

# Edmonton *f*acts

April 1999 Edmonton Social Planning Council

## More than 20,000 Edmonton children hungry

A committee known as *Feeding Calgary's Children* has released a report on child hunger and poverty in Calgary. The Edmonton Social Planning Council has developed a follow-up report on child hunger and poverty in Edmonton. Here are our findings.

*Feed the Children* talks about three types of poor nutrition—persistent hunger, intermittent hunger and poor quality diet. Children with unmet persistent hunger needs are always facing hunger. Children with intermittent hunger needs are often hungry. Children with poor quality diets live in families with incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). These children may not be hungry but may still be at risk of hunger or malnutrition.

In Edmonton, at least 9,965 children face persistent hunger. Another 10,093 Edmonton children have intermittent hunger needs and are often or sometimes hungry. Another 28,114 may live on poor quality diets because their families are too poor to purchase the basics of food, shelter and clothing. In total, one in three Edmonton children (48,172 children) are hungry or at risk of malnutrition.

In Calgary, 6,636 children have unmet persistent hunger needs. Another 9,536 have intermittent hunger needs. In addition, 28,889 children live in low-income households and may be at risk of malnutrition. In total, 45,061 children are hungry or at risk of malnutrition.

### **Always Facing Hunger—Children with Unmet Persistent Hunger Needs**

To measure the number of children with persistent hunger, the Calgary committee used the number of children living in Supports for Independence (SFI) welfare households. Nine thousand, nine hundred and sixty five (9,965) Edmonton children and 6,636 Calgary children lived in households which received SFI.

Statistics Canada uses LICO to measure how many Canadians live in low-income families. Families that rely on SFI live well below LICO.

A single parent with two children receives an SFI allowance of \$11,724 a year or about \$977 a month. The SFI allowance for a family of three is just 44 per cent of LICO.

A family of two parents and two children receives an SFI allowance of \$12,120 a year or \$1,010 month. This allowance is 37.6 per cent of the LICO for a family of four in an urban environment.

### **Often or Sometimes Facing Hunger—Children with Intermittent Hunger Needs**

To measure the number of children with intermittent hunger, the Calgary committee used the number of children who use the

food bank. It estimated low, calculating the lowest possible number of children using the food bank.

Due to the ever-increasing demand, food banks must restrict the number of times a family can receive food. On average, a family can use the food bank six times a year. The Calgary committee therefore took the number of children using the food bank and divided that number by six to arrive at the lowest possible estimate.

Since Edmonton's Food Bank and the Calgary Inter-Faith Food Bank are not the only food programs in Edmonton and Calgary, the committee multiplied the lowest possible estimate by two. Finally, since one can assume that children living in SFI households would be regular food bank users, it subtracted the number of children receiving SFI.

In 1998, Edmonton's Food Bank served 60,174 children. The Calgary Inter-Faith Food Bank served 48,709 children.

According to the formula, 10,093 Edmonton children and 9,536 Calgary children experience intermittent hunger needs which go unmet.

### **At Risk—Children with Poor Quality Diet**

According to the Statistics Canada Federal Census data for 1996, 32.1 per cent of Edmonton children and 23.7 per cent of Calgary children live in households with incomes below LICO. In actuality this percentage represents 48,172 Edmonton children (0 to 17 years) and 45,061 Calgary children (0 to 17 years). Calgary's Feed the Children report states that, "it may be considered a safe assumption that children living in households whose incomes are below the low-income cut-off point may have poor quality diets."

### **Hungry Children**

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In Calgary, 6,636 children have unmet persistent hunger needs. Another 9,536 have intermittent hunger needs. In addition, 28,889



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For a copy of the full Edmonton report, see the Edmonton Social Planning Council website at [www.edmspc.com](http://www.edmspc.com).

## Introducing



# Income Gap Widening in Alberta

In October, the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto released *The Growing Gap*, a 120-page report on the growing gap between the rich and the poor. According to *The Growing Gap*:

**The rich are getting richer.** Each of Canada's top 10 CEOs brought home more than \$10 million last year. On average, the top 100 CEOs saw a 56 per cent increase in compensation last year.

**Full-time jobs are disappearing.** A generation ago, about two-thirds of the employed labour force worked a full-time 35-40 hour a week job. Now only half the workers have such jobs. About one in five jobs is part time (double the number from 20 years ago).

**The middle class is shrinking.** Those earning the equivalent of between \$37,600 and \$56,000 in 1973 accounted for 40 per cent of the population. A generation later, only 27 per cent of the population found themselves in the middle.

**The gap between the rich and the poor is widening.** In 1973, the richest 10 per cent of families with children under 18 made 21 times more than the poorest 10 per cent of Canadian families. In 1996, the richest 10 per cent of families made 314 times more than the poorest 10 per cent of Canadian families.

**The gap between the rich and poor is growing faster in Alberta and Ontario than in other parts of Canada.** Armenia Yalnizyan, author of *The Growing Gap*, culled this fact from a February 1998 article in the *Canadian Economic Observer*.

The article was from a Queen's University and Statistics Canada study, "Differences in Earnings Equality by Province, 1982-94." The author, Ross Finnie, studied earnings inequality in each province. Until Finnie's study, all the research had studied Canada as a whole. No one had looked at the trends in individual provinces.

Finnie uses a statistical tool known as a Gini coefficient to measure the difference between the highest and lowest income levels. He calls the difference earnings inequality. Finnie then calculates the national earnings inequality level and levels for each province.

Atlantic Canada had the greatest earnings income inequality, Manitoba the lowest. "Newfoundland had the greatest degree of overall earnings inequality, with its Ginis ranging 15 to 20 per cent above the national level..." Alberta and B.C. had average earnings income inequality close to the national level.

From 1992 to 1994, Ontario saw a decline in earnings inequality, while Alberta's earnings income inequality grew from .385 to .408. Only Newfoundland saw a similar rate of increase. Alberta's earnings inequality is still below Atlantic Canada's and Quebec's, but we have climbed above the national level. Finnie's study only reaches to 1994. When Finnie updates his study to include 1999 numbers, we will know if Alberta's income gap has remained above the national level and has continued to increase faster than the rest of the country.

—TB

**A**t the Edmonton Social Planning Council, we're excited about our new partnership with *Vue Weekly*. This new *Edmontonfacts* insert will appear four times a year. In the past, we published *First Reading*, a quarterly just for our members. This new insert is like *First Reading*, but is no longer a members-only publication. It's free to the thousands of Edmontonians who read *Vue*.

In these pages, you will find statistics not included in the March 1999 budget speech. You will learn that 68.2 per cent of the families cut off welfare—about 37,000 families—can't afford food and rent.

When the Feeding Calgary's Children committee released *Feed the Children*, we saw it as an honest and important attempt to quantify child hunger in Calgary. We responded by using Calgary's methodology to quantify child hunger in Edmonton. Both studies looked at food bank use and assumed children fed by food banks experience some degree of hunger. The studies then calculated the number of children on welfare and concluded that those children live on such low incomes they experience a deeper, more persistent hunger.

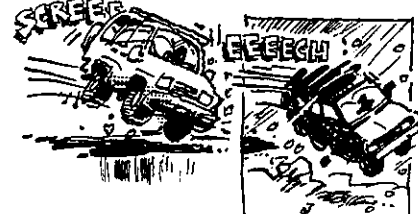
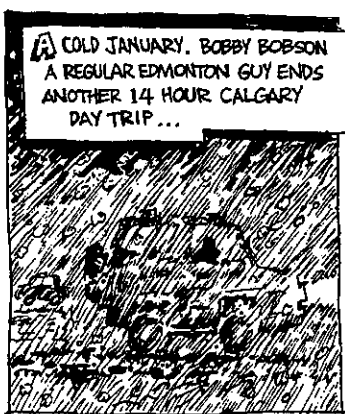
The Klein government dismissed both studies because it doesn't want to believe that children on welfare experience hunger. The studies weren't pure science, but who can argue with the food bank numbers? In Edmonton and Calgary, many children aren't getting enough of the right foods, and we think it's important to get those facts on the public agenda.

This insert also includes a new super hero—E Man, short for Economic Man. E Man is a new strip by Edmonton cartoonist, Gerry Rasmussen. E Man is our chance to laugh at this crazy market-obsessed world. Thanks to Gerry for donating this strip to the Council.

Terese Brasen, Communications Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council



Editorial



STUCK. FIND THE CELL, CALL SOMEONE. OUT OF BATTERIES. DEAD. BOBBY BOBSON CATCHES THE METAPHOR. HIS LIFE IS STUCK IN A SNOWBANK, WHEELS SPINNING—GOING NOWHERE ...

NOW STRANDED, BOBSON DECIDES TO TURN ON THE RADIO... WHAT'S THIS? YES, ANOTHER RADIO TALK SHOW PREDICTING DOOM—



...SPENDING MONEY AND BORROWING MONEY GOT US INTO THIS MESS! GOVERNMENT PENSION PROGRAMS ARE GOING BANKRUPT, OUR SAVINGS WILL BE LOST, AN INTERNATIONAL MONETARY HOLOCAUST IS COMING

LATER BACK IN HIS TOWNHOUSE BASEMENT, BOBBY EXPERIMENTS WITH A SECRET MAIL ORDER FORMULA, ONE GULP AND THE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS...



ECONOMIC MAN!! ...TOUGH, READY FOR THE FUTURE, E'MAN HAS A PLAN...



CONTINUED

# End of the Line

Elaine (not her real name) doesn't open her mail these days. Most of it's bad news—bills and collection notices. Capital Health wants her to pay an old ambulance bill. Her landlord, the City of Edmonton's Capital Region Housing Corporation, wants its rent.

Capital Region Housing is subsidized housing. "The unofficial name," says Elaine, "is end-of-the-line housing. For me, it's truly the end of the line. I'll have no place to go. If they serve the papers, I will have that many days or hours to get out. We'll be out on the city boulevard with all our stuff."

**"It's like a crime. People just walk on by. They don't want to admit they saw it..."**

Elaine's stuff won't include boxes and bags of groceries. Her cupboards are bare. She has no income, can't find a job, can't get welfare and has no idea how she'll feed her daughter when she comes home from school.

"We have been cut off from different food banks," says Elaine, explaining that the Edmonton Food Bank places limits on the number of hampers one family can receive. A family like Elaine's can receive just six hampers a year.

"Elaine has gone for many, many jobs over the last few years," says a friend she met eight years ago in church. "She would go for many, many interviews, get encouraged, then they wouldn't hire her."

Elaine and her daughter survive on sporadic maintenance payments which Alberta Justice collects on their behalf. At one time, they were on welfare. Then Alberta Family and Social Services began cutting its welfare rolls. From March 1993 to April 1997, the department cut the caseload by 60 per cent. In less than four years, 54,581 families lost their welfare benefits. Elaine and her daughter were among those families.

Elaine appealed the decision to cut her benefits and lost. "They seemed to focus on Elaine not looking for work," says a friend who attended the appeal. "That was their main beef. They figured she was not making an effort. They were giving her suggestions for jobs. Could she work here? Why didn't you try this? And has your daughter gone out and looked for work."

Elaine's friend says the department pretends to protect children but did nothing to protect Elaine's daughter. "It broke my heart to think about her daughter. They say you have to look after the children. But in Elaine's case the children were not looked after, and I think it has affected her terribly. They should have made some provisions for her daughter."

In 1990, Alberta Family and Social Services gave welfare a new name—Supports for Independence or SFI. The department wanted to control caseloads. From 1983 to 1990, the welfare caseload had grown 60 per cent. In

the early '80s, rising caseloads surprised no one. The boom was over and unemployment was at 10.8 per cent. By 1990, although unemployment had returned to the pre-recession low of 6.8 per cent, caseloads kept rising.

SFI would focus on employment training—weaning clients from welfare as quickly as possible. "Social Services started trying to get me back to work," Elaine recalls. "They kept saying you are trying to get out of work. I was told I was lazy. I started receiving letters and phone calls. The cheque would be late, then I would have to phone and bargain with them, have a meeting with them and plead my case just to get the money.

"I may have been employable to a certain extent, but not to the extent they believed I should be," says Elaine. "When my daughter started school, I started taking courses. But Social Services was making my life a misery and it kept escalating. I wasn't cut off right away but they would withhold the cheques until I got more paper and more paper work into them."

In 1997, Social Services contracted the Canada West Foundation to look at the impact of welfare reforms. The resulting report, *Where Are They Now?*, concluded that about half the clients found work. Another 16.1 per cent took out student loans or went to another program, such as Employment Insurance, Workers' Compensation or Canada Pension.

On the surface, it looks like good news. Only 7 per cent said they left welfare because they were cut off. Seven per cent doesn't sound like a lot, until you do the arithmetic. That's 3,821 families—with no income. The study was based on a telephone survey. It only reached the 3,821 families lucky enough to still have a home and a phone.

No one knows exactly how many families have actually been cut off and left with nothing. Alberta Family and Social Services doesn't keep those records beyond six months. A family loses its benefits then six months later the department deletes the file.

Look closer at *Where Are They Now?* and there's another disturbing statistic. After leaving welfare, over two thirds (68.2 per cent) of respondents reported not having enough money for food and shelter. That's 37,224 families that can't pay the rent or get enough to eat.

Since 1992-93, welfare spending has dropped by about \$700 million per year. To Albertans, it is a modern day miracle—a balanced budget, lower taxes and a disappearing debt. But to take \$700 million out of the budget, an estimated 37,224 families had to go hungry.

Welfare policy goes back to the 1970 *Social Development Act* which stated that "no person



within Alberta will lack the goods and services essential to health and well-being." The Act is still in place. According to Section 02 of the Act, the "Legislative authority for Supports for Independence (SFI) is the Social Development Act (SDA)."

The department never went to Albertans and asked for a new mandate. It never asked Albertans to abandon the Act and the principle that "no one will lack the goods and services essential to health and well-being." Instead, it abandoned those principles behind closed doors.

Yesterday, Elaine and her daughter had a free meal at the church, but they don't know where they will find their next meal or how long it will be till they join the ranks of the homeless. Elaine knows she and her daughter suffer from malnutrition. There's the skin problems, depression, fatigue, lack of concentration. "You have no strength or energy to get through the day."

Despite her hunger and poverty, Elaine manages not to look the part. Shop around and you can find a large bottle of shampoo for just a dollar. Wash your clothes without detergent—just water. Accept donations and random acts of kindness.

Although *Where Are They Now?* admits thousands of welfare recipients were simply cut off without work, student loans or another form of income, Elaine says people just don't want to discuss it or deal with it. "The blinders go on. It's like a crime. People just walk on by. They don't want to admit they saw it because they don't want to be held accountable."

"They treat me like I'm invisible," she adds. "After a while you start to believe it. Maybe I don't really exist. Maybe I am really nobody."

—Terese Brasen

# Women's Poverty

by Arlene Chapman

The following is from a workshop presented at the Parkland Institute forum, *Poverty Amidst Plenty*.

In 1993, the Government of Alberta began its deep cuts to health, education, day care and welfare spending. The government had a new vision: "a prosperous Alberta with an open, accountable government that lives within its means and delivers quality services at low cost." To achieve this vision, it chose to cut spending.

The government claimed the cuts were gender neutral. In 1995, Bob Scott was communications director for Alberta Family and Social Services. "We don't track by gender," he told the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. "We don't care if it's a man or a woman, the head of the household is the one making the decisions. It makes no difference to our programs."

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. In October 1995, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues published *Differential Impact and the Alberta Advantage*. The report examined whether the cuts and changes hurt or helped women. Not surprisingly, it found the cuts to health care, education, day care and welfare were cuts to women. The Alberta Women's Coalition has since prepared an update, *Feminization of Poverty*, which looks at whether anything has changed since 1995.

## Loss of well-paying jobs

For Alberta women, the cuts to health, education and public administration have meant the loss of well-paying jobs. In 1996, 6,860 fewer women were working in provincial public administration than in 1991. In 1993-94, AUPE (Alberta Union of Provincial Employees) lost 2,939 women members—compared to 1,707 men.

Over 98 per cent of nurses are women and 81 per cent of all health care sector workers are women. In health, there were 2,160 fewer female nurse supervisors and registered nurses, as well as 1,435 fewer women in technical and related occupations. A 1,340 increase in professional health occupations (physicians, chiropractors, etc.) offset some of the losses.

The number of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and other health assistants increased by 1,220. However, the increase in health assistants may simply mean that LPNs with less training are replacing well-paid nursing specialists. According to Statistics Canada, the average income for a full-year, full-time nurse in Alberta in 1991 was \$34,475. For nursing assistants, the average full-year, full-time income was \$23,149.

