



# A Report to the Community

CaryaCalgary.ca



Carya engages Calgarians on the traditional territories the Blackfoot named Moh'kinsstis, where the Bow and Elbow rivers flow as one. We acknowledge the authentic history and oral traditions of the people of Treaty 7: the Siksika, Piikani and Kainai Nations, the Tsuut'ina Nation, the Stoney Nakoda Nations—Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney—and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta, Districts 5 and 6. In the spirit of respect, reciprocity and reconciliation, Carya works to strengthen individuals, families and communities to live together as our rivers do, in confluence, and we honour all who share this sacred space.





# Rooted Together

## A Story of Strength, Resilience, and Connection

At Carya, we know that every Calgarian has a unique story - often one of quiet strength, hidden struggle, and hard-won growth. In 2024, these stories were more present than ever.

Individuals and families across Calgary are navigating enormous change, including rising living costs, mental health pressures, and the complexities of multigenerational households. And yet, in the midst of challenge, there is resilience, care, and community.

This year, we're sharing our impact through the lens of a single powerful story. The story is a composite, based on the real experiences of participants in our programs. While names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy, every element of the story reflects the real hopes, hardships, and healing we witness every day at Carya.

The family's journey is a mirror of what's happening in Calgary and a testament to what's possible when community care is within reach.

Thank you for being part of this work. Together, we're building stronger families and communities for generations.

Sincerely,



Paula Telfer  
Chief Executive Officer



## Chapter One

### The Weight of It All

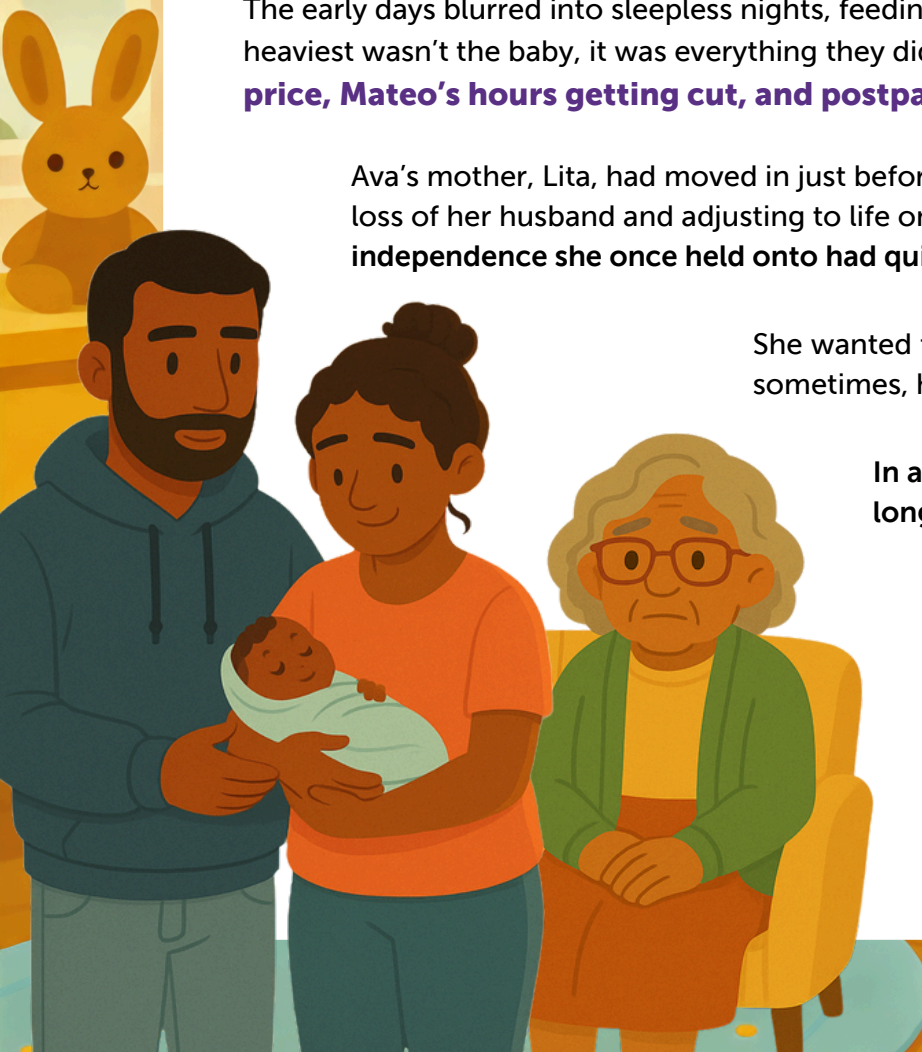
When Ava and Mateo brought their newborn daughter home, it wasn't to a picture-perfect nursery. It was to a second-hand crib tucked into the corner of their small Calgary rental.

