

## ALBERTA FLOODS: ONE YEAR PROGRESS REPORT



After a disaster, it can be hard to find silver linings, but anyone impacted by the floods in Alberta last summer knows that the outpouring of support they received from across the country was really something special.

Red Cross knows the effects of disasters of this magnitude linger for years after the actual event. These effects can be shattering. Emotional, financial, and family stresses remain long after the water recedes.

We deeply appreciate the trust you have shown the Canadian Red Cross. We pledge to continue to earn that trust and we thank you for your outstanding support in helping Albertans get through this difficult time. You have made a tremendous difference.

# MOVING FORWARD, WITH THANKS: THE STORY OF ONE HIGH RIVER FAMILY

Slabs of fresh sod draw subtle lines along the High River field where Andrea Vasquez's kids play soccer now. Just as the park shows few signs of last year's devastating floods, Vasquez says her family also refuses to be defined by the disaster.

Rather than focus on all they've lost since June 2013, the family of six is determined to stay positive and express the gratitude they will always feel for friends, family and countless strangers since the floods.

**"We want to tell people how much their efforts mean to us, that we are truly grateful," says Vasquez, 43. "It has been rough for us, it's true. But there has also been more laughter than tears. We have been so fortunate in many ways. And frankly, all I can say is thank God for the Red Cross because I don't know how we would have managed."**

On a recent May day, Andrea, her husband, Freddy, 49, and son Tomas, 13, gathered in the newly-sodded field as Noah, 15, coached the local kids' soccer team. The couple also has two daughters, Jelene, 20, at college, and Kaylia, 18, currently volunteering with a youth group in the Philippines.

While Noah ran soccer drills beside the town's still-damaged library, Andrea, who works with ESL (English as a Second Language) students at a local school, recalled the destruction of their rented home last year. But that traumatic event is not their only challenge. Just months before the disaster, Freddy was diagnosed with a brain tumour, severe head trauma and heart issues. Headaches were already keeping him from work and family finances were extremely tight.

**"We were already reeling, then the rains started," Andrea recalls quietly now.**

On the morning of the floods, Freddy was home when nearby rivers rose over their banks. Worried, Freddy decided to check on Andrea and the boys at

school. Water was already running through the streets, so he waded through the murky flood.

"At first, the water was knee high, but then it got thigh deep and freezing, then past my stomach. The current was so strong," Freddy remembers. Still, he managed to reach the school only to discover it was empty. He tried to return home to rescue their dog, Joey, but the route had become impassable.

An hour later, the family finally found each other at the high school, recalls Andrea. It was there that they first encountered Red Cross. Amidst "incredible mayhem, a real gamut of emotions, with seniors in shock, foreign workers who couldn't speak English, and so many terrified townspeople," Red Cross was registering evacuees and assisting families trying to find each other. Food and water were offered in the gym. In the chaos, Andrea helped to phone students' frantic parents, while Freddy translated for Spanish-speaking residents. Later, they assisted with a second evacuation from the high school, first to Nanton, then Blackie.

Eventually, Andrea's mother turned up in a half-ton truck and her father returned with her sister who was starting chemotherapy that day. "Yes, it was a pretty bad day for us," Andrea recalls now, but somehow it ended with the family gratefully reunited at a friends' home in Okotoks. They ended up staying there for almost three weeks.

**"It was a time when we didn't really cry, but just laughed, even though we had no idea what would happen, if our dog was dead or alive, what state our house was in. We had nothing, but we had each other."**

Days after that were filled with waiting, worrying and wandering like "flood zombies," between parks and coffee shops. Eventually, they went to the Blackie evacuation centre supported by Red Cross and helped give out cold drinks and food.



“That place was amazing. People were treated like royalty with meals, clothes, just everything handed to them.”

The family also appreciated the shelter’s makeshift “hallway of healing,” that developed as aerial photos were taped to the walls.

**“I remember it was day eight, and I finally saw my community in those pictures. There were definitely lots of tears, but it was also so helpful.”**

A few days later, when they were allowed to return home, they found their dog alive but their basement and its contents destroyed. Smelly mould was already spreading. Their daughter’s bedroom and suitcases packed for college were “trashed,” along with the laundry room, family room, bathroom and pantry.

