

first reading

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"Walking past a homeless person, especially when you're on your way home, can make you uneasy. Just the concrete fact that you have something in abundance that that person needs so badly seems to demand action....They are all, in some sense, missing persons, and they can all, each individually, be found--be fed, be clothed, be welcomed into shelter."

-The New Yorker magazine

The year 1987 has been designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. This year was intended to at least focus our attention on who the homeless are. With only one month remaining, what might we have learned?

We may have learned that homelessness is not strictly a condition of inhabitants of third world countries. We may have learned that in this country the homeless include not just those men and women who sleep in abandoned buildings and sometimes wander the streets with overflowing shopping carts in tow.

Having a home is not simply having a roof over your head. To be homeless is having a roof that leaks or a room with no heat, having to move night to night, shelter to shelter, or having to live in temporary accommodation because family violence has forced you out of what you once called home. There are thousands of homeless Canadians; nobody seems to know just how many.

This edition of *First Reading* takes another look at the subject which the International Year of the Homeless was intended to make us all aware of. The articles which follow discuss the condition of homelessness and the factors which have led to it becoming such a significant problem. They also focus on the specific situations of the inner-city homeless and under-housed, and the special situation of homeless youth.

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The next edition of *First Reading* will, hot on the heels of a supposed policy announcement by the federal government, deal with the status of daycare in both Alberta and Canada.

To all of our readers, best wishes for the holiday season and the new year which lies ahead.

Homelessness

A STATE OF HOMELESSNESS

Lynn Hannley

"Millions of people in the world have no home. They are the pavement dwellers, those who sleep in doorways, subways and the recesses of buildings. But hundreds of millions of others don't have a real home. These are the people who live in dwellings that afford little protection from the elements, that lack safe water and sanitation, and that provide little or no personal safety."

John E. Cox
Canadian Housing, Summer 1986

Although these statements may seem a bit dramatic, the United Nation's 1987 estimates indicate that approximately 100 million people have no home at all, and 900 million people are living in inadequate housing. As Leanne Rivlin has stated, "the problem of homelessness has escalated into a critical, contemporary social issue."

The designation of 1987 by the United Nations as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless focused attention on homelessness, thus allowing a re-examination of society's perceptions of the problem. Historically, our first perception of homelessness is that it is primarily a problem of developing countries. Our second perception of homelessness is as a problem associated with "inner-city skid row." As Jim Ward has indicated: "The skid row population first developed in response to the need for a highly mobile labour force. Single men were accommodated in basic housing for low rents in central areas of cities....Employers seeking labour...come to these areas to recruit."

Homelessness is no longer just a problem of developing countries or transient labour, rather it is a problem that is faced by a variety of households. Unfortunately, the use of the generic term "homeless" limits our perceptions of the different situations that can result in homelessness. Peter Marin has said: "It [homelessness] has become such an abstraction and is applied to so many different kinds of people, with so many different histories and problems. Homelessness in itself is nothing more than a condition visited upon men and women [and, increasingly, children] as a final stage of a variety of problems about which the word 'homelessness' tells us nothing at all. Or to put it another way, it is a catch basin into which pour all of the people disenfranchised or marginalized

or scared off by processes beyond their control." Studies on the homeless in North America indicate that homelessness is a condition that affects the mentally ill, the physically disabled or chronically ill with limited or no income, the elderly poor, poor families, single people, immigrants, youth, indigenous peoples, single parents, alcoholics, and traditional transients.

Homelessness affects different people for varying lengths of time. For some it is merely a temporary situation, for others it is a condition that they leave and return to, for still others it is an ongoing and chronic problem. Homelessness for some is absolute; they have no home and are living on the street, in abandoned buildings or in temporary shelters. For others, the condition is relative, in that they have a home, but it is substandard, lacks basic services or is too expensive.

It is difficult to determine how many absolute homeless there are in Canada, since only those who use existing shelters can be recorded. The Canadian Council on Social Development estimated, based upon the use of shelters and soup kitchens, that there were between 20 000 and 40 000 street people in the country. However, a manager of Toronto's hostel operations identified 20 000 different people who had used the shelters in Toronto in a one-year period. His figures did not take into account the number of people who didn't use any of the shelters during the year. To date, there has been no Canadian research to establish a ratio between the number of people using emergency shelters and those who choose the street or abandoned buildings in which to live, but it is estimated that the number of absolute homeless, based upon those who use existing services, is extremely conservative.

