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fACTivist

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Publisher
Susan Morrissey

Editor
Terry Jorden

Contributors
Vasant Chotai, Manuel Escoto,
Courtney Grotski, Stephanie Haar,
Terry Jorden, John Kolkman and
Susan Morrissey

Contact
Editor, #37, Commonwealth
Building, 9912 106 Street,
Edmonton, AB, Canada, T5K 1C5
780-423-2031 ext. 354 (tel)
780-425-6244 (fax)
terryj@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

Subscription
To be added to our distribution list
contact:
Stephanie Haar
780-423-2031 ext. 349
Stephanieh
@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

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Winter/2015



Gay/Straight Alliances: an important issue of our time and in our schools

By Susan Morrissey, Executive Director

If you have read any of my messages in past editions of the fACTivist, you will recognize that I often make reference to our collective need — and in my opinion — responsibility, to make our city a welcoming, safe and inclusive community. In fact, the Edmonton Social Planning Council's vision is for a healthy, just and inclusive community.

So, you can see why I agreed to involve ESPC in sponsoring an event called *We Are Listening, Sparking Public Conversation on Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs)* with the City of Edmonton Youth Council, Pride Centre of Edmonton and Public Interest Alberta.

Run mainly by our youth, the event went off without a hitch. Ten individuals, many of whom were youth, spent a part of the afternoon telling their stories, their involvement being in school environments where GSAs were present, where they were not, and how these experiences are or have influenced their lives. We also heard from parents and educators who

explained why they believed GSAs are a good thing.

Inside this issue, we are featuring an article (p. 6-7) summarizing what was said which I hope will offer you a bit more knowledge and insight into this important issue.

As I stood back and listened to each of the individuals speak, what resonated the most with me was that they were speaking about having a safe and healthy place for students to feel accepted, develop confidence and take on leadership roles.

This is really not much different from creating a community where we all feel safe and included, where our points of view are heard and we can all thrive. As one parent said about his son: "The thing we want for our boy is not to just survive, but to thrive, to live in a world that celebrates who he is, every moment, everyday, the same way I want every child in every school in this city and province to be celebrated."



On the cover ...

Kathaleen Quinn and Richard Feehan were among more than ten speakers at a public forum on gay straight alliances in city schools held at the Winspear Theatre on Jan. 31.

Organized by the City of Edmonton Youth Council, Pride Centre of Edmonton, Public Interest Alberta, and the ESPC, the event was called *We Are Listening – Sparking Public Conversations on GSA* and featured many emotional testimonies from parents, teachers

and students. A transcript of the discussion was prepared afterwards by ESPC and provided to all MLAs as part of the government's call for public consultation on Bill 10. For more on what was said see p 6-7.



April 17th evening with Anne Wheeler and Rebecca Jenkins

Celebrate our 75th anniversary during a special screening of *Bye Bye Blues*

ESPC is partnering with the Film and Video Arts Society of Alberta (FAVA), Metro Cinema, and the Alberta Media Production Industries Association (AMPIA) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the release of the much-loved Canadian film, *Bye Bye Blues*.

The 1989 classic was filmed in Alberta and tells the story of the romantic entanglements of a wife and mother (Rebecca Jenkins) who joins a local dance band to provide for her family while her husband (Michael Ontkean) is at war. Written and directed by Alberta-born Anne Wheeler, the multiple Genie award-winning feature film is partly based on the experiences of Wheeler's mother.

The special screening is part of FAVA FEST, an Edmonton festival of film and video arts running between April 13-18. The screening of the film will be at 7 pm Friday April 17 at the Metro Cinema, 8712 - 109 St in Edmonton. The evening will feature musical entertainment prior to the screening by Jenkins and her husband Joel Bakan. After the screening both Jenkins and Wheeler will participate in a moderated discussion and Q and A.

"Because the film was set in Alberta near the time ESPC was created, and that it looks at how people struggled during the war, it seemed like a great way to also mark our 75th anniversary," said Vasant Chotai, president of the ESPC Board of Directors.

The film was recently rescued from copyright limbo through the efforts of Bakan and is now beginning to be seen and distributed more widely. The University of Alberta Archives provided a mint condition 35mm print for this special screening. Part of the proceeds from the evening will go towards the digitization of the film for future re-release.

Tickets, available to ESPC members at a discount, will be available at the door and also for advance purchase through Metro Cinema's website, metrocinema.org



Anne Wheeler and Rebecca Jenkins



Save the AGM date

The next annual general meeting of the ESPC is on Thursday, **May 21** in the Centennial Room of the Stanley Milner branch of the Edmonton Public Library.

April 14, deadline for Award of Merit nominations

Nominations are being sought to determine the next recipient of the ESPC Award of Merit for Advocacy and Social Justice.

The council is seeking forward-looking and courageous individuals and groups who have not turned away from controversy in an effort to seek social justice. The efforts of the individual or group should have had a clear impact on the community and be either ongoing or for a considerable period of time.

"We recognize that many individuals and groups in our community work tirelessly to advocate for programs that parallel the social vision of the Edmonton Social Planning

Council," said board member Rose Marie Tremblay. "From time to time, we provide an award of merit to an individual or group whom we believe has provided a long-term record of dedication and achievement in the pursuit of social policies of benefit to Edmontonians."

A nominating committee made up of board members will decide whether any nominee sufficiently meets the award criteria. If a nominee is selected, a presentation will be made at the ESPC's annual general meeting on May 21.

Nomination forms are available at edmontonsocialplanning.ca. The deadline to submit nominations is midnight on April 14, 2015.

