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# GROWING NEW WINGS

■ Chrysalis Foundation gives people with disabilities growth, change and opportunity

by **LINDA HOANG**  
Saint City News

**Growth.**  
This is what persons with disabilities can achieve when they walk through the doors of Chrysalis.

**Change.**  
This is what happens when Chrysalis helps their clients fulfill their employment, volunteer, and recreational goals.

**Opportunity.**  
That is what St. Albert businesses and other non-profit organizations are giving Chrysalis clients when they allow those persons with developmental disabilities to work and volunteer in the community.

Chrysalis is a non-profit organization, located on 13325 St. Albert Trail, that has been dedicated to assisting persons with disabilities realize their potential and meaningfully work and volunteer in and

around the community for 40 years.

"Growth, change and opportunity" is Chrysalis' motto, and they try to instill this motto among staff, clients, and the community each day.

"We absolutely believe in change, growth and opportunity, and [we] live that everyday," Chrysalis spokesperson Suzie Kim said. "We strongly believe every citizen has the right to contribute and be a part of the community, and so we provide personalized services to assist individuals with disabilities achieve their goals."

"Chrysalis' is the cocoon stage before the caterpillar turns into a butterfly, so we believe that all individuals who seek Chrysalis services are capable of growing into these beautiful butterflies. Sometimes they need additional support in certain places and we try to find that to help them achieve their full potential," Kim added. "We do a lot of assessment with each individual to find out exactly where their interests lie to find meaningful activities that they can take part in that will help them grow into more, if not full, independence."

Chrysalis has two main programs: the Vocational Services (work) program and the Alternative to Employment Services (volunteer) program.

St. Albertan Chrysalis clients with developmental disabilities have found both employment opportunities as well as volunteering opportunities in the city through Chrysalis.

Kim says Chrysalis clients volunteer regularly at the St. Albert Health Unit, the Musée Heritage Museum, the St. Albert Public Library, the Sturgeon Community Hospital, and there are clients who are employed at Connect Logistics, St. Albert's Sobeys, Zellers, and more. She said there are about 21 businesses and organizations in St. Albert who are partnered with Chrysalis in some way.

"We have a lot of volunteers and employees in the St. Albert community," Kim said. "Our guys that are employed have a learning disability, so it's only a matter of they need a little bit more training, a little more support in getting into their employment, but once they get it down and they're comfortable with it, they



**Chrysalis**

AN ALBERTA SOCIETY FOR CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES

become your most loyal employee."

"People are finally starting to learn the value of that," she added. "Putting in a little bit more to get a little bit more back. [If] you're willing to work a little harder with our guys, they'll show so much loyalty to you."

Elizabeth Gerencser, a St. Albertan Chrysalis client with Cerebral Palsy, has been loyally volunteering in St. Albert for over 25 years, said Val Copeland, a Chrysalis worker who assists clients with job and volunteer placement and checks up on their progress.

Along with the employment and volunteer programs Chrysalis provides

its clients, the organization also runs on-site day programs and activities.

Kim said there is a culinary demonstration program where clients learn how to cook, handle food safely and more.

There is a learning centre where teachers are on hand to help clients develop their skills.

Chrysalis also has a computer room and a computer program called the Success Maker, where clients can learn how to read and do math starting from a kindergarten level and progressing up to a Grade 12 level.

But the day program Kim said Chrysalis is most proud

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PHOTO SUPPLIED

Chrysalis client Kelly Chernowski (right) poses in front of his artwork with summer student Magda Peisowicz during art class last Thursday.

of is their art program. "We have a brand new art program instructor and we've built a whole new art room, and the program is so in demand that now we're opening up the program for Saturdays for any clients who work Monday to Friday," she said. "The artwork is just absolutely beautiful."

Kim also adds there are

volunteers who come in once a week to do therapy and scrapbooking with the clients.

"Sometimes it's amazing because you'll know an individual who has been in the service for 10 or 15 years and they don't communicate so you won't really know that much about them, but as soon as you give them

a new outlet to express themselves, you start to discover these things about them that you never would have known," she said. "Through scrapbooking they start expressing dark things about their past or their hopes and dreams and wishes and they do it completely through these scrapbooks, it's amazing."

Recently, Chrysalis launched their Spirit of Chrysalis program, a series of information sessions designed to get the name of the organization out into the community. The sessions are one hour long and take place every two weeks and Kim said the next information session will be on Aug. 21.

"The sessions are just to provide greater awareness to people of the different ways they can connect with Chrysalis and the community," she said. "It's an opportunity for us to get our name as far into every nook and cranny of the community as possible."


Chrysalis is funded mostly by the government and private donations, but also has a manufacturing division on site that produces wood products and plastic bottles and containers, which are sold across the province and Canada, with profits going directly back into Chrysalis services.

Chrysalis assists about 400 persons with disabilities in the St. Albert, Edmonton and Calgary region.

"There's so much potential and beauty in each and every individual that's a part of our organization," Kim said. "Once you get involved, you can't help but become impacted by the power and potential that you see, the change that you see happening around you."

To learn more about Chrysalis, visit <http://chrysalis.ab.ca>.

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