

Celebrating 30 years of empowering the lives of children and families

30th

ANNIVERSARY

G R T

Getting Ready for **Inclusion** Today

Annual Report
2024-2025

a letter from our EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Families, Friends, and Community Partners,

As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for all that we have accomplished together. Our mission to support, nurture, and empower children and families has continued to thrive, and it is only through the dedication of our staff, the trust of our families, and the strong partnerships within our community that we have been able to achieve so much.

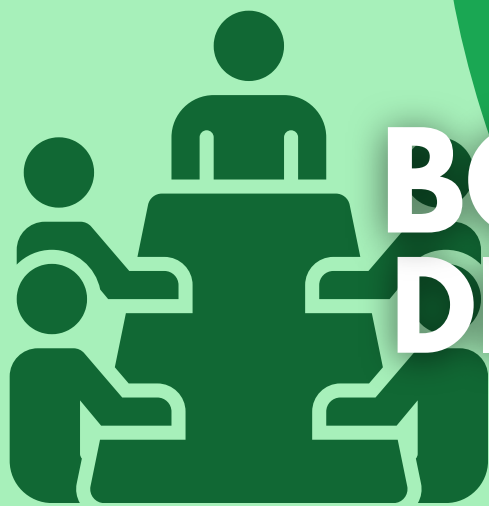
This past year, we have seen incredible growth and success across our programs. Our children have blossomed in supportive, enriching environments designed to foster learning, development, and a strong sense of belonging. Families have continued to play a central role in our work, and their engagement and collaboration have been critical to each child's success. Whether through day-to-day connections, family events, or individual support, our commitment to whole-family well-being remains unwavering.

We are especially proud to have launched our new North Kindergarten program, a new initiative that expands our reach and deepens our impact. The North Kindergarten program has already become a vibrant extension of our community, providing high quality early learning experiences and nurturing the development of children in new and exciting ways. The response from families has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are excited to see this program continue to grow and flourish.

Equally important have been the new relationships we've cultivated throughout the community. From local service organizations and schools to health care providers and volunteers, our network of support has grown stronger and more connected. These partnerships are essential to building a resilient and inclusive environment where every child and family has the opportunity to thrive.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to innovation, equity, and excellence in all that we do. Thank you to our government and community for being a part of this journey – your continued support and involvement make all the difference to our children and families that we are blessed to work with every day.

With heartfelt appreciation,
Paula Carby – Executive Director



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Michael Barrett

Vice President
Michele Monteith

Secretary/Treasurer
Carolyn Olson

Directors
Lana Barrett
Richard Lefebvre
Jim Chisholm
Katrina McCallum

a message from our BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear G.R.I.T. Friends,

Reflecting on the last year, I believe that our purpose remains clear: to deliver high-quality, tailored learning that meets each child's unique needs, keeps families at the forefront, and strengthens the community networks around them.

We built on our Kindergarten Program by opening a second classroom in Calgary's northeast. This was a deliberate step to ensure families can access excellent education close to home rather than travelling elsewhere. Local access helps families form enduring connections and enables children to progress alongside peers they first meet through our program. That continuity matters: familiar faces, trusted educators, and a community setting underpin confidence, belonging, and long-term success.

Throughout the year, we offered social experiences for every child in our program, including those attending preschools and daycares in the community. For children with complex needs who cannot attend community programs, we delivered bespoke support at G.R.I.T.'s facility so they could participate fully and meaningfully. We remain steadfast in our belief that time with peers and the chance to build friendships are fundamental to lifelong learning.

Our collaborations with educators and community organizations grew stronger. By working shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow educators, we promote education and continuous learning within each child's community. These relationships align support, enable shared expertise, and create smoother pathways for children and families. The result is a more connected ecosystem, reflecting local strengths and positioning each child to thrive.

This year marked an important milestone: 30 years serving children and families in Calgary. We are proud to have upheld our philosophy -quality above quantity- throughout these three decades. Much has changed over the years, but our values have not. We will continue to measure success by the depth of each child's progress and the strength of the relationships we forge together.

To our families, educators, community partners, funders, donors, volunteers, and our extraordinary staff, thank you. Your support, expertise, and care make our work possible and keep our mission alive. On behalf of the Board, I am deeply proud of what we have accomplished this year and optimistic about the path ahead. Together, we will keep widening access, strengthening community, and providing the personalized, high-quality education every child deserves.

