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# Housing First and Edmonton's Plan to End Homelessness

By Chris Rudge, Volunteer Writer



Photo by Ryoko Yagi

## Introduction

Homelessness in Edmonton is often attributed to the volatile boom and bust economic cycle, to down-and-out transient workers and to "trouble makers" from outlying communities. The real face of homelessness, however, is often as complicated as it is both tragic and completely preventable.

In 2008, approximately 3,100 homeless individuals were living in Edmonton, a number estimated to reach 6,500 by 2018 (ECEH, 2009). That year, Mayor Stephen Mandel set the ambitious goal of ending homelessness in our city within 10 years. To achieve this goal, he created the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, a community-led group made up of leaders in the public, private and non-profit sectors in Edmonton who are dedicated to finding a solution to homelessness. In 2010, the committee worked with volunteers, community organizations and other local stakeholders to develop a new homelessness reduction strategy titled "A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness." This "Housing First" initiative would

substantially increase the number of available housing spaces, in combination with enhanced social services.

## Housing First

Housing First is a relatively new strategy of addressing chronic homelessness that is generating significant interest due to its early successes. Unlike previous policies, Housing First places an emphasis on establishing people into housing as the first step towards long-term stability. The theory behind this is that homeless individuals suffering from mental illness and/or addiction problems cannot be expected to address such problems while living on the street. Housing First works in contrast to another traditional strategy of addressing chronic homelessness known as Continuation of Care. *Continuation of Care* functions through a series of milestones, requiring addiction and other issues to be addressed before housing assistance is granted (Atherson & McNaughton Nicholls, 2007). This strategy is based on a stepping-stone program where individuals prove they are responsible and "deserving" of socialized housing. However, most experts believe that this argument is inherently flawed. These Continuation of Care policies have resulted in no overall reduction of homelessness throughout the US highlighting the need for new approaches (Kertesz, Crouch, Milby, Cusimano, & Schumacher, 2009).

While Housing First is relatively new and somewhat unproven in the academic community, it is quickly becoming a key strategy for many municipalities aiming to eliminate homelessness. For instance the City of Toronto has been implementing a *Housing First* strategy for several years. Their strategy is starting to show some promising results. A

(Continued on page 2)



## Lunch and Learn Series

Along with the Edmonton Public Library, the ESPC continues the popular Lunch and Learn Series.

.....

**January 25, 2012**

**Topic:** Family Literacy in Alberta

**Speaker:** Wendy Peverett, Edmonton and Area Family Literacy Regional Network Coordinator, Centre for Family Literacy and Jonna Grad, Executive Director, Centre for Family Literacy

.....

**February 29, 2012**

**Topic:** Culturally Motivated Violence Against Women  
**Speaker:** Sabrina Atwal, Project Director, Indo-Canadian Women's Association

.....

**April 4, 2012**

**Topic:** Alberta Labour History Institute's Role in Preserving the History of the Alberta Federation of Labour and Their Contribution to The Labour Movement in Alberta

**Speaker:** Winston Gereluk and Jim Selby, Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

.....

**Place:** Audio Visual Room, Stanley Milner Library

**Time:** 12:00 to 1:00PM

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## Housing First And Edmonton's Plan To End Homelessness, *continued from page 1*

2007 study found that 90% of clients remained in housing after one year, while 85% perceived their future as positive. Clients of this program were relying less on emergency services (including ambulances and emergency room visits), drop-in centres and soup kitchens. As well, clients said they were taking greater advantage of addiction treatment programs, education, job training, food banks and mental health programs (Toronto Shelter Support & Housing Administration). Although promising, the upfront investments required for these policies are high and have the potential to significantly strain already tight municipal budgets. While the fiscal hawk in some of us may cringe at the thought of such heavy investments into social services, the cost of poverty is staggering. The average hospital stay in Canada costs the system \$7,000; treatment of injuries from falls, fights, etc. costs on average \$9,400 and the treatment of mental disorders in emergency rooms accounts for 7% of acute care expenses (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2008). Researchers in British Columbia estimate that for every homeless person, the public sector has to pay \$55,000 to ensure their needs are met (Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction, 2008). Researchers in Calgary believe that to cover the same costs, it costs government \$134,000 per homeless person (Edmonton Homeless Commission, 2010).

### What's Next?

Successful highlights since the initiation of Edmonton's "A Place to Call Home" Housing First strategy include the development of 424 permanent homes. A Housing First Action centre was also developed to coordinate programs. The Boyle Renaissance project, which is currently under construction in the downtown community, The Quarters is an excellent example of Housing First in action. This will include 150 affordable - not free - units for families, couples and individuals. Other initiatives aim to increase the number of affordable housing units in buildings without encompassing more than 20% of

any one building, thus avoiding a warehousing or ghettoization effect.

The vision of an Edmonton free of homelessness by 2018 is ambitious and the Mayor and Council should be commended for setting such ambitious goals. Success, however, will require continued investments even during lean economic times. It will also require the ability to prove that these are investments that will improve the lives and livelihoods for countless deserving people.

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# Barriers to Physical Activity Among Low-Income Edmontonians: The Leisure Access Program

By Kayla Atkey, Volunteer Writer



Photo by Christine Dagatan

Although the health benefits of physical activity are well-established, high rates of physical inactivity among Canadians continue to persist. Recent data indicates that only 15% of Canadian adults are achieving recommended levels of physical activity (Active Health Kids Canada, 2011) while 88% of children and youth do not meet the guidelines set out by Canada's physical activity guide (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). This is problematic considering that physical inactivity has been associated with a number of adverse health outcomes such as an increased risk for chronic diseases, disability and premature death (Health Canada, 2011).

Opportunities for physical activity are not divided equally among Canadians. Instead, the ability one has to achieve adequate levels of physical activity is deeply influenced by wider social and economic determinants. Income, for example, has been identified as a key determinant of physical activity. According to a 2007 report by Statistics Canada, leisure time physical activity is less prevalent among low-income groups and Canadian immigrants in contrast to the highest income group in Canada (Gilmour, 2007).

Low-income groups and neighbourhoods face a number of barriers to physical activity:

- Findings suggest that concerns over safety in low-income neighbourhoods may discourage outdoor leisure activities and sports (Veugelers, Sithole, Zhang, & Muhajarine, 2008; Raine, 2004).
- In a 2005 study on low-income barriers to physical activity among adolescents, the inability to pay facilities fees prevented those surveyed from being physically active on a regular basis (Romero, 2005).
- In regions of the USA where the majority of the population has a low-socioeconomic background tend to have limited access to recreational facilities, which was associated with lower levels of physical activity and a higher risk of overweight status (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page & Popkin, 2006).
- As the sites where people live, work and play, municipalities have a key role in addressing barriers to physical activity among low-income groups.

