

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2024-2025

BIGGER THAN OUR BUSINESS



Table of Contents

01

**Land
Acknowledgement**

02

**Message from the
Managing Partner**

03

About Ballard

04

**Our Impact
Commitments**

05

**Top 10 Impact
Highlights**

07

Commitment #1
Begin with Ballard

15

Commitment #2
Resilient and Employable Workforce

21

Commitment #3
Empowered and Prosperous
Communities

27

Commitment #4
Scaling Impact and Transforming
the Ecosystem

31

Thank You!

Land Acknowledgement

At Ballard, we recognize that our work takes place on Treaty 6, 7, and 8 territory. These lands have been home to diverse Indigenous Nations since time immemorial, including the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, and Stoney Nakoda. This is also within the Métis Nation Homeland, home to the Métis (Otipemisiwak). We also acknowledge the non-human inhabitants of these territories, including the plants, animals, watersheds, and ecosystems that sustain us and with whom we share responsibility.

As Treaty people, we acknowledge both the historic and ongoing impacts of colonization and recognize our responsibility to participate

meaningfully in reconciliation and decolonization. This includes continuing and expanding partnerships with Indigenous communities, actively supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, and committing to enhanced education and training for our team on Indigenous histories, rights, and ways of knowing.

Through this acknowledgement, we recommit ourselves to respecting the languages, cultures, and governance systems of the diverse Nations across these lands. We recognize that decolonization is an ongoing process, and we are dedicated to integrating these principles into our consulting practice, relationships, and organizational values.



Message from the Managing Partner

When I started Ballad, my vision was to build an organization that delivered services differently, with innovation, agility, and a clear focus on making an impact. I wanted to create a place where passionate, skilled people could come together to help Albertans achieve greater resilience and opportunity. Looking at how far we have come, I could not be prouder of the team we have built.

From our beginnings as a small office in Whitecourt securing our first rural northern contract, we have expanded to numerous locations across Alberta and grown to a team of over 50 dedicated individuals. This past year, our simulated worksites continued to set a standard for innovative training, our Social Return on Investment (SROI) measurement demonstrated just how substantial our impact truly is, and we achieved significant milestones such as Living Wage and COR certification. These accomplishments reflect not just the strength of our programs, but the dedication of the people behind them.

BALLAD'S CORE VALUES:

Accountable: Deliver exceptional services; be committed to positive social and environmental impact.

Collaborative: Be a team player; build meaningful and inclusive relationships.

Entrepreneurial: Be willing to innovate and implement creative solutions / nourish the entrepreneurial spirit.

The stories and results shared in this report capture the difference we are making in communities across the province. From helping over 1,200 Albertans build skills and pursue employment to supporting communities and employers with strategies that create long-term resilience, each achievement builds on the values and vision that have guided us from the start.

I am grateful to our team, our clients, and our partners who make this work possible. Together, we have built something special, and I look forward to seeing how we continue to evolve and strengthen our services in the years ahead.

John Corie
Managing Partner



About Ballad

Founded in 2012, Ballad has grown into a trusted partner for organizations across Canada, specializing in two core areas of expertise:

Employment Services:

We prepare individuals for meaningful careers through targeted training programs that meet industry demands. From construction and hospitality to supply chain management, we provide participants with the skills, certifications, and work placements needed to succeed.

Consulting:

Our consulting services help clients in the public and private sectors navigate challenges and seize opportunities. Whether it's optimizing operations, implementing strategic growth plans, or supporting community development, Ballad delivers tailored solutions that drive results.

With locations in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Whitecourt, and High Level, Ballad is well-positioned to serve clients and program participants across a wide range of sectors. From Employment Service programs to Consulting, our two-fold organization helps build stronger communities and brighter futures.

Learn more about how we can work together at
balladgroup.ca



Construction site tour with WERC participants.



Grand opening of Buffalo Crossing Gas & Convenience.

Our Impact Commitments

Ballad was founded on the belief that business can and should be a force for positive change. Over the years, this belief has shaped how we approach every project, program, and partnership. In 2023, we formalized this commitment by embedding social impact as a core business function, ensuring that our intentions are matched by clear actions and accountability. Through this process, we identified four impact commitments that continue to guide our efforts and focus our resources where we believe we can make the greatest difference:

1

Begin with Ballad

Optimize the positive impact and reduce the negative impact created through our day-to-day business and operating decisions.

2

Resilient and Employable Workforce

Long-term reattachment to the workforce and increased capacity to be resilient to economic vulnerability.

3

Empowered and Prosperous Communities

Thriving and prosperous businesses and communities that are empowered to pursue their long-term vision.

4

Scaling Impact and Transforming The Ecosystem

Concerted knowledge mobilization and relationship building for industry advancement.

We are proud to share the progress we have made and the momentum we have built. This second Annual Impact Report highlights both the outcomes we have achieved and the groundwork we continue to lay for long-term change. We remain focused on deepening our impact through collaboration, learning, and sustained action, always guided by the needs and aspirations of the people, communities, and industries we serve.

Our social impact activities and indicators are aligned with the TRC Call to Action #92 for the corporate community where possible, as well as the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Canadian SDG Framework, adopted in 2015 by all 193 UN member states.



Top 10 Impact Highlights

1

Supported 1,262 Albertans through nine Employment Service programs with a 71% completion rate.

