

first reading

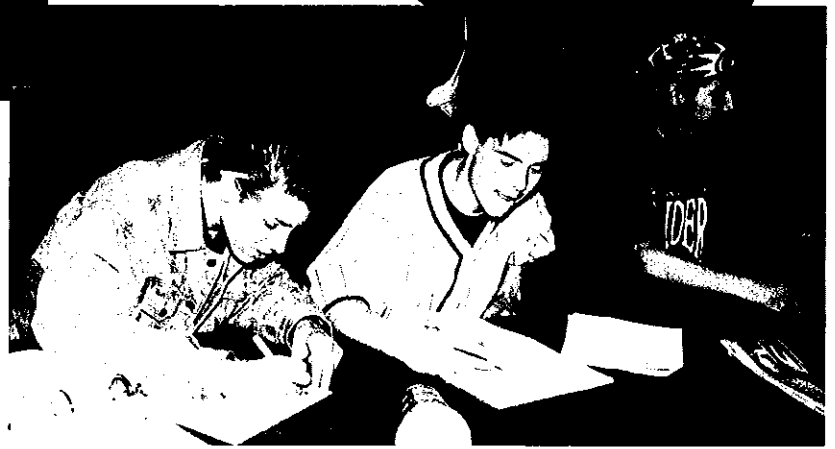


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Edmonton Social Planning Council

May 1992

Glory Days



INSIDE: Teen prostitution; Helping dropouts; Life at EYOC...



First Reading is published six times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council is an independent, not-for-profit organization, whose activities include social research, policy analysis, and advocacy.

We welcome new members, or the opinions and suggestions of our current members. All membership requests or newsletter contributions can be forwarded to:

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Tricks no treat

By Sheila Kushniruk

When you're faced with the option of working at a minimum wage job where you're totally dispensible, or working for \$800 a night with frequent abuse, prostitution often wins out. At least there you get a lot of money for having to put up with crap all day long.

Sex for money, big money, but with it comes frequent beatings, being raped without the protection of a condom, being robbed often at knife point or gun point and death threats. There's money in it for sure, unless you have a pimp or a boyfriend who takes it off your hands.

If you're a young teenager who has left a bad situation at home, the streets don't look so bad. You might even be so whacked out on drugs, the streets look pretty good.

John first started working the hill at 12 years of age, dressing as a drag queen. He was already hooked on drugs and the only way to get money to support the habit was to turn some tricks. He said it was his own choice. Now 13 years later he's tired.

"It was fun at first. Now it's like a chore to pull a trick. I've seen so many men, so many faces, turned so many tricks. I could have had a house and a car by now. I've made a killing, but I blew it all on drugs," said John.

On a typical day he sleeps till about 3 p.m. then goes for coffee with friends before he makes his way to the hill at about 4 p.m. He stays with friends and eats sometimes at home if he can part with the money that would otherwise go for his one to two gram daily

cocaine habit "If I didn't have my drug problem I wouldn't be out there turning tricks. It's hell out there if you don't know the streets, all the fag-bashers and cops."

John has upgraded to a grade 10 education and taken a nine-month hairdressing course, but he said there's no way he could hold down a steady job because he's too messed up. For now he turns tricks and is honest with his clients. If they ask him what he's thinking about when he's serving them, he tells them all he wants to do is get them over with so he can take the money and go buy his drugs and sit back and get high.

"If I didn't have my drug problem I wouldn't be out there turning tricks. It's hell out there if you don't know the streets, all the fag-bashers and cops."

"It pays the bills," said John.

Now if he spots any young boys on the hill he tells them they should leave. "You're too young. I don't see any point in it. Get off while you can," I tell them. Besides," John smirks, "I hate the competition."

The lifestyle has worn thin for Jessie too. He's been at it since he was 12. Now at 19 he's made some steps to breaking away, but he's not quite there yet.

Jessie was in and out of foster homes and ran away for the

first time when he was eight years old, but returned. By 12 he had finally had enough and chose to live on the streets instead. It didn't take long to realize he needed some way to earn money in order to survive and besides stealing the odd car, turning tricks seemed easy enough.

"It was the first time I ever had to do anything like that... People always told me the streets weren't safe, but when I was 12, I was fed up with home so I packed my bags and left," said Jessie. "It wasn't fun. I was scared of being beaten up and molested. I was scared and lonely and I missed going camping and fishing with my family."

Jessie

tried looking for regular jobs, but he said he was always shoved off or told they weren't hiring even though there was a sign in the window. He was turned down to wash dishes, be a waiter, work as a janitor or maintenance helper. "Trying to turn yourself around, it ain't easy."

The street isn't all bad. "There was no rules to attend to. It was like I was free. I was happy about that. But after one year on the street I was tired of staying up all night long and sleeping all day."

By the time he was 17 he realized he was going nowhere but downhill.

Drugs were a factor for Jessie as well as alcohol. Now he's dry, but he still buys hash almost every day and he's currently on the run from the police.

Jessie said the hardest part about being young and working on the hill is you can't be timid. "I wasn't really shy, but for some of these young guys they're shy and it's hard for them to



Edmonton's downtown streets are busy in the evening as prostitutes earn their livelihood. For many, the money is for mere survival, for others it's for addictions or pimps. Photo by Andy Yakimishyn.

walk up to a biker."

Now when Jessie sees a kid on the hill he just gets mad. "It makes me pissed off they're on the street, but there's nothing I can do about it." He said he tries to talk to them, but he remembers what it was like to be told. "I never really cared what they said. I just felt it was my life and I could do what I wanted."

For now the money pays for places to stay and meals here and there. He said the only time social assistance appealed to him was when he was over 18 and he could get \$470 a month.

After rent, that allows him \$110 to spend for the rest of the month. It isn't much, but he said it's better than when he was under 18 and the allowance was only \$25 per month after room and board. "There was nothing I could do with \$25, so I still worked... It's like giving pennies."

In the future Jessie wants to be a construction worker or maybe a child care worker so he can help

other kids like himself.

For Carol and Denise their lives on the street hold more promise than anything else out there. Carol is like a mother hen. She looks out for her fellow prostitutes and tries to talk young ones she knows into leaving the life. She said the only thing that keeps her on the streets is the money and the friends she

has.

Carol was not a teenager when she started. She was 21 and she and her husband needed money to support their cocaine dependency. The couple had found themselves in deep debt and only big money would help. She has become all too familiar with street life and wouldn't wish it on anyone, especially young girls.