Sincerely,

Michael Barrett, Board President

WHO WE ARE



Getting Ready for Inclusion Today

Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (G.R.I.T.)

Calgary Society is a long-standing program of excellence, meeting the diverse needs of preschool children with developmental disabilities in and around the Calgary area. Our Alberta Education funded program provides specialized and individualized home, community, and school based education. A team of experienced professionals work in collaboration with parents to provide an effective and dynamic education experience for the children we serve!

MISSION

Empowering the lives of children and families.

VISION

Every child deserves the right to achieve their full potential. We provide an early education program that is tailored to a child's individual needs with opportunities to experience inclusion and full participation in their home, school, and community setting.

BELIEFS

We believe that a positive and successful transition into the school system requires support and advocacy from a highly experienced education/therapy team working together with the families.

We believe that children benefit from the Consultative Model, which involves consistent therapy and education provided by a Child Development Specialist. They work as part of a team with teachers and therapists who establish, model, and monitor these strategies for the Child Development Specialist and the family unit.

We believe that parents need to be provided with flexible program options that cater to each child's individual needs including time in home, in the community, and access to specialized programs.

G.R.I.T. Calgary begins in the basement of a Calgary home.

30 YEARS OF EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

1995

Enrollment grows and G.R.I.T. worked out of a variety of settings including Willow Park, Chinook, and Avenida before finding our new main location.

1996

G.R.I.T. launches it's first Kindergarten Program.

2013

G.R.I.T. adopts it's main office space in SE Calgary.

2021

G.R.I.T. opens a second location in North Calgary.

2024

THE G.R.I.T. DIFFERENCE

For 30 years, G.R.I.T. Calgary Society has supported children and their families, fostering inclusion and growth through flexible, community-based programs.

INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT

We create tailored programs that celebrate each child's unique abilities. Our focus on children with particularly complex disabilities ensures specialized expertise and individualized care, distinguishing us as a leader in inclusive education and therapy.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

With small staff-to-child ratios, our skilled teams build deep, meaningful connections with families, promoting trust, collaboration, and a shared vision. We offer both a team-based model and specialist-driven support. Some children thrive with a full multidisciplinary, while others benefit from targeted interventions with a specific specialist. This flexible approach ensures that every child receives the right level of support for their journey.

FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACH

We provide an unwavering commitment to supporting, empowering, and educating the entire family, recognizing that lasting effect comes from strengthening the family unit. This creates a foundation for an ongoing, positive impact that extends beyond the child's immediate learning experience.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

From homes to daycares to community settings, we meet children where they are, ensuring inclusion in their natural environments. Our innovative home-based approach distinguishes us from traditional organizations that solely provide care in their offices, fostering a supportive and empowering environment for children and their families.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

Our programs, such as Pre K & Kindergarten, Integrated Education Therapy, Social Therapy Education Program, and Woodcliff Play Group, are thoughtfully designed to address specific developmental needs.

SPECIALIZED GROUPS IET

STEP

Our Social Therapy Education Program (STEP) offers children a chance to be exposed to a classroom environment. The focus of this group is to promote social communication as well as develop independence with classroom routines and daily tasks. Themed crafts, circle time, and sensory exploration allow children to engage with each other in a structured environment to develop positive relationships.

Our Integrated Therapy and Education (IET) program offers sensory-focused activities (visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory) for children needing increased sensory focus or gradual exposure. It provides a variety of adapted crafts, opportunities for exploration, life skills practice, and fun for children and their CDSs.

PRE K & KINDERGARTEN

WOODCLIFF PLAY GROUP

By renting out the basement of Woodcliff United Church, we are able to provide children in our program with a large space where they can explore and interact with their peers! This group is especially beneficial for children with busy bodies or those who are trialing new, large equipment like walkers or electric wheelchairs.

Fosters children's love of learning and curiosity, while building meaningful relationships. Directed by a Certificated Teacher with the support of three Child Development Specialists, this program features small class sizes for personalized learning. A Speech Language Pathologist and Occupational Therapist visit regularly to support individualized goals. Children thrive in a nurturing environment, developing independence and preparing for future educational success.

THE CHILD'S TEAM



Every child in our program is supported by a dedicated team of qualified professionals who design and implement personalized goals to help them achieve their fullest potential. These teams are tailored to each child's unique needs and work to ensure they are fully included in their homes, schools, and communities.



**Certificated
Teacher**



**Child
Development
Specialist**



**Speech
Language
Pathologist**



**The
Family**



**Physical
Therapist**



**Occupational
Therapist**



**Vision
Facilitator**



COMMUNITY IMPACT

We provided support in

**12 COMMUNITY
PRESCHOOLS**

**9 EARLY LEARNING
& CHILDCARE
SETTINGS**

**100
CHILDREN
ENROLLED
IN OUR
PROGRAM!**

**28 CHILDREN
ENROLLED IN OUR
KINDERGARTEN
PROGRAM**

**25 PARTICIPATED
IN OUR OTHER
SPECIALIZED GROUPS**

**22
CHILDREN
WITH HOME
PROGRAMS**

**5 CHILDREN
RECEIVED
PROGRAMMING IN
HOSPITAL**



NORTH LOCATION!



Celebrating 30 years of G.R.I.T. Calgary Society wasn't our only highlight this year...

We also marked an important milestone by opening a **NEW LEARNING SPACE in northeast Calgary!**

This new location addresses a critical need in a high-demand area, making it possible to better serve families who previously had limited access to the programs offered at our main office in the southeast.

Having this additional space has allowed us to...

- **Enhance Accessibility:** Offer more space and resources to meet the growing demand for our programs. This location was chosen strategically to create an additional inclusive learning environment for the children in our program. It reduces travel and logistical challenges for families in underserved areas, making our programs more accessible!
- **Support Development:** Provide children with opportunities to build essential skills and learning foundations that prepare them for a successful transition to their next educational setting.
- **Promote Growth and Inclusion:** Create a welcoming, well-equipped classroom where children have access to specialized tools that help them succeed. This inclusive space allows children to learn alongside their peers, build friendships, and gives families access to flexible programs that best suite their unique needs.

This new space means more children can **thrive** and more families can feel **supported** in their communities!

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Our relationships with community partners such as daycares, community preschools, Alberta Children's Hospital, and various health/education programs are essential to the success of our program. These connections allow us to provide well-rounded support for children and families, share expertise, and ensure continuity of care across different settings. By working closely with these organizations, we strengthen our programs, stay engaged with the broader community, and create collaborative networks that help children thrive!

FOOD BANK



This year, during our annual winter luncheon, G.R.I.T. staff came together to make a collective donation to the Calgary Food Bank! Giving back is a core part of our values, and we're always looking for ways to further support our community and develop new connections. We look forward to continuing this tradition for years to come!

SHOULDICE PARK



Our children, families, and staff enjoyed a wonderful day at the Shouldice Inclusive Playground! Each year, G.R.I.T. hosts a special park day where families and staff from across the city and all of our programs can come together for fun, laughter, and connection. This event gives children the chance to play, explore, and make new friends, while families build relationships and strengthen their support networks within the community.

STUDENT PRACTICUMS



We love our practicum students! Each year G.R.I.T. accepts students from several programs across Calgary including the University of Calgary, Bow Valley College, and CLI College! These students bring fresh perspectives and energy to our program, enriching the learning experience for our children and helping us support our families! Their involvement allows us to stay connected with our community, share best practices, and foster collaboration. By mentoring future professionals, we strengthen ties with local institutions and ensure that innovative approaches continue to shape our services.

STORIES FROM ALUMNI

JEFF'S STORY



"My name is Jeff Barrett and I am a graduate of the G.R.I.T. program, class of 1998. I am born with arthrogryposis and the children's hospital therapists were not out to mistake that I would ever be able to walk. In our last meeting at the hospital, when I was about three years old, we were shown brochures of wheelchairs.

Fortunately, we had just registered with the G.R.I.T. program and the G.R.I.T. occupational therapist, Gwen, came to the meeting with us. My parent's have told me that as we left the room, Gwen turned to them and told them, "we will get Jeff walking." As you can see, I have defied those odds thanks to some fantastic G.R.I.T. occupational therapists, physical therapists, and my developmental specialist, Sandy Summers.