2

Introduced Social Return on Investment (SROI) for WERC programs, showing every \$1 invested generates \$3.19 in value.

3

Ballad staff volunteered 290 hours to support the communities we call home.

4

Certified as a Living Wage Employer, ensuring all staff and eligible contractors earn wages that meet real living costs in their communities.

5

Achieved COR (Certificate of Recognition) certification with an 89% audit score, reinforcing Ballad's strong health, safety, and workplace practices.

6

Tripled community investment to \$17,585 across 42 initiatives. Whitecourt's Haunted House welcomed 1,200+ guests and raised over \$10,250 for an inclusive playground at Pat Hardy Elementary.

7

Supported Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation in opening Buffalo Crossing Gas & Convenience, a major economic project generating \$1M in its first quarter and driving future community growth.

8

Completed a province-wide Staff Housing Assessment and Strategy for Alberta Forestry, Parks, and Lands, engaging 231 staff and supervisors to guide investments in safe and modern accommodations.

9

Supported 173 businesses through Employer Edge and engaging hundreds more as hiring and training partners.

10

Reached record employee engagement with a 68 eNPS score (up from 48) and launched Ballard's first Mentorship Program, fostering cross-team growth and connection.



Begin with Ballard

SCOPE :

All corporate activities including operations, marketing, human resources, finance, and governance.

DESIRED CHANGE:

Optimize the positive impact and reduce the negative impact created through our day-to-day business and operating decisions.

At Ballard, we believe that the impact we create starts with how we operate as an organization. This year, we advanced several initiatives to ensure that our day-to-day business practices reflect our values and contribute to stronger communities. Highlights include becoming a certified Living Wage Employer, achieving COR certification for our health and safety management system, launching new staff development programs, and expanding opportunities for employees to give back through volunteering and community initiatives. Together, these actions demonstrate how we are building a positive workplace culture and reducing our organizational footprint while creating meaningful benefits for those around us.

COR Certification: Strengthening Workplace Safety

We are proud to share that in 2025, Ballad became officially COR-certified (Certificate of Recognition) by the Government of Alberta. This certification confirms that our health and safety management system meets the high standards set by Alberta Occupational Health and Safety and reflects our organization-wide commitment to building safe, respectful, and supportive workplaces.

Ballad achieved a strong overall score of 89%, demonstrating the effectiveness of our practices and the strength of our safety culture across teams.

COR certification is both a milestone and a signal of our values in action. It reflects our proactive approach to health and safety, reinforces our operational integrity, and positions us strongly for future opportunities. Most importantly, it represents meaningful progress in creating work environments where people can thrive.



Ballad is proud to be a Certified B Corporation, using business as a force for good since 2023. We are committed to driving social impact, environmental responsibility, and inclusive growth in every aspect of our work.



Our Living Wage Commitment

This year, Ballad was officially certified as a Living Wage Employer by the Alberta Living Wage Network. This certification reflects our commitment to ensuring that all staff and eligible contractors earn wages that meet or exceed the actual cost of living in the communities where we work.

A living wage is not the same as minimum wage. It is calculated annually based on real expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare. In 2024, the living wage was set at \$20.85 per hour in Edmonton and \$24.45 in Calgary, with region-specific rates for High Level, Grande Prairie, Whitecourt, and Red Deer. At Ballad, these figures serve as our wage floor, not the minimum standard.

To earn and maintain certification, we underwent two formal audits to demonstrate that we meet or exceed the living wage through a combination of wages and benefits. Both audits confirmed that our compensation practices align with the certification requirements.

Becoming a Living Wage Employer is a choice, not an obligation. It is one of the ways we act on our values, care for our team, and contribute to economic stability in the regions we serve. It reflects our belief that fairness, dignity, and long-term investment in people are central to a healthy workplace and a stronger community.



Ballad staff at the Red Deer simulated worksite for quarterly employer event.

Measuring What Matters to Staff

This year, we saw a significant increase in our employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS), reflecting continued progress in cultivating a positive and engaging workplace. In January, we scored 48, and by July, that number had risen to 68, marking our highest score to date. These results signal growing employee satisfaction and reinforce our commitment to building a supportive and values-driven work environment.

When asked what they valued most about working at Ballad, employees most frequently cited the following:

- Career growth and innovation
- Work impact and community development
- Company culture, workplace relationships, and teamwork

In addition to our eNPS survey, we also conduct a quarterly Employee Wellbeing Survey. This survey serves as a vital tool for assessing employee happiness within their role, the organization as a whole, and their team dynamics. We received a score of:

Happiness

4.2/5

Personal Motivators

4.1/5

Company Motivators

4.1/5

Relationships

4.5/5

Growing Together Through Shared Experience

In January 2025, Ballad launched its first internal **Mentorship Program**, a new initiative designed to support professional development and strengthen relationships across the organization. The program pairs mentees with experienced mentors from different offices, programs, and teams, creating intentional opportunities for connection, learning, and mutual growth.

Participants meet on a monthly basis to share knowledge, explore challenges, and build skills that contribute to both individual and organizational success. By encouraging cross-functional pairings, the program supports one of Ballad's core values: learning from one another and building stronger teams through diverse perspectives.

The Mentorship Program reflects our commitment to creating a workplace where people at all stages of their careers feel supported, empowered, and connected. Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and we look forward to expanding the program in the year ahead.



