



the *f*ACTivist

Newsletter of the Edmonton Social Planning Council



www.edmspc.com

Winter 2008

"Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."
(Pericles)

**the fACTivist
Provincial &
Federal Issues:**
In this edition, we explore some key issues of concern at the Provincial & Federal level in the coming year.

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ESPC Hits Ground Running in New Year

By Susan Morrissey, *Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council*

Welcome to the first edition of *the fACTivist* in 2008! The focus of this edition will be on provincial and national issues impacting Albertans. With election calls being anticipated in early 2008 for both the Federal and Provincial governments, this focus is timely.

No matter what the topic - from affordable housing to minimum wage, from health care to child care - as citizens we have a right and responsibility to know the issues and the positions of the candidates.

As you read through this newsletter, we hope that it will help to inform you, and perhaps even move you toward action within your community. The articles within will also give you a glimpse of the diverse - and even international - work our staff are involved in.

Changes Coming for the Council

2007 was a productive year for the Council,

during which our staff had the opportunity to participate in and contribute to many interesting projects and coalitions. Already, the New Year has presented us with new and interesting opportunities and challenges.

Recent changes in our current office building have made it necessary for us to move. We have found a great new space, and look forward to settling into our new home.

The Council is also looking to hire a new staff member to manage our resources and assist with research. We will have more details on this in the Spring.

And finally, our new logo and website will be ready to launch in early Spring! (You will find more details on page 7.)

All signs point to an exciting and productive year for the Council. On behalf of our staff and board of directors, I wish you all the best in 2008!

"Alberta (Dis)Advantage for Families and Youth" Conference January 25th, 2008

Co-hosted by the **Edmonton Social Planning Council** &
the **MacEwan Institute for Research on Family and Youth (MIRFY)**

Don't miss this opportunity to explore the key issues impacting families and youth in Alberta with our knowledgeable & experienced panel speakers:

Marilyn Fleger -- Jan Reimer -- Heather Day -- Jim Gurnett -- Hope Hunter -- Deanna Williamson

Register Now!

Registration Fee: \$55 (\$20 - Students)

Price @ the Door: \$65 (\$25 - Students)

Contact Jessica Mair at mirfy@macewan.ca or 633-3924 to register.

Visit www.edmspc.com for more information.



United Way
Member Agency



Low-Cost Housing should be Mandatory

By Greg Farrants, *Albertans Demand Affordable Housing (Edmonton)*
 ~ Article originally published in the *Edmonton Journal*, January 7, 2008

In Alberta, governments side with business, not the people, and the housing issue is no exception.

Edmonton's city council recently proposed a five-per-cent inclusionary housing policy for the city.

Inclusionary zoning, as it is otherwise called, typically involves setting aside 10 to 30 per cent of new houses or apartments for low- to moderate-income households.

This policy has been implemented in many communities across North America as a response to acute housing shortages, resulting in an inclusive mix of "affordable" and "market-rate" housing.

In Edmonton, the policy received its only public input in November. That input is being ignored while council proceeds with closed-door meetings solely with industry.

Initially, the public and industry were each given a chance to speak on the proposed housing policy at a November meeting of a city council committee. Unfortunately, the councillors present voted to create a different committee consisting of only politicians and developers to revisit the policy in the new year.

Councillors would rather discuss market strategies with industry than involve those affected by high housing costs and homelessness. By shutting the low-income voice out, council has dangerously narrowed the debate and has already chosen an ineffective solution.

Not surprisingly, the committee has given in to industry and chosen the "incentive-based" approach, rather than adopting a mandatory policy.

The incentive-based approach gives developers the final say whether the feeble five-per-cent policy will be implemented in a particular new development.

A mandatory policy, on the other hand, would be legally binding. However, provincial and municipal governments are reluctant to introduce policies that interfere with "the market," regardless of the policy's overall benefit.

While the market has failed to provide housing solutions for a growing underclass of our population, government and industry insist on using market solutions as token responses to

Adding a Provincial Perspective

In April 2007, as part of its \$285 million in "new" funding, the Province set a target of providing more than 11,000 affordable housing units over 5 years. \$100 million of this amount was earmarked for municipal housing programs. This was followed by an announcement by Premier Stelmach of a ten year plan to end homelessness.

Good intentions aside, the pace of new affordable housing construction has thus far not noticeably increased. And at the time of writing, the City and Province have yet to conclude an agreement covering Edmonton's share of the new funding.