## The City Of Edmonton's Leisure Access Program

In 2006, the City of Edmonton implemented an initiative called the Leisure Access Program. The goal of this initiative is to address obstacles to physical activity by making the use of recreation facilities more accessible to all Edmontonians, regardless of socio-economic status.

The Leisure Access program provides adults, seniors, youth and children from low-income families with free access to recreation facilities and attractions located in the City of Edmonton. Significant discounts are also offered for a range of registered leisure programs. The program also offers discounts for the material sometimes required for participation.



## What is the Leisure Access Program?

The program offers low-income adults, seniors, youth, and children free use of City of Edmonton recreation facilities and attractions (swimming pools, fitness centres, Edmonton Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton Park, etc.) and discounts on registered programs (daycamps, art classes, swimming lessons, etc.) for one year.

## What can I do when I get a card?

- Get in free to City of Edmonton facilities
- Register for programs and get 75% off of the fee - if a program costs \$40, you only pay \$10
- Adults and seniors can register for 3 programs and each child can register for 4 programs at the discounted fee.

## Who can get a card?

You may qualify if you meet the following:

- If you are currently on an approved Government Program for example (AISH, Income Support, Health Benefits, etc.)
- Have an income below the low income cut off line
- If you are a recent landed immigrant or refugee

## How can I get a card?

Certain documents and an application are required.

Visit [www.edmonton.ca/lap](http://www.edmonton.ca/lap).



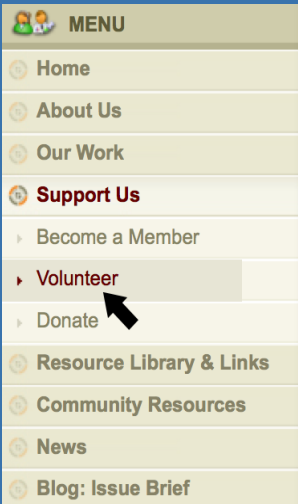
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## Barriers To Physical Activity, *continued from page 3*



Photo by Michael Lokner

Qualification for the Leisure Access Program is based on income-related indicators such as disability, household income or newcomer and immigrant status. Participation in the program can be renewed on a yearly basis (City of Edmonton, 2011).

Ultimately, to successfully reduce obstacles to physical activity among low-income groups and improve the health status of all Canadians, multi-level interventions that address health inequities must be implemented. Further, these interventions must target not only individuals and communities, but also the political and economic environment.

At the municipal level, the leisure access program is one example of what can be done to reduce disparities in health by alleviating financial barriers to physical activity among low-income groups.



For more information on the Leisure Access Program, please visit: [http://www.edmonton.ca/for\\_residents/programs/leisure-access-program.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/programs/leisure-access-program.aspx).

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# A Look at Lethbridge

By Leah Read, Volunteer Writer



Photo by Christine Bennett

Reducing poverty in our communities is everyone's concern. However, the roles of different actors, including various levels of government tend to be ambiguous and disconnected. Although municipal governments face many unique challenges in addressing community needs, there are specific actions they can undertake to help alleviate poverty.

Here we will examine the steps taken by the City of Lethbridge to support the creation and promotion of a local poverty reduction strategy in a city where the number of low wage workers is 17.8%, significantly higher than the provincial average (Public Interest Alberta, 2011).

In 2002, the need to address increasing disparity was recognized by Lethbridge City Council. In response, the Council developed the Community & Social Development Committee (CSDC) as an advisory board to identify social service priorities and a social policy for Lethbridge (CSDC, 2008). The committee determined the roles of various levels of government, social agencies, and concerned citizens that were involved in this initiative, and sought to align their efforts with a coherent and comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty. Local governments can contribute to poverty alleviation by promoting awareness of poverty-related issues, building relationships among diverse stakeholders, and encouraging an integrated and collaborative approach to poverty reduction (Torjman, 2003). The CSDC in Lethbridge is a salient example of what this comprehensive approach may look like.

The CSDC clearly outlined the role of the City of Lethbridge stating that it serves "to facilitate collaboration between local stakeholder groups, identify social assets and needs and arrive at potential solutions," (2008, p. 10). Clearly delineating roles not only promotes efficiencies and helps to avoid service replication, but it also creates accountability. The committee identified specific groups that struggle in the community including families with children, youth, Aboriginals, older adults, new Canadians, and individuals with disabilities (Ibid.). Several recommendations were made to address the needs of these marginalized groups such as improved access to affordable housing, childcare, transportation, counselling, settlement services and ESL classes.

Although traditionally, municipalities have been responsible for the physical infrastructure of their communities, a recent report by the CSDC clearly acknowledges that the "social infrastructure" is just as important to the well-being of a community (2011, p. 3). Viewing citizens as invaluable assets, the committee recognizes that by engaging people, the capacity and social capital of the community is enhanced. Social capital, as defined by Robert Putnam, "refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit," (1993, p. 1, 2). By mobilizing community assets such as the rich local knowledge acquired by community groups, municipalities can better advocate for federal and provincial funding to support relevant programming. While funding may come from differing governmental jurisdictions, the answers come from the local community.

The ability of the CSDC to clearly identify persistent and emerging issues, leverage existing community assets, and to recognize where service gaps exist is closely linked to its establishment of a poverty reduction

(Continued on page 6)



## Quick Lethbridge Statistics

The median after-tax income for a couple with children was \$68,645 (2006 Census).

The median income after-tax for lone-parent families was \$34,676 (2006 Census).

The median income for female lone-parent families was \$31,884 (2006 Census).

The median income for male lone-parent families was \$40,414 (2006 Census).

Lethbridge saw a 1.41% population increase between 2010 and 2011.

The unemployment rate of Lethbridge as of January 2011 was 4.3%.

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Available at:  
[www.lethbridge.ca/City-Government/city-administration/Documents/2012-2014-CSD%20Bus%20Plan.pdf](http://www.lethbridge.ca/City-Government/city-administration/Documents/2012-2014-CSD%20Bus%20Plan.pdf)



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## A Look at Lethbridge, *continued from page 5*

strategy. The existence of this strategy creates a framework for stakeholders to organize community knowledge, open dialogue with each other, and monitor progress. Although the adoption of a local poverty reduction strategy has the potential to strengthen approaches to address poverty, unfortunately, not all municipalities have such a plan in place.