Regarding the number of relative homeless in

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the country, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has reported that more than one-million of the 8.4 million households (approximately 15%) were living in housing that required major repair. CMHC has also reported that approximately 200 000 households were living in crowded conditions and that 18% of Canadian households were paying more than 30% of their income for housing. Some Canadians live in housing that lacks basic facilities. For example, in 1981 nearly 51% of the housing located on Indian reserves lacked central heating, and 30% had no bathroom. In addition, it is difficult to record the number of individuals living in substandard rooming houses or suites in private dwellings, if these are not separate dwelling units as defined by the census.

Some Myths of the Homeless

For many of us, the fact that homelessness exists and is a growing problem is indeed puzzling. Prior to discussing the question of why there is growing homelessness in our population, there are a number of myths that must be addressed. The first myth is that people are homeless by choice. This is a very dangerous assumption, since it can lead to apathy and inaction. As Leanne Rivlin has said, "Very few people choose to be homeless. Most are forced into that existence by poverty, the elimination of services, fires that demolish homes and evictions...."

The second myth is that the homeless have relatives and family who should be responsible for them. The issue of family responsibility is often raised in conjunction with homeless youth, however many youth and runaways are victims of family violence and sexual abuse. In truth, they have no "home" to return to, and for many youth the street is a much safer place than the home they formerly had [see *Youth On The Streets* elsewhere in this issue]. The same is often true for battered women and children, or the elderly who are abused by their family.

The third myth is that most homeless are formerly hospitalized mental patients. While the homeless will include people with psychiatric histories, not all of these people are former

mental patients. Welfare officials in most major Canadian cities have indicated that between 30 and 40 percent of the homeless have had psychiatric difficulties. Whether these difficulties resulted in a condition of homelessness, or whether they are a result of the condition of homelessness is debatable, since chronic homelessness is bound to have a detrimental effect on a person's mental health. As one study found through interviews with homeless men and women, "for those who were spared mental illness before they became homeless, the daily stresses of marginal survival can be highly distorting and exhausting."

The vast majority of the homeless are poor. Employment is often difficult for them to find, particularly in times of economic recession. In addition, many homeless people are on some form of income transfer payment which, in many cases, is inadequate to meet their needs. The growth of food banks and emergency hostels in most major Canadian cities is one indication of an increasing number of impoverished people. Although not the appropriate means of income redistribution, food banks have effectively reduced the number of homeless. As incomes decline or housing costs increase, households can direct more of their income towards housing by turning to a food bank for groceries. For example, the Edmonton Food Bank indicated an increase in the use of its services in 1983 when shelter allowances were reduced, and again in 1987 when shelter allowances were further reduced for single employables.

The lack of good quality, low-cost housing is also a major cause of homelessness. For many low-income households, the only affordable housing is of substandard quality. The literature on homelessness portrays numerous examples of households living in poor quality housing. The following information from an interview with an elderly woman summarizes the sense of entrapment which results when no affordable housing options are available: "She is fortunate to have a stove, her landlord tells her. Most older women live in a single room with a two-burner hotplate. But on cold, damp days she wonders, because it takes up so much of her limited space,

only two burners work and the oven door, of a different color, fits so poorly it never gets hot enough inside to allow a cake to rise. The owner has said he would fix it for almost a year now, but she is afraid to remind him."

Inner-City Redevelopment

Dislocation is another cause of homelessness, and much of this dislocation is a result of the process of gentrification. The geography of many Canadian cities is such that the older, affordable housing stock is located in inner-city neighbourhoods. However, as these communities become desirable locations, higher income households move in, renovate the housing stock and displace low-income families and individuals. Much of this older housing stock had, at one time, been converted into rooming houses, and this now lost housing stock has not been replaced by the private market. In Ottawa, for example, between 1976 and 1979 municipal data indicated a loss of 40% of the city's rooming house stock, which removed some 2528 affordable, single units. With no suitable or affordable housing available, many of these dislocated households are left homeless. Dislocation has also been the result of major public or private redevelopment. For example, the Downtown Eastside Residents Association in Vancouver estimated that approximately 1500 low-cost housing units were lost in their neighbourhood between 1980 and mid-1985. Unfortunately, much of the lost housing stock were rooming houses. This situation was further aggravated by the dislocation of long-term residents living in hotels that were converted into apartment hotels to accommodate "Expo" tourists.

