

May
1990

first reading



Volume 8, Number 2

Edmonton Social Planning Council

May/June 1990

Let's put people in urban planning

Edmonton's future direction will depend on the extent to which the city can integrate a social planning perspective into decision-making, mayor Jan Reimer told the annual meeting of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

"Social planning is not an abstract science or an academic exercise," said the mayor, herself a former board member of the ESPC.

Instead, social planning brings people together so that their voices are heard and their needs are met when decisions are made. In doing so, it helps achieve a humane, attractive, livable city.

"It should be a motherhood statement to say that cities are made for the people who live in them, but in fact it isn't," said the mayor.

She pointed out that when urban planning is done without the human factor in mind, the result is often a need for extensive—and expensive—remedies. North American cities have spent years planning to move cars rather than trying to move people, and are paying a heavy price.

Again, during the boom years of the '70s, talk of a human scale in

Mayor Jan Reimer

Edmonton's downtown development was dismissed as "uneconomic," until people lost interest in going downtown.

"Now it is taking a major campaign to restore the "heart" of the city—to make it a place where people want to be."

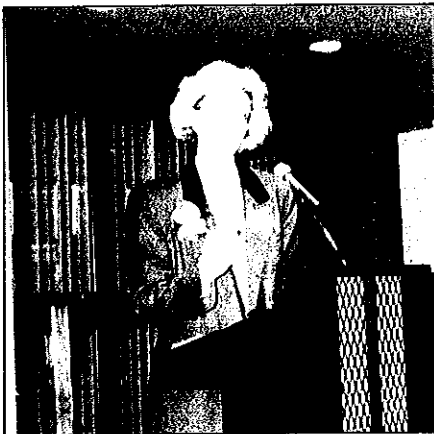
She addressed the need for integrated planning,

using the problems of the homeless as an example. At least 10 different departments in three levels of government have an impact on the homeless, along with an array of community groups and the private-sector housing industry. But homeless people still tend to fall between the cracks.

Integrated planning means counting the full costs—including social costs—of a course of action.

"We need to find the ways to include those costs in the accounting ledgers being used to make public decision and set spending priorities."

(continued on page 3)



Also in this issue:

Business perspective
**Bread lines and
bottom lines**

- page 2

**Business missing the
day care boat**

- page 4

**Children are falling
through the cracks**

- page 6

Rental hotline

- page 8

The business perspective:

Bread lines and bottom lines

The images are seared in Edmonton's collective memory: the Gainers striker thrown to the ground; the replacement workers herded through a phalanx of nervous cops and the stories of personal hardship during a hot summer of labour discontent.

It left a bad taste with a lot of people. The daily scenes of picket line violence not only hardened attitudes to Gainers' owner, but convinced many that this is the way business operates — with a commitment only to the bottom line and little interest in social justice.

Is it fair to describe business as hostile to social progress? Can the marketplace respond to social needs? Or, should government legislate social objectives?

"I know business gets abused," says John McDougall, "but business will work very hard to maximize social benefits."

Things were done quietly in the past, says the past president of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, defending the contribution that business makes to improve Edmonton's quality of life. Efforts by the Chamber to make it easier for workers to obtain higher education and the active role of many entrepreneurs in charitable organizations often go without fanfare or recognition, he notes.

He maintains that businesses do not march to a

ers off the hook.

"Where there are no unions, that's where there are people working for the minimum wage," says the 15-year union veteran and secretary treasurer of the Edmonton and District Labour Council. "Unions have helped a lot. Employers won't do anything unless it's in the collective agreement."

But McDougall contends that there isn't a bottomless pit of business profits for wages or social programming.

"Without the wealth created by business, all social programs have lost their basis for existence," says McDougall. "I can come up with a host of wonderful programs to respond to all kinds of demands." But, he adds, we must be able to pay for them.

McDougall concedes that business is often portrayed as being cold-hearted when it comes to encouraging additional social expenditures. This 'hard' attitude, however, is driven by the "discipline imposed on business" that prohibits an entrepreneur from spending beyond his/her means. "Business is forced to make decisions that are rationally-based, not emotionally-based," he suggests.

Regulating a social conscience

The private sector's social conscience is sometimes prodded by the law. In 1986, the federal Conservatives introduced the Employment Equity Act to encourage the hiring of women, Natives, visible minorities and disabled persons in federally regulated companies.

A companion federal contractors' program requires certain companies that bid on contracts worth more than \$200,000, to produce plans detailing how they will hire, train and generally advance the role of designated groups not only in operating the desired contract but in the company's overall plans. Approximately 10 percent of the Alberta workforce is covered by the legislation.

In the late 1970s, Ottawa had a voluntary program to hire designated groups but industry rarely called upon the government's program consultants to implement equity initiatives, says Michael Huck, a regional employment equity consultant with the federal government in Edmonton.

The hiring of designated groups has changed since the introduction of the 1986 legislation. "It's

"Someone has to pay for social programs."

single drum, and it is wrong to rely on class analysis to understand business actions. The extent of commitment to improving social conditions "is a function of individuals," he adds.

The hard-nosed side of business

For Ann Ozipko, business agent for the United Garment Workers local in Edmonton, employers could best show their commitment to improving social conditions by raising wages. She pins her hopes for better salaries and working conditions on aggressive unions that don't let managers and own-

now part of doing business," Huck notes.

"The environment is more receptive," he says of employers' willingness to hire groups that are under-represented in the labour force. Many unregulated companies are also independently pursuing equity programs. "If a good company were undergoing good human resource planning, they would do this anyway," says Huck referring to projected labour shortages and the need to look to non-traditional sources for new employees.

Could the "market" have responded to the employment needs of minorities and women? Or is it necessary to rely on legislation to advance the nation's social agenda?

"All legislation does," responds McDougall, "is move decisions away from the marketplace to someone's subjective view of



John McDougall

what is equal." He feels mandating equality does not encourage genuine commitment by business.