Ballad staff during a mentorship meeting.

“Being part of the first cohort of Ballad’s Mentorship Program was a truly enriching experience. My mentor played a key role in supporting my growth as a leader, encouraging me to think outside the box and approach challenges with creativity and intention. One of the biggest areas of growth for me was in formal writing—particularly in business development and proposal writing. I’ve come away feeling more confident and equipped, with tangible improvements I can see in my day-to-day work.”

- Amy Bancescu

“One of the best parts was having a space to ask questions, reflect on my goals, and get honest feedback in a really supportive way. My mentor shared practical tools and advice that I’ve already started applying in my role, and it’s made a noticeable difference in how I approach challenges. It also helped boost my confidence and gave me the motivation to keep pushing myself outside of my comfort zone.”

- Daymien Bourrie

Giving with Purpose

In 2025, we continued to strengthen our community investment efforts through sponsorships, donations, and employee matched-giving. Our approach remains largely employee-led, with staff identifying opportunities to support local organizations that are meaningful to them and to our clients. This year, we are proud to share that our community investment reached **\$17,585**, which is nearly three times greater than last year's total. We also supported **42 initiatives**, up from 14 in the previous year. This significant growth reflects both our deepening commitment to giving back and the generosity and engagement of our team.

This year, our community investment supported a wide range of organizations addressing critical needs across Alberta. Here are some examples of the initiatives and programs we were proud to contribute to:

- The Calgary team donated to **Woods Homes**, a long-standing mental health centre that provides treatment and support services for children, youth, and families across Alberta.
- The Grande Prairie team supported **Wapiti Community Support Association**, strengthening local programs focused on food security, housing access, and poverty reduction.
- The Edmonton office donated to **Boyle Street Community Services**, a frontline organization providing wraparound support to people experiencing homelessness, addictions, and systemic discrimination.
- The Whitecourt team continued its multi-year relationship with the **Community Lunch Box Society**, attending and sponsoring their annual Celebration Night fundraiser in support of food security programs.
- Ballard contributed to **Creating Hope Society**, which carries forward healing work for Residential School survivors and supports those affected by the child welfare system.
- The Edmonton team made a donation to the **Edmonton Down Syndrome Society**, supporting inclusive programming and advocacy for individuals with Down syndrome and their families.
- The Red Deer office donated to **The Mustard Seed**, helping to provide emergency shelter and food to individuals experiencing homelessness in the downtown core.
- In response to the Jasper wildfires, Ballard donated to the **Canadian Red Cross Emergency Relief Fund**, supporting families displaced by the fires with immediate aid and supplies.



Whitecourt staff donating to the Whitecourt Christmas hamper.

Environmental Sustainability in Action: Whitecourt

At our Whitecourt location, we are putting sustainability into practice, one drop, one scrap, and one red wiggler at a time.

This spring, we installed three 100-gallon rain barrels to collect water from the eavestroughs. These now supply all the water needed for our outdoor planters and garden beds, helping us cut back on municipal water use and support long-term environmental goals. We are also designing a new misting system for the greenhouse to make our water use even more efficient.

Inside, our hospitality program is reducing organic waste through a rolling composter and a new worm farm. The composter turns kitchen scraps into nutrient-rich compost for our greenhouse. The worm farm, currently home to 30 red wigglers, is in the early stages of development but will grow over time, eventually processing up to six cups of organic waste per week and producing valuable fertilizer.

This system may be small for now, but the impact is growing. We are already seeing a reduction in waste and water use in Whitecourt and are planning to introduce similar systems in our WERC programs in Grande Prairie and Red Deer.



WERC participant harvesting from the greenhouse they built.



Promoting Wellness Through Active April

In April 2025, Ballad staff took part in **Active April**, a month-long initiative focused on movement, motivation, and mutual encouragement. Designed to be inclusive of all activity levels, the challenge invited team members to log their steps, share photos from walks and hikes, and celebrate personal milestones together. A total of **15 staff members** participated, collectively logging an impressive **4,058,119 steps**. From casual strolls to marathon training, Active April brought staff together in a fun, supportive way that promoted wellness and connection across teams.

Ballad in the Community

This year, Ballad employees volunteered a total of **290 hours** to support events and initiatives in their communities. From fundraising runs to holiday programming and hands-on service, our team members gave their time, energy, and heart to causes they care deeply about. The following are just a few highlights from an inspiring year of community involvement.

- The Edmonton and Calgary teams attended the inaugural **Every Woman: An International Women's Day Gala** in Spruce Grove, a powerful evening that brought together women from across Alberta to share stories of resilience, recovery, and leadership. The event raised funds for Adeara Recovery and Turning Point, two organizations supporting vulnerable women through therapeutic and addiction recovery services.
- For the second year in a row, Team Ballad ran the **Calgary Marathon**, raising \$2,013 for the Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region. In our first year, we supported the event by hosting an aid station and sponsoring an individual runner. This year, we officially registered as a corporate running team, and we're proud to share that we placed 37th out of over 200 corporate teams in total funds raised for local non-profits!
- Eleven Ballad team members participated in the **Alberta Walk Together for ALS** in Edmonton, an event that holds deep personal meaning for our team. In addition to walking in solidarity with those affected by ALS, we contributed \$1,750 through our Community Investment fund, demonstrating our commitment to standing beside our colleagues and their families.
- The Red Deer office spent an afternoon volunteering at **Ronald McDonald House**, where they prepared a home-cooked meal for families staying at the facility. The team was deeply moved by the care and support RMH provides to families navigating medical crises.