Carol looks out for her friends, one of them being 18 year old Denise who has already turned tricks for four years. Denise was

Putting prostitutes in their place



By Jonathan
Murphy

People in McCauley are sick and tired of prostitution. Sick of being propositioned on the way to the grocery store, and tired of picking up used condoms and syringes left by the hookers and their clients. Things were bad enough that long-time community activists were thinking of packing up and moving their families away from the inner city. They decided instead to launch a last ditch campaign to get rid of the streetwalkers and their customers.

They have lots of support. Politicians, the police department, and the media have all lent a hand. And the pressure is certainly having an effect. Hookers are now spread all over the core area, instead of being concentrated in Boyle Street and McCauley.

But like all good causes, the anti-prostitution movement has its critics, and the disquiet is growing. Some claim prostitution is inevitable and McCauley has been home to hookers as long as the neighborhood has existed. Maybe it is the community activists who are trying to change the neighborhood after their own image, not the prostitutes.

Back in 1884, Nellie Webb made a name for herself. She was the City's first prostitute to be convicted for her sins. Naturally enough, her brothel was in the inner city; in those days that was all Edmonton amounted to. As the town grew, prostitutes and boot-

leggers stayed in the old core, which adopted the role it maintains to this day. A home to people, trades, and services unwelcome but necessary to Edmonton's good citizens.

Edmonton has always been a prime location for prostitution. During the pioneer days, lots of men travelled out here alone. Bars and women livened up a brutal, grim existence. After oil was discovered in Leduc in 1947, the boom brought a new flood of single men from rural areas and outside the country. They worked up North for months at a time, and when they came back to town they had a pocketful of money and plenty of pent-up sexuality.

Alice Hanson was director of Boyle Street Co-op and then the Boyle

"They should back off from taking matters into their own hands, it's just going to escalate things."

McCauley Health Centre during the seventies and eighties. She remembers the inner city as a place where people had their own communities and generally left each other alone; "people who lived in McCauley turned a blind eye to other groups. They consciously ignored what was going on."

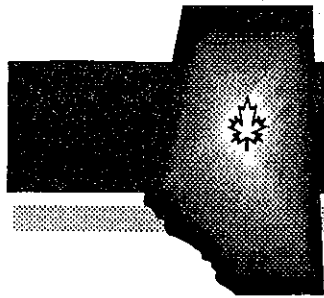
Redevelopment of Boyle Street upset everything. The old houses and walk-ups were razed, replaced by high rises and condominiums. The new residents had put money into their homes. Prostitution was a threat to their investment. The fight was on. Police were enlisted to step up pressure on the prostitutes and their clients. Eventually, the residents forced

the City to install a system of one-way streets, disrupting the flow of cars and making prostitution so difficult that the hookers moved. To McCauley.

Harvey Voogd is a spokesperson for Communities for Controlled Prostitution. His group aims to force prostitutes out of residential areas into a downtown zone of tolerance. Voogd recognizes prostitution has always been part of this neighborhood, but it wasn't intolerable until it became concentrated there. "We started seeing a lot more of them in south McCauley" he says, "and they seemed to be getting younger." Barricades and one-ways have succeeded in disrupting the traffic flow of men looking for prostitutes, although the police have said they want to restore normal traffic. "(Police Chief McNally) is in for a big cat fight if he removes the one-ways," warns Voogd.

Prostitution is now diffused throughout the neighborhoods around downtown, but Voogd believes that will make the problem more visible and likely to be solved. "If I could arrange it, I would have them all work in Glenora, so that something would be done about it."

Still, prostitution hasn't been completely eliminated in McCauley, and activists have launched more controversial methods of harassing the sex trade. Names of convicted johns are printed in the community newspaper, the police have a letter writing campaign to men seen consorting with prostitutes (but not charged or convicted of anything), and Com-



Alberta Facts

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WE ARE NOT RACISTS BUT...

Dispelling Some Of The Myths About Multiculturalism, Immigrants and Racism

Alberta continues to witness cases of discrimination and ill-treatment against non-whites and some religious groups. Jewish synagogues and cemeteries have been defaced; Aryan Nations have burned crosses in southern Alberta. Natives, Sikhs and Moslems face public ridicule about their dress; turbans have been banned by local legions and there was a long and loud provincial furore against turbans in the R.C.M.P. Workers express fear that immigrants take away their jobs and somehow cheapen the labor force. Vietnamese are made responsible for the existence of ethnic gangs. "Paki" taxi drivers are refused by customers. Even Alberta politicians have joined in denouncing multiculturalism legislation.

Racism is rooted in myths.

Maria Perez and Teresa Soto work as secretaries in a large insurance firm. Noticing the other secretaries carry on informal conversations during work hours, they started conversing in Spanish. After a week, they were both called in to the supervisor's office and told they were not to talk in Spanish at work any more.

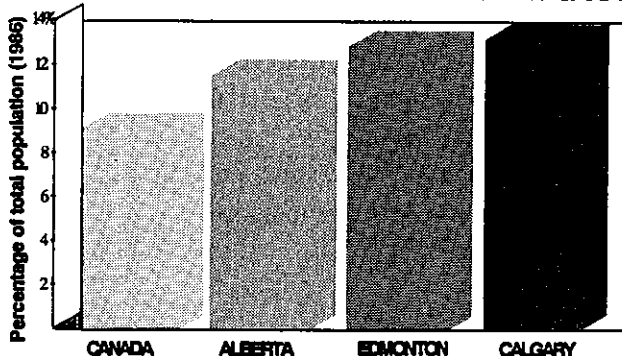
The Common Myths:

MYTH: "Multiculturalism as a policy is divisive. It ghettoizes ethnocultural groups and it is destroying Canadian unity."

REALITY: Canadian unity is threatened by the Anglophone-Francophone debate, the East versus West disparities, the rich/poor inequalities, and urban/rural splits. Multiculturalism, rather than causing divisiveness, is a philosophy of unity because it applies to all Canadians. Many of the ethnocultural groups are national in scope, and participate in activities of national interest.

In 1988, 58,810 immigrants from 170 different countries showed their loyalty to Canada and willingness to be an integral part of Canada, by

VISIBLE MINORITY POPULATIONS OF ALBERTA AND CANADA



becoming citizens of this country. People who belong to these groups hold jobs in the Canadian mainstream, shop in the same stores and supermarkets as everyone else, and attend many of the same public functions. That they attempt to meet their needs by congregating at special events to build support networks, to socialize, to listen to music or attend a dance recital should in no way be interpreted as ghettoization.

