



2024 - 2025

FROM INCLUSION TO BELONGING -

**Voices From the PREP
Community**



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Our Vision

Individuals with Down syndrome are active and included members of their communities.

Our Mission

PREP provides individuals with Down syndrome, their families and community members with the information, resources, and skills they need to create the best possible opportunities for inclusion.



CURTIS SLATER

A Message from the Executive Director

This past year was one of continued growth at PREP, as we now serve over 150 members. Across our programs and services, we expanded opportunities for children and families while also creating spaces where every child feels they belong.

We saw powerful examples of belonging in action. Students participated in school events, joined community recreation programs, explored the arts, and volunteered alongside their peers. These small moments cumulatively reflect something bigger, as students build their confidence, develop critical life skills, and take their place in community life.

We strive to be a safe and welcoming space where children know they are valued, where people believe in them, and where they are encouraged to grow. Belonging does not mean lowering expectations, it means providing the right support so children can be challenged and discover their capabilities. PREP is often where that journey begins, and we walk alongside our members at every step.

I am inspired by the determination of the children we serve, the trust families place in us, and our dedicated staff. I am deeply grateful to our donors, funders, and volunteers whose generosity, advocacy, and time make this work possible. Together, we are building confidence, connection, and a sense of belonging that children carry with them wherever they go.

Thank you for being part of the PREP community and for helping make this work possible.

VOICES FROM THE PREP COMMUNITY

Board of Directors

- **Jenson Tan**, Board President
- **Jason Loo**, Treasurer
- **Miranda Specht**, Secretary
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- **Madeleine Lemire**, Director
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Message from the Board President, Jenson Tan

I'm proud of the impact PREP had this year and the progress our community made together. PREP doesn't just foster inclusion in principle; it helps families feel genuine belonging in daily life – including mine. My daughter Keira has grown through PREP's therapy supports, making meaningful gains in her development. Just as importantly, she's built confidence and social connection beyond the classroom. From inclusion to belonging becomes real when each child is seen, supported, and celebrated for who they are. That shows up in powerful ways: engaging more fully with classmates, forming friendships, and knowing she is valued in her school and community.

Partner Quote:

“Indigenous elders believe that every child is born capable. And that we all have gifts, talents and specialties that can be shared with everyone.

What we need to do as educators is help children recognize these gifts and talents that can be shared. We treat everyone equally, and we make sure that those kiddos who need that lift get it, so that they have the same opportunities as everyone else. The Indigenous way of knowing and doing is so supportive of inclusion. That's why things work well here,”

– Seana Stewart, Principal of Student Services & Inclusive Schooling Coordinator, Yellowknife Catholic School District, NWT



Lena and Ethan

Family quote:

“The definition of belonging is the fundamental human need and feeling of being accepted, valued, and connected within a group, community, or social setting. In thinking of Ethan's future, these are all goals and hopes that we have for him in living a happy and fulfilled life. We aspire for him to have a caring community of people surrounding him, a feeling of acceptance and connection, and the ability to be valued and loved for who he is,”

– Lena, a PREP parent.

Land Acknowledgment

In the spirit of our efforts to promote reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional territories and oral practices of the Blackfoot (Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai), the Tsuut'ina (Sarcee), the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

REMARKABLE REMOTE LEARNING

Gaius' Victory Dance

PREP's Education Support's team Natalie P and Shawna B have established a unique partnership with the Yellowknife Catholic School District, in the NWT. In 2022, Natalie travelled to Yellowknife twice to meet with their education staff. The goal was to enhance their internal capacity to support Gaius, a student with Down syndrome, who was entering kindergarten.

Gaius is a natural comedian, and he enjoys nothing more than telling a good joke, basking in the giggles and guffaws that ensue. The classic knock-knock banana joke is a fan favourite. He adores music and exudes confidence performing alongside his older brother, Reyes, and dad, a Music/Band teacher and Juno Award winner, at the annual school Christmas concerts and talent shows.



Gaius and Reyes

His eclectic taste in music has evolved from Three Little Speckled Frogs to – more recently – Justin Bieber, Bruno Mars, Soundgarden, and Taylor Swift. He's also active, enjoying gymnastics, biking, and swimming.

When Gaius was in Grade two, his parents Lori and Stephen sought extra support for him with reading. PREP offered to meet this important need, and Hannah, our reading coordinator, started remote sessions with him. And now that Gaius is in Grade four, his parents have added further sessions of speech therapy to the mix. Kayla, a speech language pathologist at PREP, joined team Gaius.

