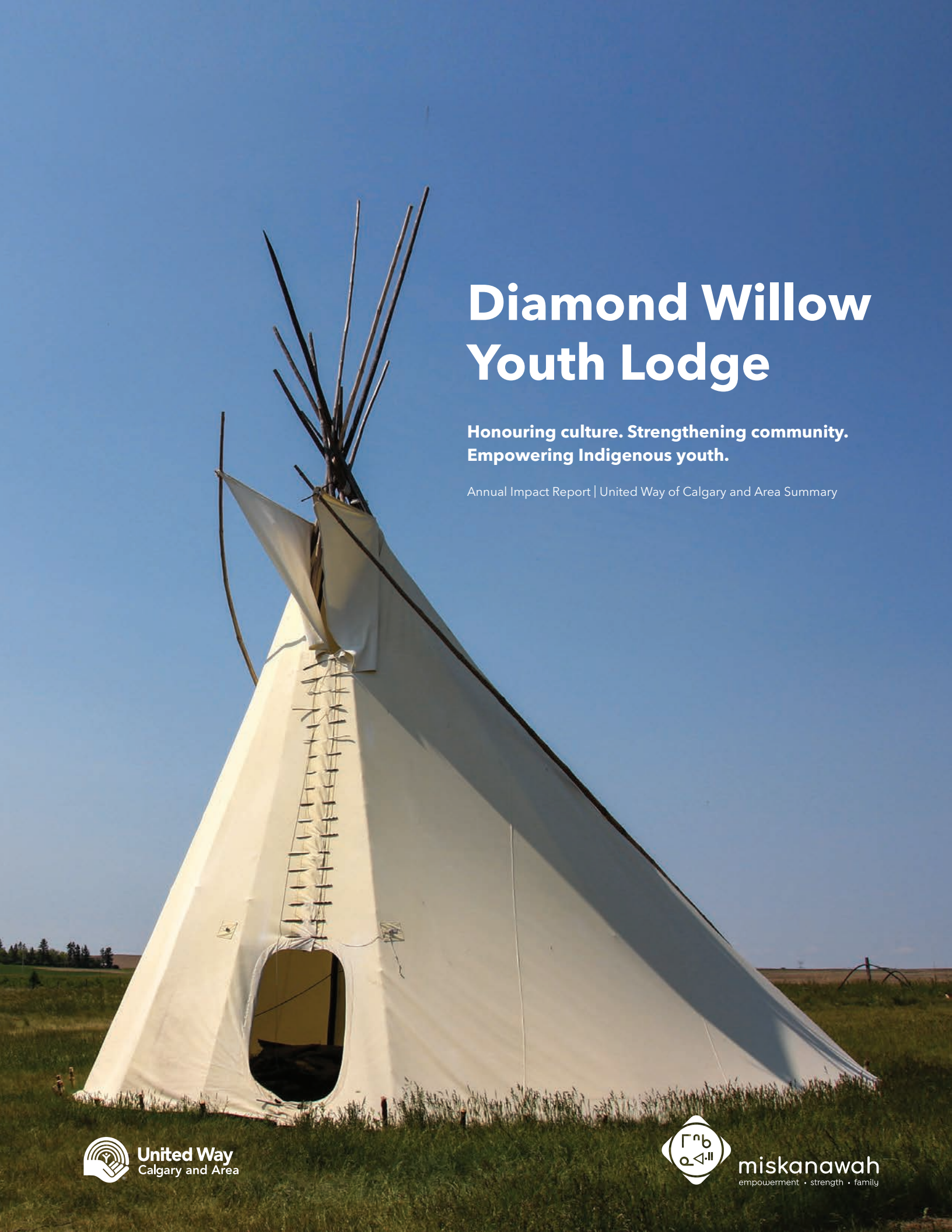




Diamond Willow Youth Lodge

**Honouring culture. Strengthening community.
Empowering Indigenous youth.**

Annual Impact Report | United Way of Calgary and Area Summary

The content within this report is considered smudged information according to indigenous practices.



Land Acknowledgment

In the spirit of our journey to promote reconciliation, we would like to honour the truth of our shared history and acknowledge Treaty 7 territory and the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, that includes the Kainai, Siksika and Piikani First Nations. We acknowledge the traditional lands of the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney First Nations. We also recognize the Métis and Inuit people who have made their home here in Moh'kins'tsis, also known as Calgary.



A Year of Growth

Every young person deserves a place where they can simply belong.

For a growing number of Indigenous youth, Diamond Willow Youth Lodge is that place.

Each year, more young people from across Calgary are choosing to spend their time here, returning again and again to reconnect with culture and be part of a community where they feel welcomed exactly as they are.

Their continued presence reflects something powerful: a growing sense of trust, belonging and connection.