News Shorts

Homeless count up 6.1 % since 2012

In the face of rising rental prices, low vacancy and high in-migration, Edmonton's homeless numbers are being described as "stable." The 2014 Homeless Count, conducted by Homeward Trust Edmonton, found 2,307 people without a home, an increase of 133 people or a 6.1 per cent increase from 2012. In that time, Edmonton's overall population has grown 7.4 per cent. Among the homeless individuals counted, an estimated 16 per cent are new to Edmonton, 46 per cent identify as Aboriginal and the number of people in shelters continues to increase, up 26 per cent from 2012. For the full report: http://www.homewardtrust.ca/images/files/2015-02-05-14-10Homeless%20Count%202014-Final%20Report_Feb5-15.pdf

Record attendance at last Homeless Connect

More than 2,000 people attended the fall Homeless Connect event, the most since the bi-annual event began in 2008. The day-long event held at the Shaw Conference Centre, provides one time and place for a wide range of services such as employment, health, education, clothing and housing. A total of 2,041 people attended including 24 homeless children and 87 at-risk children. The next Homeless Connect is on April 12.



Homeless Connect volunteers

Former ESPC board member passes away

Father Edward Kennedy, a former Edmonton city councillor and ESPC board member, passed away on Jan. 20 at the age of 89. "The first time I met Father Ed I was on the board of the Quality of Life Commission, an organization closely associated with the ESPC," said ESPC board president Vasant Chotai. "At that time he convinced me to join the ESPC board of directors for the valuable research role the council plays in our city. I quickly came to know Father Ed's compassionate nature... He always brought personal stories of people in the community who were experiencing difficulty in their lives." The official obituary is located at: connelly-mckinley.com/



Father Ed Kennedy

obituary_intro.php?id=3183

April 15, deadline for research project grants

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research is seeking funding applications for seed grants, project grants and doctoral awards. The centre recently made changes to its grants program to allow the program to better meet the need for policy-relevant research evidence, while ensuring that all applications submitted have an equal opportunity to receive funding. For more go to: www.research4children.com/ and select "funding opportunities."

Alberta parents paying more for school fees

A Postmedia report in January showed that parents of school-aged children in Alberta are paying nearly five times more than the average Canadian parent. The report showed that Alberta parents paid an average of \$240 per student in 2012, just to cover the cost of various mandatory charges levied by school districts. Those mandatory charges cover everything from busing to textbooks to noon-hour supervision to supplies. Elsewhere in Canada, similar school fees rose by about 28 per cent, to just over \$54 per child.

Presenters sought for national homeless conference

The 2015 National Conference on Ending Homelessness will be held at the Hilton Montreal Bonaventure in Montreal, Nov. 2-4. The program features 60 concurrent sessions tentatively organized into seven streams. Organizers are seeking presentation proposal submissions on leadership, planning and practice, youth homelessness, housing and homelessness research and policy. Deadline for submissions is April 2, 2015. To register visit caeh.ca/caeh15/

March 5 Roof Awards tickets on sale

The 2015 ROOPH Awards, celebrating the achievements of people and organizations addressing affordable housing and homelessness initiatives in Edmonton, is taking place on March 5 at the Westin Hotel. Individual tickets are \$65 while a table of eight is \$500. Tickets are available at eventbrite.ca/e/2015-rooph-awards-luncheon-tickets-14116190907

Premier commits \$5.5 million more for Legal Aid

In October Premier Jim Prentice committed more funds to the Legal Aid program as well as an increase to the maximum income level for assistance. The new income cut-off for Legal Aid will be \$1,588 per month, which is an increase from the current limit of \$1,338 per month for a single individual. The change means all AISH recipients would qualify for legal assistance. Derek Cranna, the chair of the Legal Aid Alberta board, welcomed the government's announcement saying: "We look forward to building on this positive step to achieve

a long-term, sustainable funding strategy for Legal Aid." For more see legalaid.ab.ca

Bissell's Thrift Shoppe reopens after second fire

Bissell Centre's 118th Avenue Thrift Shoppe re-opened its doors in December after two devastating fires destroyed the main building in September 2013 and the temporary location in June 2014. The two fires directly affected the 6,000 low-income people who were forced to look elsewhere for affordable clothing and household goods. The store also provides free clothes to impoverished families and individuals through the Community Closet Program, plus it provides funding to support various Bissell Centre programs and services.

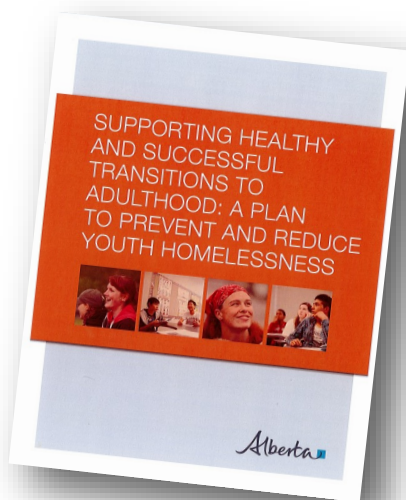


Derek Cranna



Province releases plan to end youth homelessness

The plan entitled *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness* was released in February by Human Services Minister Heather Klimchuk. The plan represents the next step in the province's 10-year plan and is a targeted response to youth homelessness. The causes of youth homelessness, the report said, are complex and multiple. Youth homelessness is the result of a number of economic and social factors that impact an individual or family at a personal level. The report is located at: humanservices.alberta.ca/.../youth-homelessness-initia...



City opens two sparkling new community rec centres

In December, the Meadows Community Recreation Centre and Library opened in the southwest followed by the opening of the Clareview Community Recreation Centre and library in the northeast in January.



Meadows Community Recreation Centre

The 34,419 square foot Meadows facility features an aquatic centre with a leisure pool, lane swimming and waterslide, fitness centre, gymnasium, arena and multi-purpose rooms. It also includes a new branch for Edmonton Public Library. Unique to The Meadows are the indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities including an outdoor spray park and sports fields in the district park and a skating rink next to the facility for use in winter.



Clareview Community Recreation Centre

The 344,000 square foot Clareview facility, and surrounding park, includes a recreation centre, library, multicultural centre and high school. The majority of the facility opened to the public in December 2014 with the school opening in September 2014. The recreation centre includes an aquatics area, fitness centre, gymnasium, running track and children's play area. The park includes a skate park, sports fields, artificial turf, and baseball diamonds.

