



the

70th Anniversary Volume

fACTivist

WORK: WAGES & TRAINING edition Spring 2010

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Training Programs—Helping Albertans Get Back to Work?

By JENNIFER HOYER, Resource Co-ordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council

Alberta hasn't been immune to rising unemployment rates across the country. Many Albertans, after finding themselves without a job, have discovered that the provincial government has programs to help them get back on their feet. Alberta Works offers a wide range of services to help people find new work in their area of expertise, or to retrain for a different field. Some programs target specific areas of the population, such as youth, persons with disabilities, and First Nations.

The recently unemployed aren't the only ones feeling a pinch on their wallet, however—the Alberta government has delivered a pared-down budget for 2010. With this in mind I contacted Employment and Immigration to discover how much the recession has impacted demand for their programs, and to get a feel for the effects that budget cuts will have on their ability to deliver services. Public Affairs Officer Terry Jorden was able to provide some insight into the current situation.

Increased Demand on Alberta Works

Jorden confirmed that the tables have turned since the boom years of 2006 to early 2008. Instead of helping employers find potential employees, Alberta Works staff now spend more time with the recently unemployed. All of their programs, from income supports to job searches and education for work, are in full demand.

According to Jorden, changes have been made to accommodate this. They've increased enrollment in education programs, and they have focused their priorities on training that will set people up for employment as soon as possible.

To achieve quicker re-employability, resources have been re-allocated from general academic upgrading to specific skills-training. Jorden admitted that these programs often cost more, but Alberta Works foresees a higher success rate with this method. In 2009, they provided skills upgrading to 20,750 Albertans – 12 per cent more than the year before.

It's not clear how the success of individual programs and initiatives is being tracked. While Jorden reports that program reviews are conducted regularly and students complete surveys upon finishing courses and programs, this information is kept for internal use only. With all areas of government spending coming under close scrutiny, I was curious that more attention hasn't been paid to the return on our investment in these areas.

Impact of Cuts to Education Supports

In recent weeks, the media has taken a closer look at cuts to education supports for students who are trying to upgrade their skills. Alberta Works grants often allow students to attend upgrading schools such as NorQuest College. Many students have been forced to drop out after funding from Alberta Works ran out in fall 2009, and the wait list for September 2010 is growing. Ironically, many of these potential students end up accessing other government supports instead: while they wait to upgrade their skills, they often end up on income support.

According to Minister Thomas Lukaszuk, Alberta Works will deal with a recent \$12.5 million cut by equalizing support payments: some students will receive less income support for participating in skills upgrading programs, while others will see their cheques go up a little. Lukaszuk argues that, even after cuts, Albertans will be receiving more government help than British Columbians in similar programs. This has drawn sharp criticism from NDP opposition. They argue that it contradicts the government's promise to focus spending on vulnerable Albertans.

As many Albertans find themselves without work, it's important for the rest of us to pay close attention to what our government is doing to help the unemployed get back to work. We need to keep asking about the effectiveness of existing programs. We need to question whether cuts are

(Continued on page 2)



Lunch & Learn Series



Housing & Homelessness in Edmonton

April 28, 2010
@ 12pm

Stanley Milner Library

The second in our series of lunch-time talks features **Susan McGee** and **Murray Soroka**, Executive Director and Housing First Director, respectively, of **Homeward Trust Edmonton**.

Come out to gain insight into the work being done on the issue of homelessness in Edmonton.

The event is **free of charge** & open to the public.

Bring your lunch!

Employment Training, *cont'd from page 1*

costing us more by draining other programs. We should examine not whether income supports will keep us one step ahead of our

neighbours one province over, but whether they are enough for the unemployed Albertan next door.

Published Sources

"Job-training cutbacks another blow to laid-off working poor." Edmonton Journal, March 2, 2010. Accessed online at www.edmontonjournal.com.

"Tory cuts sting: welfare rates rolled back for adult education." Calgary Herald, March 27, 2010. Accessed online at www.calgaryherald.com.

"Cuts to income support harm workers." News Release, Alberta's NDP Opposition, March 26, 2010. Accessed online at www.ndpopposition.ab.ca.

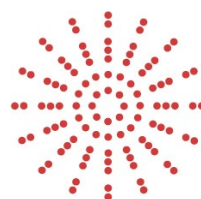
Lessons Learned from a Living Wage Campaign

By DAN MEADES, *Director, Vibrant Communities Calgary*

In 2009 Vibrant Communities Calgary and our community partners and volunteers were the driving force behind a vote before the Calgary city council on adopting a Living Wage for municipal employees. It was a long campaign involving hundreds of people in Calgary that ultimately ended with the City voting down any policy that involved a Living Wage.

