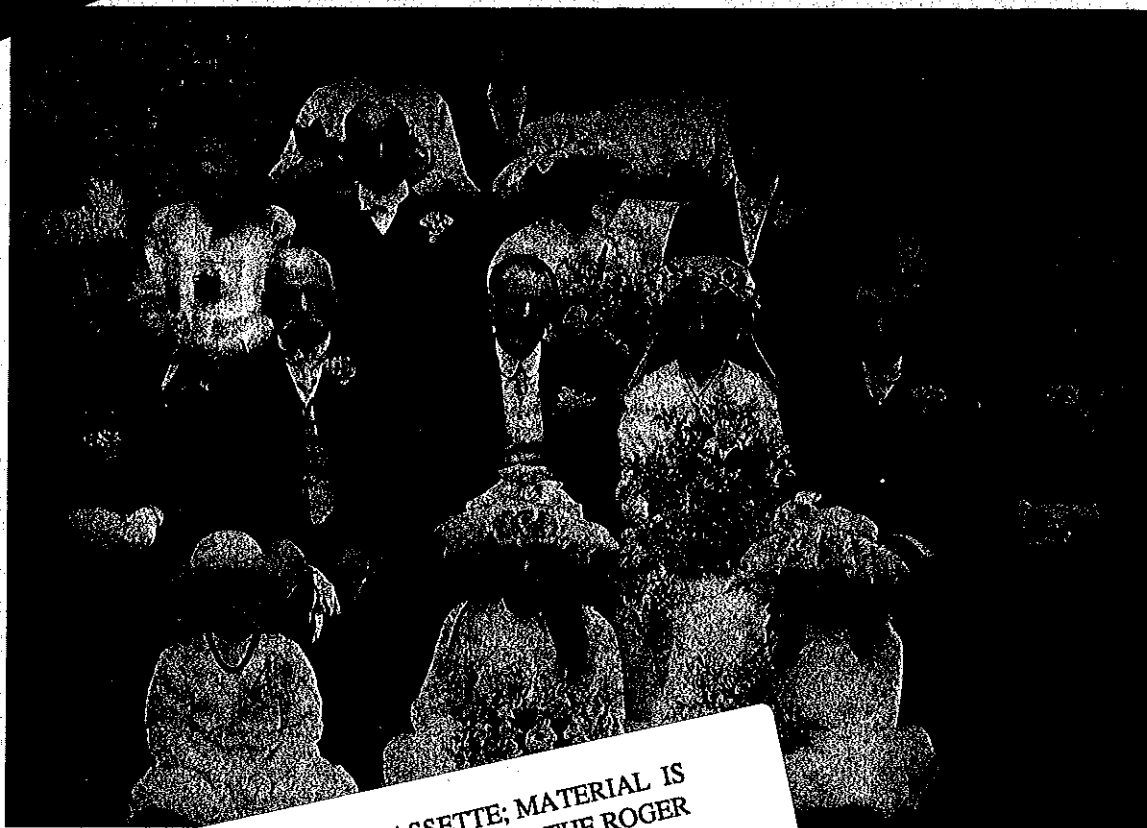


*Working with Families*

# An Issue of Family



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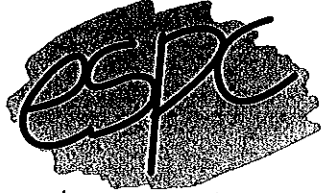
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## SOCIAL PLANNING

c o u n c i l

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 magazine contributions can be forwarded to:

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

We reserve the right to edit all contributions.

**Managing Editor:** Jonathan Murphy

**Editor:** Sheila Kushniruk

**Graphic Designer:** Lesli Thompson

**Contributors:** Corine Ferguson, Colleen Jensen, Carl Sorensen, Marion Willis, Alison MacDonald, June Sheppard, Jonathan Murphy and Sheila Kushniruk

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## Our Mission

" The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that all people should have the social rights and freedoms to live and work in an environment that enhances individual, family, and community growth without restricting the same rights and freedoms for others. The Council seeks to create, to advocate, and to support changes in policies, attitudes, and actions in order to enhance these social rights and freedoms. "

## Our Goals

- To undertake research into the nature and magnitude of social issues in the community.
- To increase public awareness and understanding of current social issues and to exercise an independent voice in the community.
- To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and in the implementation of programs.

# Bitterness and revenge robbing divorced parents of family

By Sheila Kuschtruk

Your kid can be an effective tool when you're fighting with your ex-husband or ex-wife. You can use the youngster as a means of getting revenge—say by telling the kid how awful their other parent is, or by refusing to hand over the kid for visits, or by just trying to cut the other parent out of any meaningful interaction by moving away, etc. It's something that has been going on for years, but it's recently been given a name—parental alienation syndrome.

Just mention the subject to a parent like Heather and you'll hear plenty about it—most of which seems hard to believe. Heather applied for a legal separation from her husband in 1986 after struggling in the abusive relationship for years. Her four-year old daughter Megan was with the husband at the time in another province visiting relatives and they never returned to Alberta. Her husband managed to stall legal proceedings so that he had the child for almost six months before they got into court. During that time the husband wouldn't allow Heather to see or speak to the child. He was granted interim custody partly because six months had already gone by and to change things would have resulted in a disruption in the child's life.

On paper, the order awarded Heather generous and liberal access to Megan. In reality there were occasions when Heather would drive 15 hours to pick up Megan only to find he wouldn't let her go unless Heather brought the police with her. The husband and his extended family would tell Heather the only way she could see Megan was to go to court. Once in court the family would swear they were willing to allow Heather to have her access periods. It made Heather out to be difficult, requesting court intervention when none was required.

When they did finally end up in a court custody battle the case lasted four days and included a court-ordered home study conducted by a specialist. The study said

both parents could parent effectively, but since the husband and his family were not allowing Heather to be involved it recommended Heather be granted custody. The judge disregarded the recommendations. The judge felt Megan was healthy and in a good environment as she was living with the husband and grandparents. Heather was to have Megan for every long weekend, half of Christmas and Easter holidays and six weeks in the summer.

The first summer access period required police intervention to get Megan on the plane and that only came after Heather paid \$1,800 for a court application to get the awarded time with her daughter. For the next five years access was made difficult and many times required police intervention.

A few years ago the husband moved to Alberta, but left Megan with the grandparents for nine months. When Heather started custody proceedings Megan was brought to Alberta to live with the father. It meant that Heather didn't have any grounds to say her ex-husband was disobeying the court order.

Access was never increased even though the child was now only an hour away. In fact, in the last two and a half years Heather has only had Megan for a total of nine days. "All of the times I went to pick her up other plans had been made for her, or she was not there. When I attempted to see her at school I was

*Continued on page 4*



Children are often caught in the middle of bitter divorce battles.

photo by Sheila Kuschtruk

told that she would not talk to me and had been told to run the other way if she saw me."

Megan moved back with the grandparents in 1993. When Heather attempted to call she was told never to call again and then they would hang up the phone. Her letters were returned to sender. Heather used the opportunity to make an application for an enforceable court order. This time Megan was put on the stand and she told the court she did not want to see her mother for a few years. The Judge was told that there was no pressure on Megan and that the family was not opposed to access. Megan agreed to write Heather once a week and phone every other week. Heather has received one call where Megan said there was nothing to be said and one letter stating the same. The battles have cost Heather over \$30,000 in legal fees. Not to mention her \$300 monthly support payment which goes to her ex-husband.

"Megan has been pressured from the time she was five to not want a mom. She is not allowed to call me mom and she is encouraged to be rude and non-compliant...She has cried to me and told me that I have divorced 'them,'" said Heather.

"The effect on Megan is that she has lost a full half of her family. She has been taught that 'motherhood' is a worthless concept, that the parent who takes has all the rights.

"I live with the knowledge that for all intents and purposes except for having added to the gene pool my only child is dead—can she be resurrected later? Will I even like the person she grows up to be in her warped environment, who knows."