Youth, parents, teachers speak out on Gay/Straight Alliances in schools

In 2014, Laurie Blakeman, the Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Centre, drafted a private member's bill that sought to remove a section from the Alberta Human Rights Act prohibiting open classroom discussion of sexuality without parental permission. Motion 503, which also asked the Alberta legislature to support Gay/Straight Alliances (GSA) in the province's high schools, was defeated in April, 2014 with 38 per cent in favour and 62 per cent against. In late 2014, Blakeman introduced Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive School Act. The government responded with a bill of its own, Bill 10. Blakeman's bill would have made gay-straight alliances mandatory in schools where students ask for them. The government bill, called the Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, instead allows students who are prohibited from forming a GSA by their school boards to ask the Court of Queen's Bench for a judicial review. In the face of growing opposition, Premier Prentice tabled Bill 10 to allow for public consultation. In response to the call for public consultation, four Edmonton organizations including the ESPC hosted We Are Listening: Sparking Public Conversation on GSAs on Jan. 31. This public forum was structured to gather feedback on the GSA issue to be later presented to government. Here are the highlights:



Caeleah Bartosck

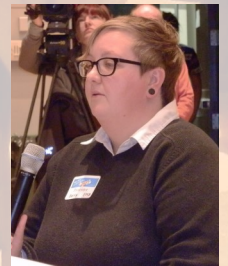
A 13-year-old grade eight student who helped establish a GSA at her school.

"My school got a GSA three weeks ago. At the first meeting, we got 40 kids in there. So, that's sort of proof that we needed a GSA in our school. I am really happy about that. I have made so many friends due to this. I was scared and excited at the same time when I walked into the GSA for the first time. And I was afraid (that there would not be) anyone there. But when I walked in and saw all these different people ... They are all my friends now. I can go there and I am accepted by the kids at my school. I still see kids at my school teasing other kids for being gay or for being assumed that they are gay. We can be ourselves now and I can already see kids being more open. I went from hating my school to loving my school within three weeks. I have made new friends and I am learning to be a bigger leader in my community."

Kerry Maguire

Edmonton Public School Board teacher at Jasper Place High School and district consultant for sexual orientation and gender identity.

"One of the things that I have seen is that it is not always



the students who are starting up GSAs. Now we are starting to get staff members saying that they see a need for this, that they see a benefit. One of the things that I see students really struggling with is family conflict. That's probably the biggest support piece that we deal with. We think about culture and identity as something passed on from our families but a lot of our students do not have that. Their families may not know how to support them or how to help them gain awareness about themselves.



Richard Feehan and Kathaleen Quinn

Both described themselves as social work educators and parents of an 18-year-old son.

Mother:

At night (our son) Brenndan would get phone calls. These kids would call him feeling very alone, very sad and sometimes suicidal. He would stay on the phone talking to them. They have phenomenal teachers who provide support but they would reach out to him and to the other leaders in the GSA to tell their story. This was very alarming to Richard and I to realize our son was 16 and was getting calls from people who were suicidal. My biggest thought, as

a person who has been active all my life in social issues, is that in 2015 we are expecting our children to do this work. I just cannot tell you how appalling that is that we feel we do not need to make this world accepting for everyone.”

Father:

“The thing we want for our boy is not to just survive, but to thrive, to live in a world that celebrates who he is, every moment, everyday, the same way I want every child in every school in this city and province to be celebrated.”



Aura Leedy and mother Krista

Aura, 17, a student at J Percy Page and a member of the City of Edmonton Youth Council.

“In grade ten it was my first real experience in a GSA. It was beautiful. I don’t know how to put this, it was beautiful, just beautiful. Everyone there was very supportive. Everyone had gone through pretty much the same thing. They were all ready to really help each other which was really cool because I think a lot of the time people just think about themselves and give up. And that’s sad. For me, GSAs save lives. It saves the personality because I would not be where I am without it.”

Krista Leedy (Aura’s mother)

“My spouse and I went to the school (when Aura was in grade seven). We tried to talk to the administration and the teachers. I tried to talk to the parents of the other kids involved. One parent. ONE PARENT, was open to a conversation! In the meanwhile, my daughter sank deeper into that dark void. As a parent, I felt helpless. At home, in our community, I could give her a supportive environment, but at school I

had little influence. At that time the teachers could only address what was happening in their classrooms, not in the hallways, not before and after school. And in our opinion, the school administration was unwilling to address the issue. There was no GSA at that school.

For two and a half years we lived in desperation ... We sought medical help and advice. We continually made our plight known to the staff at the school. We encouraged her to get involved in positive extra-curricular activities. We limited her social media and we listened. We did everything that good parents are supposed to do, but it didn’t matter how many positive experiences or how much laughter we shared, seven hours of her day, five days a week, was filled with the dread, hate, self-loathing and fear.

Courtney Cliff

A community liaison worker for the AltView Foundation in Strathcona County.

“I believe that the government must help to facilitate these groups and must not be a hindrance. GSAs are safe spaces, lifelines and community resources and I have seen firsthand how GSAs are important in rural schools in which I work.”

Lauren White

A 16-year-old St. Joseph High School student who described herself as straight.

“Maybe (someday) I will come back to St. Joseph and walk down the halls and I would no longer hear things like: “That’s SO gay.” Jesus has said: “Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.” I believe that GSAs are one of the best ways to act on this teaching especially in an age of discrimination against LGBTQ youth. Right now in Canada, students only make up 13 per cent of the population but we do make up 100 per cent of the future. We need to be healthy and we need our well-being to be placed in top priority. Alberta’s schools need GSAs. Please help us.”



Additional Resources

Gay/Straight alliances in schools reduce suicide risk for all students

news.ubc.ca/2014/01/20/gay-straight-alliances-in-schools-reduce-suicide-risk-for-all-students/

Anti-homophobia measures reduce binge drinking for all students

news.ubc.ca/2013/08/15/gsa/

Gay-Straight Alliances in Alberta Schools. A Guide for Teachers

ismss.ualberta.ca/sites/dev.ismss.ualberta.ca/files/GayStraightAlliancesinAlbertaSchoolsWells2006.pdf

Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia GALE BC. 2004

galebc.org/GSAbooklet2004.pdf
(Accessed Apr 10, 2005).

