

July
1998

Poverty in Action

Grassroots Mentoring Project Final Report and Evaluation

People helping people
Overcoming barriers
Victory over poverty
Energy to overcome
Restoring self-worth
Triumph over shame
Yours "grassroots"

Insightful to others and oneself
New and exciting

Active, always moving forward
Caring for others
Timely
Invigorating
Others helping others
Never-ending friendships

*This was written by one of our
Advisory Committee members
who first came to the conference
for the food. She is now involved
in several other community groups
and has spoken publically about
her experiences*

Submitted by: The Edmonton Social Planning Council
Submitted to: Health Canada, Health Promotion & Programs Branch

July, 1998

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1.0 Project Background

1.1 Project Title and Sponsor

The project was entitled:

Poverty in Action: Grassroots Mentoring Project

Project Number: 5555-09-1997/0010008

Edmonton Social Planning Council

#41, 9912-106 Street

Edmonton, AB

T5K 1C5

Phone (403) 423-2031

Fax (403) 425-6244

Contact person: Christopher Smith, Program Director

1.2 Project Partners

A partnership of groups worked on the development of the project.

- City of Edmonton, Community Services
- The Edmonton Social Planning Council
- The Phillia Advocacy Group
- We Cope
- The Quality of Life Commission
- Robertson Wesley United Church
- The Unitarian Church of Edmonton
- The National Anti-Poverty Organization
- University of Alberta, Centre for Health Promotions
- The Support Network

1.3 Project Structure

As project sponsor, The Edmonton Social Planning Council provided guidance to the project staff and supported the efforts and activities of the group. Project activities were lead by an Advisory Committee which was made up of people from the target population. The Advisory Committee met on a regular basis.

Decision-making was based on a consensus model.

Executive Summary

For many who live in poverty in Canada, the cuts to health, education and social services have impacted them to the extent that they are no longer able to just "get by". With no significant improvement to the existing system in the foreseeable future, the problem arises as to : "How do those living in poverty develop the skills and resources to cope with their situation"?

In May 1997 over two hundred poor people came together at the first Western Canada Poor People's Conference in Edmonton to discover the magnitude of the problem, its causes and consequences, and possible solutions. This three day event was designed to provide insights to the social and individual causes of poverty, to help build self-esteem and overcome barriers, to develop political awareness and action groups, and to pursue strength through organization and emotional, spiritual and economic personal development. Out of the conference came a decision that, in Edmonton, we needed to continue this process, hence, Poverty in Action was born.

The developmental phase of the Grassroots Mentoring Project has given us the opportunity to gain insight from others who live in poverty as to what types of information, resources and workshops are required to build the skills that can eventually break the cycle of poverty. We worked on helping people to gain the confidence to self-advocate and to feel empowered so that they would be more able to fully participate in society.

Through intersectoral collaboration with churches, municipal departments, community agencies, schools, etc. we were able to create a model where all benefitted from working together. We managed to generate additional funds to ensure that any barriers to participation, such as transportation and childcare, were addressed. We were also able to complete the editing of the video from the conference with the help of funding from Health Canada and Action for Healthy Communities.

During the funding period, we actively recruited volunteers to sit on our various committees, to provide transportation, to facilitate workshops and to share their skills. Our volunteers logged an estimated 1000 hours. We also worked closely and collaboratively with a number of community groups such as: The Quality of Life Commission, Edmonton Working Women, Wecope, Edmonton Food Bank, The Phillia Advocacy Group, Alberta Commission for Citizen's with Disabilities, The Unitarian Church, Robertson Wesley United Church and the University of Alberta Centre for Health Promotions, just to name a few.

The attached evaluation and final report highlights the activities we used to achieve our objectives.

Final Report

What we have accomplished

33 public speaking engagements

Throughout the funding period we have worked diligently as a group to complete the tasks set out in our original proposal. During this time, we participated in many public speaking and education engagements which included church groups, lecturing at universities and colleges, facilitating workshops for other community groups, presenting sessions at conferences and speaking to school groups.