Since the inception of the CSDC, the City of Lethbridge has established a housing first program called Social Housing in Action (SHIA), and has implemented a ten year plan to end homelessness. "Street homelessness [has been] reduced by 53% and shelter occupancy by 25%" and over 350 households have been placed in permanent tenancy due to the program (CSDC, 2011, p. 13). Also, the City of Lethbridge website (2011) makes information available regarding Family and Community Support Services, social development initiatives, and social reports and studies, demonstrating a willingness of local government to promote awareness of poverty-related issues and solutions.

This August, Lethbridge launched the poverty reduction approach of Vibrant Communities, a pan-Canadian initiative that promotes "comprehensive thinking and acting, building upon existing community assets, and fostering long-term learning and change" (Barlow, 2011). The purpose behind Vibrant Lethbridge (VL) is not to re-invent social programming, but to increase its impact by aligning the strengths and local knowledge of community organizations with government and business, thereby increasing the capacity of communities to grow and flourish.

Supported by the values already established by the CSDC, VL will provide strategic direction to the City's poverty reduction initiative. Lethbridge provides a good example of how a municipal government can become actively involved in reducing poverty. By supporting the establishment of a poverty reduction strategy and facilitating the fusion of diverse actors, municipal governments can and should act as a catalyst for change.

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# Poverty Reduction Strategies in Halifax

By Brittany Christiani, Grant MacEwan Social Work Practicum Student



Photo by Rick Brown

Halifax has amped up their fight against poverty in recent years, especially between 2011-2012. A number of poverty reduction initiatives work in concert with the main goals of the 2009 Poverty Reduction Plan of the set out by the Province Nova Scotia. This provincial plan focuses on children and families, enabling and rewarding work, improving support for people most in need, and collaboration and co-ordination.

In order to stimulate employment rates, Halifax is taking part in a new provincial infrastructure program titled Building for Growth. The program has benefitted Halifax because it provides funding to construct new roadways and highways, bridges, schools and new tourist sites in the area. This will create more job opportunities for people who reside in Halifax and are in need of work. "[The] redevelopment of the city benefits the urban area, as it will make the province more attractive to residents and tourists and could positively impact the economy of Halifax and thus the social ecology of the city," (Geography 2UI3 Section 4, 2011).

The poverty reduction plan also provides funding to universities in Halifax. Although the responsibility of education lies within provincial jurisdiction, it is important to note that seven of the province's universities call Halifax home. "The province works hard to keep tuition low and in fact it was the only province to have a tuition

decrease in 2008-2009 ... the strategy of putting money into education is beneficial as the residents of urban Halifax are able to become skilled workers," (Geography 2UI3 Section 4, 2011). The province recognizes that a better education earlier on will give students the skills they need to succeed, while also making post-secondary education more affordable and potentially reduce the likelihood of poverty in Halifax.

Halifax is also home to a not-for-profit organization called the Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank, which is part of the Community Care Network Society. The organization offers donations of food and furniture from people and businesses in the city along with a wide range of new and used donated merchandise available in the organizations two retail stores both named Great Things in Store. In addition to the bare necessities, Parker Street offers a Skills Development program in their facility that teaches users of their food bank information technology and career development skills needed to enter the workforce, including Microsoft Office. After completion, the students are given a refurbished computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse from their computer recycling program in order to enhance their employability (Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank, 2011).

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is also working on a number of initiatives focusing on producing more affordable housing, which will fill housing needs in Halifax. One of these is permitting secondary suites as-of-right (i.e. creating more basement suites). This initiative is relatively inexpensive because the HRM would be creating separate living spaces in houses that already exist. It is a discreet way of providing affordable housing and preserves neighbourhood characteristics. On the economic side, creating secondary suites as-of-right would contribute to home owners' mortgages through a set rent and make them more affordable in the long run.

(Continued on page 8)



## Looking at Halifax

The median after-tax income for a couple with children was \$71,088 (2006 Census).

The median income after-tax for lone-parent families was \$31,203 (2006 Census).

The median income for female lone-parent families was \$30,273 (2006 Census).

The median income for male lone-parent families was \$37,698 (2006 Census).

Halifax's Consumer Price Index rose 3.6% between October of 2010 and October of 2011.

Halifax has seen a drop in the amount of citizens using monthly Employment Insurance beneficiaries by 12.3% between September of 2010 and September of 2011.

Halifax saw a 1.4% increase in population between October 2010 and October 2011.

The unemployment of Halifax dropped 11.4% between October 2010 and October of this year.



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## Housing Poverty Reduction Strategies in Halifax, *continued from page 7*

Two other initiatives being discussed are the use of density bonusing and inclusionary zoning when building new housing infrastructure. Density bonusing is accomplished when a developer can exceed maximum unit density levels in exchange for lower cost housing units. An example of this is building a housing unit that is a couple stories higher as long as some of that space can be used for lower-cost housing units. This allows the private sector to build affordable housing with little cost to the city. Along the same lines, inclusionary zoning “requires builders to incorporate dwelling units in the middle of the affordability range into their projects in exchange, for example, the entitlement to build in a specific location...” (Townsend, 2011).

It is clear that the HRM and the Province of Nova Scotia are taking steps to help reduce poverty in their city. Through creating new jobs through city restoration, placing more money into the education system to give people a better chance to become skilled

workers, offering basic necessities through non-profit organizations and creating cost-effective affordable housing, Halifax seems to be on the right path for creating a better life for the people who call it home.

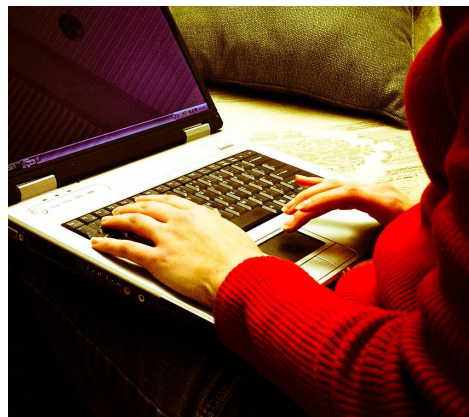
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# Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiatives

By Grace Han, Volunteer Writer



Photo by Frank Maurer

Hard-working Albertans are struggling to support themselves and their families. Edmonton has seen a rise in income disparities due to rapid economic growth and rising housing costs. Many Edmonton families and individuals are experiencing poverty or are at risk of falling into poverty and homelessness. Poverty has been linked to an increase in crime, gang activity, teen pregnancy and poorer health. Edmonton City Council can look towards Calgary's successes in poverty reduction projects for ways to plan for their own strategies to deal with poverty.

