



Edmonton Social Planning Council

**COMMUNITY-BASED  
RESEARCH**

**The Sacred Heart Collective:  
An Effective Use of a Closed  
School?**

**Community Experiences at the  
former Sacred Heart School in  
Edmonton, Alberta**

**Research Conducted by**

**Jill Atkey and Dianne Henshaw**

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Sacred Heart School  
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### **Researchers and Report Authors**

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Thanks to all the participants in this research who generously shared their experiences at the former Sacred Heart School. Special thanks to staff from Edmonton Catholic Schools and members of the Sacred Heart Collective who provided valuable insights about their experiences at Sacred Heart.

This report is your report. We hope it will add to our collective understanding of the specific experience at Sacred Heart and the effective community use of closed schools.

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## Executive Summary

Demographers have noted that there is a trend to the closure of schools in the central portions of most cities in North America due to low birth rates, the migration of the population to the suburbs, school use policies, and the cost of maintaining aging buildings. This trend has led to a discussion of the appropriate use of a closed school, and some innovative partnerships have emerged. This evaluation summarizes the experience of the Sacred Heart Collective, a group of nonprofit agencies that have moved their offices into the former Sacred Heart School, and the unique community initiative undertaken by the Collective which is to provide free access to meeting and recreational space in the school.

Surveys were sent to all 42 community groups who had accessed space at the school in the year 2004. In total, 23 surveys were returned, a return rate of 55%. The school was used for a broad range of activities including arts and cultural activities, sports and recreation, education, community support, and social events.

Results of the survey suggests that cost (free) was the main reason that groups chose Sacred Heart for their event, with the size of the facility (the availability of a gymnasium) being the second consideration, followed by location and transportation. Ease of booking, and the security afforded by the facilities host were other factors that affected the decision to come to Sacred Heart.

The survey asked respondents about the impact on the organization of being able access space at the Collective. It was clear that the Collective had many positive effects:

- Facilitated the development of small, fledgling community groups
- Allowed some groups to meet who would otherwise be unable to gather
- Allowed low income people to participate in events who would otherwise be excluded
- Afforded opportunity for recreation (primarily basketball and volleyball) to youth who otherwise would not be able to afford it
- Made groups feel more connected to the McCauley community and sometimes to each other.

On the whole, user groups were very pleased with the opportunity to have low cost space, and heartily endorsed the model for community access. On the other hand, respondents also identified a few problems with the facility:

- Not enough space availability, especially gym (for sports and recreation) and meeting space (day and evening)
- Security and accessibility are issues that need to be addressed
- Lack of adequate signage
- The kitchen is not well equipped
- Very poor wheelchair accessibility

The evaluation was also designed to examine the experience of agencies that are part of the Sacred Heart Collective and have office space in the school. It was clear that most agencies saw the Collective as a way to obtain inexpensive office space, a not insignificant factor for nonprofit agencies. Also, the informal and casual networking opportunities were of great benefit to all the agencies concerned. However, it was equally clear that agencies felt they had been left out of many of the management decisions that were made, particularly as the Collective was coming together, and that there is no sense of a true collective or of collegial decision-making.

In conclusion, it is possible now to say that, while not without flaws, the Sacred Heart Collective was a successful and effective pilot initiative that allowed for a broad-based segment of the community to access space for a range of activities that were educational, cultural and recreational. The initiative contributed to the social cohesiveness of the McCauley community, and also contributed to the development of some community groups that might otherwise not have been able to gather. Social inclusion was enhanced by the initiative in that groups were provided access to services they would not otherwise be able to enjoy. In fact, all 12 of the possible positive outcomes of community access to school space that were outlined at the beginning of this report, were realized at Sacred Heart School.

## 1. Context

In November of 2003, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC or the Council) moved into the former Sacred Heart School, along with seven other nonprofit organizations that together comprise the Sacred Heart Collective (the Collective). This report will outline the history behind the move, describe the unique initiative undertaken by the Collective, tell the story of the Collective experience, and provide an evaluation of the experience to date. Finally, there will be an attempt to answer the question: Is this a good use for a closed school, and should this model be replicated elsewhere?

The closure of several schools in the inner-city and inner-suburbs has largely been the result of converging trends in Edmonton and elsewhere. Demographers report that low birth rates, an aging population, older schools in the inner city that require extensive repairs, and the phenomenon of urban sprawl, are typically the primary reasons for school closure<sup>1</sup>, a trend also expressed by Edmonton Public Schools in its Ten-Year Facilities Plan: 2005-2014.

The Alberta government's space utilization policy, which requires that any school space be utilized at 85% of capacity during school hours, contributes to a strict interpretation of the value of schools in communities. That policy combined with the growing suburban population means that inner city schools are disproportionately affected by closures.

David Foot, perhaps Canada's best known demographer, highlights the trend and suggests that we should not be surprised by school closures as our demographics have been pointing us in this direction for some time. Foot encourages us to look ahead and be creative when making decisions about the use of future schools. Innovation is top of mind when he suggests:

[...] a partnership between the local hospital or home-care facility and the board of education. Classrooms could be converted into units for seniors so that they might have the opportunity to live in familiar neighbourhoods, even in their old classroom, and perhaps close to their children and grandchildren. The principal's office could become the health-care office, and the building would remain an integral part of the community.

Innovation was also at play in Edmonton when the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Trinity Developments and the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund partnered to convert an old school into an apartment building in order to provide shelter and support to some of the city's most troubled immigrants. As well as providing living accommodation, the old school will provide access to employment training, English language classes, tenant counseling and other service – in fact, it will become a centre of community activity (*Edmonton Journal*, January 25, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, M. *Saving Inner-city Schools*. Organization for Quality Education, June 2001. [www.oqe.org/doc/oqe1085.pdf](http://www.oqe.org/doc/oqe1085.pdf); Gobalet, J. and Lapkoff, S. *The School Closure Crisis*, School Closure Newsletter, Winter 2004. [www.Demographers.com/SCHOOLCLOSURESNEWSLETTERS.pdf](http://www.Demographers.com/SCHOOLCLOSURESNEWSLETTERS.pdf)

The ESPC and Edmonton Catholic Schools (ECS) had a different idea for creating a community hub when they entered into agreement in the fall of 2003, but the spirit – community access to a closed school – was the same. Given Sacred Heart School’s importance as a community resource in McCauley, residents experienced a collective sense of loss when the school closed in the spring of 2003. Sacred Heart School was the first Catholic school in Edmonton and although its physical structure changed over time, it has maintained a strong and consistent presence in the community. At community meetings, parents spoke of the importance of the school in their lives. More than a place where their children attended school, Sacred Heart staff provided community supports, hot coffee, and even groceries for families in need at Christmas time. Because of a lack of public facilities in McCauley, it was clear that this community resource was an essential ‘hub’, whether it contained an operational school or not. The goal of the Collective was to maintain the school as a valuable and positive asset to the community.

“We like running programs out of this building. It is central and it feels like part of the community. I think our participants and their families also have a certain comfort level there – schools are usually seen as public spaces – inclusive. Many/most of our programs are in partnerships with groups in the community – this space enhances these partnerships.”

Although it is difficult to quantify the benefit to a community of access to public space, there is general agreement that such availability has a positive ripple effect that impacts individuals, families, and the community as a whole. Ann Fitzpatrick, in her report *Children and Youth Lose When School Space Shrinks* (October 2000) concludes that affordable, accessible, local community space that houses diverse recreational, art and cultural activities is necessary to enrich the life of families and communities.

Without such activities, communities as a whole deteriorate and people – young and old – lose valuable connections to resources and to each other...Everyone loses when public space shrinks.

The need for community access to school space, in both open and closed schools, has been articulated elsewhere. Ironically, in its planning for future school sites, the City of Edmonton has identified the importance of community access:

School sites in communities of the future will be centrally located, multi-use ‘community knowledge campuses’ that serve students and learners of all ages and house a range of complementary recreational, community and public services. They will be ‘beacons’ at the heart of the community that are relevant, adaptive, flexible and accessible.

Similarly, the Planning Department of Edmonton Public Schools, in its report *Ten-Year Facilities Plan: 2005-2014* published in May of 2004 outlined the principle of creative re-use of surplus space, or space in closed schools: Surplus school space that is viable and



has value to the community should be identified for potential partnership use. However, that report also noted that such partnership agreements “will be at no cost to the district” (p.20).

Visions of schools as multi-purpose community hubs are not limited to the future, and a similar concept for existing older schools, particularly in communities with precious little public space, also has advocates.

Dr. Richard Shingles, an American advocate for community access to school space, outlines twelve reasons to support affordable access:

1. Improves student performance;
  - Studies have shown that participation in school-based after-hours programming has a positive impact on learning and improves education outcomes.
2. Encourages physical activity and healthy lifestyle development;
  - The Sports Alliance of Ontario estimates that every 1% increase of physical activity among our population saves \$30 million dollars in health care costs
3. Provides a cost-effective use of school space;
4. Prevents crime;
  - Organizations such as the National Crime Prevention Centre recognize that recreation, leadership opportunities, and other development programs for children and youth prevent crime
5. Increases opportunities for newcomer settlement and integration;
6. Promotes volunteerism and community participation;
7. Sustains community programs;
8. Encourages artistic and cultural expression;
9. Promotes life-long learning;
10. Fosters accessibility and inclusion;
  - Raising participant fees will disproportionately affect low-income families and children by further limiting their access to programs.
11. Promotes community well being;
  - Opportunities for communities to ‘come together’ in community spaces increase social cohesion and nurture the development of cultural and community events
12. Fits with government policy directions.

