

Precarious Work



**The Reality of
Precarious Work**

**A Profile of Poverty
In Edmonton**

**Social Justice Event Review:
The ROOPH Awards**

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We are always interested in receiving photos, articles or story ideas. Please contact our research associate, John Kolkman, at johnk@edmontonsocialplanning.ca to be added to our volunteer list.

A full bibliography is available upon request.

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Executive Director's Note

Susan Morrissey

I remember when I got my first job, many years ago at the age of 15, working in our neighbourhood grocery store. I can't begin to venture a guess as to what my rate of pay was, nor did I really care. It was my first opportunity to earn my own money to spend on those new jeans, trendy make-up, and popular music of the time.

Fast forward to today, and why we are focusing this issue of the fACTivist on precarious employment. Recently I read an article that seemed to downplay the impact of work that is part-time, contract, or temporary. The author cited numerous examples of who they believed was benefiting from this type of work, namely youth still living at home, retired folks just wanting to make a bit more money to offset pensions, and those who wanted the flexibility of working on an infrequent basis.

There is another side to this though, and one that has significant negative consequences. Statistics tell us that many individuals in precarious employment situations are women—especially single parents, immigrants, Indigenous persons, those with disabilities, older adults, and youth. Research also links precarious employment with negative physical and mental health outcomes such as increased stress associated with job insecurity and the pressures to hold down more than one job to support oneself and family.

I am not so sure if folks in the mainstream really understand what it takes to live on part-time employment. I also question if most people know just how many people work in precarious work situations. We have decided to use this edition of the newsletter to increase awareness of the struggle many vulnerable individuals experience. 🌍



What the Data Shows about Precarious Work

By John Kolkman

During an economic downturn like the one Alberta is currently experiencing due to low oil prices, the number of people involuntarily working part-time rather than full-time tends to increase. This is particularly the case for younger workers just starting out on their careers. Part-time jobs tend to have fewer employer paid benefits, if any at all, and less job security. Statistics Canada considers work full-time if a person works 30 or more hours per week in their main or only job.

There is plenty of data confirming that the past decade has been challenging for young Albertans entering the job market. Labour force data from CANSIM Table 282-0087 shows that the number of young workers between the ages of 15 to 24 years with full-time jobs declined from 226,600 in 2006 to 179,200 in 2016, a decline of 47,400, or 21 per cent. During the same ten year period, the number of workers 25 years and older with full-time employment grew strongly from 1,378,100 in 2006 to 1,664,200 in 2015, a gain of 286,100 full-time jobs, or 20.8 per cent.

Between 2014, and 2016, 23,900 full-time jobs for young workers disappeared. 31,100 full-time jobs for older workers also disappeared in the same time period.

In 2006, young workers below the age of 25 made up 14.1% of all those with full-time jobs (or just over one in seven). By 2016, young workers made up only 9.7% of all those with full-time jobs (or fewer than one in ten).

The economic downturn is only adding to the woes of young workers in Alberta compared to older workers. Between 2014, and 2016, 23,900 full-time jobs for young workers disappeared, or 11.8 per cent. While 31,100 full-time jobs for older workers also disappeared in the same time period, in percentage terms the job losses were much lower at just 1.8 per cent.

(continued on p. 20)

The Reality of Precarious Work

Heather Curtis

To me, precarious work means you never know what hours you will get, how much money you will make on your next paycheque, whether your shifts will be cancelled last minute, and whether you will have a job next month, or even next week.

Before moving to Edmonton to begin working at the Edmonton Social Planning Council, I worked at a drop-in childcare program in Halifax, Nova Scotia. My shifts were based on the registration of children, so if no families needed childcare that day, I would not be paid for my shift. As a result, one week I might work 35 hours, and the next I could work 15. All the workers at the childcare centre were constantly worried about whether they would have shifts the following week or month, as scheduling was extremely inconsistent.

These inconsistent hours made it incredibly challenging to plan my finances, to ensure I budgeted my money properly to cover all my expenses, and to participate in social events or outings in the Halifax area. Regularly, my paycheque barely covered my Visa bill for that month. During my two years living in a bachelor apartment in Halifax, I didn't turn on the heat because I knew I didn't have room in my budget for that extra expense. Something as simple as staying warm and comfortable during the winter became out of reach because of my inconsistent hours and low pay.