Calgary City Council has worked closely with community partners to create an after school program for youth between the ages of 6-16. It provides a safe, supervised environment throughout Calgary from 3-6pm every weekday. This program gives youth opportunities to socialize with their peers, build up their self-esteem, and improve their physical, leadership and creative skills. This is often a time of the day where youth are unsupervised and are at risk of making poor decisions that can lead to in accidents or injuries (City of Calgary, 2011). These types of programs decrease the likelihood that youth will participate in activities that could harm them, including getting involved in gang activity. These programs can also help working parents. They:

- Make their lives less stressful knowing that their children are in a safe place after school.
- Allow them to save money for essential goods and services they would otherwise be forced to spend on private after-school childcare.

- Can offer parents more work opportunities because they are not forced to be home to look after children when they are finished school for the day.

Calgary is a leader in this type of innovative project and is the first in Canada.

Transportation is necessary for daily functioning such as work, school, or routine activities like buying groceries. Calgary City Council provides affordable transportation to low-income individuals. With the support of Calgary transit and Calgary City Council, the low-income transit pass is available for \$40.00 per month. This program recognizes the needs of the low-income population and shows support for improved access to affordable transportation. Although Edmonton has a discounted transit pass program, it is only for AISH recipients. Based on the success of Calgary's low-income transit program, Edmonton could consider expanding its program to other low-income groups. However, a problem to Calgary's low-income transit passes is that it can be difficult to prove whether or not individuals have a low-income since only a notice of assessment is accepted. Also, there some populations such as youth experience barriers to this benefit. For instance, youth cannot receive a discounted youth transit pass unless they are enrolled in school. There needs to be an easier way to access the low-income monthly transit pass. Also the transit pass could be combined with reduced cost-access to recreational and leisure opportunities. This would simplify application processes for community services. Both cities could look into making an all-inclusive pass for transit and community services (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2012-2014).

Calgary City Council targets youth employment to improve assistance for youth who face barriers to employment. Vulnerable youth often feel isolated, have low self-esteem and lack the finances to obtain safe and secure housing. Youth

*(Continued on page 10)*



## Calgary at a Glance

The median after-tax income for a couple with children was \$81,835 (2006 Census).

The median income after-tax for lone-parent families was \$40,356 (2006 Census).

The median income after-tax for female lone-parent families was \$38,524 (2006 Census).

The median income for male lone-parent families was \$49,141 (2006 Census).

Calgary's Consumer Price Index rose 3.3% between October of 2010 and October 2011.

Calgary's population grew by 2.2% between October of 2010 and October of this year.

Calgary's unemployment decreased 11.6% from October 2010 and October 2011.

A point-in-time count done in 2008 found that 4,060 people were homeless in Calgary on any given night.



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

## Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiatives, *continued from page 9*

employment strategies provide individuals with networking opportunities, promotes career planning, and reduces the likelihood of joining gangs. Aboriginal people are over-represented in the low-income population. The City of Calgary Youth Employment Center periodically offers a program for Aboriginal youth called "Born to Be". It is a career and living skills program that includes work experience, pre-employment training, recreational activities, and cultural activities. It is over 20 weeks and is available to Aboriginal youth between ages 15-24. It increases a youth's sense of accomplishment and belonging, while also giving youth a positive work experience. This project supports aboriginals in finding work and supporting employment goals and recognizes their unique cultural needs. In addition, Calgary City Council worked closely with the United Way of Calgary and Area to create a program for teenage mothers. "Discovering your opportunities" is a paid 5 week career and life planning program for young mothers aged 15-19 during summer months. Participants learn job search skills and complete a work experience based on their interests. High school credits can be obtained during this program (Youth Employment Centre, 2011). Failure to get a diploma often results minimum wage and low skill jobs. As a result, they cannot obtain the finances needed to pursue further education or other training opportunities that could have potentially provided increased earnings. Completion of a work placement program will help participants increase their self-esteem, encourage them to complete high school as well as plan for the future. By fostering these vulnerable youths job and life skills, it helps them find and keep a job that protects against the risks of poverty.

Overall, Edmonton has made efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness but requires more visible and effective strategies. Calgary City Council has worked in collaboration with community groups to relieve some of the financial strains of poverty and to address the root causes of this major social problem. Edmonton should

use some of Calgary's initiatives as a foundation for approach to reducing poverty.



*Photo by Tristan Brand*

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# Fighting Poverty: The Importance of Multi-Level Cooperation

By Michelle K. Maitland, Volunteer Writer

Economic disparities and social inequity are a prominent reality throughout our Canadian society; it is a reality that is too often misunderstood, relegated and swept under the proverbial rug. The Government of Alberta has a number of initiatives geared toward supporting low-income Albertans, such as: income support, providing employment and training, health benefits, child and family supports, and housing assistance. Despite these initiatives, Alberta has yet to champion an official policy directed specifically at reducing poverty. Currently, within Alberta there are only two municipalities that have poverty reduction strategies under development: Lethbridge and Calgary (City of Lethbridge, 2011) (Gandia, 2011). Poverty is a highly complex social issue that has resonating effects throughout a variety of sectors, including health and justice systems. Legislation and community based initiatives are the tools needed to break the cyclical nature of poverty that affect individuals and families across Canada. We can learn from and utilize the successful strategies from other municipalities who have developed and initiated official poverty-reduction policies within their own cities.

Winnipeg is a city which faces similar socio-economic issues as many other major metropolitan areas within Canada. Approximately 15.7% of Winnipeggers and 21% of children under the age of 18 live below the low-income cut-off (City of Winnipeg, January 2010). Unsurprisingly, the highest poverty rates in the city are concentrated heavily within the urban core. At-risk populations, who typically live in the core of these metropolitan areas, are groups of people who are susceptible to falling into the cycle of poverty and its associated social issues (i.e. crime). Two of the fastest growing populations within Winnipeg are the Aboriginal community and migrant community - both of which are susceptible to impoverishment. Winnipeg is home to a large Aboriginal population which



Photo by Bryan Scott

is expected to grow exponentially within 20 years; projections are pointing towards a 61.7% increase between 2006 and 2026. By 2026, Aboriginal youth under the age of 25 will comprise 17.35% of Winnipeg's total youth population (City of Winnipeg, January 2010). Additionally, Winnipeg has a relatively high rate of immigration. This is strongly welcomed and encouraged, as it will boost the city's future economic potential. Winnipeg's immigration rates are forecasted to increase from 6000 individuals in 2006 to 11,000 individuals in 2026 (City of Winnipeg, January 2010).

In order to take a proactive stance on the city's future social and economic development, 'Speak up Winnipeg' was developed in 2009, acting as an ongoing forum providing the opportunity for all Winnipeggers to share thoughts, experiences, and advice while allowing for an open discourse on how the city should, ideally, develop. This was a critical and effective step in pushing for a municipal development strategy which is based largely upon community strength and vitality.