"We need to become less afraid of the "R" word. So long as we explode in righteous indignation if someone suggests something we did is racist, we effectively prevent discussion of the issue and silence people of color."

Barbara Findlay - With All Of Who We Are: A Discussion of Oppression and Dominance.

MYTH: "Government is spending too much money to preserve the song and dance of minorities."

REALITY: What is referred to as the "song and dance" of minority groups is in many cases the art of new Albertans. Time spent on these programs are all undertaken by volunteers. Ethnic minority "song and dance" provides alternative entertainment at low prices for many who are too poor to afford the shows offered by the more established groups. The provincial government spends one dollar per capita a year for its multiculturalism programs.

MYTH: "Previous immigrants made it with no help, while today's government is spending millions on immigrant and refugee programs."

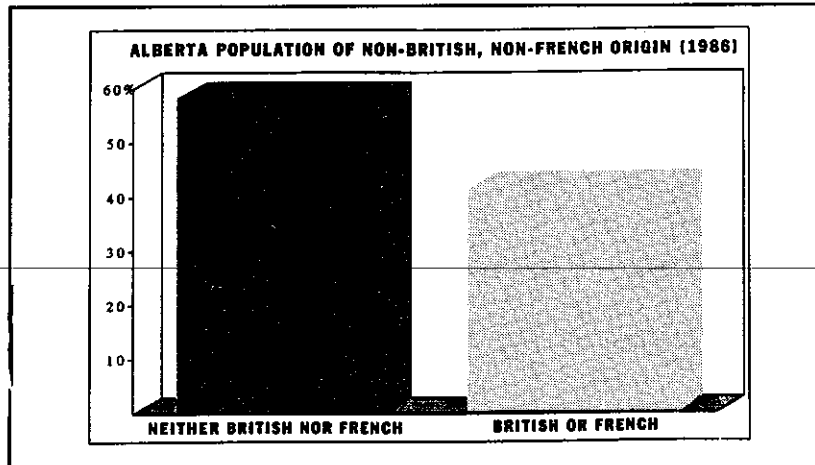
REALITY: During major migrations from Europe in the early years, major incentives were offered to attract immigrants. Assistance included free land, considerable travel subsidy, settlement allowances, start-up provisions, equipment and even wives. Today

most immigrants have to have education and/or money before they are allowed into Canada. Estimated amounts of money brought in by immigrant entrepreneurs in 1987 was \$3.1 billion. The average amount being brought in per immigrant now is \$18,000.00. They contribute to the economy.

MYTH: "Immigrants are a drain on our welfare and education systems."

REALITY: The percentage of immigrants receiving welfare is smaller than the percentage of Alberta-born recipients. Despite their high levels of education, immigrants work at low-paying jobs rather than use the welfare system. Foreign-born persons in Canada bring with them the training received and paid for in other countries. More than one in five of Canada's nuclear engineers are members of a visible minority. Immigrants also bring with them their artisanship working as jewellers silversmiths, sewing machine

operators and knitters (30 per cent are visible minorities). Others are physicists, dentists, physicians and surgeons (11-15 per cent are visible minorities).



MYTH: "We are taking in too many immigrants into Canada."

REALITY: The largest wave of immigration was in the years 1910-1913. Four hundred thousand immigrants came in 1913 alone, while a yearly average of 125,000 came during the 1980s. The numbers set by Immigration Canada for the next five years is 250,000 per year. Immigrants are needed to boost the labor force because of low birth rates in Alberta and also because of the aging of the population. (Alberta's birth rate is 1.7 per cent with replacement rates at 2.1 per cent)

MYTH: "Immigrants take jobs away from Canadians."

REALITIES: Immigrant entrepreneurs created 11,918 jobs in 1987. Immigrants are consumers, they buy houses, appliances, cars etc., thus creating a demand for products which in turn creates jobs. Immigrants also bring their children who attend our schools and create jobs for teachers. Non-English speaking immigrants create a need for English-as-a-second language courses with more spin offs. Many immigrants take jobs Albertans are not willing to take. While many of us sleep peacefully at nights, the toilets and offices of our province are being cleaned by immigrants.

MYTH: "Racism started in the 1970s and 1980s because of an increase in the number of non-white immigrants."

REALITY: Aboriginal people in Alberta were subjected to racism before the influx of non-white immigrants. The Ku Klux Klan was active in Alberta in the 1930s. Racism is not the result of the presence of non-whites but an ideology of racial superiority of whites over non-whites. It exists because one group exercises power and control over another, and because differences are often viewed as "less than" or "inferior".

Harjit Bains Singh recently got a transfer to Edmonton from Sarnia, Ontario, to work as a chemical engineer with a petro-chemical company. In his attempts to locate a good house for his family in the upper-class neighborhood of Riverbend, he was unsuccessful. He was told by a landlord he doesn't rent to East Indians because their smell of curries penetrate into the walls of the house.

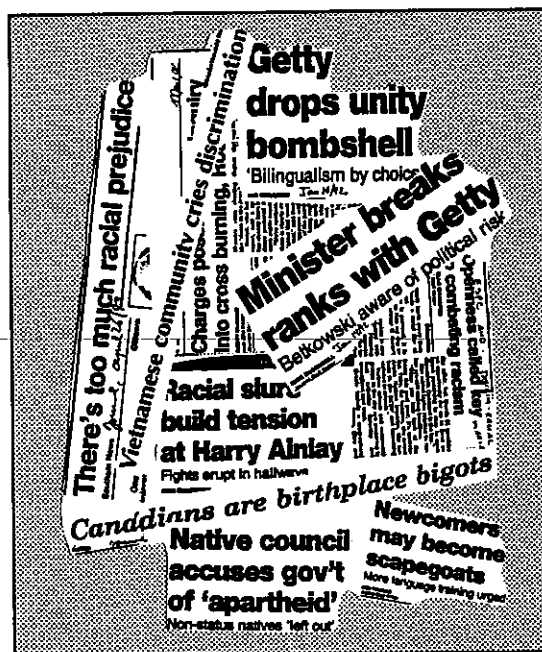
MYTH: "Racism is a problem of non-whites."

REALITY: To say that it is a problem of non-whites is a "Blame the Victim" thesis. This thesis often implies equal opportunity exists for different racial groups.

The fact is 'discriminatory policies and practices are maintained by those who have social, economic, and political power.

MYTH: "Employment equity means reverse discrimination in favor of visible minorities."