Heather's case is a bit unique because the child's father was granted custody. In Alberta in 1989 custody of the children was granted to the wife in 5,291 cases—to the husband in 797 cases and joint custody in 1,666 cases. There are no statistics to indicate what percentage of cases result in parental alienation. There is enough of a problem that Family Mediation Services, through the Provincial Family Court, has developed a course called *Parenting when you live apart*. It is a free orientation seminar for restructuring the family after separation or divorce. Parents learn how to maintain their relationship with their child without putting the

child in the middle of a bitter conflict. The course was started about a year ago in Edmonton when a team in the family court heard about a program operating in Georgia. The team has been working with family court in Calgary to develop the course. While it was in the planning stage they invited the participation of many community stakeholders such as the Orphaned Grandparents group. To date about 300 parents have taken the seminar. There's no way of telling whether the courses have made a difference because the program is only a year old and they aren't keeping any statistics on success. In Georgia the program is more extensive. They have an 80 per cent success rate meaning the participating parents didn't have to resort to court battles in most cases. That success is the motivating factor for the courses here in Alberta.

Helen E. Smith is the course coordinator and she facilitates a number of the seminars, sometimes with the help of a lawyer or a parent who has been through the custody process. The course is taught in two parts—the first part deals with the parents' needs, what they can expect (i.e. a grieving process), a discussion on parental alienation and some advice on where divorced or separated parents can get support. The second part focuses on the effects on the child and their reactions to the stages of marriage breakdown. The course helps parents to work out parental plans. There is even a manual available to aid parents through the restructuring. For more information you can contact Family Mediation Services at 427-8329.

This recent attention to parental alienation is little consolation to Heather who has lost over eight years in her child's life. But to others it could be an ounce of prevention that protects a child from a lot of pain and anguish. ✽

✽ ✽ ✽ ✽

# Nuclear family often leaves no room for grandparents

While some grandparents play the stereotypical role of occasional babysitter, advice giver, and gift bearer, that just doesn't fit the many grandparents who are parenting their children's children, or trying to regain contact with grandchildren who have been disengaged following divorce or conflict. For them, being grandparents is often challenging and even traumatic.

Those grandparents who are parenting for the second time around have moved up the generation ladder, but are still burdened with the responsibility of being a parent. They are caught in a system which often doesn't recognize their parenting rights and they are stigmatized for raising children who, for whatever reason, cannot fulfil the responsibility of being parents.

Grandparents who have been disengaged from their grandchildren are often dismissed as having done something to deserve the denial of access. They are fighting against a society which places little importance on the rights of grandparents.

There's a support group in Edmonton that deals with grandparents who have been cut off from their grandchildren and for those grandparents who find themselves parenting the second time around. It is called Orphaned Grandparents. There are about 60 paying members and another 50 that come and go. About 40 per cent of the group have been disengaged from their grandchildren as a result of a divorce or the break up of a common-law relationship. About 30 per cent of the group is being denied access to their grandchildren because there is an unresolved family conflict. The rest of the group is made up of members who live too far away from their grandchildren to have access to them; second-time parenting grandparents; or grandparents who have been cut off because

their child has died and the link to their grandchildren has been severed.

The Orphaned Grandparents group encourages members to volunteer with children's groups or daycare, but most are terrified of becoming attached. The group offers support to each other, but with limited resources they

By Sheila  
Kushniruk



Marlene Greene (left) and Annette Bruce with Morgana. Both women are members of the Orphaned Grandparents group.

photo by Sheila Kushniruk

can't go much beyond offering a friendly ear. Many of their members come looking for a quick fix to the problem and in most cases there is no quick fix. They'd love to be able to access the help or advice of professionals, but time and finances don't allow.

Annette Bruce is the president of Orphaned Grandparents. She is one of the luckier members of the group in that her disengagement from her grandchild was short-lived. Annette and her husband Gordon got a rude awakening to the court system when one of their daughters left an abusive marriage and took her 18 month old daughter. The husband sued for custody of the child and to the Bruces' horror he won. "We were blown away...I had to keep checking that I was

*Continued on page 6*

really there in that courtroom and not in a nightmare." The Bruces had assumed that their daughter would get custody of Morgana because their daughter had moved home to live with them to escape the abuse. They expected Morgana would be raised by her mother with their support as grandparents.

The custody battle was a disaster—the husband presented his case first and had brought in a character witness that discredited the Bruces' daughter. His presentation lasted for most of the proceeding. The daughter's lawyer was ill-prepared. Custody was awarded for six months to the ex-husband, to be followed by an assessment. Morgana's mother was allowed



photo by Sheila Kuschiruk

*Grandmas and Grandpas can provide stability when there are family problems.*

visitation rights. After each visit the entire Bruce family would be wrenched by 18 month-old Morgana who would plead and cry not to be taken back to her father. After six months Morgana thought her mother was abandoning her. She had been used as a tool by the father who would threaten to cut access unless the marriage was reconciled. Fortunately, after the six month assessment, the judge reversed his decision. It made the Bruces realize how naive they had been in initially assuming the child's best interest would be served by the courts. The battle got them interested in the Orphaned Grandparents group, which had been in existence since 1987.

The group helped them to realize how our society really places no value on the role of the grandparent. They met members who have fought for years without seeing their grandkids. They also met people who had

suffered the double pain of having their adult child die, leaving behind grandchildren who are then disengaged from them. "They are the heartbreaking cases...at least divorce provides a higher success rate in being allowed access to grandchildren," said Annette.

The Divorce Act is geared around parental rights and while it may profess to be in the best interest of the child, that is not always the case. In Quebec a grandparent's rights to access are observed in custody battles and it is up to the parents to prove that is not in the child's best interest. All other provinces place the onus on the grandparents to prove their relationship is important to the child. The Orphaned Grandparents group has petitioned the federal government to amend the Divorce Act to recognize their rights. They were also involved in a consultation paper on custody and access which was put out by the federal government last fall. The paper acknowledges that custody and access is often not working as it was intended.

The group would like to see the system changed so that in place of court battles there is constructive conflict management and parental planning. If that fails, then the court system could be utilized to determine what is in the best interest of the child. Gordon Bruce says a lot of people think the resolution in conflict management comes out of hiring a lawyer and suing.

The Bruces have witnessed what damage a custody battle can do to a small child. "The game-playing that adults do has effects on the child that parents don't see or don't pay attention to, yet as grandparents we see it and pay more attention," said Annette.

The Bruces have come to realize that today's nuclear family, with a mom, dad, 1.5 kids and a dog, has really done some damage to the old notion of family where all extended members are valued. "Today the dog probably has more rights than the grandparents," says Gordon. "We're all disposable," adds Annette. "We'll keep you for as long as things go well, but when things don't go well, you're out...We have to go back to valuing the family."

Orphaned Grandparents would like to see more responsibility placed on parents and extended families to resolve conflicts before government intervenes. For instance one

group member lost contact with her daughter years ago and as a result she hadn't seen her two grandsons for years. In her search she discovered that the daughter had put the boys up for adoption and one of the boys had health problems that made it necessary for him to live in a local hospital for years as a ward of the province. She fought for, and won custody of the boy and now struggles with the burden of all the boy's medical needs. She has had to come out of retirement to handle the financial responsibilities of raising her grandson. She still hasn't been able to track down the other grandchild. She wishes she would have been consulted when her daughter put the two boys up for adoption. "Why should the priority be given to strangers (adoptive parents) rather than extended family?" Annette questioned.

As well as being cut off from consultation, grandparents don't qualify for all the benefits a parent would. There are some income tax allowances and credits which aren't extended beyond parents; company health care benefits can't be transferred to grandchildren; and many of the support programs available for kids through a parent are not accessible to kids through the grandparent (i.e. psychiatric counselling, anger management, etc.). This is frustrating to grandparents like Marlene Greene who are raising their grandkids. The only way around some of these obstacles is to apply for a Private Guardianship Order where you would have to declare your own child as an unfit parent. That's not easily done.

"We're saving the taxpayers money. Why should we have to go on Supports For Independence (welfare) in order for us to connect with services for these kids. The child has to be apprehended (by the province) to get access to all these services," said Marlene. This, added to the frustration of having no experience in the system, leaves many grandparents lost when it comes to finding support. The unique problems and needs of the second-time parenting grandparents has resulted in the idea of starting a separate support group.

