

2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT

Recovery on Campus

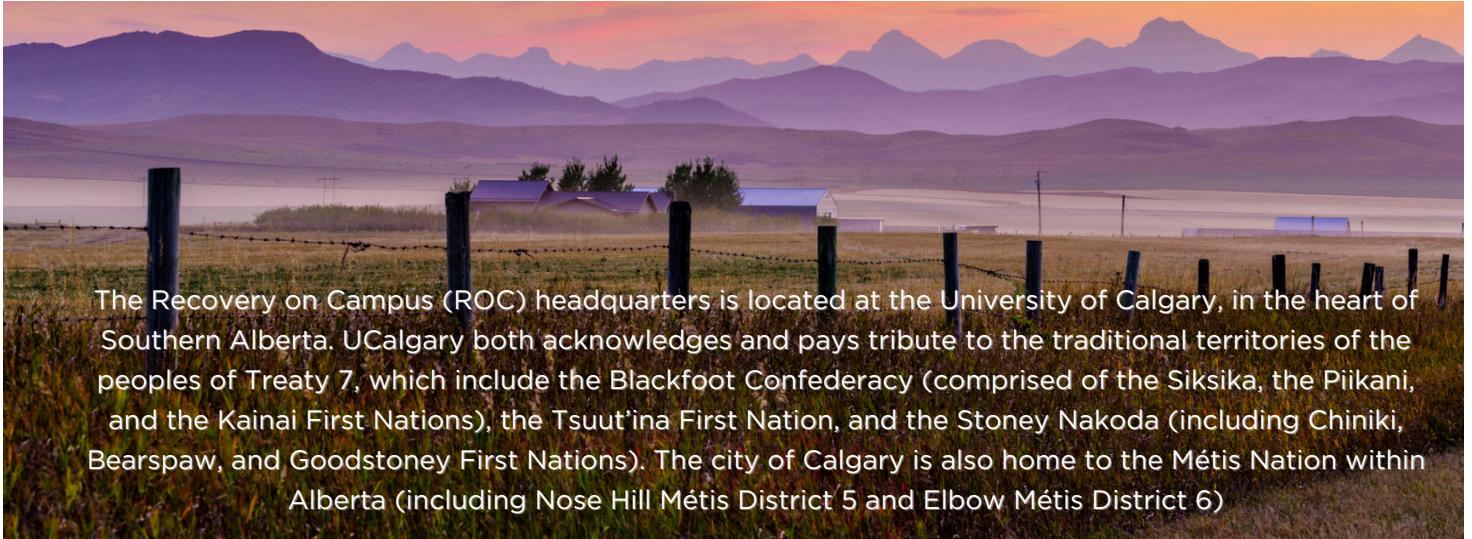
Co-creating recovery friendly campuses



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Alberta

Honouring place: territorial land acknowledgement



ROC partners with 26 post-secondary institutions across Alberta, each of which resides on the traditional land of Indigenous Peoples. The map below shows the approximate locations and boundaries of post-secondary institutions for each treaty.

1. Keyano College
2. Northwestern Polytechnic
3. Northern Lakes College
4. Portage College
5. Athabasca (Online)
6. Concordia University of Edmonton
7. MacEwan University
8. Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
9. NorQuest College
10. The King's University
11. University of Alberta
12. Lakeland College
13. Burman University
14. Red Deer Polytechnic
15. Olds College
16. The Banff Centre
17. Alberta University of the Arts
18. Ambrose University
19. Bow Valley College
20. Mount Royal University
21. Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)
22. St. Mary's University
23. University of Calgary
24. Medicine Hat College
25. Lethbridge Polytechnic
26. University of Lethbridge



Message from

Victoria F. Burns

**Founder & Director, Recovery on Campus (ROC),
Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work**

This year marked a major milestone: the launch of ROC's first formal action plan. What began with one peer support meeting and a borrowed coffee cart has grown into a provincial initiative and an emerging international model for systems change in post-secondary recovery and well-being. Over the past year, we have stayed grounded in our grassroots origins, centering lived experience, responding to real campus needs, and building recovery-friendly environments one relationship at a time.

