



Annual Report 2024

Member's Meeting November 2024

Over this last year our ministry, planning, and priorities have been shaped by these priorities:

- **Next Gen** (ministry to the next generation of Youth and Children)
- **Groups** (good things happen in rows, but the best things happen in circles)
- **Empowering Leadership** (equipping congregants for ministry leadership)
- **Digital Ministry** (hybrid, in person and online ministry is our new normal)
- **Supporting Christian Education** (realizing the redemptive potential of SCA)

Here is a sampling of outcomes that have marked this past year:

- **Baptisms:** 75 baptisms between October 2023 – May 2024. Most of these testimonies reveal their growing desire to know Jesus because of our church through either kids ministries, youth ministries and group and adult care ministries (31 young adult/adults, 30 youth, 14 kids).
- **Kids:** A 32% increase in Kids weekend attendance, largely due to offering Kids Ministries during Saturday services.
- **Kids:** Started Kids Nights where Kindergarten to Grade 6 kids come to the church on a Friday night to learn God's Word through worship, gym games, craft, snacks and play.
- **Weekend's Ministries:** Continued growth not just in new people joining the Weekend's team, but also depth of community and relationship in those teams.
- **Care Ministry:** Grateful for the 70 plus volunteers who serve through prayer teams, calling teams, meal ministry, card ministry, support groups, seminars, Senior Connect and the newly forming Shut-in Ministry.
- **Groups:** It was encouraging to witness 745 people join in one of our 70 SPAC Groups with a balanced age demographic (Ages 20-45 = 38%; 46-64 = 34%; 65+ = 28%).
- **Groups:** We saw an increase of 31% (80 people) this past year in Medium Sized Groups (*Connections, Alpha, Wednesday Gents, Thursday Basketball, Pickleball, Daybreak and WayGaming*).



- **Groups:** Our Connection Groups continues to be a huge factor in helping draw new or feel new people. This has helped catalyze new life groups and has helped people feel a sense of belonging.
- **Audio Visual:** The management of our AV systems has been adjusted to provide a more efficient and effective strategy for upkeep and maintenance of our systems.
- **Youth:** Unity and relationships developed between the church and school allowing for collaborative ministry.
- **Finance:** We finished the year with a slight surplus in the ministry fund and we continue to draw down on the compassion and mission funds by contributing to both local and international projects. We are grateful for the generous response to our request for giving to boiler replacement project.
- **Leadership:** We said goodbye to Pastor Greg Hochhalter and welcomed Pastor Jeremy Cook as our new Lead Pastor and are looking forward to seeing this new chapter of our story written.

Compassion Giving Report

Below is an excerpt from the "Bridging the Gap Evaluation". A report prepared by Strathcona County's Family and Community Services.

Appendix B: Program Summary for Communication

Note: This appendix contains a two-page summary of the Bridging the Gap program, focusing on basic program information and high-level impacts demonstrated through the evaluation. This information may be re-purposed into communication materials for the program, for various audiences, as needed.

Overview

When people and families in Strathcona County run into challenges that put their housing situation at risk, Bridging the Gap (BTG) can help with short-term financial aid and the option to access other social support services. Since 2017 it has helped many local individuals and families avoid having temporary hardships turn into permanent setbacks. This unique partnership between Heartland Alliance Church, Heartland Housing Foundation, Sherwood Park Alliance Church and Strathcona County Family and Community Services (FCS) bridges a serious gap in the network of available social supports. Each partner organization fulfills a different and complementary role in the program, showing what can be achieved when we partner together to help our community.

Background & Need

Individuals and families living in Strathcona County sometimes experience unforeseen challenges that result in significant financial disruptions that in turn put their housing situation at risk. A risky housing situation can exacerbate other issues and cause significant distress for those experiencing it. For example, some families may be forced to consider moving which may lead to other negative financial impacts. It may also disconnect them from natural supports such as friends or family or even from school or work. Multiple stressors also make it harder to deal with other issues they may be facing. Unfortunately for individuals and families in these circumstances, emergency financial and housing resources can be limited or difficult to access and, if available, may not be accessible in time to avoid a housing crisis.

Description

Bridging the Gap funds provide a temporary solution to an urgent housing-related financial need that helps individuals and families get back on track. Rapid access to this short-term relief provides breathing space for recipients to address their immediate needs and get to the other side of their challenges. Each program partner takes on a complementary role, from contributing funds for the program (Heartland Alliance Church and Sherwood Park Alliance Church), to reviewing and approving applications (FCS) and distributing funds to approved applicants (Heartland Housing Foundation). In addition to financial relief, FCS Solutions Navigators are there to work alongside individuals and families, creating a network of support and building awareness of available community resources so participants are better prepared to move forward and tackle this and future challenges.

Program Impact

As a result of this program, individuals and families experiencing financial challenges have a better chance to remain sustainably housed in their Strathcona County community, maintaining their connections and natural supports and accessing additional community supports such as FCS Solutions Navigation when they need to. Ultimately, they are empowered to better cope with future challenges. A recent review of the program highlighted:

- Between January 2023 and May 2024, \$92,083 of BTG funds were provided to 39 participants, with an average amount of just under \$2,400 provided per participant.

- Most participants accessed funding for expenses associated with rent (72%) and/or utilities (44%), followed by mortgage expenses (15%), alternate accommodation needs (e.g., due to fire or an unsafe situation) (5%) and/or property tax payments (3%).¹¹
- Of all 39 participants, at least 24 (62%) were at risk of eviction or homelessness, and BTG funds helped prevent this immediate crisis for these individuals.
- Available data strongly suggests that for many participants, positive impacts of the program on their housing situation extend multiple months beyond the period immediately following receipt of BTG funds.
- All but one of the 39 BTG participants (97%) accessed FCS services at least once after receiving BTG funds and almost half (49%) accessed FCS services six or more times.
- As a result of receiving BTG funds, many participants experienced broader impacts such as accessing other supports and services, feeling unburdened by immediate financial pressures giving time and space to work on other items connected to sustainability, maintaining or securing housing, and experiencing a positive impact on their mental health.

Each time BTG funds are provided, lives are changed. Missing just one or two paychecks can mean the difference between paying rent and facing housing uncertainty. Whether it's a father needing time off to care for an injured loved one or a mother waiting to start a new job, BTG funds offer short-term relief to overcome housing challenges. But these funds do more than help cover bills - they give people control back over their lives and, often with the support of Solutions Navigators, empower them to face future challenges. One recipient expressed heartfelt gratitude saying, "It was a Godsend; I was able to pay most of my bills with the funds given to us. My family would be in bad shape if we did not receive this help. We are so thankful!"

A Unique and Vital Program

What makes BTG such a unique program?

- **Rapid and flexible** - Funding is provided to eligible recipients quickly and in a flexible way, so it is available to individuals and families when they need it and for what they need, to support their journey towards housing sustainability and respond to their immediate financial challenges.
- **Strengths-based and supportive** - The program is built on a judgement-free, strengths-based approach, from application to the ongoing wrap-around support provided by Solutions Navigators, empowering participants to experience success beyond addressing their immediate housing-related financial need.
- **A community partnership** - Emerging as a grassroots response from the community to a social issue, organizations in Strathcona County work together to raise funds and provide supports, and in doing so raise awareness of housing-related challenges in the community.

Opportunity/Call to Action

BTG shows what we can do when we come together as community partners to support our local families and neighbours when they have nowhere else to turn. It shows how a little help, given in the right way at the right time, can support people to turn a potential catastrophe into a bump in the road, setting them up to thrive as part of our shared community.

¹¹ Some participants have more than one type of housing-related need for the funding, so the total exceeds 100%.