For more information on the Orphaned Grandparents group you can call Annette at 961-3168. If you are interested in becoming involved with a new group on Grandparents Parenting for the Second Time, you can call Marlene Greene at Edmonton Community and Family Services 428-5908. ✽



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# The Premier's Council and Alberta families

*Dr. Lyle Oberg, MLA, is the Chairman of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families. We spoke with him about some issues which are affecting Alberta families.*

*By Shella Kuskmiruk*

Did the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families oppose the endorsement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Yes they did, but it's not that they opposed the endorsement of the Rights of the Child, what they opposed was the bill that was brought forward. If you take a close look at the bill (the one that came through the legislature) what it stated is that this Charter would take precedence over any other law in Alberta. As you go through the UN Charter the way it was written there are a lot of very vague terms and in essence what you end up

doing is putting the interpretation of the UN Charter into the hands of lawyers and judges and we felt that wasn't necessarily the best arena for that to be judged on. Obviously the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families is very supportive of children's rights and family rights, however we felt the wording was not good for Alberta.

The background of the UN Charter of Rights which leads to some of the vagueness is that it was brought forward essentially for Third World countries. I realize all other provinces except Alberta have adopted it, but again I don't believe they adopted it as super-seding legislation which is the way it was brought forward here.

What is the government's position on the rights of the child?

I think the position of the government is very much a pro-family position. I think it is supportive of the family and yet it is supportive of the child. There is very little tolerance in our government for the abuse of children and that's a lot of where our thinking is coming from.

How do the rights of children and parents clash?

There are a lot of problems in society—I won't say with the rights of children—but I'll give you an example of what happened in Edmonton over the weekend where [it is alleged] a 15 and 16 year

old essentially broke into a house and stabbed a woman to death. In my personal view, there does have to be some parental responsibility for that. So, whether or not you completely divorce the rights of the children from the rights of the family—where do rights and responsibilities come in and I guess that's a very difficult question, a philosophical question. When you see things like that, it's very difficult to justify the rights of children, and I don't mean that in a negative term. I think what we're saying is that the family does have an influence over these children and perhaps the family should be held responsible for some of this as well. It's a tragic kind of thing...like we've all heard about the circumstances in St. Albert where the 11 year old kid was stealing all these cars. And essentially the child could do as much as he wanted, there was nothing that could be done to him. So in our point of view the family does have some responsibilities in the rearing of children. I think there is a point where you bring into consideration abuse—sexual abuse, all that, which obviously causes some of the problems.

And that's when you feel the state has a right to get involved?

Definitely. I'll go one step further and say not only the right, but the responsibility to get involved.

With the Premier's Council existing to ensure government policies and programs encourage healthy family functioning and to strengthen the capacity of families to meet the needs of their members—how do you account for government cuts to daycare, to kindergarten, and to welfare which many advocates say have caused hardship for families?

With regards to the kindergarten first of all, what the Minister of Education has stated is that kindergarten's first and foremost responsibility is to the education of the children. The 200 hours, which the province funds, he says is an adequate amount of hours for kindergarten and we support that. There are studies that show, and you can go through studies from one side of the picture to the other, apart from the children that need early



*Dr. Lyle Oberg, Chairman of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families and MLA for Bow Valley.*



intervention, that at about grade four or grade five there isn't a difference between the children who have had kindergarten or who have not had kindergarten. There is a difference in the children who need early intervention and that has been addressed partially through the Brighter Futures program.

With regards to the cutbacks in welfare, the research shows that if people are working the family is a more stable unit. The focus of the welfare cuts has been to get people back working.

But you hear in the news about situations where parents can't find jobs and their welfare is being cut back or cut off and they think they might have to give up their children because they can't support them?

Yes, but in all fairness these cuts have been going on for a year now and there have not been cases where people have had to give up their children. The Premier's Council, myself and the government certainly do not want that situation, I can guarantee you that. We do not want, in any stretch of the imagination, to break up the family unit because of monetary restrictions. On the other hand there does seem to be a lot of evidence that shows that, for example, the substance abuse in adolescents was related to family links in a lot of different circumstances such as working parents and single parent families...

Is the Premier's Council planning to look into these cuts to ensure they are not having negative effects on families?

We put out a thing called the Family Policy Grid which was a document put out about a year ago. That document was recognized world-wide and we were asked to give a presentation in Malta at the United Nations for the International Year of the Family. What that document does is that it's given to all government departments so they can apply their legislation, their workings against this Family Policy Grid to determine their effect on the family. It was given to departments seven or eight months ago and the initial report... back showed that they had followed it and that they had changed a lot of things and that it was an extremely positive experience to put things against the Family Policy Grid.

Could you give me an example of one department that has changed something because of the Family Policy Grid?

I won't say that they have necessarily done a huge change one way or another, but what they have

ensured is that their policies fit into the Family Policy Grid. We've reviewed every department and had them bring it back.

So then what would be an example of a change?

I can't give you one off the top of my head. The documents came back four or five months ago when it was last done and I just can't remember off the top of my head.

Some of these cuts seem to be encouraging working women to quit their jobs and stay at home. Do you think it is better for mothers to stay at home?

That's a bit of a loaded question. I can cite research that tells that it is better when mothers stay home... With regards to parental responsibility, again perhaps parental responsibility is towards the children, on the other hand in these financial times it is extremely difficult to raise children in a one-income family. Each family has to look at their own individual statistics, their own individual circumstances to determine what is going on. I'll give you an example. My wife has chosen to stay at home and my taxes are paying for other people's wives to go out to work, so there are two sides to all of this coming in.

But with subsidies being cut...

Subsidies have been cut, but they still come from taxpayers dollars. For example in my circumstance my wife has given up a profession to stay at home, by her choice.

But for a lot of families it's not a choice.

That's right and that gets back to the point I was making earlier.

Well wouldn't you think that daycare subsidies and programs should be added to rather than cut to help families?

I guess it's all in your definition of how you're helping families. That's a very difficult question to answer. Putting more money into daycare programs would encourage the children being out of the family and at the daycare. On the other side of the argument it would also encourage the family to have more financial resources with two parents working. As a government and as a taxpayer is it our responsibility to do that?—and that's a very difficult question. Personally I think every family must make the decision on their own merit. To increase the subsidies to all daycare people when I can afford it, or my family can afford it, you begin a universal argument. So it's

not just as easy as saying yes all daycare should be completely paid for by the individual, or yes it should be paid for by the government. Each circumstance is different. Each case is different and it's up to each individual family to sit down and weigh out the pros and cons. You can't take all individual responsibility away from the family.

What is the Premier's Council definition of a family?

The Premier's Council does not have a definition of the family and I'll give you a reason for that. I did a talk show on this two months ago, on the International Day of the Family. The question that I was asked most was what is the definition of the family and I refused to answer that because I think the family is different in every circumstance. When you start laying down in black and white what a family must do or not do I think that's very much a damnation on our society as a whole. My definition of a family, as a parent, is different than your definition of a family. We have to allow for that flexibility and I completely disagree with setting out a definition for it.

Would you say then that the Premier's Council supports families whatever their make-up?

The Premier's Council in Support of the Family has taken a stance against same-sex families.

Why is that?

They feel that same-sex families do not promote family values.

So that is the position of the government?

No, that is the position of the Premier's Council. The Premier's Council is at arms length from the government. It has been set up to advise the government, however it is at arms length.

So as far as the Premier's Council is concerned a same-sex family is not a healthy family?

I won't say it's not a healthy family. What I will say is that the Premier's Council does not support same-sex families. We feel the family influence is, I won't say healthy, but I will say it's negative.

Considering that the courts have now recognized that discrimination against homosexuals is not acceptable—isn't it a form of discrimination to say that same-sex families do not promote family values?

No. What we are saying is that same-sex families, or homosexual families do not promote the

family values that the Premier's Council expounds. We have the right to our opinion as does anyone and the Vriend verdict is under the Individual Rights Protection Act and says that sexual orientation should be put in. Whether or not the definition can be expanded to include same-sex families, protection of same-sex families, I can use the right-wing argument that it would

then protect say paedophilia—which is certainly one that has been brought out. In the Vriend case it is purely on work discrimination and I have gone on record as being against any kind of discrimina-

tion. I'm not in favor of homosexuality as a lifestyle, but on the other hand I'm even less in favor of discrimination. The Vriend case cannot be expanded to include all types of things such as same-sex families, things like that. It was a specific verdict on a work-related incident.

Can a single-parent family be a healthy family?

I think a single-parent family can be a very healthy family. To criticize someone purely because circumstances have caused them to be a single-parent family is extremely wrong. We have a lady on our Council who is a single parent with four children and she has a very wonderful family life. And again statistically, and on outcomes, two parent families have better outcomes when it comes to drug abuse and things like that. But still, there are single parent families who are extremely stable and extremely wonderful families and to say anything different would amount to generalizing and you can't do that.

Would you have a position on what is causing the rise in the number of single-parent families?

What you're talking about essentially is the divorce rate in Alberta, or single, unwed mothers. The divorce rate in Alberta is approaching 50 per cent and we have not looked at that specifically, but certainly that is something that needs to be looked at.

Is it a concern for the Council that the numbers are rising?

Yes, I think it is a concern. We have established at the Council that a two-parent family is a more stable environment, a more stable family unit. We recognize that not every family is going to be a two-parent family. We do have to look at the factors involved that are leading to lack of two-parent families. That does not mean to say that

*"I'm not in favor of homosexuality as a lifestyle, but on the other hand I'm even less in favor of discrimination."*

one-parent families are less stable, but I don't think we can do anything about it at the moment, but I think if we can identify some factors that promote a two-parent family, or prevent the demise of the two-parent family, then I think that is certainly something we should look at.

What concrete steps is the government proposing to ensure parents support their families after a relationship ends?

We have not looked at that specifically, but certainly that is something that they are very strongly for. There's a private member's bill coming forward on maintenance enforcement.

Is tying maintenance enforcement to licencing something that the Premier's Council would favor?

It's one way to ensure that maintenance gets paid and certainly the Premier's Council is very much in favor of maintenance enforcement, whatever the legal situation turns out to be.

People have criticized that bill saying that you only renew your driver's licence once every four years—the conditions don't come up often enough to be a very substantial tool against parents who don't pay enforcement?

You have to look at what it has been in the past and how do you build improvements into that. If you had a perfect world then there would be no problems with maintenance enforcement. Every divorced father or mother would make their payments. I think what we're trying to do is move towards that as much as we can. At the moment courts can garnishee wages. There are cases of divorcees putting assets into someone else's name—there's all these kinds of legal barriers that are out there. It's easy to look at it and criticize, but until you've gone through and actually looked at what those legal barriers are and what the facts of the matter are, then it's very difficult. So I think this is a step in the right direction.

So this is another thing that could come into the future work of the Council

Oh yes, we recognize this as a problem and realize that single moms have a tough time. Again statistically they are a lower income group and they have a very tough time of it especially if the father is not making the maintenance payments.

Many social agencies are concerned that welfare cuts to 16 and 17 year olds are forcing these teens onto the streets because they cannot return to an abusive family home. What is the Premier's Council doing to support young people who have been victimized by their own families?

With regards to the legislation there is an appeals process if they do fall through the cracks. One of the abuses of the situation that occurred before is that 16 and 17 year olds were moving away from families and lining up for welfare and using that as a tool against their parents. There are numerous examples of this. What the legislation states is that the parents have to and should be involved with 16 and 17 year olds rather than having them automatically go on welfare. I think what we're

trying to do is keep the family unit intact. I think if there are abusive situations, then they should be handled in a legal manner. There are other situations

occurring where there is an appeal process through the department of social services for that. To automatically say that every 16 and 17 year old who wants to move away from the family should be supported by the state is a very interesting point. I think each circumstance has to be looked at. Not every 16 or 17 year old gets along with their parents, but on the other hand do we want to encourage family break up or do we want to encourage family reconciliation? I think it's the latter, but again there are appeals for them to go through.

At last weekend's Progressive Conservative party convention a delegate was supported in her call to end welfare funds for teens and runaways and return parents' rights. A delegate also claimed teens are having babies just to get welfare. Do you think the viewpoints of the delegates are reflective of the government or the Council?

Again the Council is not the government in any circumstance. The Council has taken an approach that single unwed moms are a reality and just because of a moment of indiscretion they should not be ostracized from society. I think you have to consider that in every political party, be it whatever, everyone is entitled to freedom of speech. They are putting forward their ideas and it's our job as a party to take those ideas and look at them. Some we will agree with and some we won't... \*

*"The Council has taken an approach that single unwed moms are a reality and just because of a moment of indiscretion they should not be ostracized from society."*

# Underclass poverty breeds crime

By Jonathan  
Murphy

It's not surprising that Barb Danelesko's murder last month sent shock waves through Edmonton. If the twisted perpetrators of such a senseless crime could reach deep into the suburban middle class and pluck Mrs. Danelesko from this earth, is any of us safe?

Equally predictable though less justifiable is the fear mongering and pot-stirring of the gutter press and many of our provincial politicians. While one columnist proudly announced he is arming himself with "anger and a baseball bat," our Premier went on national television and called for children to be executed.

The same day Barb Danelesko was killed, a different young woman was kicked to death in a back alley in another Edmonton neighborhood. The same newspaper, which five days in a row carried the Mill Woods killing on its front page, chose to mark Linda Staudinger's last terrified moments of life with a small story on page 20. That media indifference only reflects our own sense of priorities. The death of a lonely addicted drifter warrants no more than a momentary shudder and a reminder to our kids never to venture down to *that* part of town.

However different their lives, Barb and Linda share more than the date of their passing. They both died for the same reasons. The Young Offenders Act wasn't responsible, nor the Charter of Rights, our permissive society, or expletive-filled school textbooks. What killed these two very different women was the poverty, ignorance, and hopelessness of the underclass.

Killings on skid row and in the housing projects aren't that rare. Usually, though, the marginalized just kill each other. That's what happened to Linda. What made Barb's death so different and so notable is not how she was killed, or why, or even who killed her. It was the fact that she was one of *us*.

If we could restrict the killings to people like Linda, a lot of us would go about happy in the knowledge that as long as we don't live near *those* people, don't hang around *those* bars, we will be safe. But it doesn't work like that. Like a backed up sewer, the ugly stench of underclass existence

periodically escapes and overwhelms us, a reminder that as long as so many of our fellow citizens are in pain, we cannot be immune from the consequences.

We can strap children. We can send every punk to boot camp. We can even hang twelve year olds, as one of our cabinet ministers so righteously demands. But that won't have the slightest effect on crime.

IF OUR POLITICIANS SHOWED LEADERSHIP instead of inciting fear and anger, they would tell us that the get tough approach has been in full swing for decades down in the States, and that it has been a total failure. In the twelve Bush/Reagan years, the American jail population ballooned from 475,000 to 1.1 million. Hundreds have been executed, with thousands more on death row. But the murder rate still rises inexorably, jumping 18 per cent alone between 1987 and 1991. In 1988, 22 of every million Canadians were murdered. Americans bested that rate by nearly four times.

People in the underclass don't commit crime because they think they're going to get off lightly. They don't care how long a jail term they will serve, or even if the state takes their life. They've been beaten, abused, discriminated against, malnourished, marginalized and written off since they were born. And when your own life is worthless, so is everybody else's, be you Linda Staudinger or Barb Danelesko.

Short of copying Hitler and eliminating the underclass as a preventive measure, the only way to stop these tragedies is to bite the bullet and do the difficult thing. The difficult thing is to not pander to the baying for revenge, it is to resolve not to allow the gulf between *us* and *them* to deepen. The difficult thing is to make sure we all have opportunity and a cause for hope, a reason to value ourselves and everyone else on this small earth. In our hearts we know that is the only way to stop the tragedies of Barb Danelesko and Linda Staudinger from repeating themselves with ever more devastating consequences for our survival as a society. ✽

# Putting in their two-bits...

A collaborative effort in our city has caused people to sit up and take notice. Already the federal government has consulted the Children and Families Initiative as it begins to restructure Canada's social security system.

Even if the Children and Families Initiative (CFI) is new to you, you will no doubt be hearing more about it in the weeks to come. It was initiated in early 1993 with a two-year mandate: to collaborate and thereby channel human and financial resources towards eliminating the most damaging effects of child poverty. The collaboration includes people from education, health, police, business and human service funding agencies.

On March 11, three members of the CFI's steering committee presented an initial submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. They recommended a national annual income program along with coordinated training programs controlled at a local level with guaranteed work or training instead of unemployment insurance and welfare for youth aged 18 to 24. They offered the CFI as an ideal collaborative group to work with governments in the definition and delivery of new models of social security; and proposed that Edmonton would be an ideal location for pilot projects because of the collaborative, community-based work that has already been done. The House of Commons Standing Committee expressed interest in the CFI and its ideas.

The CFI would achieve these ideals, with the help of the government, by reallocating resources, working with others to share and promote ideas, developing the new delivery model and raising public awareness through a marketing campaign to change attitudes towards poverty.