And, as Greg Farrants makes clear, unless the City adopts an inclusionary zoning policy requiring affordable housing in all major new projects, there will also be problems finding suitable locations for this housing. Moreover, the Province's refusal to amend the Municipal Government Act to specifically allow for inclusionary zoning puts any future City policy on shaky legal ground.

During the upcoming provincial election, all of the political parties should be challenged to detail their plans for making sure more affordable housing shovels get into the ground.

the deepening housing crisis.

Developers are represented by lobby groups that pressure governments to maintain business-friendly policies, while neglecting social responsibility.

One local lobby group against the inclusionary housing policy -- the Urban Development Institute -- states on its website that it is "an ambassador for the land development industry to help create vibrant, sustainable communities."

At the November meeting, its spokesperson said the five-per-cent policy "will cost developers and home builders \$86 million in the first three years," or less than \$29 million a year.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation reports there were 9,816 single- and multi-family housing starts in 2006 in Edmonton, not including the suburbs. That translates into gross revenue for the industry of about \$2.95 billion in 2006. Over three years, that would total \$8.85 billion.

This lobby group is squabbling over spending \$86 million on affordable housing over three years, while the industry it represents would

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ESPC Moving!

As of March 1st, 2008, our office will be at:

Commonwealth Building
Suite 37, 9912 - 106 St

Stay tuned to our website
(www.edmspc.com) for move updates.

Homeless Memorial

January 19

@ Boyle Street
Community Centre

10116 - 105 Ave

From 4:00 - 5:00 pm

Round dance to follow.

This memorial service is held annually to remember the members of our community who passed away as a result of homelessness in the past year.

All are welcome.



Affordable Housing, cont'd from page 2

bring in \$8.85 billion in gross revenues in the same amount of time.

This continued persuasion against non-market solutions and neglect of social responsibility has resulted in an unprecedented catastrophe that now has the United Nations monitoring the entire country on housing and poverty every year instead of every four.

A UN special reporter on adequate housing, Kothari Miloon, toured Canada last October, visiting select cities and communities including two in Alberta: Edmonton and the Lubicon Lake Nation, north of Valleyview.

Miloon urged that a "housing continuum concept" be adopted and that housing rights be fully recognized through government legislation.

Indeed, legally binding inclusionary housing policy is a crucial component to a vibrant, sustainable community.

There is nothing stopping city council from implementing the mandatory policy with an increased percentage other than governments' fundamentalist economic ideology choosing industry's profits over people.

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

SROI aims to capture the social and environmental benefits of projects and programs that are not incorporated in conventional financial returns.

5 Areas Where SROI Can Inform Change

1. Public procurement - improving the impact
2. Public expenditure - improving the impact
3. Social economy - improving performance
4. Grant giving & financial investment - enabling new forms of investment
5. Corporate social responsibility - greater accountability

Source:
New Economics Foundation

Visit www.neweconomics.org to learn more about Social Return on Investment.

ESPC in Vancouver: National Symposium on Housing

By Susan Morrissey, *Executive Director*

In October I had the good fortune to attend the National Symposium on Housing Shortages In Growth Economies, held in Vancouver, B.C. A timely topic with all the issues in the news across Canada about the difficulty many individuals are facing finding affordable, safe housing despite our economy being in a boom. The two keynote speakers, Dr. Andrejs Skaburskis and Judith Allen provided an overview of the nature of the problem from a policy perspective and the need for strategic planning and bold thinking to address the shortage. Judith gave a detailed explanation of work being done in London, England looking beyond the issue as simply a housing problem.

What followed were panel discussion around the unique challenges facing Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver as these cities are going through major growth. In addition, participants were treated to a lunchtime presentation from Carl Guardino, President and CEO, Silicon Valley Leadership Group who spoke about how his community has responded to the housing crisis. Carl provided many examples of best practices such as providing a voice for the voiceless through the Housing Action Coalition. The

Coalition has established affordable housing proposals and spoken out in favour of meeting

these standards. In addition, it encourages elected officials to become educated on housing issues in their community through attending 4 workshops per year developed and hosted by the leadership group.

Participants were then given the opportunity to participate in the mobile workshops touring around Vancouver to see some of the innovative solutions to affordable housing issued including the developments in Coal Harbour, The West End and the Downtown East Side.

