

*A Place to Call Home:*  
Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

# Update YEAR 1

APRIL 2010

## Homeless Commission

Anne Smith, Chair  
Hal Danchilla, Vice-chair  
Kathy Barnhart  
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Hope Hunter  
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Susan McGee, Ex-officio



A year after the release of *A Place to Call Home*, Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness is already celebrating significant advances. In some cases it has exceeded its targets for year 1.

### The Highlights:

- ✓ 424 permanent homes have been secured for 546 people who had been homeless.
- ✓ A Rapid Exit program is under way at one shelter.
- ✓ A Pathways to Housing program has been developed. In its first 3 months of operation it has accepted 15 people with a concurrent disorder of mental illness and substance abuse, and 10 have been housed.
- ✓ A furniture bank has been established.

# Edmonton's Homeless Commission Moving the Plan Forward

*A Place to Call Home* was officially released on January 29, 2009. The Plan was endorsed by Edmonton's City Council, which established the Edmonton Homeless Commission to champion implementation of the Plan.

Part of the Commission's job is to provide an annual update to stakeholders, all orders of government and the community at large. The details of this update reveal that not only have more homeless people found permanent housing in Edmonton 2009/10, but also that the foundation for this Plan, the Housing First philosophy, is now firmly in place.

## Embracing Housing First

Housing First recognises that people need a permanent home of their own. Once a person experiencing homelessness has been housed, he or she receives the supports necessary to stay in that home. Agencies in Edmonton intuitively understood the importance of housing and supports, so they readily embraced the Housing First philosophy. Indeed agencies were already using their limited resources to find housing for people suffering from homelessness. However, implementing the scale, breadth and depth of the Housing First model outlined in the Plan has required a transformative change in the way we do business. Finding homes, identifying funding sources, negotiating with landlords, initiating outreach services, providing the appropriate wrap-around supports for each client are the new realities for many agencies in the field.



*Edmontonians have told us that homelessness is not acceptable in a compassionate city like Edmonton and that we need a roadmap to solve this issue. A Place to Call Home - Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness - sets out real strategies and targets to reach our destination: ending homelessness in Edmonton. As the custodian of the Plan the Commission and indeed all Edmontonians should be justifiably proud of the success that the community has achieved in the first year of the Plan. Over 500 people that were previously homeless now have a place to call home and are being provided the supports to retain their homes. But we have just started down the road, we need to keep our foot on the gas and our eye on the goal of ending homelessness in our community.*

Mayor Stephen Mandel



## BEYOND THE NUMBERS - STORIES OF HOPE

### A Future With Hope

John (not his real name) grew up in southern Sudan during the worst of the war years. He came to Canada in 1997, arriving in Edmonton 5 years later. John suffers from chronic depression and has severe addiction issues. He tried to commit suicide several times – once from a third floor apartment building in 2007. The result was a brain injury. Since then he has been homeless, victimised by street violence, and a chronic user of shelters, emergency rooms and hospital beds. In June 2009, he was hospitalized with active TB, discharged in September for 11 days and readmitted because of his seizure disorder and alcohol abuse. During those 11 days on the street he visited ER 7 times. He was then referred to Pathways to Housing and discharged to the program Dec. 21. With intensive support and stabilization, he had only 3 ER visits in the month of January, and did not go once in the month of February. He is in his own apartment, living on AISH, with a money management program. A structured Harm Reduction program for his alcohol use has been put in place until he decides to begin treatment. His TB treatment is nearing successful completion and his near disastrous liver function is normalized. He is looking forward to a reuniting visit with his children who are in care.

### Being a Good Mom

Dianne (not her real name) grew up in and out of foster homes. She was sexually abused by family members. When she was 17, she started drinking, which led to drug abuse and the world of crime and gangs. During this time her children were taken away and placed in government care. She spiralled downward from there, into a life of prostitution and homelessness.

Then Dianne heard about the Homeward Bound program through the YMCA Transitional Housing Facility. She made the decision to change her life and with the help of Homeward Bound she found a home. Six months later she's still living there, raising her 3 month old baby. She recently completed and complied well with a three-month Supervision Order with Childrens Services during which time she went to drug relapse prevention and parenting classes on a regular basis. She is receiving income supports and working on getting her basic ID and opening a bank account.

Dianne has goals now: to complete high school, pursue post-secondary training, and to reconnect with her other children.

# Goals

## YEAR 1 Targets & Strategies

## FUTURE Targets

1 Provide permanent housing options for all people living on the streets and in public places



Develop a **Housing First Action Centre** to coordinate delivery of programs



Develop a **shared core assessment** and engagement protocol



**10 UNITS**

Develop a **Pathways to Housing** type program for those with the most challenging and complex needs

2011

- ⦿ All people living on the streets or in public places will have been given the option of permanent, supported housing

2 Ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing with appropriate supports for people who are homeless



**424 UNITS**

Secured 424 **supported housing** units.

This far exceeded the target of 150 units set for 2010.



**FURNITURE BANK**

Develop services to help people establish their homes: moving services, **furniture bank**, appliances and household accessories



The Housing First Action Centre **negotiates with private landlords** for provision of units throughout the city. No more than 20% of the units in any one building to be set aside for the program.



**Mobilize community members** to support successful inclusion of people who were homeless

2014

- ⦿ Develop 1000 units of permanent supportive housing

2019

- ⦿ Secure 1650 modestly sized units

3 Ensure emergency accommodation is available when needed, but transition people quickly into permanent housing



Develop and implement a **Rapid Exit Program**

2012

- ⦿ Decrease the number of sheltered homeless to 2006 levels

2014

- ⦿ Decrease the average length of stay at an emergency shelter to less than 7 days.