That approach is now informing institutional strategy, policy, and peer-driven programs across Canada and beyond. In 2025, ROC secured \$3 million in multi-year funding (2025-2028) from the Government of Alberta, strengthening the infrastructure needed to sustain and scale recovery-oriented systems across the post-secondary landscape.

My commitment to this mission is deeply personal. In 2018, I nearly left academia because I felt there was no space for both my recovery and my career. That experience drives my belief that no student or employee should have to choose between their recovery and their education or professional aspirations. Recovery on Campus exists to ensure they never do.

In 2025, ROC became part of the UCalgary's Office of Institutional Commitments, embedding recovery into broader mental health, inclusion, and sustainability priorities. That transition signals what we've known all along: recovery doesn't belong on the margins, it belongs at the heart of how we build healthier, more inclusive campus communities.

While we've made tremendous progress, our work is far from finished. I'm excited for this next chapter in making recovery visible, valued, and supported, on every campus, for everyone.

**Thank you to our funders
and supporters**



Ministry of Mental
Health and Addiction



Physical space,
infrastructure, and affiliation



Student-focused
grants



Donors



Vision

Post-secondary communities where addiction recovery is visible, valued, and supported for everyone.

Mission

We co-create inclusive and sustainable support systems for addiction recovery pathways through peer-led programs, transformative education, community-based research, and cultural change across post-secondary communities.

Strategic Priorities

1 | Providing and Refining Recovery Supports

2 | Advancing Recovery Education and Awareness

3 | Producing Impactful Research and Evaluation

4 | Scaling Campus Recovery Programs

5 | Ensuring Sustainability of Campus Recovery Programs

***Note:** In 2024-2025, ROC expanded from a single campus-based program at the UCalgary to a province-wide initiative providing seed funding and technical support to post-secondary institutions developing local recovery programs. As partnered programs are still developing, most outcomes in this report reflect the University of Calgary Recovery Community (UCRC), which serves as ROC's headquarters and template model.



Goal 1: Providing & Refining Direct Supports

Ensuring recovery pathways are visible, accessible, and supported through peer-led, culturally responsive services.

PEER SUPPORT MEETINGS

282

Meetings

1125

Peer support meeting attendees

394

UCRC Hub drop-ins

9

Peer support meetings/week

83%

increased sense of belonging after attending a meeting

97%

Would return without hesitation

EVENTS & OUTREACH

19

UCalgary hosted substance-free events

522

Substance-free event attendees

3428

Outreach interactions

467

Students reached through classroom visits

Substance-free events included: Monthly Coffee Cart, Crowchild Classic, Halloween celebration, winter holiday party, paint and pour, summer BBQ, graduation party, Lunch n' Unlearns

STUDENT PEER RECOVERY NAVIGATORS

6

Student peer recovery navigators hired

1,620

Hours of peer support

600+

Students engaged

Peer Recovery Navigator duties include: Chairing peer support meetings, hosting substance-free events, providing 1:1 support, office support, and community outreach.

SUBSTANCE-FREE RESIDENCE

12

Beds available, up 300% Year-Over-Year

42

Applications received

6

Residence personnel trained in naloxone

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

\$100,000+

Distributed in awards and scholarships

50

Student and staff awardees



2024 Awardees at the ROC Reception

Goal 2: Advancing Recovery Education & Awareness

Enhancing recovery education, training, and dialogue across post-secondary communities.

43%

reduction in stigmatizing attitudes among 225 trained recovery allies

102

Students completed credited Addiction & Recovery course (SOWK 553.12)

10

practicum students trained



Goal 3: Producing Impactful Research & Evaluation

Co-creating community-based research and evaluation grounded in lived experience to inform policy and practice.