Established in 2018 through a partnership between United Way of Calgary and Area and Miskanawah as part of United Way's Akak'stiman Indigenous Strategy, the Lodge offers Indigenous youth ages 12 to 29 a free, culturally grounded space to gather, learn and grow.

The Lodge is guided by the Indigenous Youth Coordinators, Indigenous Youth Council and Elders. Programming reflects the interests, identities and experiences of those who attend.

Whether they are creating ribbon skirts and beadwork, sharing meals, playing sports, participating in ceremony or simply spending time together, youth are strengthening their connection to culture, community and themselves.

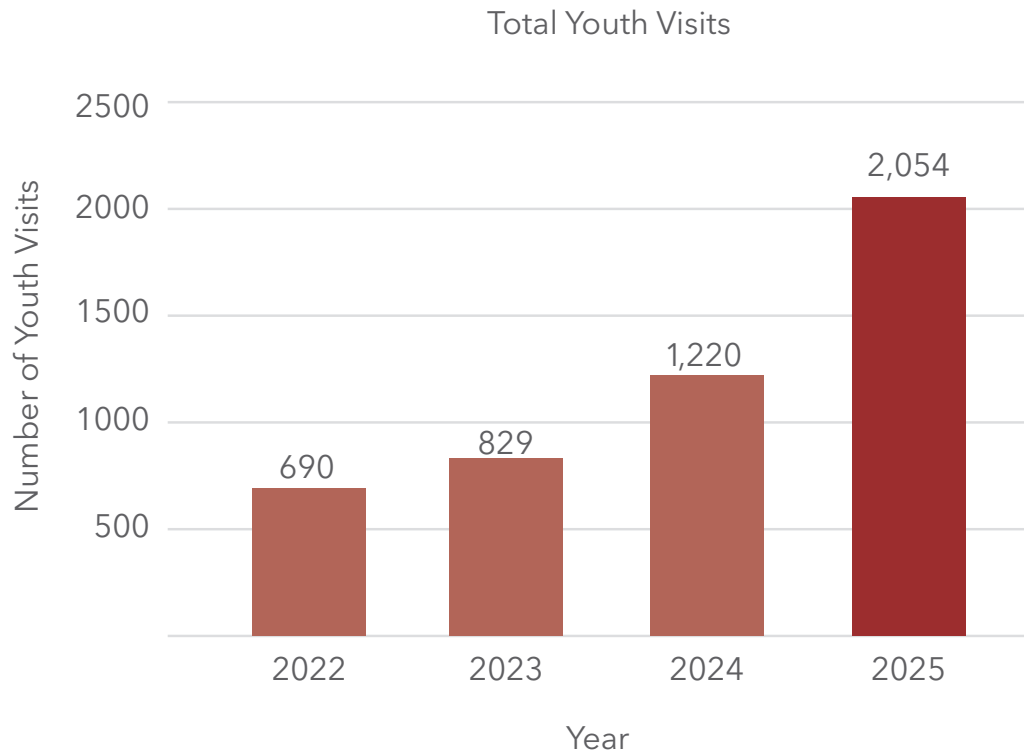


"The Lodge means a lot to me. It's where I connect with friends, learn from elders, and feel grounded."

—Youth Participant

Thanks to your generosity 2025 marked another year of meaningful growth.

The Lodge welcomed 2,054 youth visits, a 68% increase over the previous year and more than 4,700 visits have been recorded since 2022, continuing to welcome more visitors as the need in Calgary grows.



Yet the true measure of success isn't found in the numbers alone. It's found in the young people who travel across the city to find belonging, the conversation with an Elder after a difficult week and the friendships formed over a shared meal.

Behind every visit is a young person choosing connection. Because of continued support, they know there is a place where they belong.

Stories of Growth

For one young woman, Diamond Willow Youth Lodge became more than a place to attend programs. It became a place to stay connected—to her siblings, her culture and her community.

Over time, she and her family built a lasting connection with the Lodge and Miskanawah. As she navigated independent living, the Lodge remained a consistent source of support, belonging and cultural connection.

Through the Lodge, she developed skills in beading, ribbon skirt making and gained the confidence to share and sell her work at local markets.

That confidence continued to grow, and she became a member of the Diamond Willow Youth Council, helping to shape programming, advocate for Indigenous youth and build meaningful relationships with Elders. Her story shows what culturally grounded support can make possible: stronger identity, growing leadership and a lasting sense of belonging.



Grounded in Culture

Throughout 2025, youth shared that participating in ceremony helped them feel safe, proud and connected to who they are. In response, the Lodge expanded opportunities for sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, storytelling and cultural teachings, all guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Askiy-pimatswin Youth Camp

For four days, 18 youth came together with six staff and nine Elders and Knowledge Keepers for the Askiy-pimatswin Youth Camp. On the land, youth had space to learn from Elders, connect with one another and experience culture in a lived, relational way.