Vibrant Communities Calgary learned a lot through this process, not the least of which was how we define success. At the outset of the campaign we would accept nothing less than the City adopting a comprehensive Living Wage policy as success, but that thought discounted the efforts and advances made in our community by the volunteers and community partners that mobilized around one crystallizing root cause of poverty; low wages. In retrospect while I do think targeting the city was a very valuable activity, the greatest value of the campaign was the community awareness that was created around a very important issue. Before Vibrant Communities Calgary took on the issue of Living Wage public awareness of the issue of low wages and the effect of paying a poverty wage was very low. Through our efforts we were able to normalize the language of Living Wage and make the issue resonate with Calgarians.

While I do think the campaign had some important effects on Calgary, there are areas that could have been addressed differently. The outpouring of community



vibrant
COMMUNITIES
CALGARY

support on this issue was inspiring to be sure and we encouraged many of these supporters to speak at Council to show their support. We have been told since that in a forum such as a Council meeting, the number of speakers is less important than the diversity of messages. As I look at some of the success that other Canadian Municipalities have had around the issue of Living Wage many of them have propelled the issue forward with their City Councils by lobbying them to pass a motion to research the potential effects of a Living Wage policy. I think this strategy of incremental change allows City structures time to adapt to potential change and build merit.

I am still inspired by how engaged the people of Calgary can be on important issues. Despite having lost the vote at city council we still have a remarkably engaged and informed group of volunteers that are very committed to moving the issue of Living Wage forward. This group is called the Living Wage Action Team, they meet monthly and have just completed a strategic planning session which included how best to ensure that the issue of Living Wage gets pushed forward in this year's Calgary Municipal

Disclaimer: Articles, quotes and commentary in this edition of *the fACTivist* produced by contributors outside the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the ESPC.



ESPC Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, May 12th
5:00pm

Unitarian Church

10804—119 Street
Edmonton, AB

Keynote Address:

Peter Faid,
former ESPC Executive
Director, 1980-1990

Please join us to celebrate
our accomplishments, and to
hear about the upcoming
activities of the Council.

Your membership must be current in order to vote.

Memberships may be
purchased or renewed at the
door.

Light refreshments
will be served.

Kindly RSVP by
April 30th, 2009

Walk-in attendance is also
welcome

RSVP to Stephanie:
780-423-2031
or

[stephanieh@
edmontonsocialplanning.ca](mailto:stephanieh@edmontonsocialplanning.ca)

Minimum Wage Frozen—Now What??

By JOHN KOLKMAN, Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator, *Edmonton Social Planning Council*

The Alberta government took almost everyone by surprise on a sleepy Friday in early February by freezing the provincial minimum wage at \$8.80 per hour.

While there had been many warnings about a tough provincial budget due to deficit problems, very few people saw the minimum wage freeze coming. An increase in the minimum wage has no impact on the provincial budget, as the province employs no minimum wage workers.

Linking the minimum wage to the average weekly earnings of Albertans was one of the reforms brought in by Premier Ed Stelmach back in the June 2007 when the 'progressive' part of Progressive Conservative seemed to carry more weight.

In fact, it was the Premier himself who announced the change in the minimum wage policy in a government news release calling it "a key action under Premier Stelmach's plan to manage growth pressures and improve Albertans' quality of life."

Benchmarking is a way of taking the politics out of the debate over what is a fair and reasonable minimum wage. It avoids situations where the government of the day makes a sudden substantial hike to the minimum wage shortly before a provincial election, only to freeze it for long periods thereafter. Instead, the government's decision to tie the minimum wage to changes in the average weekly earnings of Alberta workers leads to more manageable annual increases using an agreed upon formula. It is fair and predictable to both employers and employees.

The average weekly earnings index covers all Alberta workers whether they are paid by the hour or earn a salary. Statistics Canada calculates it by dividing total weekly payrolls of all Alberta employers by the total number of Alberta employees.

The provincial government's most recent profile of minimum wage earners provides some interesting insights. The profile covers the time period April 2008 to March 2009. A relatively small number of Alberta employees (20,630 or 1.4% of all employees) earned minimum wage. However, a much larger number (126,500 according to Statistics Canada data) earned \$10.00 per hour or less. A higher minimum wage sets a floor below other low wage earners.

There are often perceptions or misleading statements made suggesting almost all minimum wage earners are high school students living with their parents, or people working in jobs where they can earn tips. Neither is true. The Alberta Minimum Wage Profile found that only one-third of minimum wage earners (33.2%) are less than 20 years of age, and over half (51.2%) are older adults over age 25. The profile also found that fewer than one in seven (14.1%) worked in an occupation like food and beverage servers where they might earn or share tips. Well over half of minimum wage earners (55.7%) worked full-time rather than part-time.

When Minister of Employment and Immigration Thomas Lukaszuk announced the minimum wage freeze, he promised that an MLA Committee made up of all parties in the Alberta Legislature would review the matter and try to find a better mechanism for future increases to the minimum wage.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is keen to participate in a review of the minimum wage. One of the questions to be explored is whether there is a better mechanism for making adjustments to the minimum wage than changes in the average weekly earnings index?

