achieving stable housing due to the presence of an eviction record.²¹

There are many faces of houselessness. People of all ages, backgrounds, and family structures can be affected. More socially vulnerable groups, like family units or youth, may avoid the limelight more than others, though. These groups are oftentimes part of the “hidden homeless” who do not access support out of concern over possible repercussions from authorities.²⁰ However, these vulnerable groups still need help. One way that supports have been

offered to at-risk youth and families is through investment into Edmonton’s All in for Youth programming,²³ which is explored in the second case study found in Section 5 of this report. In addition to major successes in service accessibility and usage, there is evidence that this kind of comprehensive programming can result in significant, long-term financial return. The All in for Youth report references literature that suggests that the financial output of similarly comprehensive and accessible services in a school setting can have a \$3-\$15 return for every dollar invested into the program.²³ Although adult populations do not generally have a school environment to access in this way, it is important that wrap-around support services are offered in a similarly accessible way to vulnerable people. If there is a space where at-risk individuals can spend a number of their waking hours among accessible services, the evidence indicates that this availability will translate to an increased program usage.^{21,24} This supposition is the basis of *The Acres* multidimensional plan, involving housing and a community garden in addition to the presence of supportive services.

“Most health and social interventions do not pay for themselves. Rather, they yield benefits judged sufficient to merit their cost.”²⁶ p. 11

Analyses of cost-effectiveness are not necessarily adequate methods for determining the value of an intervention like housing provision. From a short-term financial perspective, social spending is not a good investment. However, the long-term improvements for an individual and community are generally unaccounted for in these analyses.²⁷ When looking under the social lens, it is challenging to put a monetary value on the benefits of empowerment, community investment, and social justice.²⁷ Empowerment is an important piece of long-term community improvement. Disempowered people cannot organize or act autonomously, which prevents them

from leaving the sphere of a ‘disadvantaged’ person.²⁸ Systems must be challenged, and communities mobilized for programming that achieves long-term social benefit. One way that this can occur is through grassroots interventions that use a collaborative approach to fit a community's needs. Community gardens are a well posed intervention for this kind of community leadership.²⁹ The social connectedness that can be drawn from participation in a shared activity, such as a community garden, is valuable for social integration and investment. A garden allows for a community’s collective efficacy to blossom.²⁹ As members of a community come together to collaborate, trust and social investment follow, which may result in a decrease in a community’s criminal activity²² and broader improvements in community wellness.²⁹ The relationships that are born out of this environment may also allow for more civic engagement and encourage the development of a more united community that can advocate for itself and its needs.²⁹

Section 4: The Role of Staff Support

Organizations grow and benefit in a variety of ways when they have good employee retention. On the surface level, the public always seem to be more drawn to places where employees appear happy, and where there is limited staff turnover. However, from a functional perspective, employee retention is incredibly important for community organizations that support comprehensive, complex projects. This is because of the benefits that consistent staffing can lead from both a financial and a human perspective. Consistent professional support will save money by limiting the need for ongoing recruitment. It also allows for less overall staff training time and fewer fees associated with these training efforts.³⁰ Well trained, knowledgeable, and experienced

staff also help to facilitate improved productivity.³⁰ They can spend time accessing established relationships and can consequently focus on the tasks at hand.

More importantly though, consistent staff can provide high quality customer service. Trust is a very important factor when considering the residents who will be utilizing the services provided by projects like *The Acres*. Employee retention gives the residents time to become comfortable with the staff and allows for relationships to grow. Familiarity is key in establishing a trustworthy relationship that will help to facilitate a feeling of community safety and promote access to provided supports.

