COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A lunch briefly warms the hearts of the Calgary and Area Child Advocacy Centre

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, the BLG Calgary office knew that many would be deeply impacted, especially in the healthcare industry. They remembered one of their local community partners: the Calgary and Area Child Advocacy Centre (CCAC).

The CCAC is a non-profit organization that addresses child abuse with an integrated approach. They work closely with their partners—the Alberta Health Services and the Calgary Police Service, to name but two—in order to ensure the safety of children and youth.

Ruxandra Andreiasi, from BLG's Clients and Markets team, reached out to her contact, Karen Orser, CCAC's Chief Executive Officer, and asked if there is any way they could support them in this strenuous time.

"Perhaps with a warm lunch?" she asked.

Karen was happily surprised with the offer, saying they have been stressed lately, attempting to navigate the COVID crisis: "A warm lunch would be such a lovely treat – even if we all have to stand 6 feet apart to eat it!" Karen wrote back.

Karen was appointed CEO of CCAC in September 2019. She was previously President and CEO of Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS) of Calgary and Area and holds an MBA in Executive Management from Royal Roads University.

The Calgary team soon turned their efforts to organizing the lunch.

"We believe in what they do," Ruxandra told us over the phone. She proceeded to describe the centre's beautiful waiting rooms—a quasi-indoor park with soft toys for younger kids and Xbox stations for the older ones.

The CCAC's integrated approach means that they aim to reduce the long-term impact of trauma on a child, offering every service from investigation to therapy—all the way to medical assistance—right on site. During their investigation process, for example, they film (or record) the forensic interviews so that the child refrains from reliving the traumatic experience.

BLG has a four-year relationship with the Centre, having sponsored and volunteered for them.

Melinda Park, Partner at BLG, is on the board of the organization and Chair of the Governance Committee. The CCAC Board is composed of a variety of key personalities, such as the Deputy Chief of the Calgary Police Service and the Chief Superintendent of the RCMP, to name but them: "As a board member, it is a privilege to sit with those people," said Melinda. She informed us that every board meeting begins with a case study, allowing for a grounding experience.

"When you understand how a child suffered and is now being helped, it's incredibly humbling," continued Melinda.

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Debra Mauro, a long-standing Board Member, feels "incredibly proud of the people performing [the Centre's] work on daily basis."

When we spoke with Karen about her recent experience at the CCAC she was "amazed by the commitment and work" of BLG members over the years. She was clear about one thing, though: "it's not about the transaction—it's about how we build partnerships—those deep and meaningful relationships."

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"We're so grateful for our partnership with BLG," she concluded.

In spite of the hard subject matter she has to deal with on a daily basis, Karen is proud about many aspects of her work: "how we help families and the way children *do* heal." She emphasized the verb as if to remind us (and perhaps herself) that there is hope amidst the trauma.

She just as quickly informed us that the CCAC is also about prevention: "we want to build awareness."

She reminds us that child abuse is something that affects us all: it is about the community coming together and reporting inappropriate behaviour.

If some of the statistics from their website raise the hair on your arms, awareness is important in preventing further abuse. Indeed, the CCAC supports on average 56 victims and families through their Victim Support Program monthly. Not to mention that 133 new cases are assessed there every month.

After the lunch, Ruxandra received a note from Christine Fowler, CCAC's Director of Administration who signed off with: "knowing that there are people who care about our well-being and are willing to show their support in such a beautiful way meant a lot to us. Thank you sincerely for putting a smile on our faces during these trying times and for all of your support."