

THE ALEX
DENTAL
HEALTH BUS

For some, going to the dentist means a few rounds of emergency flossing in the week leading up to the annual appointment. For others, seeing a dentist is an unattainable luxury, writes *Kerianne Sproule*, for the Calgary Herald



1. **First and foremost**
The dental health clinic on wheels provides care for our community's most at-risk kids and youth ranging in age from six to 24 — some of whom have never seen a dentist.
2. **The importance of dental care**
It may surprise some that pediatric dental disease and tooth decay are the top chronic childhood illnesses in Canada. With one in five kids living in poverty, the prospect of every child being treated for rotting teeth is depressingly low. Not only that, it's been proven that decay can inhibit the cognitive development of a child — not good for the little sponges that are elementary school students.
3. **It takes a village**
Making something as significant as The Alex Dental Health Bus happen — it's the only service of its kind in North America — takes a whole lot of collaboration. The on-board team consists of dental hygienists, a resource specialist and professional dental volunteers. Behind the scenes, though, is buy-in from Alberta Health Services, local school boards and a growing number of local dental clinics that have become allies in treating these young patients.
4. **A smile a minute**
Fully 3,349 students were treated between November 2013 and May 2014. Of these, 920 were seen through the high-needs school program and 85 were scheduled for restorative dental care at a partnering dental clinic.
5. **An investment in Calgary's future**
Being born out of an initial \$375,000 donation from the Willow Park Charity Classic Golf Tournament, The Alex Dental Health Bus program requires approximately \$380,000 annually to continue operating. Through continued support from kind local donors, the City of Calgary, partnering businesses and contributions from the 2014 Calgary Herald Christmas Fund, the DHB can continue to keep Calgary's kids smiling for another year.



Compass donation began with challenge

Herald Christmas Fund co-ordinator Hilda Van Camp accepts a \$11,700 cheque Tuesday from first-time donors Compass Compression, represented by company president John Forgeron, right, and vice-president of operations, Phil Ness. The donation started with a challenge from a Compass leader to his children; they would earn money for the Fund, based on the number of chores they did. The idea of contributing to the Fund then spread into his workplace at Compass, which is in the oil and gas service sector. *CRYSTAL SCHICK/CALGARY HERALD*

A Christmas Fund thank you to you all

Generous donors stepped up and brave clients told their stories, *Valerie Berenyi* writes

The first time I volunteered at an emergency shelter was a revelation.

A bunch of work pals and I cooked some big pans of lasagna and served them along with salad and dessert to the families sleeping in a church basement that night.

The most eye-opening part came when we took plates of the leftovers and sat down with the “clients” to share a meal.

I began chatting with a couple at our table while their two young kids played quietly nearby.

They told me about moving here from another province, how the jobs and rentals they’d set up in advance had gone sideways, how one of them had got sick and how a whole series of unfortunate circumstances had landed

If you take the time to talk to someone down on their luck, you’ll soon find precious little difference between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

them in this shelter.

“I never thought this would happen to us,” said the dad, sadly shaking his head.

That’s when it struck me: he and his family were nice, perfectly normal people who’d had a run of very bad luck, and they didn’t have a safety net to catch them when they ran into difficulties in a strange, new city.

Even though I’m not religious, that old expression, “There, but for the grace of God, go I,” popped into my head.

I don’t know what became of the family, but I hoped that, with a little help, they soon found their feet under them and were able to make a good life here.

Over the years, working as a reporter and editor at the Calgary

Herald, I told the stories of others who wound up living in shelters, relying on mobile health clinics, fleeing abuse or desperately trying to get help for mental-health problems.

And I would always think: given happenstance, that person might be me, a friend, a family member, a neighbour, a colleague.

If you take the time to talk to someone down on their luck, you’ll soon find precious little difference between “us” and “them.”

We have numerous charitable organizations in Calgary that recognize the fundamental humanity of the less fortunate. Since Nov. 21 the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund has shone a klieg light on 12 of those agencies through stories and statistics, photographs and videos.

Today, the coverage of our 2014 campaign wraps up — although



Valerie Berenyi

donations will be accepted until midnight.