The deinstitutionalization of mental institutions began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was based upon the assumption that it was not necessary for patients with mental health problems to be detained for long periods in an institution, since new drug treatments would allow patients to function in the community and lead a more "normal" life. Unfortunately, as patients were released into the community, there were no parallel programs for the development of the necessary support services. The lack of these support services, including affordable housing, resulted in many discharged patients becoming dependent upon emergency shelters for housing. Most shelters were ill-equipped to meet the long-term needs and requirements of this new homeless population. A study of housing gaps in Toronto revealed that many individuals with psychiatric histories were barred from a number

of hostels. In addition, hospitals were often reluctant to admit individuals who had a history of disrupting hostel environments. For these individuals, the street was their only option.

As Peter Marin indicated in a 1986 article: "...on the streets of our cities there are two dramas, both of which cut to the troubled heart of the culture and demand from us a response we may not be able to make. There is the drama of those struggling to survive by regaining their place in the social order. And there is the drama of those struggling to survive outside of it. The resolution of both struggles depends upon a third drama occurring at the heart of our culture; the tension and contention between the magnanimity we owe to life and the darker tendencies of the human psyche; our fear of strangeness, our hatred of deviance, our love of order and control."

The Root of the Problem

As Michael Sloss has also aptly said: "Although the causes of homelessness are many, all too often the root of the problem is structural not personal. Failed housing policies, long-term unemployment, the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals and the declining ability of social welfare benefits all contribute to homelessness and the diversity of today's homeless population. The major problem in addressing urban homelessness lies in integrating the efforts to eliminate its structural causes and in drawing the lines of responsibilities between government, private welfare groups and individuals for the shelter and rehabilitative needs of homeless people."

Homelessness involves a myriad of problems, of which housing is only one aspect. While seeking solutions to homelessness, we must also recognize and take into account that there is no homogeneity among the homeless themselves, and that the needs and aspirations of the various individuals are different. We can no longer deny the existence of the homeless in developed countries, nor can we afford to ignore the needs of the homeless in the third world. In the developed countries, we can no longer blame the homeless for their plight, rather we must recognize that the causes of homelessness are many and varied.

The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has placed the issue into the public arena. The development of appropriate solutions will require co-operation among all sectors of society, including governments at all levels, the private sector, the non-profit sector and the homeless themselves. Governments and agencies

must remain or become flexible, committed to change and, most importantly, be willing to address and initiate policies and programs that will make both a short-term and long-term difference. It is hoped that by raising public awareness of the problem, solutions will be

found to decrease or eliminate this ever-increasing blight on our society.

Lynn Hannley is the Executive Director of Communitas Inc., a non-profit community resource organization located in Edmonton.

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BACK ISSUES OF FIRST READING

Readers wishing to purchase back issues of *First Reading* may do so by mail at \$1.00 per copy. For multiple copies, please phone 423-2031 for reduced rates.

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THE INNER-CITY SHELTER STRUGGLE

Ann Harvey

"Tom" worked labour jobs most of his life; on construction, mining and other resource industry jobs. He never had the job stability nor the inclination to settle down. Consequently, he had no family ties or support.

When he came to the big city between jobs or paycheques he would stay in either the cheap room he had kept rented while he was away or he would find another. The inner-city became home to him, as it has for a number of working and retired resource industry workers. It's the one community some have grown to know as their own, their touchstone between jobs, or after the jobs have left, or when they have grown too old to find employers to hire them.

Tom worked hard, played hard and drank hard. He did just fine "thank you very much" with his TV, bed, chair, dresser and hotplate (he never did like cooking much). He developed a general acceptance of the other tenants in his rooming house that came from years of familiarity with others who sought cheaper accommodation in his neck of the city. They were people on welfare, people driven to alcohol and suffering the family rejection and isolation that it had brought them, natives off the reserve seeking a better life in the city, seniors who had been living there since the building's "better days," over half a century ago, and who could now afford no other accommodation on their meagre pensions, and people who had quirks, habits or behaviour that would have daily landed them in jail if they lived in other suburban neighbourhoods of the city. Here they blended in.