4 Prevent people from becoming homeless



Enhance **Homeless & Eviction Prevention Fund**

2014

- ⦿ Reduce the need for emergency shelter capacity by 50%

5 Establish a governance structure and an implementation process for the Plan that builds on the strengths of the community; develops capacity; promotes collaboration, innovation and cost-effectiveness; and measures progress



The Homeless Commission produces an annual update, documenting progress on implementing the Plan, to be submitted to all orders of government



Charge **City Council** with responsibility for leading the effort



Establish a **Homeless Commission**



**Measure progress** and set aggressive targets



Develop a Homeless **Information and Management System**



Foster **culture of collaboration** amongst agencies

### LEGEND



**Target Achieved**



**Strategy Developed**



**Strategy Under way**



**Strategy Not Met**

## LETTER TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

# Tackling the Challenge: It Takes a Community

At the release of *A Place to Call Home – Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* on January 29, 2009 Linda Hughes remarked that “we have a strong network of social agencies and institutions working to help the city’s most vulnerable citizens: they have helped us develop this plan and they will be crucial in delivering it.” How prophetic. Those social agencies have taken up the challenge, have embraced the Housing First philosophy and most importantly have helped house over 500 Edmontonians who were previously frequenting our emergency shelters or sleeping rough on the streets. Congratulations!

Nor would these fabulous results have been possible without the leadership provided by Homeward Trust. Through their efforts we now have a Housing First centre that is co-ordinating the delivery of outreach services, securing housing and co-ordinating the provision of support services to the newly housed.

As impressive as the numbers are, it's important to look at the personal stories behind them. One homeless person, for example, had been sleeping rough in the river valley for years. Over a period of 3 weeks, the outreach worker gradually managed to convince him to move to an apartment. It took persistence and skill to build a relationship of trust. Initially the man didn't want to talk, couldn't make eye contact: the entire focus of his energy was on survival. That has now changed. He has a place to call home.

However, the process of adjusting to a new life is often challenging for the newly housed. That's where our support services come in. Health issues can come to the surface, as the newly housed move from surviving to living. Each client has to re-learn the basic daily life skills that they've lost. A grocery store can be overwhelming, let alone managing

their finances. But the most significant challenge our support workers are hearing about is loneliness: many of the newly housed choose an apartment in a new part of town. They want to move away from negative influences in their lives. The downside is they're now in a community where they don't know anyone. Community volunteers can play a role here: they can take their new neighbour shopping, show her where the local rec centre is, help her navigate the library.

Our agencies too have gone through transformative change over the last year, and they have more than risen to the challenge. The Housing First concept was well-known, but each agency had to re-think their services in taking the concept and applying it consistently in the field. We've seen more collaboration amongst agencies, as they embrace the principle that there is no wrong door: a person who is homeless can show up anywhere and receive the same services.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the leadership provided by the City of Edmonton, and the Province of Alberta. Alberta is the only province in the country with a plan to end homelessness, and the government has made a significant financial investment to support our Housing First programs.

Through these changes we have established momentum – as we can see in the results. However, we must remember that this is a 10 year plan. We need to keep our eye on the prize, recognizing that maintaining momentum may require even harder work. We now have, however, an excellent foundation to build upon.

Anne Smith

CHAIR

EDM. HOMELESS COMMISSION

Jay Freeman

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDM. HOMELESS COMMISSION

## What We Heard

On March 18th, 2010, the Homeless Commission met with the agencies that had contributed so significantly to the development of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness just over a year ago.

The day was one of both celebration and reflection. Celebration for everyone's noteworthy work: the Commission as champions and stewards of the Plan, Homeward Trust as the management/funding body, and the agencies who are on the frontline delivering the Plan. And it was time to reflect on the progress we as a community have made in the past year, share our learnings and discuss how to maintain the momentum we have created. 140 frontline workers identified timely access to government services and supports as a major obstacle to be addressed. They would also welcome more frequent opportunities to collaborate and partner with each other, creating a dynamic force directed at Ending Homelessness.

The Commission also met with the senior leadership and board members of the agencies. Over 40 key opinion leaders offered their wisdom and insight. They acknowledged the importance of a community wide approach to Ending Homelessness and called for increased communication between all those charged with implementing the Plan. They suggested that the Commission organises regular think tanks, forums, and strategy sessions.

There was an overwhelming commitment to continue executing the Ten Year Plan. The Commission acknowledged that while they are the stewards of the Plan, it is the community that deserves praise for its successful implementation to date. The Commission would like to thank all of those who took part in the forums: we are eager to continue the dialogue.

*On behalf of Premier Stelmach and my colleagues at the Alberta Legislature, I want to congratulate the City of Edmonton on the first anniversary of its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Edmonton has been a leader in Alberta in terms of understanding the magnitude of the homeless challenge, and in implementing a realistic plan aimed at getting people off the streets and into permanent housing.*

*The Province of Alberta is proud to partner with the City through our own 10-year Plan to End Homelessness, which is also based on the Housing First model. Under our Plan more than 1,300 formerly homeless people now have permanent homes; 933 new housing units have been supported; and emergency shelter use is decreasing in all major cities.*

*While the challenge is great, by working together we will end homelessness as we know it today, and make our communities better and brighter for all.*

Honourable Jonathan Denis, QC  
MINISTER OF HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS