

## Fall 2017

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## Executive Directors Update



*It's hard to believe that summer has come and gone and now the leaves are falling off the trees. We had a particularly busy past 3 months working on reports and projects and attending events in the community. As you read this newsletter you will see what the staff have been up to including working in partnership with the Edmonton Community Foundation on the 2017 Vital Signs report, researching and preparing the Living Wage numbers for 2017 and our summer student took on the task of researching and writing a research paper on access to justice (seeing that he just started his studies in the Law faculty)*

**Susan Morrissey**  
Executive Director  
Edmonton Social Planning Council



Vital Signs 2017 Launch (L to R) Susan Morrissey (Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council), The Honourable Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities), Martin Garber-Conrad (Chief Executive Officer, Edmonton Community Foundation), Carol Watson (Communications Director, Edmonton Community Foundation)

## Feature Article: Student Max Jenkins

### ACCESS TO JUSTICE: THE GREAT GAP IN CANADA'S JUSTICE SYSTEM

Maxwell Jenkins, Research Assistant

#### WHY JUSTICE IS INACCESSIBLE

The United Nations Development Program defines access to justice as “the ability of people to seek and obtain a remedy through formal or informal institutions of justice for grievances” (UNDP, 2004). Though Canada is served by a generally excellent legal system, it remains a system functionally inaccessible to many Canadians. The 2010 Listening to Ontarians project found that half of the respondents (low and middle-income Ontarians) with a legal problem had not sought legal assistance, although it would have been helpful (Sossin, 2010). 48.4% of Canadians will experience at least one civil or family justice problem over a three-year period (Currie, 2016). While many Canadians will face a serious legal problem in their lifetime, few will have access to the services that could help them address those problems.

One of the key factors behind inaccessibility is cost. 42% of respondents in the Listening to Ontarians project cited perceived legal costs as the main reason for not seeking legal assistance (Sossin, 2010). The cost of a relatively short two-day civil trial in 2016 was \$25,517, making this a well-grounded sentiment. Legal Aid Programs (LAPs) are government funded organizations meant to provide legal representation for low-income individuals facing significant legal problems. Unfortunately, the income thresholds for these programs generally fall below the Low Income Measure (Statistics Canada's measurement for poverty), meaning the majority of low income households are not eligible for legal aid.

Many legal problems do not require full legal representation, and can be resolved with low or trivial expenses (Currie, 2016). Non-profit organizations that specialize in providing legal information or else helping people deal with legal problems are common in Canada. However, the Alberta Legal Services Mapping project found that “both service providers and members of the public have generally low levels of knowledge about available legal services and related social supports”. A common occurrence for community members seeking aid is that they are simply unsure of where to go (Stratton, 2011).

### THE COST OF INACCESSIBLE JUSTICE

A recent report identified loss of employment, loss of housing, and increased reliance on healthcare and social assistance as common measurable effects of unresolved legal problems. Based on survey responses and national averages, the report determined that, through increased reliance on public health services and other government transfers, unresolved legal problems cost Canada's public institutions at least \$800 million each year (Currie, 2016).

Aboriginal people were 3.6 times more likely to experience problems with discrimination, 3.2 times more likely to have a disability benefits related problem, 2.9 times more likely to report a problem with police action or a family related problem, and 2.1 times more likely to report a relationship related problem. Visible minorities were 3.6 times more likely to report a problem related to discrimination, 3.4 times more likely to have a police related problem (Currie, 2007). The Everyday Legal Problems survey followed up on respondents after a three year period, and found that having a single legal problem greatly increases the probability of experiencing subsequent legal problems (Currie, 2016). As the Ontario Civil Legal Needs Project put it, “the poorest and most vulnerable [Ontarians] experience more frequent and more complex and interrelated civil legal problems” (Sossin, 2010).

#### ACTION FOR JUSTICE

Legal aid programs have experienced numerous shortfalls and budgeting problems in recent years. Both the Ontario and British Columbia programs came close to cutting key immigration and refugee programs (Ghoussoub, 2017). The Alberta Government recently approved a \$21.4 million increase to Legal Aid Alberta's budget, a necessary step to prevent the program's near miss with insolvency the previous year (Heidenrieck, 2017). The Canadian Bar Association's report on access to justice found consensus among academic sources that “for each dollar spent on legal aid, there is a \$6 to \$13 return on investment” (CBA, 2013). A follow-up paper specifically set 6 benchmarks legal aid programs should reach by 2030. These largely encompass making legal aid a comprehensive institution, capable of proactively addressing a broader range of legal problems (CBA, 2016).