- Seven Edmonton staff traveled together on the **Canadian Blood Services "Life Bus"**, donating blood in support of public health and emergency care needs across Alberta. This small but vital act of service brought our team together for a cause that has life-saving impact across the province.
- In October, the Whitecourt team hosted its annual **Haunted House fundraiser**, welcoming over 1,200 guests for a night of spooky fun and community connection. The event raised more than \$10,250 for Bear Necessities' inclusive playground project at Pat Hardy Elementary School. These funds will help ensure children with mobility challenges can access the entire playground year-round.
- During the 2024 holiday season, Ballad volunteers supported **The Mustard Seed's Family Gift Centre**, a \$2 toy store that gives low-income families the opportunity to choose and purchase gifts for their children and grandchildren. Volunteers helped with gift selection, wrapping, and setup, making the season brighter for families who may not otherwise have had gifts under the tree.



Edmonton staff attending Every Woman: An International Women's Day Gala.



Turtle sanctuary built by WERC participants.



WERC participants volunteering with the Salvation Army.

These projects illustrate how Ballad's everyday actions, whether in program design, partnerships, or resource use, can spark positive change from within. They reinforce our belief that community and environmental impact begins with the actions we take every day.

When Learning Meets Impact

As part of our commitment to "Begin with Ballad," we seek to maximize the positive impact of our everyday operations and decisions. This includes creating opportunities within our Employment Services programs for participants to apply their skills through community-focused projects that generate meaningful local benefits.

Participants in Ballad's Employment Services programs dedicated program time to practicing their skills while giving back to their communities. Some highlights from this year include:

- The **WERC Grande Prairie shop team** showcased their creativity and craftsmanship by building a turtle sanctuary for Harry Balfour School. With generous support from Windsor Plywood, the team completed detailed finishing work and safely delivered the sanctuary, providing a new home for the school's turtles, Stinker and Dozer. This project not only demonstrated participants' skills and teamwork but also made a lasting impact on the school community.
- The **WERC Red Deer team**, joined by current and former participants, donated 40 handcrafted wooden Christmas trees to residents at Taylorview Towers. Twenty were fully finished and twenty were left unfinished for residents to decorate through the lodge's recreation program. This meaningful collaboration highlighted participants' craftsmanship, strengthened employer relationships, and showcased the practical skills developed through Ballad's hospitality program.
- **Participants in the WERC Grande Prairie program** volunteered with the Salvation Army's Kettle Campaign, embracing the opportunity to connect with the community while supporting a cause that has personally touched many of their lives. This experience deepened their sense of purpose and reinforced the value of giving back.
- **Participants in the NW ESTS Whitecourt program** applied their skills to local conservation efforts, building bat houses for a biologist in Edson, recycling bins for the Whitecourt Lunchbox Association, and bird and bat houses for the Whitecourt Fish and Game Association. These projects gave participants the chance to contribute to their community while developing hands-on experience and a sense of purpose.

Resilient and Employable Workforce

SCOPE:

Employment Services programs

DESIRED CHANGE:

Supporting clients with long-term reattachment to the workforce and increased capacity to be resilient to economic vulnerability.

Across Alberta, we continue to deliver a wide range of industry-responsive Employment Services programs that serve diverse participants, from youth to mature workers and from skilled professionals to individuals facing significant barriers to employment. This year, we operated ten programs, achieving strong outcomes and expanding our impact through initiatives such as the launch of the AgriEdge Careers program in Calgary. Our programming included employment readiness, supply chain, insurance, agriculture, transportation, and youth employment, as well as our simulated worksite training models. Together, these programs help participants build skills, gain work experience, and reattach to the workforce with greater stability and confidence. Highlights include:

Program Participation and Outcomes

In the past year, Ballad supported **1,262 clients** through nine employment-focused programs, achieving an overall **completion rate of 71%**. These programs provided tailored training, skill development, and work experience opportunities, equipping participants with the tools they need to secure employment and build lasting economic stability.



Barriers and Participant Resilience

Many participants entered Ballad's programs with significant barriers to employment, ranging from systemic challenges to personal hardships. Examples include addictions, mental health concerns, sporadic work histories, criminal records, and unstable housing.

- In **WERC Red Deer**, 39.5% of participants reported addictions and 17.3% faced mental health challenges
- In **WERC Grande Prairie**, 19% reported mental health challenges and 18.3% struggled with addictions

By addressing these barriers holistically, Ballad not only helped participants secure employment but also supported their long-term resilience and capacity to remain connected to the workforce.

Understanding Participant Growth

Launched in January 2024, the **Circle of Resilience** is Ballad's in-house evaluation tool designed to measure holistic growth across both personal and professional dimensions. Built on the understanding that employability is closely tied to personal resilience, COR helps us assess progress in seven interconnected areas: **Basic Needs (1), Sense of Self (2), Physical and Mental Health (3), Money (4), Skills and Employability (5), Connections and Relationships (6), and Spirit and Culture (7).**

The evaluation tool is used at key points during the participant journey: at program intake, completion, and 90 days after program exit. This approach allows us to understand not just whether someone has gained skills, but how they are building the confidence, stability, and networks needed to thrive.

