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Storm Clouds on the Retirement Security Horizon?

By JOHN KOLKMAN, Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator, *Edmonton Social Planning Council*

The reduction of poverty among seniors is one of the successes of federal and provincial social policy. As recently as 1980, four out of ten Edmonton seniors lived in poverty (as measured by the Low Income Cut-off After-Tax). In recent years, as few as one in twenty seniors are living in economic poverty.

The Three Pillars of Retirement Security

The main reasons for the decline in seniors' poverty are improvements to Canada's retirement system made over the past several decades. This system relies on three main pillars. The first pillar is Old Age Security (OAS) supplemented by a Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for low income seniors. These are non-contributory federal benefits funded from general revenues. The Alberta government also provides a benefit to low and modest income seniors called the Alberta Seniors Benefit (ASB), also funded from general revenues.

The second pillar is the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), a mandatory contributory plan funded by employers and employees. The third pillar is employer-based pension plans, group and individual registered retirement savings plans (RRSPs), and any non-registered savings and investments seniors may have.

Even if a single senior relied solely on the first pillar for their retirement income, by combining OAS, GIS, and ASB payments, their income would only be slightly below the LICO After-Tax level for a one person household. A senior couple in the same circumstances would actually have a combined income slightly higher than the LICO After-Tax level for a two person household.

Contrary to the perception of some, the second pillar of the retirement system (CPP) is in reasonably good shape. The CPP has been placed on a firmer financial footing in recent years, in part due to higher contribution rates, and in part due to more professional management of the CPP Investment Fund. In 2007, the Chief Actuary of Canada concluded that the CPP Fund can pay out its pension obligations for at least

the next 75 years.* Even with the hit the CPP Fund took in last fall's financial market meltdown, this is not expected to change significantly in the Chief Actuary's next report.

So, on one level, Canada's seniors have never had as much financial security entering their golden years as they do today. But there are many storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

Concerns on the Horizon

One storm cloud is the financial health of the third pillar of the retirement system. Unlike the CPP, many employer-based pension plans are seriously under-funded, with some very large plans on the brink of insolvency. There is tremendous pressure on trade unions and employees to accept cuts to their pensions, and/or to allow existing defined benefit plans which pay a predictable retirement income to be converted to defined contribution plans which do not. And anyone with registered or non-registered retirement savings knows about the steep losses incurred in equity investments, and the meager interest being paid on guaranteed investment certificates and term deposits.

Another storm cloud is the rapid aging of the Canadian population. Statistics Canada expects the number of seniors over age 65 to outnumber the number of children aged 15 years and younger within the next ten years. The growth of the seniors' population will accelerate in 2011 when the leading edge of the baby boomers turn 65.** One of the policy responses has been to encourage seniors to continue working by abolishing mandatory retirement. Another recent policy response is to penalize those who take CPP benefits before age 65, while rewarding those who wait as long as age 70 to begin drawing benefits.

Governments are looking at the aging of the population with alarm, and the decline in the number of seniors living in

(Continued on page 2)

* CPP Investment Board: <http://www.cppib.ca/faqs.html#0011>

** Statistics Canada. *Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006*, by Age and Sex, p. 6.





Seniors & Low Income, *cont'd from page 1*

poverty as an opportunity. Much of the improvement in the incomes of seniors is being offset by increases in user fees charged to seniors by all orders of government. (*See page 3 to read more about the changes to prescription drug coverage for seniors.*) In addition, accommodation charges for long-term care have more than doubled in recent years. Much of continuing care is being deregulated, which means that there is no limit on the accommodation rates charged by operators. Personal care is largely uncovered by the public health care system, with seniors having to pay for these services out of pocket.

By taking a larger slice out of the savings of seniors in the short-term, the government is short-changing itself in the longer term.

Instead of taxing the savings of seniors over many years, seniors are being forced to deplete their savings to pay for increased user fees and other expenses today.

Canada has much to celebrate in reducing the incidence of poverty among seniors. The design of Canada's retirement income system can in fact serve as a model for reducing economic poverty in the working age population including families with children. Nevertheless, care must be taken to ensure that this progress in reducing seniors' poverty is not undone through short-sighted changes to other policies affecting seniors.

John Kolkman recently celebrated a milestone birthday (his 55th), bringing him one year closer to his own golden years.