REALITY: "Reverse Discrimination" implies non-white workers are being preferred over white workers. The facts show however, it is minority workers who face discrimination in not having equal access to training; in not having their credentials valued; in being denied jobs and promotions despite qualifications and experience. Employment equity helps ensure equitable representation of all groups in the workplace. Many use the "reverse discrimination" label even when one target-member group is hired. They do so because their once exclusive competition is now being opened up to new contenders.



"If I wanted to create a racist society, I would put only a few people in the Ku Klux Klan. I would construct the social world so that all the other white people deplored the Ku Klux Klan...and did nothing about it. Most white people are socialized first of all not to notice racism, and secondly to be unable to do anything about racism when they do see it."

Barbara Findlay - With All of Who We Are: A Discussion of Oppression And Dominance.

"...the inseparable twin of racial injustice is economic injustice...When the underprivileged demand freedom, the privileged first react with bitterness and resistance. Even when the demands are couched in non-violent terms, the response is the same."

Martin Luther King



Racism is often masked:

An economic mask: "We can't afford this program" or "They're taking jobs away from Canadians"

A friendly Mask: "Some of my best friends are...and they agree with me."

A political mask: "Don't Canadians have the right to decide how this country is going to be run? Whatever happened to democracy?"

A traditional mask: "This is the way we do things in Canada and anyone who comes here should accept and do things our way."

A historical Mask: "We have never had problems until now when they started raising a ruckus"

*Robert Gower, National Education Representative,
North Bay Ontario*

Recommended Reading:

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munities for Controlled Prostitution is organizing pickets of prostitutes. They will disrupt the prostitutes' business until they move south onto the Boyle Street drag, an area they feel should be a 'zone of tolerance'.

Lynn was a prostitute who started off working swanky hotels and ended up on the drag in Edmonton before she quit drugs and street life. She doesn't like the harassment. "They should back off from taking matters into their own hands, it's just going to escalate things." Lynn says that like everyone else, prostitutes have a right to make money; for most of them it's the only way they know how, "what kind of job can you get when you're fifteen years old and you've run away from an abusive home?"

She also doesn't agree with the police tactics, especially sending letters to the homes of men seen hanging around on the drag, "That's way out of line, they're just going to anger the johns, mess up their family lives, and increase violence against the prostitutes". If the police want to do something, she says, "They should focus on the johns who pick up juveniles". She doesn't buy the argument that it's hard to prove a sex act took place; "They could just follow them and observe."

Rick Jones has lived in Norwood for one year. He decided

to do something about the prostitutes when he realized his children could be exposed to potentially-infected discarded condoms and needles. Jones formed Action Against Johns, and is one of the more militant activists in the war against prostitution. He feels his children's lives are threatened, and he

cial area, we wouldn't bother them...if they all of a sudden get violent, that will be to their detriment, at that point the general public will finally open up their eyes."

Like Rick Jones, Gary is determined to continue the pickets until a solution is found. His comments and tone of

voice reflect the strength of feeling of many local residents; "We'll be tarred and feathered by the social workers, by everyone except people who live in the neighborhood...if what we're doing doesn't work, there will be desperate people in the community. I might become one of them if my child is molested by a john." Gary says a prostitute has already been violent towards the pickets. Though he declined to provide details, he says charges have been laid. He says "It's dangerous out there but we have no choice.

Jane Runner has personal and professional experience with prostitution. Now she co-ordinates programs for Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights (POWER), a Winnipeg-based group which offers a variety of services to women involved in the sex trade.

Winnipeg has gone through the same frictions between inner city communities and prostitution. But Runner claims that by speaking with and on behalf of prosti-

The company of carefully chosen companions between the ages of 18-25 all trained in the art of personalized service.

WE SELECT OUR STAFF WITH YOU IN MIND! BLONDES, BRUNETTES & REDHEADS OF ALL AGES AVAILABLE! ALL LADIES ARE GUARANTEED TO BE ATTRACTIVE AND FRIENDLY OR WE'LL SEND YOU SOMEONE ELSE! AT NO EXTRA CHARGE. CREDIT CARDS ARE WELCOME!

MAJOR CREDIT CARDS

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BEAUTIFUL BLONDES, BRUNETTES, RED HEADS ARE HERE FOR YOUR CHOICE

YOU'VE NEVER HAD ROOM SERVICE LIKE THIS BEFORE!

COMPANIONS ALSO AVAILABLE FOR FEMALES.

These girls are in a class of their own. Share in a stunning visual and nerve tingling fantasy. 'Kind, Cute & Cuddly'

GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN!

24 HOURS

24 HOURS

Edmonton's Yellow Pages : The City has a double standard on prostitution.

puts their safety ahead of the prostitutes. "Yes, the prostitutes probably do feel safer in a residential area, but if my kid had to die or a prostitute had to die, I would prefer it was the prostitute".

Jones claims there are up to 160 people volunteering on the pickets of street prostitutes, and he's not planning on taking Lynn's advice to stop disrupting the business. He says "We're not going to back off, if the prostitutes would go away and work in a commer-

tutes, her group has been able to help control problems. "The women's views are essential to the issue...we approach the women and encourage them to have respect for the community. We find the women don't respond to being harassed."

Runner emphasizes that "Prostitutes have rights like everyone else". A survey of Winnipeg prostitutes showed that 75-80% came from very dysfunctional, abusive homes, "A good majority are victims. They're getting criminalized, and that isn't helping them."

Alice Hanson echoes the concerns of former prostitutes. She agrees that "All the half dozen or so women I've known well who prostitute were victims of incest...they left home to get away from it and they needed money". She also worries that society is trying to solve the prostitution problem without talking to either the hookers or their clients. "The prostitutes have a right to some control over their lives... and where do the johns, the pimps fit in? We ought to try to get people together. But it would have to be a very carefully thought out strategy."

Everyone seems to support Voogd's plan for a 'zone of tolerance' or red light district. But they all emphasize it would have to be safe, a major factor in women choosing to work out of residential rather than industrial areas. The current location being suggested by Communities for Controlled Prostitution is on and around the 96th Street drag, by far the most dangerous neighborhood in the city.

Prostitution would be a complicated enough issue without AIDS. The potential for AIDS transmission through prostitution

has been used by police as another reason to 'clamp down' on hookers. Karen Grimsrud, Deputy Medical Officer of Health, notes that prostitution has not yet been identified as a cause for the spread of HIV infection into the general population in Edmonton, although she emphasizes that in other countries sex with prostitutes is a major factor in spreading the virus.