A starting point for setting a fair minimum wage might be that no Albertan working full-time for a full-year should have to live in poverty. Currently a full-time minimum wage earner working 35 hours per week for 50 weeks a year earns an income thousands of dollars below any of the accepted poverty measures. These poverty measures include the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) either Before-Tax or After-Tax, and the Market Basket Measure).

Instead of using changes in average weekly earnings, the level of the minimum wage could be based on annual changes in one of the accepted poverty measures. Preliminary calculations suggest that this would result in a minimum wage of between \$10 to \$12 per hour depending upon the poverty measure chosen and how full-time and full-year employment is defined.

One of the downsides of relying on poverty measures is the delay by Statistics Canada publishing up to date information. Data on

(Continued on page 4)



The Future of Community:

Speakers Series

The ESPC, E4C and the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year:

ECF — 20 years

E4C — 40 years

&

ESPC — 70 years

To celebrate their achievements in service provision, advocacy and community support, the 3 agencies are co-hosting an exciting speakers series.

Upcoming speakers:

Linda Hughes—May 13th

Sheila Watt-Cloutier—Sep 15th

Get your tickets today through TIX on the Square (tixonthesquare.ca)

Minimum Wage, *cont'd from page 3*

average weekly earnings is available within two months of the end of the previous calendar year. For example, data for average weekly earnings in 2009 was available by the end of February 2010. Meanwhile data for any of the accepted poverty measures is not yet available for 2008 and won't likely be for several more months.

Whatever the mechanism chosen for setting the Alberta's minimum wage, inaction should not be an option. Despite being Canada's wealthiest province, Alberta is once again sliding toward the bottom when it comes to its minimum wage. Out of the 13 provinces and territories, Alberta currently has the fourth lowest minimum wage. By September 2010 Alberta will fall to third lowest, with only British Columbia and Prince Edward Island having a lower minimum wage.

I encourage *fACTivist* readers to send me their ideas on what an appropriate level is for Alberta's minimum wage and how the level of the wage should be adjusted thereafter. Better yet, I encourage everyone to get involved in the upcoming review of the minimum wage which will be conducted by the Legislature's Standing Committee on the Economy.

Sources

Alberta Employment & Immigration. (2009). *Alberta Minimum Wage Profile, April 2008-March 2009*. Available at: employment.alberta.ca

Canada Ministry of Labour. (2009). *Current and forthcoming minimum hourly wage rates for experienced adult workers across Canada*. Available at: labour.gc.ca

Supporting Aboriginal Workforce Inclusion

By DONNA KNEBUSH, *Employment Outreach Consultant, City of Edmonton*

The City of Edmonton Human Resources Branch works with the Aboriginal community on initiatives that support a diverse and inclusive workforce.

With community partnerships like Oteenow Employment and Training Society and Métis Employment Centre the City of Edmonton creates new initiatives and training that support a workforce reflective of the community we serve. The partnerships are important to maintain strong relationships in the Aboriginal community. Gaining trust and understanding the community while respecting their culture is where the Human Resources Branch started.

Aboriginal Employment Info Sessions

The City of Edmonton Aboriginal Outreach Consultant has been providing information sessions to the Aboriginal community since 2007. These sessions were introduced to attract, retain, and source qualified Aboriginal people to apply for positions at the City of Edmonton while continuing to explore community partnerships.

These thirty minute information sessions are presented in the Aboriginal community and provide an overview of the City of Edmonton hiring process. Some of the topics presented include: Resume Tips, Interview Preparation, Edmonton Aboriginal Employees Resource Network (EAERN),

current and potential projects and the On-line Recruitment Management System. The Aboriginal Outreach Consultant provides hands on guidance on navigating through the City of Edmonton website.

The information session provides literature to assist individuals with their job search. This includes a step-by-step guide to the City of Edmonton's on-line application process, Frequently Asked Questions, Public Computer locations, and provides a phone number and email address for assistance should it be required. In addition the information session highlights our [City Careers Site](#).

The information sessions highlight a number of City of Edmonton initiatives, including:

♦ Nikanihew Youth Leadership Program

The Nikanihew Aboriginal Youth Leadership program is committed to involving Aboriginal youth in cultural, health and wellness, leadership development and recreation participation, with the aim of keeping youth actively engaged in positive activities in the community. The Nikanihew program has been running for eight years out of the Community Facility Services Branch. The youth participants from the pilot program

(Continued on page 5)



MEMBERS: We Want Your Feedback!

Please take a few minutes
to fill out our
2010 Members' Survey
by May 31, 2010!

It's easy!

You can either fill out &
return the paper copy you
received in the mail
OR
fill it out online at
edmontonsocialplanning.ca

(Go to the "Support Us"
page, and click on
"2010 Members Survey".)

