

2023 Living Skies AGM Report from River Bend Integrated Community Ministries

My name is Chantalle Morrow-Fesciuc, and I am the director of River Bend Integrated Community Ministries; we go by ICM.

We are a social justice ministry located in the middle of Saskatoon's core community. - You may know the area as the "inner city." Our mission states that we are working to build relationships of solidarity, justice, respect and compassion among congregations, individuals, community organizations and core residents.

We are The United Church of Canada's smallest social justice ministry, but we do big things.

ICM walks with people in our neighbourhood and is a ministry of relationships and presence. We engage in Ethical Community Collaboration every day, and one of our guiding documents is "Nothing About Us Without Us" which is a document that lifts up the understanding that people are the experts in their own lives and that Ethical Community Collaboration is at the forefront of any ICM Initiative. ICM's commitment to Ethical Community Collaboration ensures that the voices most impacted by decisions are actually at the development and decision-making tables.

These guiding principles ensure that ICM offers justice instead of charity when justice is what's needed.

All of ICM's initiatives are community-led, community-developed, and staffed by EV or "Essential Voices" from the surrounding community. This includes me. I have lived approximately eight blocks from ICM's core community office for all of my adult life and come with my own stories and background of lived experiences.

We are led by the communities we serve and supported by an incredible network of volunteers.

The following are some of the things ICM is able to bring to the community in 2022 through authentic relationships and bearing witness to our neighbours:

- ICM hosts a weekly community-developed traditional Sharing Circle to address our communities' self-identified need for mental health support and a return to culture in a sensitive way. It is led by Elder Judy Pelly, who says that the only way our community can heal is through sacred ceremonies such as the Sharing Circle and Metis Knowledge Keeper Dr. Jackie Maurice, who wrote an article inspired by our weekly Circle called [The Sharing Circle](#).
- Chop and Chat, a long-time once-a-week community meal, closed down due to restrictions, and we were able to pivot through 4 incarnations before landing on a takeaway meal which allowed us to connect with our neighbours safely.
- ICM Community Pantry/ Food Boxes is a partnership developed with the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre, where 2 EV staff take delivery of donated food bags which are then picked up by people in our community that need them the most.
- Grow a row for ICM - over 1000 pounds of fresh vegetables were donated to the ICM Community pantry by local congregations and community members.
- ICM is a part of Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada's stakeholder registry. We are part of a community consultation to receive information about topics pertinent to our mission statement within the core community. The ways that ICM participates may sometimes include consultations, being a part of an advisory body or research activities such as surveys or public opinion research on ICM's chosen public policy topics (mental health, urban communities, harm reduction, Guaranteed income etc.) Anytime ICM can help inform best practices using ethical community collaboration is a benefit. For instance, in 2022, I was invited to share views on urban mental health. I have been advocating for a national 3-digit emergency number for mental health emergencies. When you call 911, you know you will only be connected to emergency services (fire, police and ambulance). ICM

advocated for a three-digit number that would connect exclusively to mental health resources.

Success!! This is set to happen on November 2023, and the three-digit number will be 9-8-8.

- Individual Advocacy and System Navigation for our core community neighbours — by the “system,” I mean the way for people to get their fundamental human rights met- housing, food and clothing, access to education, timely mental health support and social service agency advocacy, among other things.
- Education to the larger community of the United Church of Saskatoon and the Living Skies region through newsletters, consultations, workshops and speaking engagements.
- ICM is a soft start to employment for people that may have never held a job before; there is a focus on personal mentorship.
- A safe place for our neighbours to drop in for a coffee, open up, and be vulnerable without being judged. People can be real and honest with their truths because the rest of the EV staff and I are real and honest with ours. We are a safe, non-judgmental space filled with people who may have a similar story and need a safe space to talk and not be talked at.

This is bearing witness and can be some of the most critical work that ICM does, although it can be difficult to quantify: how do I turn the reality of guiding an overwhelmed grandmother through accessing Jordan's Principle or supporting a community member who has lost their sister to the epidemic call MMIWG2S into words in a report?

- I spend much of my time listening to uncomfortable truths, believing them, and then reflecting on those truths and thinking of how ICM might honour ours and the National Church's commitment to reconciliation which is actually reconciliACTION.
- ICM becomes a job reference which can lead to a crucial housing reference for EV staff
- Living skies region youth ministry - Youth spring and fall retreats where I have been invited to speak about pertinent social justice issues.
- Board members are getting increasingly diverse- we have more work to do there, but I am happy with our progress and direction.
- Working with Ev staff, board members, volunteers and the Living Skies region, ICM has launched a Directors Educational outreach workshop series focused on what BIPOC people actually want us to know and, ultimately, how we can answer the “ what do we do now” questions that are asked while engaging in anti-racism work. We will be learning about some of the more uncomfortable topics- what are microaggressions and why do people get upset about them/ nothing about us without us/ what is and also; why should we care about topics like; systemic racism/ Guaranteed basic income and ethical community collaboration/ Unearned privilege/ Unearned stereotypes and personal bias etc.
- ICM has cultivated a Lived Experience Speakers Bureau- speakers are people with direct lived experience of various issues connected to intergenerational trauma, reconciliation, gang affiliation, MMIWG2S and poverty who speak about their personal lives and stories. Speakers will also discuss the solutions and their personal successes.
- St. Andrew's College offers integration seminars as a course- ICM hosts students for 10 weeks per year under the framework of community-engaged learning.
- ICM supports core community agencies whenever we can in a variety of ways. We share our gifts as we are able.
- ICM is also on the Reconciliation Saskatoon Learning Committee and the Saskatoon Emergency Response to Covid team.

Our new Moderator has called us to be innovative and creative, and that's what ICM is: Daring Justice.

Many blessing,

Chantalle Morrow-Fesciuc

Director of River Bend Integrated Community Ministries