"You have changed my perspective about people in poverty. Thank you."

Grade six student

Four monthly meetings

Our members participated in monthly meetings which were used to update them on activities completed by the Advisory Committee and staff.

One celebration

We held a celebration on December 20th which was a collaborative effort involving our members. The Unitarian Church provided transportation and bought gifts for the children, Robertson Wesley United Church prepared and served the food, and the Alberta Medical Association also provided gifts for children.

Four workshops

These workshops covered the following topics: Supports for Independence Policies and Procedures, Public Speaking and Media Relations, Challenging Attitudes on Poverty, and Landlord and Tenant Rights and Responsibilities. Regular attendance at our monthly meetings numbers between 20-35 participants.

"Good work! You don't exclude anyone."

Workshop participant

Over one thousand phone calls

Of over one thousand phone calls that were received by Poverty in Action, 250 of them were for information and specific help, such as support and referral services. Over 41 different agencies and organizations call on a regular basis for collaborative efforts in one form or another as well as information for their clients when they are unsure of resources or specific income security policies which affect their clients. The remaining calls dealt with everything from groups and individuals wishing to support our work, requests

POVERTY IN ACTION

Final Report

Edmonton Social Planning

Council

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"Poverty in Action is a family who works hard, plans and follows through to get the job done. People helping people in a caring and nurturing atmosphere.

*Quote from essay,
"What Poverty in Action
means to me"*

I really value the chance to help Poverty in Action in a "board" capacity, ...felt I didn't have knowledge or abilities...I realize I have a lot to give and my ideas have value.

*Advisory Committee
Member*

"Everything about Poverty in Action is positive. It's been a lifesaver-the support-knowing you're not alone-its been a real life saver.

*Membership survey
participant*

for public presentations and workshops, media interview requests and volunteer offers.

How the group made decisions

The target population is consulted through surveys, and the opportunity for their input occurs at our regular monthly meetings. Our Advisory Committee is also made up of the target population, and they make the final decisions based on the input received from the membership. The general membership meets monthly, and the Advisory Committee meets monthly as well as any time there is a necessity for quick action. The sub-committees meet as required. All members of Poverty in Action participate in the decision-making process at one level or another.

The Advisory Committee operates to support the development of Poverty in Action in ways that are consistent with its goal. The Committee offers suggestions and guidance, help in planning and implementing and, when possible, evaluating initiatives that will continue to establish Poverty in Action as a credible group. The Advisory Committee will work with the staff, the Edmonton Social Planning Council, and other appropriate individuals and groups on an ongoing developmental plan for Poverty in Action. In addition, the Advisory Committee will continue to work to:

- provide information to the general membership;
- explore ways for the membership to provide information to the Advisory Committee;
- support the development of committee work and actions that Poverty in Action can carry forward;
- be involved with public education and consciousness-raising activities;
- support the work of the staff;
- support fundraising strategies.

The staff is responsible for carrying out the initiatives brought forward by the Advisory Committee.

Evaluation Activities

The evaluation was done by the project staff in conjunction with members of the Advisory Committee. The method we are using for this evaluation is an ongoing participatory approach.

The Advisory Committee has been working very hard on its organizational development. During the funding period, we met for 16 regular meetings and one half day organizational planning workshop. During the regular meetings we planned and decided on workshop topics as suggested by our membership, discussed strategies of how to best get the public to understand the struggles and myths that poor people deal with, and worked on our group, and committee structures. We have been working with a consultant to put into place our operating practices, decision-making processes, and a structure that will eventually support incorporation. We strive to maintain shared leadership and work on skill development as many of the Advisory Committee members have had little or no previous experience.

On the whole, we feel that since the Grassroots Mentoring Project was in its developmental stage, we have accomplished our major objectives and are now looking forward to fully implementing our new model of development.

As part of our ongoing evaluation exercises, we asked the participants in our workshops and training sessions to complete evaluation forms. The majority of the evaluations completed were positive in their responses. One suggestion for improvement we received was that there was too much information in too short a time frame. This is being addressed by providing an informational workshop on a specified topic (i.e. Landlord and Tenant Rights and Responsibilities) and then doing more specified follow-up sessions based on group interest.

Problems encountered

The major problem we identified was that we, as staff, had difficulty in delegating tasks to our specific committees and volunteers. This led to time constraints and the staff facing deadlines that seemed impossible to meet. We met our deadlines and learned through this process that we need to utilize our volunteer support and committees in a more meaningful and productive way.

We have begun to utilize our Social Issues/Advocacy committee and have requested that they take some time to act as volunteer office support. At the present time, we have 6 volunteers who rotate time spent in the office.

"...it is the basic idea behind Poverty in Action that has brought and kept me here. Poor people working together, struggling, learning and growing towards common goals of empowerment, societal equality and the eradication of poverty."

Advisory Committee member

"We dealt with too much information in too short a time."

Workshop participant

"Need more small group workshops."

Project Evaluation

1. What we were going to do. What we did.

Objective #1

Enhance target populations' ability to improve their own lives and obtain economic self-sufficiency through employment.

"I appreciate the support, also the contacts with people and or groups that can help with problems. P.S. the people are great!"

*Membership
survey participant.*

Our target population is working towards the goal of "obtaining economic self-sufficiency through employment". Our workshops, meetings and advocacy services focus on building self-esteem and empowering individuals so that they feel less isolated and more able to participate in society.

We plan activities that "enhance the target populations' ability to improve their own lives". This is done through regular monthly meetings and workshops which give people the opportunity to gather and share information, develop valuable skills, network, and learn that they already possess valuable skills that they too can share.

Although our goal is for people to help themselves, we found that some people did not have the skills or the tools to do this. Some people only needed information, while others required more in-depth interventions to have the opportunity for growth. For those that required more such interventions, we enlisted the help of another group to collaborate with us and help us with the individual support component of our work plan. This group, The Phillia Advocacy Group, has proven a valuable partner.

"Great organization, helped me achieve a better standard of living- liked the support and advocacy."

*Membership
survey participant*

To further facilitate a person's ability to enhance their own lives and become self-sufficient we, in collaboration with the Support Network, have developed a self-help resource manual that contains basic information about income support programs. This manual, written in plain language, will help people who are unsure of their rights and responsibilities, and will further empower the target population by giving them a tool they can use to access the services they need to attain self-sufficiency. Poverty in Action in cooperation with the Support Network is currently pursuing funding to publish the manual.

Objective #2

Enhance the public's understanding of issues related to poverty through opportunities to listen to people living in poverty tell their stories and share their experiences.

We have begun to gather a group of committed speakers from our membership. To enhance their ability to confidently speak out on the issues, we have developed a resource manual which contains statistics and updated reports that strengthen their stories and experiences.

This dedicated group receives ongoing training through workshops, participation on community committees, interviews with media reporters, and participation in the monthly Poverty in Action meetings. With the help of other funding sources, members and staff have been involved in over 30 public presentations and media interviews across Alberta. This indicates the need for continued outreach in the area of public education and ongoing support for the members who wish to share their experiences and know their voices are heard.

As part of our public education presentation package, we produced a video entitled "What Can Poor People Say?" which was premiered at the Millwoods Roundtable on Poverty in May 1998. We have also shown the video to our membership, the Advisory Committee and representatives from other groups. The response to this powerful video has been very positive. We look forward to continuing to show this video as a means of reaching the public on the issues of poverty. We have developed a workshop entitled "Challenging the Attitudes on Poverty" which also utilizes this resource. We did a pilot test of this workshop with Poverty in Action members and are currently tailoring this workshop to specific groups (e.g. police, social workers, teachers, and other community groups).

We are collaborating with the Edmonton Social Planning Council on the Community Calendar Project. Several of our Poverty in Action members will be featured in the 1999 calendar.