Prizes!

Everyone who completes
the survey will be entered
into a draw for 1 of 3
**\$25.00 Chapter's gift
cards!**

Contact Stephanie at
(780) 423-2031 x 349 for
more information.

Aboriginal Workforce Inclusion, *cont'd from page 4*

have become the swim instructors and mentors for current participants.

♦ Pre-employment Operator Training

The Pre-employment Operator Training program was created to recruit and prepare Aboriginal candidates for jobs in the public transit system. This was a 5 week program with a direct link to employment opportunities. The program provided candidates an opportunity to gain new skills in the areas of Customer Services, Resume Tips, Interview Skills, Driving Skills and Work Life Balance. Once the pre-employment program was completed, candidates had to apply on the Edmonton Transit posting. At this point candidates went through the same hiring process as all other applicants.

♦ Flying Eagle Program

Another program that the City of Edmonton can be proud of is the Aboriginal Flying Eagle program. The objective of the Flying Eagle program is to create healthy relationships with the Aboriginal community. It teaches cultural awareness through recreational activities, and is inclusive to children and youth of all ethnicities. The program structure provides an excellent template for any culture and can be used to promote and educate children and youth, which ultimately creates acceptance and awareness.

These programs are just some of the many areas covered through the information sessions given within the Aboriginal community.

For more information visit www.edmonton.ca/careers.

Program Building Better Futures for Women

By ANETTE KINLEY, *Research & Communications Assistant, ESPC*

The recession has had a tangible impact on many industries in the Prairies—slowing the frenzied pace of work during the boom to a crawl. However, the signs of economic recovery are beginning to show.

Major infrastructure and industry projects—both new and resumed—are scheduled to begin in the next few years. However, industry is expecting labour shortages despite Alberta's high unemployment rate (which reached 7.5% in March—the highest since 1996). The mining and construction industries, for example, report the growing shortage of skilled trades people as a key concern. These industries are facing pressures due in part to the aging trades workforce. In addition, other major projects forecast across Canada are expected to reduce the number of workers available to relocate to the Prairies.

As a way to meet their labour force needs, these industries are seeking to increase the participation of groups typically under-represented in the trades—such as women and Aboriginal peoples. Programs like Women Building Futures (WBF)

have a significant role to play in building these segments of the trades workforce.

Women Building Futures

Founded in 1998 as a grassroots group, Women Building Futures has come a long way in just over a decade. To date, WBF has trained over 400 women in skilled trades.

WBF is not content to stop there, however. It is seizing the opportunities of the economic recovery and gearing up to expand its programs to meet rising demand. The organization aims to expand enrollment to 400 women per year by 2015. WBF is also working to increase the representation of Aboriginal women in its programs to 30% of its student population (currently 19%).

WBF training programs prepare women to work as pipefitters, welders, carpenters, electricians, and many other trades. The range of WBF's programs is expected to expand as they forge new partnerships and as opportunities in industry evolve.

The quality of the WBF program is shown in its consistently high (90%



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Looking for Information on Social Issues?

Visit the **ESPC
Resource Library**
OR
**Speak to our Resource
Co-ordinator, Jennifer!**
(780) 423-2031 x 354

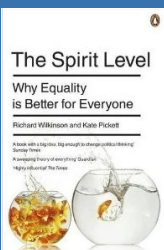
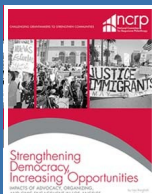
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Available 24/7 @
socialresearchlibrary.ca

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rich source of current and
historical publications on
social issues.

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*Strengthening
Democracy,
Increasing
Opportunities:
Impacts of
Advocacy,
Organizing and
Civic
Engagement in Los Angeles
County.*
(National Committee for
Responsive Philanthropy,
2010)



*The Spirit
Level: Why
Equity is
Better for
Everyone.*
(Wilkinson, R
& Pickett, K.,
2009)

Women Building Futures, *cont'd from page 5*

+) employment success rate. This success is in part due to WBF's focus on building strong relationships with industry partners. On a more individual level, WBF's success can also be owed to the supports it provides to its students. This includes: initial assessments of readiness and "fit" for a trades career, and job placement and retention support. WBF programs also involve workplace culture conditioning, academic upgrading and safety certification—all of which contribute to long-term employability.

WBF's support goes beyond training and employment however. Recognizing that a lack of affordable housing is a barrier to training, WBF built 42 units of fully furnished suites as part of its new training centre. Eighteen of the suites are designated for single women with children. This housing is crucial to allowing women who face economic barriers to enter the program—to build a new future for themselves.

Better Futures for Women & Communities

In early 2009, Women Building Futures published a Social Return on Investment report, which found that every dollar invested into the program resulted in 6 dollars of social and economic return (value) to society.