What followed was weeks of trips to the Red Cross office at the rodeo grounds for cleaning supplies: overalls, masks, garbage bags, buckets and drinking water.

Freddy says they lined up almost daily in an atmosphere that “was positive and happy.” He recalls being helped by Red Cross volunteers from California, Ontario, British Columbia, “all over.”

Along with hundreds of High River families, they also received Red Cross cash cards at different times to help buy groceries, gas, and household goods. He recalls purchasing their daughter’s clothes and items for college. Andrea remembers getting light bulbs, bed linens and eventually a washer and dryer. Friends gave them second-hand sofas, a desk and television.

**“I know everyone found it really, really hard to ask for help,” says Andrea. “My mum said it was almost the hardest thing she ever had to do. Pride really became an issue for us. But we did suffer loss, and in the end, we had such a positive experience when we did reach out.”**



The family has since been offered Red Cross help at least once a month, says Andrea. And at Christmas, like most High River families with school children, they also received a cash card to help with holiday expenses. They bought the boys’ winter coats, shoes and other necessities. Freddy got new glasses.

“If it wasn’t for the Red Cross, we would have had a terrible Christmas and every day the bill collectors would probably be calling us,” she says.

But financial help isn’t the only thing that has made a big difference, she adds. The emotional support means just as much.

“Frankly, this winter was really ugly for me, with Freddy being ill, and the flood damage, and my sister sick, too. But our Red Cross caseworker has just been wonderful. At times, she is the only one who has stopped to ask me: How are you, really? Not just: How ya’ doing? She truly asks because she cares, and that is such a release to have someone who really wants to know.”

Now, as the flood anniversary draws near, the family is still hoping for provincial Disaster Recovery Program financial assistance. They had no renter’s insurance and Freddy’s former workplace is disputing some of his health issues. But the family is determined to stay positive.

“We have enough trouble for one day, so there’s no point in borrowing from the next,” says Andrea. “Even at our lowest point, we try not to carry too much forward because we do have a choice, and it’s the only choice really, to keep moving ahead.”

“If something else happens, like it floods here again, then so be it. We got through the last time with only the clothes on our backs but we still have the most important thing: Our family.”

# FROM DEVASTATION TO PEACE OF MIND: THE STORY OF ONE STONEY NAKODA NATION FAMILY



Living with seven kids in four tiny motel rooms for months on end might test the patience of many people, but Phillomene Stevens is just grateful her family is safe.

**"I have no idea what we would have done if the Red Cross hadn't put us here. No one else was really helping us and we were getting really sick, so this is actually a lifesaver for us," says Stevens.**

Until recently, the 61-year-old grandmother lived in a Canmore motel with her four grown daughters, their husbands, and seven grandchildren aged

three to 17. It's been almost a year since the 2013 floods devastated Stevens' split-level bungalow on the Stoney Nakoda Nation, but the family still has no idea when they will be allowed to go home. Mould and rot made their place unsafe and was making them ill. By January, Stevens was hospitalized for lung problems, and her grandchildren were also falling sick.

**"It was winter, really cold, and we were staying off and on at my mother's place, but that was pretty crowded. We kept trying to go home and clean up our house, but the mould and smell always came back. So we really needed something else. Without the Red Cross, I might not be here at all. It was pretty bad."**

She says the floods changed everything. Last June, Stevens was looking forward to a fine summer of outdoor feasts, lots of family and fresh air. At the time, British Columbia relatives were visiting her house, along with her 93-year-old mother, five daughters, their husbands and a dozen kids. It was busy but everyone was pitching in, she recalls.

But then the rains didn't stop and they knew trouble was ahead. Past floods had threatened Stevens' home, so they all started making sandbags.

**"At first, the kids just thought it was great fun outside in their raincoats and gum boots filling the canvas bags that my husband made," she recalls now with a smile. "But the adults weren't so happy."**

Soon, a creek crept near her front door and flood water and sewage began pouring into her basement. "It all happened so fast that we couldn't move all our stuff in time. And it started to smell pretty bad, too."

Despite this, the family stayed in the flooded home for the weekend, unable to get past fallen trees and shifting water. Fortunately, they had a power generator, food and water, but that ran out quickly. Finally, a neighbour on an



ATV turned up to say Red Cross was handing out supplies at the local school.