This year's results demonstrate that resilience can be developed and sustained when the right supports are in place. The Circle of Resilience offers meaningful insight into how participants are strengthening their foundations for long-term success and well-being.





Teaching WERC participants carpentry skills.

Highlights from this year's evaluations:

90%

reported improved financial stability

86%

experienced greater Basic Needs security

81%

improved in both Sense of Self and Skills and Employability

95%

showed growth in two or more resilience areas

72%

improved in four or more dimensions

15%

advanced in all seven areas of resilience

Employment Outcomes Highlight

For programs supporting individuals with more significant barriers to employment, we exceeded our contract target of 50%, reaching an average job placement rate of **64%** at program completion.

Our core focus is long-term employment. While our 90-day outcome currently averages **47%**, we are approaching our 50% target, with multiple strategies underway to strengthen sustained job retention.

Notably, we achieved an almost **10% year-over-year increase** in 90-day outcomes, highlighting the growing impact of our approach and continued investment in long-term success.

Demographic Highlights

- **24%** of participants identified as immigrants.
- **20%** identified as Indigenous.
- In the **DB2W** program specifically, 375 participants were immigrants and 225 were Indigenous.



WERC hospitality participant crafting mocktails.

Measuring the Value of Our Impact: Social Return on Investment (SROI)

This year, we introduced a **Social Return on Investment (SROI)** calculation for our WERC programs in Red Deer and Grande Prairie to better understand and communicate the full value of the programs' impact. SROI is a way of measuring how much social and economic value a program generates for every dollar invested. It looks beyond job placements and income to include improvements in confidence, housing stability, mental health, reduced reliance on social assistance, and other positive outcomes for participants and the community.

To calculate SROI, we gathered input from participants, employers, and other partners to identify the most meaningful outcomes. We then used data from our Circle of Resilience tool and other program records to measure changes in participants' lives and assign a fair financial value to those changes. This careful process, which used conservative estimates at every step, resulted in a **3.19 SROI ratio**. In simple terms, this means that for every \$1 invested in the WERC programs, **\$3.19 worth of positive social and economic benefits** were created, including increased earnings for participants, reduced use of emergency services, and stronger community connections. In total, the programs generated more than **\$31 million in social value from just under \$10 million in funding**.

This result reinforces that the WERC programs are not only changing lives but also delivering exceptional value to funders, employers, and communities. Building on the findings from this initiative, we plan to expand WERC's reach into more communities, strengthen supports for participants, and deepen partnerships with employers. These recommendations will help ensure that even more Albertans can overcome barriers, reattach to the workforce, and achieve long-term economic resilience.

What Our Employment Partners are Saying

This year, employers not only welcomed our participants into their workplaces, they also shared how Ballard's training, support, and collaborative approach have made a difference. Their words highlight the value of our employment readiness model and the long-term impact of investing in people.

"Ballad has consistently demonstrated their ability to provide us with candidates with the proper skills and safety training required for employment."

— Charissa De Rudder, Hodge Vegetation Control

"What sets Ballad apart is their ability to understand our unique needs and their emphasis on providing quality staff who have become long-standing employees within our company."

— Kyle Paul, Coca-Cola Canada Bottling Limited

"Since the fall, we have hired two individuals through their program, and we are extremely pleased with the knowledge, skills, and work ethic these hires have brought to our worksite."

— Ron Egan, Clark Builders

"Ballad's approach, grounded in collaboration, practical skills training, and employment readiness, represents a meaningful investment in people and a proactive response to the ongoing labour gaps faced across multiple industries."

— Jordan Asels, N'deh Limited Partnership

Participant Stories

Carol Desjarlais

Essential Skills to Success | Whitecourt

Carol, a mature Indigenous participant, joined the Essential Skills to Success program this year after nine months of unemployment and the recent loss of her father. With formal schooling up to grade 9, she had built a wide-ranging work history, finding the most fulfillment in construction and oilfield roles.

Despite personal challenges, Carol fully committed to restarting her career. She completed workshops on resume building, interview skills, and job searching, and renewed her expired safety certifications. With support from Ballad's Business Development Specialist, she secured a training opportunity with Clark Builders on the construction of Whitecourt's new Arts and Leisure Centre.

After completing her placement, Carol was hired full-time. Her efforts were recognized when she received the Clark Stars Award for excellence on the job.



"This is the best job I've ever had. I'm so grateful to Ballad for helping me believe in myself again and giving me the opportunity to prove what I can do."

Harley Labbe

WERC | Red Deer

Harley entered the WERC program in March 2025 looking to gain new skills and direction as part of her recovery journey. She quickly became an active and engaged participant, taking full advantage of both training and development opportunities.

A visit to the Red Deer Fire Station inspired Harley to explore public service. She has since enrolled in Ignite the Fire, a firefighting training program for women starting in August. She also secured reliable transportation, found stable housing, and recently began a new role as a cabinet frame shaper at Klaas Custom Woodworking.



"Ballad gave me a second chance and helped me believe in myself again. I no longer feel lost. I'm proud of who I've become and where I'm headed."

Juanita Spence

WERC | Grande Prairie

Juanita joined the WERC program in February after almost a year of unemployment while receiving Income Support. She faced a number of barriers, including a criminal record that limited her job prospects, as well as personal challenges related to mental health and divorce.