The benefits to WBF students include:

- ♦ increased income and assets;
- ♦ greater access to health benefits; and,
- ♦ improved family life and self-confidence.

The impacts on employers include:

- ♦ reduced recruitment and safety training costs; and,
- ♦ increased access to skilled labour.

WBF also benefits government in terms of:

- ♦ reduced costs of income support, daycare subsidies and health benefits; and,
- ♦ increased revenue from personal and property tax.

WBF appears to be well on its way to achieving its vision of "inspiring positive economic change for women and forever transforming the face of industry in Canada".

Thanks to Wanda Wetterberg for providing information for this article.

For more information on WBF, visit womenbuildingfutures.com

Other Sources

Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey, March 2010. Available at: www.statcan.gc.ca/

meet the ESPC STAFF

The Council's Dedicated IT Contractor: Paul Dobrotvorskyy



Paul (Pavlo) Dobrotvorskyy, was born in the city of Kharkov, Ukraine (formerly part of USSR). He has a Master's degree from the State M.Ye.Zhukovsky Aerospace University. Paul's first job was as a network

administrator, even before his official graduation.

Paul came to Canada at the age of 25, spring 2001. (The picture above is pretty much his face back then.) His first job was to support network infrastructure at a variety of non-profit agencies around Edmonton. He has also developed several training programs for the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.

In 2003, Paul achieved 2 goals: graduating from the NAIT Information Systems Technology program and establishing his own consulting business. Since then the range of his IT services—and the number of clients he serves—has grown dramatically.

However, Paul is still loyal to many of the agencies he first served, including the ESPC. In fact, Paul has been serving the Council longer than any of its current staff! "It is my pleasure to be able to provide high quality and affordable services to the non-profit organizations," Paul says.

Apart from his business activities, Paul and his wife are raising two young kids—a process that is not only a lot of work and fun, and keeps them very busy, indeed!



An audio version of this newsletter is available on our website (edmontonsocialplanning.ca).

Recordings of *the fACTivist* are generously provided by VoicePrint Canada, the non-profit, 24/7 audio newsstand. Visit www.voiceprintcanada.com for more information.



WANTED: Enthusiastic Board Members

The ESPC is seeking new board members!

Are you passionate about the type of work the Council does? Are you interested in helping set the vision and direction for the organization?

Volunteer as a member of our board of directors!

Visit the [Board page of edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca) for more information and to apply.

Thank you!

The ESPC would like to thank board members **Doug Meggison** and **Larry Brockman** for their 8 combined years of dedicated volunteer service to the Council.

After two consecutive 2 year terms (the maximum allowed), both will be retiring from the board in May.

Focus on Work as Spring Brings Signs of Recovery

by SUSAN MORRISSEY, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council

This Spring edition of *the fACTivist* is focused on the issues of improving wages and preparing people for work. This is a timely topic as we are starting to see signs of recovery in the economy. Our staff was very interested in looking into what's happening and what's available to help people get back into the workforce. You will see from the articles that there are many innovative things taking place. And, although certain indicators are showing improvements, there are some stark realities that should not be overlooked.

A recent report released by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has found that 54% of Canadians now live in the country's 24

urban areas. 2.5 million working poor and 1.2 million low income families live in Canada's cities. Demand for employment insurance is huge and wait times for social housing space is now a minimum of two years and a maximum of 5 years. I have a hard time getting my brain around the fact that many people in need of affordable housing are required to wait not one year, but two for subsidized rent.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council applauds the work of the many individuals, agencies and orders of government that are helping folks with skill development and training. Getting people back to work helps individuals, families and our community.

meet the ESPC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Committed Citizen, Doug Meggison, Handing off Presidency



Doug Meggison lives the word 'citizen.' Born and raised in Edmonton, he makes it his business to be part of--and contribute to--the communities in which he lives and works.

Doug is the Policy Analyst for the Health Sciences

Association of Alberta (HSAA), and a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 955. He has previously been employed by the Service Employees International Union as an organizer and is a founding member of the Carbonear and District Labour Council in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In his work at HSAA, he provides thoughtful analyses of political trends and government policies at all levels, supporting the work of the union's executive, committees and staff.

Beyond his workplace, Doug walks the talk. Among many other things, he has served 3 years on the Edmonton Public Library Board, and is a founding member of the Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism (ECAWAR). After serving two full terms on the ESPC Board, Doug will be retiring as president of the Council in May.

Doug is deeply committed to his family. With his wife Marie he parented two young adults. He is also a doting grandfather to Shane, even though they live on different continents.

meet the ESPC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Exiting Board Member with Diverse Background: Brockman



For the past 25 years Larry has worked in community and health related issues from street level to management. Work in the area of health prevention and promotion has consistently placed him in partnership with other individuals and

organizations from the local to the national level. Such complex teams and coalitions have served to develop communication and leadership skills.