These benefits were outlined for community use of schools that were still in use, but are equally applicable to the use of closed schools. Given that there is a trend towards school closures in inner city neighborhoods, it is unfortunate that there is very little written in the literature about the use of closed schools.

At a local level, in 2004 the Council conducted focus groups on inclusion in Edmonton, and one of the suggestions brought forward to enhance inclusion was the concept of using schools (which could be either open or closed schools) as community hubs, open for use as meeting space, for community celebrations, and for recreation.

Given drastic increases in fees for community access to schools in Ontario since 1998, the bulk of research in this area comes out of that province. The United Way of Greater Toronto recently tracked the effects of changes to the provincial funding formula for community use of school space in their report "Opening the Doors: Making the Most of Community Space" (2002). They found that in a four-year period during which fees to use school space increased dramatically (on a cost recovery basis), 31% of agencies surveyed had to reduce or cancel programs, 18% had to increase funding efforts, and 18% had to increase participant user fees. Overall, community use of schools dropped by 43%, with arts and cultural groups experiencing the largest decline.

"It's great for the students who were formerly registered at Sacred Heart to still have access to the school. It's a gem for the inner city community."

These results highlight the fact that one of the most significant barriers to securing space in schools is permit and leasing fees. In recognition of such barriers, the Ontario government recently announced the Community Use of Schools Initiative through which they will provide funding to individual school boards to assist with the cost of operating school facilities.

A lack of local research in this area makes it difficult to assess the impacts of fee structures in Edmonton, but community access to schools is one of the driving forces behind the Joint Use Agreement between the City of Edmonton, Edmonton Catholic Schools and Edmonton Public Schools. Under the Joint Use Agreement, space in schools can be used by community members for a fee of \$30/hour, with a three-hour minimum in place.

We know that past surveys in the McCauley neighbourhood have identified increasing access to affordable recreational opportunities as a key priority for this area. At the same time, non-profit organizations struggle to secure accessible and reasonably priced office space in the inner-city.<sup>2</sup> Combined, these factors became the rationale behind the formation of the Sacred Heart Collective with the ESPC located on site to coordinate free community access to school space.

"Due to the space available, our young children were able to have a need met – to meet in a large group and do recreation."

### **A History of the Collective**

The sequence of events that led to the creation of the Sacred Heart Collective began at a public meeting held on April 5, 2001. At that meeting, members of the McCauley community and parents of children who attended Sacred Heart School met with

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<sup>2</sup> This information comes from ESPC's Comprehensive Plan for community use of the Sacred Heart School site, submitted to Edmonton Catholic Schools in July 2003.

representatives of the Edmonton Catholic School Division to discuss the closure of Sacred Heart. Opposition to the closure was strong as the community had a lot to lose. The original plan had been to turn Sacred Heart into a “centre of excellence” for inner city children. Under that plan, Sacred Heart would have been a school as well as a one-stop centre for adult education and social services (*Western Catholic Report*, April 16, 2001). Now the school was facing closure altogether, a situation that is always difficult for communities to accept.

In spite of community resistance, Edmonton Catholic School District decided to close Sacred Heart, but also promised to continue to allow community access to the facilities, and particularly to continue to allow the Edmonton Inner City Children’s Project to run programming in the school. As community members gradually accepted the fact that the school would close, they began to embrace the concept of turning the school building into a community hub that would be available for access by groups and individuals requiring recreation or meeting space. While the building had been functioning as an operating school, access to the facilities through the Joint Use Agreement was fairly expensive and the booking process was perceived to be somewhat of a hassle. With the closure of the school, the best scenario for the community was to maximize community use of the building and to develop an easier process for booking space.

At about the same time, the Community League Hall in McCauley was demolished, resulting in a major loss of public space in the area. This was the consequence of a set of discussions between Community League members and Edmonton Parks and Recreation. The decision to tear down the building was made largely because the Community League did not have the capacity to maintain the building, and although the building had good public meeting space, it lacked other amenities such as a kitchen and a storage space. The emerging vision for the newly-closed Sacred Heart School was that it would become what the League had previously been to the community, but with the added advantage of providing extra recreational facilities.

In order to realize the concept of Sacred Heart as a community hub, Edmonton Catholic Schools needed to find a tenant for the building that would help to defray operating costs. Shortly after the school closed in June of 2003, part of the space was taken over by two ECS programs – Aboriginal Learning, and Lifelong Learning. The McCauley After School Care Association continued to rent much of the rest of the school. However, there was still a fairly large portion of the school that could be home to an organization that would rent the office space, and also help to organize and manage community access to the building’s facilities.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council learned of the possibility of renting space at Sacred Heart just at the time the Council was actively seeking to reduce their building occupancy costs by moving to less expensive quarters. After a series of meetings, ESPC agreed to become the lead tenant in the portion of the school that was still available, and to sublease space to other nonprofit agencies, which together became the Sacred Heart Collective. That decision was made, in large part, because of the opportunity it afforded for ESPC and the Collective to coordinate community access to the public areas of the

school, a function that the Council felt was in accordance with our vision of an inclusive community.<sup>3</sup>

The plan to house the Collective in Sacred Heart appeared to be beneficial to all parties. In return for low-cost rental, the Council and other Collective organizations would help ECS fulfill its promise to the McCauley community by facilitating access to community space. The arrangement also allowed ESPC to move into the inner city and work with grassroots organizations, allowing for relationships to grow that would help to contextualize the research and advocacy efforts of the Council.

However, by the time agencies were beginning to move into the building in the summer and fall of 2003, much of the space that had previously been offered to the Collective had been taken over by the ECS programs that had moved in earlier, leaving much less room for Collective agencies. That meant that some agencies that were originally part of the Collective were unable to obtain office space at all, and other agencies had to be satisfied with less space than they had originally planned to use. In addition, there was less space for meeting rooms and common areas for agency and community members. In spite of that, Collective agencies were relatively pleased with the arrangement, and were optimistic that extra room would become available in time, as they had been assured that their chance of acquiring more space was better once they moved into the building. Unfortunately, the opportunity to acquire more space for the Collective never materialized. While the ECS programs in the building have been helpful in allowing Collective agencies to use ECS meeting space on a limited basis, more space that is for the exclusive use of community groups has not been made available.

### **Development of the Community Access Initiative**

The use of closed schools to house nonprofit agencies is not new, and is certainly not unique to Sacred Heart. What makes this initiative notable is the fact that the Collective was organized with the aim of providing community access to public spaces in the school at no cost to community groups.

From the beginning, each member of the Collective agreed to pay an extra \$2.00 per square foot in rent in order to offset the cost of operating the community hub. That amount would not have been sufficient, however, without the active support of ECS. In addition to providing office space to ESPC at a greatly reduced rate, the ECS provided custodial services, and also continued to provide the liability insurance for the gym and kitchen that were being used by the community but were not being rented by the Collective. Further, ECS has generously paid for a custodian to be on site during any community event that has more than 50 participants, which means paying overtime hours to the custodian for about 60% of the weekends in the year. Without the partnership of ECS, the Collective would not have been able to provide access to community groups at no cost.

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the Collective member agencies that moved into Sacred Heart in the summer and fall of 2003, and a brief description of each, are included as Appendix 1.

For ESPC, the community use concept was at the heart of the move to Sacred Heart. Accordingly, funding was secured for a half-time coordinator (from the Wild Rose Foundation), and the Council worked diligently in October and November of 2003 to bring Collective agencies together to develop a framework for providing community access. Initially, the decision was made to place few constraints on the types of bookings allowed or the organizations that would have priority. This would allow the Council to assess the extent of the need and the prime times for usage, and therefore determine the type of regulation and structure that might ultimately be required.

Consequently, at the outset, the coordinator was given a great deal of flexibility in the way the service was delivered to the community, working within a short set of guidelines developed by the Collective. The guidelines specified that:

- Community groups would be allowed access on a first come, first served basis
- Groups whose members were primarily from the McCauley area would be given priority in case of a conflict.
- Regular users (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) could be asked to relinquish their time slot with two weeks notice, if a one-time user required the space; it was expected that this type of bumping would happen infrequently
- Saturday and Sunday nights would not be booked on a regular basis, leaving those nights available for special events and celebrations.

The Collective considered the idea of requiring each group to put down a booking deposit which would be used to cover any loss or damage that might occur during an event. However, that practice was not adopted, primarily because the paperwork involved was perceived to be too great to offset the advantages. It was decided that this was a policy that could be instituted at a later date if it was deemed necessary, but to date there has been very little property damage and the policy was never revised.