As you probably know, G.R.I.T is an in-home program, which was perfect for me. I started off with G.R.I.T. Developmental Specialist, Sandy Summers, going with me to preschool, which meant I could attend school with my sister, Allison and my neighborhood friends. After preschool, I was able to attend public school all on my own. Sandy came by every Tuesday afternoon, to keep in touch, read books, play games, eat junk food, and drink Coke. Through Sandy, I met her son Graham, who would become a life long friend and we would go on many adventures together – what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. My experience with G.R.I.T. helped me build confidence in myself and be a part of our neighborhood community and I got to go to my neighborhood schools. "Getting Ready for Inclusion Today" doesn't just mean that people with disabilities are getting prepared to be included, I think it also means people in the community get prepared to welcome those with disabilities. My friends just accepted that I did things differently, and if I were to drop my pencil or need help with a door, or my lunch, my fellow classmates would assist me without a second thought.

In grade three, I got my first power chair. I would scare my mom as she would drive past the school and she would see me racing across the school yard with my friends standing on the back of my wheelchair. I was definitely the most popular kid in school – my sister can attest to that. I went through the public school system all the way to high school and went to Mount Royal University for the broadcasting program, where I studied video editing. After my time at Mount Royal University, I developed a love for video editing and have built a career for myself in this field. I currently work as a video editor for a company called Virtual Gurus, also based in Calgary. I create video content for non-profit organizations and luckily enough I am able to work from my office at home.

Now, the sport that I play is called power hockey. Power hockey is an adapted version of floor ball hockey for people in wheelchairs and I have been playing for close to twenty years. I have made many great friends in Calgary and across the globe as I have travelled to numerous locations, won multiple awards and even represented team Canada in a tournament in Italy. I got my first taste of public speaking being the MC at the G.R.I.T. Gala way back in 2007 and it helped give me the confidence to speak here today as well.

Even though my time with G.R.I.T. ended long ago, my family still has connections with them as my brother, Michael Barrett, is the current President of G.R.I.T., my mom Lana sits on the board, and my dad was the former president of G.R.I.T. when I was initially in the program back in the mid 90s. I have met so many fantastic people on my journey through G.R.I.T., just to name a few: Paula, Annette, Sandy, Kim, Carol and so many others. G.R.I.T., Getting Ready for Inclusion Today, really helped me feel included in all facets of life growing up. It made a huge difference in our lives, and they continue to make a difference in so many children's lives."

– Jeff Barrett, G.R.I.T. Alumni (Class of 1998)

STORIES FROM ALUMNI SAMMY'S STORY

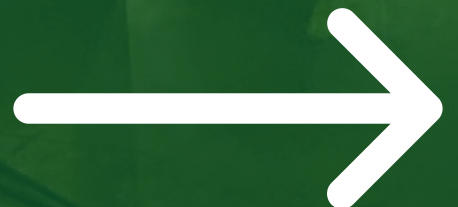


"I'm Michelle Monteith, my son Sammy is currently 21 years old. Our story began in May of 2007, and I was on a year's maternity leave from my career. At the time, [my daughter] Sophia was just seven months old, and Sammy, who was 3 1/2, was thrilled to have a baby sister. He was full of energy, ready for his first swimming lessons and to start preschool that fall. We were so excited for all the new adventures ahead, but little did we know that our world was about to be turned upside down.