They participated in hide smoking, traditional games, drumming, storytelling, spirit doll making, a sweat lodge and a naming ceremony.

One youth participant shared a powerful moment. “I feel more connected to my culture. I even got my spirit name at camp.”

It was a grounding experience filled with teachings, connection and lasting memories.

Hide Camp

At Hide Camp, youth worked with their hands and learned directly from Elder Winston Wadsworth, a trusted Knowledge Keeper. Through the traditional process of working with hide, they built practical skills while deepening connection to culture and community.

Because the experience was guided by a trusted Knowledge Keeper, it fostered patience, care and relationship—values central to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Participation has steadily increased over the years, with 2025 marking the highest attendance to date at 15 youth participants, demonstrating strong and growing interest in culturally grounded programming.

As one caregiver shared, “This is such an amazing opportunity for my daughter to learn about her culture since she can’t learn it from family members.”



“It’s important to have camps like this to transfer knowledge to youth and empower them to teach others in the community, so the cycle of knowledge continues.”

—Winston Wadsworth,
Knowledge Keeper

Elders at the Heart of the Lodge

The lasting impact of Diamond Willow Youth Lodge is rooted in relationships.

Throughout 2025, Elders played a vital role in creating a welcoming space where youth could ask questions, share stories, reconnect with culture and strengthen their sense of identity. Many described these moments as the most meaningful part of their time at the Lodge.

Monthly sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies offered by Elder Darryl Brass created opportunities for youth to engage in traditional practices that many do not have access to elsewhere.

Knowledge Keepers such as Winston Wadsworth and Tristan Monague shared teachings through hide tanning and bone carving—programs that build both cultural confidence and emotional well-being.

As a gesture of gratitude and reciprocity, youth planned and hosted a special Elder Holiday Gathering, honouring twelve Elders who supported the Lodge this year. The event included a feast and personal letters written by youth—showing the depth of relationship and respect shared across generations.

At the Lodge, Elders are teachers, mentors, knowledge holders and relatives. Their guidance strengthens identity, supports healing and helps keep cultural knowledge alive for future generations.





Youth Leadership

As youth built confidence and connection at the Lodge, many began stepping into leadership roles of their own.

The Youth Council, with eight active youth leaders, continued to help shape the direction of the Lodge in 2025. Council members co-designed programming, contributed to community events and developed meaningful leadership skills. All helped to strengthen the Lodge and the community.

Evolving Community Partnerships

Building on partnerships established in 2024 with The Alex, YMCA, USAY and Tawaw Family Resource Network, the Lodge continued to deepen collaborations to align with youth interests in sport, mentorship and cultural expression.

Key 2025 partnerships included:

- **City of Calgary Recreation Sport Hub** – weekly rugby and lacrosse for youth, with shared meals.
- **Trellis** – bi-weekly gym access supporting youth in physical activity and confidence building.
- **We Matter** – youth created national “Messages of Hope” for Indigenous youth across Canada.
- **Spirit North and Affinity Mentorship** – continued cultural, recreational and skill-building opportunities.

Looking Ahead

As Diamond Willow Youth Lodge looks ahead, the focus is on building from this year's momentum while staying rooted in what youth say matters most: access to culture, trusted relationships, land-based learning and opportunities to lead.

With continued donor support, the Lodge will strengthen the programs and partnerships that help Indigenous youth feel connected, grounded and proud of who they are.

Diamond Willow Youth Lodge's 2026 priorities include:

- **Increasing** Elder Hours
- **Expanding** land-based activities and pursuing another cultural summer camp
- **Participating** in the Ótáp ímisskaan Indigenous Youth Leadership Program
- **Hosting** the annual Oral Truthing Ceremony

Together, these priorities will help the Lodge deepen cultural programming, strengthen youth leadership and continue offering a safe, trusted space where Indigenous youth can belong, learn and lead.

With Heartfelt Gratitude

We are pleased to recognize the following donors, whose continued support in 2025 reflects a longstanding commitment to Diamond Willow Youth Lodge. Their sustained generosity helps ensure the Lodge can continue to offer culturally grounded programming, trusted relationships, and opportunities for Indigenous youth to connect, learn, and lead. Because everyone deserves spaces where they belong.

Legacy of Relatives

TransAlta

Keepers of Kindness

McCarthy Tétrault

Grandparents

Richard & Cathy Bird
Fluor Canada Ltd.



**A special thank you to the Miskanawah Community Services Association
for permission to share the vibrant stories and photographs contained
in this document.**



United Way
Calgary and Area

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