Individuals with Down syndrome often experience a variety of issues that can make learning to read quite challenging.

GAIUS' STORY CONTINUED

Issues with vision, hearing, fine motor control and working memory can seem daunting. Gaius was no different and he struggled with fine motor control, working memory, and comprehension.

For children with Down syndrome, hearing, muscle tone, facial shape differences, and challenges with learning and memory impact the development of speech. Initially, Gaius struggled to pronounce words and speaking required substantial effort. He spoke in single words, not sentences, and he did not have a broad vocabulary. As one can imagine, the ability to speak or express oneself impacts one's ability to be social. His team could see that Gaius wanted to be social, he just needed the tools.

Our enthusiastic instructors and therapists use evidence-based and individualized approaches to create success for our students. In Gaius' case, he had support near and far – benefitting from PREP's expertise remotely and his dedicated and compassionate team in Yellowknife. Danielle, his program support teacher, coordinates activities and has joined his reading sessions. In addition, Jo Fairbrother, his highly skilled classroom assistant (CA) sits in on the reading and speech sessions and Talina Makaro, a dedicated CA who is trained and experienced in supporting students with Trisomy 21, supports him in the classroom.



Gaius, Talina, and Jo

GAIUS' STORY CONTINUED

And the Determination of Young Gaius is Inspiring!

He arrives at each session upbeat and ready to learn. Hannah creates individualized lesson plans and the sessions take place over Zoom while Gaius is at school. Gaius had acquired a good base knowledge of letter-sounds before engaging with PREP. As Jo supports Gaius during the lessons, she brings the learnings back to the team.

Throughout the lessons, Gaius is engaged and he eagerly participates. He enjoys an array of books and Gaius has discovered the joy of reading. Jo notes that Gaius loves the interaction and the feedback he gets. He is self-motivated and does not need encouragement. He often does elbow bumps on screen with Hannah – a habit he picked up during Covid. Jo joins in on Gaius' scheduled dance breaks, which are a huge motivator for him. He shakes his groove thing to the Duck Song, or Justin Bieber. This helps Gaius calm his nervous system, allowing him to reset and reengage in the lesson. At the end of the instruction, he gets one last reward – playing the Cariboo game.

Over the last year, Gaius' progress has been remarkable. One year ago, he could read three out of ten (CVC) words accurately. Now he scores nine out of ten – including nonsense words – which shows that he is not simply memorizing words. CVC words are structured as consonant-vowel-consonants (e.g., for example, cat, dog, or sun).



These words are fundamental in early reading instruction because their simple, predictable phonetic structure helps children learn to decode (convert printed words to spoken words) by sounding out each letter and blending them together. Jo is so incredibly proud of him, and the way he rises to each incremental challenge that Hannah offers him.

Gaius will continue to focus on improving his comprehension skills so that he has a greater comprehension of what he is reading. His future goals will be to accurately answer the “who, what and where” questions about each story. And in addition, he’ll work on summarizing the story in a few words.

Gaius Gets Social

In September of 2025, Kayla began remote speech therapy sessions with Gaius. The initial focus was on improving Gaius' clarity of speech, communicating with others, and building longer sentences. Kayla coaches Gaius on different sentence structures (e.g., 'I want' and 'I see), using a technique called finger counting. As she counts the words on his fingers, this cues him to add a word. With this simple technique, his sentences are growing; importantly, easier expression decreases frustration.

After a fairly brief time, Gaius has changed from being a reserved young person to talking a lot and initiating conversation. In addition, his ability to read a word (as a visual cue) also helps his speech and improves his vocabulary.

There is a strong correlation between reading and speech, especially for students with Down syndrome as they can draw on their stronger visual working memory. Seeing and hearing the words is extremely helpful.



Kayla has modelled the rhythm of a conversation with Gaius. Talina observes, "He's learning the give and take of a conversation. He is starting to understand social interactions." When an adult asks how he is, he responds and then adds, "How about you?"

How About You?

We asked Gaius' team to reflect on his strengths. Kayla replies immediately, "He has a heart of gold! He applies the skills he learns and uses them in his school and community right away." Jo muses, "He's incredibly curious!" Hannah shares, "Gaius has a joy for life, which is infectious. I can't help but smile when he wins a game or dances to his favourite tunes. He shows us all not to underestimate his abilities: when given a challenge, he rises to it and his phenomenal progress in reading this year is testament to this."