The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance

High School Journal, 85, no. 3, 13–27. Lee, C 2002

Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services,

University of Alberta
ismss.ualberta.ca/students

The full transcript of this event is located at:
edmontonsocialplanning.ca

Surplus school sites: a missed opportunity for affordable housing

By John Kolkman

Edmonton is a city with a hot housing market. Market rents have more than doubled since 2000. Rents have gone up at a rate two and a half times higher than inflation overall. Apartment vacancy rates are at historic lows. Developable land is expensive and becoming more so. There are precious few sites to build non-market housing, especially permanent housing with onsite supports. Non-market housing has been built in a handful of neighbourhoods mostly in north central Edmonton.

During a time when affordable housing sites were in short supply, the City acquired 40 parcels of land one or two hectares in size for the bargain basement price of \$1 each. The first 20 sites were acquired in 2006 and another 20 sites were acquired in 2009. Until the mid-2000s, sufficient land was reserved for at least one and often more school sites in each city neighbourhood. As the decades have gone by and family sizes have become smaller, it became clear that schools would not be built on many of these sites. These sites were then declared surplus by local school boards and their ownership transferred to the City.

These 40 undeveloped building sites are located in 36 established neighbourhoods inside Anthony Henday Drive. These are neighbourhoods where residential development started in the early 1970s and was largely completed in the early 2000s. The undeveloped building sites are centrally located in neighbourhoods along collector roads with good transit service. They are often located close to neighbourhood amenities like parks, playgrounds and open spaces. The sites are located in every quadrant of the city and often in neighbourhoods with little or no existing non-market housing.

Designating some of these undeveloped building sites for affordable housing would have been an unparalleled opportunity but has instead been a missed opportunity.

Except for seniors, not one of the 40 building sites has yet to be designated for non-market affordable housing for low income families or individuals.

The City's handling of the undeveloped building sites has been characterized by communication gaffes and missteps from the beginning. Labeling them surplus school sites leaves the impression that a neighbourhood is being asked to sacrifice a school to build housing instead. The City has tried to make it clear that only the land on which the actual school building and adjacent parking lot is being repurposed for housing and not any of the planned neighbourhood open space. However, allowing the undeveloped building sites to be used for additional sports fields as an interim use also leaves the impression that constructing housing involves the trade-off of losing community green space.

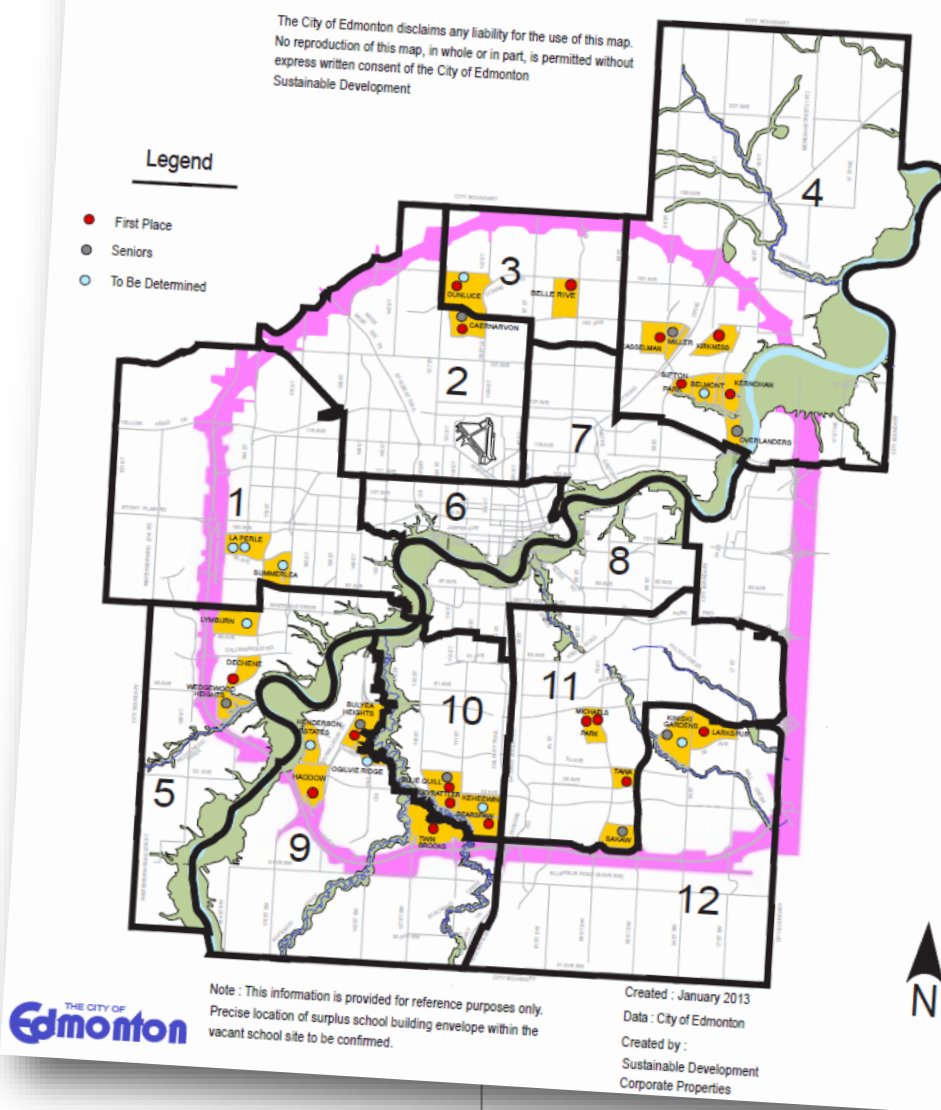
A misstep was designating all of the first 20 sites for first time home buyers, instead of designating at least some of the sites for a more diverse set of housing needs including non-market housing. The City made this decision in late 2006 when housing prices almost doubled in a four year period during the mid-2000s economic boom. However, housing prices peaked less than a year later and then proceeded to fall for the next several years due to economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis.