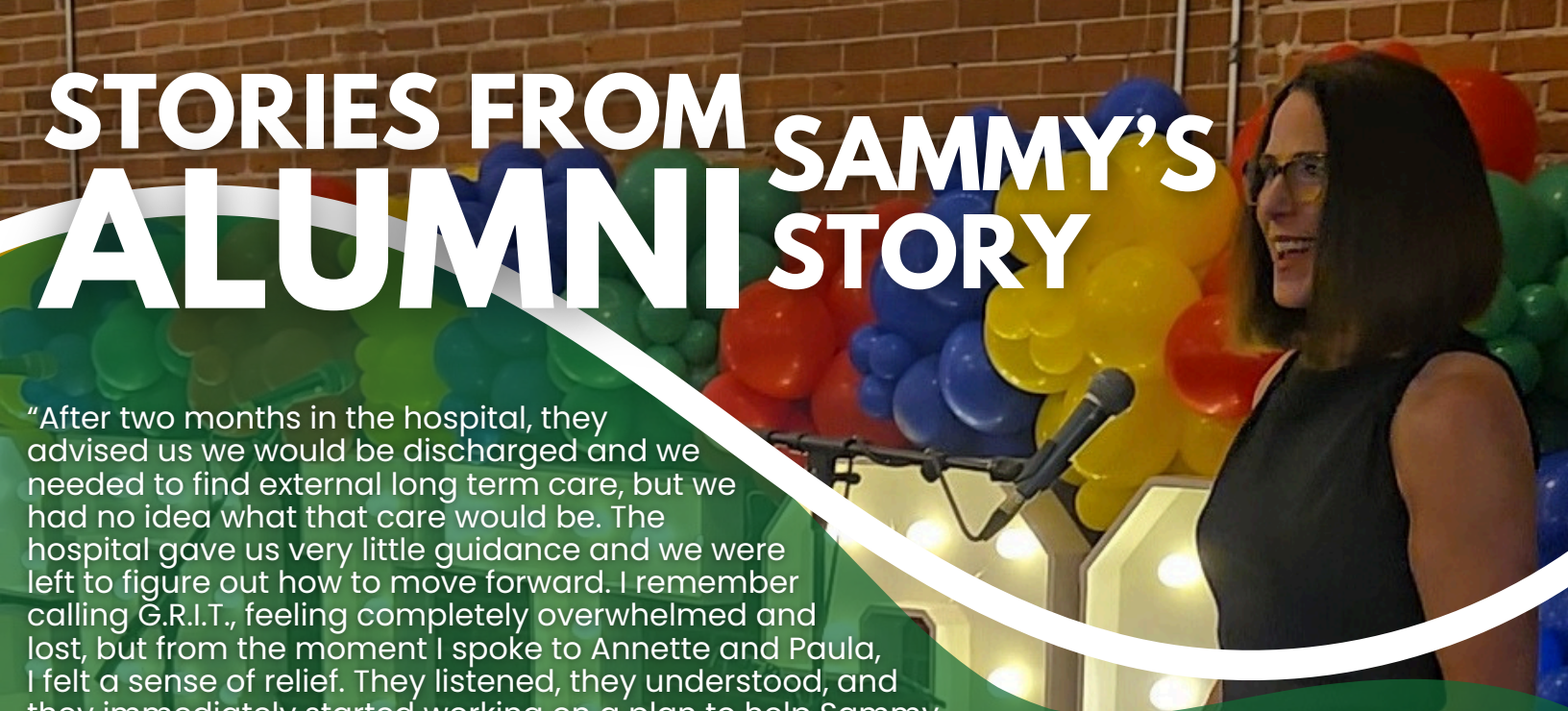
It all started one Friday night when Sammy woke up crying. Sammy had a bellyache and his temperature began to rise. As the night wore on, he developed a headache and his eyes started to swell up. By the next day, his symptoms worsened. We made a visit to the doctor thinking it was a virus and we were referred to the hospital to rule out appendicitis. Despite multiple tests, the doctors couldn't figure out what was causing Sammy's pain. After two days in the hospital, the doctors told us they had ruled out everything serious and suggested it must be just a virus. They sent us home. But within days, Sammy's symptoms returned. He became lethargic, stopped eating and his headaches worsened. We attended the emergency department one more time, only to be dismissed again and sent home. I remember on that visit at the emergency, I told Sammy it was time to go home after seeing the doctor and he said, "but mommy, I'm sick." And that was the last coherent sentence I heard him say for a very long time. So with symptoms getting worse, we went to a follow-up visit with our family physician 36 hours later. Feeling frustrated at the hospital after three visits, he immediately directed us back to the hospital as he suspected something serious.

Shortly after arriving back at the Children's, while in an emergency room, the nurse noticed that he was unresponsive. After, alarms were triggered and Sam's bed was ripped out of the wall and he was rushed to a trauma bay. It was then that we learned the devastating truth. Sammy had suffered a stroke caused by bacterial sinusitis which, left untreated, developed into meningitis. A crucial miscommunication between departments at the hospital had led to a misdiagnosis earlier and by the time it was caught, Sam's condition had worsened significantly. Sammy's stroke affected his thalamus, which is a part of the brain responsible for nearly every motor skill, speech and behaviour. The doctors weren't sure how he would recover or if he would even make it through the next 48 hours.

The weight of that uncertainty was crushing. As a mother, I was filled with a mix of fear, guilt and helplessness. How could I have ever let this happen? Why didn't I push harder for Sammy when he said he was sick? The what ifs haunted me every single day. After a week in the ICU, Sammy had stabilized, but his recovery was just beginning. We were told that his brain injury was serious and his future was uncertain. It took five weeks before he could talk and understand us, and eight weeks for him to take his first steps independently. We had to brace ourselves for a long, unpredictable road. It was during this time that G.R.I.T. Calgary Society came into our lives..."