Surveys carried out in Edmonton suggest most of the more experienced prostitutes in the business district practice safe sex as a matter of course, while Grimsrud says "Many of the prostitutes in the downtown core, who are younger and often native, do not use condoms and could theoretically present a bridge for infection to the rest of the population."

There is also a potential danger

"Prostitutes have rights like everyone else...A good majority are victims. They're getting criminalized, and that isn't helping them."

from children picking up needles discarded by drug-using prostitutes (or any other drug user, of course), though "Currently we have found very few HIV-infected drug users through our needle exchange program...the risk of contracting Hepatitis B through a discarded needle is much greater," says Grimsrud. More intravenous drug users are infected with the disease and it's more infectious than HIV. "But HIV is a death sentence", says Grimsrud. "I certainly wouldn't want my children exposed to abandoned needles".

What no-one knows is whether further harassment and criminalization of prostitution will make sex trade practices safer or rather drive the younger, more carefree, and more at-risk population underground.

Society has a depressing history of dealing with prostitution. While a very broad cross-section of men purchases sex from prostitutes, the trade operates at the margins of legality. And the municipality's treatment of prostitutes seems to vary according to their status. While the city police arrest and prosecute Indian women down on the drag, the city telephone department accepts sixteen pages of lurid advertisements for prostitution in its annual Yellow Pages directory.

Programs like Crossroads and Safehouse help juvenile prostitutes get off the streets, but there isn't much available for adult prostitutes. The Boyle Street Co-op and the Elizabeth Fry Society are

thinking of expanding their services to prostitutes, though they're both in a planning

stage. Co-op director, Hope Hunter, says "Any intervention needs to ...increase the women's control over their lives. We need to make sure we don't further victimize the women."

Prostitution is unsightly and potentially dangerous to the rest of the community. But that doesn't justify people taking the law into their own hands. There are many social problems in McCauley and the rest of the inner city which are just as unsightly and more dangerous, like poor housing and chronic poverty. And when all is said and done, it's the prostitutes, not the community activists, who are at the greatest risk of ridicule, disease, criminalization and violence.

Homeless teens need more support



**By Allison
MacDonald**

Any time of year, day or night, if you take a drive through the inner city, chances are you will see a number of young people standing on corners, in doorways or in the parks. Television ads and news specials draw our attention to runaway youth and ask us to support efforts to help them go home. These visions don't sit well with our image of Canadian society that includes an above average standard of living, the Charter of Rights, and a social "safety net" to catch the people who "fall through the cracks" of the social structure.

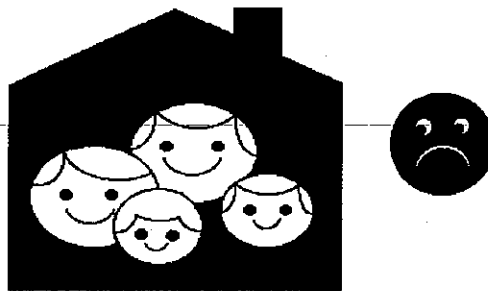
People in the community ask many questions about these youth: Why are they leaving home? What draws them to the inner city? Who is responsible for their welfare? Is it too easy for youth to leave home and become dependent on social assistance?

Discussions with the youth provide some answers we may prefer not to hear.

Inner city youth are generally 15 to 18 years old. The numbers of males and females are roughly equal, although the transient nature of the population makes it impossible to get an accurate count. On any given day there are about 100 to 200 homeless youth in Edmonton. They commonly have a variety of emotional

and behavioural problems; they lack the skills and education necessary to compete successfully in the labor market and many are frightened and lonely.

These young people are not walking out on happy families. Some give graphic descriptions of physical or sexual abuse; many left blended families because they couldn't get along with step-parents; some have been kicked out of the house by their parents and others have alcoholic parents who aren't able to provide a stable environment. A surprising number of these youth have spent many years in the child welfare system. Youth on their own are not generally considered to be "in need of protection" under the Child Welfare Act, so they are denied both



the security normally provided to children and the legal rights granted to adults in our society.

Youth describe their difficulties trying to cope from day to day. They are generally limited to low wage jobs such as telephone soliciting or working in fast-food restaurants. If they are in school full-time, they may qualify for social assistance, but the benefits received are not adequate for basic necessities, let alone clothing or recreation. They don't have the budgeting skills to stretch their allowance to the end of the month or the shopping and meal planning skills to provide a healthy diet. To survive some turn to crime. Others be-

come targets for exploitation.

In order to receive social assistance, a 16 or 17 year old must live in an approved room and board at a rate of \$215 per month. The need for accommodations far outweighs the supply as few people are willing to have a youth in their home.

Their home life affects their schooling and many of these teens end up leaving school or getting suspended. If these youth aren't academically inclined in the first place there's nowhere to go after they've left school. Those who decide they want to continue their education frequently run into brick walls. Schools are reluctant to admit students who have been a problem in the past. Teens who have spent a number of months on the streets have trouble fitting back into mainstream schools. For many youth it appears there are no real options.

Inner city agencies have developed programs and services to assist teens. Some of their efforts are having an impact. More support is needed, not just in the inner city. Youth may end up on the core's streets, but they come from all over and they're there for a reason. Maybe by listening to them and making some constructive changes, other young people will be allowed to make choices.

Alison MacDonald is a social planner with the Edmonton Social Planning Council and she is involved in a review of services to 16 and 17 year olds.

A cruel history for unwed moms



By June Sheppard

It's not all that long ago since the young girl, unwed and pregnant was overcome with panic and the fear that there was no person, no place to turn to for non-judgmental help.

She was convinced that even the constancy of her parents who had always been there to be counted on, to discuss school problems and her hopes and dreams for the future - (how trivial all that seemed to her now!) would turn her away in anger and shame.

A baby! There had been times when she'd fantasized that perhaps in another ten years or so and settled down with one wonderful fellow, she would want a baby and her parents would welcome it with delight.

But now she had to face reality and felt a loneliness never known before - a panic surging through her, together with the belief that there was absolutely no one she could reach out to.

Several decades ago, I think it's fair to say, the boy involved usually went unidentified. Or, if

his involvement was known, the term "unwed father" did not carry the stigma it did for his partner.

History plays a part in that attitude. After all, for countless years a reputation for virility followed the male who left a trail of offspring behind him! Time has not discarded that double standard, by any means.

That is not to suggest there are no young men, knowing the circumstances and their role in it who do not disappear from the scene leaving the girl to face it alone. But it is still the reality that it's the unwed mother on whom the greatest load falls.