After selecting home builders, development initially took place on only two sites where the area community leagues were supportive. As the housing market softened, the sale of the 85 townhouse units on these two sites took longer than expected.

The decision to designate all of the first 20 sites for first time homebuyers is perplexing for another reason. Starter homes are a market segment already well-served by private developers and home builders. The City claims to have achieved cost savings of \$11,000 to \$12,000 per housing unit mostly by deferring land costs for the first five years of residency. Especially in a housing market with falling prices, private developers may just have adjusted their own prices downward to match prices in the First Place program. Unit sales and construction began on four additional sites in 2013, of which only one is completely sold out. Sales still are underway in the other three. With one of the sites withdrawn, this leaves 15 sites which the City hopes will be completed between now and 2020. This implementation schedule seem optimistic especially in light of the recent steep decline in energy prices.

The second set of 20 additional building sites was declared surplus by local school boards in 2009 and are now part of

Undeveloped Building Sites Being Repurposed



Additional Resources

Surplus School Building Sites by Communities, City of Edmonton, edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/surplus-school-building-sites.aspx

Fact Sheet: Surplus School Sites, City of Edmonton, edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/Fact_Sheet_on_Surplus_School_Sites.pdf

The Important Role of School Surplus Sites, Don Iveson, doniveson.ca/2014/10/28/the-important-role-of-surplus-school-sites/

Surplus School Sites — the battle begins, Edmonton Journal, blogs.edmontonjournal.com/2012/08/17/surplus-schools-sites-the-battle-begins-again/

the City's undeveloped land inventory. Three sites are being retained by the City for purposes other than housing. Eight sites have been approved for seniors housing which may include low rise apartments. While city council has yet to make a final decision, the administration is recommending that either townhouses or secondary suite housing be built on the nine remaining sites. With the exception of family housing, it is not likely that most other types of non-market housing which require a low rise apartment zoning will be built on the remaining sites.

Some additional undeveloped building sites may become available in future years in neighbourhoods in which residential

development started in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, planning rules were changed in 2005 to no longer require land to be reserved for schools in every city neighbourhood. Fewer undeveloped building sites will likely become available in future years compared to the recent past.

The City's failure to designate any of the 40 sites for non-market housing is a missed opportunity to ensure a better geographic distribution of this important type of housing throughout the city.

John Kolkman is the ESPC's Research Coordinator.

Two Edmonton programs address homelessness and mental illness

By Courtney Grotski

Homelessness is a harsh reality affecting over 10,000 people every night in Canada. Research has shown that up to two-thirds of the homeless population suffer from mental illness. Homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities and substance addictions can constitute an extremely vulnerable population. People with mental illness remain homeless for longer periods of time and have less contact with family and friends. They are often misinterpreted as being non-compliant, in denial, or intentionally antisocial and disruptive. Those with mental illness also likely to have reduced coping skills and delirium and impairments resulting from drugs and alcohol.

However, recent reviews are suggesting that mental illness in itself may not in fact be a significant predisposing factor for homelessness. The vast majority of persons experiencing serious psychiatric disabilities do not become homeless. While the prevalence of mental illness is indeed higher among the homeless than among the housed population, it still affects only a minority of the homeless population. The higher prevalence of mental illness in those with homelessness is most often explained by the low socioeconomic status often accompanying those who live with mental illness, as opposed to the psychiatric pathology itself. In fact, if an individual with a severe mental illness receives sufficient support, this could even act as a protective factor against homelessness.

Alberta was the first Canadian province to introduce a 10-Year Plan to end homelessness. The plan for Alberta is based on a Housing First approach – an approach that has proven successful across North America. The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. Adopting a Housing First approach will likely require a shift in thinking among governments,

communities and homeless-serving agencies. This is because it involves a fundamental change in the way homeless citizens are served and assisted.

Prior programs designated to ending homeless often used a Treatment First approach, whereby people experiencing homelessness are placed in emergency services and must address certain personal issues such as addictions and their mental health before being deemed ‘ready’ for housing. The Housing First approach has recently been adopted in Canada as the accepted model of treatment. Here is a look at two Edmonton programs using the Housing First approach for mental health clients. The information is based on interviews with each program on Nov. 21, 2014.

* * *

DiverseCity and Pathways to Housing Edmonton are two organizations committed to ending homelessness in those affected by mental illness. DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton have both witnessed success in their programs. While DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton see a variety of mental disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and depression tend to be the most common. They claim that the over-representation of homelessness in those with mental illness is due mainly to not knowing how to access resources and having less support. As well, substance abuse and symptoms such as paranoia and illogical thoughts make it difficult to handle finances, keep employment and maintain relationships. DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton address these issues and more and provide supports to help clients to maintain housing and garner independence.

DiverseCity Housing

DiverseCity Housing, started in 2008, takes clients who are involved with the criminal justice system. DiverseCity follows a “harm reduction/recovery focused model,” meaning that they support clients wherever they are currently at in their lives. The one caveat is that clients must be able to live independently or they are referred elsewhere. With the help of DiverseCity, tenants find their own leases and are provided with rental assistance. Clients are provided with basic furniture and a new bed. They get \$150 worth of groceries and start-up supplies. DiverseCity is affiliated with a variety of city programs so clients can choose ones that are located nearby. DiverseCity also works with other organizations to ensure that individuals receive as much support in any area that they require.