Federal Minister Lloyd Axworthy has promised to present an action plan on the modernization and restructuring of Canada's social security system. It will be based in part on the report of the House of Commons Standing Committee, in turn based on input it received. Then the Standing Committee

will conduct a second round of consultations to gather Canadian's views on the plan. They will then report back to the minister. It will be time consuming, especially given that Quebec is approaching a provincial election and social security is a red hot topic. At present the restructuring process seems to be stalled in an effort to not influence that election.

By Carl Sorensen

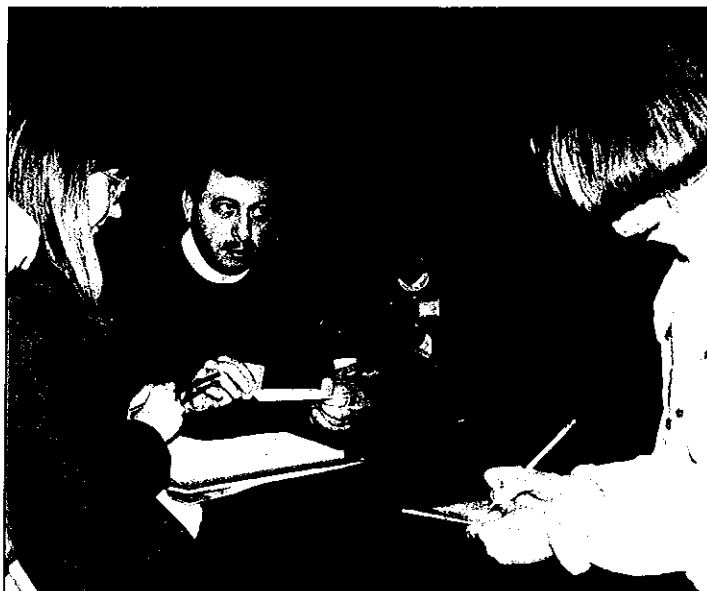


photo by Sheila Kustmirak

Stakeholders discuss the priorities for the Children and Families Initiative.

The Edmonton CFI will continue to be heavily involved in the process—in proposing and testing innovative models for reform based on principles identified by the Initiative and making further submissions for a 'new model of income support.'

Besides working on income support the Initiative is actively involved in the redesign of child welfare services in Edmonton. Children and Family Initiative representatives were invited to sit on a committee which is putting together regional recommendations for redesigning services to children in conjunction with the Commissioner of Services for Children. CFI will also be making its own submission for recommended changes. They are calling

*Continued on page 24—CFI*

# Child and Family Services in Manitoba—A System in Crisis

By Marion  
Wills

Street kids, youth gangs and child prostitution are the grim realities of a child welfare system on the verge of bankruptcy. And those charged with the responsibility of providing services are feeling the strain. Expanding case loads, declining resources and 'Filmon Fridays' which, by the way, have eliminated approximately 4,000 person days of service per year, have made it virtually impossible for Manitoba child welfare agencies to fulfil their legal obligations to protect children. Instead, agencies are hard pressed to provide even the most basic services.

Cuts to education, including Manitoba's Student Allowances Program, a reduction in day care, the elimination of the Manitoba Foster Parent Association, the closing of 14 Indian/Metis Friendship Centres and one of the highest child poverty rates in this country are just a few examples of the social deficit created by governments determined to reduce the fiscal deficit.

According to Jane Runner, Director of P.O.W.E.R., 23 per cent of Winnipeg's prostitutes are under the age of 18. Rumor has it that some may be as young as nine years old. Runner is quick to point out that these are kids who live in a world without choices and for them prostitution means survival. Keith Cooper, Executive Director of Winnipeg Child and Family Services agrees. Says Cooper, "There are approximately 350 children working the streets during any given year."

Inspector Lou Spado of the Winnipeg City Police Department estimates that as many as 500 Winnipeg youth are involved in gang related activities. Says Spado, "It's the youth over the age of 14 who are the most affected by Manitoba's declining child welfare resources. Kids who would benefit from therapeutic placements are placed in independent living programs. Many of these kids just don't have the skills to live independently."

But the problems run deeper than just funding says Cooper. "There is an attitude out there that these kids simply can't be salvaged. The system needs to change both its attitude and its focus. This province spends a host of money on kids in care. That money," says Cooper, "would be better spent on mediation services, teaching homemakers and other programs that work to reduce the number of kids in care and strengthen families."

Manitoba's child welfare system has undergone a three-phase evolution: *The 1922 Act Respecting the Welfare of Children* provided only for last resort intervention for children at imminent risk. *The Child Welfare Act of 1974* retained child protection as a central feature but also emphasized the provision of assistance to families encountering difficulties as a means of avoiding the protective placement of children. And the *Child and Family Services Act of 1986* was developed with a view to strengthening and expanding the protective and service components of past legislation in addition to placing emphasis on the importance of the family and community involvement in matters relating to child welfare.

In recent years, the Manitoba system has been the target of criticism and subjected to numerous reviews. Most of the controversy has been centred around a system so highly politicized that, according to P. Colleen Suche, QC and author of *Children in Residential Care Facilities*, "Relationships among agencies, facilities and the Directorate are often adversarial. There is neither a sense of common goal or collective responsibility. Typically when something goes wrong, the system looks for someone to blame when the culprit is often the system itself. Confusion over roles, lack of accountability and inefficiency contribute greatly to this situation." She adds, "There is a deeper and more troubling problem. Many senior members of the child welfare community express concern over the lack of direction the system receives."

The system seems to have lost sight of the fact that it exists to protect children."

Many of Manitoba's child welfare experts agree. Political appointees on Winnipeg C.F.S. Boards have replaced elected community members. Manitoba's Office of the Child Advocate reports to the minister of family services in spite of recommendations from provincial court judges, the latest being Judge Brian Geisbrecht, and others charged with reviewing aspects of Manitoba's child welfare system, that the Children's Advocate be external to the department of family services.

Says Suche, "There are many skilled and dedicated people who individually or in small groups have created 'Islands of excellence' within the system. Despite this, the system as a whole is stagnant. Creativity is stifled, innovation is discouraged, and the justification for too many failings is lack of resources. At a time when child welfare must find ways to be more effective, it appears complacent in its decay. For any meaningful change to occur, it is essential that this fundamental issue be addressed."

As each and every province considers the merits of child welfare reform, Cooper offers a word of caution. "You don't solve problems by reforming a system and believing that everyone will live happily ever after. The problems are just too numerous and complex in nature. There are no quick fixes."

There are some lessons to be learned from the type of child welfare reform that has taken place in Manitoba in recent years.

Firstly, government should get out of the business of service delivery. Agencies operate much more effectively when released from the rigidity of government structures and rules. A child welfare system that operates at 'an arms length' from government stands a better chance of creating a basis for advocacy.

Secondly, service delivery in Manitoba has

become so fragmented that it is neither efficient nor effective. It is both dangerous and counter-productive for government departments to cut and slash programs in isolation without regard for human consequence. The departments of family service, justice, education and so on, must learn to recognize their inter-relatedness. It is that relationship that must be reflected in funding and planning statements if 'the best interest of the child' is to be maintained as the central theme of Manitoba child welfare policy.

photo by Jonathan Murphy



Children should be the central concern in the redesign of services.

Thirdly, the larger community must learn to balance human rights with human responsibility. Intellectual honesty will be paramount in understanding the gestation of the problem. In short, Manitobans were much too willing to hand over responsibilities to a government which they blindly trusted!

Should the Manitoba government fail in this regard, then Manitoba may have little choice than to lapse back to the Child Welfare Act of 1922, an act that provided solely for last resort intervention for children at imminent risk! ❖

*Marion Willis (formerly Marion Glover) is a Winnipeg based child advocate. She is known nationally for her work as legal interviewer in a recent inquiry into Native Child Welfare in Manitoba.*

# Pitting preventative programs against roads and sewers

## ...what will win out in smaller communities?

By Colleen Jensen

In these tough economic times governments seem to underestimate the value of preventative social programs like those offered province wide through Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) funding.

On February 24, 1994 in the provincial budget it was announced that \$ 34 million of Alberta Family and Social Services funding, which had been given to communities to specifically fund FCSS programs, would now be distributed through the Department of Municipal Affairs. The money previously given by the province as 80 per cent funding, requiring 20 per cent municipal matching, would now become part of a large unconditional grant pool, that could be spent however municipalities saw fit. It was to be the end of a long standing, successful provincial/municipal partnership.