The way to increase the role of women and others in the workforce is to provide the educational support and lifeskills training they might need to participate in the labour market. Business, he says, has a role to play in creating a level playing field for disadvantaged groups.

"It (the support program) could be funded by business," says McDougall, but he rejects legislated approaches that make equity initiatives "part of the built-in cost of doing business."

Business is not blameless when it comes to addressing the social needs of the community, McDougall adds. "The one place where business has failed is in it being far too focused on its narrow self-interest." Business has to recognize the big picture, he says, and take into account all the impacts of its decisions.

But responsible corporate decision makers are not always an abundant commodity, says McDougall. "When we see these kind of people we should encourage them."

"If everything business does is demeaned," he warns, "then business will stop trying."

Let's put people in urban planning

(Continued from front page)

Reimer also addressed the traditional dichotomy between economic development and people-oriented issues such as environmental protection.

"Environmental issues and social issues can be pitted against each other in a fruitless conflict," she said. Instead, we need to develop a new framework for thinking about the supposed antagonism—a framework that goes beyond the old one-two of "first we make the jobs, then we clean up the mess."

"The challenge in the future is to say we're not going to make the mess. We're going to do it right the first time."

One of the most important functions of social planning is to ensure that the views of different groups are heard, especially the view of groups who have less power to make their views known.

For instance, in a situation where housing prices are rising, the concerns of poor tenants are as valid a planning concern as the jubilation of the real estate industry.

"Both points of view are relevant. Both should

"Your voices are needed..."

be part of any decision-making process," she said.

"As an elected political leader, I know the power of influential lobbyists—and I know the value of balancing that influence with good information," she said.

She challenged the ESPC and other community groups to take advantage of occasions for making their views known, and cited the final draft of the city's general municipal plan that is expected to come before city council shortly.

One of the plan's top priorities is the revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods. However, during recent public hearings on the plan, no agencies came forward to support the objective.

City hall needs help in maintaining the political will to turn the verbal commitment to inner-city neighbourhoods into action, she said.

"Your voices are needed—and I need to hear them."

Daycare activist says:

"Business missing the day care boat"

The private sector in Canada has been slow to respond to the need for day care in the workplace, says Avril Pike, Alberta member of the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association, a national umbrella organization of day care activists.

Yet the fastest-growing sector of the female workforce in Canada is women with children under six. This group grew from 47 per cent in 1975 to 70 per cent in 1988.

Business, Pike contends, views day care as a government responsibility and doesn't yet see the value of on-site centres for children. Those benefits include reduced absenteeism, higher productivity and lower staff turnover.

In the U.S., corporations such as Chrysler and Ford provide day care centres at their offices and plants.

In Alberta, Pike knows of only a few on-site child care facilities. These include Canada Place, which houses the federal government's offices in Edmonton, and the Calgary Herald.

"We're five to seven years behind the United States," says Pike, who is also executive director of the Oliver School Centre for Children, a non-profit day care for 90 youngsters in Edmonton.

She thinks business likely feels commercial and public facilities already meet day care needs. Pike also suspects that business has yet to come to grips with a pending labour shortage and the need to entice new workers with on-site day care.

Need convincing

So, what will convince the private sector that it's in its own interest to provide day care on-the-job? Two things, says Pike.

Firstly, as a short-term measure, the federal government should introduce legislation requiring employers to provide on-site day care. Ottawa should also subsidize employers to include day care spaces, the same way it manages to provide incentives to industry to drill for oil.

The second factor that will bring industry aboard the day care bandwagon is the influence of more women in the workplace. Women are having children later in life and their return to offices and shop floors often includes a demand for extended maternity leaves, job-sharing and on-site child care. These demands, Pike feels, will be acted upon by employers because the returning women are stable members of the workforce — a much needed resource to employers.

Pike predicts that as women make their way up the corporate ladder, this too will influence management to look positively at benefits like on-site day care.

To date, there has been little lobbying of industry by day care advocates, Pike observes.

"There's a certain degree of lack of effort because we're busy lobbying government to raise basic standards," she

says. "We're still in the pushing stage."

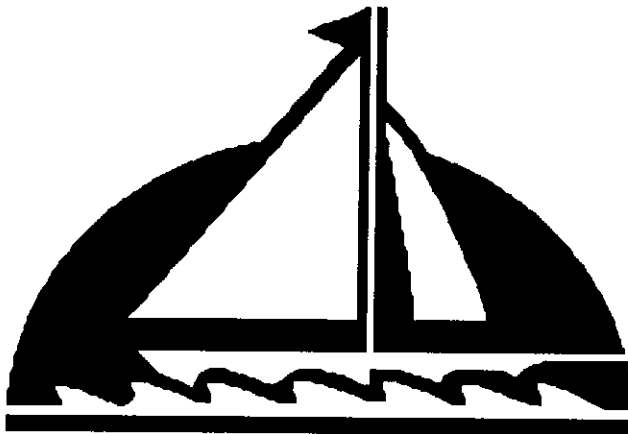
Pike would like to see the Alberta government or the City start day cares in their offices. Downtown banks could operate a centralized day care for all their workers in the city core.

At one major U.S. bank, the turnover rate for women with children in their on-site day care was three per cent, compared to 15 per cent for women whose children were in outside day care, and 18 per cent overall turnover in the bank.

Retraining costs can range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 depending on the job. The bottom line alone may ultimately force businesses to address the day care needs of their employees.

But for the moment, she expects Canadian business will watch the corporate day care experience of the U.S. and will likely not take the initiative until labour shortages become more pressing.

"Canada develops slowly," says Pike, "we're good at following ideas."



Bill C-69 — bad news for the poor

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is concerned that capping the federal-provincial initiatives to share costs for social programs will have serious implications for the poor in Alberta.

The Planning Council presented a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance on May 15 to ask the government to reconsider Bill C-69 which proposes changes to the Canada Assistance Plan (C.A.P.) and the Established Program Finance (EPF).