An intensive community treatment team follows clients closely, with a mandate to visit tenants in their home at least once per week. The team is responsive; they are on-

call evenings and weekends. DiverseCity applies much effort into reconnecting patients to psychiatrists or other healthcare professionals that the patients may have seen previously, working to establish relationships between tenants and service providers. DiverseCity tries to ensure that each client is connected to a general practitioner doctor, to reduce unnecessary use of hospital ERs. DiverseCity educates their tenants on primary care and helps them become more independent so that they do not have to rely on hospital facilities or mental health units. Many individuals are also mandated to treatment through the court system.

DiverseCity strives to increase independent living skills in the clients that they work with. Gradually, to client discretion, DiverseCity pulls back their services and provides less intensive treatment to foster independence. The DiverseCity team acknowledges that in the beginning they used to hold on to clients for too long, but now they are better able to judge when a tenant is ready to be on their own. DiverseCity has observed significantly decreased incarceration rates in their clients that have entered their program, and are seeking to lower these rates even further.

Pathways to Housing Edmonton

Edmonton was one of the first Canadian cities to introduce the Pathways program, based on the model first introduced in New York City. Pathways Edmonton accepts clients without them having to demonstrate any commitment to sobriety or interest in treatment. Like DiverseCity, they have a harm-reduction approach committed to meeting people where they are at now regardless of their problems. This program is client directed and is designed to support people who suffer from persistent mental health issues, by helping them find them a place to live and getting set up. Pathways helps with funding and works with clients to determine what part of the city tenants would like to live in, by considering what services they may need to access and other related factors.

Pathways Edmonton is part of a larger community health centre which offers an all-encompassing approach to healthcare. They provide a laboratory, a dental clinic, access to a psychiatrist and many other services. This allows clients to get all their services done at one location; if not, clients can have transportation arranged to bring them to appointments. Pathways Edmonton also provides the opportunity for doctors and psychiatrists to do home visits. This organization utilizes an ACT team, comprised of eight clinicians and one team-leader, who see patients at least once a week, but will see clients everyday if necessary. Each member of the ACT team spends about half of their time doing generalized tasks, such as teaching life skills or helping with grocery appointments. The other half of the ACT team member's time is spent in his or her area of specialization.

While Pathways is primarily health-focused, they also help with budgets, managing money; essentially, any service in the community that a client may require.

Pathways Edmonton deals with meeting the needs of those with the most intense mental health issues. Because of this, they are available to collaborate with organizations that have difficulties meeting some of the needs of their more complicated clients. Pathways operates on a "time-unlimited" basis – clients can stay in the program forever if they need; there is no pressure for them to graduate. Pathways Edmonton has seen success, with a housing retention rate of approximately 78 per cent. 35 of their clients have been housed for 1,000 days or more since starting the program, and Pathways Edmonton is working everyday to improve these statistics.

While local organizations have made strides in alleviating homelessness, difficulties remain. Both DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton identified landlord hesitancy to rent to those with mental illness as an issue. Some landlords are hesitant due to the stigma surrounding mental illness, and others have had negative experiences renting to certain tenants (although not necessarily with individuals from either of these programs). To try to overcome this, both organizations insist that education is imperative. DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton would like to see a reduction in the stigma surrounding mental illness and homelessness, and they ensure that landlords are aware that their services are available 24 hours a day to clients, so that landlords do not have to deal with difficult situations themselves. If a client has a poor track record and has been evicted in the past, these organizations work with clients to help them make changes to their behavior and try to help the tenants present themselves in the best light possible.

Boardwalk Rental Communities Edmonton is a major Edmonton landlord organization that provides additional rental subsidies to clients. Both DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton have established relationships with Boardwalk Edmonton. However, establishing strong relationships with landlords is not always enough. DiverseCity and Pathways Edmonton cited low vacancy rates as one of the main issues that they must overcome. Both organizations are hoping to see an expansion in stable, affordable housing for their clients in the future.

Courtenay Grotski is a University of Alberta student planning to go to medical school to become a doctor. She wrote this article as part of a Sociology course.

By Vasant Chotai

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the ESPC.

The Edmonton Council of Social Agencies, as we were known in the beginning, was created just after the outbreak of World War Two, following a vote by about 50 social agencies. The day was June 27, 1939. The place was MacDonald Hotel. People behind the idea were: John Imrie, managing editor of the *Edmonton Journal*; and John Blue, manager of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce.

The original purpose of this new organization was to improve the way relief services were coordinated but in the face of the war, the Council also saw itself as part of the larger global struggle. While Canadian soldiers were overseas fighting for democracy, the Council set out to protect democracy at home by coordinating the city's response to help those less fortunate.

This was a particular Canadian notion of democracy, different from the American idea of individual freedom in the pursuit of happiness. In Canada – and in Edmonton – democracy was linked to the idea that we are all responsible for the welfare of all people. Or put another way: We are not free unless we are all free.

As the population of Edmonton changed, and the needs of people changed over the years, our Council changed as well, to stay relevant and useful to the community.

From the '40s to the '70s, the national mood was to involve more and more government. In the '80s and '90s, the mood turned significantly towards the private sector. And in the last decade the nation has been experimenting with joint involvement. During that period, the Council saw its role changing from coordinating services for the needy between government and community groups, to the task of speaking up for the vulnerable. More recently, the Council is carrying out research and analysis into social issues and informing decision-makers of the most effective policy and program options.

During these recent decades, the Council attracted many people who later went on to other public leadership roles such as Cora Casselman, Elmer Roper, Marcel Lambert, Lou Hyndman, Dave King, Gerry Wright, Bettie Hewes, Michael Phair, Father Edward Kennedy and Jan Reimer, to name a few.

One of these leaders put it this way: "The Council showed me that you can actually work towards an ideal, and make it happen."

Since the Council was established 75 years ago it:

- called for the creation of Edmonton Community Chest, which eventually evolved into the United Way of Alberta in the Capital Region
- assisted with the formation of Edmonton John Howard Society, Edmonton Citizenship Council, Edmonton branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton Christmas Bureau, Disabled Action Group, Boyle Street Co-op and the Society for the Retired & Semi-Retired.