The early days blurred into sleepless nights, feedings, and diaper changes. But what weighed heaviest wasn't the baby, it was everything they didn't see coming: **groceries doubling in price, Mateo's hours getting cut, and postpartum anxiety creeping in like fog.**

Ava's mother, Lita, had moved in just before the baby arrived. Still grieving the recent loss of her husband and adjusting to life on a fixed income, she was struggling. The independence she once held onto had quietly slipped away.

She wanted to support her daughter—**she really did**—but sometimes, her words came out sounding like judgment.

In a house that didn't feel like hers, she no longer knew where she belonged.





Then came Sofia.

Mateo's teenage niece needed a safe place to land after things at home became unsafe. Ava and Mateo didn't hesitate. It wasn't just guardianship, it was love in action.

**But no one tells you how hard it is to care for a newborn and a teenager at the same time.**

Sofia barely left her room. When she did, tension followed. **Quiet. Guarded. Sharp.**

Mateo held it together as best he could, juggling part-time work, overdue bills, baby feedings, and a household beginning to fray.

Ava, isolated and overwhelmed, spent long hours alone with her doubts. The neighbourhood felt unfamiliar. Her friends felt far away.

Days bled into one another: crying, feeding, and aching doubt.

**The house was full.**

**But everyone inside it felt alone.**

**1,534**

unique families were served through  
Carya programs and services in 2024.



## Chapter Two

### A Flicker of Light

Ava's first real moment of light came in the middle of a crowded farmers' market.

Desperate to get out of the house, she wandered aimlessly, exhausted, unshowered, pushing the stroller on autopilot, when a smiling woman at a small booth caught her eye.

**"Hi, I'm with Carya,"** the woman said gently.

**"We host free drop-in groups for caregivers. No pressure. Come when you're ready."**

**That invitation changed everything.**

The drop-in group was **beautifully imperfect**. Toddlers wobbling between toys, coffee in mismatched mugs, parents who didn't flinch when Ava cried mid-sentence.

For the first time in a long while, she felt **seen**.





Carya offered more than parenting tips. It offered belonging. A space to be vulnerable. A space where other parents nodded in quiet solidarity when she whispered,

**“Sometimes I just want to leave.”**

**She wasn’t judged. She was accepted.**

One day, a staff member gently encouraged her to try something new, **Circle of Security**, a group designed to strengthen bonds between caregivers and their children.

Ava hesitated. **But something inside her said yes.**

That circle became her anchor. A space to learn, reflect, and begin the slow, steady work of trusting herself again as she bonded with her baby.

Through Carya’s Families in Community programs:

**91%** of parents reported stronger attachment with their child(ren).

**83%** built meaningful connections within their communities.

**89%** developed supportive relationships with other parents and caregivers.



## Chapter Three

### Lita's New Beginning

Lita had spent her life showing up for others, **quietly, dependably**. But after losing her husband, something unraveled.

Grief softened her edges. Purpose slipped through her fingers. She felt like a guest in her own life.



When Ava gently suggested she try an art group at **Carya's Village Commons**, Lita hesitated. She wasn't sure she belonged. She wasn't sure she belonged anywhere.

But something inside said that she had nothing to lose.

**She used to love painting.** So, she went.

At first, she painted in silence. But with each brushstroke and every shared cup of tea, something stirred.

She wasn't just the widow, or the helper, or the grandmother here.

**She was Lita.**

**Creative.**

**Curious.**

**Still healing, but whole.**



Encouraged by the warmth she found at Carya, she joined another group focused on **navigating relationships with adult children**.

There, she learned to set boundaries with love. To listen without defensiveness. To reconnect with Ava, not just as a mother, but as a fellow woman finding her way.

One afternoon, a facilitator mentioned Carya's financial wellness programs.

**"It's low-pressure,"** they said.

**"Just a space to get support with things like taxes, benefits - whatever you need."**

Lita wasn't ready.  
But the idea stayed with her.

Through Elder Friendly Community programs:

**90%** of older adult participants felt more connected to their communities.

**68%** of those facing isolation at intake found renewed participation and engagement.

**95%** of participants shared that Carya's services met their needs with care and compassion.



## Chapter Four

### Opening Up

Sofia's silence deepened. She started skipping meals. Sleeping through the day. Then Ava noticed faint scars on her arm. That night, Mateo sat beside her.

**"I know things haven't been easy," he said. "But you're not alone. We're not going anywhere. Would you talk to someone at Carya?"**

Sofia didn't say yes. **But she didn't say no.**

Counselling wasn't easy. At first, it felt like just another adult asking too many questions. But her therapist didn't push.

They sat. Listened. Painted her nails in silence until the words started to come.

**Bit by bit, Sofia opened up.**

In 2024, Carya provided **5,756** counselling sessions to **2,919** individuals.

**81%** of families in counselling saw improvements in family functioning.

**100%** of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support they received.

**96%** of Wellness Collective participants strengthened their ability to cope with life's challenges.



Watching her, Mateo realized he needed help too. At first, he resisted, believing therapy was for people who were really struggling. Eventually, he said what he hadn't dared admit out loud: ***I'm not okay.***

And that didn't make him weak.  
It made him **human**.