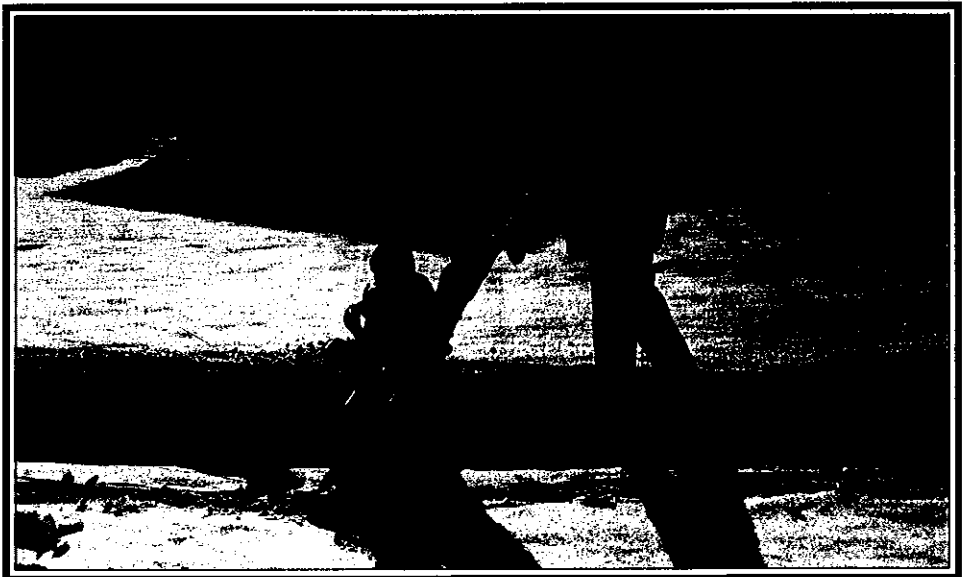
Girls in this situation at one time were hastily put "out of sight" - sent miles away at parental demand to keep the shame of that steadily protruding stomach a secret. I knew three or four such situations in the Edmonton high school I attended.

There were a lot of "forced marriages" as well. Sometimes they even worked but more often it was a loveless arrangement which came to an end after a "decent" period of time long enough to produce the child and then followed by divorce.

Something which began as a disaster for one young girl - uninformed and vulnerable - grew into a family trauma because of the attitudes and values of the time.

Sometimes the attempts to deny the situation were near frantic. I recall how confusing people of one neighborhood with which I was familiar found it when it became known that the older woman always called "mother" by a young boy named Bill was, in fact, his grandmother.

The woman he addressed as



Raising a child alone poses many challenges. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

his "sister" who was permitted to come around and see him on rare occasions was in reality his mother. She too had been an "unwed mother" so life in the family had to be rearranged!

Such a tale of intrigue and denial and false relationships so a young unwed mother's shame could be squelched!

Many a young unwed mother kept her pregnancy a secret and set out, often with few financial resources, to seek a future for herself and her baby alone. What she found was often poverty, homelessness and the agony of knowing her baby was not receiving proper care or love while she looked for work. Some were drawn into the street with its dangers and violence.

Today, agencies, associations and concerned groups in many places have programs that first of all attempt to encourage the unwed mother to know and value herself so she will understand how vital it is that she take control of her own body, her own feelings and her own life.

Not all are being reached, of course. Some seek employment with virtually no education because their schooling was interrupted too soon by motherhood; some, in frustration and under stress have vented it on their child; some keep their whereabouts a secret to their families while many parents, through

Unwed moms no longer ridiculed

By Sheila Kushniruk

We are a kinder, gentler society today when it comes to accepting unwed moms. Women are no longer shipped off to stay with an aunt until the whole horrible thing is over, the child safely steered through an adoption. Today unwed women can walk in public with a bulging stomach and feel no shame.

Margaret Gallo wishes things would have been different for her 40 years ago. When she found out she was pregnant she was rejected by her boyfriend's family and sent to stay with family-friends hundreds of miles away, a disgrace to her father and a disappointment to her mother. She was forced to wait out a pregnancy away from family and friends in a strange community knowing she would have to give up the baby she was carrying. She re-

the agony of the experience have come to a better understanding and acceptance. They are ready now to help. That is why it is important that any helping service use every effort to get the two together.

Fathers are just as vital to a reconciliation with their daughters as are the mothers although it is the latter who still come out in greater numbers.

Help is available which did not exist in earlier times but in many parts of the country it is still not enough.

members hoping someone would come along and get her out of it so she wouldn't have to give her child over to complete strangers, but it never happened. "You do as you're told. You're trapped with no help and no promise. There was no welfare in those days," said Margaret.

She felt lonesome, frustrated and at times overwhelmed by her changing body. Margaret was 23 at the time, but with a job as a telephone operator and no support from her boyfriend her choices were limited. If she had chosen to keep the baby she could have gone to Regina to the Salvation Army, but it would have meant a lot of hardships. Her brother told her she deserved better than that and he made all the arrangements including financial assistance from the boyfriend's family to keep it hush, hush.

Margaret corresponded with an aunt of hers during the pregnancy in hopes the aunt would take the child, but her father's influence spread too wide and the suggestion was unheard of. Margaret delivered a healthy baby girl and only saw her for a few minutes before she was taken for good. The only thing she knew was the baby had red hair. She was left on the maternity ward for a few days after and the crying babies broke her heart.

She watched the birth announcements in the newspaper and knew instinctively when her daughter's appeared. She looked

up the people's address from the announcement and went to look at the house where they lived - it was a big white house that was to haunt her in her dreams for years to come.

Back at home she received no moral support for her overwhelming sense of loss. She was expected to forget it and get on with her life. She was told she gave some mother and father a great gift, but the response wasn't what she was hoping for. "It's just an excuse for something that's inexcusable in my eyes," said Margaret. She couldn't listen to Brahms's lullaby without crying and every birthday made her miserable. After about 10 years the problem started to eat away at her because she was never allowed to deal with it. Everytime she brought it up she was told to get on with her life, no one wanted to listen.

"I wasn't the only one this happened to. Every once in awhile someone would disappear from classes or work. They probably would be having a child, but you were told they were visiting an aunt," said Margaret. She remembers cases where the child would go to another member of the family to be raised, sometimes the grandma was young enough they would pretend to be the mom. "Very few single women tried to raise the child on their own. It was practically unheard of."

Margaret's daughter eventually found her but with no help from the system. She happened to stumble across a hospital bracelet with Margaret's family name. Her adoptive mother had kept it when she should not have according to the system rules.

