



# 2021 HOC Annual Newsletter

*Our Vision: Okotoks, Our Healthy Home*  
*Our Mission: To facilitate and promote wellness through community partnerships*

## **President's Message – Sandi Courtorielle**

In 2021 HOC continued to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19, we were able to adjust more quickly to any new changes and restrictions as the year went on.

The Community Garden stayed open throughout the 2021 growing season. Jesse Lavoie, Community Garden Coordinator, wonderfully managed the garden through his willingness to assist the gardeners and encouraging fellowship and cooperation amongst the gardeners. Much appreciation to the Town Staff for their support in making the Community Garden a success. I would like to thank Jesse, in his second year of volunteering as Garden Coordinator, for his dedication and hard work.

The Community Gardeners were cooperative with COVID-19 guidelines and many fulfilled the garden maintenance component requirement. Thank you, gardeners for contributing to the ongoing health of your Community Garden. Thank you to Bente Yanota and her team of volunteers for the care of the Okotoks Food Bank Garden space.

HOC Members contribute to a wide variety of initiatives to foster wellness in our community. Past committees included Dementia Friendly, Physician Attraction and Retention and the Active Transportation Committee, to name a few.

Looking forward HOC will continue to; encourage new community gardens in emerging neighborhoods, education and promotion of bee friendly environments, and other ways to contribute to the health of Okotoks community members.

HOC members look at wellness in the community in the broadest sense and how they choose to define it. Informal feedback and regular updates are shared at our meetings with:

- Town of Okotoks - Community Wellness
- Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre
- Okotoks Food Bank
- HOC Community Garden

We welcome people interested in learning more about wellness in our community or HOC to attend a meeting. HOC meetings are held monthly on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. and currently via Zoom Video Conferencing. Please contact [HOC@Okotoks.ca](mailto:HOC@Okotoks.ca) to be added to the upcoming meetings

I want to thank the HOC membership for the honour and privilege of being the President for the last 3 years, I look forward to seeing where HOC will go in the future as Past President. Thank you to Debbie Posey and her Staff for providing support and guidance throughout the challenges we all faced in this New World of ours.

# 2021 HOC Annual Newsletter

## ***Kids in the Kitchen virtual cooking program – Dr. Zach Levacque***

For six weeks from April to June 2021, 50 youth and their families tuned in weekly for a virtual cooking program, facilitated by local professional chef Darren Nixon. The program, entitled Kids in the Kitchen, was the result of nearly two years of planning by the HOC and other community members. The program was funded by the Emerging Leaders in Health Promotion (ELiHP) grant and donations from Sobeys Okotoks. The ELiHP grant program is supported by the Alberta Medical Association and MD Financial Management, and is awarded to medical students and resident physicians to develop health-promotion projects in their communities. HOC member Dr. Zach Levacque was awarded this grant in 2019 along with his colleague Dr. Brad Duce, with the aim to reduce food insecurity in local youth through a cooking program to teach food preparation skills and nutrition.

Recall that back in 2019, life was much simpler. The HOC had developed a great in person cooking program. Many enthusiastic community members had offered to volunteer their time or resources. Then, of course, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the rules, and an in person program became impossible for the time being. The HOC members were tasked with reinventing the entire program in a virtual format. To reach this goal, the HOC teamed up with local chef Darren Nixon. Chef Darren brought his cooking expertise to the project, as well as his experience as an educator in both kitchens and virtual spaces. 50 youth, aged 8-12, signed up to participate, and were encouraged to invite the rest of their households to tune in as well.

Each of the six weekly virtual sessions saw Chef Darren guide participants through learning a new recipe and other food-related educational topics. Recipes were drawn from the locally produced cookbook *Our Time Together*, freely available from the Foothills Children's Wellness Network. The recipes includes breakfast, snacks, salad, pizza, and dessert. The aim was to empower youth to try challenging new recipes that would require minimal adult supervision.

The Kids in the Kitchen program received excellent feedback from participants. Many expressed interest in an in-person version of the program. The HOC will be looking to build upon the success of the project and deliver similar virtual or in-person programs in the future.

## ***Community Garden – Jessie Lavoie***

2021 was another excellent year for the HOC Community Garden. The hot, dry weather bought an intense growing season that allowed things that often do not grow to flourish. As excited as we were to see that garden grow so well the true highlight was the plot holders and the community that exists. Throughout the season gardeners actively helped with the shared responsibilities such as weeding common areas and helping to keep the garden well maintained.

We also saw gardeners support one another daily, from advice and tips, to watering each other's plots when away. A highlight that showed the relationships that are developed was when a gardener was unable to make it to garden unexpectedly, and the surrounding plot holders quickly noticed. They quickly reached out to the garden coordinator to check in and make sure the gardener was doing ok and to see if any support was needed.



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This demonstrated the social connections that are built in the community garden and shows how gardeners look out for one another.

Maintenance is an ongoing component of managing the community garden and work was carried out throughout the year to ensure all plots remain in excellent condition. Town of Okotoks staff continued to be an excellent source of information and support, from administration to answering questions about water, and assisting as needed.

HOC continue to manage and support the 55 plots in the community garden plus to Okotoks Food Bank Learning Garden. In addition, this year they were able to share their knowledge and expertise with other residents interested in community gardens. Supporting the community in this way helps to further build the strength of the garden and we look forward to continuing this in 2022 and enjoying yet another excellent year of gardening in Okotoks.

Follow us: <https://www.facebook.com/healthyokotokscoalition>

A reminder that if you are interested in getting a garden plot but did not have one the previous year, please email [hoc@okotoks.ca](mailto:hoc@okotoks.ca) or call 403-995-2773 to get on the waiting list. We have 55 plots that are available to rent for \$30 a season.