Through one-on-one career counselling, Juanita identified a new goal: to pursue a career in the oil and gas industry. She dedicated herself to the process, completing workshops in first impressions, interview skills, and stress management. She also worked closely with Ballard staff to update her resume and complete necessary safety certifications.

Juanita was soon hired by Alberta Safety Control as a shop hand, with the company already expressing interest in supporting her continued training and advancement.

“I am very appreciative of having the chance to work with Ballard and receive the help I needed to get on my feet. I feel like I have a real future now.”



Antarpreet Kauldhar

WERC | Red Deer

Antarpreet joined the WERC program in November after immigrating from India. With a background in IT engineering and no experience in trades, he initially found the program overwhelming. But with steady support and his own commitment, he quickly adapted.

He became one of the most dedicated participants, regularly arriving early and staying late to develop his skills. Antarpreet mastered a wide variety of tools and successfully completed a cabinet project from start to finish with exceptional attention to detail.

After participating in Ballard's career development workshops and completing a job shadow in construction carpentry, he made the decision to pursue a new career in the skilled trades.

“Ballad gave me the tools, guidance, and support I needed to start a new career path. I’m proud of what I’ve built here, both in the workshop and in my life.”



Empowered and Prosperous Communities

SCOPE :

Consulting services

DESIRED CHANGE:

Thriving and prosperous businesses and communities that are empowered to pursue their long-term vision.

Through our Consulting Services, we worked closely with communities and organizations to advance projects that foster economic stability, build capacity, and support long-term community goals. By providing strategic planning, business development expertise, and access to funding opportunities, we help our partners create conditions for prosperity and resilience. Highlights from this work include:

Buffalo Crossing Gas Station: Fueling Long-Term Economic Growth

On April 17th, 2025, Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation celebrated the grand opening of the new Buffalo Crossing Gas & Convenience, a revitalized gas station and convenience store that is already transforming the community. Ballard was proud to attend the opening, where Senior Manager of Consulting, Colin Critch, delivered remarks on behalf of our team about the importance of making a lasting impact. This project truly exemplifies that value, with all speakers highlighting its ability to create opportunity “for generations to come.”

Ballad supported the Nation by developing a comprehensive business plan that secured the financing and grant support needed to move the project forward. The updated facility, perfectly located between two popular lakes, is well-positioned to capture steady traffic from commuters, tourists, and seasonal residents. In its first quarter of operations, the new Buffalo Crossing Gas & Convenience has already generated **\$1 million in revenue**, a strong indicator of the long-term sustainability of this investment.

Beyond its immediate economic impact, the gas station will help Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation advance its broader vision for self-reliance, prosperity, and community development. The profits generated will be reinvested into services and programs that benefit Members, while also sustaining employment opportunities for staff transitioning from the former facility. This revitalized business also lays the groundwork for additional projects and infrastructure that will strengthen the local economy well into the future.



Before project completion.



After project completion.



Chief Roger Redman, Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation.

This revitalized business also lays the groundwork for additional projects and infrastructure that will strengthen the local economy well into the future.

Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre

As part of our work to strengthen communities and build capacity within organizations, Ballad's Consulting Services team supported the Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre in Whitecourt to advance their Transitional Housing Project. This initiative aims to provide safe and supportive transitional housing for women and children leaving emergency shelters, giving them the stability they need to access programming, build independence, and create a foundation for the future.

Our team played a key role in helping Wellspring secure seed funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). This crucial milestone now positions the organization to pursue capital funding for the project's construction and long-term operations. By helping Wellspring move one step closer to making this essential housing a reality, Ballad is contributing to a stronger, more resilient community in Whitecourt and the surrounding area.

Strengthening Mental Health and Addiction Services in North-Central Alberta

In fall 2024, Ballad supported the Alberta North Central Alliance (ANCA) in conducting a comprehensive Mental Health and Addiction Needs Assessment across five municipalities and five First Nations in the Slave Lake region. This initiative responded to an urgent need to evaluate and improve access to mental health and addiction services, particularly for rural and underserved communities.

In addition to a detailed analysis of demographic and service data, Ballad facilitated a regional symposium and a series of stakeholder interviews to build consensus around actionable solutions. Through this process, the assessment identified both strengths and significant gaps in the regional service landscape. Stakeholders highlighted the need for more culturally competent services, integrated support that connects mental health care with housing and employment services, and expanded virtual service options to address geographic barriers.

The findings of this assessment will inform future planning, policy, and investment to build a more integrated, accessible, and culturally relevant mental health and addiction service system in North-Central Alberta. By equipping ANCA and its partners with clear evidence and practical recommendations, this work is helping communities move closer to their long-term vision of resilient, thriving populations.



Consulting team with the Alberta North Central Alliance (ANCA).

Supporting Those Who Care for Alberta's Parks and Lands

In 2025, Ballard partnered with Alberta Forestry, Parks, and Lands (AFPL) to tackle one of the Ministry's most pressing challenges: outdated and inadequate staff housing. AFPL's 210 housing units were aging, limited in supply, and poorly aligned with workforce needs, creating both human resource and operational risks.