Plans to impose a two-year ceiling increase of five per cent on federal transfer payments to the

provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta for social assistance, welfare services, health care and education were announced in the last federal budget.

The Planning Council is pleased that the three provincial governments affected by the proposed changes in the C.A.P. have launched a legal suit.

"The outcome of the court action is as yet undetermined, but if the provinces' legal challenge is successful, all Canadians will win — if not, poor Canadians will certainly lose," says Peter Faid, Executive Director of the ESPC.

Editorial Comment **Continued cost sharing imperative**

*By Peter Faid, Executive Director
Edmonton Social Planning Council*

Behind the ceiling on C.A.P. and EPF lies an important ideological question: what responsibility does the federal government have in ensuring national standards in the provision of services to Canada's disadvantaged?

While Alberta may be a "have" province, wide variations exist in income levels within it. According to 1986 Census Canada data, there were 148,000 poor households in Alberta — 16 per cent of all households. There were 103,000 poor children — 15.7 per cent of all children. These are the people who will be affected by changes to C.A.P. and EPF, not the wealthy who live in Alberta.



It is implied by the ceiling on funding that present levels of social assistance are adequate, and so future payments must take only inflation into consideration. In fact, surveys have shown that more than half of single, employable welfare recipients cannot find shelter at the allotted amount, and that the number of people using the local food bank and also receiving welfare climbed from 45 to 61 per cent.

It is also implied by the proposed legislation that the cost of the C.A.P. and EDF is becoming overwhelming and must be cut back. In fact, data collected by the National Council of Welfare shows that spending on these two programs has remained relatively stable from 1984 to 1989. Capping the amount of transfer will put social programs into jeopardy without reducing government spending or aiding the reduction of the deficit.

The continuing cost-sharing of C.A.P. and EPF is imperative if governments are ever going to be able to deal with poverty in Canadian society.

The federal government must reaffirm its commitment to all Canadians, but in particular to the single mothers, children, elderly, unemployed and native people who form the poor in Canada. It must not allow false ideas of 'fiscal restraint' to obscure this commitment.

First Reading is published 6 times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. We invite your comments:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912 106 St.,
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5
(403) 423-2031 Fax: (403) 425-6244

Managing Editor: Peter Faid
Writing/Production:
Mountain Ash Communications

Children are falling through the cracks



"There are a growing number of young people in our communities who, for one reason or another, are unable to come to terms with themselves and the worlds in which they live," says Gerry Fewster in an introduction to Expanding the Circle — A Community Approach to Children's Mental Health.

This document was produced by the Alberta Children's Mental Health Project of the Department of Social Services and Community Health in 1986. It called for a broadly-based, community approach to children's mental health with leadership, coordination and support offered by the government.

Four years later, little has been done to address these recommendations, charges Judy Ballantyne, Director of Operations for the Canadian Mental Health Association. No mandate or authority has been given to provide overall planning in the area of children's mental health. Existing community services are poorly advertised and uncoordinated. Government departments still dispute jurisdiction.

"There is such a tight definition of mandate and such competition for resources that mentally ill children and their families are falling through the cracks between departments," she says. "We need an overarching system that makes sure a child who needs help gets it, regardless of departmental definitions of who serves whom."

Ballantyne is one of the organizers of a May 31 workshop designed for mental health professionals, parents and foster parents, teachers, decision-makers and others concerned with the crisis in mental health services for children.

The goal of the conference is to create a community-based advocacy group to lobby for a system with a clear mandate, designated responsibilities, adequate resources, a broad range of treatments and supports, wide accessibility, individualized planning and accountability.

"Mad" kids not bad kids

Children who don't get treatment for mental illness quite often end up in the criminal system. "It seems as though kids have to jump off a cliff before there is recognition that they're off balance," says Ann Glas, whose son has spent the past five years in jail.

The response to children and adolescents who come under the jurisdiction of the Solicitor General through the Young Offenders Act is to take them out of their communities into the correction system. Their mental health concerns are dealt with in isolation and in a punitive environment. The Solicitor General's ruling overrides other needs of the child. Children under the care of the Solicitor General's department cannot be transferred to hospital, for instance, unless they first go back to court.

"The Solicitor General deals with 'bad kids'; there is no recognition of 'mad kids'," says Cheryl Wharton of the group "This Kid is Driving Me Crazy". The group was established two years ago to provide support, information and referral to parents with children in need of mental health services.

Out-of-control behaviour

Frequently other government departments have been involved indirectly prior to the child or adolescent coming into contact with the arm of the law.

The education system is often the first point of contact for children with emotional problems. Teachers make initial observations of children who are disrupting class or school administrators become involved if discipline is needed.

School counsellors can work directly with the child and can coordinate needed agencies if they recognize problems, Wharton says. However, there is a distinct difference in the availability and roles of school counsellors in urban versus rural communities. Sometimes a child psychologist is contracted to the school board to assist counsellors, but again, this is not uniform throughout Alberta.

Some school districts, such as the Edmonton Separate Schools, have special classes for behaviorally disturbed children. However, there is a waiting list for these programs and schools often have to attempt to prioritize entrants. In many cases, teachers are left to deal with the problem on their own, which leads to staff burn out.

"It seems as though kids have to jump off a cliff before there is recognition they're off balance."

ALBERTA FACTS

Number 8

Published by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

May, 1990

Women and Poverty: What Gender Engenders

"I was divorced in 1964 . . . I raised my son on a woman's wage. We had difficult times—thank God for my mother and sister, we never had to go on welfare. But I never had money for myself, no dental work, never able to get a much-needed eye exam.

Now, I am 58 . . . unable to find work, a day here or there, doing janitorial work and babysitting.

I am on welfare. I am allowed \$476 a month; my mortgage is \$420 a month, leaving me \$53 a month to pay my expenses.

I am ashamed to be on welfare . . ."
Alberta woman

Women at Risk: Why?