SAGE Awards

The SAGE Awards celebrate seniors who inspire, empower and engage others in making our community a better place to live and play.

Focusing attention on these outstanding accomplishments supports a positive perception of seniors and helps reduce negative outcomes such as elder abuse and ageism.

The luncheon celebration will be held
November 4th, 2009
at the Sutton Place Hotel.

Tickets are \$50, & go on sale **September 1st.**

Know an outstanding senior in Edmonton that deserves recognition?

Nominate them for a SAGE Award today!

Deadline for nominations:
August 15th

For more information, or to download a nomination form, visit

www.mysage.ca/sageawards.cfm

SAGEly Supporting Seniors in Greater Edmonton

By DAVID LOPER, *Communication Coordinator, Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)*

SAGE, the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton, like other senior centres, has a wide variety of activities, programs, clubs and classes for seniors. Many of these are open not just for SAGE members. There is an agreement between many senior centres that recognizes membership in any senior centre and allows registration and member discounts. Check with each centre for which of their programs apply. Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) has a great website and publication that list programs at each centre. (*Visit www.seniorscouncil.net*)

Broadening the appeal to seniors and welcoming new seniors is a concern for many organizations and at times brings changes to traditional roles. One example of this is the SAGE agreement with the Don Wheaton YMCA for SAGE members' access to that Y's special programs for seniors.

Recognizing Senior's Contributions

Other programs and events reach out as well. The annual SAGE Awards, presented by Servus Credit Union, honour seniors who have contributed significantly to our society in 9 different areas: arts & culture, business & entrepreneurship, community building, education, health & wellness, public service, science & technology, social justice & peace, and sport & leisure. (*See the side bar on*

the left for dates and nomination information.) Proceeds from the Awards celebration go toward programs like the Seniors Safe House that provides shelter for seniors facing abusive situations and the This Full House Program for seniors whose "stuff" fills their houses and limits their lives.

Improving the Lives of Seniors

SAGE is involved in many joint efforts to improve the lives of seniors. In partnership with many of Edmonton's senior serving organizations and the City of Edmonton, and under the leadership of Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC), we have been working on an important long range strategic plan for seniors services in Greater Edmonton. (*See page 4 for more on the role of the ESCC.*)

Another need for seniors is home services from snow shoveling and lawn mowing, to minor repairs and housecleaning. SAGE is doing a redesign of its Home Services Program, and other senior serving agencies that provide home services have been involved in the process of looking at these needs with a city wide focus.

There is also a heavy demand for Seniors Housing. Seniors, their families and those who work with them need

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SAGE, cont'd from page 2

information about the variety of housing for seniors. SAGE offers consultation, publishes a Seniors Housing Guide and is working on the upcoming Seniors Housing Forum (September 26) to help meet this need.

Other exciting programs at SAGE are Multicultural Outreach partnering with the Multicultural Health Brokers to serve immigrant and refugee seniors. Our urban gardening project also reaches out to these

seniors.

The SAGE Directory of Senior Services offers information on programs and services provided by government, health, charitable and private sector organizations. It is an invaluable resource for seniors and those who serve them.

For more information or publications call 780-423-5510 or visit www.mysage.ca.

ESPC Book Club

Our book club meets every few months to chat about great books related to social issues.

Everyone is welcome!

We need your help to choose our next series of readings.

What types of readings would you like to do?

Answer our poll @ edmontonsocialplanning.ca to have your say!

Farewell

The ESPC is sad to announce the departure of our Resource Coordinator, Erin Krekoski.

Her last day with the Council will be Aug 21, 2009.

Erin has made a significant contribution to the Council since she joined us in the Spring of 2008. She will be dearly missed!

A Critical Look at the Revised Seniors' Drug Plan

By NOEL SUMMERVILLE, *Chair, Seniors' Task Force, Public Interest Alberta*

In June, all Alberta seniors received a large, glossy, three-fold government bulletin designed to sell them on the revised pharmaceutical strategy announced by Minister Liepert on April 23, 2009.