Collective influences of organizations, planners, educators, government models, and political philosophies have helped shape social development policy in Manitoba. More specifically, the emphases of Winnipeg's anti-poverty strategies are placed heavily upon community building and involvement; social inclusion and equity act as the key in achieving a socially and

(Continued on page 10)



## Quick Winnipeg Statistics

The median after-tax income for a couple with children was \$67,769 (2006 Census).

The median income after-tax for lone-parent families was \$32,455 (2006 Census).

The median income for female lone-parent families was \$31,389 (2006 Census).

The median income for male lone-parent families was \$38,589 (2006 Census).

Population increased by 1.6% between October 2010 and October 2011

Labour Force went down 1.1%

Unemployment went up 2.4%

City of Winnipeg (2011). *OurWinnipeg: It's Our City, It's Our Plan, It's Our Time.*



Available at: <http://winnipeg.ca/interhom/CityHall/OurWinnipeg/pdf/OurWinnipeg.Jul15.2010.pdf>.



## OurWinnipeg: It's Our City, It's Our Plan, It's Our Time (2011)

### Quality of Life and Opportunity

1. Strive to use mandated municipal service areas, such as libraries and recreation, as opportunities to foster strong cross cultural relations that contribute to healthy communities
2. Provide equitable access to municipal programs, services and facilities
3. Work with community partners to foster an inclusive and equitable community
4. Work within municipal service areas as a collaborator on poverty reduction
5. Acknowledge that aboriginal Winnipeggers bring a diverse richness of cultures, traditions, languages, teachings, values, skills and perspectives to our city.
6. Foster opportunities for aboriginal Winnipeggers, particularly youth, to obtain meaningful employment by building on current civic practices, processes and community partnerships
7. Develop community directed strategies to support quality of life for our growing communities of international newcomers
8. Include age-friendliness in city of Winnipeg strategic planning
9. Collaborate with developers, community organizations and other partners to foster an age-friendly and accessible urban development

## Fighting Poverty, *continued from page 11*

economically sustainable and resilient city. 'OurWinnipeg', made official in August 2011, is the City's plan to ensure Winnipeg develops into a successful and sustainable city. It will address a wide variety of topics, related to municipal sustainability, such as environment, quality of life, housing, and recreation. 'Complete Communities' is a term used by Winnipeg's municipal government to encompass the city's plan for ensuring that there is equal opportunity for all members of dynamic communities to live, work, shop, learn and play together (City of Winnipeg, July 2011). Poverty is addressed within the city's plan by anticipating the future circumstances surrounding at-risk populations and by narrowing the gap of disconnect that occurs between the individual and the community. [See sidebar (to-the-right) for Winnipeg's action plans for ensuring quality of life and opportunity within the city]

By focusing upon community revitalization through multi-level partnerships, Winnipeg is taking care of two problems with one strategy, effectively addressing poverty, while at the same time building lasting symbiotic relationships throughout Winnipeg. There is an impressively large and intricate network of cooperation between the various levels of government, community based programs, NGO's and Winnipeggers as a whole; such collaboration is vital in creating change and ensuring a healthy socio-economic future.

The success and effectiveness of anti-poverty policies have proven to be heavily dependant on the translation of such policies into community based programs and initiatives. Government policy is the backbone of community based poverty reduction efforts; providing resources, timelines, action plans and goals. Therefore, the greatest chance at successfully reducing poverty is to be achieved by first implementing various policies, programs and initiatives that start 'at home'.

Edmonton may have goals to end homelessness. However (and by no means am I discounting this initiative), these goals do not entirely address poverty within the

city. Poverty is not an issue which is restricted to individuals with no permanent residence; it is an issue that plagues many working households, immigrant populations and various other at-risk populations (i.e. single mothers). Many Albertans who are living on the socio-economic fringes of society are faced with routine social exclusion and an inherent disconnect from their communities. By developing municipal level strategies for poverty reduction with community based initiatives and programs on the front lines, Edmonton will be able to efficiently combat poverty and the associated socio-economic issues that poverty festers.

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# Aboriginal Poverty in Edmonton: Beyond a One Size Fits All Approach

By Lindsey Graham, Volunteer Writer



Poverty reduction plans are gaining momentum as provinces across Canada adopt their own strategies to reduce socio-economic disparity. Eradicating poverty is a lofty goal. The multifaceted nature of poverty adds to the challenge, and requires multi-pronged strategies that get to the root of the issue. Recognizing this challenge, Albertans have been working together to develop a solution and re-imagine the economic realities in the province. The Action to End Poverty in Alberta Steering Committee is working to lead the development and implementation of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan for Alberta (Action to End Poverty in Alberta, 2011). To combat and devise an effective strategy to mitigate poverty, we must first understand the demographics of the low-income population. Socio-demographic trends over time indicate that there are particular cohorts of Edmonton's population who are more susceptible including young people, women, lone-parents, recent immigrants, and Aboriginal people (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2011a).

The reality is that Aboriginal people in Edmonton continue to be overrepresented amongst the low-income population. In many Edmonton neighbourhoods, over 50% of the Aboriginal population lives in poverty. The poverty rate amongst Aboriginals in Edmonton is 1.4 times higher than Alberta's Aboriginal average and 2.5 times higher than the average for all Edmontonians. Since 1981, the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population in Edmonton has been consistently higher than the Edmonton average.

In October 2009, a *Statistical Profile of Aboriginal Peoples Living in the City of Edmonton* was prepared for Alberta Aboriginal Relations (Quinless, October 2009). The findings in this study reveal that the incidence of low income among the Aboriginal Identity population (38%) was much higher than the non-Aboriginal population (16.5%). In 2005, the median income of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over in the City of Edmonton was \$18,769 compared to \$28,233 for the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2008). As of October 2011, the unemployment rate of all Aboriginal people in Edmonton was 13.0%cent, up from 9.3% in October 2010. In contrast, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for all of Edmonton in October 2011 was 5.1%. Unemployment and low employment incomes place many Aboriginal families in a precarious financial state.

According to the Edmonton Financial Literacy Society, Canada's Aboriginal community is more susceptible to low levels of financial literacy as they are disadvantaged due to generally lower levels of education, the presence of difficult socio-economic conditions and have a tendency towards tenuous relationships with mainstream financial institutions, (Edmonton Financial Literacy Society, 2010a). The report *Aboriginal Financial Literacy in Canada: Issues and Directions* prepared for the Canadian Task Force on Financial Literacy in 2011 documented the many barriers and systemic issues that impact the degree of financial inclusion and level of financial literacy amongst the Aboriginal population (Collin, February 2011). These challenges mirror those of low-income people, but with additional cultural and structural barriers, none the least of is generations of exclusion from Canada's financial institutions. Cultural barriers they face include language, values that affect financial decision-making and

(Continued on page 14)



## Aboriginal Edmonton

"Aboriginal" in this article includes: Inuit, Métis, North American Indian.