The rooms that were available for use were:

- Gymnasium (without the stage) that has a capacity of 480
- Kitchen area directly across from the gymnasium that the Collective equipped with a donated fridge and stove
- Large, square space in the basement that can accommodate about 30 people, and an adjoining room with a sink and a long cupboard
- Large meeting room on the second floor that can be used for meetings of up to 40 people.

Community League groups began using the basement and the gym for their programs in October of 2003, having no other place to call “home”. Other groups gradually learned of the space availability, and the evening and weekend time slots that were allotted for community use soon began to fill. The availability of space at Sacred Heart School (now

sometimes referred to as Sacred Heart Centre) has never been marketed or advertised except for a very short notation in the classified ads of the Boyle McCauley News in the fall of 2003. In spite of that, word-of-mouth networking led to 30% usage of the gym by December, 2003.

### Extent of Community Use

The use of facilities at Sacred Heart by nonprofit community groups has increased steadily since the program was initiated. In 2004, the first full year of operation of Sacred Heart Centre, there were approximately 4000 different individuals involved in community activities at Sacred Heart, totaling almost 20,000 visits by community members (See Appendix 2). Further information about the community user groups themselves, and the types of activities that were held will be included later in this report.

Although the number of community members who accessed the Centre is quite large, usage expressed as a percentage of time available indicates that the Centre has not yet reached capacity. Usage statistics appear in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Community Use of Space, Expressed as a Percentage of Time Available**

Room	2004					2005		
	Jan.- March	Apr- June	July - Sept.	Oct- Dec.	Average	Jan.- March	Apr- June	Average
Gym	27	37	43	56	37	60	64	62
Basement	21	21	24	32	23	19	26	23
Rm 226	27	28	24	17	27	33	33	12
Kitchen	15	3	6	17	10		0	11

It is apparent that usage tended to increase over the year, particularly for the gymnasium, but in general, these percentages may appear to be quite low. However, it should be understood that the total hours of availability are long and extend beyond the prime time for community rentals: 6 to 11 pm on weekdays, and 9 am to midnight on weekends. If we look at usage differently, we could define maximum usage as meaning that a facility has at least one booking in each morning, afternoon, or evening session that it is available (regardless of number of hours used in that time period). Using that definition, the gymnasium was at 62% of maximum throughout 2004, and 75% of maximum in the first six months of 2005. In addition, the gym was at 100% utilization on weekday evenings in 2005. The meeting space, room 226, was used only 35% of maximum, and the basement 33%, and the kitchen 33% as it was used for a community kitchen and also for a small meeting space during the day.

**Table 2: Maximum Community Use of Gym – At Least 1 Booking - Expressed as a Percentage of Time Available**

Room	2004 (Jan.- Dec.)	2005 (Jan.- June)
Gym	62%	97% (weekdays) 84% (Sat.) 48% (Sun.)

It should be noted that just as usage increased steadily in 2004, the percentage of time in use has increased again in 2005. Averaged over the first six months of 2005 the gym was used 55% of the time available on weekdays and 75% of weekend time available. Using the above definition for maximum usage, the gym was at maximum use 97% of the on weekdays (used every evening, except if a regular group cancelled), 84% of the time on Saturday, and 48% of the time on Sunday. Basement use and kitchen use also increased dramatically in 2005. The kitchen has been used during the day for meeting space, leading to a 35% usage rate on weekdays, and 33% on Saturdays.

The gym booking was at 62% of maximum throughout 2004, and 75% of maximum in the first six months of 2005. In addition, the gym was at 100% utilization on weekday evenings in 2005. The meeting space, room 226, was used only 35% of maximum, and the basement 33%, and the kitchen 33% as it was used for a community kitchen and also for a small meeting space during the day.

## 2. Research Methods and Results

### What the Evaluation Seeks to do

During early discussions of the evaluation, a number of different perspectives of what to include in the evaluation emerged. While there is a desire to identify larger scale issues such as the best uses of closed schools, and who the ‘right tenants’ are, it was agreed that the Collective’s two primary functions needed to be evaluated in a way that allowed us to review what the Council has learned since embarking on the process.

The first function, the leasing of school space by non-profit organizations, is not uncommon in Edmonton and has been modeled in several other closed schools. The second function, the Council’s coordination of free community access to school space, is unique in Edmonton and was one of the driving forces behind the partnership.

This report will thus focus on the Collective’s experience and evaluating one use of a closed community school. This report will not be positioned to make recommendations for or against other uses of schools. What the report will do is document the experiences of Collective members and the groups who access community space through the Collective.

Four questions have guided our evaluation:

1. What has been the experience of the Sacred Heart Collective in its first year and a half?
2. How has the initiative been received by Edmonton Catholic Schools and the collective members?
3. How has free access to community space at Sacred Heart School impacted community groups?
4. What are some of the factors that would need to be considered in replicating this model elsewhere?

### **Evaluation Design**

The evaluation design included several different tools In seeking answers to the four guiding questions. In order to assess how access to community space at the school has impacted community groups, two questionnaires were created. One questionnaire was distributed to groups who regularly book space at Sacred Heart (once per month or more), and a slightly different survey was sent to groups who use Sacred Heart for occasional events. (A survey is included in Appendix 3.)

Because we lacked an initial needs assessment by which to measure the successes of community access, the surveys were created to both assess group needs and assess whether the facilities were able to meet those needs. Other than measure the physical requirements for groups, the surveys also addressed questions of booking procedures, the benefit of the facilities host, and a section on how community-based organizations have been impacted by their access to free space.

In total, 42 surveys were sent out and 23 were completed. A return rate of 55% gives us a fairly representative sample of the community groups who access community space through the ESPC.

To help us understand the experience of the Collective in its first year, as well as how various stakeholders have received the initiative, a number of interviews were conducted. Initially conceived as a focus group, gathering enough members at the same time proved difficult and we moved to a more individualized method. Semi-structured and conversational in style, the interviews followed a general set of questions that aimed to develop a sense of an organization's perspective on: the history or process behind forming the Collective; initial reservations about joining the Collective; the benefits and drawbacks of the arrangement, and; the 'management' of the Collective.

In total, interviews were conducted with five of eight Collective members including the ESPC. A further two interviews were conducted with individuals at ECS – the District Principal with whom ESPC shares Sacred Heart School and the Properties Planning Coordinator with whom ESPC initiated the discussions and finalized the contract. Finally, the ESPC's own records on community groups and statistics on use of the facility provide a context for the community-use aspect of this unique arrangement.



There are some limitations to the methodology that should be noted at this time. The evaluation was conducted by members of the staff of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, including the Sacred Heart Coordinator. This may lead to bias in the responses received, as community groups may not feel free to be critical of the organization that is providing free access to space. In addition, groups that were unable to access space at the school have not been represented in the findings. Finally, although the response rate of 55% is quite representative of the groups surveyed, the actual number of responses is fairly low, rendering statistical analysis difficult to interpret.

### **Evaluation Findings re Community Access to School Facilities**

Results in this section will be divided into three separate areas: (1) Types of groups and their needs; (2) Their experience at Sacred Heart School; and (3) The impacts of access on their group/organization. Except where it is instructive to look at responses separately, the results will combine the responses of regular users of the facilities (groups that use the building at least once a month, or more) and one-time users.

Response rates:

Regular users: 15 surveys returned of 24 distributed (63%)

One-time users: 8 surveys returned of 18 distributed (44%)

#### ***Types of groups and their needs:***

It is very difficult to classify the groups that have used the facilities at Sacred Heart because most offer a range of services or activities and there is no clear-cut way to delineate them. Groups were asked to self-identify according to the classification shown below (groups were able to check more than one box ; the average was 2.5 responses):

Arts/Culture	12
Sports/Recreation	11
Support	9
Social	8
Education	9
Advocacy	2
Community Development	2
Other	10

(A list of the groups accessing space at Sacred Heart in 2004 is included in Appendix 2.)

There was also a very broad range of activities offered at Sacred Heart in the past year, including art classes, dance classes and performance rehearsals, drama, music lessons, concerts, support (perinatal, single moms), cultural celebrations, basketball, volleyball, board games, soccer skills for preschoolers, literacy education, fair trade education, addiction education, political forums, planning meetings, English language training, and religious services. Some of the survey respondents represented organizations that held a variety of activities at the school.

Most of the survey respondents serve a wide population base, with the majority serving families or a combination of children/youth/families. Only two groups were restricted to adults, one was restricted to children and one was restricted to teen-aged youth. Several are open to all age groups but they have a specific cultural focus. Ethnic organizations that have accessed space include Filipino, Aboriginal, Latino, Hispanic, Colombian, Salvadoran, Sudanese, Cambodian, Afghan, Sierra Leonean, and also groups that serve new immigrants in general.

When asked to identify where in Edmonton most of their participants reside, 10 of 22 groups (45%) said the majority of their participants live in McCauley or the inner city, one identified north-east Edmonton, and the remainder were “all over Edmonton”. Two groups serve residents of McCauley. Those groups that have members who reside outside the McCauley area were asked why they chose to meet at Sacred Heart School. The responses in order of frequency follow (respondents were able to choose more than one):

“The free access to gym space allowed us to practice in more of a realistic space as to the size of our usual performances. It was because of the support of Sacred Heart, we were able to form a more coordinated, theatrical group.”