While the information in this bulletin is factual, it is more remarkable for what it doesn't explain than for what it does:

- It fails to explain that the new, means-tested plan will eliminate the existing universal, premium-free plan under which all Alberta seniors pay 30% of the cost of prescription drugs to a maximum of \$25 per prescription.
- It fails to explain that, while providing free or low-cost prescription drugs to low-income seniors, the cost of this benefit, along with \$20 million of government savings, will be transferred onto the backs of middle-income seniors who will end up paying much more for the medications they require.
- It fails to explain that the Blue Cross Non-group plan in which seniors will be eligible to enroll is actually the same plan that many Alberta seniors now use, but that the government is requiring premiums for this plan to be virtually tripled by the time that the new seniors' drug plan starts on July 1, 2010.

The following table shows the rate increases that the government is requiring Alberta Blue Cross to impose in order to create 'a level playing field'. No doubt its friends in the private insurance industry will enjoy playing

Alberta Blue Cross Non-Group Annual Premium Rates

Effective Dates	Single	Family
Prior to July, 2009	\$246.00	\$492.00
July 1, 2009	\$492.00	\$984.00
July 1, 2010	\$762.00	\$1,416.00

on a field in which the single rate is increased by 310% and the family rate by 288%.

Based on these increased rates, what Alberta seniors will have to pay for their prescription drugs is based on a very crude measure of their taxable income as determined in line 260 of their previous year's tax return. Seniors are divided into five categories. For single seniors, their premium is based on whether their taxable income is up to 1, 2, 3, 4 or more thousand dollars per month. For couples, the taxable income thresholds are doubled, as shown in the following tables:

For a single income senior:

Taxable Income	Annual Premium
\$0 - \$12,000	\$0
\$12,001-\$24,000	\$0+CP*
\$24,001-\$36,000	\$381.00 + CP
\$36,001-\$48,000	\$571.44 + CP
\$48,001 or more	\$762.00 + CP

For a senior couple :

Taxable Income	Annual Premium
\$0- \$24,000	\$0
\$24,001-\$48,000	\$0 +CP*
\$48,001-\$72,000	\$708.00+CP
\$72,001-\$96,000	\$1,062.00+CP
\$96,001 or more	\$1,416.00+CP

* Premiums followed by "+CP" require a co-payment of 20% of cost to a maximum of \$15 per prescription.

The three levels of premium that seniors will pay are 50%, 75% and 100%, respectively, of the inflated Alberta Blue Cross Non-group premium rates.

Why is the government doing this?

The point of the new seniors' drug plan is not to save the government \$20 million. Rather,

(Continued on page 4)



Seniors' Housing Supports

The 3 levels of government offer a variety of housing supports for seniors, including:

- ♦ **Seniors' Homeowner Grant Program**
Grant to offset municipal property tax increases.
- ♦ **Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors**
Annual rebate on the education portion of property taxes.
- ♦ **Seniors Lodge Program**
Lodge accommodation for functionally independent seniors, based on income.
- ♦ **Seniors Self-Contained Housing**
Affordable apartments for independent low-income seniors. Rent based on 30% of income.
- ♦ **Residential Access Modification Program**
Grants to assist homeowners and tenants to improve their home's wheelchair accessibility.
- ♦ **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program**
Income-based forgivable loans to homeowners for repairs to improve health and safety or accessibility.
- ♦ **Emergency Repair Program**
Funding for low-income rural homeowners for emergency repairs.

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Senior's Drug Plan, *cont'd from page 2*

it is part of a concerted campaign to dismantle our system of universal, single-payer, publicly delivered healthcare.

Many mechanisms are used to further this campaign:

- ♦ Restricting benefits on the basis of income, as in the seniors' drug plan, is one.
- ♦ De-listing services such as gender re-assignment and chiropractic care is another.
- ♦ Failing to provide medically necessary services, such as long-term care under the continuing care strategy, is another.
- ♦ Arbitrarily rationing services such as MRI examinations is yet another.

These are all ways of driving more and more people out of the public system, and as a larger percentage of Canadians no longer have a vested interest in making the public system work, it will wither. The private enterprisers and corporations will respond by moving in to fill the void and reap the rich rewards for their shareholders.

Clearly, Minister Liepert is determined to pursue this campaign, but he was forced to abandon the original Pharmaceutical Strategy in the face of strong public protest.

If we all stand together to oppose the larger campaign to dismantle our universal, accessible and sustainable health care system, that campaign too, can be defeated.

Creating a Common Vision for Edmonton Seniors

By RICH GOSSEN, *Executive Director, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council*

The Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council and representatives from its member agencies have been planning the past year-and-a-half for development of a strong framework for improving the lives of Edmonton's seniors.