For a number of reasons, women are much more likely to be poor than men, and increasingly—as the numbers of single mothers grow—they are more likely to head a poor household.

Many women have grown up expecting that marriage will be the "career" that protects them from poverty. Then they find themselves thrown unprepared into welfare or "pink ghetto" jobs when divorce, death or disability strikes their family.

Elderly women are at special risk of poverty, particularly if they have been unable to contribute to a generous pension plan during their working lives.

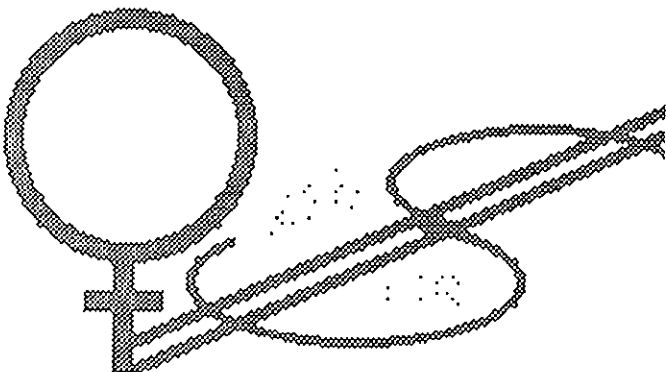
Working Women

Historically, women have put most of their working lives into having children and caring for their families. Those who did work outside the home were often excluded from pension plans because they took time off for child rearing and did not contribute the same number of years to the job that their male counterparts did.

Even the Canada Pension Plan, which was not fully in place until 1966, reduces benefits or disqualifies people who have interrupted their careers for 15 percent of their working lives or more.

In a working life of 45 years, 15 percent is just under seven years—about the length of time a woman with two children close together in age would take off if she wanted to wait until they entered school before rejoining the workforce.

Women are working in greater numbers than ever: 64% of all working-age women in Alberta are in the



Continued

labour force. In all occupations, at all levels of education and experience, women earn less than men.

The average full-time salary for women in Alberta is \$20,827 per year, compared with \$32,005 for men. This wage gap—65 percent—has only improved by two per cent since 1939.

In Alberta, 73 percent of all part-time workers are women. Such jobs pay badly and seldom offer benefits or pension plans. Their flexible hours, however, make them attractive to women raising children.

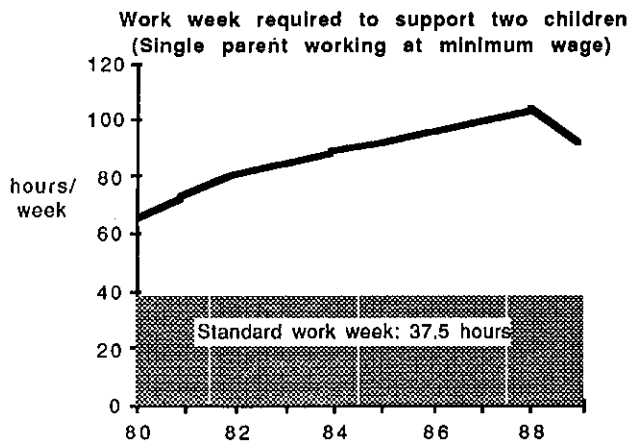
Low pay brings additional problems later in life: pension plans tend to be based on income, so women continue to receive less than men after retirement.

[I am a woman aged 50 who never married]. I did manage to get work before my U.I.C. ran out but the job doesn't pay much, plus it is extremely heavy work and I am having difficulty keeping up with the younger workers and on my last report have been severely criticized for this...

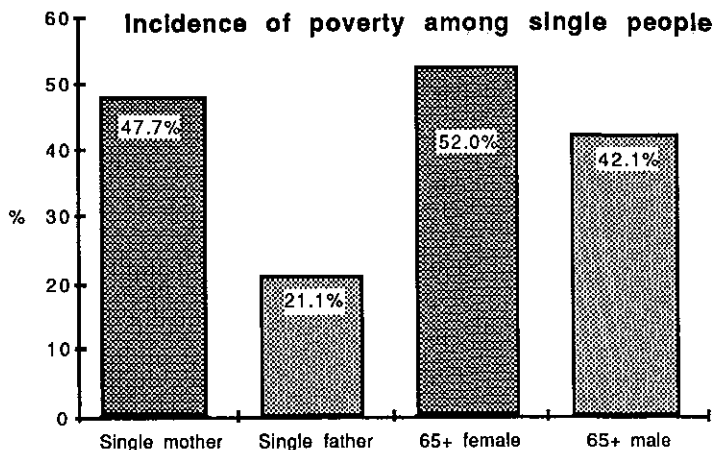
— Alberta woman

Single Mothers

One poor family in three is headed by a single mother. Job prospects for a woman in this situation are likely to be limited. She will find that few jobs traditionally open to women have wages high enough



A single woman earning the minimum wage would have to work more than double the standard 37.5-hour work week to maintain herself and two children at the poverty line. This situation has worsened over the past decade in Alberta. In 1989, even with the 1988 increase in the minimum wage, she would have to work 91 hours—in addition to the time needed to care for her children and run a household. Even if she earned \$6.00/hour, she would still be required to work 68 hours/week.



Women are at particular risk of poverty during two periods of their lives: while they are rearing children, and when they retire. This graph shows that 47.7% of single mothers and 52% of single women over 65 in the Edmonton area were living at or below the poverty line in 1985.

to raise a family.

She will also have to find affordable and reliable child care, both during her job search and throughout her employment.

If she is divorced or separated, she will have experienced an average 30-percent drop in her disposable income (while her husband's income typically rises by 70 per cent). She is likely to find that her ex-husband is among the 67 percent who default on child-support payments.

If she is on social assistance and is considered "employable" by virtue of the age or number of her children, she will be encouraged to seek work. If she earns more than \$115 a month, a portion of her monthly social assistance cheque will be deducted. On top of this, she will also have the burden of finding child care.