Cost (free)	27
Location (central)	8
Has a gym*	8
Lack of facilities elsewhere (kitchen)	7
Friendly, caring staff	3
Ease of booking (flexible, accessible)	2
Amenities, cleanliness	2
Access to Transit	1
Free Parking	1

\*unable to distinguish on this questions if it was the size of the room, or the availability of a gymnasium for sports or recreational use

Regular users of the school were asked where they met before coming to Sacred Heart School. Six (6) of 14 respondents checked multiple answers, indicating the difficulty in finding regular meeting space and recreational facilities. Without a regular meeting space it is difficult for a group to establish an identity and to promote regular attendance at group functions. Groups previously met in churches, community league space, someone’s home, or offices of other nonprofit agencies. Two groups did not meet regularly as a large group before they found space at Sacred Heart, and one group did not meet at all. The Sacred Heart Collective has been instrumental in helping to establish these new groups and three organizations specifically mentioned that Sacred Heart has provided consistency for their group members and stability for the organization. One-time users were typically groups that already have their own office space, either at Sacred Heart or elsewhere, and needed a space to hold a specific event. Most had not held the event previously, but if they had, it was generally held in a church, or in another school.

Groups that had previously been meeting elsewhere were asked why they moved to Sacred Heart. Better location (including parking) and better facilities were the top two reasons for the move. Surprisingly, less than half of respondents cited lower costs. This does not indicate that the groups were able to pay for a facility. Rather, it highlights the responses from the previous question that indicate many groups were already meeting in no-cost facilities, but that Sacred Heart offers better location and better facilities/amenities, still at no cost. A large majority of the groups that access Sacred Heart report that a facility fee would create a hardship for the group and its members.

“The no cost space rental helps participants to be more involved in the social and educational activities. No cost means no, or less, burden in joining the group”

There is only one group that reported it no longer meets at Sacred Heart, citing a problem with the lack of wheelchair accessibility as the reason for the move. Given that there has been essentially no advertising of the availability of community space at Sacred Heart, groups were asked how they learned about the space.

Word of mouth	9
Agency with offices at SH	10
Other (other agency, school board staff)	4

When asked to prioritize what was most important when choosing a location for their event(s), one-time users and regular users reported similar priorities, but with a couple of significant differences.

**Table 3: Reasons for Choosing an Event in Order of Priority**

Regular Users	One-Time Users
Size	Cost
Cost	Size
Location	Location
Transit	Transit
Parking	Ease of booking
Ease of booking	Nearby amenities
Nearby amenities	Parking

For one-time users, the fact that the facility is free was by far the top priority for choosing to come here, followed by the size of the space available (the gym). For regular users, the top two factors were reversed. The fact that the school is located in the McCauley Community was the third most important factor for both types of renters, followed by public transit access. Parking was a high priority for regular users, but one-time users placed parking as the last priority. The booking process was a higher priority for one-time users.

## *The experience of community groups at Sacred Heart*

All respondents were asked to indicate what they like about the space and their experience when they attended events at the school. Results for one-time users and regular users were very similar and are therefore reported together.

“Access to Sacred Heart has given us a central place for our church service and added to our numerical strength/growth: easy accessibility, secure environment, and a conducive atmosphere for service.”

**Table 4: What Users Like Most About Sacred Heart**

Item	No. of Responses
No cost	15
Location	13
Cleanliness	11
Safe and Secure	8
The times available	7
Reliability of access	6
Accessibility	5

Other comments suggested that the ability to book two spaces at once (the gym and a meeting room) allowed flexibility and an expansion of programming that is not always available. All groups that responded felt the ability to book on-site with the Sacred Heart Coordinator (rather than dealing with ECS directly) was an asset. Indeed, the on-site booking within a personalized community atmosphere was considered by all respondents to be one of the assets of the Sacred Heart initiative. In spite of this, 3 of 22 respondents felt there was still too much paperwork – that you shouldn’t have to deal with two agencies (ESPC and ECS) in order to book a space. Another respondent commented that “it is very significant that ESPC gets involved in the booking process. It is an important role for an organization to play.”

Responses also indicated a high level of satisfaction with the booking policies, in spite of the fact that many cited lack of availability of space as a major drawback of the community access initiative. Respondents were supportive of the policy of “bumping” regular users for major one-time-only functions. Group members generally appeared to understand the reasons why they were bumped, felt that the policy is fair, and with one exception, they felt they were given sufficient notice. Organizations expressed appreciation for the flexibility that is shown in the booking process and the ease of contacting the coordinator if circumstances surrounding the booking changed.

In the words of one user, the system for booking at Sacred Heart is “better: more accessible, friendlier, personal, flexible than with a central system”.

All supported the “first come first served” principle currently followed and no groups expressed a desire to limit the bookings of any one organization. Groups were asked to suggest a process for booking that would be fairer, or that would allow more groups to have better access, but no alternative processes were put forward. To address the lack of time slots available one group did suggest that one weekday evening be set aside for one-time only bookings. Another suggestion, that regular users should be moved to alternate space indicated a strong sense of frustration about the lack of availability of times. That suggestion would essentially mean a complete duplication of resources – one facility for one-time users and one facility for regular users.

Of the 22 respondents who answered the question regarding adequacy of the space, 18 (82%) said the space was adequate, and 4 felt the space had not met their needs. The reasons given for lack of satisfaction with the space included:

- Kitchen too small
- Kitchen needs more equipment
- Kitchen needs a fan both for heat and as a fume hood
- Sound in gym is not good (\*)
- Basement is dark and ugly; basement not clean
- Difficult to access (doors locked, nobody answered doorbell)

\* The Collective purchased a sound system to alleviate this problem.

When interpreting these results it is important to remember, however, that these respondents have been able to access space. We have not heard from those who chose not to come because the facility did not meet their needs, or who were turned away because of limited availability of space. Those who have not been served, have not been heard, which is a fundamental weakness of this evaluation process.

In 2004, there were 16 groups who were turned away because of lack of availability of space. Three were requesting weekly recreational space, two were looking for weekly meeting space, and 11 wanted to book a one-time-only event. In addition, regular Saturday-afternoon users have given up their booking fairly regularly, on average once per month, in order to accommodate a one-time-only event. Furthermore, 50% of the groups that were able to access space expressed some level of frustration, either with the times that space was available, or with the fact that they could not get more time to hold more events. On a positive note, several respondents also commented that if space was unavailable, the coordinator made every effort to make other arrangements, highlighting the flexibility in booking procedures that was perceived to be a major asset of the project.

This leads to the question of unmet needs. Some groups that did hold events at Sacred Heart, and who felt that the space was adequate for their event also expressed the need for other space requirements in order to expand their programming/meeting capabilities. In fact, 10 of the 15 regular-use respondents (66%) expressed a desire to have access to space that cannot be currently accommodated or to have access to their current space more frequently:

More meeting space	4
Office space/unshared space	3
More recreation time available	3
Sports not currently allowed (soccer/floor hockey)	4
Daytime gym usage	2
More art room	2
Room for other programming (e.g. food co-op)	2

In contrast, only one of eight one-time users expressed a need to have more times available. A lack of sufficient space was the most frequent complaint about the experience of accessing space at Sacred Heart. However, building accessibility issues were also highlighted as a fairly major problem.

A majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with access to the school. Sixty per cent of those who completed the questionnaire were critical of the ease of access to the building.

After-hours accessibility (door locked)	5
Signage (other languages)	5
Signage (numbering doors)	2
Wheelchair accessibility (including washrooms)	5

The accessibility issue was reiterated when respondents were asked if they had any problems while holding their event. Seven of 20 respondents (35%) mentioned that they had difficulty gaining access to the building in order to hold their event.

Another aspect of the experience of using space at Sacred Heart is related to the role of the facilities host. A large majority (90%) of respondents indicated that the existence of the facilities host enhanced their experience at Sacred Heart and they were very happy with the way the host fulfilled his job requirements and conducted himself in his work. The most appreciated functions of the facilities host in order of priority were:

- Provides a sense of safety and security
- Locates equipment
- Helps with set-up of equipment
- Pleasant, helpful, supportive.

Only two respondents indicated that they thought the facilities host could do more: one group thought he could have been more helpful with set-up and another group felt he should stay at the door to let people in. In spite of some of the relatively minor problems experienced by groups who have accessed Sacred Heart facilities, all eight of the one-time users who responded indicated that they would consider holding another event at the school and only one of the regular users no longer uses the school, and that was related to lack of wheelchair accessibility.

*The impacts of access on the their group/organization*

Questions on perceived impact were in the form of statements to which participants were asked to respond in a Likert scale format.