This stress can negatively impact a person's sleeping and eating patterns and physical and mental well-being. You can become isolated in your apartment because you don't have much money for entertainment or social outings. I was very careful with how I budgeted my money and regularly checked my account to make sure I had enough money to spend on a certain item or social event.

As I regularly felt stressed about money and finances, it was important for me to find affordable ways to positively redirect my stress. I was able to join the Saint Mary's University gym at a discount because I was an alumna and I worked out numerous times a week. I regularly attended the university hockey and football games, which were free to attend as I used to be a student. It was important for me to do things I enjoyed that gave me

opportunities for social interaction and that diverted my stress and negative energy in a positive direction.

Having a stable, permanent job with regular hours and decent pay means a person doesn't have to worry about having enough money to meet their daily needs and to cover their expenses. It means being able to go out for dinner or see a movie with friends without worrying about how it will impact their daily or monthly budgets. It also means knowing how much money you will receive each paycheque so you can plan your finances, cover your expenses, save money and plan for the future.

Having a stable and secure job with the Edmonton Social Planning Council has given me the opportunity to feel secure in my finances and to ensure that my needs will be met and my expenses paid. My new financial security has also given me the freedom and latitude to enjoy a range of unique events and activities that the city has to offer.

Every resident of Edmonton deserves the opportunity to feel included and involved in their own local communities, to feel secure in their finances and to have extra funds in case of an unforeseen emergency or illness. Something as simple as having a little bit of extra money at the end of the month can do wonders for a person's physical, mental and emotional well-being. 🌱



Precarious Employment

Navroop Tehera with Rebecca Fletcher

Precarious work is a form of employment that is often poorly paid, insecure, part-time, or contract labour, and in some cases informal. Precarious labour has become a defining feature of the labour market in Canada. It has influenced all sectors of the labour market from retail to public sector work. Cities such as Toronto and Calgary are seeing larger portions of the work force being classified as temporary. In 2013, a study done by the McMaster University and the United Way found that 52% of the jobs in Toronto were defined as precarious.

The impacts of precarious labour are disproportionately felt by women, recent immigrants, and refugees. Supporting a family can be seriously impacted by the lack of long-term full time jobs with paid benefits. The long-term impacts of precarious labour lead to stress and depression, and can hinder long term planning. In addition, precarious labour has contributed to the rise in poverty in urban areas. Contract or temporary workers may face sudden termination of their contract and are unable to make ends meet financially pushing them into poverty.

In 2013, a study done by McMaster University and the United Way found that 52% of the jobs in Toronto were defined as precarious.

Employment agencies such as Randstad have become the middleman in the precarious labour market. These causal labour agencies work with employers to fill casual positions that are short term and lack paid benefits. This is seen as mutually beneficial because employers can fill short-term needs without hiring a full time employee. The employer gains short-term labour that doesn't pay benefits, and causal work agencies charge an hourly rate in which only 60% is given to the worker. Those who experience this type of work find it stressful because they never know if they can find more work when contracts expire. This type of experience in the labour market often leaves workers questioning if they could ever start a career.

This experience was mirrored by me and many of my colleagues, who have worked on limited term contracts in the hopes of finding a permanent job to start our careers. Our aspirations and the current conditions of the labour market have left many of us frustrated because the majority of entry level jobs posted are contracts or internships do not lead to a guarantee of permanent labour. As a result, many of my colleagues and I feel we are in a constant cycle of looking for permanent employment while continuing to work full time in precarious positions.

(continued on p. 19)

A graphic for the ESPC AGM. At the top, there are diagonal stripes in shades of blue and green. Below this, a circular badge with a red border contains the text 'SAVE -the- DATE' in white. A light green banner with a ribbon tail contains the text 'ESPC AGM' in large, outlined letters. Below the banner, the text 'WITH KEYNOTE BY CHERYL WHISKEYJACK FROM BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY' is centered within a thin green border. At the bottom of this section, the date 'May 25, 2017' is written in a cursive font. The background is white with blue speckles. At the bottom, there are more diagonal stripes in shades of blue and green.