Numerous concerns were expressed to the provincial government by municipalities and the network of support agencies funded by FCSS. One major problem was the possible loss of federal cost sharing under the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), where larger municipalities had been able to access considerable funding beyond what the province allocated. Unconditional grants would prohibit municipalities from continuing to cost share in this manner, thus causing funding losses beyond those announced by the province.

As a result, the province extended two options to municipalities — receive the FCSS funds unconditionally or conditionally (still tied to the FCSS Act). Should municipalities choose conditional funds, they could avail themselves of CAP cost sharing but would have to abide by current mandate, accountability and matching requirements. The substantial paperwork and need for 20 per cent municipal matching could, of course, be a large deterrent in small communities and thus come some of the worries.

Initially municipalities were told to expect approximately a five per cent reduction in funds; however, after final calculations some communities were to receive as much as a 14 per cent reduction. To alleviate some of this difficulty, Family and Social Services agreed to give a one-time transitional grant to municipalities thereby keeping the reduction at five per cent in the first year, as had previously been announced. Communities welcomed the grant to give them time to plan for larger reductions in the following years. They were pleased the province had heard their concerns for the short term.

Urban and rural centres are feeling the stress of tremendous cuts in many areas including other general municipal assistance grants, transportation, social housing, day care and even to kindergartens. In the rural areas, FCSS programs provide the focus of direct social programs offered in the community. For urban centres, the sheer number of users explains the impact.

In these times of high stress, with people often feeling they have lost control of their lives, the province must show leadership and take responsibility for social programs. Provincial downloading on municipalities should not be done in the name of local autonomy. If municipalities choose the unconditional option they may be playing right into the carefully dealt hand of the provincial government—municipalities will be saying, "yes, we will be responsible for the social needs of our communities" and the province will be off the hook. If grants are cut and social programs suffer, the municipality will become the bad guy.

In other departments, such as health and education, the province is encouraging a regional structure and there are also many multi-municipal FCSS programs in Alberta. Yet with the option of unconditional funds,



tremendous barriers now exist for regional FCSS programs. For example, Red Deer and District FCSS has been a cost effective and efficient partnership of six municipalities since 1977. With the changes, each municipality must now decide how they will receive provincial funding and if they want to remain in the regional program. Being cash strapped, the temptation is certainly there for each municipality to take the FCSS allocation unconditionally and spend it on other concerns. They could also decide to remain in the partnership with unconditional funds, but this would affect the federal CAP cost sharing. If the partnership continues, a new inter-municipal agreement must be negotiated and reviewed annually.

Many believe that people who use social programs should "pull themselves up by the bootstraps" and "look after their own because I did". And this is exactly what FCSS programs help people to do—they help people help themselves rather than relying on direct government support. FCSS programs keep people in their own homes (Meals on Wheels and Homemaking), they keep youth off the streets and out of correctional facilities (Boys and Girls Clubs, Teen Counselling, School Liaison Workers and After School Care Programs), and they help people deal with stresses (preventive, short term counselling, parenting courses). Yet somehow there is a big fear in the guts of every community, that decision makers don't see the merit and need for these programs—somehow roads, sewers and computer systems may come before humane services.

We must move on, however, and be positive because the play is not over; we've only seen Act I. Communities have and will become unified on this issue—now the job becomes one of making sure local politicians understand. They will need facts and figures to prove success, along with loud and strong input from constituents who use the program. Politicians will come to know how



photo by Stella Kushniruk

FCSS offices across the province offer many services to seniors such as Meals On Wheels or transportation on Handibuses.


important preventive programming is, both socially and economically.

FCSS may not continue as FCSS, but the philosophy of FCSS programs will remain. A name change in marriage does not change the person or her beliefs and values. Likewise, preventive social programs will continue to make personal, social and economic sense.

Yogi Berra once said, "the future is not what it used to be" and he's right, but it doesn't mean there won't be one! The actors from Act I just have to learn a new script and deal with local politicians as the new directors. And let's make sure that one actor still has the major role: the province! \*

*Colleen Jensen is the manager of the City of Red Deer Social Planning Department. She has been involved with Family and Community Support Services in many capacities for over 12 years.*

The Edmonton Social Planning Council  
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Alberta Capital Region

# Parents ignored as government cuts child care programs

By Corine Ferguson

Child care was experiencing its first turn at the political chopping block when I graduated from an early childhood development program nine years ago. It was the first time the public became informed of operating allowance cuts to child care programs. Public outcry and concern saw parents come together under an association entitled *Coalition for Quality Child Care*. This group allowed

seen a 'give till it hurts and then some' approach.

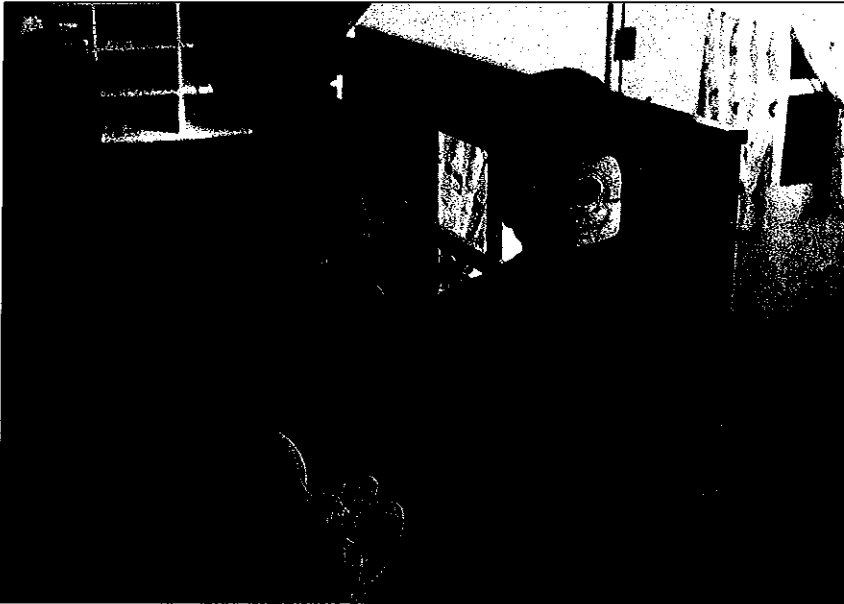
Now, more than ever, while dramatic changes are taking place and the threat of privatization lurks on the horizon, the government needs to concern itself with the people's views. Unfortunately the level of quality child care continues to fluctuate. The provincial standards are at best barely being met in the majority of child care programs. A handful consistently strive to exceed these standards and address the government's need for attention to increased standards and training. Instead we are told that drastic reduction of financial support is necessary to benefit our children and those of future generations. As a child care professional, advocate and parent, I find myself asking "To what extent?" The government's commitment continues to sway from one direction to the next. The people most recently affected are kindergarten children.

The government's support is less than encouraging. In an era where downsizing and budget cuts are the norm, there continues to be indecision about the future of daycare in our province.

Who's responsibility is it anyway?—

government who form and shape the society and generations of the future, or parents? Clearly it needs to be a cooperative effort. The parent's input is a vital component which reflects challenges facing today's families and the survival of the family unit as a whole. Realistically, the government must play a part in this process as well. To ensure that parents can actively participate in the labor force and contribute to a healthy economy, the government needs to address the issue of affordable, accessible, high quality child care alternatives. Their role in all of this is ensuring availability of programs that

photo by Alison MacDonald



Many children's lives are affected by child care programs .

parents a voice to the government regarding high quality, affordable, accessible, not-for profit child care program alternatives for all children 0-12 years. Now, almost a decade later, not much has changed! Child care continues to be on the political forefront. Only now, four ministers later, parents have come full circle from being recognized as a voice with contributions to the direction of programs for children, to being shut out entirely where no program or service is immune from cutbacks. In an effort to reduce our province's ever growing deficit every facet of government monitored services has

meet and reflect all of the needs of the work force. To further strengthen the partnership between parents and the government there must be involvement of trained professionals. Professionals in the field of early childhood can lend an objective hand in this process assisting in the formation and practice of standards established by the province. With all of these qualified, interested groups one may ask why our future is still so uncertain?