At the 2021 Annual General Meeting, we learned more about being a Bee City from David Misfeldt

# 2021 HOC Annual Newsletter

## Okotoks Food Bank Report - Bente Yanota

### Community Learning Garden

The safety protocols and restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic made community gardening interesting this year, to say the least! However, demonstrating flexibility and a great positive attitude, our team of staff and volunteers enabled us to have another fruitful and safe growing season.

- This year we harvested 1,562 lbs of produce from the garden.
- We shared our bounty with the Salvation Army Food Bank, Oilfields Food Bank and the Food Rescue Program out of High River.
- Our volunteers logged over 100 hours helping with watering, weeding and harvesting throughout the season.
- Sunflower heads were donated to a local school for the children to use for educational purposes.

If anyone knows of people wanting to volunteer next year in the garden, they can visit our website at [Okotoksfoodbank.ca](https://www.okotoksfoodbank.ca) to fill out an application form.



# 2021 HOC Annual Newsletter

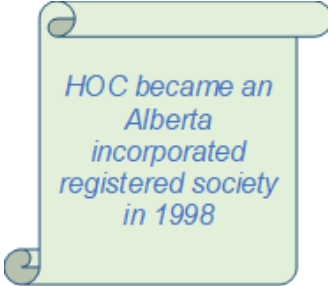
**Community Wellness Report – Debbie Posey**, Town of Okotoks Community Wellness Manager and HOC staff liaison

2021 saw new challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic continued. Opportunities to promote social wellness and connection became an even higher priority. Our small (but mighty) Community Wellness team worked hard to promote programs, services and messaging to encourage residents to be kind and stay connected to each other and the community. Our service areas generally include:

- Community social development
- Volunteer Services – engaging residents with volunteer opportunities to support Town activities, programs and events and, providing support to voluntary agencies
- The Okotoks Family Resource Centre, providing a host of supports to people including referral to other programs, Volunteer Driver program, Community Volunteer Income Tax, connections to emergency financial support, recreation fee assistance, mental health first aid and other supports to reduce stress and provide help
- Administration of the Town's Community Access Program, providing subsidized taxi service to eligible residents as well as the On Demand Transit program
- Affordable Housing initiatives

Community Wellness staff also provide liaison and support to community groups including United Way/Okotoks Partnership Committee, Healthy Okotoks Coalition and the Community Garden, the Foothills Children's Wellness Network, Rural Resiliency Action Partnership and more.

Some of the initiatives undertaken to strengthen social fabric and encourage social connection in this pandemic year included:



*HOC became an  
Alberta  
incorporated  
registered society  
in 1998*

- The #okotoksstrongertogether continuation of branding and messaging through the website and social media channels to highlight and promote connection and kindness
- Social check-in program where caring volunteers stay in touch with residents feeling alone and isolated.
- A drive through Seniors Week event complete with bags filled with giveaways, virtual hugs and waves from Big Rocky, the Deputy Mayor and the Dawgs. A bagpipe concert was again played outside the seniors residences.
- Innovative ways to provide programs and services virtually and/or connect people with the supports needed to cope at home were constantly developed and adapted
- Strengthening of a regional interagency, seeing strong attendance from Foothills social agencies, to share challenges, successes and provide supportive connections for staff
- FCSS provided \$217,964 to social agencies and partnered with the Primary Care Network to hire a Youth Navigator
- United Way/Okotoks Partnership has a hard working group of volunteers that drive the work. They continued to work on new activities and events to raise funds through the pandemic. The support of the business community was amazing. Mayor Robertson was very much missed by the committee this year.

# 2021 HOC Annual Newsletter

## Okotoks Health & Wellness Centre – Michelle Strom

Hello from the Okotoks Health and Wellness Center and thank you for another year of support from the Healthy Okotoks Coalition. We are grateful for your partnership and the ability to be involved with healthy initiatives in the community of Okotoks. The focus at the Okotoks Health and Wellness Center over the past year has been primarily keeping patients, families, and staff safe to provide many health care services right here in Okotoks. As we move forward into 2022, safety, positivity, and community health will remain a priority with hopes to see a relaxation of positive COVID-19 cases. All the best from the teams at Okotoks Health and Wellness Center

## Origin of HOC

The Healthy Communities movement was developed by the World Health Organization as a vehicle for achieving Health for All Through Primary Health Care (PHC), applying the principles of health promotion. The inspiration to embark on a healthy community process came in 1996 after several local (former) Headwaters Health Authority staff and Board members attended a conference in San Francisco. The conference theme that year was “Creating Healthier Communities”. A partnership was formed with the Town of the Okotoks and (former) Headwaters Health Authority, through a resolution by Town Council in 1996. A core group of people indicated an interest in establishing a health coalition. Membership was open to anyone interested in health and wellness for our community. In 1998, the Healthy Okotoks Coalition became an Alberta Incorporated Registered Society. This status allows for eligibility for grants and the ability to act as a fiscal agent for community partners.

## Healthy Okotoks Coalition 2021 Board of Directors

**President:** Sandi Courtorielle  
**Vice President:** Zach Levacque  
**Secretary:** Jaclyn Geddie  
**Treasurer:** Kim Pomares  
**Director:** Linda Blasetti  
**Director:** Brenda Dengis  
**Director:** Jesse Lavoie  
**Audit Committee:** Ed Sands  
**Audit Committee:** Shelia Hughes  
**Town of Okotoks, Staff Liaison:** Debbie Posey

Join us the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month from 7pm-9pm via Zoom Video Conferencing

**Everyone is Welcome!**

Contact HOC via email at [hoc@okotoks.ca](mailto:hoc@okotoks.ca) or Telephone (403) 995-2773