We are currently developing a Speaker's Bureau that will provide the opportunity for our members to speak to the issues they are concerned about. We have a pool of eight speakers who, after further training, will be available for public presentations and media interviews.

"Poverty in Action is more than a community organization, it is **hope** for those in need, it is **support**, it is **friendship**, it is **education**, so with the abundance of knowledge; barriers can be removed, so we the poor can live in dignity throughout our lifetime.

*Quote from
essay "What Poverty in
Action means to me."*

"I am impressed at how much work and effort went into this workshop."

Workshop participant

"Most thought provoking show in Edmonton for a long time."

Exhibit visitor

For our Advocacy Training session, which was designed to give people the information and skills they needed to advocate for themselves, we utilized existing materials which we gathered from across Canada and tailored to our own needs.

In collaboration with other community groups and individuals we planned and participated in the "Art From the Unknown" exhibit held in December, 1997. This was a 3 day exhibition of artwork produced by people who live in poverty. Over 800 people attended this event that highlighted some of the issues facing the poor, such as mental illness, isolation, and lack of opportunity. Several people have called to inquire about next year's event and many artists have sold their artwork. One of the artist's drawings will be featured in an international research journal.

2. What did we learn about what worked and what didn't work?

What worked.

Through the development phase of the Grassroots Mentoring Project, we have learned many things. They include:

- Although a participant-driven project takes more time and effort in terms of consensus group decision-making, the end result is worth it. The people who are involved feel a sense of ownership, as well as pride and accomplishment, which helps to achieve our first objective.
- As people living in poverty, and working with people who live in poverty, we have learned that ongoing support is needed for people to become physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy.
- As a group we have learned, through ongoing positive communication training, that we can work through the decision making process with positive results. Our Advisory Committee members mentor each other by practicing these skills in the public sector as well as in all our meetings. This is reinforced by a consultant from the City of Edmonton, Community Services Department who works with us on our organizational development.
- Through our workshop "Challenging Attitudes about Poverty", we facilitated change in participant attitudes toward people who live in poverty. Some comments from a grade six class that participated follow:
 - "I really understand now how Poverty in Action really helps people that are in poverty.
 - "I think there should be Zero Poverty."

"Poverty in Action has helped me to recognize the need for and the work of groups and individuals, working alone or with others to resolve problems."

Membership survey participant

- Consistency was found to be very important. We make sure that our meetings and workshops are at the same time and place each month. The target population has lost trust and hope and it takes time to rebuild that trust. We strive to rebuild it by being available and challenging the barriers to participation such as child care and transportation by providing these services.

What didn't work.

Some of the things we found that were not very successful were:

- We underestimated the amount of fear among the target population in regard to public speaking. It was our belief at the beginning of the project that if we provided support and information as well as modelling positive experiences that there would be more participation. We did learn that it will take more time to gain the trust of the target population.
- Throughout our work, it became very clear that many people who face poverty issues have a difficult time participating in regular activities because they have been isolated for extended periods of time. They are often able to cope emotionally only with their daily life struggles. We did, however, learn that by being consistent, by keeping people informed through our newsletters, and by having our meeting and workshops at the same place and time each month, we were able to see new people coming to our meetings and becoming involved. Again, it takes time to rebuild the trust that has been lost over the years.

"It is Utopia to think poverty can be totally eliminated, but if you don't shoot for the stars, it's likely you won't even reach the moon."

Membership survey participant

3. What difference did it make that we did this work?

Throughout the funding period for the development of the Grassroots Mentoring Project, Poverty in Action has been involved in many community speaking engagements, workshops and various community development initiatives. Through the evaluation forms from our workshop participants, and letters of thanks and support, we have found an overwhelming indication that we are making a difference.

"I feel better about myself and with strength in numbers, I have more power to be heard and eventually get good results."

Membership survey participant

Some of the comments we have received are:

- "Thank you kindly for giving me what I could not afford otherwise, out of my own pocket."
- "Thank you, very beneficial. You did a great job!"
- "Thank you for saddening me - Reminding me - helping me realize I've had blinders on."
- "Overall great experience - has strengthened my conviction/committment to advocate for people in a situation of poverty, or are seeking empowerment with various agencies."