### 2006 Census

City of Edmonton Population - 684,090

Aboriginal Identity Population - 38,170

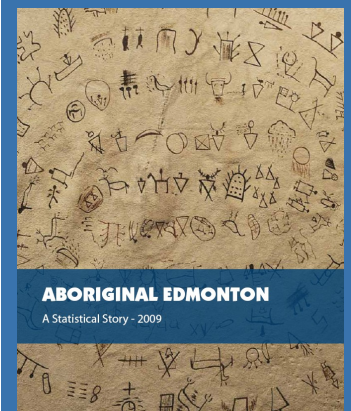
Aboriginal Population as a Percent of Edmonton's Population - 5.6%

North American Indian (First Nations) - 15,989 (2.3%)

Métis - 20,695 (3.0%)

Inuit - 495 (0.01%)

City of Edmonton (2010). *Aboriginal Edmonton: A Statistical Story - 2009*.



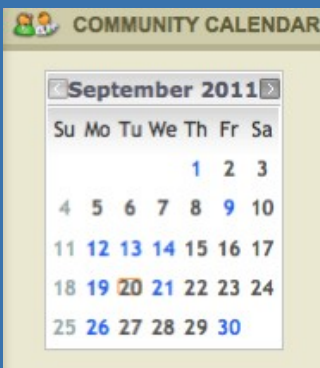
Available at: [http://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/Stat\\_Story-Final-Jan26-10.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/Stat_Story-Final-Jan26-10.pdf).



## Want to check out more community events?

Visit our website at [edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca) and navigate our **Community Calendar** to see future events in the Edmonton community:

- Awareness Events
- Conferences
- Fundraisers
- ESPC Board Meetings
- ESPC Events
- Publication Releases
- Workshops



## Aboriginal Poverty In Edmonton, *continued from page 13*

money management, non cash-based economies, lack of trust toward financial institutions. Structural barriers include the education, literacy and numeracy deficit, and the lack of access to basic banking services.

Although urban Aboriginal populations may have greater access to banking services, it does not remove the financial challenges. Low-income urban Aboriginal populations are especially vulnerable to financial crises as a result of low financial literacy and immediate financial pressures. Aboriginal serving organizations operating in urban centres routinely assist clients suffering from the results of bad financial decisions or predatory lending practices like payday lenders, which conveniently locate their business in low-income communities. To respond to this crisis, the *Task Force Report* called for culturally adapted and relevant training to improve financial literacy.



In Edmonton, the Edmonton Financial Literacy Society (EFLS) works to deliver financial literacy education to over 1,600 people. Their programming is aimed predominantly toward low-income clients, including Aboriginals, Recent Immigrants, and Youth (Edmonton Financial Literacy Society, 2010b). EFLS strongly believes that understanding the experience of low-income individuals and incorporating local community knowledge and experiences are important in developing projects that meet the unique needs and challenges in the community. The EFLS partnership model provides an effective way to achieve community driven responses, and to date has formed innovative partnerships with schools, trades programs and the Aboriginal community. Their *Managing My Soniyaw* program provides effective approaches to support Edmonton's Aboriginal community in improving their money management skills to overcome systemic barriers such as housing affordability, debt reduction, long-term savings plans, and home ownership goals.

Increasing financial literacy of individuals living on low-incomes is an effective strategy to reduce poverty on a sustainable basis (Momentum, April 2010). However a comprehensive strategy, including financial literacy training, will only be effective if the income gap is lessened, and employment outcomes are improved. The ESPC's recent report *In This Together: Ending Poverty in Alberta*, provides recommendations on how to achieve this. For instance, the report suggests raising and indexing minimum wage, raising social assistance payments, and assisting low-income people by creating asset building initiatives (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2011b). The City of Edmonton has partnered with the federal and provincial governments to deliver the Aboriginal Work Partnership Initiative (AWPI), which aims to increase participation of Aboriginal peoples in the labour market by developing programs and partnerships that attract and engage Aboriginal people in the City's workforce. Edmonton is heading in a positive direction toward creating a more inclusive city with equal opportunity for all residents. Strong leadership, public support and awareness of the need for a strategy to reduce poverty are required to ensure that momentum is not lost.

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## ESPC Staff Profile: Stephen MacDonald



Stephen MacDonald is the newest edition to the Edmonton Social Planning Council team. As the ESPC's Resource Coordinator, he is responsible for maintaining and promoting the organization's resource library and its online database ThreeSOURCE ([www.threesource.ca](http://www.threesource.ca)). As well, he provides research services to Edmonton based social advocacy organizations, edits publications released by the ESPC and takes on various other responsibilities associated with the work of the organization.

Originally from Sydney, Nova Scotia, Stephen became interested in social justice and related issues while completing his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science at Cape Breton University. He decided to pursue a career as a librarian while working as a student assistant at the university's library. His interest in the

profession grew after a conversation he had with one of his professors about her experience as a research librarian with the Canadian Institute for International Affairs. While completing his MLIS at Dalhousie University, he was fortunate to learn about the direct social impact that librarians can have on the communities they work in. These experiences and his interest in having a job where he can use his skills to advocate for greater equality and social justice led him to take on this exciting role with the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Outside of work, Stephen spends his time reading, playing soccer, socializing with friends and learning more about Edmonton (including how cold it can get around here in the middle of the winter!). He enjoys visiting the Old Strathcona Farmers Market on Saturdays and loves wandering around Whyte Avenue when he has the chance. His first three months have been enjoyable and hopes that this is the start of a long and enjoyable relationship with the Edmonton Social Planning Council and his new city.



## What is SAGE?

SAGE (Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton) is a full service not-for-profit seniors' organization whose mandate is to build and maintain a broad range of programs and services that enhance the quality of life for seniors and their families in the greater Edmonton area. With over 40 years of experience, Sage is regarded as a major provider of innovative seniors' services in the capital region.

Their mission is to to enhance the quality of life of older persons through service, innovation, advocacy and volunteerism.

SAGE's objectives are to:

- a. Provide services that promote socialization, intellectual stimulation and information acquisition for seniors;
- b. Enhance the safety and well-being of those who are isolated, disadvantaged or at-risk in the community;
- c. Connect seniors to services that assist them in participating as active members of the community; and
- d. Advocate on issues affecting seniors on their behalf.