The Council also supported services for children, youth, women and people with disabilities. More recently we have focused on increasing citizen participation, legal assistance and carried out

research and development of government social policy.

The Board of Directors has been providing direction and overseeing the Council's activities through monthly board meetings and three committees: the Board Development, Policy and the Finance Committees. The executive director and the small group of staff implement the actual work of the Council.

During my tenure, the Board expanded the number of committees to support the Council's work. In order to secure financial

ESPC: celebrating 75 years of action

stability, we created a Fund Development Committee to diversify funding sources. So far, we have held a limited number of fundraisers, like the bi-annual marathon casino and a fashion show where businesses donated food, beverages and silent-auction items. Volunteers from the community came forward to help with these activities. However, we still need to work on securing regular financial donations from the business community and private funders.

Two suggestions stood out in our 2013 membership survey: to increase our advocacy role for citizens and to build a greater profile in the community.

We formed a new Advocacy Committee to scan salient issues and develop a coherent response. The Council works both in informing the general public about our research findings and also in advising decision-makers and elected officials. The Council works closely with decision-makers at face-to-face meetings and through task-oriented committees to influence policy and program decisions.

The Council widened the scope of distribution of its research information giving it a higher profile in the community. In addition to printing our research reports for distribution and in our publications *The fACTivist* and *From Words to Action*, we have taken research data to the public media. We have partnered with other prominent non-profit community organizations and the news media to release user-friendly research summaries and community profiles through the newspaper, like *The Vital Signs* that was very well received.

In addition, we are increasingly providing research data to other groups for their work: two examples to cite, the affordability gap data for the United Way and the poverty profile for the Mayor's Task Force on the Elimination of Poverty. (see p. 13)

The Council has gained a reputation for conducting non-partisan, unbiased research on social issues to inform the public, the politicians, the government officials and our partnering non-profit community groups. We actively promote improvements in programs and supports for the vulnerable individuals of our community.

Vasant Chotai is the president of the ESPC Board of Directors.

ESPC poverty profile reveals one in eight live in poverty

By Manuel Escoto

A *Profile of Poverty in Edmonton*, showing that one in eight Edmontonians live in poverty, was released by the ESPC during a media event with Mayor Don Iveson at Edmonton City Hall Jan. 14.

The report shows that although the Edmonton economy is among the strongest in Canada and most Edmontonians earn reasonable incomes, other Edmontonians experience poverty. Utilizing the most recent data, the report provides a baseline analysis for community groups and government to guide future actions to reduce poverty.

Low Income Incidence

The city of Edmonton's low-income rate of 12.3% is the highest among the communities within metro Edmonton. Of the 100,870 persons living in low income, 44,200 lived in low income couple families, 30,600 lived in lone-parent families and 26,070 were single adults. The prevalence of low-income is highest among lone-parent families, followed by single persons and couple families. Since 2000, the poverty rates of all three types of families have decreased.

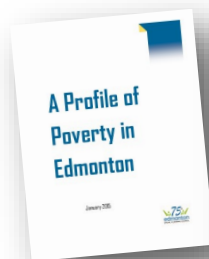
Child Poverty & Family Size

The report indicates that children are more likely to live in poverty. With a poverty rate of 15.4%, 32,830 children aged 0 to 17 live in poverty. Of this total, 18,376 lived in lone-parent families and 14,470 lived in couple families. In addition, children living in families with three or more children have higher poverty rates (37.3%) compared to two children (29.1%) and one child households (27.8%). This trend is true for both lone-parent and couple families. Although child poverty rates were lower in 2012 compared to 2000, the report indicates that rates have steadily increased since 2006.

Employment Rates & Low Wage Earners

At 69.6%, metro Edmonton's employment rates have been among the highest since 2000 compared to other major Canadian cities. The number of people employed in metro Edmonton has grown from 491,200 in 2000 to 739,600 in 2014.

According to the report, employment has not always translated into earning a sufficient income. In total, 123,700 individuals in metro Edmonton earn \$15 per hour or less. 62% were women and 77% were 20 years and older. The report also states that in 2011, 59.2% of Alberta children in poverty lived with families where one or both parents worked full-time year round. Although the region offers many employment opportunities, many are low



Mayor Iveson responding to media questions.



paying and often lack job security, fixed hours, and benefits such as paid pension, prescription drugs, and dental coverage.

In spite of these issues, Edmontonians in all family types obtain most of their income from paid employment. Moreover, the trend between 2000 and 2012 has been toward a greater reliance on employment and less reliance on government transfers for family income. For example, lone-parents earned \$5 in employment income for every \$1 they received in government income transfers. Not surprising, food bank use follows these trends in Edmonton. Utilizing Food Bank Canada data, the report shows that 12,825 Edmontonians accessed the food Bank in March 2014, representing a slight increase over 2013 (12,677) but lower than 2000 (13,798).

Housing and Homelessness

Since Edmonton's 10 year plan to end homeless was adopted in 2009, homelessness has decreased by 27%. The report indicates that 2,252 Edmontonians are homeless, almost double the amount of homeless individuals in 2000 of 1,160 Edmontonians. A reason for this is the lack of affordable housing. Data from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicates that Edmonton has the second lowest vacancy rate and fourth highest monthly rents of all major cities.

Age, Gender and Vulnerable Population

Youths are more likely to live in poverty, especially children six years of age and younger. Seniors 65 years and older are least likely to live in poverty, with a rate of 7.3% primarily because those who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years may receive Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Alberta Seniors Benefit. At 13.5%, female Edmontonians are likelier to live in **(cont. on p. 15)**

Christmas Bureau of Edmonton recipients increase by five per cent

The Christmas Bureau of Edmonton tallied up its recent 2014 campaign and determined that 64,636 individuals benefitted from a festival meal during Christmas by either receiving a food hamper or a food gift card, a five per cent increase from 2013.

A total of 14,500 families, 2,893 seniors and 5,491 singles and childless couples benefited from the campaign.