Tom suffered an accident on the construction site of a major, downtown department store complex. He was left partially crippled and brain damaged. In and out of hospital for a number years, he was released back into the community he knew--the inner-city. He became registered under the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program, leaving him about \$650 a month to live on. He considers himself lucky compared to single employables, who now get only \$180 to \$215 per month for rent and utilities--especially hard in winter months.

He walks with great difficulty now, a cross between a limp and a shuffle. He is easily put

off-balance and has a metal brace in one leg. In the inner-city this means he is easily victimized, getting rolled for his money more often than he cares to remember. The elderly, alcoholic and mentally ill suffer the same threat in this neighbourhood.

Even with an address, I.D. and the bank account that a community agency helped him set up, at month end he can't cash his cheque for the money he needs to live. The cheque has to be processed first, taking days. So he goes to a private cheque cashing business where he loses a good portion (sometimes \$40) of his small cheque just for the privilege of cashing it. Unfortunately, provincial government cheques are not guaranteed, as are federal income security cheques.

Tom considers himself lucky to have found a room to rent for under \$250 a month. There aren't many left. Hundreds of rooms have disappeared over the last decade, during the "boom years," where people bought up land to make a fast buck speculating. Eighty to eighty-five percent of the neighbourhood is owned by absentee landlords. In an area of the city where unemployment hovers between 28% and 44%, cheap rooms are hard to come by and approximately 1400 people live in rooming house accommodation.

The housing that is left is often of substandard quality. Over 70% of the rooming houses have less than six years structural life left according to City of Edmonton data. Many are of woodframe construction, built between 1900 and 1925, and are dilapidated fire traps today. Three "roomers" have lost their lives to fire in the past few months.

The Edmonton Inner City Housing Society grew out of a community development process, beginning in the mid-1970s when the City of Edmonton initiated an urban redevelopment plan.

The City's Area Plan for Boyle Street/McCauley supported the need for low-income housing in the area. However, supportive words in a planning document could not bring about renovations and new construction of community housing when absentee ownership was so high.

"We'd seen housing as a problem for years in the inner-city," observes Alice Hanson, past co-

ordinator of the Boyle/McCauley Health Centre, a community-based walk in clinic. "But no matter what services the Centre and other agencies tried to provide to individuals in the neighbourhood, it was always undermined when the rug was pulled out from under people when they lost their housing."

What was needed was the commitment of inner-city workers and residents to initiate a new approach to community housing that would be stable, affordable and community-based. Rather than short-term or half-way housing, this would be accommodation that could become *home*, and that could actively involve residents from the inner city in decisions about their own housing.

In 1983, seed money from church sources was used to hire staff, and the Inner City Housing Society was off and running. The Society now has two housing projects in operation:

1. Home House -- a shared accommodation for five people with some history of mental health problems, and
2. a 10 suite rooming house project.

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The Society is presently developing a second rooming house project -- a new, 26 suite construction project -- in conjunction with Alberta Mortgage and Housing's Special Purpose Housing Program. While excited with the prospect of putting new housing on the market, the Society faces a major dilemma if the project is "go." Even at the 2% interest rate offered through the program, new construction is too expensive for the very poor. (No suitable buildings were found available for renovations.) Break-even rents would be above what single employables, those on some pensions and the working poor could easily afford. Because the Province of Alberta does not offer a rent supplement program to private non-profits and municipalities, as do some other provinces, the Society faces the necessity of committing itself to a major fundraising effort if it is to bring down the costs to its roomers.

By December 31, the final day of the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, the proposed housing project will have been given the word to go ahead or not.

Ann Harvey is the Executive Co-ordinator of the Edmonton Inner City Housing Society.