“Recovering ‘in place’ reinforces the idea that recovery is not just personal change —it also requires societal change. We must build environments where people in recovery can find community, purpose, and belonging”

- Dr. Victoria Burns, RIPL Founder & Director

20

Lab Volunteers & Student Trainees

7

Conference Presentations

8

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Research Article

“Recovery is Complicated”: A Qualitative Exploration of Canadian University Students’ Diverse Recovery Experiences

Victoria F. Burns PhD, Tye Strachan, BA, MSW, Ingrid Sinclair, BA, BEd & Noor Hadad, BA
Pages 359-376 | Published online: 07 May 2024



The Mathison Centre Conference

Goal 4: Scaling Best Practices Across Post-Secondary Institutions

Leading the co-creation of Campus Recovery Programs (CRPs) across post-secondary communities through modelling best practices, providing mentorship, and financial support.

4 Post-secondary institutions signed the Recovery-Friendly Campus pledge.



University of Calgary Pledge Signing



Red Deer Polytechnic Pledge Signing

3 x \$75,000 grants

awarded to post-secondary institutions in Alberta. (Red Deer Polytechnic, University of Alberta, Mount Royal University).

16 x \$3,000 grants

awarded to post-secondary institutions in Alberta.



Keyano College Pledge Signing



Mount Royal University Pledge Signing

Goal 5: Ensuring Sustainability

Securing long-term funding, staffing, and institutional commitment to embed recovery into post-secondary communities and policies.

\$3 Million

3-year grant from Government of Alberta Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction

\$173,520

In UCalgary Student's Union Quality Money grants received to expand our peer recovery navigator program

2025

ROC integrated into UCalgary's Office of Institutional Commitments



Dr. Victoria Burns and Minister Rick Wilson, Alberta Minister of Mental Health and Addiction

STAFF & STUDENT TESTIMONIALS



“My name is Krysia, I am an undergraduate student entering my final year in a Psychology-Biology combined degree. I have been involved with the UCRC as a volunteer since 2022, but I wasn’t open about being in recovery yet as I was worried it would impact my chances for a graduate program in clinical psychology. The support I found in this community has helped me develop a sense of trust in others, and a mindset where my struggles can be a source of strength and not shame. In the upcoming academic year, I will be an Honours student with the Addictive Behaviours Laboratory, and disclosing my lived experience during the supervision interview was a milestone in my personal and professional journey.”

-Krysia Denys, Peer Recovery Navigator, BSc '26

“Every campus deserves a space like the UCRC. During my student and professional life, I struggled with addiction. Today, the UCRC is a sanctuary in my recovery journey. As an addict in recovery, UCalgary alum, and UCRC Peer Recovery Navigator, I now have the privilege of showing students that recovery is possible and supporting them in their own personal recovery journey. The courage I witness when current students walk into a recovery space like the UCRC inspires me and gives me courage to continue improving myself so I can keep helping others.”

- Chris Melendez, BScENG '21



“Receiving the Recovery on Campus award has been an incredible honour. The applied work I have participated in through ROC has undoubtedly boosted my career prospects and the opportunities available to me upon the completion of my degree. With this additional funding available to me going into my final year, I will be able to participate in the initiative on our campus with an ease of mind regarding the financial stresses that surround being a student, a mom, and a person in recovery. I look forward to immersing myself in the upcoming programming for ROC where I am able to strengthen my own personal recovery and develop on the education I learn in class.”

-Shaela Brandt, RDP BA Psychology Student

STAFF & STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

Tansi

William Maskwa Nisihkason,

I am William J. Bear from Flying Dust First Nation. I have been with UCRC since the fall of 2024, and I am a regular at multiple meetings, including 12-step, wellbriety and discussions.

UCRC has become a second home to me. I had to fight tooth, nail, and addiction to get here to the University of Calgary, and my experience here has been deeply rewarding. Before arriving, I went to the Sunrise healing lodge to rest my spirit for three months, focusing on my recovery and restoration.

Nov. 30, 2023, I won my 2-year court case for my childhood sexual assault on my reservation. Where my world failed, UCRC succeeded and surpassed. The truth is that I was failed by nearly every life-saving system within Canada growing up until the present. I was in the Saskatchewan 16 and 17 program due to the inability to safely live with my parents growing up. I was raised by dealers, users and those who chose emotional abandon as a state of survival for the better part of my life. I was heart-hardened and hateful of my humanity and the humanity that failed around me. I was an assimilated First Nations who knew nothing about who I was, where I fit in, nor did I understand my language or culture until I came to Calgary.

I learned more about myself in one year than I did in my entire life because nohkom and nimosom, my grandparents, would seldom talk about the past. I could only see the past reflected in their actions some of the time. Coming to the UCRC held a safe place for me when I was vulnerable, defeated and alone. Never did I think I could come this far, but in my heart, I knew I had no other choice. There's nothing to go back to but the slow death or "la petite mort" of the reservation experience.

It was hard processing my family actively dying in addiction, alone, while I was in recovery, not alone. I lost a niece in fall 2024 due to an alcohol related accident; she was born a few months after I lost my son when I was 16. She became a daughter, and I lost her here while I was at the UofC.

Her death brought me to UCRC's recovery group, where I cried for help, and the people here supported me through my journey... I began to heal in a place where I didn't feel alone. The Blackfoot use the word niitsitapi for "real people". That's what I found here at the UCRC recovery hub on campus: real people willing to endure real discussions, with solutions, not judgment. I can't even begin to count my blessings here. I've been in recovery for 5 years now, finally getting my one year here at UCRC. It is an honour to be alive during this period of my life, when I don't have to hide in the shame or shadows of my own existence, and I can come to a place where I can transmute my pain into power.

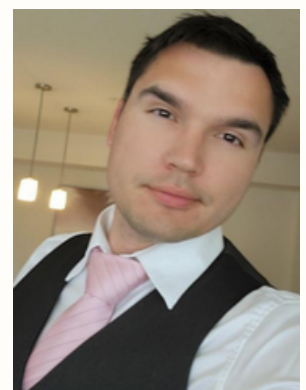
Today, I can laugh, love and relate. I am more emotionally regulated and honest on my voyage of self-exploration. That is a gift of inexplicable benefit to me on my educational journey here at the UofC. I love the community environment deeply here at the UCRC. Thank you for your enduring gift of support whilst we find ourselves again.

Hiy Hiy,

Yours Truly,

William J. Bear

Last first people of Flying Dust First Nation.



STAFF & STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

My name is Jenny. I had anorexia when I was 11, and I was diagnosed with severe depression in my early 20s. It took some time and several psychiatrists to work out the correct medication for me, but eventually we found it. I have been taking anti-depressants for over thirty years now. Depression is part of my life, part of who I am, but it does not have to rule my life.

A community of amazing people have held my hands and my heart along my recovery / life journey - many professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, nutritionists, and fitness experts), and literally dozens of wonderful friends and co-travelers (you know who you are!).



For the past fifteen years, I have had the great fortune of being loved just as I am, through all the ups and downs, by my amazing husband and son.

To each one of you in my community, across the years and across the miles, I repeat, "I could not have done it without you." Over the last few years, I have learned not to feel ashamed to talk about taking medication for my mental health. I am grateful for the connections I have made by being more open about my mental health struggles. Being in recovery means being empathetic, being open about my mental health struggles. Being in recovery means being empathetic, being open to others' struggles, and being in community. Whenever I share my story or talk about my mental health with a student, a colleague, or a friend, I learn more about them. We connect, and our work together becomes sounder and stronger.

We are so incredibly lucky to live at a time where the stigma around mental illness is fading, and we are able to connect with our fellow travelers. The road is still bumpy, and certainly not straight, but there are many of us out here, living our best lives, holding each other's hands and hearts.

-Dr. Jenny Godley, Professor, University of Calgary



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