In therapy, he spoke for the first time about growing up in a home where emotions were buried. **About the quiet rage he carried.** About his fear of losing himself while trying to protect everyone else.

Each session peeled back another layer and though the road ahead wasn't easy, **they were walking it side by side.**



## Chapter Five

### Rooted In Each Other

Healing didn't come all at once. It arrived in steady, small steps like roots growing underground.

Ava completed Circle of Security and stayed in touch with the moms from her drop-in group. Their weekly texts became a lifeline that was full of humour, empathy, and the quiet reminder: **you're not alone.**

Mateo kept attending therapy. **His shoulders softened. He laughed more freely. Listened more deeply.** He began showing up not just as a provider but as a partner, a father, and a man learning how to feel.

Lita continued to blossom. As she rebuilt her sense of self, she began to imagine what independence could feel like. She attended **Carya's financial wellness program**, where a kind staff member guided her through every step - filing taxes and uncovering benefits she didn't know existed. It was a small shift. **But a powerful one.**



# 900+

individuals built financial literacy through financial coaching programs, matched savings groups, and Carya's free tax clinics in 2024.



## 2024 Highlights from Carya's Financial Wellness programs:

Budgeting skills increased from **47%** to **100%**.

Goal tracking improved from **66%** to **97%**.

Financial stress dropped significantly, from **71%** to **35%**.

She bought herself new shoes, the kind that didn't pinch and got her reading glasses repaired. And she began contributing to the household again - **not out of duty, but pride.**

And Sofia?

**Sofia found her footing again.** She picked up a part-time job. Then another in the summer. She started sketching. Volunteering. Saving. And that summer, she bought her first car.

It wasn't fancy. **But it was hers.**

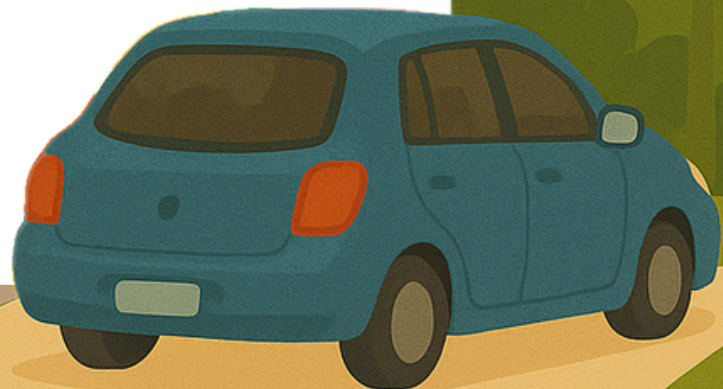
When she pulled into the driveway, Lita clapped. Ava cried. Mateo smiled wider than he had in months.

The home they shared was still modest. Still full. Still sometimes chaotic. But now?

There was **laughter** in the kitchen.  
**Conversation** at the dinner table.

**Trust** between generations.  
They hadn't grown apart under pressure.

**They had grown together.**



## Where Stories and Strategy Meet

*Rooted Together* represents just four impact stories out of the thousands we see each year. While the names have changed, the challenges, courage, and transformations are real.

At Carya, we witness these quiet shifts every day and understand that **change doesn't happen in silos**. It happens when people are supported in every part of their lives.

That's why our work is rooted in four interconnected pillars:

**Family functioning, mental health, social connection, and living conditions.**

Whether someone connects with Carya through a parenting program, counselling session, or community activity, they are met with wraparound support that adapts to their unique and evolving needs.



**Because our community is strongest when everyone can realize their potential.**

In 2024, generous volunteers contributed over **6,300** hours, enhancing Carya's mission and empowering the Calgary community.

We would like to extend a special thank you to our Board of Directors who contributed their time and talent in 2024:

Avril Martin  
Deanna Shymkiw Yeo  
James McLean  
Kirsty Sklar  
Shannon Hughes

Bruce Edgelow  
Erika Chomiak  
Jennifer Santry  
Lynda Paananen  
Wilbert Arends

Connie Berkshire  
J.P. Gerritsen  
Jessica Kruhlak  
Nina Vaughan

# Thank You to Our Incredible Supporters

Carya is grateful to the hundreds of individual donors, corporate partners, and funders who share our commitment to building strong families and communities for generations.

In 2024, thanks to the incredible generosity of supporters, **\$9,405,393** was contributed, ensuring individuals and families had access to timely, barrier-free programs and services when and where they needed them most.



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PwC Canada

Rotary Club of Calgary Downtown

TC Energy

*We are proud to recognize the corporate partners and organizations above for contributions of \$10,000 or more between January 1 and December 31, 2024.*

To view our 2024 Audited Financial Statements, visit [CaryaCalgary.ca/about/our-impact-and-reports/](https://CaryaCalgary.ca/about/our-impact-and-reports/)





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