Action should not be limited to reforming the formal justice system. Legal service providers outside the formal system have made progress in improving access to justice. Efforts like the Edmonton Community Legal Centre's frequent legal information clinics, and the Alberta Legal Information Society's "walk-around" website that attempts to use step-by-step questions to pinpoint the specific legal problem being faced by the user.

In their comprehensive 2013 report on access to justice, the CBA canvassed members of marginalized communities across Canada on their experience with and perceptions of the Canadian justice system. The summarized sentiments were, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the legal system functionally only served the affluent and upper class of society, and that the promise of a truly just and democratic society has been largely unfulfilled (CBA, 2013). The evidence demonstrating that there is a yawning gap in the Canadian justice system supports these conclusions. This gap not only damages people's faith in democratic institutions, but also places a substantial burden on society by allowing unaddressed legal problems to fester and cause unnecessary damage to people's lives. If Canada is to become a truly equal and inclusive society, more effort must be put towards achieving equitable access for justice.

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## ESPC Updates

### LIVING WAGE UPDATE:

More than Minimum: Calculating Edmonton's Living Wage 2017 Update uses Statistics Canada data and independent research to determine the cost of living in the City of Edmonton and the wage required for a family of four to provide for themselves, to participate in their community, and to avoid financial stress. The living wage calculation includes basic necessities such as food, childcare, transportation, and shelter in addition to government transfers and tax deductions.

Edmonton's living wage for 2017 is \$16.31/hour, which represents the wage that a family of four requires to live in economic stability and to maintain a modest standard of living. The living wage for 2017 is \$0.38 less than the 2016 amount of \$16.69/hour and \$1.05 less than the 2015 wage of \$17.36/hour. This difference is mainly attributed to improvements in child and family benefits at the federal and provincial levels.

Find the report here: <https://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/f-social-issues/f05-income/1040-edmontons-living-wage-2017-update/file>

### AGE FRIENDLY EDMONTON:

The Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) has been approached by Age Friendly Edmonton to conduct research on the experiences of social isolation among Indigenous seniors. The ESPC will conduct interviews with Indigenous seniors, will distribute an electronic survey to Indigenous caregivers, and will complete focus groups with professionals in the senior-serving sector and socially active Indigenous seniors. The ESPC is striving to educate the general public, service providers, and policy-makers on the unique challenges experienced by Indigenous seniors in the City of Edmonton. The ESPC will investigate the following questions:

1. How do Indigenous seniors experience social isolation in the City of Edmonton?
2. How do Indigenous seniors themselves define isolation and the ageing process?
3. What challenges, barriers or opportunities do Indigenous caregivers, service providers and other professionals providing services to Indigenous seniors experience in Edmonton?
4. How do Indigenous seniors experience barriers of access to programs and services that are

meant to combat feelings of isolation?

Watch for the final report in late 2018!

### CHILD BENEFIT ENHANCEMENTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES REPORT

(Report Takes Early Look at Child Benefits Impacts)

By John Kolkman

A new report takes an early look at the difference recent enhancements in federal and provincial child benefits are making for low income families with children. The report results from a collaboration involving the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) and the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE).

The collaboration involved working with women who have been involved in exploitative sex work involved in a CEASE sponsored program called Building Blocks for Families (BBFF). This phase of the project examined the impact of enhancements to refundable child benefits that took effect in July 2016. Combined, the new Alberta Child Benefit and a new Canada Child Benefit (which replaced poorly targeted federal child benefits) resulted in several hundred more dollars per month in child benefits depending on family size.

By an initial focus group with the women in June 2016 and follow-up interviews a year later, the report found that all of the families participating in the BBFF initiative were using the additional income to better their lives and especially to better the lives of their children. Tangible benefits included reduced food bank use in favour of buying more nutritious food, paying for school clothes and supplies, and ensuring utility bill payments are kept up to date to avoid disconnections.

A link to the full report is available here: <http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/a-espcc-documents/a06-newsletters/a06g-reports/1043-child-benefit-enhancements-making-a-difference-for-low-income-families>

### RESEARCH UPDATES:

This is a review of current research reports on social issues and the non-profit sector in Alberta and other parts of Canada. The purpose of the update is to keep social service sector employees informed about research on subjects and innovative programs and services that social service practitioners

in Alberta and across Canada are working on. Summaries featured in this document focus on subjects such as housing and homelessness, poverty, social policy, at-risk women, social determinants of health, hunger and food security. To subscribe to receive the Research Update please hit the subscribe button at the bottom of the front page of our website [www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca)

## MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATE SURVEY:

Always interested in knowing the positions of elected officials and providing an opportunity for our citizens to gain insight and understand the positions of candidates for the election, ESPC contacted and asked Edmonton candidates for City Council what they feel the City of Edmonton should be doing to address poverty in Edmonton. Head to our website if you are interested in the answers that were provided.