Immigrant Women

Women who are new to Canada face many problems, particularly if they do not speak English and come from cultures very different from this one.

Even if their English is good, heavy accents may disqualify them from many jobs. Cultural and racial differences may make immigrant women targets of discrimination if they seek work.

Their experience, degrees and training may not be accepted as qualifications in Canada, forcing them into poorly paid work or the expense of retraining.

Women from families that break down after arriving in Canada may be faced with a new language, a new culture and the difficulties of finding a job—particularly hard if they have never worked before.

Elderly and Older Women

Because women in Canada have a longer lifespan than men, they make up the majority of senior citizens. As women grow older, they can face financial hardship even before they reach 65.

A woman in her fifties who has spent her life as a homemaker and finds she must go out to work will probably find herself seeking work in a competitive, youth-oriented job market. Her experience running a household is not likely to impress prospective employers.

Pension plans for women are far from universal. The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) is based on income, which is smaller for women than for men and penalizes those who are absent from the workforce for extended periods. Women who work in jobs with good private pension plans can also suffer if they take time off to raise children.

Many women work in non-unionized jobs, such as waitressing, where there are no pension plans at all. In 1986, only 35 percent of women in the labour force were contributing to private plans.

Women without a private pension of some kind must rely on Old Age Security benefits (\$337 a month in 1989), supplemented by the Guaranteed Income Supplement of up to \$361 a month. A provincial-government supplement is also available under the Alberta Assured Income Plan (AAIP), but only provides between \$10 to \$95 extra each month.

Widows between 55 and 59 are eligible for the Alberta Widows Pension. However, women who are divorced or never married are not eligible for this benefit and must rely on social assistance.

Pension plans are usually designed to support a couple. Benefits drop substantially when one party dies, but expenses may be only slightly less.

Women's poverty and children

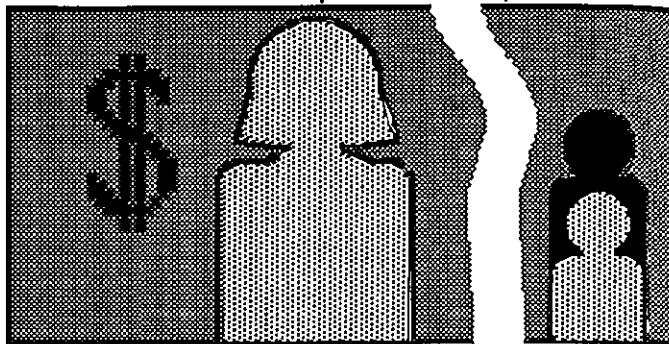
Because so many of today's poor are women and an increasing number of these are single parents, their children are deeply affected.

Pregnancy

Poor women tend to have babies that are less healthy. A woman who cannot afford nutritious meals when she is pregnant is likely to have babies with low birth weights.

A pregnant teenager is even worse off: not only is she more likely to be poor, but very young mothers have a higher chance of delivering a smaller baby too.

Infant mortality is higher among children with lower-than-normal birth weights. Children with low birth weights have higher chances of health problems later in life.



A single mother with two pre-school children who is earning \$21,000 a year—the average salary for females in Alberta—would have to spend between 25 and 30% of her income on child care alone.

Home life

Children are affected by their mothers' poverty throughout their developing years.

Lack of affordable day care may mean children have to change day care or sitters frequently. Many women on limited incomes have to move frequently when rents increase beyond what they can afford. They may wait a long time for subsidized housing.

These disruptions can be very hard on children, who may not adjust well to frequent changes in caregivers, neighbourhoods, schools and friends.

Women absorbed in finding and keeping a decent job, trying to schedule and finance child care and meeting the cooking, shopping and cleaning needs of their families, will have difficulty finding "quality time" to spend with their children. As a result, children whose emotional needs are not met may call attention to this by developing behavioural problems.

"I have only recently realized that I live in poverty, and have for all my life... I have raised three children and three times was forced to give them up to foster homes. At times I stole clothes and food, sold myself sexually . . . These things have left scars on me and my children. All three have attempted suicide. The scars are permanent."

— Alberta woman

In conclusion

Women are at a substantially greater risk of poverty than are men—at almost every stage of their lives.

As well, it is women who most often shoulder the burden of child support in single-parent families. This means their children are also at greater risk of poverty. All too often, this sets up a cycle of poverty linking poor mothers with poor children for generations.

Questions for discussion:

1. You have read here about some of the reasons women are more likely than other people to be poor. What other things might cause women to be poor?
2. Historically and socially, why do you think women are more susceptible to poverty?
3. What are some changes in society that need to occur to help women—as a group—out of poverty?
4. What are the effects on society if women—daughters, wives, mothers and single adult women, working or dependent—are poor?
5. What assumptions do you think better-off people make about those who are poor? Why?

What can you do?

1. Try to understand the context of women's poverty. There are reasons women as a class are more likely to be poor that go beyond individual situations.
2. Recognize that women's poverty affects us all. It is in society's best interests to prevent problems that touch so many people. Poverty is a cycle that will keep poor people poor unless committed people get involved.
3. Get involved: join or start a group that takes action against one or more of the issues affecting women and poverty. Many special interest groups

would be happy for volunteers to help them with their work, or to provide guidance to someone with a new idea. Tell your friends and colleagues what you have learned and get them involved too.

Write to your Member of Parliament (MP), your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), and your local Chamber of Commerce and ask them what they are doing to encourage the above changes.

Recommended reading:

Morrisette, Diane, *Housing for Canadian Women: An Everyday Concern* (background paper), Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1987.

Not Enough: The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty in Canada, Report of the CCSD National Task Force on the Definition and Measurement of Poverty in Canada, Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1984.

Pension Reform with Women in Mind, Ottawa, Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1981.

Poor Now, Poor Later: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development, Ottawa: Canadian Council on Children and Youth, 1987.

Women, Poverty and Public Policy, Victoria: Community Council of Greater Victoria, 1985.