Much of Larry's recent work has addressed

the controversial realm of sexual health applying the most recent theory and practice to sexual health education, promotion, prevention and harm reduction. He has worked with diverse populations from youth, to new immigrants to sex trade workers.

Currently, Larry is the Executive Director of OPTIONS, responsible for overall management and the planning and implementation of programs and services.

Larry has served on the ESPC Board of Directors for 4 years—the maximum term—and will be retiring from the board in May.



70th Anniversary Gala & Silent Auction

October 28th, 2010
6:00pm

Maple Leaf Room,
U of A Lister Centre

Join us for an evening of
entertainment and reflection
as we celebrate the ESPC's
70 year *legacy of
commitment to community!*

Keynote Address

Michael Phair,
*former City Councillor & former
ESPC Board President*

Special Guests

Rob Rainer,
*Executive Director, Canada
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Maria Dunn,
*Edmonton Singer-Storyteller
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Solving Immigrant Employment Issues a Steep Climb

By JON BOL, *MacEwan Social Work Practicum Student, Edmonton Social Planning Council*

There are no single solutions for immigrants regarding employment that can be implemented by federal and provincial governments. Why? For all human beings around the globe, moving from one place to another place means reshaping people's life style and adapting to it is not easy.

Immigration itself reinvents individual immigrants. It is a new life for people, educationally and economically. Therefore, it is not easy to find immigrant employment solutions in a short period of time one way or another. Immigration also involves readjusting to something new; it is a long process. It is like a child's journey as she grows and develops into a young adult.

Immigrant employment is a complex issue, since it depends on so many factors, like the environment in the city or town, and the skills and background of the individual.

Employment itself requires people to fulfill certain things such as education. Education may be an employment solution for some people.

Education

Education seems to be solution for many people in this world. It lifts people out of poverty, especially low income individuals. As I said earlier, immigrant employment solutions is not a simple issue to solve. Some immigrants arrive with no education at all. Therefore, when those individual immigrants have settled in their new places where most of the host community members are educated, it makes it harder for the immigrant themselves to be employed in fields that need individuals with professional skills.

Who can be blamed at this point? No individual person can be blamed because this is a new chapter for both the immigrants and the hosts. It is hard to find solutions, and collective ideas need to be debated at all levels, especially in training or learning new skill to fit the job requirements.

Training for those non-educated individual immigrants seems to be effective. But it takes a long time to learn the language first before entering into specific training for a career.

On the other hand, those who came with their skills from their respective countries are often required to start over again at the elementary education level. They (the new

skilled immigrants) find themselves as students, and this takes them some time before they are able to focus on employment. *Why?* They have to get new skills (new education system) that will make them fit or to be recognized by employers, professional associations, and government departments.

Why is education important for immigrants? Education is a tool for employment for most people in every society not just immigrants. Therefore, besides education, one of the most important things that many immigrants focus on first even before entering into Canada is employment. However, this becomes difficult after a few weeks in Canada for various reasons. One, lack of education level for non-educated individual immigrants makes them unable to find jobs. Second, unrecognized credentials for those immigrants who came with their education is another factor contributing to their unemployment, and it puts them in limbo for a while in terms of their financial situation.

Employment

Economically, low wages is another systemic issue facing many immigrants in Canada.

Why? Most immigrants find themselves employed in menial jobs often at or near the minimum wage. This doesn't allow them to feed themselves and their families. These unreasonably low wages do not even help the individuals to pay their rents. This applies not only to immigrant workers but also individual mainstream members who work in these types of jobs. As a result, some decide to quit those jobs because it does not provide an adequate living, and they have no choice but to turn to social assistance.

Therefore, those individual immigrants (skilled and unskilled individuals) have to decide whether to go back to school and live in poverty for while, or find some reasons to continue receiving social assistance. In this case, finding immigrant employment solutions are not one day or one year debate. It is a journey for them and the host governments.

To put it simply, readjusting to new life for most immigrants is an uphill battle. In other words, finding immigrant employment solutions are like when a young ant is

(Continued on page 9)



Looking for a Flexible Volunteer Opportunity?

Get involved with some of our exciting anniversary projects!

We are looking for people to write great articles for the fACTivist based on the materials in our archives.

We also need support in producing commemorative materials for our anniversary gala in the Fall.

Visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca & fill out our Volunteer Application form (under the Support Us tab).

Immigrant Employment, *cont'd from page 8*

climbing a tall tree. If anyone can imagine how hard it is for the youngest ant to reach on the top of a tall tree, it is like that.

Economic Impact on the society

It is costly for our governments to have immigrants on social assistance. At the same time, it is even harder for the immigrants themselves to be in this situation when they would rather be contributing to Canadian society through productive employment.