A Profile of Poverty In Edmonton

Rebecca Fletcher with excerpts from *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton Update, February 2017*

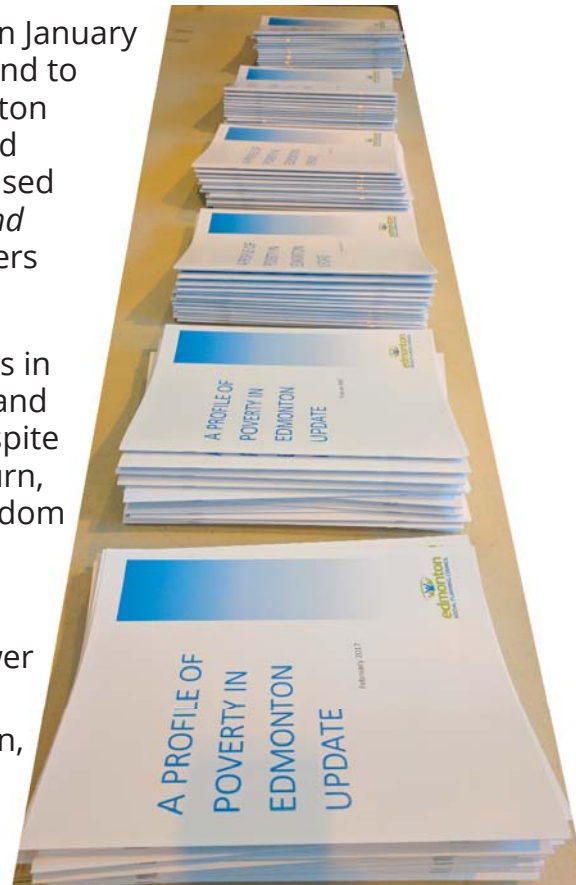
ESPC released its first Profile of Poverty in Edmonton in January 2015 to describe the landscape of poverty in our city and to serve as a benchmark for the City's EndPovertyEdmonton initiative. In February 2017, we updated the profile, and shared a launch with EndPovertyEdmonton, who released their *End Poverty Action Guide for Edmonton Religious and Spiritual Communities*. The ESPC is pleased to be partners with EndPovertyEdmonton.

Much has changed since 2015, both politically (changes in government at both the provincial and federal levels) and economically (a prolonged downturn in oil prices). Despite the challenges posed by the current economic downturn, the policies of all three orders of government have seldom been better aligned to make meaningful progress in poverty reduction.

This profile update provides data and analysis to answer the following questions:

1. What is the overall picture of poverty in Edmonton, and how has it changed in the past two years?
2. How does poverty vary across age, gender, and households in the city? What trends are we seeing among different population groups?
3. Who is impacted most by poverty? What population groups are at higher risk of experiencing poverty than others? (i.e., Indigenous people, recent immigrant/refugees, low income workers, women, children and youth.)
4. What are the emerging trends impacting poverty in Edmonton or influencing the work on eliminating poverty?

The two years since ESPC published *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton* have been challenging ones for the city of Edmonton and its residents. From the autumn of 2014, when oil prices topped \$100 US per barrel, there was a rapid descent to the \$30 to \$40 US per barrel range. Oil prices have only crawled back into the \$50 US per barrel range in recent months. Alberta oil is priced at a significant discount to the above prices.



Job growth has slowed markedly and the final six months of 2016 have been marked by job losses exceeding new jobs created. The number of Edmontonians needing to access employment insurance, social assistance, and using the food bank are all up sharply. The number of people moving to Edmonton has also slowed, helping to make rents somewhat more affordable. A higher vacancy rate and additional investment in affordable housing by the three orders of government provides hope for continued progress in reducing the number of homeless Edmontonians.