**Table 5: Impact on the Organization**

- 5 – Strongly agree with the statement
- 4 – Agree with the statement
- 3 – Undecided about the statement
- 2 – Disagree with the statement
- 1 – Strongly disagree with the statement

Statement:	Regular Users		1-Time Users	
	Median	Av.	Median	Av.
1. Having access to the space at Sacred Heart School allows us to hold more events/activities than we could before.	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.6
2. We can provide free events because of Sacred Heart School OR if we didn't have access to S.H. we would have to charge fees for our activities	3.0*	2.8	5.0	4.4
3. We can include more people in our events because of Sacred Heart School	4.0	3.9	5.0	4.1
4. Using the space at Sacred Heart School means that we can host events for people in the McCauley neighbourhood.	5.0	4.1	3.0	3.4
5. Without Sacred Heart School we couldn't continue to hold events	3.0*	3.1	3.0	2.6
6. Access to space at Sacred Heart School has not had any impact on our group.	1.0	1.7	2.9	3.0
7. Having events at Sacred Heart School makes us feel like part of the community.	5.0	4.3	4.5	4.0

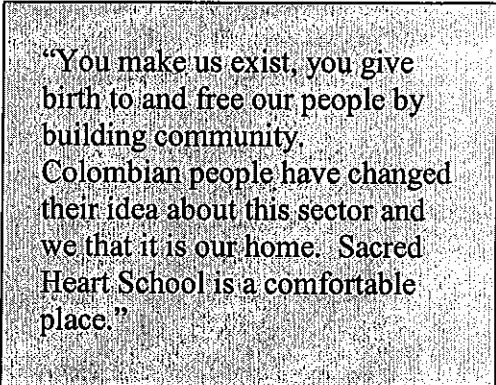
\*Responses to these two questions were highly polarized for the regular use group, indicating strong feelings and sharp disagreement. Although the median and the average would imply a neutral response, the actual responses indicated either strong agreement, or strong disagreement with the statement.

As one would expect, there is a slightly different pattern of responses for one-time and regular users, so this section on impact will be analyzed separately.

Among one-time users, 75% reported it allows them to hold events that are free to participants. This means that low-income participants are not excluded, and they are able to include more people in their events. Three of eight one-time users felt that being able to hold events at Sacred Heart had a positive impact on their group, but two respondents (25%) felt there had been no impact. Only 35% of one-time users felt that they provided more service to McCauley residents as a result of holding an event here, but 75% felt more connected to the McCauley community. One-time users neither agreed nor disagreed (responses were overwhelmingly neutral) with the statement that they would not be able to hold their event without Sacred Heart School.

In contrast, 7 of 15 (47%) of regular users either agreed or strongly agreed that they would not be able to meet without the existence of Sacred Heart and all responded that there had been a positive impact on their group. In addition, 60% said that they were able to provide more programming for people in McCauley, and 75% felt more connected to the McCauley community because of meeting in the Centre. The question of whether they would charge fees if the facility was not free elicited sharply divided responses among regular users - 6 groups (40%) felt strongly that they would have to charge fees, 5 groups felt strongly that they would not charge fees, and four groups gave a neutral response.

In summary, regular users provide more services to McCauley residents. In addition, they felt that Sacred Heart had more of an impact on their group, and almost half felt that without Sacred Heart they would have nowhere to meet. Two of the groups commented that the existence of the Centre was instrumental in their development and that they may not exist if the facility had not been open to them. One-time users felt that they could hold their event elsewhere if Sacred Heart did not exist, but that they were able to have more participants, and more low-income participants, by holding their event at Sacred Heart. Almost all agencies reported that use of the school allowed them to feel more connected to the McCauley community.



“You make us exist, you give birth to and free our people by building community. Colombian people have changed their idea about this sector and we that it is our home. Sacred Heart School is a comfortable place.”



### **3. Experiences of Collective Members/Edmonton Catholic Schools**

#### *Collective Members*

As outlined in the previous section on methodology, semi-structured, informal interviews were held with representatives from five of the seven Collective member agencies. Because we were seeking to answer questions about the experience of Collective agencies, it was necessary to provide a format in which individuals could put their perceptions and perspectives into their own words. Interview notes were transcribed, using the exact words of the interviewee whenever possible.

Although the interviews were done individually, a common view of the process and experience of the Collective agencies gradually emerged. Overall, the picture is one of several agencies coming together quickly, and for expediency, in order to gain access to low-cost office space in the McCauley area. At the outset, each organization was aware of the need to provide community access to common areas of the school, and each group endorsed this function of the Collective by agreeing to pay a slightly higher rate per square foot in order to offset some of the costs involved in operating and organizing this aspect of the Collective concept.

Individual group members were in total agreement that the agencies that co-habit the building do not operate as a formal collective in the true sense of the word. In spite of that, a casual collective feeling has emerged. All interviewees agreed that the informal gatherings that happen in the hallway or beside the photocopier were beneficial and enriched their experience at Sacred Heart, and possibly had an effect on their own programming. There was also general agreement that the sharing of physical resources (the postage machine, the photocopier/fax/printer, tv/vcr) was helpful. Indeed, as informal relationships have strengthened over time, agencies have begun to share their office space, particularly for evening meetings, when it is convenient for both parties. This reinforces the fact that meeting space is at a premium, a fact mentioned by three out of the five people interviewed.

Although everyone interviewed believed that ESPC had not done the work to create a true collective at Sacred Heart, there was some variation in the willingness expressed by those collective members to invest the resources and do the work that would be required to become a functional collective. Some agencies expressed disappointment that collective decision-making and formal sharing of ideas and knowledge has never occurred. (Understandably, the agency that is part of the Collective but has not been able to have an office in the school, and therefore cannot participate in the informal gatherings, was most critical of the lack of cultivation of a true collective.) Others were worried that the time invested in developing a collective might be to the detriment of their own programming. It was clear that a delicate balance needs to be found, but that some form of collective decision-making and sharing of information would be welcomed by all groups for their mutual benefit. For example, one member suggested that we could hold occasional workshops on topics that would be beneficial for all, such as stress management or fundraising. Some agencies also thought that a more deliberate and

regular process to enhance collaboration might lead to the development of formal partnerships to work on projects in pursuit of a common goal.

With regard to the management of the collective, all the individuals that were interviewed were somewhat critical of ESPC, noting that the Council has made most of the important decisions unilaterally, informing the Collective after the fact. There was an acknowledgment that time constraints contributed to the need for the Council to take a management role, and that the lack of a clear process for developing consensus was also a barrier. However, all members felt that the management of the collective should be more collegial. Some communication issues were also identified, particularly with respect to working with Edmonton Catholic Schools.

All of the members of the Collective were appreciative of their ability to access community space at Sacred Heart, particularly gym space. One individual expressed a desire for more communication about events that are happening in the school, so there can be more overlap in people attending from the community, and more mingling among staff and clients of individual Collective agencies. Although most events have been restricted to clients of one agency, there is potential for wonderful interaction among different groups. One example of a great collaborative success was a multicultural gathering in which people from different multicultural backgrounds planned and hosted a meal for 350 individuals. It allowed for people from different multicultural backgrounds to interact and identify with one another in a way that is rarely possible. As well as clients of different organizations getting together, there is also the potential for individuals to access more than one agency. One of the agency representatives identified that because people can access a number of different services in one place, the school has become a “go-to point” for the inner-city.

On the other hand, the lack of suitable meeting space was frequently mentioned as a problem for community groups as well as for staff of groups with office space here. Similarly, the inability to expand into larger office space or to acquire more space for administration, was another problem that was identified.

### ***Edmonton Catholic Schools***

The Properties Planning Coordinator for Edmonton Catholic Schools, Gerry Hartland, and the District Principal responsible for Sacred Heart School, Rick Dombrosky, were interviewed to assess their feelings about the value of the Collective, and its impact on the community.

Both officials with Edmonton Catholic Schools reported that they were pleased with the relationship between ESPC and ECS as it has evolved over time. The community use aspect has gone well from their point of view because it upheld their agreement with the community, and there have been no complaints from members of the community to date. In the words of the District Principal: “There were a couple of security breaches, and some issues to overcome with respect to several agencies working in the same building, but overall, the issues have not been a barrier to a good working relationship.”

The fact that the day care and the ECS programs are housed in Sacred Heart has enabled ECS to rent space to the Collective for a very reasonable rate. This has been considered a pilot project, with the unique aspect being free community access, and from the ECS perspective, it has been successful. This model could be replicated at another school, but the implication was that a large agency would have to be found to lease a major part of any building chosen for this use, so that the other, smaller collective agencies could rent at a reduced rate per square foot.

#### **4. What We Have Learned and Recommendations**

##### ***Community Access to School Facilities***

It is clear both from the responses to specific questions and from comments written in on the survey that community groups and organizations are very appreciative of the opportunity to access space at Sacred Heart School at no cost. In particular, the intent to reach out to the McCauley community appears to have been successful, as groups overwhelmingly felt that meeting at Sacred Heart allowed them to include McCauley residents, and that it made them feel more a part of the community. Approximately half say that the majority of their participants are from McCauley or the inner city area.

Understandably, groups that meet regularly at Sacred Heart felt that the ability to access space here had more of an impact on their group than organizations that held only one event here. However, even one-time users felt the impact was positive, and that it allowed the organization to hold more events than they could previously. Approximately half of the users say that without Sacred Heart they would have no place to hold their events.