With input from seniors, senior-serving staff, non-profit groups and organizations, and other stakeholders, the ESCC has put together a discussion paper on *Services for Edmonton's Seniors: Creating a Strategic Plan Toward 2015*. Using the World Health Organization's age-friendly work as a guiding resource, the document identifies the following key focus areas: community support, health services, communication and information, social participation, transportation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, housing, and outdoor spaces and buildings. In an effort to create a common vision to address gaps and collaborate in working toward solutions, the discussion paper sets out guiding principles for all of the key areas, as well as goals and suggestions for how to follow through on each one.

The discussion paper is still at the draft stage but very soon it is expected to be ready to unveil to members of the public, the boards of member agencies and the entire senior-serving sector. Member

boards will be asked to endorse the document, thereby authorizing the ESCC's "process committee" to use it as the basis for preparation and approval of a strategic plan. Agencies will then be asked to develop action plans that will implement the strategic plan and thereby address the needs of seniors as they become an ever-increasing segment of the city's population.

The desire to facilitate development of a broad strategic plan for Edmonton seniors dates back to the ESCC's formation in 2004. In its first three years of operation, the ESCC worked to build credibility and establish trust with community-based senior serving organizations. In 2008, work began on a broad strategic plan via the Council's quarterly meetings with executive directors and board representatives. In August, a few volunteers from this group met with representatives from The United Way, FCSS, Edmonton Community Services, the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital and ESCC to develop a vision for seniors services in Edmonton. Drafting vision statements, it was felt, would provide focus and direction for groups that are providing services to seniors in Edmonton and area.

The starting point was to discuss what will make Edmonton an age-friendly city,

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Senior's Coordinating Council, *cont'd from page 4*

identifying goals and suggested actions to address current gaps. During 2008 the group also came up with a plan to undertake a review of outreach services to seniors. ESCC made an application to the New Horizons for Seniors program to undertake this project in 2009 with the help of a steering committee of many stakeholders.

By the end of 2009, the hope is that a broadly-based agreement on the outlines for a strategic plan for services to seniors, as well as agreement on how outreach services will be delivered to meet the needs of the demographic bulge of seniors that agencies will be dealing with during the coming years, will strengthen the entire sector. The five year plan will, of course, need to be reviewed and assessed during that period but it is expected to stand the test of time and lay the groundwork for succeeding five year plans.

In addition to the ESCC's work on the discussion paper and strategic plan, the Council is continuing its efforts to facilitate initiatives and work with agencies to address transportation barriers that prevent seniors from being able to get to where they need to go. The Council is also working to address the huge challenges immigrant seniors face in adjusting to life in Canada. A key goal of this work is to prevent social isolation.

The Council also helped to launch the *Creative Age Festival* in 2008 in Edmonton. *Creative Age* highlights the importance of the arts for older adults in relation to creative



expression, lifelong learning, health and well-being. The festival, which grew significantly in 2009, encourages increased opportunities for seniors to participate in arts programs, and celebrates and showcases the artistic accomplishments of seniors. It also gives staff in the senior-serving sector the opportunity to improve their awareness and skills. The event not only entertains seniors, but also opens opportunities for social engagement.

Other work the ESCC has been involved in includes

development of a promotional DVD highlighting senior centres as community hubs (for educational programming, recreation opportunities, meal provision, social events, and support services); preparation of Edmonton Community Services' *Aging in Place: A Neighbourhood Strategy Report*; and supporting the *Snow Angels* and *Driving Angels* programs (which encourage people to shovel snow for frail seniors in their neighbourhoods, and recognize drivers dedicated to transporting seniors).

The ESCC was established to provide a mechanism for coordinating the efforts and resources of senior-serving organizations in Edmonton. The Council will continue to facilitate preparation for the increased service demand brought on by the demographic shift in our population.

For more information about the Council and its initiatives, go to www.seniorscouncil.net or call 780-423-5635.

Housing Supports, *Cont'd*

♦ Home Adaptations for Seniors Independence

Forgivable loan, up to \$3,500, for minor home repairs to help low-income seniors stay at home.

♦ Home Living/Home Care Services

Services provided in home based on assessed need. Include professional services (e.g. nursing) and personal care services.