Child care always seems to come up last on the political platform; and now once again when provincial debts run high the issue of child care runs lower than ever on the priority list. How are parents coping with all of this? In July of 1993 a survey was circulated by an independent firm (on behalf of the government) to assess the feasibility of deregulation issues. Despite deep rooted concerns by parents, child care workers and other interested parties, it was surprising that a meeting with the minister of Family and Social Services was not granted. Pressing the issue resulted in the group settling for a meeting with the deputy minister. In January, 1994, family day home programs were the target of drastic reduction tactics which added up to extensive funding cuts. Once again, parents and concerned child care professionals failed to get a meeting with the minister of Family and Social Services. Another deputy minister unsuccessfully attempted to bridge the parents, professionals and government. With the passing of only a few months since the last shocking blow, the Supports For Independence program has been slashed to an unrecoverable level. For single parent families requiring child care, the loss of this support is considerable in their struggle to be financially independent.

Once again, operating allowances to child care programs were cut. To maintain the existing level of care within current programs parents will have to pay more. A further discouraging note is the severe cuts to education which will see kindergarten class time reduced by 50 per cent with rotating attendance which creates a virtual nightmare for parents and children. Finding alternative child care arrangements or just flexibility in a person's job to accommodate days when children are at home will be atrocious! Must two-parent families be forced to consider one

parent withdrawing from the work force in order to accommodate the government's latest deficit cutting ploy?

It is frustrating, to say the least, having a government in power who wants to be addressed on a first name basis and work with the people on 'real' issues when experience has shown that the door to negotiation is closed at every turn and decisions will be made with or without public support. Our Premier has made it crystal clear that nothing anyone can say or do will sway his party from their objectives. As child care providers we are painfully aware of the first five years of a child's life being the most critical learning years. If cuts on the backs of young children are any indication of the price we must pay; there's no question about government's future commitment of child care in this province. ✽

*Corine Ferguson is the director of the Whitemud Demonstration Childcare Society, a member of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee at Grant MacEwan Community College, and chairperson of the Edmonton Coalition for Quality Child Care.*

## *espc* news

A reminder for volunteers and fun-seekers that the Edmonton Social Planning Council is having a fund-raising casino June 10 and 11 at Casino ABS, City Centre. Drop by and try your luck!

Sandra Morrison has been hired as the coordinator for the prostitutes' resource centre. Sandra has already begun to make contacts with service agencies, communities and street prostitutes and everyone is eager to get the centre up and running. A first priority is to find a location for the centre and establish it as a drop-in where street prostitutes can come for support or advice on health and family violence issues, or even to seek alternatives to working on the streets.

ESPC has hired Shirley Hardman to do a four-month study of the barriers many visible minorities face in obtaining services in Edmonton. She will also be doing an internal analysis of the ESPC to ensure there are not any barriers which prevent the participation of visible minorities.

# Work vs. Home

## ... who's winning?

By Allison  
MacDonald

Your workday might only amount to seven hours, but for many women work starts all over again with the five o'clock whistle.

In a study on employment trends, conducted by the Edmonton Social Planning Council over 1992 and 1993, we spoke with women who are trying to juggle work inside and outside the home. Many spoke of the conflict between the needs of their children and the need to pay the bills. A compromise for some is working part-time hours. One woman described her situation as follows: "I switched to part-time contract work when my baby was born. This job has worked out well because they allowed me to work the days that my husband is home so one of us is always with the baby." She also spoke about how helpful her husband is around the home.



*The rearing of children is more than just a mother's responsibility.*

Photo by Sheila Kusinirak

Not everyone is so lucky. Other women told us of difficulties finding quality child care that didn't use up most of their income or that would accept children on a part-time basis. Some mentioned behavior problems with their children that resulted from too much time without parental influence.

Add to these concerns the fact that women still hold primary responsibility for housework. A report by the Vanier Institute of the Family released earlier this year states that

94 per cent of women with children spend an average of 3 hours and 22 minutes each day doing housework. Only 53 per cent of men with children do household chores on a daily basis and they average just 2 hours and 1 minute each. The women in our study gave examples of how this affects their lives: "I do contract work which takes a number of hours, but for every hour I work I know I will have to make it up later at home," said one, while another commented, "My husband doesn't pick up the slack. I have extra work taking care of him."

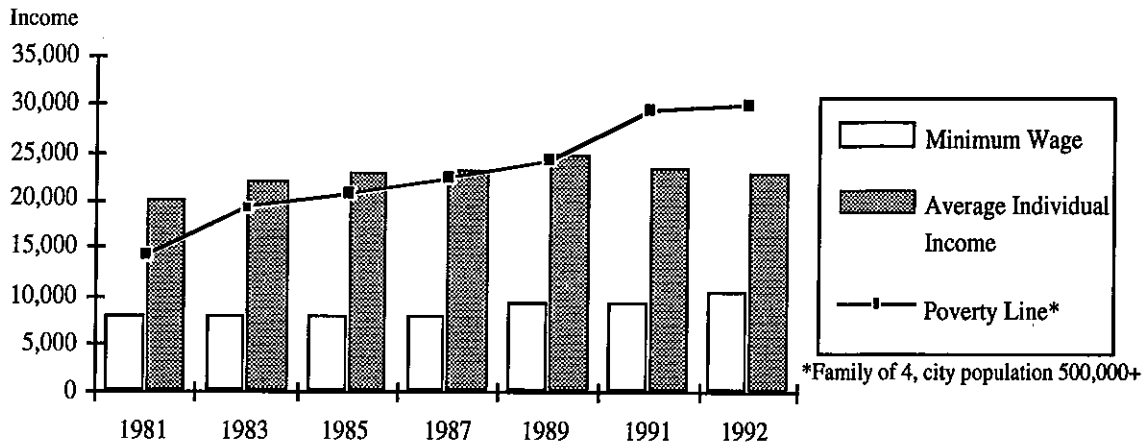
Given these considerations, the obvious question is, why do so many women choose to work outside the home. While many Canadians still hold the dream of a traditional family, in which the husband goes out to work while the wife stays home and takes care of the household, the likelihood of the dream becoming a reality is quite small. In fact, recent statistics indicate that much of the growth in women's participation in the labour force is a result of necessity rather than preference. Most families today simply can't cope on one income.

In 1911, just over 16 per cent of Canadian women held jobs outside the home. By 1991, the rate had jumped to 58 per cent. Most of the increase occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, a period during which the cost of living grew much faster than wages. As the table below demonstrates, in 1981 a person in Alberta earning an average income made enough to provide for a family of four and stay out of poverty. By the 1990s, this was no longer possible. (See graph opposite)

### Where does the money go?

The Vanier Institute reports that the average Canadian family has an income of \$64,705 and that the largest single expenditure (\$14,633) is for personal taxes. Forty-one per cent of the remaining income is used for food, shelter and clothing. If the same family had to rely on a single income, the percentage applied to basic necessities would be far

## Poverty line vs. income, Alberta



Data compiled from various Statistics Canada publications.

higher and there would be little money available for other needs including transportation, school supplies, health care, recreation, etc.

Raising healthy children is a costly venture. The Social Planning Council's *Family Budgeting Guide* estimates that the average cost of raising a single child from birth to 18 years of age is \$108,395 (1993 dollars). At an annual average of over \$6000 per child, a single income is simply not adequate for most families.

The struggle to make ends meet results in family stress as well. A number of the women in our study commented on the fact that their children worry about the family income and the possibility of a parent being laid off. One woman asked, "How can you raise healthy children on No Name macaroni and cheese?" Another said her biggest fear is for her children's future: "Will they be able to find work or will they have to live with me forever?" Similar feelings of insecurity were expressed by most of the people we spoke with.

### Married women and work

Married women with children under 18 have a higher labour force participation rate (71 per cent) than married women without children (64 per cent) or women who are not married, with or without children (65 per cent). Although women's wages are still

only 70 per cent of what men earn, most married women today are providing at least 30 per cent of their household income. (Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994)

Some people look at the growth of companies managed by women and see a new hope for the future. In one of our study groups, the discussion focused on women as entrepreneurs: "Look at *Mary Kay and The Body Shop*.. The women's approach works well. They understand that everyone in the organization needs to be successful for the organization to benefit." Many women would like to see more opportunities for self-employment.

Others are interested in an expansion of job sharing, flex time and home-based employment. They spoke of the skills they develop as a homemaker: "I am responsible for budgeting, planning, child care and household management. These should count for something on a resume."

