



the fACTivist

Newsletter of the Edmonton Social Planning Council



www.edmspc.com

Spring 2007

In this issue of
the fACTivist:
We explore some of
the complex issues
surrounding housing
in the city.

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Lending our Voices to the Housing Crisis

By Susan Morrissey, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council

We have dedicated this edition of the fACTivist to the issue of housing to continue the dialogue about this pressing issue.

You don't have to go very far these days to hear about the lack of affordable housing in Edmonton and through-out Alberta - it has become a common topics in newspapers and radio programs.

We hear stories of people in communities throughout Alberta living in their vehicles, while working full time as well as entire families living much of the year in tents. One need to only take a stroll through our river valley in the summer to see the remnants of temporary housing.

The recent count of homeless persons in Edmonton conducted in October 2006 by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing reported a substantial increase in homelessness. The number of homeless increased 19% from the last count in 2004.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, it still seems difficult to believe that so many people are struggling to find places to live when the city is enjoying the benefits of a

healthy economy. In such a time of prosperity, how can this be?

Affordable housing strategies both at the municipal, provincial and national levels are examining and proposing possible solutions. Premier Stelmach recently struck an Affordable Housing Task Force to make immediate and long-term recommendations after consultation with Albertans.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is continuing to raise our voice on this very serious issue, as you will see in the pages that follow. We continue to lend our voice to such groups as the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness and the Living Wage task force. Our collective efforts will help to heighten peoples' awareness of the complex causes and consequences of housing issues - from homelessness, to low wage jobs, to the lack of safe, affordable housing.

Is there a simple, magic solution to this problem? Definitely not. However, it is encouraging that this issue is appearing more often on decision makers' agendas, with the aim of finding innovative long-term solutions.

Tracking the Trends 2007: Available April 12!

After many months of data gathering and research, the ESPC is proud to announce the release of the 2007 edition of *Tracking the Trends*. The new edition builds on previous issues, featuring more detailed socioeconomic data and analysis. It will be a great reference document for people working on social issues.

The publication is available for download, in sections, under the "Publications" section of our website (www.edmspc.com).

Coil-bound hard copies are available for purchase - \$20 for members, and \$30 for non-members (plus shipping).

Download an order form from our website, or contact Stephanie Haar to order your copy.

ESPC Annual General Meeting Scheduled for May 10!

See page 5 for more details.



United Way
Member Agency



When Housing hits Home ...

By Stephanie Modeste, Social Work Practicum Student, MacEwan College

Home. A word that means many different things to many different people. For many, "home" is something temporary. For others it represents their name on a waiting list - their dreams of what it will feel like to have a safe, welcoming place to live with dignity and raise healthy families.

Many of us take this word for granted. "Home" is a place that has always been there, and there has never been a threat that we would lose it. Unfortunately, more and more Albertans cannot afford to take "home" for granted.

Growing Reality

Many Albertans, and more and more Edmontonians, are aware of the housing crunch - it is a growing concern that impacts their daily lives in very important ways. It is no longer a surprise to see no vacancy signs on every block, or for apartments to be converted to high-end condos. What's more, the problem isn't limited to private apartments - applicants for subsidized housing are often being informed that it could be up to two years before units become available.

Clearly, the housing issue is really starting to hit home - not just for people with low - and fixed incomes, but also "regular" working Edmontonians with adequate incomes. The real value of incomes has not changed since 1980 (the median income has actually declined in value). With the astronomical increases in home prices, and the substantial rise in rents, many Edmontonians' incomes are becoming stretched to the point where it is becoming

difficult for them to pay all their basic bills, let alone maintain a decent standard of living.

Rising costs are forcing some people to live with family or friends, or to settle for sub-standard housing. In extreme cases, they may end up living on the street or staying the night in shelters. City shelters are seeing their numbers continually rising, particularly over the winter months.