In summary, it is fair to say that the Sacred Heart initiative has had a very positive impact on group development and programming in the inner city and has promoted recreational events for low-income participants. It has also served to provide continuity to community groups who met here when the school was open, or to former students who are able to come here for recreational opportunities. This was viewed as a very positive contribution

It is also evident that having access to space that is free was a very strong factor in the choice to come to Sacred Heart, and that it had a great impact on most groups surveyed. Seven of the eight one-time use respondents agreed that without free access they would have to charge participants for their events, and two explicitly mentioned that this would eliminate low-income people from participation. Regular users were more divided in their response to that question, and their responses were strongly polarized, but approximately half strongly agreed that they would have to charge participants.

The other major factor that brought community groups to Sacred Heart is the availability of the gymnasium. The size of that space and its recreational nature made it very

desirable for the groups that used it. That reinforces the importance of using schools as community hubs, as there is very little gymnasium space to be found elsewhere.

In addition to reinforcing the value in the general principle of facilitating access to low-cost meeting and recreation space in the inner city, survey responses also allowed us to determine what details about the processes and procedures are effective, and what could be improved.

According to the survey responses, the two most important aspects that have led to the success of the initiative are: (1) the on-site booking system that is flexible and easy to access; and (2) the facilities host who is a community member, and has proven to be reliable, friendly and helpful. These two main components of the initiative have allowed for relatively easy access to space and a safe and secure atmosphere when the event is being held.

There are other aspects of the initiative that are somewhat problematic and need to be addressed in the coming year.

The most-often cited complaint had to do with the availability of space, particularly during the daytime. The basement is the only meeting space available during the day and it is not seen to be appropriate by most community groups. Besides issues of cleanliness and a lack of windows, it is also difficult to access for seniors or anyone with a physical disability. Because of that, some groups have been forced to meet in the kitchen, which is small and not set up to be a meeting venue. There is a meeting room available on weekends, and three weekday evenings, but that is not enough to satisfy the demand as it is not available on Wednesday or Thursday, two of the busiest evenings of the weeks. The Department of Lifelong Learning of ECS has graciously allowed Collective agency members access to their meeting space during the day (and sometimes in the evening, though that is more problematic due to security concerns). The Collective is grateful for this as it has eased the problem somewhat, but the meeting room is not always available, and there is a cost, albeit very minimal.

Gym availability is also very limited. Groups had to be turned away that needed access to recreational space or a very large meeting space during the day, and there are not enough evening slots to satisfy the demand. Similarly, demand for the gymnasium on Saturdays is very high, and some groups have had to significantly alter their meeting times, or to find alternate space for their programming.

Access to the building is an issue that concerned many of the groups that use Sacred Heart, particularly on weekday evenings. Sometimes the custodian would forget to open the door, or would have the door open for the required half-hour, but participants would come at times outside that half-hour window. There is a doorbell only on the 2 main entrances, and some groups complained that the custodian does not always hear the doorbell. Having to answer the doorbell is an issue for the evening custodian(s), who is always very pleasant and helpful, even though it interferes with his ability to complete his own work.

Signage over the doors was an issue related to access to the building. Many groups, when they first come to Sacred Heart, are confused about which door will be open, and it is difficult to describe to someone which door they are to use. Signage, as simple as putting large numbers on each of the doors, would help to alleviate that problem. In addition, users should be encouraged to post large signs with instructions for finding the event venue from each of the doors in the school. Some survey respondents requested signage in different languages, which could be done by the host or sponsor of the event.

Wheelchair/disabled access was also noted as a problem. Although there is one door that is fairly level for wheelchair access, it is in the wing of the building that is locked during weekday evening and weekend hours so it is not of much use to the community users of Sacred Heart. Also, the doors are fairly narrow – large enough for a small, conventional wheelchair but too narrow for some of the larger electronic wheelchair models. Once a disabled person in a wheelchair gains access to the building, there are no washrooms with wheelchair access, no accessible water foundations, and no way of gaining access to the second floor.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council contracted an architect who specializes in disability issues to do a disability “audit”. Major recommendations included: (1) make at least one of the four building entrances wheelchair accessible; (2) install one unisex accessible family style washroom; (3) install a small public elevator; (4) install two universally designed water fountains; (5) install a universally designed public telephone; and (6) update the alarm system to include visual signals. There were also some recommendations that were less pressing, including wheelchair accessible parking stalls, improved signage, assisted listening devices for meeting rooms, and more detail, color and texture contrast in the hallways to assist those with visual and cognitive limitations.

To partially address the issue of wheelchair accessibility, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has purchased a portable ramp that can be used at the front entrance to allow wheelchairs to negotiate the one step up from the main sidewalk. The sidewalk itself can be accessed from the church parking lot to the west of the building.

Several of the groups felt that both the kitchen and the gymnasium could be better equipped. The kitchen requires pots, pans and dishes, as well as a hood fan and better ventilation. The Community Kitchen group that meets regularly in the kitchen was able to access funding to purchase dishes and kitchen utensils, but those are kept in a locked cupboard for their own use. Community users, particularly one-time users, would appreciate common utensils for general use.

Basketball hoops are the major problem in the gymnasium. The hoops that are in the gym are made for use by elementary school children. The adult basketball players that use the gym on evenings and weekends are taller, stronger and rougher than elementary school children, and need heavy-duty, breakaway hoops, but those are costly. Edmonton Catholic Schools has been very generous in fixing and replacing broken basketball hoops, but this is a temporary measure that will not be the solution for the long run.

### Recommendations regarding community use:

1. Leave only one door open at any time for the facilities host to monitor. This would have the drawback that some people would be walking through the school in order to get to their event, which may be far from the one open door, meaning that there would be more dirt tracked on to the floor, particularly in the winter.
2. Employ a weekday evening facilities host. At the moment, the facilities host is here only on the weekends. The custodians provide access to the building, and also must supervise, community groups that come on weekday evenings.
3. Have two facilities hosts on duty during weekend events – one to monitor the open door, and the other to roam the school to provide security and supervision. There were only two incidents (one theft, one vandalism) during the year but the possibility exists for more problems to occur because there are no doors to block off upstairs hallways. More frequent monitoring of the halls would help to alleviate this problem.
4. Keep one evening a week open in the gymnasium for one-time users.
5. Possibly provide specific time slots that might allow for more group access to the gymnasium. For example, groups could book the gym from 6 pm to 7:30 or from 7:30 pm to 9 pm, allowing two groups to use the gym on any given night, rather than having one group book in the middle of the prime time hours.
6. Place large numbers on or above each of the doors to allow for easy identification of the door to be used for a specific event. Also, signage at the front door needs to be improved so that visitors are able to find the offices of Collective members.
7. Apply for funding for:
  - a. Improved speaker system for gymnasium
  - b. Equipment for kitchen
  - c. Equipment for gymnasium, especially break-away basketball hoops and more tables/chairs
  - d. Equipment for kitchen – pots, pans, utensils, hood fan

### *The Sacred Heart Collective*

As noted in the results section, the organizations that form the Collective are unified in their feeling that they operate as individual organizations that inhabit one building, and share some common resources. There is no feeling that there is an operating Collective. Agencies are pleased with the access to low-cost office space, the ability to use the copier, fax, and postage machine at very little cost, and the opportunity for casual networking. However, it is clear that much more could be done to promote a sense of a collective working together to achieve similar aims. The top-down management style

was seen to be somewhat problematic, and agencies felt that the communication from the Council to the member agencies could be improved.

#### Recommendations:

1. Strike a small committee to look into existing models for operating a similar collective and make suggestions for improving the collective experience of the agencies that share space at Sacred Heart.
2. Schedule more regular Collective meetings. The purpose of some of the meetings would be to discuss office management issues. Other meetings could be used to discuss/have speakers on issues that are common to all of the nonprofit agencies that rent space at Sacred Heart. Examples could be fundraising issues, stress management or public education. The frequency of these meetings would be discussed and decided by Collective members, as most agencies already have stretched their resources to deal with issues related to their own mandate, and a balance must be achieved.
3. Create a committee to consult with ESPC regarding the relationship with Edmonton Catholic Schools

“We enjoy sharing space with other NGOs – we gain access to each other’s clients who routinely visit more than one NGO office at Sacred Heart. We enjoy the solidarity and support from the collective environment and have developed friendship with other NGO workers, united in the same struggle.”