I found the two days extremely interesting, met some incredibly knowledgeable individuals and broadened my own awareness of the challenges other cities and communities are facing.

To learn more about the CHRA's National Symposium, and to read the background paper 'Housing Shortages in Growth Economies', visit: www.chra-achru.ca/



ESPC Learns About Social Return on Investment in London

By John Kolkman, *Research & Policy Analysis Coordinator*

One of the most common questions asked by funders of non-profit service providers is about the value created from the investment they made. In other words, funders want to know what kind of bang they get for their buck.

There is understandable reluctance on the

part of non-profit groups to answer this question. In part this is because of the difficulty of measuring these impacts. Moreover, some of the impacts seem to defy any kind of measurement. For example, how do you measure such as intangibles as

(Continued on page 4)



Social Return on Investment, cont'd from page 3

increasing a person's self-esteem or improving their parenting skills?

In recent years, funders have been requiring service providers to measure the outcomes they are achieving. Government funders in particular are requiring that outcomes be measured as a condition for receiving financial support. So, for example, an employment agency is required to track how many of their clients find paid employment as a result of the training they receive.

Last November, I had the opportunity – along with three other Edmontonians – to attend a week long training workshop sponsored by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in London, England. The NEF is a world leader in developing both the methodology and practice of measuring social return on investment.

The Edmonton delegation spent a busy and productive week learning about SROI from leading practitioners in the field. Many of these experts are using SROI as a tool for measuring social value in their own non-profit organizations or social enterprises.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a methodology that builds on outcomes measurement by translating them into tangible monetary value. This helps both non-profits, funders and participants to get a more complete picture of the benefits that flow from the service provided. The investment can then be measured as the 'return' or value created for participants, communities and the society.

As defined by the New Economics Foundation, SROI:

“...measures the value of the benefits relative to the cost of achieving those benefits. It is the ratio between net present value of the benefits to the net present value of the investment. For example a ratio of 3:1 indicates that an investment of \$1 delivers \$3 in social value.” (Source: *Measuring Real Value: a DIY guide to Social Return on Investment*, page 3).

The four people who received the SROI training have formed a knowledge team. Members of the team are meeting with funders, program evaluators, and some key non-profit decision-makers to discuss SROI as a tool for proving and improving service provision in this province.

SROI is not about reinventing the wheel. It is about building upon what already exists. For instance, the Canadian Outcomes Research Institute with offices in both Edmonton and Calgary is a national leader in program evaluation and outcomes measurement. There is considerable interest in both cities in expanding the use of SROI.

The ESPC is interested in SROI as a tool for both proving and improving the value created by the non-profit voluntary sector. This tool could also be used to make government social policy more effective, another ongoing concern of the Council.

Support for this SROI training was provided by the Muttart Foundation.

More info about SROI, including a copy of the DIY Guide cited above, is available at: www.neweconomics.org/

To learn about outcomes evaluation in Alberta visit: www.cori.ca/

Looking for Information on Social Issues?

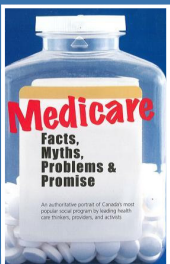
Visit the ESPC Resource Library today!

Open to the public:
M– F 8:30am- 4:30pm

Online Catalogue:
Available 24/7 @
www.edmspc.com

Our resource library is a rich source of current and historical publications on social issues.

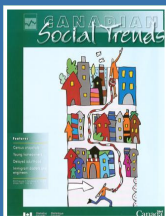
Featured Book:



Medicare:
Facts, Myths,
Problems &
Promise
(Landry, C)

Featured Subscription:

Canadian Social Trends (Statistics Canada)



Meet the ESPC Board of Directors A Long-Serving Board Member: Joscelyn Proby



Joscelyn Proby has served the Edmonton Social Planning Council as a board member for almost 4 years - a long term that will be coming to an end at the next AGM this Spring.

Joscelyn immigrated to Canada from the United Kingdom in 1978, with the British equivalent of a Bachelor of Social Work from the London School of Economics. She later earned an MA in Journalism from the University of Western Ontario, which led into a 12 year career as a journalist in Saskatchewan, Toronto and Alberta.

Eventually, however, Joscelyn's roots from the London School of Economics drew her back to a career in social work.

Since September 2006, Joscelyn has worked as a social worker on the kindergarten outreach team with the Edmonton Catholic School Board. Prior to that she was with ABC Head Start for four years, working primarily with low-income families and their preschool children.