“He helped us get so many great things,” Stevens says, listing flour, baking powder, jam, peanut butter, pancake syrup, soup, bacon, eggs and hamburger. “We really like cooking our traditional bannock. And I thought it was so nice that somebody really knew what we needed.”

The next day the family ventured out to register with Red Cross at the school. A shelter was set up there with cots, blankets and hot meals, but the place was already full. So, they all moved to Stevens’ mother’s place, which wasn’t as badly damaged. They spent the rest of the summer there, largely outdoors in a makeshift camp with tents and propane stoves.

“If you asked the kids, they would probably say it was the most wonderful summer. I was freaking out but I had to be positive for everyone and say we’re going to be okay. Some people got scared but I would talk to them and we managed.”

**Red Cross provided much of their food and water. “Basically, Red Cross is how we made it through summer and fall.”**

Stevens normally works as a crisis counselor at a women’s shelter. Others in the family usually work as well, but the floods uprooted them all, and soon they were also getting sick.

They were back and forth to Red Cross regularly getting cleaning supplies and made at least 20 trips to the dump, throwing out damaged, mouldy furniture and household items. They moved inside at her mother’s when it got too cold to camp.

At Christmas, Red Cross gave the family some funds to help celebrate the holidays. Stevens bought her grandchildren winter clothes and a few small toys. But by January, Stevens was hospitalized for lung problems, and the

family decided to approach Red Cross with their housing difficulty. Shortly after, they were moved to a Canmore hotel for one month, and then shifted to the four motel rooms that they occupied until mid-May.

“We still have no idea when we can go home, but at least we’re together. That’s what keeps me going. My family is what I live for,” says Stevens.

Now they are all feeling much better. Stevens regularly picks up her grandchildren from school. For months at the motel, they found Canmore parks and places to run and explore. She worried though when the kids tried to ride bikes or play in the motel parking lot. Stevens’ daughter, Lorane, who has two children, Ronin, 3 and Seraphin, 8, agreed it was tough.

**“Originally, it was a little bit like being on vacation, but now not so much. We just wish we could go home.”**

Recently, the family was moved again to a complex of temporary trailers in Morley, on the Stoney Nation, while they wait for their house repairs. Red Cross is currently offering help with furnishings and household goods to people in this interim housing.

Daughter Cassandra says the family will always be grateful for the assistance.

**“Before, we saw on TV how the Red Cross can help internationally with all sorts of disasters, but now we know personally how much they have helped us,” said Cassandra.**

“Yes, mentally and physically, they have given us so much,” added Stevens. “The Red Cross has given us safety and real peace of mind.”

# RED CROSS RESPONSE: RECOVERY AND BEYOND

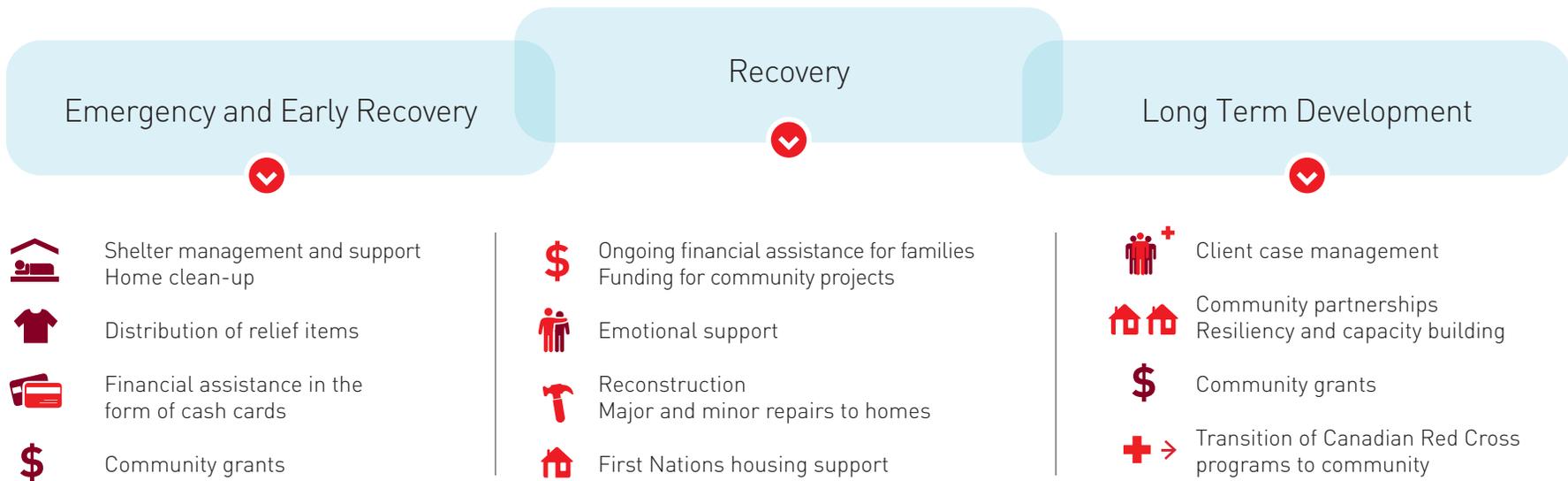
*Assistance to nearly  
70,000 individuals  
in affected areas*