#### Factors To Consider In Replicating the Model Elsewhere

One of the reasons for this evaluation is the possibility of replicating the Sacred Heart model in another closed school. While it is difficult to generalize from the experience in one community and one school, there are some inferences that can be drawn from the responses to the surveys we received. Ideally, a needs assessment would be done in any community where replication of the Sacred Heart model is being considered. However, there are some things we have learned about the need for access to community space that should be considered when making decisions about replicating the model elsewhere:

- There is more demand for recreation and meeting space than can be met by the facilities at Sacred Heart
- Groups would like to be able to play more sports indoors (soccer and floor hockey)
- Free access to community facilities is key to broad participation by low income people
- A fairly central location is highly desirable – not all groups using Sacred Heart were part of the McCauley community, but groups that had participants from outside the surrounding area often chose this location because of its central location and easy access from other parts of the city

- More daytime access to community facilities is needed. This may be more applicable to the inner city location than other neighbourhoods, but that determination is beyond the scope of this evaluation
- Many community groups (and particularly ethno-cultural organizations) require, or would like, a small office space that is for their own private use
- A gymnasium is an important asset to a community hub (groups require both the recreational opportunities provided by a gym, and the ability to hold large gatherings)
- A community hub such as Sacred Heart contributes to the cohesiveness of a community.

It became clear during this evaluation that certain things need to be in place in order for this model to be replicated successfully, and improved:

- Daytime access to all common areas would be beneficial
- There is a need for meeting rooms of various sizes
- Tables and chairs are required in each of the meeting rooms and a sound system is beneficial for larger rooms
- A kitchen must be close to the gym and be equipped, at a minimum, with a fridge and stove (preferably extra large oven) while pots/pans/dishes would be a definite plus
- On-site, flexible booking is a definite asset
- Security and issues must be attended to -- perhaps have only one door open with a security guard posted at all times
- Having a facilities host on site during community access hours is key to the success of an event
- The facility should be close to transit, and have lots of available free parking
- In order to allow for free community access to space, the agency facilitating the access must pay little or no rent on common areas and community access space. This can be accomplished if there is a major tenant or several tenants willing and able to pay a higher rent on office space, allowing the building owner to reduce rent on the rest of the building. Another option is to convince the building owner of the value of the community access initiative and be willing to have a lower income from that building
- Work needs to be done well in advance to build a cohesive collective of agencies willing to work together to create a community hub that includes access to recreation and meeting space, as well as enter into a partnership that would allow for more collaboration among agencies
- Disability access (not immediately necessary, but highly desirable, at least for first floor accessibility).

“Having an office inside of the school facilitates the booking of space; you meet with the person in charge and discuss the arrangement right there, in the moment.”

If all of these conditions are in place, the Sacred Heart Centre initiative should replicate fairly easily and successfully to a similar school location.



## **Appendix 1 Description of Original Sacred Heart Collective Members**

### **Action for Healthy Communities**

AHC's programs support residents in low income neighbourhoods to build on their existing capacities, skills and assets by planning and implementing health related projects in their communities.

### **Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association \***

ACCPA provides a link between police services and the community and increases community awareness and participation in crime prevention activities.

### **Boyle McCauley News**

The Boyle McCauley Newspaper is a non-profit, community-orientated newspaper distributed to homes and businesses in the Boyle Street and McCauley neighbourhoods.

### **Centre for Eritrean Culture & Sports**

CESC promotes personal growth, health and supports the family as the basic building block of a successful future for members of the Eritrean community in Edmonton.

### **Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers**

EMCN is a community agency that seeks to assist immigrants and refugees coming to Edmonton to achieve full participation in the community, contributing their experiences and skills to strengthen and enrich the lives of all Canadians.

### **Edmonton Social Planning Council (lead organization)**

The ESPC works with community partners on research, advocacy and public education to address issues related to poverty, inclusion and the social determinants of health.

### **McCauley Community League**

The MCL is a volunteer, neighbourhood-based organization that addresses local concerns and initiates projects that enhance the quality of life in McCauley.

### **Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations**

NAAR is a coalition of 70 organizations and individuals who work to research and educate on the issue of race relations in the Edmonton-region.

\* Left in early 2005

## Appendix 2 Groups Accessing Space at Sacred Heart in 2004

### Use of Community Space at Sacred Heart School (Dec. 2003-Dec. 2004)

(Includes the gym, kitchen, basement and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room)

#### Regularly Scheduled Users

Community Group	Scheduled Use	Approx. Number of People per Visit	Approximate Number of Total Visits 2003-04
1. Edmonton Land Trust	Monthly	10	100
2. NAAR Board	Monthly	10	40
3. Boyle McCauley News Board	Monthly	10	100
4. Sudanese Canadian Community Assoc.	Monthly (6 months)	30	180
5. ESPC Board	Monthly	14	140
6. Women's Sudanese Group	Twice	15	30
7. Global Hand Drummers + Dancers	Weekly x 2 groups	15	1200
8. Action for Healthy Communities (Various meetings)	Weekly	10	400
9. Filipino Society of Edmonton	Monthly x 3 months	15	45
10. Spanish-Speaking seniors ESL Classes	3 x per week	6	216
11. AB College of Social Workers	Monthly	25	200
12. Leadership Training Group	Twice monthly	20	160
13. Single Mom's Group	Monthly	8	24
14. Starlight Friendship Group	Monthly	10	30
15. Deeper Life Bible Church	Weekly	30	600
16. Edmonton Inner City Children's Project	Weekly	25	1125
17. McCauley Community League – Guitar Lessons	Bi-weekly	10	200
18. McCauley Community League – Games Group	Weekly	12	480
19. McCauley Community League – Adult Art Group	Weekly	12	480
16. Diversity Educators Meeting	Quarterly	35	105
17. Yoga Classes	Weekly for 10 wks	10	100
18. Ugandan Dance Group	Weekly for 6 wks	8	48
19. Cambodian Youth Group	Weekly	15	600

20. Edmonton Columbian-Canadian Society	Twice weekly x 4 months	10	80
21. Chinese Multicultural Health Community Kitchen	Monthly	8	40
22. McCauley Community League Volleyball	Weekly	15	600
23. Rainbow Spirit Dancers	4 x week (5 min.)	20	1600
24. Sudanese Youth Group	2 x week	20	800
25. Eritrean Centre for Culture and Sport	Monthly	100	800
26. Salvadoran Society Youth Program	Weekly, 3 months	10	120
27. Bosnian-Herzegovina Ethnic Dancers	Twice weekly	25	1600
28. Chinese Cultural Promotion Society	Monthly	200	1000
29. Edmonton STARS Youth Group	Weekly	40	600
30. Children Under 10 Soccer Team Conditioning	Weekly	20	320
31. Edmonton Columbian-Canadian Society – Youth Events	Monthly, 4 months	75	300
32. Action for Health Communities Project Gathering	Monthly	100	400
33. White Buffalo Dance and Drum Theatre	Weekly	20	480
34. Opportunity Cha Cha Cha	Weekly	25	225
35. Pre-School Soccer Skills Project	Weekly	20	200
<b>Total Number of Regular Users</b>		<b>1,063</b>	
<b>Approximate Total Number of Visits by Regular Users</b>			<b>15,768</b>

### Day Camps – Summers and Holidays

<b>Camp</b>	<b>Approximate Number of People Per Visit</b>	<b>Approximate Number of Total Visits</b>
1. City of Edmonton Community Services	15 children daily for 6 weeks	450
2. Inner City Teen Project	20 teens for 3 weeks in summer	300
3. Edmonton inner City Children's Project	15 children for one week	75
<b>Approximate Number of Visits by Camp Participants</b>		<b>825</b>

**One-Time Users (Community Groups that Used Community Space Once)**

<b>Community Group</b>	<b>Approximate Number of People</b>
1. Community Crime Prevention Building Bridges Group	85
2. Horticultural Society	30
3. Holistic Health Association Training Event	30
4. Catholic Social Services	25
5. Bissell Centre	30
6. ECALA	30
7. Bissell Centre Children's Christmas Party	250
8. Aboriginal Group Traditional Feast	150
9. Way of the Cross – Easter Event	400
10. Community League Music Festival	100
11. May Week Poetry Reading	60
12. Voice of the Voiceless	300
13. Chinese New Year Celebration	150
14. ECALA Literacy Celebration	150
15. Change for Children One World Beat Concert	350
16. Bissell Centre Aboriginal Round Dance	400
17. Men's support Group on Addictions	40
18. Chinese Mandarin Society	150
19. Catholic Social Services Youth Event	60
20. Council of Canadians	100
21. Nigerian Church Prayer Meeting	75
22. Columbian Halloween Party for Children	150
23. Columbian Community New Year's Eve Party	200
24. 3 Election Forums Organized by ECHOH and EMCN	300
25. Catholic Social Services Refugee Youth Christmas	40
<b>Total Number of One-Time Users</b>	<b>3,655</b>

**Approximate Number of Visits by People Accessing Space at Sacred Heart School in 2004**

<b>Types of Users</b>	<b>Approximate Number of Total Visits</b>
1. Regularly Scheduled Users	15,768
2. One-Times Users	3,655
3. Day Camps	825
<b>Approximate Number of Visits by All Users in 2004</b>	<b>20,248</b>

## Appendix 3 Research Questionnaire

### SACRED HEART SCHOOL ACCESS QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete. The questions are divided into three sections: (1) questions about your group/organization; (2) questions about the Sacred Heart School facilities; (3) questions about how the use of this space has impacted your group or organization.