The ESPC staff and board would like to thank Joscelyn for her contributions to the Council, and wish her the best in the future.





Many Edmontonians Not in Line for a Secure Retirement

By John Kolkman, *Research & Policy Analysis Coordinator*

Pensions are not likely to be a big issue in the upcoming provincial election campaign. Nevertheless, there are two provincial initiatives currently underway that could have a significant bearing on how many Albertans will be able to enjoy a financially secure retirement. The first initiative is a joint Alberta-BC review of occupational pensions in the private sector. The second is a closed door look at setting up a provincial pension plan.

The percentage of employed labour force that is covered through pensions in their workplace is steadily declining. A discussion paper prepared for the Alberta-BC review found: "Coverage nationally in occupational pension plans, including public sector plans, peaked at 45% in 1991 and dropped to under 39% by 2006. Currently, only 22% of British Columbians and 23% of Albertans employed in the private sector are covered by occupational pension plans" (p. 3).

Moreover, those workers most needing pensions for a secure retirement are the least likely to have them. A recent study by the Canadian Policy Research Networks found that only 14% of Alberta low income families in which the family head of household worked full-time had a pension plan (p. 26). By contrast, 51% of non-low income working families had a pension plan.

The situation in the voluntary sector is akin to that in the private sector. According to a 1999 survey, the most recent information I could find, only 17.5% of employers in the voluntary sector provided an employer-sponsored pension plan.

Improving workplace pensions is not the sole answer. Nor is relying on individual or group Registered Retirement Savings Plans. RRSPs are plagued by exactly the same problem as workplace pensions – namely, those most needing them are least likely to have the financial means to make regular contributions. In fact, low income Canadians are even less likely to have RRSPs than they are to have a workplace pension. And even when they do, low and even middle income persons are sometimes forced to raid their RRSP nest eggs to pay for everyday expenses well before retirement.

Premier Ed Stelmach has talked about setting up a provincial pension plan to

supplement the Canada Pension Plan. While details are vague, the proposal is currently being studied by a closed door committee led by former CD Howe Institute head Jack Mintz.

The decision to once again study a provincial pension plan is puzzling given its rejection by a Conservative MLA committee in June 2004. Albertans already contribute to the federal Canada Pension Plan (CPP). An alternative to creating a stand alone Alberta pension would be to strengthen the CPP.

Since major reforms were made a decade ago, the CPP is on a solid financial footing with sufficient assets to fully meet its obligations to retirees for at least the next 75 years. One way to increase benefit levels would be to increase the amount of income to which CPP deductions are applied. Currently, deductions are only made on up to \$41,400 of annual income. Many high income earners, like corporate CEOs, make their entire CPP contribution on their very first paycheque of the year.

Corporate executives often have very generous pension arrangements for themselves while an increasing number of their lower paid employees have no pensions whatsoever. Requiring high income earners to make a greater contribution through the CPP is one way to correct this imbalance.

Growing Gap in Retirement Savings

The gap between the rich and poor is not only increasing in terms of income and wealth - it is widening for retirement savings, as well.

On average, two parent households with main income earners aged 35 to 54 made the following annual contributions to RRSPs and RPPs:

In 1986,

- ◆ Top 20% of earners - \$8,000
- ◆ Bottom 20% - \$1,200
- ◆ **Gap - \$6,800**

In 2003,

- ◆ Top 20% - \$11,300
- ◆ Bottom 20% - \$1,200
- ◆ **Gap - \$10,100**

Source:
Statistics Canada,
'The Daily' - Sep 26, 2006

Online Resources

Here are some links to get you thinking and discussing pensions.

- ◆ Info on the **Alberta-B.C. pension review**, including making a submission: www.ab-bc-pensionreview.ca/
- ◆ **CPRN study** mentioned above: www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1757&l=en
- ◆ **Report on pensions in the voluntary sector** cited above: www.hrsv-rhsbc.ca/docs/PensionBackgrounder.pdf
- ◆ **Conservative MLA committee report** recommending against a provincial pension plan: www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/library/egovdocs/alii/2004/145363.pdf
- ◆ Info on the **Canada Pension Plan**, and its recent financial performance: www.cppib.ca/



Low-Income Edmontonians Need a Single-Payer Drug Plan

By John Kolkman, *Research & Policy Analysis Coordinator*

Old myths die hard. One of the most enduring is that people living on low-income won't benefit from a pharmacare plan because they already have government subsidized coverage.