Talina has worked with Gaius for almost four years, helping him to be independent and understand classroom expectations. Soon, she'll be moving on to a new role at the school. She reflects deeply before responding to our question. "Gaius has taught me the joy of dancing!" Her demeanor shifts and she struggles to contain her emotions, "He showed me just how much I needed this job. He's taught me love and care and he'll be in my mind forever."

We think you've made quite an impression, Gaius. Cue the victory dance!

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Family Support

Description

Families that have a child with Down syndrome come to PREP seeking hope, compassion, and belonging. Our Family Support team welcomes families into the PREP community and provides them with evidence-based, trustworthy, and timely information and resources. Our families come from diverse backgrounds, yet they share the common goal of acquiring knowledge and building confidence so they can effectively support and nurture their children with Down syndrome from birth to adulthood.

Highlights

- This year we engaged with **281 families** and welcomed **5 new families** to PREP.
- We supported **17 families** with fee assistance requests
- For our 14th annual mother's day retreat, we had **40 moms** attend for a day of community building and self-care.
- The Family Support team continued to **connect with external agencies**, including Telus Spark, Zoo, Little Red Reading House, Inclusion Alberta, Mount Royal College, University of Calgary, and much more.

Funded By

Alberta

Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)



Little Red Reading House

Early Learning

Description

Our weekly parent-child classes for children (ages 0-3) provide a hub of connection for families nurturing a child with Down syndrome. Parents value the opportunity to meet and share with others who are starting their challenging yet rewarding journey of parenting a child with Down syndrome. Early Learning is a safe space for participants to develop authentic relationships and discuss a range of topics of interest.

Highlights

- This year we engaged **19 families**
- We launched a **new pilot program** for Early Learning families to explore LENA, a research based language program

Funded By



Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

Testimonial

“The Early Learning Program was an incredible lifeline that was gifted to us through the first years of Ethan’s life. It allowed us to meet families in a similar place on their journeys and build lasting, meaningful friendships. This community has become an extension of our own family, providing support, resources, and a place to land when things get tough. We are forever thankful for everything we’ve gained through the Early Learning Program.”

– Lena, a PREP Parent



Early Childhood Services

Description

Program Unit Funding (PUF) is provided to school authorities for children with severe disabilities/delays who require additional support beyond what is offered in a regular ECS program. PREP has provided a high-quality Early Childhood Services (ECS) program to PUF eligible children in Calgary (ages 2 – 6) since 1989. Our goal is to provide an enriched learning environment with therapy services tailored to meet each individual child's unique needs as they prepare for a successful transition into Kindergarten.

Highlights

- We engaged **15 children** in our ECS program
- We were able to **renovate the ECS gym and bathrooms**. The gym was painted, new gates installed, and stairs were added to practice stair-climbing skills and build endurance. The bathrooms were upgraded and modified so that they were more child friendly with child size toilets and low privacy walls.
- **Transportation company** was implemented for the ECS children. **Two buses** were put in place to transport children to and from PREP.

Funded By

Alberta
Education



K – 2 Program

PREP's K-2 Program supports students' development in the key areas of executive functioning, social skills, language, and behaviour. These skills are targeted within an enhanced atmosphere designed to give students opportunities to practice and develop skills that complement their community classroom environments. A multidisciplinary team including an instructor, therapy assistant, speech-language pathologist, and an occupational therapist work with students to target goals.

Funded By:



Highlight:
10 Registrants

3 – 6 Program

Funded By:

DENTONS

MICHELS®

Highlight:
7 Registrants

PREP's 3-6 Program supports students who are currently enrolled in a Grade 3 to 6 classroom. This program focuses on supporting students' development in the key areas of executive functioning, social skills, language, and behaviour. These skills will be targeted within an enhanced atmosphere designed to give students opportunities to practice and develop skills that complement their community classroom environments. A multidisciplinary team, including an instructor, therapy assistant, speech-language pathologist, and an occupational therapist, work with students to target goals. Students enjoy building social relationships with their peers while developing their skills to live more independent and active lives at school and in their communities.