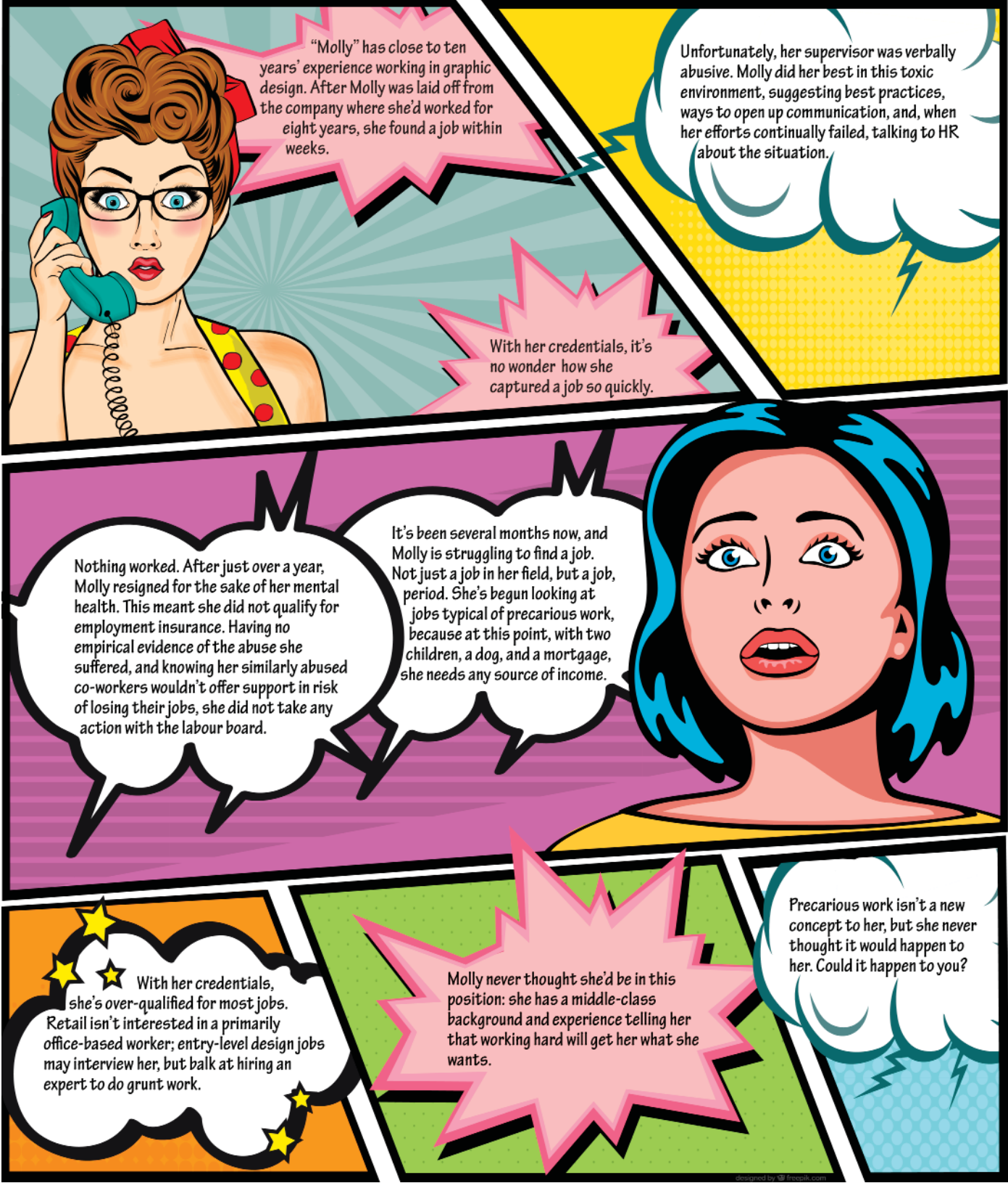
So far, there have been no widespread reductions in public spending by any of the three orders of government, further cushioning Edmonton's economy from the recession that has more severely impacted Calgary and the rest of Alberta. In fact, to counter the effects of the recession, infrastructure spending on major transportation, post-secondary, and healthcare projects has been growing. In addition, the federal and provincial governments are also making significant new investments in social infrastructure including the enhanced Canada Child Benefit, the new Alberta Child Benefit, provincial minimum wage increases, and affordable housing.