Woman Against Poverty Report, Edmonton, 1990: Alberta Status of Women Action Committee.

Women and Poverty: What Gender Engenders is one of a series of fact sheets on social issues produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. Copies are available in bulk for classes and study groups.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit social action agency which seeks social justice through policy analysis, applied research, community development, and training and consultation.

For more information about the Council, its regular publications **First Reading** and **Alberta Facts**, or other publications, please contact:



Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912 - 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5
Telephone (403) 423-2031 Fax (403) 425-6244

A United Way Member Agency



Doctors don't want to label

Another department with some involvement in children with mental illness is Alberta Health. Sometimes a family doctor has been consulted by parents who are trying to find a cause for their child's acting-out behaviour.

"Medical professionals, who readily discuss and treat mental illness in an adult, seem to have great reluctance in diagnosing, and consequently properly treating a patient under the age of 18," says Wharton. "Doctors don't want to label children, so they talk about 'out-of-control behaviour', but there are no services to deal with that. By denying there is a real problem, the child is not getting the kind of help he or she might get otherwise."

In fact, what you can do to help children with mental illness in Alberta is very limited, according to child psychiatrist Dr. Paul Copus. "The whole service is underfunded, understaffed and there are few treatment facilities."

There is such a shortage of professionals working in the area that there is little opportunity for followup treatment after the initial assessment. Waits extend up to six months.

"We have so many demands on our time dealing with emergencies that there is not much time left over to spend on ongoing treatment with families and children," Copus says.

Out-patient mental health services are provided free through community-based mental health clinics. In reality, these clinics offer only a limited amount of service to children and their families.

Child-welfare status required

Alberta Family and Social Services provides mental health services to the child welfare population, but in order to access it, the family has to have child welfare status. Once again, the number of professionals is too small for adequate casework, so caseworkers react on a crisis basis rather than provide preventive care.

Foster homes are not presently appropriate for most mentally ill children and foster parents and adoptive parents are not always given adequate medical information, Wharton says.

Jurisdictional problems also occur. The funding for programs for mentally ill children, CASE House for example, comes under Family and Social Services, but the mandate for children's mental health comes under Alberta Health.

Note: For more information on the conference "Accountability for Children's Mental Health" call 482-6091.

**"The number of professionals
is too small for adequate
casework ..."**

Families caught in the maze

"The biggest challenge facing families caught in this maze is the isolation created directly by government bureaucracy and indirectly by society's medieval thinking of mental illness," says Wharton. This trip through the maze is happening during a period when the family is under tremendous stress in attempting to come to grips with the fact their child may be seriously ill. It recently took Wharton 23 telephone calls to get help for a family in crisis, and that is fairly typical, she says.

The issue is made even more difficult by the social stigma attached to mental illness in our society.

"If your child is hit by a car, lots of people rally around, but if you tell your neighbours your kid has a drug problem or might commit suicide, they don't want to hear about it," Wharton says.

Parents feel isolated and guilty and eventually get very tired of going around in circles. Children and parents become alienated from each other. In desperation and frustration, many families give up and their children or adolescents become statistics in provincial records or are left to their own resources on the street.

"We have to make politicians sensitive to the need to support children's services, even though there is no short-term reward to them in terms of votes or popularity," says Carroll Ganam, president of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

There is a long-term price to be paid by ignoring the developmental needs of children and families, she points out. Mental health problems don't just go away, they follow children into adulthood. Adults who can't function in our society may require institutionalization, or a range of social services. They may go on to have dysfunctional families — tragically repeating the cycle.

"If we don't deal with children's mental illness when it starts to occur, they will grow into adults who do not have the skills they need to create for themselves and their families a rewarding and meaningful life."

Rental Hotline: What the people say

In the last issue of First Reading, we presented the facts on the growing disparity between the shelter allowance and the actual cost of housing. In this issue, we let the people affected speak for themselves. The Income Security Action Committee (ISAC) set up a rental hotline inviting people to tell us their stories. Following are edited versions of some of the calls received.

Caller #1

My rent's going up 25 per cent effective May 1. I'm a single person on a very limited income due to disabilities. Now my income is being eaten up more and more by rent. Therefore I am unable to buy the things necessary for my disability such as special shoes. I may have to go on social assistance or AISH to make sure these things are covered. Up to this point I've been able to save enough money by myself to handle these situations, but I don't think I can much longer.

Caller #2

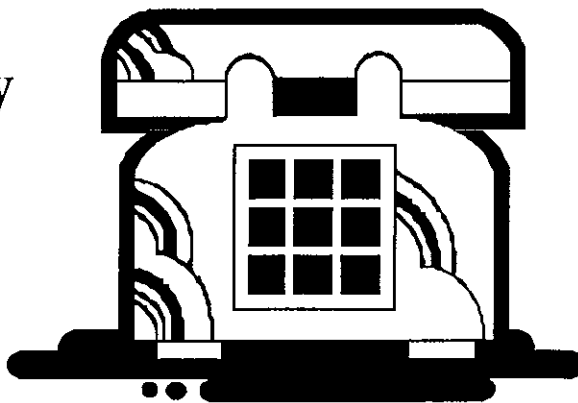
My rent was \$395 a month and I'm getting \$836 a month on a disability pension. My rent went up by \$20 — it's \$415 a month now, but I have to pay my own utilities including telephone which is generally at least \$45 a month, up to \$60 a month during winter. That's more than 50 per cent of my income for rent and utilities.

I have a hard time spending \$10 on a pair of running shoes for my son. We cannot afford things like fresh vegetables and fruit most of the time. I am constantly using the Food Bank. What can you buy for \$10 a day except macaroni and beans and weiners, and the stuff that sometimes they give to you at Safeway? They put old tomatoes or old oranges in a bag because they're starting to go bad and they discount it.

I was born here and I feel like I'm pretty close to living on the street. There's no future for us at all. The government is really letting people down here, because as I understand it, your rent is only supposed to be 20 percent of your income. Unless you're on welfare...