♦ Supportive Living

Specialized seniors housing facilities - may include meals, housekeeping and social activities. Residents can also receive home care services. Subsidies available.

♦ Facility Living/ Long-Term Care Centres

Nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals providing room, board and skilled medical and nursing care. Health care costs covered based on assessed need; prescriptions and ambulance services are free of charge.

Accommodation charges range from \$44.50 to \$54.25 per day, depending on room type.

For more information on these programs, download the *Seniors Programs and Services Information Guide* at seniors.gov.ab.ca and the *SAGE Seniors Housing Guide* at mysage.ca

meet the ESPC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

New Addition to ESPC Board: Ron Chalmers



Ron Chalmers recently retired after 28 years as a writer for the *Edmonton Journal*, and is a music writer for *Legacy Magazine*. He has lived most of his life in Edmonton, and is a homeowner in Mill Creek.

Ron is married with two adult children. He holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters degree in Political Science from the University of Alberta and Stanford University, respectively.

The ESPC is pleased to have Ron as one of its newest board members.



Seniors Find Peace of Mind in Cohousing Communities

A Review of *The Senior Cohousing Handbook: A Community Approach to Independent Living*

By ERIN KREKOSKI, Resource Coordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council

Senior cohousing is a model of independent-intradependent living that is vastly different from assisted living facilities and retirement communities, and distinct from communes and intentional communities. The cohousing model incorporates both private dwellings and common facilities, designed specifically for a community of residents – in this case, seniors – interested in building a supportive community together.

Now, I'm only in my mid-20s, but this book actually made me want to move into a Senior Cohousing community! The book is full of interviews, pictures, design plans, and stories of successful (and a few unsuccessful) cohousing communities. What resonates most strongly is the contentment, satisfaction and fulfillment of actively participating in a community as an alternative to our independent, and often isolated, individual households.

Cohousing for seniors takes the uniqueness of aging into account. Some communities, for example, incorporate an extra suite for a full-time caregiver to occupy, should one of the residents find themselves in need of that type of support. Mutual care and support seem to be the norm in the communities profiled in this book. As one soon-to-be-resident explained, "In the house where I'm living now, if I fall off a ladder, who's going to know? In cohousing, even if you're in your own house, you're going to know if you don't see somebody." Senior cohousing provides community supports in many different forms, such as shared meals, community activities and events, easy opportunities to informally visit and socialize, and the opportunity to help one another with chores and errands. The model provides the peace of mind of knowing that there is always somebody that you know and trust if you really need help, and because all community members will be in need of some supports at some point,

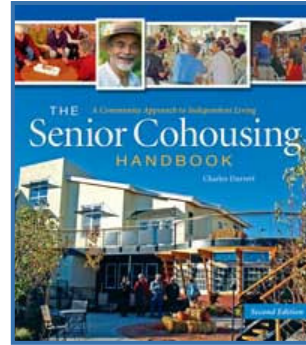
providing care or help is not viewed as burdensome, but rather as a form of collective insurance.

These social features make the cohousing model stand out from other models. In many of the examples in the book, a group of potential community members engaged in a long process of visioning, designing,

and building their community. Community principles, obligations, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution are discussed and agreed upon at the outset, meaning that residents come to cohousing with a commitment to one another, and an idea of the shared values of the community. Participating in the design process means that the community can be structured both to fit and to be flexible. Some communities have prioritized features like easy access to shopping and services, accessible floor plans and elevators, extra-quiet individual units, green space, and energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Communities can include both higher and lower income seniors, and the vast majority of cohousing communities are financially self-sustaining.

This book does a great job of illustrating the potential of the senior cohousing concept. It gives examples of what has worked and what has failed, provides resources, and answers questions for people looking to start or to join a senior cohousing community. The handbook contains examples from Denmark, the USA, and around the world. In addition to looking at some of the advantages and risks, the handbook answers common questions regarding the physical design, the social design, financial considerations, the planning process, and the day-to-day life in a cohousing community.

'The Senior Cohousing Handbook' (Durrett, C.) is part of the ESPC Resource Library collection.