The women we spoke with suggested that once there is real recognition of the work done by women in the home (such as pensions for homemakers and income tax policies that don't discriminate against single income households), along with more creative options for paid employment, we will be able to find a balanced approach to meeting the needs of today's families. ❖

*Alison MacDonald is a social planner with ESPC.*

# Searching for strong family values

By June Sheppard

Not many years ago Edmonton imposed an evening curfew ordering children and young teens to clear the streets and go home.

The reason was to put a stop to the misbehavior, the fights, the attempts to form gangs, and the "hanging around".

The object was to get the kids back to the safety of their home and family.

It occurred to me and to many others that going home for many of the youngsters did not necessarily mean returning to safety or to a caring family with a warm welcome! That, in fact, a significant number looked to the streets as a refuge from home and what passed for 'family life.'

One of the reasons for introducing the curfew was that outbreaks of violence, going beyond just rough-and-tumble games, were becoming more frequent.

The streets were blamed for this misbehavior.

But it cannot be ignored that in shocking numbers the home has been the teacher of violence not the shelter from it.

Not that family problems leading to violence are new to the domestic scene, but in past decades the curtain was down on it and silence reigned.

Today we are overwhelmed with revelations about what goes on in the privacy of homes. And yet the family is still by far the most fundamental institution that human beings require.

It is not the sole source but the most influential one that teaches us how to love others, how to learn about having a conscience, to build up a set of values.

It has been called the 'last humanizing force' left in society. And there are still many which fulfil

that role, but it is the numbers of families which no longer exert that force that can't help but make us tremble for so many of today's and tomorrow's children.

Reading about children taking their own lives in suicide has become almost a commonplace horror.

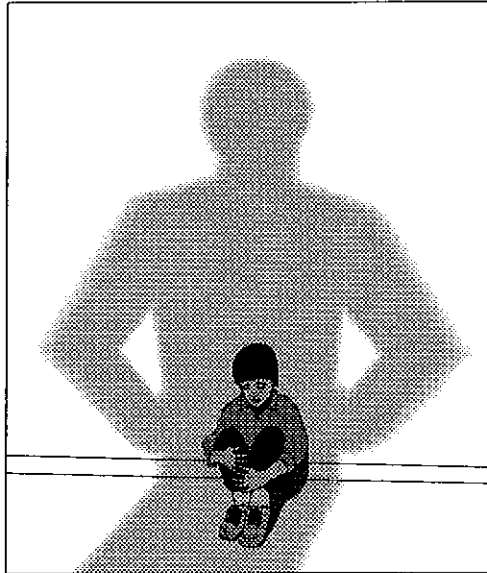
All too often we learn the teenager, or even younger, suicide victim has felt no one cared -

no one listened - that what he or she did made no difference to anyone.

The question must come to mind: "how can one, who has no sense of being valued, learn early on to value her or himself?"

The weakening of the family in recent times is undeniable. That doesn't portend its disappearance.

In fact it is at this time of rapid change in the world that strong family values can help us to cope, to come to terms with the unfamiliar.



How do we judge that the family is worth saving? I believe it must be on a democratic base. Children learn to treat others equally if equality is basic in family relations.

I enjoyed these words from American writer Letty Cottin Pogrebin's book *Family Politics*. "If the family were a container, it would be a nest, an enduring nest, loosely woven, expansive and open. If the family were a fruit, it would be an orange, a circle of sections, held together, but separable—each segment distinct. If the family were a boat, it would be a canoe that makes no progress unless everyone paddles. If the family were a sport, it would be baseball: a long, slow, non-violent game that is never over until the last out."

And a final belief of my own. It is a progressive step when society accepts the idea of people living in families of their own choosing. \*#

# Can community schools survive?

You've got to wonder sometimes, don't you? I mean, you think you've caught on to what the government is doing in one area and then they do something that totally contradicts their earlier position.

Take the concept of community schools. There are 66 of them in Alberta and they have strong ties to the community using the educational process for both individual and community betterment. In them you'll find a school, but you'll also find many programs which operate at the school for the children, their parents and other members of the community such as seniors and new Canadians. Alex Taylor Community School is one example—they have a snack program, a pre-school drop-in program, a food bank distribution centre, a drop-in for seniors, an English as a Second Language program for adults, a summer-school program, regular information sessions with a police liaison, a before and after-school care program and even a distribution centre for used furniture and clothing—all of which used to be funded in-part by the provincial government through Alberta Education. This also included the use of the school facility for outside community groups such as Brownies, Boy Scouts, and Continuing Education. As of September 1994 all Alberta Education community school funding has been cut off. This, on top of cutting kindergarten hours by 50 per cent, creates a great burden on the schools and their communities to keep very successful programs alive.

Now this seems to be contradictory to me. It was just this year that Alberta Education began a pilot project in two local junior high schools where community services would set up shop within the school—one-stop services. It involves services such as a police liaison, on-site workers from the Edmonton Board of Health, child welfare workers, and mental health professionals. The services are geared to the students, their parents and brothers and sisters. It's bringing community services into the schools. Mind you, the programs are a bit different in that they deal with problems that have already appeared

rather than some preventative measures which community schools offer. Anyway the concept seems the same to me—making the school more than just a centre for learning.

I asked Marlene Poloway, the community school coordinator of Alex Taylor Community School, what the loss of funding will mean to the school. She said it could mean anything from the loss of personnel to the loss of key programs. Since they

By Sheila  
Kushniruk



Marlene Poloway jokes with an Alex Taylor teacher as they prepare for a staff lunch donated by nursing practicum students.

photo by Sheila Kushniruk

have a parent auxiliary group in place which helps with fundraising and budget planning, the group will now have to decide what is essential and what they can do without. The essential programs will require extensive fundraising to keep them going.

It's a tough blow for a school that serves an already disadvantaged community. Funding for all their community-based programs had to come out of the community school funding and fundraising, rather than being taken from the regular school budget. The Community Education Association of Alberta has protested the deregulation of the Community School Program saying that a single

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general education grant is inappropriate. Approximately 60 per cent of the community school grants fund had always been allocated for activities outside the mandates of school jurisdiction. They said 'the grants opened the doors of the schools and provided leadership and support to the community at large.' They're right. Talk to any parent or program user at a community school and you'll hear the same message. Parent Auxiliary Groups are grappling with what to cut and what to keep—do you keep the snack program which costs Alex Taylor School over \$4,000 a year to run; do you tell the seniors to find another place to go; do you tell new Canadians that they can't take ESL there anymore or do you refuse to provide pre-school or after-school care to children.

"This is just the beginning," said Marlene. They are scrambling to make up shortfalls in the regular school budget which include the loss of 200 kindergarten hours per child, general budget cuts, as well as cuts to all subsidies for school supplies.

The only ray of hope comes from people in the community who have called and offered to make muffins once a week, or bring in fruit, or volunteer their time and efforts to keep programs alive.

Once again government downloading has tossed vital programs out leaving disadvantaged communities to fend for themselves. ❊

 **Annual General Meeting**

You are welcome to attend our **AGM**  
to be held **May 19, 1994**  
at **7 p.m.**

Our guest speaker will be  
**the Honorable Bob Pringle**  
Minister, Saskatchewan Social Services.  
Location to be announced—call the ESPC for details.

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on the government to ensure that the well-being of children is the prime motivator of change. Achieving effective, efficient services to children and their families requires the support and involvement of the public and to make a difference the system needs to build on the strengths of individuals, families and communities. The regional report will be submitted to the Commissioner at the end of April and he will make his formal submission to the government in June.

The third initiative which the CFI is involved in is supporting the expansion of four local programs for children. These include Headstart, Health For Two, School Nutrition Programs and municipally funded daycare programs.

This marks the second year for the CFI and it's taken a lot of cooperation and consultation to come to this point. In fact over 230 key players became involved last November to identify important issues and actions. They were from community agencies and organizations concerned with issues of poverty affecting children and families. These people identified 45 issues, each with an action. This was then narrowed down to 15 at which time they voted on the most pressing issue. Income support rated number one and the group decided to propose a vision, plan, and workable strategies for income support involving the three orders of government.

The Edmonton Children and Families Initiative has the potential to be a major Alberta contributor to the reform of Canada's social/income security system. ❊

*Carl Sorensen is a social planner and special projects coordinator with Edmonton's Community and Family Services Department.*