The Christmas Bureau provides low income people with a single application process to receive a food hamper or food certificate, toys for children age under 12 years of age and a teen gift card for youth age 13 to 17 years. For many, the stresses of being able to provide a festive celebration are lessened by the gift they receive from the Christmas Bureau.

The success of the campaign is a result of the Christmas Bureau’s partners including 630 CHED Santa’s Anonymous,

the Edmonton Sun’s Adopt-a-Teen, the Salvation Army and more than 100 referring social services agencies.

The Hamper Sponsorship program allows organizations, families and individuals to support the campaign by sponsoring a family. Hamper sponsors apply with the size and number of hampers they wish to assemble and deliver, and are matched with Christmas Bureau clients. In 2014, 490 sponsors provided for 1,231 families, seniors and individuals.

As the Christmas Bureau marks its 75th year of operation, it anticipates a higher need in 2015. Donations can be made year round at christmasbureau.ca or by phone at 780 454-6074. To stay up to date on Christmas Bureau activities and fundraising events, visit christmasbureau.ca. Follow the bureau on twitter @christmasbureau, Facebook or by signing up to receive a newsletter at christmasbureau.ca/subscribe



Want to volunteer for the ESPC?

Get involved with some of our existing and new volunteer opportunities!

We are looking for people who can:

- research and / or write reviews
- help in the community
- serve on the board
- plan events / fundraise

For more information, visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca and click on Donate

Looking for research advice?

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides **FREE** research advice to social advocacy organizations in Edmonton! Are you seeking publications or statistics in social policy areas such as:

<i>Housing</i>	<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Health</i>
<i>Education</i>	<i>Food Security</i>	<i>Income Security Programs</i>
<i>Urban Issues</i>	<i>Social Services</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>Disabilities</i>	<i>Poverty</i>	<i>Immigration</i>
<i>Families</i>	<i>Children and Child Care</i>	<i>... and more!</i>
<i>Seniors</i>	<i>Indigenous Peoples</i>	
<i>Labour Force</i>	<i>Crime and Safety</i>	

If you need a hand finding information about local social issues or related topics, contact Research Assistant Manuel Escoto at 780-423-2031 ext. 351 or by email at manuele@edmontonsocialplanning.ca



U of A political science student joins board

A U of A undergraduate interested in the link between photography and colonialism joined the ESPC board of directors last September.

Erin LaRocque says she is exploring the continuing relevance of colonial narratives in representing inequality and cultural difference within material advertising international volunteer programs.

Erin believes it is very important to challenge the boundaries of what is *political* and to recognize that power relations and politics are found almost everywhere, even in the most unassuming places.

She has been involved on and off campus in social science research, on topics from public experiences with healthcare in Alberta to local Indigenous-settler relations.

She is also passionate about youth involvement in politics and has been involved in the Get Out the Vote campus campaign to encourage students and youth in general to participate more in elections and in democratic decision-making more broadly.



Erin LaRocque

Despite suggestions that today's youth are apathetic and politically unaware, she has found that youth have a lot to say if they are given the platform to be heard and recognized as legitimate stakeholders in the future. Erin is looking forward to connect with other like-minded, politically active individuals in Edmonton and to contribute to ESPC's ongoing work.

Poverty Profile, continued from p. 13

poverty compared to males (11.9%).

Aboriginals living in Edmonton make up 5.6% of the population, have a median age of 26.3 years and are more likely to live in poverty than Edmontonians overall. Of the 41,990 Aboriginals in Edmonton, 28.5% live in poverty compared to 12.7% of all Edmontonians. More troubling is that 43.7% of all Aboriginal children live in poverty compared to the 18.1% of Edmonton children overall. Aboriginal employment rates are lower, unemployment rates are higher while median after-tax income of \$23,118 is significantly lower than the \$32,060 Edmontonians average. Regarding recent immigrants, the report states that "A characteristic of Edmonton's immigrant communities is their dynamic complexity and diversity; whether they chose to settle here as immigrants or came as refugees fleeing conflict. These categories influence access to education and employment opportunities." Using data from the National Household Survey, a high proportion of recent immigrants are of working age, have an employment rate of 68.8% and an unemployment rate of 8% which are comparable with the overall rates. However, their median employment income is \$27,966 which is less than the Canadian born average of \$42,091.

Emerging Trends and Recommendations:

- The region is young and increasing diverse.

- Growing numbers of educated immigrants are not having their qualifications recognized.
- Low income Edmontonians rely on public transit for employment but have trouble paying the fares.
- Income inequality is increasing. Between 1982 and 2012, the bottom 50% of tax filers saw a 3% increase in their real (after inflation) median incomes compared to a 50% increase for the top 1%.

ESPC recognizes that the city of Edmonton's ability to end poverty is limited and it is aware that "most of the required investments need to be made by other orders of government." Regardless, the ESPC recommends three measures that city council can make:

- Implement discounted transit passes for all low income Edmontonians, regardless of income source. The council recommends using the Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) as its baseline level.
- Increase capacity to provide affordable housing. The council recommends the use of surplus school sites as well as reserving land in new neighbourhoods.
- Implement a living wage in the city of Edmonton to ensure that those working fulltime do not live in poverty.

For the full report see edmontonsocialplanning.ca

About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

2014-2015

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Communications Officer
Manuel Escoto
Research Assistant
Stephanie Haar
Executive Assistant

The ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization. Our focus is social research – particularly in the areas of low income and poverty.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision

A healthy, just and inclusive community.

Our Mission

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership within the community by addressing and researching social issues, informing public discussion and influencing social policy.

As a Member

- 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
- be eligible to vote at ESPC AGMs and have a say in the direction of the organization
- be eligible to serve on the board of directors
- advertise your non-profit events in the *fACTivist*

For more information on becoming a member visit
edmontonsocialplanning.ca

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(780) 423-2031



(780) 425-6244



info@edmontonsocialplanning.ca



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Mailing Address:
Suite 37, 9912 - 106 Street NW,
Edmonton, AB T5K 1C5