4. What could we do differently?

In the future we will make more use of our committees. As staff we learned that there were many valuable skills among the members that we could have better utilized. This process has recently begun through the development of terms of reference and organizational support for the committees.

"Important to keep the group going-need funding for that."

Membership survey

5. How do we plan to use evaluation findings for continuous learning?

Our evaluation process has been ongoing. We regularly consult with our Advisory Committee as well as the general membership to determine topics for workshops, specific activities, concerns, and issues that need to be dealt with. We do this through regular questionnaires and meetings. We will use this information to review with the group what we want to plan for the next six months.

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MEMO



edmonton
SOCIAL PLANNING
council

DATE: July 16, 1998

TO: Midge Cuthill, Coordinator, Poverty In Action (PIA)

FROM: Brian Bechtel

CC: none

RE: Poverty In Action Financial Report

Please find attached a final financial report for the Health Canada funded portion of Poverty In Action's activities.

PIA has done an excellent job of staying within the prescribed budgetary parameters.

The only reason PIA has exceeded its spending budget is due to the decision to publish an addendum to the *Tough Times Handbook*, but this was a decision we made together, so we will find the money from another source.

Poverty In Action

Final Financial Report
January 1 - June 30, 1998

REVENUE **1998**

United Way	
Project Revenue	
Government Grants	
Government of Canada	25,000
City of Edmonton	
Government of Alberta	
Other (donations)	4,375
Foundations	2,700
Miscellaneous	20
TOTAL REVENUES	32,095

EXPENDITURES

Project Expenses	2,989
Staff Salaries and Expenses	22,116
Office Expenses	2,004
Building Occupancy	
Professional Fees	
Meetings	327
Library	
Transportation	170
Promotion and Publicity	5,313
Recruitment and Education	20
Insurance	
Miscellaneous	25
Alberta and Edmonton facts	
Agency Publications	
Professional Services	
<i>Direct Program Expenditures</i>	32,964
<i>Administration Expense</i>	3,296
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	36,260
Surplus(Deficit)	(4,165)

Accomplishments

- Organized 1997 Western Canada Poor Peoples Conference
- Successfully launched the Zero Poverty Campaign
- Made presentation to City Council re: Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board
- Helped organize "Art from the Unknown" exhibit
- Made presentation to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance
- Developed "Grassroots Mentoring Project"
- Helped organize the Millwoods Round Table on Poverty
- Meetings and workshops are organized every month
- Active in the community, sharing our experiences and educating the public about poverty related issues

Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Health Canada

Description of Poverty in Action:

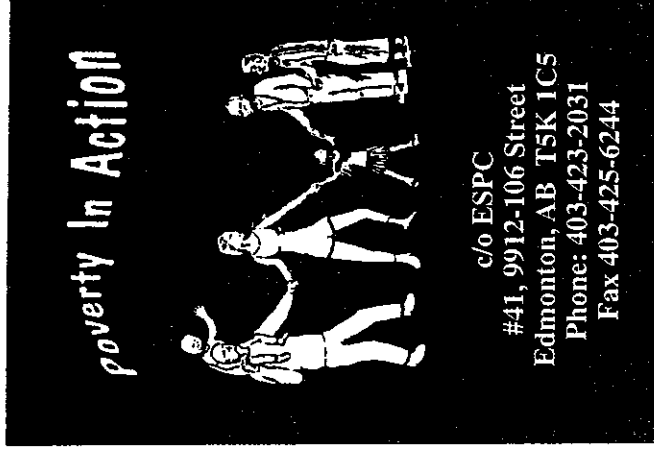
Poverty in Action was formed in October 1996 by a group of individuals who wanted to bring people living in poverty together. We discussed issues at a grassroots level at the 1997 Western Canada Poor Peoples' Conference: "Poverty in Action" held May 22-25th.