Canadian Co-Housing Communities

Here is a sample of a few of the co-housing communities across Canada:

- ♦ **Prairie Sky Cohousing Cooperative (Calgary)**
Alberta's first cohousing community, based on the principles of caring, respect, and sustainability.
- ♦ **Saskatoon Cohousing Group (Saskatoon)**
Newly forming seniors cohousing development of 20-24 homes to be located near downtown.
- ♦ **Cranberry Commons Cohousing (Burnaby, BC)**
A closely knit community of families, singles, and seniors with individual homes and extensive shared facilities.
- ♦ **WindSong (Langley, BC)**
An environmental award winning development with 34 family homes, community gardens, greenspace and common space on 6 acres of land.
- ♦ **Northern Sun Farm Co-op (Sarto, MB)**
A rural intentional community with a focus on alternative energy, appropriate technology, simple lifestyles and self-reliance.

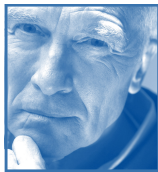
For more information, check out www.cohousing.ca



VoicePrint
Canada's Broadcast Reading Service

An audio version of this newsletter is available on our website (edmontonsocialplanning.ca).

Recordings of *the fACTivist* are generously provided by VoicePrint Canada, the non-profit, 24/7 audio newsstand. Visit www.voiceprintcanada.com for more information.



Contributions, Challenges & Adventures: Senior Years

by SUSAN MORRISSEY, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council

Welcome to the Summer edition of *the fACTivist*. This time around, we have chosen to focus on the topic of seniors. This subject is something very near and dear to my heart, as my previous work was in working with seniors to help them remain active while maintaining their independence.

In my current work at the ESPC, the demographics may be different—dealing with individuals and families who are struggling with low wages, housing issues and poverty—but many of these social issues speak to the issues faced by seniors. Individuals on a fixed income continue to face the same challenges in finding affordable housing that is appropriate to their changing physical needs, maintaining healthy diets, and being able to actively participate in our community.

However, this newsletter also focuses on some of the many contributions seniors are making in our community. We have many groups in Edmonton which encourage older

adults to continue to remain active whether it is through volunteering or belonging to a seniors centre. I think this quote by William B. Terhune sums up this constructive approach to seniors and aging very well:

"If one would understand older people, one should first forget age. Oldness is not so much passing a certain birthday as it is the rearrangement of a complicated set of physical, mental, social and economic circumstances. One must not label a man who has lived a lot of years as an old person. For an individual who has early formed good habits of living, picking up the important techniques of adjustment and acquired a good attitude or philosophy, life continues to be an ever-increasing adventure in development. Development can continue at sixty, seventy and eighty as surely as it did in youth".

I hope all of our readers are enjoying the summer weather and all of the fantastic activities and festivals that Edmonton offers.

Looking for Information on Social Issues?

Visit the ESPC Resource Library today!

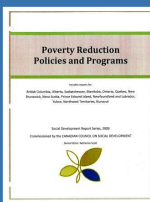
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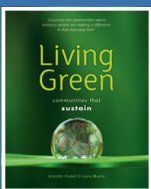
Our resource library is a rich source of current and historical publications on social issues.

Featured Report:

Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs: Canadian Provinces & Territories (Canadian Council on Social Development)



Featured Book:



Living Green: Communities that Sustain (Foskett, J. & Mamo, L.)

Whirlwind Regional Poverty Forum Tour a Success

The ESPC's John Kolkman visited five Alberta cities this Spring to help build public support for Alberta to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

The five city tour, done jointly with Bill Moore-Kilgannon of Public Interest Alberta (PIA), started in Red Deer on April 29, followed by Fort McMurray on May 6, Grande Prairie on May 7, and ending with Medicine Hat on May 11 and Lethbridge on May 12. Afternoon forums were held in each community.

Attendance exceeded expectations, varying from a low of 15 participants in Grande Prairie to a high of 35 participants in Lethbridge. The high level of interest was gratifying because the forums were not tailored to the broader public but rather local service providers, government representatives, funders and key business people. The forums also garnered substantial radio, TV, and newspaper coverage in each of the five cities.

The regional forums were organized by PIA along with community partners in each city. The assistance of the local United Way in each community was especially helpful and appreciated.

John presented information on poverty in

each community based on the 'We Can Do Better' report published last November. Specific information on child poverty and employment trends in each community was also presented. Bill Moore-Kilgannon presented background information on poverty reduction strategies in Ireland, the UK, and in several provinces across Canada. He also reviewed plans for a similar initiative in this province.