PERSONAL SITUATIONS OF PEOPLE WHO SOUGHT SHELTER ACROSS CANADA ON JANUARY 22, 1987

Situation	No. of People	% of Sample
Unemployed	4239	54.7
Current or ex-psychiatric patient	1556	20.1
Receiving social assistance	3995	51.5
Evicted	726	9.4
Alcohol abuser	2580	33.3
Drug abuser	1163	15.0
Physically handicapped	237	3.1

Source: *Homelessness in Canada* - Canadian Council on Social Development

YOUTH ON THE STREETS

Gail Williams

"Homelessness is not simply the lack of stable shelter; it is a life in disarray. The homeless person's existence is a public existence...there is no privacy...no future thinking, therefore no goals or ambitions...."

Off the Streets, Summer 1986

Midnight on Thursday, December 31, 1987 will mean very different things to different people in this country. For most Canadians, it will simply mean the opportunity to sing a few rounds of "Auld Lang Syne" with friends and to resolve to quit smoking one more time. A small percentage of those Canadians will be aware that it also marks the official end of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH), and they will resolve to continue working for the changes in policies, programs and public awareness which were started, but far from finished, in 1987. And for the homeless men, women and children who live in our cities it will merely mean another night spent in a bus shelter, a parking garage or an abandoned building. They will make no resolutions, because they are too tired, cold, hungry and sick to do so.

"Homeless" is a wonderfully descriptive and all encompassing word, immediately conjuring up for most people images of vagrants, deviants, troublemakers and lazy bums who are always looking for handouts. "Homeless" seems to mean that the individual disappears, to be replaced by a variety of stereotyped beliefs regarding that person's personality, motivation, work habits and personal philosophy of life. One of the main thrusts of IYSH has been the need to increase the public's awareness of the homeless as individuals who have very different ideas, needs, resources and skills. This article will continue that trend through a discussion of homeless youth -- who they are, where they come from and what they experience as marginal people living on the edge of society.

In recent years social workers and others who work in inner-city areas in Canada have become conscious of an increasingly disturbing trend among the population of "street people" with whom they work. More and more young people between the ages of 15 and 18 years are appearing among the street population. These

young people are bitter, angry and disillusioned. They are searching for an answer to the question, "where do you go when you can't go home?" For many of them, the only answer is life on the streets, a third world existence where food is dug out of garbage cans and dumpsters, and shelter is found in parking garages and bus shelters. Where the basic necessities of survival become where to find the next meal and where to stay tonight, and daily life is punctuated by abuse and ridicule. These tragic circumstances are happening right now to children all across Canada, and many people are beginning to believe that the social, legal and economic costs, as well as the even more important costs involved in the loss of human potential, are much too high a price to pay.

Establishing absolute numbers of homeless youth is an extremely difficult task because of the transient and isolated nature of the group. An Alberta Social Services study conducted in 1985 in the Edmonton region estimated that on any given night between 70 and 130 homeless youth were living on the streets without stable accommodation or support. Sixty-four percent of them were between 16 and 18 years old, and one-quarter of them were Native. Given that economic circumstances for families and social service agencies have worsened rather than improved since 1985, it is probable that the number of young people living on the street has increased during the intervening years. In fact, one respondent to a survey conducted by the Edmonton Coalition of Homelessness in February of 1987 estimated that at that time there might have been closer to 200 kids existing on the streets of Edmonton.

Runaways and Throwaways

Essentially, homeless youth fall into one of two categories. The "runaways" are those who are escaping from an intolerable home situation,

NUMBER OF SHELTERS AND THEIR CAPACITIES
in Alberta on January 22, 1987

	Number	Capacity
Men and Women (includes shelters for families)	8	296
Women	3	105
Men	8	1015
Youth	2	48
Battered Women (including children)	<u>24</u>	<u>518</u>
	45	1982
Source: <i>Homelessness in Canada</i> - Canadian Council on Social Development		

usually involving physical or sexual abuse, emotional neglect or a general lack of willingness or ability to care on the part of responsible adults. At the Youth Emergency Shelter Society in Edmonton, one out of every two girls and one out of every three boys is running away from sexual abuse or incest. Runaway children consciously choose the degradation of living on the street as a preferable alternative to staying at home.

