



## Taxes with a HEART

Tax season can create a lot of anxiety for residents. Every year the Tax and Assessment team works with residents to answer questions or talk about payment options but staff recognized there were some customers that might need additional help from other community agencies.

And so the HEART program was born. This internal program, created by the Tax and Assessment team, works with agencies such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Alberta South Region Lethbridge Elder Abuse Response Network (LEARN), and the Hoarding Outreach Management and Education (HOME) teams to assist vulnerable homeowners.

It is the first program of its kind in North America, offering vulnerable homeowners an opportunity to seek assistance from a variety of community programs and resources through an outreach team that consists of Tax and Assessment staff and two community liaisons who act as the department's triage and provide the property owner with the right help.

"The creation of this program has definitely been a team and community effort," says Larry Laverty, general manager of Tax and Assessment. "Our job of collecting taxes isn't always easy but we do our very best to help homeowners. Knowing the lives of our most vulnerable customers have been dramatically changed for the better because of HEART makes it that much more rewarding."

The project has been an overwhelming success, says Laverty, because the program has helped many of our City's vulnerable citizens when they may not have otherwise accessed those services.

The program has helped homeowners experiencing abuse situations, illiteracy, physical health issues, and mental health issues such as dementia, anxiety, substance abuse and hoarding.

"HEART is making lives of vulnerable homeowners better, safer and it's helping prevent homelessness," says Laverty. "This is the first program we are aware of that provides an in-depth solution from a combined assessment, taxation and community lens to address these growing community issues."

This program has received provincial and international recognition:

- International Association of Assessing Officers 2020 Public Information Program Award [https://www.iaao.org/wcm/Membership\\_Content/Awards/Public\\_Information\\_Program\\_Award.aspx](https://www.iaao.org/wcm/Membership_Content/Awards/Public_Information_Program_Award.aspx)
- Minister's Award for Municipal Excellence's 2020 Service Delivery Innovation Category <https://www.alberta.ca/ministers-awards-for-municipal-excellence-overview.aspx#jumplinks-4>

The Tax and Assessment team is ready to support property owners now that they've received their tax notices. You can speak with someone by phone through 311, in-person at City Hall or by email at [tax@lethbridge.ca](mailto:tax@lethbridge.ca).