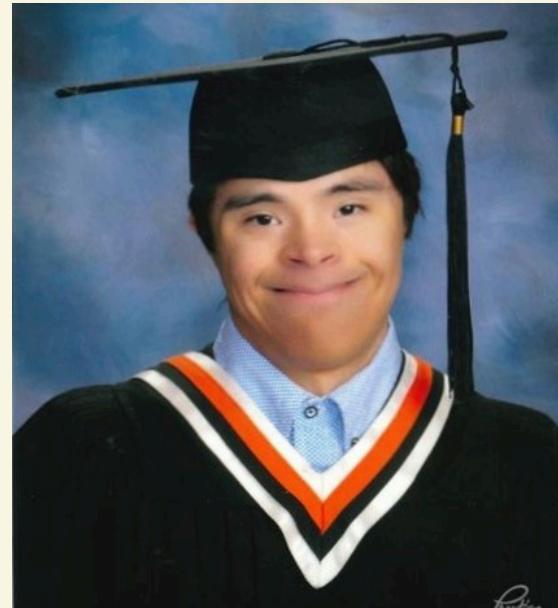
Junior High and Senior High

Description

PREP's Teen Program is uniquely designed to meet the social, emotional, and developmental needs of teens with Down syndrome in Jr. and Sr. High. This multidisciplinary program utilizes a group based therapy approach that incorporates a wide range of resources and strategies to develop our teens' independence, social communication, executive functioning, and self-advocacy skills. Working with an educator, therapy assistant, speech-language pathologist, and occupational therapist, PREP has developed a robust program that is designed to meet the individual needs of our students while giving them the skills required to transition successfully into Sr. High and adulthood.



Samantha



Zihbien

Overarching Highlights

- **28 Registrants** in Jr. High
- **20 Registrants** in Sr. High
- Created **progressive curriculum** between grades
- **Expanded** the number of classes

Funded By



Teens on the Go

Description

Teens on the Go is a community based extension of our Junior & Senior High programs that gives students the opportunity to practice the skills they have learned in class in real-world settings. By engaging in activities such as navigating public spaces and participating in community events, teens apply self-advocacy, social, and decision-making skills in meaningful ways. This hands-on experience helps build confidence, independence, and resilience, while preparing them for future roles in school, work, and society.

Highlights

- **20 total events** for Teens on the Go
- **195 participants** attended events (teens can participate more than once)
- Favourite events included:

The Police Interpretive Centre

At the interpretive centre, teens were able to engage with the police officers, ask questions, complete a scavenger hunt, and navigate the city streets downtown to enjoy a picnic outside.

Aggie Days at the Stampede grounds

Which included navigating to take the c-train downtown. Teens practiced being responsible for their ticket, punching their ticket and following the rules of the c-train. Once at Aggie Days, teens had a chance to see animals, experience different farm activities, ask questions of staff as well as complete a bingo scavenger hunt.



Funded By



Maverick's Reading Program

Description

The goal of the **Maverick's Reading Program** is to help students develop a love of reading. Being able to read reveals a new world and it can greatly enhance independence for our students. Learning to read can be an extended process for some students, therefore the team takes a strength-based approach and strives to have a full understanding of each student. Embracing this holistic view underscores the PREP staff's belief that all aspects of a person are interconnected and contribute to their overall well-being.

Highlights

- In September 2024, we **expanded the age range of the Reading program from 5 years to adults** and welcomed **five adult readers** into the program. It allowed some of our students who were graduating from High School to carry on with reading services, and we had adults in their 20s and 30s returning to PREP after many years.
- Following collaboration with Education Support, the reading program started to deliver **weekly remote services** to a student in the Northwest Territories.
- We had our **highest enrollment** in Reading services, ever.

59 Registrants**Mark**

Funded By



Big Hearted
Mavericks

Therapy

PREP has a highly skilled team of therapeutic professionals, including speech-language pathologists (SLP), occupational therapists (OT), a physiotherapist (PT), and a behaviour strategist (BEH). The PREP team offers intensive multidisciplinary therapeutic services to children, youth, and teens with Down syndrome at home and in the community

Highlights:

- **55 children** served in the community
- **38 children** served onsite
- Therapists utilized their expertise to develop a **variety of workshops** on topics related to Down syndrome.
- **Shelly Hegion, B.A. (Psych.) Behaviour Strategist** joined to provide positive behaviour support to children, youth, teens and adults. She also offered webinars to our staff.
- We welcomed a **Physiotherapy Practicum Student** from the University of Alberta.



Shelley Hegion

Funded in Part By:



Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

Education Supports

PREP offers support to educators and families through our Education Support services. PREP's Education Supports team has 45 years of cumulative experience. Our goal is to ensure all stakeholders have the knowledge, resources, and capacity to create a successful learning environment for students with Down syndrome to thrive throughout their education journey.

Highlights:

- Webinar attendees: **82**
- School Consults (zoom, in person, phone or email): **59**
- Family Consults: **49**
- Community Consults:
 - **Brooks School District:** Introduction to Down syndrome and a day and a half of school consultation
 - **NWT:** 9 days of consultation work



Camps

Description

PREP offers a variety of Day Camps during professional days, spring breaks and during the summer months. PREP is committed to low child-to-staff ratios (3-1), which enhances both safety and individualized attention (e.g., during transitions, which may be challenging).