For more information about SAGE, visit: [www.mysage.ca](http://www.mysage.ca).



Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton



The Sage Awards presented by Servus Credit Union focuses the attention of our community on the extraordinary accomplishments of older adults. It supports a positive perception of seniors and helps reduce negative outcomes such as elder abuse and ageism.

Congratulations 2011 Sage Award Recipients:

- David Barnet - Arts & Culture
- Nguon Nguyen - Community Building
- Tammy Irwin - Education
- Henry Mah - Health & Wellness
- Charan Khehra - Public & Non-Profit
- Mark M. Fenton - Science & Technology
- Hank Zyp - Social Justice & Peace
- Zora Singh Jhajj - Sport & Leisure

On May 1, 2012 in Edmonton, Alberta, our community will come together to celebrate the outstanding accomplishments and contributions of older adults in Greater Edmonton. The Sage Awards celebration honours seniors who work tirelessly to make our community, province, nation and world a better place to live, work and play. Awards are given out in nine categories: Arts and Culture, Community Building, Education, Environment, Health and Wellness, Public and Non-Profit, Science and Technology, Social Justice and Peace, and Sport and Leisure.

For further information on next years awards or about sponsoring the Sage Awards on May 1, 2012 please contact:

Karen McDonald  
 Manager, Director of Community Relations  
 E-mail: [kmcdonald@MySage.ca](mailto:kmcdonald@MySage.ca)  
 Phone: 780.701.9008  
 Fax: 780.426.5175





# Community Collaborative Effort: Empower U

By Joanne Currie, Director - Financial Stability and Independence United Way of the Alberta Capital Region



EPCOR's Empower U – Building Confident Futures. This is a new and innovative partnership in our city that is aiming to make a difference for families living in low-income. The objective of this project is to combine Financial Literacy Programs with a matched savings component to facilitate long term financial skill development, assist in the acquiring and maintaining of assets which will lead to financial stability and independence of its participants.

Seven non-profit organizations will be facilitating Financial Literacy Programs across the Alberta Capital Region working with aboriginal women, single mothers, women previously living high risk lifestyles, women who have experienced domestic violence, and women who are new to Canada. These partners include Candora Society, CEASE, Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, HUB

Housing Support Services, DECSA, Elizabeth Fry Society, Wings of Providence and the City of Edmonton. As well, there are and additional five partnering organizations including 4 Pillars Consulting, United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, The Family Wealth Academy, Human Services Government of Alberta, and the City of Edmonton lending their support and resources to ensure the success of this initiative. These twelve organizations are partnering with other funders, and business, including EPCOR and ATB Financial who have stepped up and are partnering with United Way to provide the matched savings portion of this project for 5 years. Other funding partners for this initiative include the Stollery Charitable Foundation, the Eldon and Anne Foote Fund through the Edmonton Community Foundation, and the Alberta Capital Market Foundation.

The combined efforts of this collaborative will reach over 200 women and their families/year, approximately 1000 women and their families over five years.



## Lunch and Learn Series

More Lunch and Learn Talks in 2012

.....  
**May 16, 2012**  
**Topic:** REACH Edmonton's and Its Role in Improving Public Safety in Our City  
**Speaker:** Jan Fox, Executive Director, REACH Edmonton

.....  
**September 12, 2012**  
**Topic:** Discrimination in Alberta  
**Speaker:** Charlene Hay, Executive Director, Centre for Race and Culture

.....  
**November 14, 2012**  
**Topic:** Elderly Abuse in Edmonton and SAGE's Commit Violence Against Seniors  
**Speaker:** Tanya Sinclair-Gibson (Safe House Coordinator) and Anjulie Talwar, Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)

.....  
**Place:** Audio Visual Room, Stanley Milner Library  
**Time:** 12:00 to 1:00PM

## ESPC Research Reviews

Subscribe to the Research Update, our monthly e-newsletter containing interesting reviews on the latest Canadian social research!

To subscribe, visit our Research Reviews page on our website and submit your email address in the box titled **{Sign Up For The Research Update Today!}**.

The screenshot shows the website interface for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The main content area is titled 'Research Reviews' and contains several articles with brief descriptions. On the right side, there is a 'COMMUNITY CALENDAR' for November 2011 and a 'Sign Up for the Research Update Today!' form. The form includes a 'required' field for 'Email Address' and a 'Join Now' button. A black arrow points to this sign-up button.



## What is the Creating Hope Society?

The mission of the Creating Hope Society is to build on our strengths to create hope for the future for Aboriginal people impacted by child welfare.

The society will work toward healing processes, support and reconciliation, and lobby for changes in the child welfare system and education.

The Creating Hope Society's vision is to end the perpetuation of the causes of the child welfare "cycle" (the perpetual scoop that leads to the high number of Aboriginal children coming into care.)

The Society's principles are:

- Building on the resiliency of survivors.
- Not forgetting the past, but looking forward.
- Learning/acknowledging from the past to move forward.

For more information, visit:  
[www.creatinghopesociety.ca](http://www.creatinghopesociety.ca).

# Kiss My Splash

Fundraiser presented by  
**Creating Hope Society**

December 9, 2011  
7:30PM to 10:30 PM  
at the West Edmonton Mall  
Water Park

Tickets \$12.00 per person  
Family of four only \$36.00

To purchase tickets, contact  
the Creating Hope Society at 780.477.7961  
Proceeds will be used to further CHS's  
youth, family, and community programs.



# Update: Tracking the Trends 2011 and In This Together

By John Kolkman, ESPC Research Coordinator

This fall saw the publication of two major research publications. In addition to all of ESPC's other initiatives and involvements, completing two major research reports was a major undertaking for an organization with ESPC's limited resources.

October 20 saw the public release of *Tracking the Trends 2011*. The 11th edition of ESPC's biannual flagship publication is our most comprehensive yet. It contains 128 pages of charts, tables, maps and analysis of major Edmonton demographic, social and economic trends. Over 70 different trends were analyzed in terms of both direction and value. 25 different indicators were then combined into an index measuring Edmonton's social health over the past 15 years. The 11th edition also included a special feature on Edmonton's increasing racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity including a series of colour coded maps showing Edmonton's diversity at a neighbourhood level.

Most recent data shows 73,000 children live in poverty in Alberta, a 40% increase from the year before (2008-2009).