Conditions for staff working in the social service industry are less than ideal. It has been reported that front line workers who work alongside individuals with complex needs find that their work is rewarding and meaningful, but that it often comes with many challenges. Post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout and discrimination³¹ are at the top of the list of major challenges faced by these workers. Further concerns of working in such a field include: exposure to violence, aggressive behavior, and sexual harassment.³¹ There is a unique relational skill set that is required of an employee working with houseless and high needs populations. The employees who will be working in a setting such as *The Acres* need to be trained on, and supported in, developing the skills required for success in this field. Substance use, mental illness and developmental disabilities³² are areas that workers will be required to be knowledgeable about and skilled in navigating. It is inevitable that housing support workers will find themselves in difficult and uncomfortable situations. It is many of these factors that cause a large employee turnover rate in this field of work.

Staff need support; however, many individuals working on the front lines of social service agencies must manage the realities posed by limited resources. It is not uncommon for

front-line workers of these agencies to be offered very low wages, pushing these workers to take on multiple roles leading to burnout and stress.³¹ Permanent and secure positions are often also limited.³¹ Furthermore, employees who act as personal supports in these kinds of environments become a “go-to” resource for the residents, which can come with a great amount of stress for the employees.³² Clear boundaries and rules will be needed to be put in place for the residents regarding access to services provided by the workers, including modes of contact, hours of work, and type of support provided.³² To also help this matter, there should be clear outlines and expectations in the job description for each employee.³² There is also a great benefit in employing those with relevant formal education, such as social work or mental health work, for *The Acres*.³² Investing in the support sector workforce will allow staff to be able to meet the demands of the job and be mentally healthy enough to provide a high quality of care.³¹ Burnout, lack of resources, and feeling unsupported to effectively be able to complete their job will negatively impact the residents who are requiring these services.³¹ It has been noted that similar programs are increasingly recognizing the need to have both a primary worker and a secondary worker assigned to a group of residents to cover the 24/7 nature of the work.³² Variations in responsibilities between the primary and secondary worker should be very clear and outlined in each employee's job description.³²

It is important to have and implement good employee retention strategies. Some key ideas which employees find “very important” in a job are: being treated with respect, good communication among coworkers, a feeling of accomplishment, balanced work and family life, opportunities to develop and further professional skills, friendly and helpful co-workers, freedom to do their job, receiving a competitive wage, job security, sufficient training, good benefits, recognition for work well done, and career advancement opportunities.³³ Retention strategies to

follow will be very important in maintaining a low employee turnover. Some ideas of what to consider providing for employees are: competitive salary, employee benefits package, flexible work schedule, holidays and vacation time, community involvement, health education, wellness and illness prevention, paid sick leave, and childcare assistance.³³

Other sources of staffing support need to be explored to help benefit *The Acres* and alleviate staff strain. Aside from certified employees in the healthcare field, there needs to be staff for auxiliary functions, like maintenance, and opportunities for volunteer involvement. It is important to facilitate a strong system for managing, appreciating, retaining and engaging with volunteers.³⁴ Building a volunteer base around the talents, skills and interests of those wanting to be a part of the mission of the organization will help create a dynamic group that can further the organization and allow it to build and grow.³⁴ This process of broader community involvement allows for social engagement, promotes connection- building, and helps foster understanding of the complex issues and needs that exist within a community.³⁴

Section 5: Case Studies

Given that there is no clear road map for how to approach the complex needs of vulnerable individuals experiencing houselessness, there are a variety of programs and interventions that exist worldwide that should be considered when thinking about poverty solutions. Two such cases are described below:

Case Study 1: The Norwegian Prison System. The prison system in Norway is a reformative system which is not created to punish inmates, but rather to reform criminal behaviour to behaviour suitable for life in a community.³⁵ The main punishment for incarcerated

individuals in this setting is the restriction of travel, as the individuals must remain living within the prison site. Otherwise, the prison is built relatively “normal” as incarcerated individuals get to use kitchen facilities and have rooms with large windows and televisions. Living spaces are shared in a way that resembles family living, which helps individuals develop community skills and reduces the sense of confinement within the prison. Supports are offered within the prison system, and after release, to aid in reform, long-term job stability, and a sustainably crime-free life post-incarceration. The supports available include: education, job finding assistance, and addiction treatment. The education available to individuals in the prison system includes: “primary and secondary school, work qualifying courses, vocational training, and tertiary studies,”³⁶ and is meant to help inmates integrate back into society once they are released.