June 2013 caused the evacuation of more than 100,000 people and destroyed an estimated 14,000 properties. The Canadian Red Cross has provided help to nearly 70,000 individuals in affected areas.

Immediately following the flood, Red Cross focused assistance on families who were most vulnerable, including those with low incomes, limited or no

financial resources, as well as individuals or seniors with health challenges, temporary foreign workers and renters.

Red Cross operations centres were established early on and remain in three flood-affected regions: Calgary; High River; and the First Nations communities. Flood operations will continue through to 2016.





## Meeting needs and providing hope

In a Red Cross survey following the Alberta Floods\*:

- Nearly 94 per cent of individuals said the Red Cross services they received were appropriate to their needs
- Nearly 96 per cent of individuals said the presence of Red Cross in their neighbourhood was reassuring, and nearly 93 per cent said it gave them hope

**"Thanks to you, we got the help we needed"**



\*Data was acquired from a survey of those who received only registration services from Red Cross, as well as those who received registration services in addition to other Red Cross assistance.

## Looking ahead

One year later, hundreds of families are still displaced and located in temporary housing, hotels, or with family and friends as they wait for home repairs or affordable accommodation, both of which are in short supply in flood-affected areas. Hundreds more are struggling to rebuild, renovate or repair dwellings and are faced with dwindling financial resources.

While the total number of families and individuals requiring assistance from Canadian Red Cross is slowly decreasing, new people seeking help continue to come forward with a range of unique needs and concerns which is typical during recovery from a disaster of this magnitude.

We have focused our work on four key areas:

1. Assistance to individuals and families
2. Shelter and home clean-up, repair and rehabilitation
3. Community initiatives and support to small businesses
4. Community resiliency and disaster preparedness

# WHAT YOUR GIFT DOES

## \$42 M RAISED

*95 cents of every dollar donated for Alberta Flood Relief goes directly to impacted individuals and communities*



### Assistance to individuals and families

**\$21.5 M**

- Distribution of relief items
- Registration and information line
- Confidential personal assessments to identify immediate and additional unmet needs
- Cash supplements for food, clothing, medical equipment, childcare, household goods, rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, community celebrations, transportation and occupational items to help people return to work



### Shelter and home clean-up, repair and rehabilitation

**\$9.3 M**

- Shelter management and support
- Home clean-up
- Repair and rehabilitation of homes
- Initiatives that support families and individuals returning home
- Creating sustainable funds for development of affordable housing



### Community initiatives and support to small businesses

**\$8.6 M**

- Community grants
- Support to small business
- Community partnerships
- Support for restoration of First Nations cultural artifacts



### Community resiliency and disaster preparedness

**\$2.6 M**

- Disaster preparedness education
- Community capacity building
- Community outreach campaigns
- Provision of disaster preparedness kits

# AREAS OF FOCUS



## Assistance to individuals and families



Red Cross was there as soon as flooding began, helping people evacuate, move into temporary shelters, or perhaps offering them food and water. Financial assistance was also given to those unable to meet basic needs and is still being provided to thousands of people. These Red Cross activities are focused on preserving life and property.

During the initial stages of the Alberta Floods, Red Cross:

- Distributed 945,000 relief supplies – including clean-up kits, first aid kits, water, towels, cots and blankets;
- Operated a toll-free line that was accessed by more than 55,000 people who sought to either register as evacuees, get information or be reunited with family;
- Managed or supported 16 emergency and reception centres;
- Provided financial support to replenish the supplies of eight food banks that were overwhelmed;
- And assisted the Government of Alberta at cash distribution centres.