At press time, \$1,010,000.43 had been raised.

Huzzah! A final tally will be announced toward the end of January and every cent raised will be divided equally among the 12 recipients.

I thank them for the incredible work they do, and I’m grateful to those clients who bravely stepped forward to tell their individual stories of struggle.

Thank you to the reporters, photographers and guest columnists who took care to tell such moving stories. And thank you, dear readers, for being so willing to share your financial resources with our 12 agencies.

We are fortunate indeed.

Valerie Berenyi, a freelance writer and editor, is guest editor of the 2014 Calgary Herald Christmas Fund. She worked at the Herald from 2000 to 2014, most recently as editor in chief of Swerve.

SOS team member answers the call

John Chief Moon reaches out to the hard-to-reach homeless

JENNIFER ALLFORD
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Meet John Chief Moon, a member of the Canadian Mental Health Association Calgary’s Street Outreach & Stabilization (SOS) program.

The program works to link the hard-to-reach homeless — of which an estimated 70 per cent have mental health concerns — with essential community services.

Funds raised by the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund will go to help support the program.



John Chief Moon

Q Describe what a typical day at work looks like for you.
A My partner and I load up our carts with food hampers from the food bank, gloves, toques and socks and we usually head to Stephen Avenue Walk, the CTrain station and Olympic Park. Other times we take my vehicle and we go to places where we think people might be camping. We give them food and we give them our card and say give us a call if you want to see a doctor or a counsellor, stuff like that. Most of the people we talk to are suffering from mental illness and addictions — those two go hand in hand.

Q What’s worst thing you’ve seen since you joined the SOS team?
A Sometimes, when you go to the shelters in the early morning you see First Nations youth on their small mats, in the fetal position, sleeping. That can really get to me. It’s such a waste of abilities. I just think of the grandfathers who have passed and think about

what they would think if they saw our youth in that position, overcome by addictions. I think the grandfathers are weeping.

Q Tell us about a favourite moment on the job.
A We went down to the Uptown Bottle Depot with our cart and this elderly gentleman told us, “You guys are angels. I was praying this morning that I needed some food and now you guys show up; you’re sent from God.” And that made me feel good. I am just trying to assist people who are trying to get by each day. I never really thought of myself as an angel, but it put a warm feeling in my heart.

Q As a front-line worker, how do you take care of your own health and well-being?
A When I get overwhelmed, I go to my spiritual elder on the Peigan reserve and get myself cleansed. Other times I talk to my dad for perspective. He’s an elder on the Blood reserve. He doesn’t live a fast pace like we do in the city.

Someone asked Crowfoot, the Sisika chief who signed the treaty back in 1877, how long we live. Crowfoot said our lives are as short as the condensation from a buffalo’s breath. We are here for a very short time, so while we are here we should try to help our fellow human beings.

Q Bust a myth for us.
A Some people think street people are violent and unpredictable. I’ve seen people throw money at them and not even give them eye contact. But they’re very down to earth, nice people just down on their luck.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Donate to the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund and help those in need in our community. Read more Christmas Fund stories at calgaryherald.com.

\$1,010,000.43: What the Christmas Fund has raised to date.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE: Cheques payable to Calgary Herald Christmas Fund

Visit: heraldchristmasfund.com or christmasfund.ca

Call: Please call in your donation by Mastercard, Visa or American Express to (403) 235-7481

Clip: Please mail your donation to: Calgary Herald, PO Box 2400, Station M, Calgary, AB T2P 0W8

Monday to Friday during the hours of 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

☐ Make a personal donation

☐ Make a donation on behalf of an organization

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Would you like your Christmas Fund donation published in the Calgary Herald?

Please check all that apply.

☐ Publish my name and donation amount

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☐ I am making this donation in lieu of Christmas gifts/cards

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☐ I would like to issue a challenge to (insert challenge)

Donors' names and amounts will be published only when requested.

Tax receipts will be issued for all donations over \$10.

Donations will be accepted until midnight on Dec. 31.

CALGARY HERALD

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