In conclusion, here are some of the problems, topics for further study, and possible solutions to help immigrants achieve greater economic success:

- ♦ Lacking language communication for most immigrants makes it harder to find employment even before the current economic crisis.
- ♦ Lacking skills/ experiences for immigrants is a setback.
- ♦ Education is a key to eradicating poverty
- ♦ A low minimum wage does contribute to poverty and unemployment because people do not want to stay in those jobs that pay unreasonable wages.
- ♦ Educate the public and policy makers about the importance of education so that immigrants don't remain stuck in menial, low income jobs.
- ♦ The low minimum wage compared to high rental payments makes life unaffordable for low income families
- ♦ There are costs for governments to support those on social assistance for a long time
- ♦ And what if most people are working for a reasonable wage; compare their taxes and what they receive from social assistance (impact on economy).
- ♦ Compare the impact on economy federally and provincially if most immigrants are employed and if they are unemployed.
- ♦ Compare the costs of training and the taxes they would pay if employed and what they get from the government due to unemployment. It is complex!

In Pictures: Lunch & Learn on the Immigrant Experience



Left: Susan Morrissey, ESPC Executive Director, welcomes the full house to the first Lunch & Learn at the Stanley Milner Library on February 10th. **Right:** Speakers John Bol (left) and Jim Gurnett (right).

To see more pictures and videos from the Lunch & Learn, visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca

Current Employment Research News: Downturn & Recovery

The following is an excerpt from our *Research News* page:

New from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce: Downturn, Recovery and the Future Evolution of the Labour Market.

This 12 page report analyzes employment statistics from Canada's recent economic recession and also looks ahead to changes in the labour market. The Chamber of Commerce suggests that an aging population combined with globalization and

technological changes in the way we do business will contribute to labour shortage in the coming years. They provide suggestions on how to deal with this, from tapping underutilized workforces to providing new education and training opportunities.

Want to keep up to date on the latest social research news and reports?

Sign up for our Resource Library RSS feed at edmontonsocialplanning.ca



Interested in the History of Social Issues in Edmonton?

You can browse through the ESPC's work from the past 70 years in our publication archive.

ESPC members can access the archive online!

Contact Anette at
780.423.2031 x 351 or
anettek@edmontonsocialplanning.ca
for more information.

Not an ESPC Member?

Become one today! Just send in the membership application on page 12.

Looking Back at the Council's Work on... Work!

by ANETTE KINLEY, Research & Communications Assistant, Edmonton Social Planning Council

The ESPC has done a variety of work on employment-related issues over the years—from unemployment to women's workplace issues. Here's a sample of documents from our archive:

A Dream of Things that Never Were: A Proposal For the Single Unemployed Man in Edmonton (1968)

A brief prepared for the Provincial Government by the Council's Committee on the Single Unemployed Man in Edmonton. At the time, Edmonton was often referred to as:

a 'Haven' for men and for one specific reason; food, shelter, and clothing can be obtained relatively easily for lengthy periods of time.

The brief made three recommendations for the human development of single, unemployed men:

1. to establish a "classification centre" for men as a place to determine their employability and to provide referrals to services that will help to address their problems.
2. to establish separate housing and support for men aged 25 and under.
3. to find additional jobs for which single, unemployed men can be trained.

The Council emphasized that these improvements were just part of a broader effort to improve the community as a whole:

Let there be no mistake about the importance of undertaking serious programs on behalf of the single, unemployed man. If ever there is to be a "just society" in Canada, it will only come about if all elements of Canadian society are given the opportunity for human development.

Women in the Albertan Labour Force (1974)

A brief prepared by the ESPC's Task Force on Women in the Albertan Labour Force (pictured). The report reviews statistical data on women's participation in the labour force and gender disparity in occupation and pay.

The data led the task force to conclude that:

... women were/are relegated to traditionally "female" jobs and that the wages accompanying these jobs are continually low paying. ... women, at present, are not fully participating in either the Albertan Labour Force or Albertan society to their fullest extent. In order to ensure full participation of women in the labour force, government must recognize that a concentrated effort is needed so that the vision of "equal pay for equal work" and "equal job opportunities for women" can become a reality.

First Reading: Dealing with Wages (1986)

An issue of the ESPC's former newsletter, *First Reading*. This edition included articles on the minimum wage, the concept of a living wage, and the fairness of the existing wage structure. An edition of *Alberta Facts* that highlighted poverty and income distribution statistics for the province was also included.

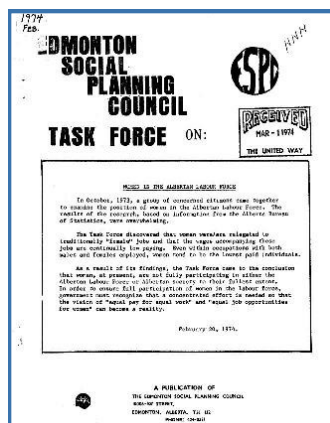
This quote from the introduction shows some parallels to the minimum wage situation in Alberta today:

Since May 1981, the Alberta minimum wage has remained stalled at \$3.80 an hour. In this same five year period the number of Alberta families that have found themselves living below that poverty line has more than doubled and cost of living in the province has jumped more than one-third. Given this disturbing picture... it is disappointing to hear ministers in Alberta's government expressing their belief that the current \$3.80 an hour is "adequate for the purpose" and the "a time of high unemployment is not the time to be talking about increasing the minimum wage."

