

LEARNING BULLETIN:

CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND EVALUATION

JANUARY 2022

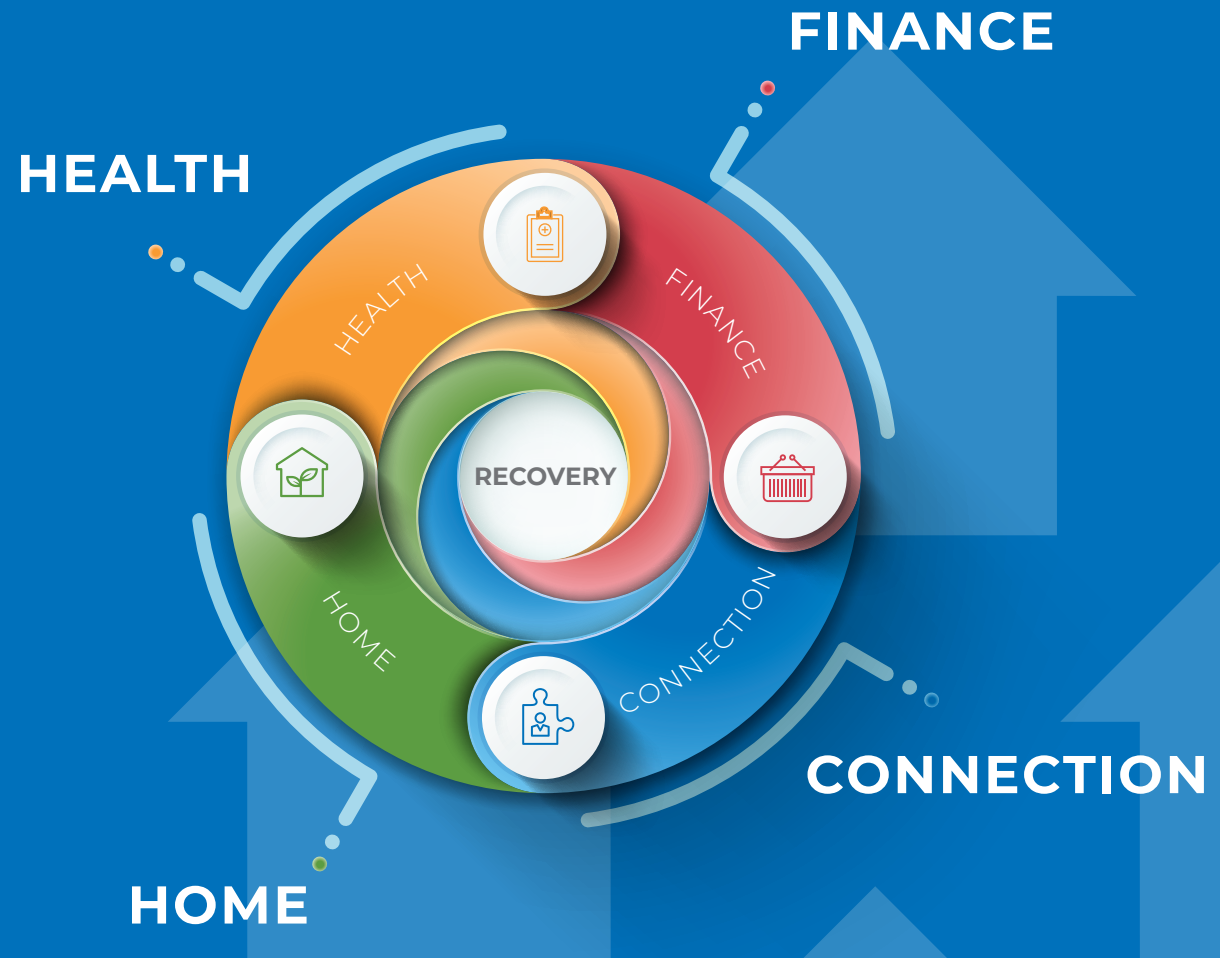
Over the course of the past decade, the Calgary Homeless Foundation and its community partners have pioneered and developed shared measurement approaches and developed a strong capacity for results-based evaluation. That was completed primarily through the use of standardized indicators applied at the program level. There is much that we have learned and much that we understand from this approach. However, the complexity of our collective work continues to increase.

Agencies and programs are faced with the adaptive challenge of unpredictable socio-economic shifts, a global pandemic, and a deepening opioid crisis. A genuinely collaborative approach to navigating these complexities requires a more collaborative and complex-aware approach to evaluation.

In service of its purpose, guiding the fight against homelessness, CHF has recently developed its next [strategic plan](#).

One of the strategic goals we identified in the plan is to create a culture of learning and evaluation. This goal describes our commitment to implement principles-focused, learning-centred evaluation approaches, in order to “elevate the funding relationship between CHF and the funded agency beyond task management, efficiency and performance.”

A recovery-oriented system of care leverages housing as a catalyst for quality-of-life improvements for participants in our programs. We understand that recovery is a complex, context-specific, non-linear process for each individual or family. In order to represent the complexity of recovery in the HSSC, we’ve collectively developed **four Impact Domains**.



These impact domains, combined with evaluation pillars: **open learning, measurement, and sense-making** make up the principles that will guide our collective work.

So what?

During 2021, we worked with seven partner agencies to design a new evaluative approach based on a version of a “Theory of Change” tool. You may have come across or used these tools before; you may be using a version of it in your organization right now. Theory of Change (ToC) has become a prominent approach because of its usefulness in capturing, and making evaluable, the ideas that guide program design. There are many ways to operationalize a Theory of Change – narrative, schematic, logical, visual.

At root, a Theory of Change is an artifact that articulates a program’s belief about why and how the program works.

We’ve designed and refined a particular structure to our ToC tool. It is a first-of-its-kind technique, which will allow us to:

- Capture each program’s unique context and design elements
- Map the unique continuum-of-change experienced by participants in each program
- Understand the causal links between context/design and outcomes
- Combine and aggregate program-level outcomes to system-level impact

Now what?

Immediate implications

- KPI focus on system coordination
- ToC focus on recovery-oriented impact
- Simplified Schedule A
- New ToC Template
- Evaluation Trainings

Impacts on your work

- Annual completion / update of ToC
- Quarterly / ongoing evaluation check-ins with CHF
- Deeper Learning

Future Opportunities

- Sector and cross-sector data aggregation
- Principles-aligned “Communities of Learning”
- Front-line Reflective Practice
- Integrated Reporting

Questions can be directed to Roman Katsnelson, Director of Programs and Evaluation: romank@calgaryhomeless.com

What is a Theory of Change?

A theory-based approach to program development requires leaders to take a step back and articulate why they believe that the program activities lead to the desired program outcomes.

It is a process of generating and reaching consensus on the explicit or implicit theories about how and why the program works.

Jones, Sheri Chaney. Impact & Excellence: Data-Driven Strategies for Aligning Mission, Culture and Performance in Nonprofit and Government Organizations. John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

03

July - September
2022
Mid-year Program
Review

04

October - December 2022
Learning Evaluation
conversations

02

April - June 2022
ToC v1 completed and
approved
Learning Evaluation
conversations

01

January - March
2022
ToC Template Issued
ToC trainings for
program managers