STORIES FROM ALUMNI SAMMY'S STORY



"After two months in the hospital, they advised us we would be discharged and we needed to find external long term care, but we had no idea what that care would be. The hospital gave us very little guidance and we were left to figure out how to move forward. I remember calling G.R.I.T., feeling completely overwhelmed and lost, but from the moment I spoke to Annette and Paula, I felt a sense of relief. They listened, they understood, and they immediately started working on a plan to help Sammy."

G.R.I.T.'s Early Intervention Therapy program (I.E.T.) and, at the time, Adapted Physical Education, were programs that became a lifeline for Sammy and me. These programs were a perfect fit for Sammy who was struggling with so many issues. His sensory processing was completely disrupted, his world was overwhelming and he had difficulty processing some simple stimuli like sounds, lights and touch. Sammy couldn't tolerate the hustle and bustle of regular classrooms or group activities, and this made it difficult for him to fit into traditional programming like preschool or activities. G.R.I.T.'s programs were designed to meet Sammy where he was at; to understand his challenges and provide a safe, nurturing environment where he could work at his own pace. The smaller group sizes allowed Sam to feel more comfortable and the one-on-one support he received, helped to build new skills without the constant overwhelm. It was in this environment that Sammy began to shine again.

Alongside the therapy programs, Sammy was supported by an amazing team of professionals who worked tirelessly to help him succeed. Donna, our Developmental Specialist knew exactly when to push him and when to provide him the extra support he needed. Donna became not just a therapist, but a trusted ally for Sammy and for me as his mom. Kim Suvanto, Sammy's teacher, understood Sammy's needs, his challenges, and most importantly, she understood his potential. Kim created a learning environment that was supportive, flexible and patient. She saw the progress Sammy was making even when it felt small to us. She celebrated every success with us. We were also incredibly fortunate to have Val, Heather and Merna on Sammy's team (these are occupational therapists and physiotherapists). Their dedication, and expertise helped Sammy understand and regain physical skills and adapt to his new reality. Val, Heather and Merna not only helped Sammy believe in his own abilities, they showed him that even with the challenges he faced, there was always a way forward.

We have always held tight to the motto: Sammy didn't have a choice about what happened to him, but as a parent, we had a choice about how he moved forward from it. We could have chosen to be angry and bitter, but we chose to believe that, while Sammy's life was going to be different, it's still going to be wonderful. Today, he's a fun, kind, empathetic and extremely loud young man. He loves to tell really bad dad jokes and you will never get a hug like you will get from Sammy. He loves to sing at Calgary Youth Singers, and he still remembers everyone from G.R.I.T.

Most importantly, if you think our story is unique, it's not. Every family that attends G.R.I.T. has their own unique and individual story. Think about that, G.R.I.T. currently assists 100 children. That's 100 families receiving the same one-of-a-kind, life changing support. Each one of these families has had the same experience we did. G.R.I.T. is so integral to so many families helping set their kids up for success and growth. I cannot thank them enough and I will support this organization forever."

