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OPPORTUNITY TO WORK FOR ALBERTA CHILDREN

Edmonton Social Planning Council Executive Director Brian Bechtel has accepted an invitation to sit on the steering committee of the Alberta Children's Forum, to be held October 5-6, 1999.

Other steering committee members include conference chair Colleen Klein and Children's Services Minister Iris Evans. The steering committee will shape the agenda for the fall forum.

"We see our steering committee role as a major opportunity," says Bechtel. "We have been calling for a summit to look at children's issues, and this forum is essentially a children's summit."

The Children's Forum will focus on various issues, including safety, crime, health, sexuality, learning and basic needs.

"Basic needs are the key to many other children's issues," says Bechtel. "Children who don't have their basic needs met cannot participate in school and community and live healthy, safe lives."

Action for Children
The Children's Forum will lead to a final report, to be published December 1999. That report will contain a concise list of action steps. Throughout the planning process and during the forum, the Council will help to develop concise action steps that improve the well-being of children and families and ensure that programs and policies meet children's basic needs.

Action for Children

Over the next few months, the Edmonton Social

Planning Council will be keeping you informed as plans for the forum become finalized.

COST OF HEALTHY LIVING

During 1998, the Council began a Cost of Healthy Living research project. Through extensive literature review, focus groups and survey research, the project will define and cost a poverty line. Working with Advanis, an independent market research firm, the Council is now surveying Edmontonians to measure public opinion on poverty and basic needs. The project will tackle fundamental issues, such as what are basic needs. Are we only concerned with food and shelter? Or do basic needs include telephone, transportation and a library card?

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CHILDREN: NEW HOMELESS CRISIS

Twenty-eight per cent of families going to the food bank were homeless some time during the past five years, according to preliminary results from a study by

Over...

the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Edmonton's Food Bank. The Council will release the full report in Fall 1999.

The Council interviewed 100 families. Eighteen of the 28 homeless families were female lone parent families. The Council found that 65 children lived in families that had been homeless. Forty-three of those children were under 12. The results support the Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness which counted 112 homeless Edmonton children.

Reasons

Families with children become homeless because they live in severe poverty. Some of the crises that push families into homelessness are evictions, marital break-ups, family violence, job loss and loss of other income.

Surviving Homelessness

Most of the families were homeless for one or two months. Twenty-one of the 28 homeless families moved in with other family members. Three families actually lived on the street. "In our society, children should not be homeless," says Brian Bechtel, Executive Director of the Council. "We have income security programs to prevent this level of crisis in children's lives. Obviously, our income security programs are failing families and children."

"Some of the families we interviewed were living on their federal Child Benefit," says Marjorie Bencz, executive director of Edmonton's Food Bank. "The Govern-

The number of single parent families in extreme poverty has tripled in just five years.

ment of Alberta has a legal responsibility to ensure families have enough income to purchase basic necessities, such as housing. These families do not have adequate incomes and need social welfare programs. Food banks and other not-for-profits do not have the resources to replace a failing safety net when governments cut millions worth of programs from the people who need them the most."

MORE CHILDREN IN EXTREME POVERTY

According to Statistics Canada's latest LICO figures, the number of Edmonton families in extreme poverty more than doubled in just five years. In 1997, 11,730 Edmonton families were in extreme poverty. In 1993, the number was half that—5,550 families. Most of Edmonton's poor families have children they are trying to feed, clothe and shelter. In 1997, 6.4 per cent of families with children were in extreme poverty.

LICO

Families with incomes below Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) generally spend more than 55 per cent of their income on food, clothing and shelter. The

1997 LICO for a family of four in a city the size of Edmonton was \$33,063.

Extreme Poverty

The Edmonton Social Planning Council uses the term *extreme poverty* to describe one half LICO. Although some families with incomes below LICO may live quite comfortably, families that live on less than half LICO are definitely in poverty.

Most single parent families low income

Statistics Canada's LICO shows that two parent families with children are doing better than in 1993, but single parent families are doing much worse.

The number of single parent families in extreme poverty has tripled in just five years. In Edmonton in 1997, 62 per cent of single parent families were below LICO. Nineteen per cent were in extreme poverty. In 1993, 6.6 per cent of single parent families were in extreme poverty.



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