This is simply not the case. Only those on government income support have their drug costs covered. Over 60 per cent of low income Edmontonians work, and therefore do not automatically qualify for subsidized coverage. Moreover, lower income Edmontonians tend to work in the types of jobs that are least likely to have prescription drug benefits.

A recent study by the Canadian Policy Research Networks found that only 20 per cent of workers living in low income households - who either worked full-time or close to full-time - had prescription drug coverage as an employment benefit. This compared to 77 per cent of high wage earners who had drug coverage. So, those most in need of coverage are least likely to have it.

In recent years, the Alberta government has enacted two benefit programs to try to fill this gap in coverage for low income working households.

The first, the Adult Health Benefit, is a transitional benefit. An individual or family is only eligible if they are leaving government income support. The second is the Child Health Benefit, which is available to all children living in low income households.

These two programs have three major flaws.

First, only those households with low incomes qualify. These thresholds range from a yearly income of \$13,000 for a single adult, to \$24,000 for a household with one child. The income limit increases by \$2,000 for each additional child.

A second flaw is administrative complexity. Receipt of benefits is not automatic, even if your income entitles you to coverage. Every year, you have to re-apply for coverage. According to a survey done a couple of years ago by Vibrant Communities Edmonton, only 22 per cent of those who qualified for coverage were actually getting it.

The provincial government's efforts to be more pro-active in ensuring those who qualify receive benefits can create its own

problems. Last September, the government sent out 30,000 letters to families with children saying that they qualified for the Child Health Benefit. As it turned out, 11,000 of those families did in fact not qualify, and the government had to send out a second letter informing them of this fact.

The third flaw is the loss of eligibility as income rises. The Adult and Child Health Benefit programs are only two of a number of income tested programs where benefits are phased out or lost as income rises. These programs were introduced to help individuals and families overcome the "welfare wall." Through these programs, we have now created a "low wage wall."

Even if low wage workers receive prescription drug coverage as an employee benefit, the often high cost of premiums can be a strong incentive to opt out in order to boost take home pay. This is especially true of younger or healthier workers. The problem with this is, if the healthy and the young opt out of coverage, costs go up for everyone else.

A national drug plan is the logical next step for expanding single-payer health care coverage. Prescription drugs are the second largest health expenditure after acute care hospitals. Drugs are the area of health care expenditure where costs are growing most rapidly.

It defies common sense that drug costs are fully covered in acute care hospitals, but not in the home or in community settings. A universal plan will reduce financial hardship for families caring for loved ones at home, where prescription drugs are not covered.

A single-payer prescription drug plan could take one of two forms. One option is a provincially administered program with federal cost-sharing. A second option would be a national drug plan that is uploaded to the federal government and is both federally administered and funded. Either of these options is superior to the current situation where rising prescription drug costs are putting an increasing strain on family budgets.

(This article is based on a submission made by the Edmonton Social Planning Council at a public hearing held by the Canadian Health Coalition in Edmonton on October 26, 2007)

Canadian Health Coalition's

10 Elements of a National Pharmacare Strategy

1. Universal public drug insurance
2. National formulary for essential drugs
3. Drug regulation that puts safety and efficacy first
4. Reform of the Patent Medicine Prices Review Board
5. Accountable and transparent decision-making
6. Patent reform
7. Regulation of drug promoting and marketing
8. National prescribing service
9. Establish a drug information system
10. Regulation for ethical conduct in clinical trials and research

Source:

Canadian Health Coalition, 'More for Less: A Pharmacare Strategy' - Sep 2007

The CHC is currently running a campaign for a National drug plan.

Visit www.healthcoalition.ca for more information, or to download a copy of the *More for Less* policy paper.



Website Redesign Survey Shows Plans are on Track

Our plans for the new ESPC website appear to be on track!

We received 68 survey responses from ESPC members, web users, and representatives of organizations working on social issues in Edmonton and across Canada. The feedback indicates that many of the features being added to the site will be useful to a majority of people.

The most popular basic features include: the search function, improved navigation, printer-friendly pages, and online forms. The addition of a bulletin board and calendar featuring community news, information and events is also highly anticipated.

About half of our respondents showed interest in the blog and discussion forum features. We

will be working hard to make these areas an interesting and engaging space to debate issues and share ideas.