Caller #3

My rent is increasing by 30 per cent in June. It's going up \$30. I can't afford it. I can pay rent and I can't eat.



Caller #4

My rent went up \$60 in April. I'm on a fixed income. I have cancer. I'm crippled with arthritis and my rent takes over half of my income with utilities.

Caller #5

I live in an apartment. The rent is \$410. It's going up August 1 to \$430. I'm on social assistance and my limit is \$410. At \$430, social assistance will not cover me. Now, I would like to stay in my apartment because I'm a single parent. I'm going to school. I have a handicapped child that's living with me and I'm having a hell of a time to find another place like I've got now.

I don't want to move to another apartment, because Edmonton has very shabby apartments for \$410. I've lived at another apartment and was paying \$400 and it went up to \$410 six months later. I was living with cockroaches. There are too many apartments in this Edmonton area that should be condemned and I mean condemned!

Caller #6

I'm intending to move into a one-bedroom apartment. With being on social assistance and going to school, they have told me the rent would be \$215 a month. I have no idea where a person could find an apartment that cheap. A one-bedroom apartment is \$350 or \$365 a month to rent. I have lived here two years and I'm still looking to find an apartment at \$215. I have not found one yet. You will never find one at \$215.

Caller #7

I'm on social assistance and my rent went up April 1 by \$110, from \$440 to \$550. Every month I can pay one bill and leave the rest until they are going to disconnect — then I pay that bill. And that's about the only way I can manage.

What the legislators say

March 14, 1990

Mr. Decore: In 1983 and 1987, shelter rates for people receiving social allowance were drastically cut because the argument at that time was that there was plentiful housing; there was lots of rental accommodation...I wonder, because of the intense pressure that renters in Alberta are now facing: would the minister commit to the fact that this matter needs immediate attention and that a program will be brought forward during this spring session to deal with Alberta renters?

Mr. R. Speaker: One of the programs that's been very successful up to this point in time is the family first home program that has put 18,000 people into their home for the first time. That's alleviated some of the pressure on rental accommodation. The other areas we hope to emphasize are in the area of senior citizens' homes and special needs homes across the province. Last year we enhanced that area by some 1,400 units; we intend to work towards the same objective for the current fiscal year.

Mr. Decore: Inasmuch as shelter allowances were reduced because of what was then believed to have been a glut of rental accommodations, now that's not the fact. Will the Minister of Family and Social Services agree that these shelter rates for people on social assistance, some 150,000 Albertans, need to be changed immediately for their benefit?

Mr. Oldring: I want to assure the hon. member that we're monitoring the situation very closely. We recognize that more and more of our caseloads are reaching the maximum allowable amount under our existing programs. The member knows only too well that this government is committed to introducing some new social reforms in this session, and I would want to assure him that we'll be making the appropriate adjustments to our rental allowances at that time.

April 2, 1990

Ms. Mjolsness: This government has cut shelter allowances by as much as 48 per cent since 1982, even though rents have increased by 10 per cent or more for substandard housing, increasing numbers of

"People have had enough of this minister dancing around..."

children are using the food banks, and this minister is refusing to increase the AISH pension even though people are suffering serious mental distress. The Minister of Family and Social Services promised in this Assembly on March 14 that he would introduce social reforms and adjust rental allowances in this session. Then we've heard that it will be sometime this year. In view of the fact that so many people in this province are suffering, will this minister tell us when exactly he is going to announce his social reform and raise the shelter allowances for people on social assistance?

Mr. Oldring: I would want to begin by saying again that this government has recognized the need for social reform, and it's much broader than just looking at shelter rates, or food allowances. We want to have a very close look at the social programs that we as a government, and we as a province, are offering. Through that process I want to make sure that I have the opportunity of consulting with Albertans, consulting with some of the advocacy groups. I'm working with those groups already... I want to assure that the reforms we announce are the reforms that are appropriate not only to address the immediate situation, but to carry us into the '90s.

Ms. Mjolsness: People have had enough of this minister dancing around, and they want an answer. People are in desperate situations. They're paying more than half of their income for rent. They're even selling their personal belongings to make ends meet. Yet this minister has cut his social allowance budget by \$12 million. Will this minister tell people of this province when they can expect an increase in their shelter allowances?

Mr. Oldring: This minister is not dancing around. This minister and this government are committed to some meaningful social reform...It's important that we take the appropriate steps and that we take the appropriate measures over this next little while, and we intend to do that.

New board members bring expertise

Five new members were elected to the board of the Edmonton Social Planning Council at the April 9 Annual General Meeting.

Heather Konrad brings to the board a wealth of professional and volunteer experience. She is currently with Price Waterhouse in the Commodity Tax Group where she works primarily in the area of Goods and Services Tax. She is a graduate of the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta. While practising law, Heather worked extensively with clients on Social Assistance.

Elizabeth Massiah is a social worker with Alberta Family Social Services and in private practice part-time — working mainly with women and AIDS-related concerns. She received her MSW from Sir Wilfred Laurier University. She is currently supervising the Foster Care Recruitment and Home-study Unit. Elizabeth also served as board member with the ESPC from 1987-1988.

Lilian West is currently working part time for the Family Service Association of Edmonton as a geriatric outreach worker and is a student at Alberta Vocational Centre.

She has also been a social assistance recipient, so will be able to bring that perspective to the board. Lilian immigrated to Canada in 1967 from Yorkshire, England. She is a single parent with three children.

Consultant **Pat Hagey** was elected to the board for a second term. Pat has been associated with

the ESPC since 1984. His undergraduate training was in social psychology and urban planning, with graduate studies at York University in social policy research. Pat has established his own consulting practice.