Please answer all questions and take a few minutes to write in additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. Please return your completed questionnaire by 14 March 2005. You can fax it to 425-6244 or return by mail or drop-off to the Edmonton Social Planning Council at 9624 – 108 Avenue, Edmonton AB, T5H 1A4. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would rather do the survey in person, contact Jill Atkey at 423-2031 (ext. 352) or jatkey@edmspc.com.

#### Section 1: Questions About Your Group or Organization

The following 8 questions can be answered by checking the box next to your desired response. Please provide additional information where requested.

**1. What type of services/activities does your organization provide? (Check all that apply.)**

- Sports/recreation/hobby
- Arts/culture
- Social activities
- Support groups
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**2. Which population group does your organization serve? (Check all that apply.)**

- Children (ages 0-12)
- Youth (ages 13-25)
- Adults

Families

**OPTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

Single mothers

Specific cultural communities (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

People with disabilities (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Our group is open to anyone

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**3. Where do the majority of your group members live?**

McCauley neighbourhood

Elsewhere in the inner-city

Another neighbourhood in Edmonton (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

All over Edmonton

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

(b). If your group members live outside of the McCauley neighbourhood, what are some of the reasons you use space at Sacred Heart School? (Check all that apply.)

It's central

It's free

We cannot afford to book space elsewhere

Lack of facilities in other communities

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**4. Where did your group meet before coming to Sacred Heart School?**

Our group did not meet before

Community league

Another school

OPTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Commercial space

Someone's home

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

5. Why did your group move to Sacred Heart School when it became available? (Check all that apply.)

Lower cost

Better location

Better facilities

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

6. Does your group still meet at Sacred Heart School?

Yes

No

(b). If not, why does your group no longer meet at Sacred Heart School? (Check all that apply.)\*

We no longer meet as a group

The location of the school doesn't work for us

We need more space than the school can provide

We need a different type of space than the school can provide

We need more frequent access to the school

We found space elsewhere (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

We had a bad experience (please tell us about this in question 36)

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**\*If your group no longer meets at Sacred Heart School, please continue to fill out the questionnaire based on your previous experience at the school.**

7. How often do you use space at Sacred Heart School?

- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- More than twice a week
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

8. What time of the day/week do you normally use Sacred Heart School?

- Daytime during the week
- Evenings during the week
- Weekends

## Section 2: Questions About Sacred Heart School Facilities

Questions 9 – 26 can also be answered by checking the box next to your desired response. Please provide additional information where requested.

9. How did you learn about the space at Sacred Heart School?

- From an agency with offices at the school
- From another agency
- From another group that uses the space
- By word-of-mouth in the community
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)



10. What activities do you normally use Sacred Heart School for? (Check all that apply.)

- Sports and/or recreation (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Arts (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Social activities (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Meetings and/or support group (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

11. Which facilities do you use at Sacred Heart School? (Check all that apply.)

- Basement
- Gym
- Kitchen
- Room 226 meeting space (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

12. Is this space adequate for your needs?

- Yes                       No

**(b). If not, why is the space inadequate? In the space provided please specify the facility you are referring to (gym, kitchen, Room 226 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, or basement). (Check all that apply.)**

- It is too small (facility: \_\_\_\_\_)
- It is not in good condition (facility: \_\_\_\_\_)
- It does not have the equipment we need (facility: \_\_\_\_\_)
- It is difficult to access -- i.e. stairs and doorways (facility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

13. When choosing spaces for your activities, what is most important to you? (Please prioritize the following list by placing numbers 1 – 7 in the corresponding boxes, with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least.)

- Rental costs
- Size of room
- Community
- Cost of parking
- Public transit access
- Nearby amenities
- Booking procedures
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

14. What do you like about the space you use at Sacred Heart School? (Check all that apply.)

- The location suits our needs
- The spaces we use are easy to access (example: stairs and doorways)
- No rental costs
- It is clean / in good condition
- We feel safe and secure
- We can rely on our access to the space
- Times of availability are good
- We do not like anything about the space
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

15. What do you dislike about the space you use at Sacred Heart School? (Check all that apply.)

- The location does not suit our needs
- The spaces we use are difficult to access (example: stairs/doorways)
- It is not clean / in good condition
- We cannot rely on our access to the space
- We do not feel safe and secure (please specify:

\_\_\_\_\_ )

- Too many restrictions (please specify:

\_\_\_\_\_ )

- Times of availability are not good
- We do not dislike anything about the space
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**16. Do you have needs for space that Sacred Heart School is currently unable to meet?**

- Yes                       No

(b). If so, which of the following activities do you need additional space for? (Check all that apply.)

- Meetings
- Art
- Games
- Sports/recreation/fitness
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**17. What changes would need to be made to Sacred Heart School to make it accessible for everyone. (Check all that apply.)**

We are able to meet all needs with the Sacred Heart facilities

Signs posted in languages other than English

Publicity material in languages other than English

Easier after hours access to the building (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

An accessible building for people with physical disabilities (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**18. What time of day/week would you prefer to use space at Sacred Heart School?**

Weekday mornings

Weekday afternoons

Weekday evenings (5:00-7:00)

Weekday evenings (7:00-9:00)

Weekend daytime

Weekend evenings

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

(b). Has Sacred Heart School been able to accommodate this preference?

Yes

No

19. How often have you been denied space at Sacred Heart School?

Very often (nearly every request)

**Often (one out of every two or three requests)**

**Not very often (less than once every three requests)**

**Never**

20. If you use Sacred Heart School on the weekends, what is the value that our facilities host adds to your experience? (Check all that apply.)

**The facilities host gives us a sense of safety and security**

**The facilities host allows us to feel connected to the community**

**The facilities host adds to our experience by being involved in activities**

**The facilities host locates the equipment we need for our activities**

**The facilities host helps us set up and put away equipment**

**The facilities host does not add any value to our experience**

**Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)**

(b). If you have any ideas on what more the facilities host can do to make your experience at Sacred Heart School better, please use the following space to tell us.

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21. If Sacred Heart School does not have space available, where do you go instead? (Check all that apply.)

**Community league**

**A group member's home**

**Another school**

**Commercial space**

**City-owned space (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)**

**We do not have another place to go**

**We have never been turned down for space at Sacred Heart School**

**Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)**

22. What is the charge for the other space?

- There is no charge
- \$1 – \$5 per hour
- \$6 – \$10 per hour
- \$11 – \$20 per hour
- More than \$20 per hour
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

23. It has been our policy to cancel bookings for regular users if a special event requires space at the school. How frequently has your regular booking been cancelled?

- Very frequently (one out of every two bookings)
- Somewhat frequently (one out of every three or four bookings)
- Rarely (it has only happened once or twice)
- Our regular booking has never been cancelled

(b). How could this policy be improved?

- Leave one weeknight open for special events
- Limit groups to 1.5 hours in the evenings so that two groups can be booked per evening
- The policy is fair as it is
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

24. What problems have you had while using space at the school? (Check all that apply.)

- We've never had any problems
- The school was locked so our program started late

**OPTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

- The school was locked so we had to cancel our program
- We didn't have the equipment we needed (example: tables and chairs)
-

Our booking was changed or cancelled because of another group

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

25. What difficulties have you had with the booking procedures for school space? (Check all that apply.)

We've never had any difficulties

Space is not available when we need it

The booking procedure is too complicated

We cannot get the forms signed in time

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

26. What should be done to improve the booking procedures? (Check all that apply.)

Nothing, they are fine as they are

Fewer forms to sign

More periods of availability

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

### Section 3: Questions about how the use of this space has impacted your group

For questions 27 – 33 please use the following scale to indicate the level to which you agree with the statement:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = somewhat disagree

3 = neither agree nor disagree

4 = somewhat agree

5 = strongly agree

27. Having access to the space at Sacred Heart School allows us to provide more activities than we could before.

1

2

3

4

5

**28. If we didn't have access to space at Sacred Heart School we would have to charge fees for the activities we provide.**

1       2       3       4       5

29. We can serve more people because of Sacred Heart School.

1       2       3       4       5

30. Using the space at Sacred Heart School means that we can provide activities/services to the McCauley neighbourhood.

1       2       3       4       5

**31. Without access to Sacred Heart School we couldn't continue to meet as a group.**

1       2       3       4       5

**32. Access to space at Sacred Heart School has not had any impact on our group.**

1       2       3       4       5

33. Meeting at Sacred Heart School makes us feel like part of the community.

1       2       3       4       5

The final three questions provide space for you to write in your own comments. It is important for us to hear from you in your own words about the impact that Sacred Heart School space has had on your organization and any other comments you might have. Please spend a few minutes answering these questions.

34. Please take a few minutes to describe the impact that the Sacred Heart School facilities have had on your group/organization. (More space on next page.)

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**PLEASE CONTINUE ONTO FINAL PAGE**

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35. When community groups wish to access other school facilities after hours they are required to book through a central School Board office, for which there is a charge. The Catholic School Board has agreed to let us coordinate the bookings from an office inside of Sacred Heart School. In your opinion, is this an important role for an organization to play? If not, why not? If so, what benefits has it provided your group?

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36. Use the space below to provide us with any suggestions or additional comments. (If you run out of room, please continue writing on the back of this page.)

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