The "throwaways" are those who are quite simply no longer welcome in the home. This may be because of family breakdown, failed adoptions or severe behavioural problems on the part of the youth. In some cases, youth simply drift away from the family unit as it disintegrates, while in others, a single parent who has found a new partner may be forced to make a choice between the new partner and the child. Many children on the street have been moved from placement to placement within the system and they are angry and mistrustful of those who may be attempting to help them, once again, having already been betrayed by those they should be most able to trust.

It is 16 and 17 year old youth who are more and more falling through the gaps in many of our social, political, legal, educational and economic systems. Although the Alberta Child Welfare Act stipulates that its protections are offered to any person under the age of 18 years, "whose survival, security or development is endangered," it also makes provision for the growing needs for independence experienced by young adults (16 years and over). In practice,

due to both manpower shortages and the difficulties involved in working with the age group, those over the age of 15, and living independently of their guardians, are generally left to fend for themselves regardless of their capabilities to do so.

Sixteen or seventeen year olds who have left (for whatever reason) an adult-supervised environment find themselves in "legal limbo." They are legally allowed to quit school, leave home and get a job, but it can be difficult or impossible for them to obtain full access to adult services, such as job skills training, temporary social assistance, signing a lease or rental agreement, or obtaining identification, legal counsel or some medical services. They suffer from having no definite status within our society—they are permitted neither the legal protections of children nor the legal rights of adults.

Children's Rights

Children were originally given protected minority status because of the harsh child labour markets which came into existence during the early days of the Industrial Revolution. Although these protections relieved children of some of their rights, they also shouldered many of the responsibilities and decisions of adulthood which were considered too important or too sophisticated for children to make. In most cases these limitations are a positive and necessary condition, but they need to be modified in those special cases where young people are living as adults without adult protections or rights.

It is generally accepted in Western culture that

adolescence is a time of turmoil and change as young people begin to search for independence and self-identity. Styles of coping with these changes can vary dramatically, from smooth and relatively peaceful, to rebellious and discordant. Ironically, rebellious young people are then placed in a highly structured and controlled environment which immediately negates their search for independence and control over their own lives. For this reason, both workers and facilities must be developed which are appropriate and specific to adolescent needs and growth patterns.

More and more young people between the ages of 15 and 18 years are appearing among the street population. These young people are bitter, angry and disillusioned. They are searching for an answer to the question, "where do you go when you can't go home?"

All adolescents are expected to go through two major transitions to officially reach adulthood--the transition from dependence to independence and from school to work. Most young people today find these transitions increasingly difficult as high unemployment, escalating costs of living and changing educational requirements keep them dependent for a longer period of time than in the past. This dependency occurs in spite of the fact that children are encouraged and expected to take on more and more adult responsibilities at a younger age, especially in the case of single-parent or dual-career households. These contradictory circumstances are creating in young adolescents serious emotional and physical stress-related conditions which were formerly found primarily in adults: tension headaches and migraines, ulcers, high blood pressure, eating disorders, depression and strongly competitive personalities. For homeless youth, even more than others, achievement of these related goals of independence and employment through conventional and accepted methods is almost impossible so they take the means which are available to them: prostitution, theft, panhandling and violence.

Many street youth initially harbour unrealistic expectations about improving their lives

dramatically by "taking to the streets" where they will make their fortunes and live happily ever after. However, once they have been on the street for any length of time, almost all of them face the same painful and depressing realities: alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, sexually transmitted and other diseases, depression, malnutrition, theft and other criminal activities, exploitation, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, isolation, and the constant danger and degradation of having no place to call their own. In many cases, suicide becomes a very real and viable option.

Homeless youth labour under an almost unimaginable deficit of resources, skills and information. It is rare that they acquire more than a grade nine education, and many of them are functionally illiterate, unable to fill out simple job application forms or write a resume. The unemployment rate among this group is virtually one-hundred percent.

More Than Just Shelter

Most social service agencies serving homeless youth have two main objectives: to remove the youth from a situation of immediate risk, and to offer realistic alternatives to street life which will help a young person to become a productive and fulfilled adult. The provision of shelter is clearly one of the most important means of fulfilling these objectives, but it is hardly the only one. Equally important are programs and people to support and encourage youth as they grow up and to extend to them respect and consideration for their needs and capabilities. For the most part, these children want the chance to grow up and lead a normal life, a chance to worry not about freezing to death under a bridge or turning enough tricks to meet their quota, but about which song is in the top ten and what movie to go to tonight.

