

Charity with a difference working for special people

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Most non-profit, charitable organizations have to rely heavily on governments for funding and the Development Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary (DDRC) is no exception.

Seventy per cent of its \$10 million expenses is provided through provincial government grants; the big difference is that this is one of the few organizations that is working hard to become less dependent on government by owning its own businesses to derive revenues.

It's had a lot of ups and downs in the 56 years it has been serving children and adults with developmental disabilities, but now has a staff of 250 looking after 800 clients. It's a huge growth since Emily Follensbee and Christine Meikle founded the Council for Retarded Children of Southern Alberta to start a school for children who were, like their own, refused admission in public neighbourhood schools.

Today, what evolved into DDRC is a dynamic and visionary organization dedicated to creating a community in which people with developmental disabilities are not only included, but also integrated in a real and meaningful way.

It is run by a hard-working board and the DDRC's CEO Odette Dantzer. She has been with the organization for the past 18 years,

first employed as a counsellor and then moving into senior management before accepting the role of CEO one and a half years ago.

No different than many other charitable organizations, adequate funding has always been a barrier to delivering the best service possible. In addition to government support, corporate and private gifting, and fundraising, DDRC has been involved in a number of entrepreneurial ventures to meet budget requirements.

Advanced Industries was a business run for many years that hired its clients to make landscape stakes, wooden whiskey boxes and sewn aprons and bags. A bigger venture was Bow Catering, a company that used clients' life skills to cook and distribute food from a kitchen in Bowness. It even produced a cookbook called Grow With Bow and was able to buy its own building in Centron Corner on 61st Avenue S.E. But when the general manager retired and the labour market became a problem, Bow Catering was wound down.

The silver lining is that its building has been leased to another catering firm called La Table du Catelain, so DDRC enjoys the revenue without the hassle.

Now Dantzer and her staff are focusing on a venture called In-Home Support Services. DDRC has

owned and operated the business since 1987, providing high-quality, flexible, and affordable home care and support to individuals and families. But the growing number of aged presents DDRC with an opportunity to provide home care to a much larger number of clients. With all profits being turned back to support its programs, DDRC expects In-Home Support Services to be a major funding program.

Manager of marketing communications Suzanne Chennells is ramping up the marketing of the service through direct mail, posters, a new web page and exposure in community newsletters. The service is available 24 hours a day year-round to meet the needs of aging parents; adults or children with special needs or personal and live-in care; and those requiring licensed practical nursing or even just companionship.

DDRC's dedicated team members are all professionals and pre-screened, bonded, insured, RN-supervised and have First Aid and CPR training. As a non-profit, charitable organization, clients are not charged GST, but best of all, they know that when they used the service, they are making a difference in the lives of some wonderful people with developmental disabilities.