After the initial emergency phase and once individuals started on their path to recovery, the Red Cross:

- Provided direct assistance to nearly 70,000 individuals, including more than 6,600 families, for their basic needs;
- Distributed cash supplements to individuals for food, clothing, medical equipment, childcare, household goods, rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, transportation and occupational items to help people return to work;
- And supported families through initiatives such as the:
  - Seasonal Assistance program - provided winter clothing and support for community holiday initiatives such as elders' feasts and children's Christmas parties.
  - Utility Bills program - provided support for clients who received back-dated utility bills just before the holiday season.

Emotional support programs are being offered to assist people with managing stress and developing coping skills. This includes providing appropriate training to Red Cross staff and volunteers so they have the skills required to offer emotional support to clients when needed, and are able to identify when individuals or families may require additional support.

*In this area of focus, \$21 million has been spent. The remaining allocated funds will continue to be spent directly with families and individuals over the next year as outlined above.*



## Shelter and home clean-up, repair and rehabilitation



Red Cross realized that the most efficient and cost-effective way to help individuals and families to get back into their homes would be to partner with other organizations who provide expertise in clean-up, repair and rehabilitation of houses.

Shortly after the floods, the Canadian Red Cross discussed partnership opportunities with four local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and subsequently utilized an American Red Cross model for offering grants to other organizations after large-scale disasters.

Early in the response, Red Cross provided Samaritan's Purse with a grant for clean-up services to 400 homes in Calgary, High River and Siksika Nation.

Last fall, Red Cross partnered with the Government of Alberta to replace or repair furnaces, hot water tanks and other essential heating items through the Winter Emergency Heat program so homeowners could stay warm in their homes or protect damaged properties over the winter.

Now, through the work of Habitat for Humanity, Mennonite Disaster Services, Samaritan's Purse, and World Renew, Red Cross will be funding the repair and rehabilitation of 210 homes in High River.

After Red Cross recovery teams consulted with families, community groups, municipalities, First Nations leadership, the provincial government, NGOs,

and other partners in flood-affected areas, our assessments revealed a range of fresh challenges hampering recovery. In response, a new Return to Home program was created. Now, several initiatives are underway including successful cost-sharing projects to help homeowners. For example, under the new Flood Permit Grant program, those facing financial difficulty repairing or rebuilding Calgary homes can now apply for Red Cross and municipal funding to help cover the cost of city permits, and Medicine Hat residents can seek assistance under the Sanitary Sewer Isolation Valve program to install back-up valves to protect their property in future.

The High River Home Ownership program creates a sustainable fund to be administered by Habitat for Humanity Southern Alberta, and is subject to Rempel Homes and Canadian Red Cross guidelines. This will provide new affordable housing for years to come. The target for this program is 25 new homes in High River.

*In this area of focus, \$5 million has been spent. The remaining allocated funds will continue to be spent directly with families and individuals in the next one to two years as outlined above.*



## Community initiatives

### Community Grants

The Canadian Red Cross Community Project Grant allows groups to apply for funding to cover community development projects, hold events or support individuals and families impacted by the disaster.

Red Cross is currently working with communities to fund needs such as: re-establishing community centres and gathering places; supporting sport and recreation services; facilitating workshops and trainings; and providing ongoing supplies to food banks. We have provided almost 40 grants to date.

Some examples of community grants: Bulk food supply for Siksika and Stoney Nakoda Distress Centre; Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary, Safe House; Alberta Elks (Stavely Elk Lodge); Canada Bridges Siksika Youth Program; Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association; Economic Developers Alberta; Calgary Homeless Foundation; YWCA Resiliency Building for Women; Neighbourlink Calgary; Turner Valley and District; Canmore Collegiate High; and Bridge Church.

### Support to Small Businesses

Since the floods, many small retailers have experienced a drop in sales, and don't have financial reserves to carry them through this weak period. In an Alberta government study, it was identified that an estimated 1,500 businesses were affected by the flooding. In High River, 76 local businesses are closing.

Recognizing these difficulties, a new Red Cross initiative will offer grants to small business owners experiencing financial hardship caused by the floods. Many of these businesses are essential to communities and provide income to employees and owners.