"The [2006 homeless count] found 2,618 homeless persons in ... Edmonton. Of these, 1774 were absolute homeless (having no housing alternative) and 844 were sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations)." (EJPCOH, 2006)

"On average the Hope Mission's co-ed shelter sees 120 people per night. This week, that number jumped to over 200. It opens at 8 p.m. and the lineup starts at least one hour before" (Hope Mission, 2006)

Housing Initiatives

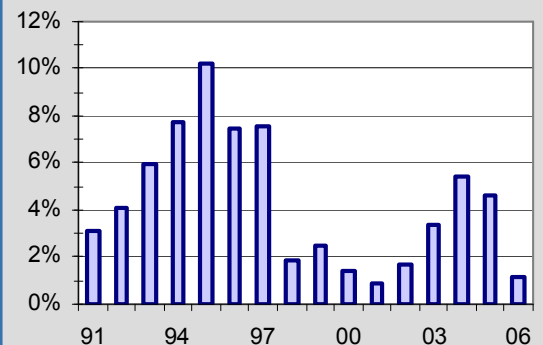
Some of the main organizations working on housing issues in Edmonton include:

1. **Boyle Street Co-op Housing Registry**
(icaf.ca/boylestcoop.html)
2. **Capital Region Housing Authority**
(www.crhc.ab.ca/)
3. **Edmonton Inner City Housing Society**
(www.eichs.org/)
4. **Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH)**
(www.moresafehomes.net)
5. **Habitat for Humanity**
(edmonton.hfh.org/)
6. **Handicapped Housing Society**
(780) 451-1114
7. **Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)**
(www.mysage.ca/)

Aboriginal Services

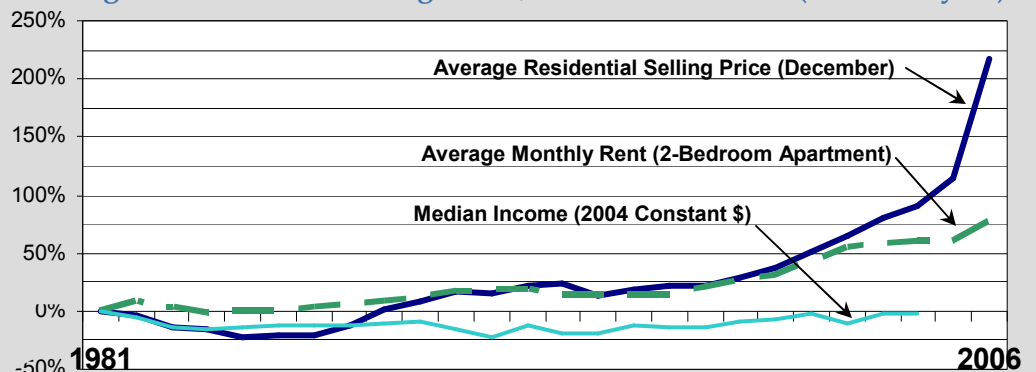
1. **Amisk Housing**
(780) 452-6651
2. **Metis Urban Housing Corporation**
(780) 452-6440
3. **Native Seniors Centre**
(nativeseniorscentre.ca/)

Apartment Vacancy Rates



Source: Tracking the Trends (CMHC)

Change in Residential Selling Prices, Rents and Incomes (1981 base year)



Source: Tracking the Trends (CMHC Rental Market Reports)



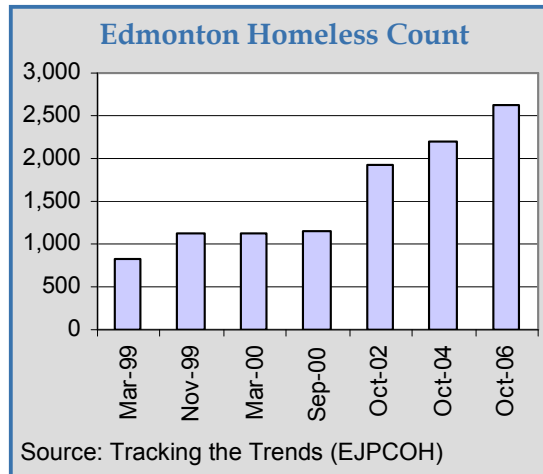
Housing hits Home

The situation is particularly strained for people on fixed-incomes, such as Edmonton's growing seniors population. Seniors typically live on more limited incomes. The challenges of this are often compounded by physical limitations that make seemingly simple tasks much more difficult and costly. For example, shopping for and bringing home a heavy load of groceries may not be possible without hiring a taxi. Increased housing costs may make it impossible for seniors to afford the additional services they need.

Solutions

Housing challenges are not new to Edmonton. However, the rapid growth the city is currently experiencing is magnifying issues that have been developing for many years. The failures of previous federal and provincial governments to recognize and effectively deal with these problems in the past are now catching up with us. The lack of programs makes it even more challenging to deal with this issue as it continues to grow and evolve. Waiting lists will not ease the housing crisis - actively planning for and developing more affordable housing will.

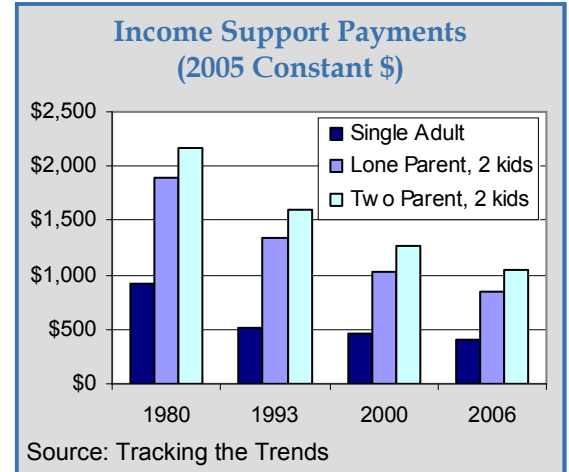
We cannot afford to ignore these issues any longer.



Free Public Forum on Housing and Homelessness, April 17

A free public forum - titled "Booming Crisis: Housing and Homelessness in Edmonton" - is being held **April 17, 2007 from 7:00-9:00pm** at City Hall.

Hosted by the Human Rights City Edmonton Project and the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, the



Taking Action

As a community, we must open our eyes and realize the housing crunch is a serious issue that we all have a stake in. Because it is our common interest, we can all play a role in bringing about a solution. How?

- ♦ Talk to other people about the issue.
- ♦ Tell your local city councilor or MLA that you are concerned about the future of your city and your fellow citizens, and **suggest creative solutions**

"We're getting lots of ideas - some are way out there, but we want to hear them."
(City of Edmonton Housing Task Force)

- ♦ Advocate for policies that will provide safe, affordable housing for all residents of our city.

So what is "home," and what does it mean? Is it just four walls and a roof over your head?

Whatever it means to each of us personally, there is one basic principle we should all agree on - having safe, adequate shelter is a basic human right.

We must take action now to ensure that all Edmontonians can enjoy that right.

Making Connections

The Winter 2007 edition of the *fACTivist* focused on the **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)**.

Safe, affordable **housing** is a key determinant of the health of individuals and, thereby, communities.

Lack of adequate housing is associated with:

- ♦ Higher rates of illness
- ♦ Higher rates of death

The **conditions of homelessness** multiply the effects of poor housing:

- ♦ Poor nutrition
- ♦ Lack of sleep
- ♦ Lack of access to medical care / medicines

As a result, the death rate of the homeless population is 8 to 10 times higher than the housed population.

(Wellesley Institute, 2006)

forum will focus on raising awareness of and addressing the housing and homelessness issues in Edmonton. **Forum includes** a panel discussion with various members of the community, followed by a Q&A period.

Call 453-2638 for more information.



Current ESPC Project Working Poor in Edmonton Project in Full-Swing

Edmonton's economy is booming. Welfare rolls have dropped by more than two-thirds in the past 15 years. Employment is at record levels, and there are growing labour shortages. Yet poverty levels have remained stubbornly high with almost one in five Edmonton households not able to afford basic necessities. Even larger numbers of households are a pay cheque or two away from falling into poverty.

The ESPC, in partnership with Vibrant Communities of Edmonton and the United

Way of the Alberta Capital Region, are undertaking a major research project to better understand why so many working Edmontonians continue to experience poverty and low income, and what can be done about it.

The project is currently in its data collection and analysis phase. Later this Spring, the results will be written up in a report along with recommended solutions for more effective approaches to lifting low income working households out of poverty.

Looking for Information on Social Issues?

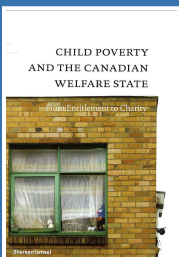
Visit the ESPC Resource Library today!

Open to the public:
M– F 8:30am– 4:30pm

Online Catalogue:
Available 24/7 @
www.edmspc.com

Our resource library is a rich source of current and historical publications on social issues.

Featured Book:



Child Poverty and the Canadian Welfare State: From Entitlement to Charity (Ismael, S.)

Featured Subscription:

Perspectives on Labour and Income (Statistics Canada)



Downtown East Committee Seeks Creativity and Balance

The Council currently sits in the Downtown East Redevelopment committee, which is currently finalizing the plan for gathering feedback from the local residents/occupants on the developments they would like to see in the area.