Now Margaret helps with

Parent Finders Association of Edmonton and she's an advocate for having the system files opened to children and parents hoping to find their natural ties.

Val has been an unwed mother twice, the first time giving the child up to the father's mom to raise after trying to do it alone for the first six months. Now six years later she is raising her second son on her own and is managing. It's a different experience from the first time when she was 16 years old. "It's not easy now, but it's a lot easier. When you're 16 you mix having children with your teenage life and you can't do that. It's either one or the other," said Val.

She realized she didn't have the financial support, the schooling or the loving and caring environment for her first son. She had been living in group homes and was sent to Edmonton to a home for unwed mothers at 15 years of age. She stayed there until the baby was three months old, but that's where the support ended. Val didn't receive any counselling or support to help her deal with being a young mother. When she did reach out for help she ended up feeling like other people were too busy with

their own lives to worry about hers. With no support from her own family she turned to the father's family where they were happy to help. Val gets to see the child whenever she can and there are secrets about who the child's mother really is.

This time Val has been able to live in an apartment building for single parents. She rents a fully furnished two-bedroom apartment and she can stay there for up to one and a half years. The time allows her to get on her feet financially



Val and her son enjoy time together at their apartment which is especially for single mothers. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

before she has to be totally independent. There are other women there who are in similar circumstances and they offer support to each other. "There should be more places like this," said Val.

With other women nearby it allows for a break when the child is wearing on the parent's nerves.

Teens find comfort if they choose to break from the streets

By Sheila Kushniruk

Friendships are crucial for teens living on the street. Friends provide shelter and food when there is no one or no where else to go to. There is a limit to friendship though.

Jay lived at home on and off after quitting grade seven. When he wasn't at home he would stay with friends, but he said he felt like a sponge after his first few nights. With no money he had to do some things he never thought he would have to do. Jay became a pimp for a girl he met one night at a hotel. He started with one girl and at times had up to four, collecting about \$700 from each girl nightly. All the money went towards cocaine.

Besides pimping Jay carried blow (cocaine) around and sold it, using large quantities for himself and his girls. He worked the girls for the summer before he ran into trouble with one of his girl's ex-pimps. The guy pulled a gun on Jay one night in an alley and as Jay ran, the ex-pimp fired at him, missing. "That stuff straightened me up," said Jay.

Jay has yet to have his 18th birthday.

Tonya left home at 17 and tried staying at friends, but her welcome wore out after about one month. She put in many calls to get on social assistance but the worker she was referred to never returned her messages or answered her calls. Once she was able to talk with a worker she was told she must share accommodation and live on \$470 a month after she turned 18. She was

told to get a permanent place to live before she would be eligible for any assistance. She will not be given a damage deposit and there will be \$230 allotted to her to get enough furniture and supplies to set up.

Going home was not an option to Tonya. By her own admittance she had a drinking problem. She was kicked out after her care-free lifestyle got to be too much for her mother. "She finally put her foot down. I guess she was fed up with me," said Tonya. "I stayed at home as long as I could because I wasn't stupid. I had a place to stay, food, no real rules."

Two of the places teens can now go are Safehouse and Tess' Place which are both single family dwellings which give the teens a sense of home and family.

Tess' Place was set up by Boyle Street Co-op and Sister Tess Slavik. Up to four teens can stay with Tess. She has seen 53 young people come and go through the house in the four years it's been there and many still keep in contact by phone calls or letters. She jokes that she must have 16 or

17 grandchildren by now.

The only rules at Tess' are there is no drugs, or alcohol allowed into the house, unless Tess is serving a drink to them on a



Tess' Place is a place where teens, like Tonya, can go to get off the streets. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

special occasion; the teens can't have sex in the house and they must work towards getting into school, a job or a program of some kind within one month of their arrival. Tess said the latter rule is to stop them from retiring at 17. The longest anyone has stayed there has been one year.

Each person has a worker at the Boyle Street Co-op who comes down on the kids if they get out of hand, so Tess does not get labelled as an authority figure. The relaxed respectful atmosphere works, in fact the house is a bit of a model for other teen living accommodations.

"It's one thing to have a roof over their heads. It's another thing

Young offenders look for home

By Sheila Kushniruk

Everyone needs a place they can call home. For teens who have committed crimes jail is perhaps the closest thing they've had to home. Edmonton Young Offender's Centre (EYOC) is not designed to be a home - it's a correctional institution. For kids who hope to get emotional support and get some control in their own lives they are

disappointed. A recent visit with native teens at EYOC illustrates how these teens seek to belong, be recognized and be accepted. They want to learn about their culture and for some it will be their first exposure to it.

James felt the time at EYOC had been positive. Growing up in white culture, a white school system, he knew nothing of native culture. "It's pretty sad that I had to go to jail to learn my culture," said James.

When the judge first sentenced the youth to three months custody it was terrifying. Thoughts of being beaten or sexually molested, like in the movies, dominated the youth's thoughts. "It wasn't as bad as I thought...I made friends there. I didn't give staff any troubles."

Some natives reject the cultural classes and celebrations at EYOC because they aren't ready

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to have a home," said Tess. "It doesn't look like an institution and it's not a group home.

To be there the young people have to want to try to get off drugs, alcohol and the streets.

Safehouse has room for up to six teens who have made the decision to come off the streets. It's usually full except for one or two days a month when a space may become available. Teens between 13 and 19 go there with drug problems and involvement in prostitution or trafficking, or both. "These kids are street involved and have limited choices of what they can do to make a living," said Bev Oldham, an outreach worker.

Teens are at Safehouse of their own free will, but they must have a commitment to change. The door is open for them to go on the streets again, but they are welcome back if they should ever want to try again. The stay can be up to two months and the teens are expected to work on goals and objectives. Staff are there around the clock for support and counselling operated by Catholic Social Services.

Teens come to Safehouse on referrals from the police, social services, word of mouth, Crossroads and even some self referrals. Often a client will come to Safehouse and stay for a couple of days then go out onto the streets again, but Bev said the fact they took themselves out of a risky situation for a few days is better than nothing. If the young person has a job, they are expected to pay a portion of their board, otherwise the teens receive funding for room and board through supports for independence in Family and Social Service. Once they've paid for room and board and a bus pass they have \$21 left over.

Bev said the first couple of weeks is usually spent addressing the young person's medical needs. Their addictions are typically cocaine, ritalin and talwin, and detox is necessary.