The warm and welcoming environment encourages our campers to engage with old friends and forge new connections. We explore different themes with visual art activities, sensory and pretend play, music and dance, gross motor activities, and cooking.



Highlights

- **100 registrants**
- PREP was **approved by FSCD** as an approved camp provider, giving families the opportunity to submit their camp costs for partial or whole reimbursement
- Camps moved to **full day and full week offerings**, providing families with more camp support



DONORS

We are pleased to acknowledge our donors, grantors and program sponsors who are vital to our ability to offer evidence-based programs and services. We strive for accuracy, however, If we have missed your name in error, please email admin@prepsociety.ca

Legacy Partners



Presented by 

- Matching



- Charity Partner

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Thank You!

DONORS - CONTINUED

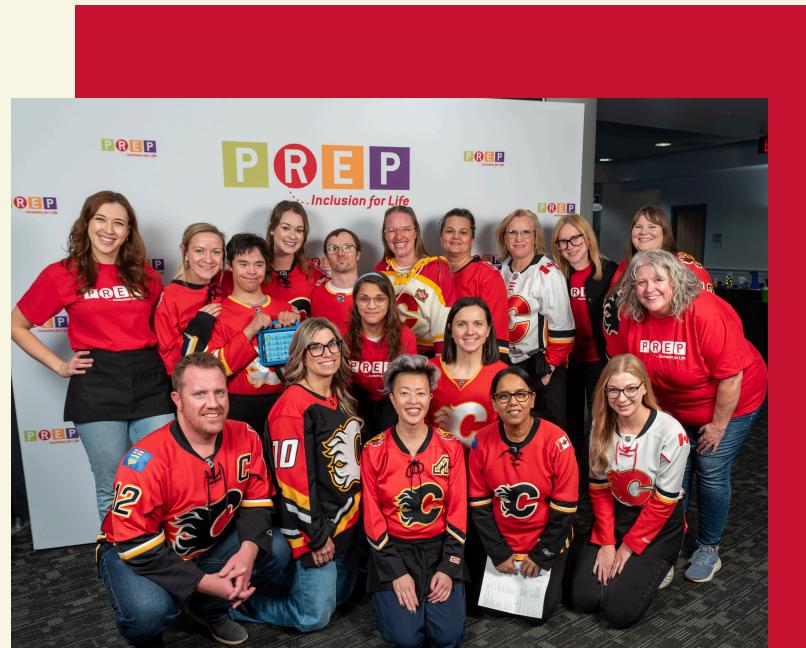
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EVENTS

PREP's Signature Event

Let's Talk Hockey 2024 raised \$87,438 for PREP. We are grateful to our guests, youth volunteers, sponsors, and donors. Our fabulous Emcees Robb Kerr and Craig Conroy interviewed Calgary Flames stars Dustin Wolf, Ryan Lomberg, and Johnathan Huberdeau to the delight of the audience. Attendees participated in a silent auction, shoot-out, hockey card trading and the crowd favourite pick-a-puck game.



Third-Party Events

- PREP youth and members of the reading team and family support team, were on-hand to support the **Mavericks Golf Tournament** which was held on June 3 at the Country Hills Golf Club.
- On June 26, 2025, the Canadian Progress Club, Bow River, hosted their **Bogeys and Business Bash** at the Springbank Links Golf Course. This lively event raised \$10,000 for PREP.
- Up the Down Market**, presented by the Down syndrome Resource Foundation, raised awareness and funds for PREP. Our PREP youth were on hand to support the event while building social skills and confidence.
- PREP was a proud partner of the **Rogers Birdies for Kids** event and we are grateful to be an official charity partner.



PREP families and staff at the Maverick's Golf Tournament



Jocelyn, Ben and Matthew

VOLUNTEERS

PREP is grateful to the forty-two volunteers who contributed 870 hours towards programs and events. Your dedication, passion and experience is invaluable to PREP.

Volunteer Profile: Q & A with Jocelyn Olsen

How did you come to volunteer at PREP?

My desire to volunteer at PREP was deeply rooted in both personal experiences and a strong desire to make a meaningful impact on both individuals with Down syndrome and their families. Having family members with disabilities and seeing the difference volunteers and organizations made in their lives, I knew PREP was the place for me. And, luckily for me, I was welcomed to volunteer with their program.