The project's Draft Vision outlines guiding principles that include:

- Providing shelter from the elements

- Diversifying housing types and styles
- Supporting property ownership
- Promoting residential (current and future) as a resource
- Bringing a balance of ages, incomes and cultures
- Encouraging a diverse community
- Making public space accessible

Visit the City of Edmonton's website (www.edmonton.ca) for more information.

ESPC Remains Active on Social Determinants of Health

The Council is very engaged in increasing public awareness of the links between poverty, inequality and health. In the past few months, Council staff participated in a number of conferences and consultations:

- A focus group on the Canadian Institute for Health Information's 'Health in Urban Places' research initiative,
- Consultations by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World

Health Organization, both of which have made social determinants of health a strategic priority,

- A day-long consultation on 'Health Literacy' sponsored by the Canadian Public Health Association, and
- The 'Forgotten Families' conference sponsored by the Parkland Institute.

The Council Becomes Active Member of ASHEN

In early 2007, the Council signed the Alberta Social & Health Equity Network Charter, making the commitment to participate in the network as an active member that supports and works towards achieving the goals laid out in the Charter. Some of these goals include:

- All Albertans receive a sustainable fair income and are therefore able to provide for their basic needs with dignity.
- All Albertans live in affordable, safe and adequate housing.

- Alberta citizens recognize and support policies and decisions that benefit the common good.
- All Albertans live in inclusive communities.

The Council looks forward to working with ASHEN to expand the network to include organizations and individuals across Alberta.

Visit www.foodsecurityalberta.ca/ to learn more about ASHEN and the Charter.



2007 Federal Budget Overlooks Housing Crisis

While allocating billions of dollars to combat "crime and terror," the federal government failed to announce any new spending to combat the housing crisis impacting families across Canada.

The Wellesley Institute's initial scan of the budget documents revealed only a few brief mentions of housing initiatives. This effectively ignores the roughly 1.5 million households in Canada who are in "core housing need."

(Visit wellesleyinstitute.com/blog/ to see the rest of Wellesley's initial budget commentary.)

It remains to be seen how the Alberta government will respond to the housing crisis in its upcoming budget. The Council will attend the budget speech on April 19 to see how it deals with housing and poverty.

Following the budget announcement, the province will be releasing its Affordable Housing Task Force report in May. Many excellent submissions were made to the task force by community organizations.

(Visit www.moresafehomes.net/ to view the submission made to the task force by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing and the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund.)

City of Edmonton Housing Strategy

The City of Edmonton's **Cornerstone Affordable Housing Plan** incorporates a number of components that show promise in easing the housing crisis, including:

1. Fixed rate rent supplements
2. First-time home-ownership plan (using surplus school sites).

ESPC Members Invited to Upcoming 2007 AGM: May 10

The ESPC will be hosting its 2007 Annual General Meeting on **May 10 at 5:00pm**.

Location: EMCN board room
2nd floor, 10010 - 107A Avenue

The evening will include a guest speaker, Dr. Alvin Finkel, who will be discussing the effect of historical social struggles on Canadian social policy. Dr. Finkel is a professor of History at Athabasca University, and the author of *Social Policy*

and Practice in Canada: A History. (Published in 2006)

All ESPC members are encouraged to attend. This is a great opportunity for you to meet the staff and board, and have a say in the direction of the organization by voting for our board of directors.

Contact Stephanie Haar at (780) 423-2031 or stephanieh@edmspc.com for more information or to RSVP.

Join the Council in the Great Human Race!

On **May 5**, the ESPC will be taking part in the Great Human Race - a community event to strengthen the non-profit sector and support volunteerism and citizenship.

The Race Day begins at 9:30am in Churchill Square. The 10K run starts at 10:00 and the 5K walk begins at 10:15.

We encourage everyone to sign up as part of the ESPC Team! You can either gather pledges and walk or run with us, or give pledges to support the Council.

You can drop off donations at the ESPC office, or donate on-line at www.GreatHumanRace.com

Contact Susan Morrissey (ESPC team captain) at (780) 423-2031 for more information.

Interesting Facts

1. Edmonton has the 2nd largest Aboriginal population in Canada, after Winnipeg.
2. The number of seniors is forecast to increase by 18,000 from 2006- 2011.
3. Edmonton is home to more Than 100,000 Post Secondary students.

(City of Edmonton, 2006)

Meet the ESPC Board of Directors

Thanking Terry Anderson for 4 Years of Service



Terry Anderson has served on the ESPC board of directors for four years – making him one of the longest-serving members of our current board.

A professor of Distance Education at Athabasca University, Terry has interest and expertise in research related to many issues, including housing and community development. Before joining the Council, he was president of the Riverdale

Community League and also founded the North Country Fair. Terry has lived in Edmonton for 12 years with his wife, Susan, and their two children, who are now University age.

Unfortunately for the Council, Terry's second term on the Board has come to an end. We thank him for his years of hard work and support, and wish him success in his future endeavors.



REMINDER TO MEMBERS

Don't forget to fill out and return the Member Survey by May 31, 2007!

If you did not receive a copy, or need a new one, please contact Stephanie Haar at (780) 423-2031

A Warm Welcome...

We would like to welcome **Stephanie Haar**, who joined us in February as our new Administrative Assistant.

With her creativity and ultra-keen organizational skills, she has already made her mark at the Council - new projects are taking off, and our day-to-day operations are running smoothly.

ESPC Opinion Editorial

Growing Inequality Threatens Social Cohesion

On January 2, the *Edmonton Journal* published a provocative opinion-editorial entitled 'Growing inequality threatens social cohesion of Canadian society.'

Written by the Council's Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator John Kolkman, the editorial used Statistics Canada data on the wealth of Canadians to highlight a 30-year trend of growing inequality, so that by 2005:

- The top 10 per cent of families owned 58.2 per cent of all household wealth;
- The poorest 20 per cent of families had negative net worth;
- Many middle-income families relied on lines of credit secured against their homes to pay the bills.

(See page 7 for wealth gap-related graphs.)

The article went on to describe the policy changes that are causing growing inequality, policy choices that could begin to correct it, and why this should be a pressing concern for all of us.

Some of the policy choices recommended include:

- Restoring some tax balance through a more progressive income tax system;
- Restoring or enhancing the universality of social programs; and,
- Making work pay for all Albertans.

The editorial obviously struck a chord, as it resulted in a number of letters to the editor, and phone calls to the Council's office.

In case you missed it, you can read the full article on the Media section of our website (www.edmspc.com).

Current ESPC Project

Seeking Voices from Edmonton's Neighbourhoods

The Council has been working closely with Action for Healthy Communities to develop the program evaluation tools for their Voices from our Neighbourhoods project.

The project brings people from 10 inner city neighbourhoods together to discuss and explore the issues in their neighbourhoods. The intention of the project is to empower and engage community members through dialogue and the formation of community member-run mini-projects.

The first set of Community Dialogues are currently being held in the neighbourhoods of Alberta Avenue, Norwood, MacCauley and Eastwood.

If you live in one of these communities – or know someone who does – and are interested in meeting your neighbours to talk about the issues your community is facing, contact Suzana at (780) 944-4687 or actionsd4@shawbiz.ca.

Visit AHC's website (www.a4hc.ca) for more information on their community initiatives.

Meet the ESPC Staff

Anette Wickenheiser: Newcomer to Council & City



Anette Wickenheiser joined the Council as Research & Communications Assistant in September 2006, with a BA in Sociology and Minor in Management from the

University of Calgary. Before joining the Council, Anette worked as a Data Analyst at the Mothercraft Institute for Early Development, a non-profit agency in Toronto supporting and providing services for families with children aged 0 to 6. From

her first day at the Council, she has taken on many challenging projects and looks forward to using her skills to help strengthen and revitalize the voice of the Council in the community.

Anette is a newcomer to Edmonton. She and her fiancée, Brad Kinley, a character animator at Bioware, moved to Edmonton in July 2006. The coming months will be busy for them both, as they move into their new home and finalize the plans for their wedding in May.



Housing and Income-Wealth Trends Not Matching Up

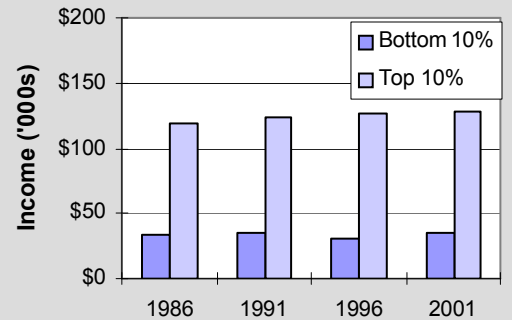
When compared with the graphs on page 2 depicting the rise in housing costs, these graphs highlight how different the momentum is for incomes and net worth.

Incomes have stagnated, and the net worth of the majority of families has not increased anywhere near the rate of housing costs.