After the presentations, the balance of the afternoon at each forum was spent in small group and plenary discussion. A particular emphasis was put on the local initiatives in each community that are making a meaningful difference in reducing poverty.

Local committees are continuing to plan poverty reduction forums in Calgary on October 20 and in Edmonton on October 21.

Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy will be the keynote speaker at the Calgary and Edmonton forums. John Kolkman will also speak at the events, along with Mark Cabaj of the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement.

More information on the upcoming forums (including registration) is available at www.pialberta.org/events/wecandobetter.



ESPC Internship: Youth GAP (Gang Alternatives Project)

The ESPC is pleased to welcome Jacalyn Ambler and Kavina Mistry as our new youth interns!

For the next three months, Jacalyn and Kavina will be researching the issue of youth gang membership in Edmonton. They will be examining the literature and statistics, and speaking with agencies and community groups in Edmonton.

Support this Great Project

If you have insight into the youth gang issue that you would like to share, email youthgap@gmail.com

Stay tuned for the Youth GAP report this Fall!

Want to learn more about our Youth Internships?
Call us @ 780 423-2031

MEMBERS SURVEY RESULTS

The results of our 2009 Members Survey are in.

Stay tuned to edmontonsocialplanning.ca
The results will be posted this summer.

Impressions of the 2009 Canadian Social Forum

From May 19-22, the Canadian Council on Social Development hosted the inaugural Canadian Social Forum. Tagged Act Now 4 Change, the forum invited participants from across the country to dialogue on issues related to poverty and poverty reduction. The ESPC sent four representatives to the event – here, Erin Krekoski shares some of her reflections on the conference with us...

Day One

The first day of the first ever Canadian Social Forum is complete. The event really is quite the spectacle: hundreds of people from across broad geographic, professional, and personal perspectives; all here in Calgary, to talk about poverty. The collective passion, dedication, frustration, urgency, optimism, and energy of so many people is both invigorating and draining.

The line-up of speakers is impressive. I heard stories of racism, poverty, hope, isolation, stigma, connection, action... And I think it will be a long time before I forget what was – in my mind – the highlight of the day: a plenary discussion featuring three individuals with lived experience of poverty, racism, illness, and the myriad of frustrations that go along with trying to access government supports. I am inspired by their knowledge of how poverty happens and why we can't seem to get rid of it. I admire their strength and courage in sharing their very personal stories. And I can't believe that we continue to administer programs, all across the country, that stigmatize and dehumanize the people that they are intended to support! What became abundantly clear was the necessity of listening to what the clients of the various support programs say about improving those programs. A no-brainer, really...

Day Two

Another whirlwind day! The workshops today were smaller – so more time for discussion and questions. That's a good thing – I was starting to feel strangely disconnected amongst so many people. I went to a great workshop about advocacy, an important subject. I appreciated very much that the speakers gave up their space and time at the front of the room to allow the workshop participants to talk about their own stories of advocacy, the barriers they were facing, and what keeps

them going. As a group we brainstormed solutions for some of the stickier advocacy issues that people were facing. For example, how do you communicate to an anti-union public about the rights of workers, the issues they face, and the benefits of labour organizations in protecting these rights?

I really enjoy learning from the experience of the session speakers, but I think I'm actually learning more from the informal discussions that are happening during smaller sessions, coffee breaks and at the tables. On the whole, another superb day.

And – make a mental note: if you ever get a chance to see the Red Power Squad, go! This group of 'B-boys', as they're called, are superb performers. They were trickin' the place up with crazy dance moves and rockin' hip hop lyrics. Their poetry comes straight from the heart, and it makes you want to smile, cry, and dance, all at the same time!

Day Three

The majority of the conference today was used for a town hall session on poverty reduction. Moderated by CBC's Mark Kelley, the Town Hall session was a lively back and forth challenge-and-answer between eight commentators, three MPs, and the rest of the Forum participants. It was a fair culmination to the conference – the tables were buzzing as participants cheered in agreement and support, posed challenges, or heckled in frustration, disbelief, and even anger.

Overall, I think that the Canadian Social Forum generated some great momentum regarding poverty reduction in Canada. A new anti-poverty campaign was kicked off: the 'Dignity for All' campaign, a collective effort of many of the different groups represented at the Forum. I think there was a lot of learning, and a lot of new connections made. All good things.