There is also evidence that, at the beginning of 2017, the Alberta economy has hit or is near the bottom. But any recovery is likely to be slow and uneven. Most analysts don't expect oil to get back to \$100 per barrel any time soon, perhaps not for a decade or more due to the United States shale oil revolution. This revolution in drilling technologies has led to millions of additional barrels of oil per day flooding onto the global market. ATB Financial's most recent forecast is that, after contracting by 4% in 2015 and 2.6% in 2016, Alberta's real GDP will grow by 2.1% in 2017 and 2.2% in 2018. The unemployment rate is not expected to improve until 2018 (ATB Financial, 2016).

Edmonton's poverty reduction initiative—supported by investments made by other orders of government—has gotten off to a promising start despite the strong economic headwinds the city has been facing. However, these efforts are in the very early stages. There will no doubt be unexpected challenges that will have to be met and overcome if the community's goal of ending poverty in a generation is to be achieved.

[You can download the complete report from our website at bit.ly/YegPovertyProfile](http://bit.ly/YegPovertyProfile)

[You can download EndPovertyEdmonton's reports, plans, and guides from their website at www.endpovertyedmonton.ca](http://www.endpovertyedmonton.ca) 



Social Justice Event Review

My Experience at the ROOPH Awards Hosted By Homeward Trust Heather Curtis

This column in the fACTivist highlights social justice events in the community.

On March 9, I attended the ROOPH Awards (Recognizing Outstanding Organizations and People in Housing), hosted by Homeward Trust, in support of our Executive Director, Susan Morrissey. She was nominated for an award to recognize her contributions in the field of housing and homelessness in the City of Edmonton. It was an afternoon of good food, excellent Indigenous performances, and valuable and heartfelt speeches.

One thing that stood out to me was the recognition that the event was being held on traditional Treaty 6 territory, showing respect to the First Nations peoples of Edmonton and acknowledging their spiritual connection to the land. There was also an exciting, dynamic and high-energy performance by the Indigenous entertainment group Running Thunder Dancers. The incredibly talented dancers showcased a variety of dance styles, traditional dress and music, including drumming and singing.



As someone who moved to Alberta from Halifax, Nova Scotia, just two months ago, it was a privilege to be in the same room as so many individuals and organizations that strive to improve the lives of the most vulnerable citizens of Edmonton. There were politicians from all levels of government, executive directors of a variety of charities and non-profits, and front line workers who connect directly with the city's most vulnerable citizens on a daily basis.

Despite different roles or backgrounds, all in attendance had something important in common. Everyone at the ROOPH Awards are dedicated to improving the lives of Edmonton's most vulnerable people, either through making or influencing public policy, participating in

direct advocacy, creating and executing critical community programs or completing social policy analysis and research projects related to poverty and low-income issues.

With such a strong, vibrant community of policy makers, advocates and researchers in Edmonton who truly have the best interests of our city's most vulnerable residents at heart, reducing or eliminating chronic homelessness is a realistic goal. Efforts to reduce homelessness must occur within all levels in a society in order to succeed and be sustainable.

It is crucial that all individuals and organizations present at the ROOPH Awards and within the city sustain their efforts in reducing homelessness and continuously work toward achieving their goals. Individuals who are homeless must be treated with dignity and compassion and their voices should be included in discussions concerning which wrap-around services or policies are needed to improve their lives and to empower them to make positive change.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is awaiting the release of the provincial budget. It is important to determine whether efforts in our city to reduce homelessness will be complemented by measures of the provincial government, such as increasing funding for permanent supportive housing, supervised injection sites and wrap-around services for homeless people. Sustainable funding from the Alberta government will assist the City of Edmonton in advancing Edmonton's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. 🏡

Did you know?

ESPC has our own awards! The Award of Merit for Advocacy of Social Justice is awarded annually at our Annual General Meeting. Nominations are open until March 31. To nominate an individual or group that has demonstrated a dedication and achievement in the pursuit of social policies for the benefit of Edmontonians, particularly those who are the most vulnerable, visit our website at edmontonsocialplanning.ca or click this direct link: bit.ly/2017Award.



Get to Know an ESPC Staff Member!