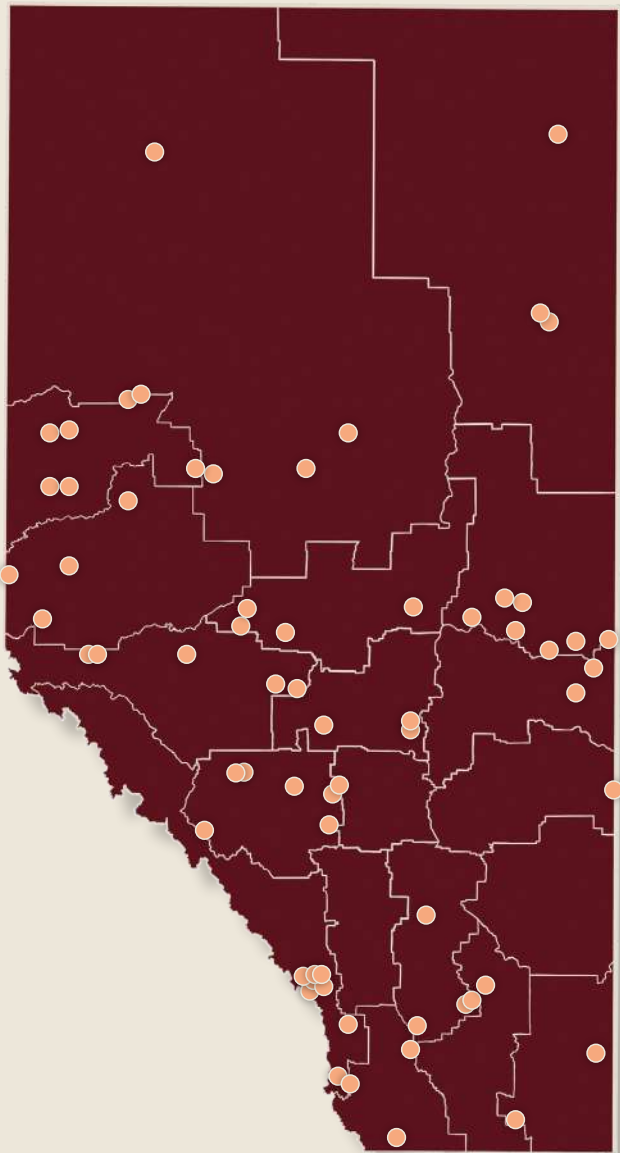
To address this long-term challenge, Ballard completed a comprehensive housing assessment and strategy. With our strategic partner, TeckEra, we inspected 203 residences across Alberta, surveyed over 185 staff and supervisors, and facilitated six focus groups with 46 participants. This engagement informed seven housing assessment reports and four tailored strategies addressing challenges across all three Ministry divisions (Parks, Lands, and Forestry).

The strategy positions staff housing as a strategic asset that improves workforce stability, safety, and organizational effectiveness. Better housing will help AFPL support its workforce and deliver vital services for all Albertans, from safeguarding forests to maintaining the parks that enrich our communities.

Engagement participants from each division:

Lands Division:	Parks Division:	Forestry Division:	Overall Engagement:
23	169	44	236

Map of Alberta showcasing the surveyed residences.





Employer Edge: Strengthening Businesses and Workforces in Northwest Alberta

In April 2024, Ballad launched Employer Edge to help businesses in Northwest Alberta build strong, resilient workforces. The program, delivered on behalf of the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services (ALSS), provides free, tailored human resources support to businesses in communities such as Whitecourt, High Level, Dene Tha' First Nation, La Crete, Barrhead, and Westlock.

Employer Edge specializes in practical solutions for workforce challenges, from workplace policies and compliance to recruitment, onboarding, and employee retention. Businesses can access expertise in compensation planning, conflict resolution, performance management, and training, helping them attract, develop, and retain top talent. This is especially valuable for small businesses that may lack an internal HR function.

In its first year, Employer Edge has already supported 173 businesses, delivering 3,199 hours of HR value—the equivalent of nearly \$550,000 in work—to companies in the region.

The program also launched its first Resiliency Lab workshops in Whitecourt, High Level, and La Crete, focusing on HR policy development and implementation, and published two issues of its magazine, *The Chronicles*, which shares HR insights, economic analysis, and local business stories.

Employer Edge is helping businesses navigate today's competitive job market with confidence. By improving HR practices, it not only strengthens individual businesses but also contributes to the economic stability and growth of communities across Northwest Alberta.

What's Ahead: A Transformative Housing Development in High Level

Ballad is proud to be supporting Dene Tha' First Nation and N'deh Limited Partnership on an ambitious housing development that will help address critical housing needs in High Level. Located on the former trailer park site on the north side of town, the 20.7-acre development will provide **153 units**, including transitional homes, single-detached homes, tiny homes, and three apartment complexes, one of which will feature commercial space on the ground floor.

We have actively supported the partners' **\$9 million infrastructure grant application** and collaborated on the first visuals for the planned community, with ongoing involvement as the design and planning stages move forward. This development will not only bring much-needed housing options to the area but also support long-term community growth and economic stability. We are excited to see this transformative project take shape in the year ahead.

Ballad is working with Dene Tha' First Nation and N'deh Limited Partnership to create a new neighborhood that expands access to safe, stable housing, strengthens the local economy, and builds a sustainable future for High Level.



Employer Edge resiliency lab workshop in Whitecourt.

Scaling Impact and Transforming the Ecosystem

SCOPE :

Strategic partnerships and industry leadership

DESIRED CHANGE:

Concerted knowledge mobilization and relationship building for industry advancement.