There are many similarities between the prison system in Norway and the proposal for *The Acres* project, and the success of the prison system is used as an example of how *The Acres* will work from a financial and logistic standpoint. *The Acres* is meant to house disadvantaged members of society – those who are likely to be forced to resort to crime to survive or as a response to the inequities of their lives. *The Acres* can be thought of as a project aimed to house and educate houseless people, and to help connect these individuals with resources that can help them feel more integrated in society. The prison system in Norway has very similar goals, and for the similar disadvantaged demographic which *The Acres* aims to serve. *The Acres* program also plans to aid its residents in similar ways to that of the Norwegian prison system. For example, both focus on building community skills in residents; both offer residents experience and education that can be beneficial and provide opportunities for employment in the long-term; and both are able to provide staff which can guide and form relationships with residents that

build trust. It is for these reasons the prison system in Norway offers a viable comparison for financial and logistical viability.

The prison system in Norway demonstrates how *The Acres* is viable from a financial standpoint. The average annual cost per inmate in Canada between 2018 and 2019 was \$120,589.³⁷ Reducing the overall number of incarcerated and re-incarcerated individuals in our prison system seems a viable option to reduce the money spent. Norway does this by offering the supports discussed previously, many of which parallel the proposed supports within *The Acres*. These supports greatly contribute to Norway's recidivism rate of 20% (in 2010), compared to a rate of 52% in the USA (in 2006)³⁵, 55% in Quebec (in 2007), and 35% in Ontario (in 2014).³⁸ Statistics show that Norway much more effectively reforms criminals and prevents crime than Canada. Canada's incarceration rate per 100,000 people is 116, which is around 66% greater than Norway's rate of 70 per 100,000 people.³⁹ These rates show that it is worth it financially to reduce crime in Canada, which is one of the goals of *The Acres*. These comparisons between the Norwegian and Canadian prison systems also demonstrate that reform is possible using the proposed techniques within *The Acres*. These techniques would greatly benefit our communities, especially given that "the cost of crime" in Canada was over 85 billion dollars between 2009 and 2010.⁴⁰

The case study on Norway's prison system suggests clear financial viability for *The Acres*, but there are also clear moral reasons suggested. Crime is expensive, that is clear, but it also causes immense suffering. People engaging in criminal behaviours have often experienced suffering and inequity in their lives as well. By offering these individuals opportunities to learn and contribute to society, *The Acres* aims to reduce suffering related to criminal activity and

houselessness, as well as address the inequities of society. The clear financial benefits of reducing crime in Canada are important, but so too are these moral benefits.

Case Study 2: All in For Youth (AIFY). Edmonton's All in for Youth (AIFY) program is a multi-year project aimed at supporting vulnerable students attending selected high needs schools in Alberta's capital city. Its vision and mission strives to tackle complex needs in the lives of students that school alone cannot fix.⁴¹ This program's method of aiding students has focussed on implementing accessible, in-school, wraparound supports that allow students and their families to thrive and maximize their potential for success both in and out of school. The AIFY project allows for multidimensional support based on collaboration between multiple community partners. These partners have allowed change to occur in five key areas: Quality Teaching and Learning, Family Support, In-School Support, Out-of-School Support and System Change.⁴¹

The in-school community partners that comprise AIFY are: the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brother Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area, The City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic School Boards, Mental Health Foundation, Edmonton Community Foundation, REACH Edmonton, The United Way of the Alberta Capital Region and e4c. The efforts of AIFY are centred in five high-needs central Edmonton schools:⁴¹

1. Delton Elementary School (Pre-K to Grade 6)
2. John A. McDougall Elementary School (Pre-K to Grade 6)
3. St. Alphonsus Elementary/Junior High (Pre-K to Grade 9)
4. Spruce Avenue Junior High (Grade 7 to 9)
5. Eastglen High School (Grade 10 – 12)