In its most positive sense, the concept of "home" is much, much more than simply a roof over one's head. It is from our home that we derive our sense of security, our self-respect and our identity. These children, whose homes are often torture chambers and prisons, lose those things which are so vital to healthy adulthood and become potentially lost to our society forever. Recognition of them as individuals who have a right to safety and security will help create programs and initiatives which can alleviate the pain and anger of being homeless in an affluent land.

At midnight on December 31, please remember that although the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has come to an end, homelessness is still a very real and horrifying

existence for many people in our society, including youth, the elderly, the mentally ill, the disabled and young families. It is also an experience which need not happen. Homelessness is a result of not caring and of not having the political will to achieve an end to it. We have the resources to end homelessness for our citizens of the streets tomorrow--if we would only choose to do so. We have only to establish

the end of homelessness as a priority. It is within our collective capabilities to effect this change now, but this may not be the case in the future, for as more and more people fall through the cracks and become human casualties the larger and more difficult the problem becomes.

Gail Williams is the Program Manager of Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society.

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EVALUATION OF THE EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

An evaluation of the Edmonton Social Planning Council was undertaken in the Spring of this year. The intent of the evaluation was to look at the Council's role in the community and to examine the services it provides. The evaluation was done by T. D. Weiden and Associates Ltd. and, as part of the evaluation, Council members were surveyed for their views.

One hundred-eighteen Council members (63% of the membership) replied to the survey. What follows are some selected results:

- 55% of respondents felt that the Council should increase its level of social activism.
- There is a high degree of support for positions taken by the Council on social issues.
- Members felt that less time should be devoted to training and consultation and more time to social action and community planning and development.
- 90% of respondents felt that the Council should charge a fee for training and consultation services conducted for the benefit of a specific organization or agency.
- 74% of respondents said they were satisfied with the amount of input they had on positions the Council has taken. Sixty-eight percent also said that they would like to see more opportunities for members to get involved in the activities of the Council.
- Brown Bag Forums are the most popular of the events and activities that the Council currently sponsors. Forty-nine percent of respondents had attended at least one "brown bagger" within the previous year.

The evaluation results are now being reviewed by the Board of Directors and staff of the Council. One of the recommendations regarding *First Reading* was that it include a "newsletter" section to let readers know more about relevant, upcoming community events, and activities and projects the Council is currently engaged in.

If you are interested in finding out more about the evaluation, a copy of the report is available for examination at the Council library.



Council News

FIRST READING is published six times per year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. If you would like to receive the publication on a regular basis write to FIRST READING, #418, 10010 - 105 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1C4, or telephone (403) 423-2031. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council. The editor of FIRST READING is Joseph Miller. The financial assistance of the United Way is gratefully acknowledged.

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New Publication

Operation Friendship: Housing the Hard to House
Published by Operation Friendship
Edmonton

This publication documents the development of the Operation Friendship facility. Wonderfully written, the publication serves as an historical account of the development of the centre, and as a guide for organizations wishing to establish similar operations.

The programming, services, financial requirements and structure of the organization are presented along with an evaluation of the facility. The evaluation deals with an examination of the areas in which Operation Friendship has encountered difficulties and the changes they would make if they could.

The publication is available from the Edmonton Social Planning Council or Operation Friendship (9526-106 Avenue,

Edmonton, T5H 0N2), for \$8.00 plus \$2.00 postage & handling.

Brown Bag Forums

Date: Wed. December 9
Time: 12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.

Topic: From Welfare to
Work: Is It Really Working?
Speaker: Geoff Anderson,
Executive Director,
Employment
Services, Alberta Career
Development and
Employment

Date: Wed. January 20
Time: 12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.

Topic: Privatization of
Hospitals: A Healthy
Proposition?
Speaker: TBA

All Brown Bag Forums are held at:
4th Floor Boardroom
10010 - 105 Street
Edmonton

The Social's Social - Let's Make it a Date!

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's Annual **Open House** will be held Thursday, December 10th, 1987 from 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome! Come and meet the people you've talked to on the telephone, the faces behind the names. Don't forget--let's make it a date!