–Michele Monteith, G.R.I.T Alumni Parent & Board Vice President

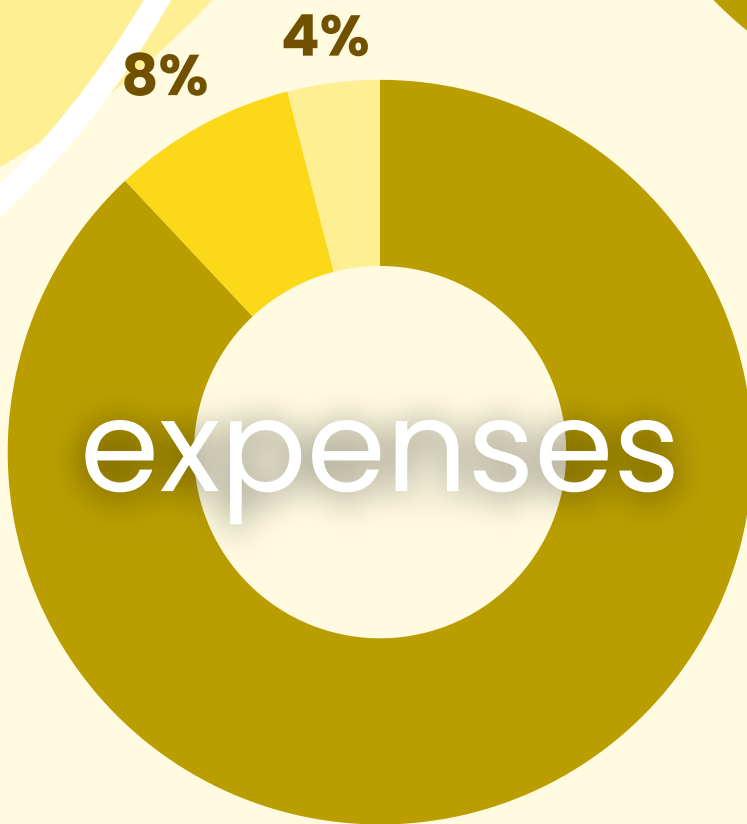
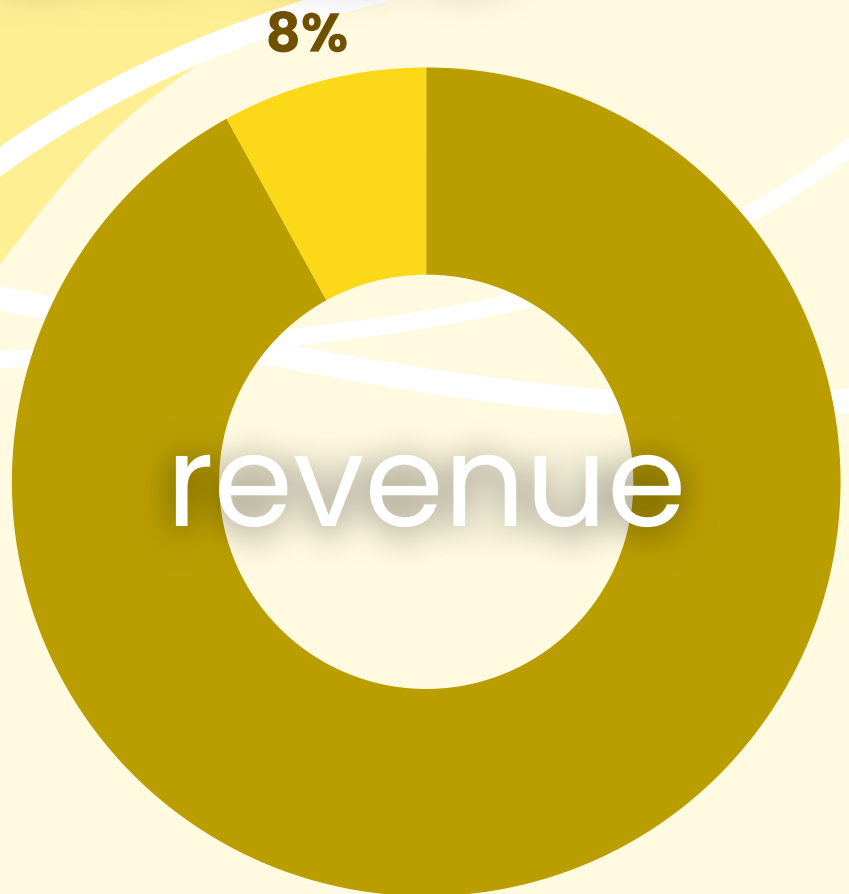


FINANCIALS

FINANCIALS ²⁰²⁴₂₀₂₅

Alberta Education
Grants

Fundraising &
Donations



Program Delivery

Administration
Costs

Building &
Operations

A child is sitting on a patterned rug, building a tall tower with colorful magnetic blocks. The blocks are in various colors including red, green, yellow, and blue. The child is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and grey sneakers. A large red semi-transparent shape with a white outline is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

FUNDRAISING & SUPPORT

Celebrating 30 years of empowering the lives of children and families

30th

ANNIVERSARY

G R I T

Getting Ready for Inclusion Today

GALA

ANNUAL
GALA





We could not have asked for a more perfect way to celebrate 30 years of G.R.I.T. Calgary Society! On Saturday, March 15th, we gathered at The Commons Hemingway Room for “An Evening Celebrating 30 Years of G.R.I.T. Calgary.” Together, we raised our glasses to three decades of success, shared stories of impact, and raised vital funds to ensure the continued growth and betterment of our organization for years to come.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made this milestone event possible: our sponsors, donors, volunteers, media partner, entertainers, décor and catering teams, and of course, every guest who attended or helped spread the word. Your generosity and support make it possible for us to deliver the exceptional program we are so proud of.