<https://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/news/espc-news/327-election-2017-candidate-survey>

## ALBERTA CHILD POVERTY REPORT:

With our partners at Public Interest Alberta once again we will be collecting and analyzing data and preparing a report which examines in detail how Alberta is doing in addressing child and family poverty. The goal is to have the report completed and available by the end of the fall. ESPC members will be notified when it's ready to download from our website.

## TRACKING THE TRENDS:

Once again we have already begun work of this massive trend analysis report which provides a comprehensive overview of Edmonton social well-being. We anticipate release of the report in February 2018.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON:

# 2017 VITAL SIGNS: BELONGING

Elizabeth Bonkirk  
ECF Communication Advisor

**EDMONTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

edmonton  
SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

Heather Curtis  
ESPC Research Coordinator

*Edmonton Vital Signs is an annual check-up conducted by Edmonton Community Foundation, in partnership with the Edmonton Social Planning Council, to measure how our community is doing with a focus on a specific topic. This year we are looking at belonging and social isolation and the communities that are at risk.*

THURSDAY  
OCTOBER  
**26**

PROGRAM ROOM  
**ENTERPRISE SQUARE LIBRARY**  
10212 JASPER AVENUE  
**12:00 NOON**

EDMONTONSOCIALPLANNING.CA

Edmonton Vital Signs is an annual check-up conducted by the Edmonton Social Planning Council in partnership with the Edmonton Community Foundation to measure how our community is doing with a focus on a specific topic. This year we looked at belonging and social isolation and the communities who are at-risk.

On Thursday, October 26, 2017 Heather Curtis, Research Coordinator, ESPC and Elizabeth Bonkirk, Communications Consultant, ECF did an encore presentation for the ESPC Lunch and Learn program for those who could not make the official launch on October 6, 2017. Over 20 professionals and general public joined them.

## Upcoming Events

### ESPC ANNUAL BAKE SALE

**NOVEMBER 23, 2017  
09:00 - 4:00**

JOIN US NOVEMBER 23, 2017

9:00 AM UNTIL 4:00 PM

FOR OUR ANNUAL BAKE SALE IN SUPPORT OF THE  
ESPC UNITED WAY EMPLOYEE CAMPAIGN

AT OUR OFFICES:

**#37, 9912 - 106 STREET, EDMONTON, ALBERTA**

COOKIES, CAKES, BREADS ARE JUST SOME OF THE  
BAKING AVAILABLE. COME AND STOCK UP FOR THE  
HOLIDAYS OR JUST ENJOY ON-SITE! PRICING IS REA-  
SONABLE AND TASTING IS ENCOURAGED.

**ESPC Member Survey:** Each year we engage our ESPC member through a survey to gauge their satisfaction with their membership and get their input and suggestions. We will be doing this again in January 2018.

**Make sure to keep your eyes open for an invitation to our annual celebration. We have not yet set the date, but mark your calendars for the first week of December to come and join us for some cheer.**

**More details to follow.**





## Board Member Biography



Meet our newest Board Member joining this past May at our Annual General Meeting.

### CALYPSE AGBORSANGAYA

Calypse is a father of two and currently works for the Government of Alberta. He has over 20 peer-reviewed publications and has been a speaker at various national and international conferences. He has many accolades that include being voted the Young Public Health Researcher of the year in European Region, and has received the Medallion for Research Excellence from the Finnish National Institute of Health and Welfare. He holds several competitive scholastic and travel grants, including a Research fellowship at the Harvard School of Public Health. Apart from his research experience, Calypse holds advisory roles in two cultural non-profit organizations in Edmonton, Alberta. While growing up in his native Cameroon, Calypse experienced abject poverty and food insecurity. These, together with his research and leadership experiences make him uniquely suited to help create awareness and advocate for equitable social policies in Edmonton. Calypse is greatly honoured to join the Board of Directors of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.



Congratulations to Doug Meggison (ESPC Board-Member) and his wife Marie Chidley for being recognized as the recipients of the Salvos Prelowitz Peace Award for 2017 presented by Project Ploughshare Edmonton



ESPC thanks the Edmonton Community Foundation for providing a grant for the development of a long-range fund development strategy.

Here is our Board of Directors participating in a strategy session.



## ESPC Out in the Community and Attending Meetings



Susan Morrissey participated in the Child Care Roundtable with Hon. Danielle Larivee, Minister of Children's Services.

Susan Morrissey with representatives from End Poverty Edmonton meeting with Hon. David Eggen, Minister of Education and David Shepherd MLA for Edmonton Centre to talk about racism.



Carol Watson, Communications Director Edmonton Community Foundation welcoming everyone to the Vital Signs Launch



The Honorable Amrjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities speaking at the Vital Signs launch