Grants would also be available to some members on the Siksika and Stoney Nakoda Nations who contribute to their communities and earn family income by helping to restore damaged or destroyed cultural artifacts needed for community ceremonial practices.

*In this area of focus, \$1.5 million has been spent on community initiatives. The remaining allocated funds will continue to be spent directly with groups seeking funding and small businesses over the next two years as outlined above.*

## Community resiliency and disaster preparedness



To help communities increase their resiliency and prepare for the possibility of future disasters, Red Cross is increasing focus on disaster preparedness initiatives in flood-affected communities. These initiatives emphasize that

disasters can strike anywhere, at any time, and teach people it is important to know the risks, and make an emergency plan for themselves and their families. Through disaster preparedness training, individuals are taught to:

- **Be prepared:** Emphasis is placed on training individuals to know the risks in their community, make a family emergency plan, and get or make a preparedness kit.
- **Plan ahead:** Individuals are encouraged to pre-arrange meeting places and ensure each member of their family knows the phone number of a trusted friend or relative in another town, in case family members are separated during an evacuation.
- **Prepare an evacuation plan:** Individuals are encouraged to carry out evacuation exercises regularly, and practice techniques to remain sheltered in the event an emergency forces them from their home.

Ongoing community outreach in flood-affected communities offers personal emergency preparedness materials and emotional support to: Canmore, Medicine Hat, Exshaw, High River, Stoney Nakoda and Siksika Nations, and seven neighbourhoods in Calgary.

Through discussions with partner agencies and community groups — such as Renewal in High River, Recovery Operation Centre in Calgary, Chamber of Commerce, municipal officials and provincial stakeholders — several opportunities to introduce Red Cross programs to increase community resiliency have been identified. Possible programs include violence and abuse prevention, first aid training, water safety education and health equipment loans. Interaction with clients and communities during the recovery operation has uncovered some unmet needs in the same areas. Strategies to implement these programs are being developed and will be finalized this summer.

*In this area of focus, we expect to spend \$2.6 million over the next two years.*

**Of funds raised for Alberta Flood Relief, Red Cross has spent \$27.5 million, which represents more than 65 per cent of the total to date.**



*The outpouring of corporate support during the flood was amazing. Shaw was the first company to step forward and contribute not only money but much more. This is their story.*

## A message from our friends at Shaw

*Since making their first connection in 1971, Shaw has been dedicated to giving back to the communities where they live, work, and play. That charitable spirit is a distinctive part of Shaw's culture, and today, they have a network of more than 14,500 employees who strive to make a difference.*

On the morning of June 21, when the flooding damage in southern Alberta became clear, Shaw knew they needed to help. They were well positioned to respond, with quick access to funds, infrastructure and skilled employees. Shaw wanted to do what they could to help their neighbours get through the storm.

That day without hesitation, Shaw donated \$1M to the Canadian Red Cross to assist with relief efforts and opened up the Shaw Go WiFi network to everyone in southern Alberta. After working with the Canadian Red Cross for a number of years and seeing the success of its programs across the country, Shaw was certain a donation to Red Cross would make a positive impact in the lives of those affected by the floods. The Canadian telecommunications company recognized Red Cross as a trusted national organization able to promptly mobilize during a disaster to meet people's immediate needs, as well as provide long-term assistance. Shaw also appreciated that Red Cross works directly with all levels of government, community-based groups and foundations in the flood-affected areas.

In this time of need, the telecommunications firm also witnessed the power of its employees joining together to help in any way possible. Countless teams volunteered their time (inside and outside of work hours) to step in and help out. Teams from Calgary walked neighbourhoods handing out flashlights, Shaw Bears and bottled water to anyone in need. An army of technicians from Victoria, Edmonton, Winnipeg and other cities went door to door in southern Alberta to ensure services and equipment were working properly. The company's television network, Global, provided hours of uninterrupted coverage, keeping communities connected to vital information. Many employees opened up their homes to co-workers, strangers and even pets displaced by the floods.

A year later, Shaw remains proud to have so many hard working and generous people as part of its family, and wishes to thank everyone – coast to coast – who stepped up to lend a hand.



See how your ongoing support makes a difference every day:

[www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)



 Online videos by the Canadian Red Cross

 Canadian Red Cross blog - Red Cross Talks