Over-qualified, Underemployed: Accessibility Barriers to Accreditation for Immigrant Women with Foreign Qualifications (2000)

A report of the findings of a 1999 study of 150 immigrant women with foreign credentials living in Alberta. As is still the case for immigrants with foreign education today, credential recognition was a significant barrier to adequate employment.

The main personal and social



(Continued on page 11)



Celebrating 70 Years A Legacy of Commitment to Community

The ESPC is celebrating its 70th Anniversary in 2010!

We are planning some great events over the course of the year to recognize this significant milestone, including:

♦ **Lunch & Learn Series @ Stanley Milner Library**

The topics planned for these lunch time talks:

- Housing & Homelessness, *April 28th*
- Seniors & Elder Abuse Awareness, *June 9th*
- Food Security, *September 15th*
- Poverty, *October 20th*
- Disability Awareness, *November 24th*

♦ **Gala and Silent Auction,** Thursday, October 28, 2010. *(See the sidebar on page 8 for more info.)*

To top it all off—every 2010 edition of *the fACTivist* will feature articles highlighting the evolving work of the Council and its achievements of over the past 7 decades.

ESPC on Work, *cont'd from page 10*

barriers to credential recognition identified by the women in the study were: cost, time, discrimination, language, lack of information, personal problems, and cultural differences.

The women in the study also shared their personal stories about finding work in

Alberta. One woman explained:

"In my home country, I had 17 years experience. They recognized those 17 years as equivalent to one Canadian year, so I got paid as a beginner."

"The Council was born and became active in the war years. During the immediate post-war period many new organizations were formed and their activities have become accepted and needed components of the complex network of services required in an area of this size. Our focus has changed fundamentally from a body primarily concerns with inter-agency activities to one which deals with a range of undertakings related to a wide variety of community problems—from the broad base of the Youth Services Division to the needs and services for our senior citizens. It can be well said that your council has endeavours over the years to accept the challenge of change in a growing and expanding community."

~ excerpt from 1960 Annual Report of the Edmonton Council of Community Services

A History of Leadership in Community Development

By LORI SIMON, *ESPC Volunteer*

Did you know that the Edmonton Social Planning Council was a go-to organization in the community development in the 1960's. Here's what they did:

- ♦ In 1965, the Edmonton ESPC coordinated a **handi-bus pilot project** with the Cerebral Palsy Association (this eventually become what we now known as DATS, Disabled Adult Transit Service).
- ♦ Then in 1969, a study by the ESPC of the feasibility of an organization to provide information and consultation to the elderly and to coordinate existing community services led to the formation of the **Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired** (now known as SAGE, the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton)— **the first seniors organization in Edmonton**.

And the list of community development initiatives the ESPC took a leadership role in goes on:

- ♦ In 1968, the Council became involved in starting a **women's emergency shelter** (now known as WIN House) to meet emerging needs in the sector. Since then shelter services in Edmonton have expanded to include Lurana Shelter and the Youth Emergency Shelter Society);
- ♦ The Council established a **Central Volunteer Bureau** in the 70's (Volunteer Edmonton and the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations are now fulfilling this role. Plus, many non-profit agencies have a volunteer component);
- ♦ In 1970, the ESPC found the need to

organize **crisis intervention services for unwed mothers** in order to prevent exploitation and isolation (Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens has been filling this role in the community for years);

- ♦ In 1971, the Council took a key role in forming the **Boyle Street Community Services Co-operative**, which is now a central agency in Edmonton's inner city;
- ♦ Social inclusion became a focal point of the Council's work in the 70's, including family, individual, and financial counseling (Today, The Support Network and the Edmonton Financial Literacy Society are two key organizations addressing these needs in our community); and,
- ♦ Several studies done by the Council highlighted the need to develop **quality, standardized Day Care services**. This work contributed to the many changes that have occurred over the years. (For example, the ESPC played a key role in setting up the **Day Care Centres at Grant MacEwan College**, which now serves as a model for other institutions. The Council was involved in introducing **Parent Link** to Edmonton a few years ago; our young children and parents are more strongly supported in their roles as a result).

I have often wondered where we would be as a community if the Edmonton Social Planning Council had not provided the early leadership needed to address our social issues. This is part of the legacy of commitment to community.



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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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
- ... be eligible to vote at ESPC AGMs and have a say in the direction of the organization
- ... be eligible to serve on the board of directors

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