At the end of the conference, I left feeling a bit more certain about some things, and uncertain about others. I think that's a good thing, too. Poverty and inequality aren't simple problems; they defy simple solutions.

I wonder how much progress we will have made before the next Canadian Social Forum... I guess we'll just have to wait and see. I mean, *work* and see.

--Erin





Life-Long Learning @ WESAC's Community Café

by STEVE RENAUD, Project Manager, Westend Seniors Activity Centre

Perhaps you have heard the expression – “a penny for your thoughts.” Historians say the phrase originated in eighteenth century cafés, where patrons were charged a penny admission. Because these coffeehouses were often a popular source of news and informal learning, they became known as Penny Universities. This is the same spirit behind Westend Seniors Activity Centre's Community Café (located at 9629 – 176 Street).

The last Wednesday of each month, from 1:30 to 3:30 pm, the Community Café hosts a drop-in Coffee Talks series aimed at adults aged 55-years and older. Intended as a way to contribute to lifelong learning, this series brings interesting visitors from the community to the Café to engage participants in lively and informative discussions.

Each session touches upon a new and interesting topic waiting to be explored through lively discussions in a café-like setting.

The Coffee Talks Series has proven to be highly successful - drawing a good attendance at each session. There's no shortage of topics and interest remains constant. The Coffee Talks are a great introduction to what a senior center is all about.

About WESAC

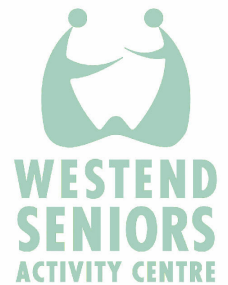
The Westend Seniors Activity Centre strives

to support seniors in remaining active and engaged in the community. Founded in 1978, as the Edmonton Self Starters Organization by Harry Farmer, the Centre is now over 1300 members strong and has become the West end hub for the senior community.

Every day the Centre is filled with seniors taking part in educational, recreational, and social programs - everything from art classes and card tournaments, to aerobics and computer classes. Most importantly, Westend Seniors brings seniors together; giving them a place to socialize and share experiences, and making them part of a supportive community.

The Coffee Talks Series is just one of the many programs offered at Westend Seniors Activity Centre. The price of admission for the Coffee Talks is a “tooney” for your thoughts. So, bring a friend, grab a cup of coffee and join the conversation.

To find out more about the Coffee Talks Series call 780-483-1209, or visit westendseniorsactivitycentre.com



Tracking the Trends Update

ESPC staff continue to work on the awaited update of *Tracking the Trends*. The document is currently undergoing a peer review process.

Stay Tuned!

Tracking the Trends 2009: Neighbourhood Well-being in Edmonton is expected to be released in September.

Questions or Comments?

Contact Anette Kinley at 780-423-2031 x 351 or anettek@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

70th Anniversary

The ESPC turns 70 in 2010!

We're looking for a *short, inspirational slogan* to celebrate our long history (& future) of social justice work in Edmonton.

Have an idea?

Want to volunteer for anniversary celebration projects?

Email anettek@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

meet the ESPC VOLUNTEER

Lori Simon: ESPC's Dedicated Digital Archive “Master”



Lori Simon has been volunteering with the Edmonton Social Planning Council for the last 8 months. She has digitally scanned all historical pictures of the Council. As well, Lori is currently working

on scanning the entire archive collection of documents in the Resource Library.

Lori has worked in the FCSS/Community Development field for the last 15 years. Working with rural communities has really opened her eyes to the social issues that individuals face on a daily basis and the need to develop strategies and action plans to meet those changing issues. She has loved helping young people build a skate

park, starting a youth center, ensuring seniors receive the support they need to live at home or delivering meals on wheels. Lori admits that these have been some of the most rewarding experiences of her life.

Lori is experienced in dealing with non-profits, building partnerships, volunteer support and grants. She is currently working towards the completion of a Certificate in Conflict Management through the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society.

Lori's other volunteer activities include working with the Twin Brooks Community League, Catholic Social Services and the John Humphrey Centre for Human Rights. When Lori isn't volunteering, she is taking in yoga classes and working with Ticketmaster.



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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by BECOMING A MEMBER, you will...

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- ... be eligible to vote at ESPC AGMs and have a say in the direction of the organization
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