Bev said some need counselling and they can make referrals to get them help. Others need moral support in applying for jobs. "A lot don't have social skills to get jobs. They can't take criticism and they don't have self esteem." Bev said one of the biggest problems is convincing a young person to take a chance and approach an

employer. They go there and fill out a job application, then they often don't even get a phone call from the employer. It does nothing for their sense of self worth.

"We get them into a supportive, safe environment where they can start making changes," said Bev.

Between 80 and 90 per cent of the teens come from dysfunctional backgrounds and have run away, said Bev. They feel in control on the street and sometimes their street life becomes a self-inflicted punishment where they feel they don't deserve better. They need to develop trust because for many trusting someone always resulted in them getting burned.

All ties must be broken from their former street lives in order to remain at Safehouse and they must abstain from alcohol, and drugs which have not been prescribed by a doctor. Their treatments are individual depending on their needs and every effort is made to break the cycle of abuse the young people have suffered all their lives.

to learn. The native studies class should be for natives only, so they feel like they can open up in the classroom without white teens onlooking, said James. Sweetgrass ceremonies take place every morning and while some kids view it as a chance to talk to friends, others are there to participate. James wishes the teens would give it a chance and learn from the ceremonies and the elders, and perhaps even staff could take more of an interest. "It straightened me up a lot. I would still have been drinking and doing drugs and been out of school. I wouldn't have known anything about native culture."

He said it would really help if a native elder could be on staff as well as more native staff so the teens don't have to compete with 50 other inmates to be able to talk with a native worker. Forty-one per cent of prisoners at EYOC are native and their average stay in custody is 79 days compared with 52 days for non-native teens. There are 115 non-native staff and eight native workers.

James said positive staff help kids feel wanted and as if they have something to give to somebody. Not all staff can do that.

Some of the teens have been in and out of EYOC a few times over the years and their next crime will probably land them in the adult prison system. Evan left school at 13 and for the past four years has worked a total of two months. The first foster home he was in was at age seven and every foster home thereafter was white. When placed with a native family at age 11 it was

a culture shock. He identified more with white culture than Indian culture.

Evan looks at EYOC as a daycare. The teen would like to see more native support groups, more native staff and staff who care about their job. "Some act like they care, but for others it's like 'Let's get the day over with.' Staff don't fight for us because they don't really care."

"You get sick of people telling you what to do," said Mike. He felt staff play favorites and they spend way too much time on the phone. "This is just a job for them". Other inmates can be a problem too where there's racism



Teens living hard lives sometimes look for answers at the end of the line. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

or just plain dislike of someone. Often a youth is stuck rooming with a person they don't get along with. The only way that changes is if a confrontation occurs and staff feel separation is needed.

David expressed anger at not having a say in any decision made in his regard. As a ward of the system since eight years of age, he said there was a longing to be placed in a native foster home. The system doesn't consult with them because it's too much paper work, he said. "That's all that happens. You're told where to go." David said he has

yet to see a child welfare worker come out to EYOC to see their clients.

They all agreed there is a need for more native staff, more native support groups as well as support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Outside EYOC the kids said there should be native group homes, native foster homes, native programs in public schools and more places for teens to go such as the Adrian Hope Youth Centre. They also felt kids need to be taught how to spend money better and they should all be consulted on any decisions that are made for them within the system. Native kids should be placed in native homes when they are up for adoption and overall they want more chances to learn their culture and their language. Because there's only one female unit at EYOC they don't get the privileges the males do, such as the right to use the gym after they've been on good behavior for long enough; they feel that should change. Teens hated having their rooms searched. Staff frequently pull all belongings out to search for drugs and because their rooms are their homes, teens resent the invasion.

Follow-up was identified as a problem. Once released from the EYOC teens are steered to half-way houses, group homes or back to their communities. They may be on a caseload for child welfare or social assistance, but once released they are to have no contact with any staff of EYOC with whom they may have built a trusting relationship. Generally their treatment programs end with their release.

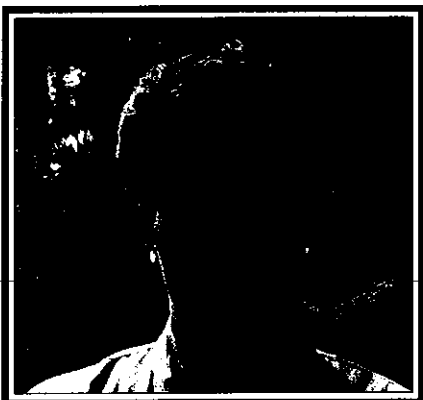
TO:

From: Edmonton Social Planning Council
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Edmonton, Alberta
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Phone: (403) 423-2031 (Fax 425-6244)

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Who's new at E.S.P.C.:

Alison Roppel joined the Council in February as Executive Assistant. Alison worked three years as campaign administrator at the Edmonton Concert Hall Foundation and has a B.A. (English) from the University of Alberta.



Alison Roppel

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Val has received help with budgeting and financial management and stress management to help her cope and she's confident when she leaves the apartment to live on her own she and her son will be able to make it.

"People are a lot more open, more accepting. There's a lot more support. It's almost like single parenting is normal. It's a surprise when someone has a boyfriend or husband helping out," said Val.

Council Briefs

Volunteers are needed for an upcoming fundraiser for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. We require 50 people to help with the summer Casino. If you could volunteer for either August 12 or August 13, please call Alison Roppel at 423-2031.

Council's Annual General Meeting March 24 brought five new board members on: Noreen Marshall - regional director of Canadian Human Rights Commission in Alberta and Northwest Territories; David Schneiderman - executive director of the Centre for Constitutional Studies at the University of Alberta; Bernd Walter - children's advocate for the Alberta Family and Social Services; Rick Guthrie - intake co-ordinator at the Bissell Centre; and Dr. Hubert Kammerer - clinical director of the Boyle McCauley Health Centre. Congratulations and welcome.

Continuing their terms on the board are: Stephen Crocker, Papiya Das, Heather Konrad, Jackie Fiala, Nancy Kotani, Alyson Lavers, Michael Phair, June Sheppard, Donald (Rocky) Sinclair and Katherine Weaver.

Retiring board members are Liz Massiah, Pat Hagey, Iris Sulyma and Violet Hill and the Council thanks them for their contributions.

Georges Ares, executive director of Association Canadienne-Francaise de L'Alberta was guest speaker at the March 24 Annual General Meeting. He addressed the future for bilingualism in Alberta and unity in Canada.



Carlos Pilquil of the E.S.P.C. works the booth at the Intercultural Education and Race Relations Resource Fair March 27, co-sponsored by the Council.