How long have you been volunteering at PREP?

I started in the Fall of 2022 in the Grades 4-6 Social Skills program. It's been fun to grow with some of the kids that were in that first class!

What do you enjoy most about volunteering at PREP?

Where do I start!? I work in healthcare IT – so, I spend my days leading people, problem solving and making decisions. At the end of a workday, spending time with my friends at PREP and getting to know their parents brings me so much joy. I learn so much from everyone every time I walk through the doors from both the kiddos and the PREP staff.

Volunteer Profile Continued

You are engaged with PREP in many different areas. What would you say to an individual who was considering volunteering at PREP?

I think I'd just remind them that kids are kids! At the end of the day this subset of kids love the same things as other kids, they just require a bit of extra support in some areas, and boy could they teach other subsets of kids (and adults!) a thing or two about empathy and inclusion!

What inspires you the most?

Seeing what these kiddos achieve and how much they grow over the course of a school year is truly inspiring. The staff at PREP provide them with all the tools and it's up to the kids to use them, so when you start to see that in play, it's pretty amazing!

ARC Resources Day of Caring

Through ARC Resource's summer student program, recent graduates and post-secondary students can develop practical skills over the course of the summer in a variety of fields. This year, twenty students came together for ARC's annual student-led Day of Caring at PREP. Over the course of a six-week campaign, ARC students raised more than \$4,200 in support of PREP.



The ARC team

Quote

“Volunteering at PREP for our Day of Caring was incredibly rewarding. It was amazing to see how our contributions like cleaning classrooms or helping with the BBQ could make a meaningful difference. Being part of a team that's committed to giving back reminded me how important it is to support the communities we're part of.”

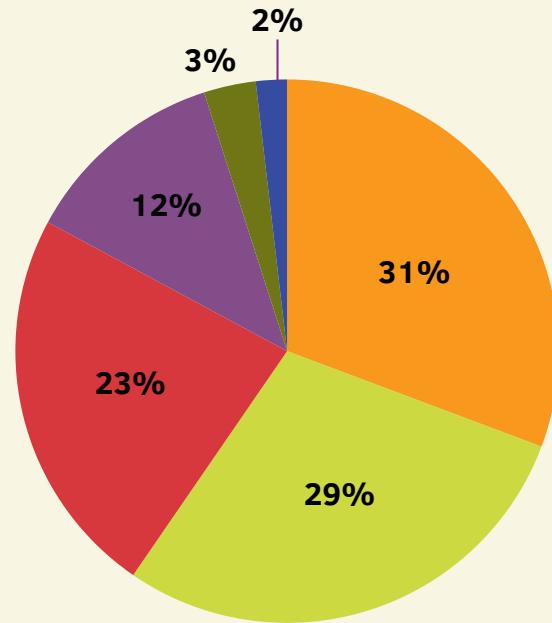
– Kanyon Schulte, Commodities Marketing Summer student

FINANCIAL UPDATE 2024 - 2025

Total Revenue

\$ 2,392,280

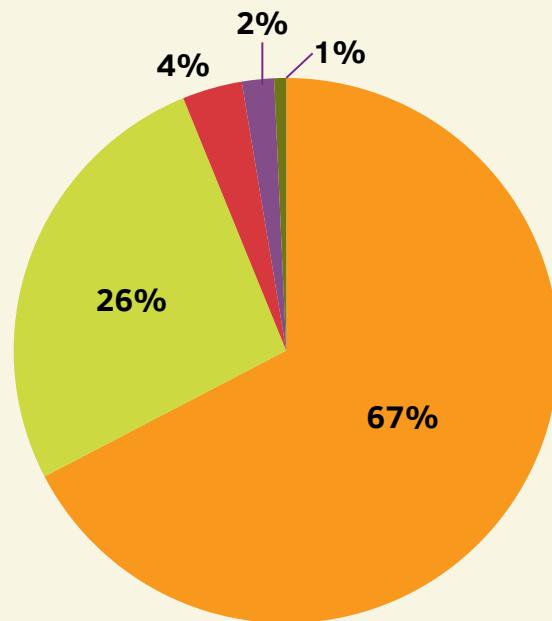
- █ Family Supports for Children with Disabilities
- █ Grants, Donations & Fundraising
- █ Alberta Education
- █ Program Fees
- █ Calgary Catholic School District
- █ Other



Total Expense

\$ 2,470,938

- █ Program Delivery
- █ Administrative Costs
- █ Maintenance Costs
- █ Fundraising Costs
- █ Amortization





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