What becomes glaringly obvious from these graphs is the huge gap between the poorest and the richest in our society.

- The income gap between the bottom and top 10% of Edmonton neighbourhoods has hovered around \$200,000 over the past decade.
- The net worth of the poorest families has actually declined faster than the rate of increased for the richest families.

Avg Income Gap between Poorest and Richest Edmonton Neighbourhoods (2004 Constant \$)



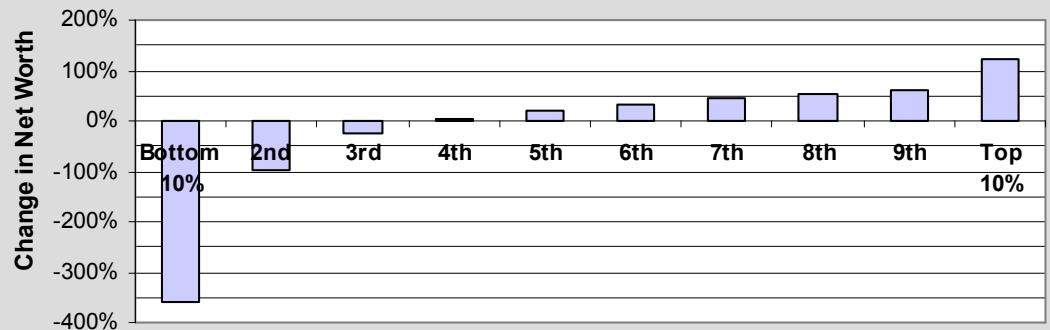
Source: Tracking the Trends (City of Edmonton)

LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?

All of the graphs presented in this issue of *the fACTivist* are generated from data in *Tracking the TRENDS 2007*.

Visit www.edmspc.com to view the publication or to download an order form.

Change in Net Worth of Families between 1984 and 2005, by Net Worth Decile (2005 Constant \$)



Source: Tracking the Trends (Statistics Canada).

Exploring the Links Between Social Work and Policy

By Stephanie Modeste, *Social Work Practicum Student, MacEwan College*

Many people envision someone shuffling papers and asking for signatures on the dotted line when they hear the word "social worker." However, during my time at the Council and Grant MacEwan I have learned that social work also delves into the world of social policy.

Social workers often work on the "front lines" with clients and their families, offering support and connecting them to resources. This direct link with clients allows social workers to understand how policies affect people on a daily basis - this is "real world" knowledge that can be used to advocate for change. Other social workers engage with social policy more directly, conducting research and compiling statistics to support advocacy for changes to existing policies.

As a future social worker, I've realized how much time and hard work are devoted to understanding how policies can affect individuals, families and society as a whole.

My time at the ESPC has allowed me to examine social policies and correlate them to some of the systemic issues that we are facing today. The current issues around housing, poverty, childcare and health, for example, can be linked to policies implemented by all orders of government. However, simply understanding these links is not enough. Effective, long-term policy change can only be achieved if we work together across boundaries of discipline and experience. Social workers have a definite role in this process.

A Big THANK YOU!

We want to extend our warmest thanks to **Stephanie Modeste**, our Social Work practicum student, for her contribution to the Council over the past six months.

Stephanie had an big impact on many projects - including *the fACTivist* - all the while juggling many other school and family responsibilities.

We wish her the best of luck in completing her program at MacEwan this summer, and her future studies through the University of Victoria!



Our Vision

A healthy, just and inclusive community.

Our Mission

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership to the community and its organizations in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy.

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Diane Dennis
Greg Farrants
Ron MacLellan
Joscelyn Proby
Ann Semotiuk
Michael Sidra

By Becoming a Member, you will...

- ... support our efforts to remain on the forefront in dealing with social issues
- ... make it possible for us to distribute our materials freely and widely to all
- ... receive our newsletters, fact sheets and other publications
- ... can vote at ESPC annual meetings and have a say in the direction of the organization
- ... be eligible to serve on the board of directors



Membership Form

Name _____

Organization _____

Position _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **Fax** _____

Email _____

Membership Type	Annual Fee
<input type="checkbox"/> Organization	\$45
<input type="checkbox"/> Household	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate (no vote)	\$10
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$5
<input type="checkbox"/> Limited Income Household	\$5

Donations Welcome - Can be included with cheque or money order for membership.

Please send completed form with a cheque or money order payable to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suite 220, 10010 - 107A Avenue
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Membership form and details available on our website (www.edmspc.com).