One-third of respondents were interested in online credit card payment, a feature that we will be adding to the site as an option for purchasing memberships and publications, as well as making donations.

Over two-thirds of people showed interest in online workshops. We will be exploring this as a potential future addition to the website.

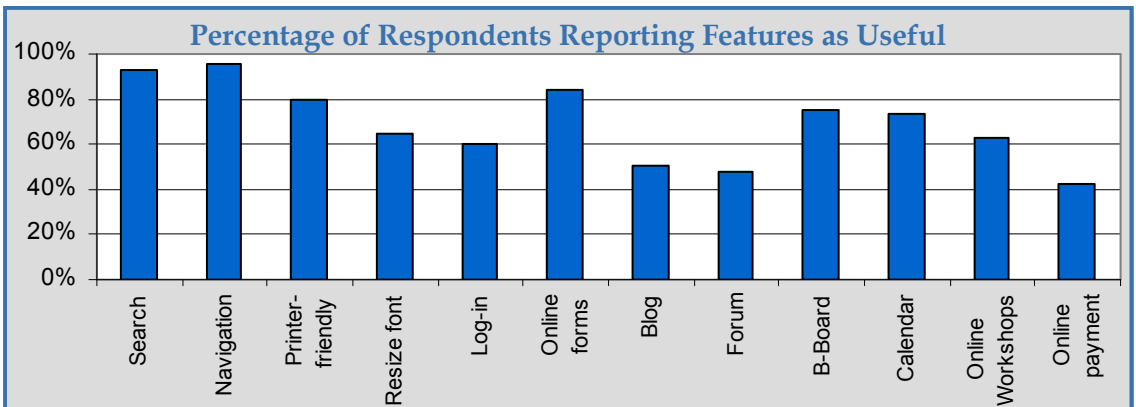
Thank you to everyone who responded to our survey. Your feedback was invaluable.

The full results of the survey can be viewed on the Projects page of our website (www.edmspc.com).

Congratulations!

to Craig Stumpf-Allen of the Edmonton Community Foundation, the winner of our prize draw for responding to our website redesign survey!

Craig took home a gift basket complete with two ESPC mugs, and a selection of hot chocolates and goodies.



Design Contest a Success: New Logo Launches this Spring

We received over 80 entries to our logo contest in late 2007 from talented designers from Edmonton and around the globe.

The ESPC staff and board reviewed the entries, and after much discussion have

selected a new logo. The winning design came from a small company in Argentina!

We will be unveiling our new logo in conjunction with our website launch this Spring. We're excited to share our new look with you!

Meet the ESPC Staff

Susan Morrissey Leading & Expanding the Council



Susan Morrissey joined the ESPC as Executive Director in December 2005, and has been busy expanding the role and capacity of the Council ever since.

Born and raised in Edmonton, Susan was educated at the University of Alberta, where she earned Bachelor degrees in Sociology/ Psychology and Recreation Administration & Leisure Studies. She started out in the health care system, working as a Recreation Therapist specializing in dementia care programming

For the last decade, Susan has taken on the challenging role of Executive Director in the not-for-profit sector. Before coming to the Council, she led the Association of Adult Day Support Programs, now called Eldercare.

Susan's philosophy on work has undoubtedly been a key to her success:

If you do it ethically the first time, with honesty and purpose, then you most often will avoid the need to go back and review your decision, defend your practice or repair your reputation.

On a personal note, one of Susan's recent joys was the birth of her first grandson!





Our Vision

A healthy, just and inclusive community.



Our Mission

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership to the community and its organizations in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy.

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Ken Stickland

By Becoming a Member, you will...

... support our efforts to remain on the forefront in dealing with social issues

... make it possible for us to distribute our materials freely and widely to all

... receive our newsletters, fact sheets and other publications

... can vote at ESPC annual meetings and have a say in the direction of the organization

... be eligible to serve on the board of directors



Membership Form

Name _____

Organization _____

Position _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ Postal Code _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Membership Type Annual Fee

Organization \$45

Household \$25

Individual \$15

Associate (no vote) \$10

Student \$5

Limited Income Household \$5

Donations Welcome - Can be included with cheque or money order for membership.

Please send completed form with a cheque or money order payable to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suite 220, 10010 - 107A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 4H8

Membership form and details available on our website (www.edmspc.com).