Nine members are returning to the board: **John Copoc**, of Creative Management Unlimited; **Beverley Decore**, a student in the faculty of business and chair of the 50th anniversary dinner; sociology professor **Gordon Fearn**; social worker **Meg Hagerly**; **Elvira Leibovitz**, an active volunteer for a number of social service agencies; **Jeffrey Pearson**, manager in the Planning Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs; **Carolyn Pettifer**, executive director of the Métis Children's Services Society; current president **Michael Phair**, manager of Settlement Services for the provincial government; and **Iris Sulyma** of Price Waterhouse.

Note: Copies of the ESPC's 1989 annual report are available from the office.



Pat Ryan (far right in photo above), retires as the ESPC representative on the charitable appeals committee. President Michael Phair lights sparklers on 50th anniversary cake.



Stephen Crocker brings an entrepreneurial element to the board. He is the president of Crocker Consulting Inc. which is a private-sector-consulting corporation specializing in small business development. He has had extensive involvement representing Metis and non-status Indians of Alberta. Stephen graduated from the University of Toronto with a B.Ed. and B.A. degree and from the University of Alberta with a diploma in Business Management Development. He has served on the Finance and Administration Committee of the ESPC since 1988.

A registered social worker in Alberta, **Papiya Das** has a Master's degree in social work and a diploma in community development from Haifa University in Israel. She worked with the Children's Aid Society in Toronto as a social worker. She is currently employed by the Grey Nun's Hospital as a psychiatric social worker.

Child poverty project grant approved

Grade one children at Norwood Community Schools placed their lunches in a cupboard which was unlocked at noon. Every day, three lunches went missing. Finally, it was discovered that a six-year-old girl was not bringing lunch, but was walking up to the cupboard with the other children when it was unlocked. She carefully selected three lunches: one for herself, one to take to her baby brother at home and a third for the family to share at supper.

A former principal told this story at the Children and Poverty in the Schools Workshop held last May. It is not the only example of children bearing responsibility for a problem that adults need to address. In Alberta, 70,000 children depend on the social allowance program for their life-sustaining needs. All of these children live in poverty.

There are a number of organizations in the community that are addressing the problem of children living in poverty in very important ways. The Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation, in cooperation with the principals of a number of schools, operates a school snack program in low-income communities.

Norwood Community Services Centre has been running a pre-school program for low-income children and their families for 20 years. Elves Memorial Child Development Centre has been running a Head Start pre-school program for five years for low-income children who are at risk for being developmentally delayed.

The public and separate school systems in Edmonton are beginning to allocate some funds to schools in "high-needs" areas. Recently, the Edmonton Public School Board directed its administration to develop a plan for implementing three Head Start programs.

What is missing is organized inter-agency effort to respond to the ongoing needs of children and their families living in poverty. That gap has now been filled by the Child Poverty Action Group, formed by the Edmonton Social Planning Council in conjunction with the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation last fall.

The United Way of Edmonton and Area has approved \$8,000 for the Child Poverty Inter-Agency Project. The funds will allow the group to undertake community-based research into the nature, magnitude and possible solutions to the problem. The grant will also be used to encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and implementation of programs for children and their families living in poverty.

The Special Projects Panel of the United Way was impressed with the collaborative nature of the project, and felt there was great potential to make an impact upon this issue.

"The Panel strongly endorses the need for ongoing commitments to address child poverty and feels this special project funding will give the needed impetus required for success," said the United Way in its letter of approval.

Métis families subject of study

Métis children, families and communities are finding themselves caught in a web of social dilemmas, concludes a recent study.

A research paper, released in May, attempts to understand and address the impact of a changing society on Métis families. The report is the result of a project which explored structures, relationships and trends within Métis families in Alberta.

The research project was initiated in response to the Lieutenant Governor's Conference—Celebrating Alberta's Families in an attempt to examine some of the issues and concerns which were not addressed at the conference.

"It is one of the first research projects to focus on the Métis family and is an important starting point for identifying and understanding Métis is-

sues," says ESPC planner Jennifer Hyndman.

Hyndman participated on a steering committee composed of Carolyn Pettifer and Lyn Dimotoff of Métis Children's Services Society, Fred Anderson, of the Métis Association of Alberta, and writer Joey Hamelin.

Sixty in-person interviews were conducted to paint a picture of the Métis reality. Issues such as racism, unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, suicide, and inadequate housing were addressed.

The report also includes historical information and recommendations to government.

Copies of the report, "Métis Participation at the Lieutenant Governor's Conference", are available from the Métis Children's Services Society by calling 452-6100.

To:

From: Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 1C5
Phone: (423-2031) Fax: 425-6244

Second Class Mail Registration Number 6390 i.d. 05/90

Council Briefs

Commemorative coffee mugs for sale

Toast the Edmonton Social Planning Council's 50th anniversary with a commemorative coffee mug. The anniversary mugs have been designed for the Council by Noboru Kubo. They are available from the ESPC office at \$10.00 each. The mugs are sand in colour and are decorated with the ESPC logo and the years 1940-1990.

Council to celebrate accomplishments of past 50 years

The 50th Anniversary Dinner committee is hard at work planning the Council's celebration dinner at the Westin Hotel, October 17. Please mark this date on your daytimer if you have not already done so.

Double up our membership

If you are already a member, please sign up your neighbour, a friend or co-worker. If every existing member encouraged a friend to join the Planning Council, we could double our membership. A stronger Social Planning Council is a more forceful voice for social action in Edmonton.

Membership Application

Membership Categories:

Individual	\$25.00
Family	\$35.00
Associate*	\$20.00
Organization	\$45.00
Limited Income	\$ 5.00

* Associate members don't have a vote or receive a discount on publications.

As a member you benefit by receiving:

- First Reading (a bi-monthly newsletter);
- Alberta Facts (a bi-monthly fact sheet);
- notice of all ESPC public activities;
- a vote at the Annual General Meeting;
- a 15% discount on all publications distributed by the Council.

First Name

Last Name

Organization

Address

Postal Code

Home Telephone

Business Telephone

Social issues of interest

Please make cheque payable to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council

#41, 9912 - 106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5

Telephone: 423-2031 Fax: 425-6244