Each issue, one staff member will interview another. This is your opportunity to find out what drives the ESPC staff in their efforts to create positive social change in their community. In this issue, Communications Officer Rebecca Fletcher gets to know our new Research Coordinator, Heather Curtis.

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Heather has spent the past three years in Halifax, Nova Scotia, completing her M.A. in International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University. In addition to living in different regions across Canada, Heather has travelled extensively in Bolivia and wrote her Master's thesis about the country.

She has experience in the Hamilton Living Wage Campaign as part of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the Hamilton Social Planning and Research Council. Heather recently started as Research Coordinator and she is interested in learning about living wage and working poverty within the Edmonton context. She is looking forward to joining many committees and roundtables in the Edmonton community to learn more about the new city she calls home.



RF: What's your favourite '90s jam?

HC: [Sings] BACKSTREET'S BACK, ALRIGHT!

RF: If you could be any animal in the world, what animal would you be and why?

HC: I'd want to be a cheetah because cheetahs can run really really fast and catch people, and I can't run.

RF: What if I told you cheetahs never prosper?

HC: I'd still want to be a cheetah. Because I'd beat you in a race.

RF: What are you known for?

HC: I am known for being obsessed with hockey, football, and Bolivia. Kind of random ...

RF: A penguin walks through that door right now wearing a sombrero. What does he say and why is he here?

HC: He says, "Hi Heather! Do you want some pizza?" I say, "Hey why are you wearing a sombrero?" He says, "I'm about to go swimming. Do you want to come?"

RF: Do you know what a sombrero is?

HC: Yes, it's a hat.

RF: Just checking.

RF: What is your proudest moment at ESPC in the last six months?

HC: In the last month and a half ... just becoming comfortable in the committees and meetings, making connections, and meeting people who are doing really good work in the city. Becoming more aware of the issues in Edmonton and the key players. 🌍

Board Member Profile

Candas Jane Dorsey



Candas Jane Dorsey is an internationally-known writer and editor. A lifelong Edmontonian, she (with her partner, fellow artist Timothy J. Anderson) has made Boyle Street community her home for the last fifteen years. She is a literary writer with nine books (and counting) and many stories, poems, reviews, and critical essays published. In addition to her work as co-founder of The Edmonton Bullet arts newspaper and The Books Collective literary press, she has for 35 years been a freelance writer, editor and communications consultant. She also teaches writing and speaks internationally on writing and publishing.

"What is your proudest moment at ESPC in the last six months?"

"As a board member, I'm proud every time the ESPC releases a benchmark report, be it *Vital Signs* or the *Poverty Profile* or any other piece of research that will help governments at all levels, groups, agencies—all stakeholders—have the information they need to make a fact-based, systemic attack on poverty and injustice. I was very pleased in this time of Reconciliation to see our report on the realities of urban Aboriginals, and in a time when myths about immigration are rampant, our *Vital Signs* gave facts. It is sobering too when we see in our reports the number of children living in poverty. Fact-based research is essential to create good social policy. Research may not sound sexy, but the longer I work as a community and social justice advocate, the more important I find it to have a reliable source of reliable evidence on social issues."—Candas 🌍

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News Briefs

The Top7 Intelligent Communities 2017

From the semi-finalist communities that appear on the Smart 21 list in the autumn, ICF selects a smaller group of honourees to be its Top7 Intelligent Communities of the Year. Edmonton made the list, and ESPC was part of it through our work with EndPovertyEdmonton. In June, one of the top seven cities will be named ICF's Intelligent Community of the Year in New York City. Thank you to City of Edmonton Employees for your efforts!

For more, visit bit.ly/2mxUkA4

A Place To Call Home

"Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson is calling for big investments from the provincial and federal

governments to help the city meet its goal to end homelessness by the end of 2020.

While Iveson said the plan has made significant strides since being launched in 2009, he said the other levels of government have not been as committed to it as he had hoped.

'Five or six years ago there was about \$100 million of investment coming in from

provincial and federal governments to build new housing units,' Mayor Iveson explained in an interview with CBC News. 'That declined to the point where the number was zero.'" —*CBC News*

For the whole story, visit the CBC. bit.ly/2mOdCkG

Safe Injection Sites

"Supervised injection sites for drug addicts could become a reality

within a year at four locations in central Edmonton.