The first year of operation for AIFY was the 2016 school year.⁴¹ They introduced a model for their service implementation called the AIFY Model.²³ This model is based on supporting the implementation and maintenance of collaborative, school-based supports for students and their families.⁴¹ The success of this program has been evident through student and parent testimonials over the course of the AIFY project. Students and families within these school communities feel supported and see the potential their futures hold. This model has demonstrated how accessible service delivery and collaboration can help to support students and families that may otherwise fall through the cracks.⁴¹ Wraparound supports in this school environment focus on enhancing parents/caregivers lives, alongside the children.⁴¹

“...being community-based, so being where families go is really important and can’t be understated. They don’t have to find an agency ... or a hospital ... or go somewhere [else]. It’s just a part of their day-to-day activities. They’re going to that school, their child’s going to that school, so it’s embedded in the community. So, for me...I think that’s really an important piece. And when I talk to people across the country, we’re unique in that respect too. Like it’s not a common way [to do things]. People talk about school-based services, but we’ve done something [different] in All in for Youth, we’ve taken it to another level.”²³ p. 16.

“I feel like the culture within the school continues to shift and the messaging continues to shift about... being more trauma-informed and understanding that for a lot of kids, this is last chance... this is it. If we don’t figure out how to support these youth, the chances of them being successful if they leave here

and ... we haven't helped them be successful, they probably won't right?²³
p.12.

In order to properly and effectively implement this high quality, wraparound support model in five AIFY schools, it costs roughly \$2.2 million annually; a cost of \$939 per AIFY student.²³ However, the return expected on this four-year investment is substantial. AIFY reports returns of a minimum of \$26.4 million, with a \$2,817 return expected per AIFY student each year when the long-term benefits of improved educational outcomes are factored in.²³ There is evidence that the kind comprehensive supports offered by AIFY can translate into a range of \$3-\$15 back for every dollar invested into this kind of programming,⁴¹ with the above \$2,817 calculated based on the lowest estimate of \$3 per student reached.

Needless to say, the AIFY school communities have been forever changed as a result of this program, along with the lives of the individual students and their families who have been able to access these critical supports.²³ The ongoing goal for AIFY is to sustain and scale the model in order to extend the longevity of the program and allow these benefits to continue to reach more students and their families. This will be hard in the midst of economic and pandemic recovery.²³ However, it is a crucial time and will allow AIFY supports to prove even more critical to students and families across the province.²³ This model of support will yield returns and will be needed in the future, as students and their families work to overcome the challenging times ahead.²³

“So, I keep repeating this to so many people but... being mom and a teacher it's really hard and I just want to go back to being a mom- but I can't (because of the pandemic) ... I don't even have the words to explain how grateful I am for [the school]. They were always there when I needed, a

phone call right away. They were always there to support me through you know the lessons. They were always there to explain if I had any questions, if there were any concerns or any fears or if I was just stressed out, they were always, always there. So, I really appreciate that.”⁴¹ p. 16.

Section 7: Conclusion

Grassroots organisations like Lady Flower Gardens are the foundation of productive community interventions and they must be treated as such. Despite gains in community outreach efforts and program innovations, these grassroots organisations must cope with frustrating financial realities. The current grant-based funding structure is unstable and forces these organisations to centre their attention on internal paperwork and pleas for investment to try and ensure that their efforts can be maintained. This attention would be better used in direct service provision. Effective programming requires long-term investments that are of adequate scale, are consistently implemented, and of adequate duration.¹⁹ To avoid this financial support would be to hinder potential successes that could come from these community-based organisations.

With all of this in mind, it seems as though there is not much of a choice as to whether or not to fund supports for vulnerable members of society. Whether inaction or action is selected will determine what costs will be incurred rather than whether or not there will be costs incurred. Social integration for marginalised individuals is not only valuable on a personal level, it is beneficial from an economic standpoint.

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