During 1993-94, we lost 1,000 full-time teaching positions. Other positions lost full-time hours, dropping from a .9 to a .5 or lower position. Positions below .5 do not pay benefits. There was a 50 per cent cut in the number of Early Childhood teachers. The Alberta government tracks the number of teachers but does not separate the data in male and female categories. So we do not know how many women were actually hurt by the cuts. We do know that most teachers (65.3 per cent) are women. In Early Childhood, the area hardest hit by cuts, 99 per cent of the teachers are women.

## Less earning power

*Seizing Opportunity* (1993) forecasted 110,000 new jobs by 1997. Between 1991 and 1996, three sectors accounted for all new jobs: community, business

and personal services; tourism and travel; and retail and wholesale trade industrial groups.

These three sectors are the low-paying sectors that demand a flexible workforce willing to work part time, part of the year. Eighty-four per cent of all Alberta women work in these low-paying sectors. In Alberta, 60 per cent of women over 15 work for wages. Women make up 44 per cent of Alberta's labour force.

For women, the strongest unions are in health, education and public administration—the areas taking the deepest cuts. Fewer members means weaker unions. And women without unions earn less than unionized women. On average, non-unionized earn \$9.22 an hour, while unionized women earn an average of \$12.50 an hour.

## Hungry families

The Alberta government does not release gender specific welfare data. However, Statistics Canada tells us women head up 80 per cent of all single parent families in Alberta. It also tells us that 60 per cent of all single-parent families headed by women live below the poverty line. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the welfare cuts hurt women and their families more than men.

Alberta's "welfare reforms" include policies that discriminate against women, children and minority populations. Those discriminatory policies include providing damage deposits once in a lifetime and forcing mothers with infants to look for work. These policies will lead to more extreme poverty and homelessness.

While forcing new mothers to look for work, the Alberta government has cut operating grants to day cares. Day care costs average over \$4,000 per year for one child. In this province, it is not unusual to pay \$6,000 per year per child. The full subsidy or maximum allowed is \$460 per month for a child under 12 months or \$380 for a child over 18 months. Even at one of the low-cost centres, a woman is left to pay about \$100 a month per child after subsidy. Even with full subsidy, a woman working full time at minimum wage (about \$800 per month) would find her portion difficult to pay.

## Measuring the impact on women

The way we collect data helps us measure how policies affect men and women differently. If we assume policies are gender neutral, we do not differentiate between men and women. For example, we count teachers, not female teachers and male teachers. We count the welfare caseload, not how many women and children are on the caseload.

The Government of Alberta seems to make this assumption. As a result, it becomes difficult to measure the impact on women. In 1996, the Government of Alberta abolished the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. Women's Policy and Programs became the Women's and Seniors Secretariat. It then joined Citizenship, and "Women" was dropped from the name. In recent economic planning documents (for example, *From Ideas to Action: Response of the Government of Alberta to the Alberta Growth Summit*) the wording used is "people."

The Alberta Growth Summit recommended that

the Alberta Economic Development Authority be expanded to become the Alberta Economic and Social Development Authority. The government responded by saying it did not agree that economic development flows from social development, as the recommendation suggested. In fact, the department believes quite the opposite, that social development flows from economic development. The original Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues paper, *Differential Impact and the Alberta Advantage*, reviewed the economic theory underlying the Alberta Advantage. "Economic theory has never been able to deal with the reality that this work [the reproduction and care of people] is necessary for the marketplace to exist at all."

Arlene Chapman is the provincial co-ordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

## Become a factivist

### Join the Edmonton Social Planning Council

We uncover the facts, then alert governments, the media and the public to the issues.

The Council started in 1940 as the Council of Social Agencies. In the last 59 years, the Council has helped form the Edmonton Community Chest (later the United Way), the John Howard Society, Edmonton's first day care (the Creche), the first Head Start program, the first women's shelter (now WIN House) (with the YMCA), the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired, the Boyle Street Community Services Co-op and the Edmonton Rape Crisis Centre (Sexual Assault Centre). Today, we continue to initiate and support community action through research, co-ordination and advocacy.

For the price of a large pizza, you can join us in our call for social change. Individual memberships—\$25. Limited income—\$5

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