The funds raised will go directly toward advancing our mission: empowering the lives of children and families.

Thank you for being part of this incredible journey!



WISH WALL
\$8750



SILENT AUCTION
\$7410



ART RAFFLE
\$1820

TOTAL
\$50,000 RAISED!

"Together we have built a community that embraces diversity and inclusion. It is this collective effort that enables us to provide the best possible support for our children and families. As we reflect on the past three decades, let us remember the laughter of our children, the breakthroughs we have celebrated, and even the tears that we have shed together. Each moment has shaped us into who we are today, reminding us the importance of empathy and understanding."

-Paula Carby, Executive Director

"For an organization like G.R.I.T., 30 years is so much more than a number, it is a testament. It's a testament to the G.R.I.T. staff. It is their compassion, their resilience, and their determination that has allowed G.R.I.T. to thrive for 30 years. To thrive despite funding cuts, despite staffing shortages, despite pandemics, and everything else thrown in its way."

-Michael Barrett, Board President



SPEECH SPOTLIGHT



CALGARY
FOUNDATION
FOR COMMUNITY, FOREVER

COMMUNITY GRANT

We are beyond grateful to have received a
GENEROUS GRANT OF \$49,295.01

from the Calgary Foundation! This incredible contribution will go directly toward IT support and cybersecurity over the next two years, helping us ensure the documentation we receive and distribute is professional, prompt, and secure. Grants like this one, that support diverse program needs, are crucial in ensuring that everything behind the scenes is running smoothly so that we can focus our energy on what matters most...

supporting our families!

Thanks to this funding, we can continue to serve our community with confidence, knowing our systems are secure and efficient.



OTHER FUNDRAISERS

Our Winter and Spring Growing Smiles fundraisers, Purdy's Chocolate fundraiser, Casino, and Giving Tuesday Fundraisers all helped us raise over **\$56,000** for our program!

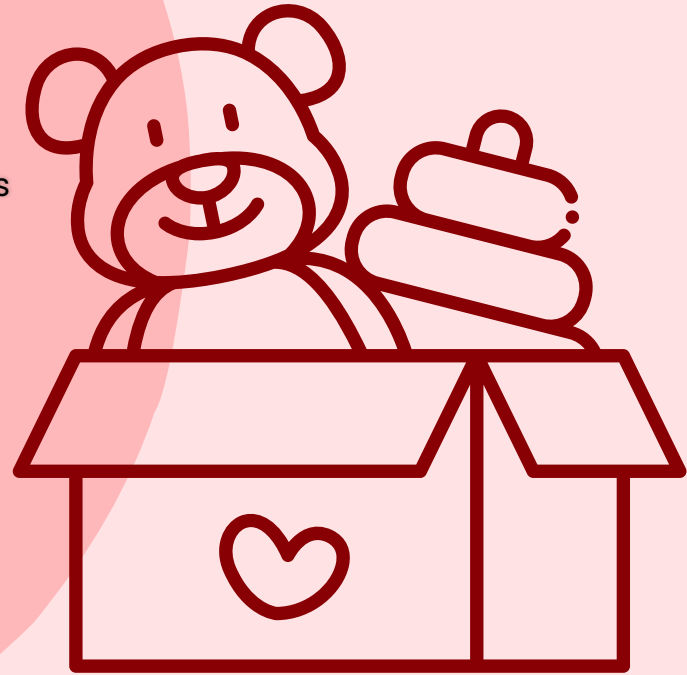


Makers Making Change

A Neil Squire Program

We are thrilled to share that Makers Making Change has once again supported our belief in learning through play with a generous donation of switch-adapted toys and battery interrupters. Switch-adapted toys allow kids to activate and enjoy their favorite toys using an accessible switch, while battery interrupters make it possible to connect these switches to almost any battery-operated toy.

These important tools help ensure that ALL children are included and can participate in play! We are so grateful for this partnership that helps make playtime truly inclusive!



THANKS

FOR HELPING US BUILD AN
INCLUSIVE FUTURE



**CALGARY
FOUNDATION**
FOR COMMUNITY, FOREVER



**SKIN HEALTH &
WELLNESS CENTRE**



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**DONATE and help us
empower children &
their families to thrive!**



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G.R.I.T. Calgary Society