This year, we focused on expanding our partnerships and strengthening connections across the employment services ecosystem. By collaborating with industry, government, and community partners, we are better able to align services, share expertise, and develop programming that meets the needs of both participants and employers. These partnerships and networks help us stay responsive to changing labour market conditions and drive lasting outcomes.

Highlights include:

Partnership with the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta

Ballad is proud to have a strong, growing partnership with the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta (WCB). Together, we are advancing industry needs by delivering training programs across the province in sectors such as insurance (Professional Insurance Careers) and recruitment (AIHR).

Through the Train and Place (TaP) program, Ballad and WCB work closely with employers to identify workforce needs and develop customized training solutions. Eligible and interested workers complete several weeks of targeted curriculum at Ballad, earning certifications in their specific training stream before rejoining the workforce with a new employer.

This model benefits everyone involved: employers gain skilled, job-ready talent while workers on WCB benefits are supported in returning to meaningful employment. The ripple effect strengthens industries, improves workforce capacity, and ensures that businesses and individuals are better positioned for long-term success. Ballad looks forward to continuing to grow this impactful partnership.



Calgary supply chain program graduates.



Edmonton team in the Energy Square office boardroom.



Edmonton insurance program participants.

Partnership with The Immigrant Education Society (TIES)

Ballad is proud to collaborate with The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) to create clearer pathways to employment for newcomers and job seekers. Our partnership ensures individuals are supported at every stage of their journey through cross-referrals and joint events such as job fairs, while also building stronger connections across the employment ecosystem.

When someone expresses interest in a Ballad program but is not quite ready, TIES provides foundational supports to help them succeed. Their wraparound services help individuals build the skills and confidence needed to thrive in Ballad's employment programs and beyond.

Together, Ballad and TIES have created a streamlined, complementary model that reduces barriers, connects individuals to the right supports at the right time, and ensures participants are positioned for long-term success in the workforce.

“What sets Ballad apart is their ability to understand the needs of the Canadian job market and additional barriers to entry that newcomers face. We are grateful for the continued support Ballad provides to TIES through attending job fairs and helping clients with work placements and we look forward to working with them in the future”

*- Mayssoun Hniedi, Manager,
Employment & Career Development*



Calgary team at the TIES holiday party.

Networks and Events

As part of our commitment to knowledge mobilization and ecosystem-building, Ballard actively participates in a range of provincial and community networks that foster collaboration, align services, and strengthen workforce outcomes, including:

- **PCDC (Private Career Development Contractors Association of Alberta):** Monthly meetings to exchange best practices and policy updates across the employment sector.
- **Interagency Alberta:** Quarterly roundtables with Government of Alberta and municipal stakeholders to coordinate community services.
- **Youth Employment Contract Provider Community of Practice (YECF CoP):** Monthly Ministry-hosted sessions focused on improving services for young job seekers.
- **ENBIX Training Alliance CoP:** Partnership-building and knowledge exchange on employer network-based innovation, advancing industry collaboration and innovative workforce strategies.
- **Business Support Network (BSN):** Monthly events connecting industry leaders to Employment Services strategies.
- **Community Collaborations:** Ongoing coordination with partners such as McMan Youth Services, local food banks, Healthy Families Healthy Futures, and Community Adult Learning Councils to address community needs and strengthen outcomes.



High Level staff at a trade show.



Grande Prairie staff at a career fair.

Thank You!

Together, we have continued to create meaningful and lasting impact in the communities where we live and work. The progress achieved this year reflects not only the strength of our programs and services, but also the passion and dedication of the entire Ballard team. Across the province, each of you has played a vital role in advancing our mission to empower resilient people, communities, and businesses.

In just our second year of implementing our Impact Strategy, we have made incredible strides. From growing the scale and reach of our programs to building deeper connections with the communities we serve, this year has marked another period of strong growth in the way we measure and demonstrate our impact.

We are equally grateful for the support of our employer partners, community partners, strategic relationships, and long-standing clients. Your collaboration, expertise, and investment amplify our work and allow us to achieve outcomes that would not be possible alone.

As we look ahead, we are excited to build on this momentum and deepen the positive change we can create together. Thank you for being such an essential part of Ballard's story and success.

Sneak Peek of the Year Ahead

Looking ahead, Ballard is building on the momentum of this year with a renewed focus on community, sustainability, and long-term impact. Our priorities for the year ahead include:

- Strengthening community connections through expanded volunteerism and new give-back components within our simulated worksites.
- Expanding simulated worksites with enhanced wraparound supports, including housing initiatives.
- Growing our applied research efforts to better understand and communicate the social impact of our employment programs.
- Enhancing employer co-investment and deepening partnerships to improve long-term workforce outcomes.

- Advancing environmental sustainability through improved recycling, water conservation, and waste reduction initiatives.
- Investing in hybrid vehicles to reduce our carbon footprint and model sustainable operations.
- Piloting new tools and outcome tracking strategies to better measure impact and guide future innovation.

Together, these efforts reflect Ballard's commitment to building stronger communities, supporting people furthest from opportunity, and creating a more sustainable future through every program, partnership, and initiative.



ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2024-2025

The report is made with a mixture of materials from FSC-certified forests, recycled materials, and/or FSC-controlled wood.