At a news conference Wednesday, officials with Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services Edmonton (AMSISE) announced some of the details of the plan, which will offer medically supervised injection services at existing community

agencies in the downtown core.

The Boyle McCauley Health Centre, Boyle Street Community Services and the George Spady Centre have been chosen as centres offering supervised injection services. A fourth program would be set up at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for inpatients only."

—*Min Dhariwal, CBC News*

For the whole story, visit the CBC. bit.ly/2mPo4Zg



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(continued from p. 7)

Precarious employment is also a reality in Edmonton's non-profit sector. Non-profits rely on funders to complete their work and pay their staff. This means that many workers are paid close to the poverty line. The average pay for an administrative assistant in a non-profit in Canada is \$32,500. As of 2016, the poverty line in Edmonton for a lone-parent family with two children is \$30,301.

ESPC releases a living wage for Edmonton each year. This year, the living wage for a single person with no children was \$17.81/h. The minimum wage is currently \$12.20/h. This means that people unable to break out of the precarious work cycle are paid \$5.61/h less than they need: a gap of 32%.

The United Way uses the living wage to calculate the monetary value of volunteer hours (though we know that volunteering is priceless). At the same time, workers at some of their funded partners may be making less than that.

Did you know?

Precarious employment is so pervasive, it's hard to talk about it without reflecting on our own experiences. If you haven't been trapped in a precarious work cycle yourself, you definitely know someone who has.

Key References

A full bibliography is available upon request.

What the Data Shows about Precarious Work

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Precarious Employment

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(continued from p. 3)

The number of part-time jobs in Alberta has been going up since the economic downturn for both younger and older workers. Between 2014 and 2016, the number of part-time jobs for young workers went up by 5,900 compared to the loss of 23,900 full-time jobs, while the number of part-time jobs for older workers went up by 39,600 compared to the loss of 31,100 full-time jobs.

Another factor making work more precarious is the long-term decline of unionization rates, especially in the private sector. Unionized jobs are likely to have better employer paid benefits like extended health, dental, disability and retirement benefits, as well as better job security protections. As of 2015, only 10.8% of employees in Alberta (just over one in ten) in the private sector were represented by a union, the lowest rate of any Canadian province¹.

Across the country, the decline in unionization rates have been greatest among young workers, especially for those younger than age 35. In 1981, 43.3% of Canadian men ages 25 to 34 years were union members. By 2014, the unionization rate for the same age group had declined to 24.9%².

There has been considerable public debate about the impact on precarious work facilitated by digital platforms including peer-to-peer ride services and private accommodation services where those working are independent contractors and mostly part-time. Reliable data is also hard to obtain. For the first time, Statistics Canada used its Labour Force Survey to begin measuring their impact over the 12 month time period from November 2015 to October 2016. Statistics Canada found that 2.7 million adult Canadians (or 9.5%) used ride services like Uber or Lyft or private accommodation services like Airbnb or Flipkey at least once during the past year. Younger Canadians were much more likely to use these services than older Canadians. For example, 14.6% of those between ages 25 to 34 used peer-to-peer ride services compared to only 2.1% of those 55 years and older. A much smaller proportion of Canadian adults offered these services (0.3% in the case of peer-to-peer ride services, and 0.2% in the case of private accommodation services). While small in absolute terms, these percentages still translate to 71,700 people providing peer-to-peer ride services and 69,400 people providing private accommodation services in Canada³.

Some of the above trends like the rise in part-time employment (and corresponding decrease in full-time employment) are related to the current Alberta economic downturn and likely to be short-term. Other trends like the decline in private sector unionization and disruptions caused by ongoing automation and digital platforms are likely to be long-term perhaps permanent changes in the job market. 🙌

01

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06

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The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan social research organization, with registered charitable status. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low income and poverty. ESPC is a source of knowledge and expertise on social issues within our community.

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

Our Vision

A community in which all people are full and valued participants.

Our Mission

Through rigorous research, detailed analysis, and community engagement, we deepen community understanding of social planning issues, influence policy, and spark collaborative actions that lead to positive social change.

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Thank you to our major funders who make the work of the ESPC possible.

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