- *In This Together: Ending Poverty in Alberta* (2011)

Months of work involving all ESPC staff went into preparing *Tracking the Trends 2011*. While Joseph Ahorro and John Kolkman did the writing and data analysis, they were ably assisted by summer student Jayda Pinkoski who prepared many of the data tables and charts. From her new home in Vancouver, former ESPC staffer Anette Kinley contributed her expertise to updating the Edmonton Social Health Index. Several volunteers also made valuable contributions including Teresa Thomas who did the neighbourhood mapping. The quality and value of the publication was also helped by four volunteer peer reviewers including two current ESPC Board Members. *Tracking the*

*Trends 2011* is available as a free download on the ESPC website or a printed hard cover version can be purchased.

November 21 saw the public release of *In This Together: Ending Poverty in Alberta*. This is the fourth straight year the ESPC has taken the lead on preparing a 16 page report that looks at major poverty trends in Alberta and the importance of comprehensive approaches and solutions. *In This Together* was co-published by Public Interest Alberta and the Alberta College of Social Workers. It is available in hard copy or as a download on the websites of the three organizations.

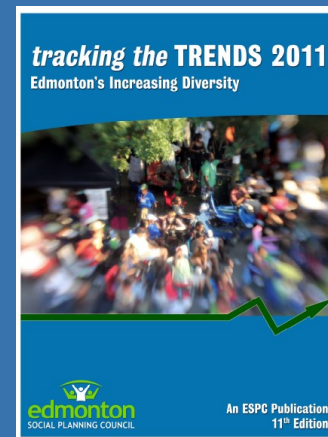


Photo by Brittany Christiani

The November 2011 report generated considerable radio, television and print media coverage. In part this was due to the dramatic spike in Alberta child poverty numbers. The report was also publicly released at an ABC Head Start early childhood development program at a public school in West Edmonton. *In This Together* provides important information and analysis to further the work of a coalition of municipalities and non-profit organizations called Action to End Poverty in Alberta. This coalition is working province-wide to make poverty elimination a key issue in the upcoming provincial election.

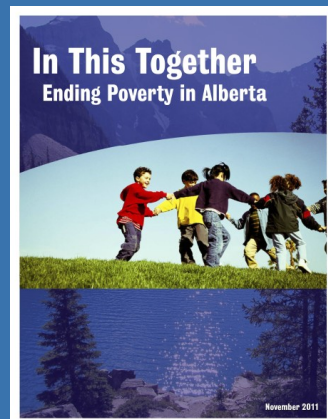


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Available in pdf format at:  
<http://goo.gl/ifoKA>.

Edmonton Social Planning Council (2011). *In This Together: Ending Poverty in Alberta*.



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<http://goo.gl/b5VVc>.

# Director's Message


By Susan Morrissey, ESPC Executive Director


I have come to better understand over these several years of working at the Edmonton Social Planning Council, that there are many organizations and players in our community each working towards helping individuals who are living on low income. However, I have also come to realize that the issue of poverty and poverty reduction is complex – not a simple one step solution.


ESPC is a part of a larger group that is working towards a provincial poverty reduction strategy engaging stakeholders, individuals living on low income and our government in the discussion and eventual development of a coordinated plan. In this issue of the *fACTivist*, we learn about some of the initiatives taking place at the local level which make up a piece of this complex puzzle called poverty reduction/elimination. We also review some of the poverty reduction work in other Alberta and Canadian communities.

Lastly, on behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the ESPC, I all the volunteers who helped us with another successful casino fundraising night on November 19 and 20, 2011. The money we receive from the casino goes directly into our program delivery in paying the wage of our research staff. Thank you again for your support.

## About the Edmonton Social Planning Council


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 www.twitter.com/edmontonspc

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### 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.

### 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

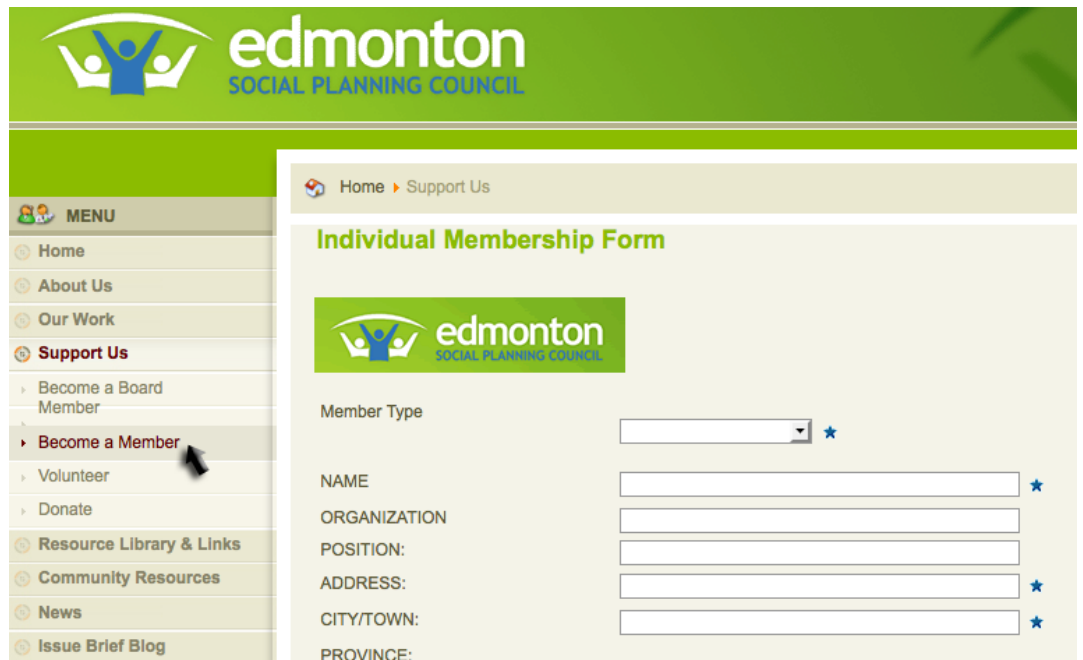
Visit [edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca) > **Support Us** > **Become a Member** for more information.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Ron Chalmers** (Chair, Finance)  
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**Joseph Ahorro**  
*Research and Communications Assistant*  
**Sabrina Sperber**  
*Administrative Assistant*  
**Brittany Christiani**  
*Grant MacEwan Practicum Student*



The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu on the left and the 'Individual Membership Form' on the right. The menu includes: Home, About Us, Our Work, Support Us (with sub-items: Become a Board Member, Become a Member, Volunteer, Donate), Resource Library & Links, Community Resources, News, and Issue Brief Blog. The form fields are: Member Type (dropdown), NAME, ORGANIZATION, POSITION, ADDRESS, CITY/TOWN, and PROVINCE, each with a required field asterisk.