Out of this conference came a resolve that the group become a formal organization with a mandate that would include the initiation of projects designed with "people helping people to help themselves" as the driving paradigm.

Poverty in Action will build on the capacity of people to be their own advocates as well as a resource to others. Thus, the participant eventually becomes the leader and mentor who can reach into the community to help others, consequently giving back to the "Mentoring project" and helping it evolve into the desired format.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead



To Share,

To Empower,

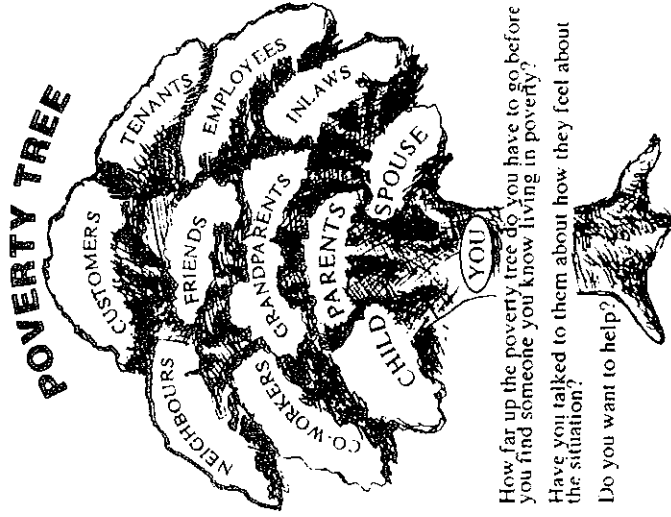
To Educate

Introduction:

Poverty in Action is a group of people living or having lived on limited incomes and resources we have realized the need to challenge poverty from a grassroots level.

Our group members are from many diverse cultural and social backgrounds. We have come together to fight the stigma of being poor.

We are dedicated to sharing our stories and using our skills and resources to help empower others living in similar circumstances. We hope that by being proactive and collaborating we can become part of the solution to end poverty in our society.



Description of Activities:

We work and meet every third Saturday in order to further our mandate "To Share, To Empower, To Educate," by encouraging participation through public speaking, listening and sharing our experiences as well as having workshops.

To Share:

At meetings we share with each other our struggles, to help each other work toward resolution. This is done with the understanding that collectively we possess a wealth of knowledge and experience.

We work together to develop creative ways to inform people of the problems faced by those of us who struggle daily to build a life for ourselves and others who will follow.

For information on how you can participate in our activities or if you wish to make a donation, call Midge Cuthill or Deana Shorten at 423-2031

For donations, make cheques payable to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council (Poverty in Action) at #41, 9912 106 Street Edmonton, AB T5K 1C5

To Empower:

Poverty in Action's mandate to "use our skills and resources to help empower others" is being acted on through the development of an advocacy and resource manual. This manual will include an explanation of current Social Services regulations and will answer questions most commonly asked. It will also list the resources available in Edmonton to those in need of material support.

Poverty in Action will begin a training program for those interested in learning advocacy skills. This training program will allow people to advocate for themselves and for others to secure their rights in the social services system. Poverty in Action will also be providing advocacy support to the public beginning in August of 1998.

Anyone interested in participating in this training program please contact the office.

To Educate:

Poverty in Action strives to educate both its membership and the public at large. We arrange for workshops every other month to gain information and skills around a variety of topics. These topics include: public speaking, media relations, human rights, the Social Development Act, etc.

The public education component takes the form of speaking engagements at local churches, schools, universities, service clubs, etc. We share our stories and our struggles to maintain dignity in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds and through our stories the public can come to understand poverty.

To Share, To Empower, To Educate

Caller: _____ Date: _____
Phone: _____ Referred From: _____
Address: _____ Information taken by: _____

Service Required: (Check off and explain below)

Listening/Advice: _____ Information /Resources: _____
Advocacy: _____ Referred to other Agency: _____
Other: _____ Follow Up: _____

Information and Action taken:

Caller: _____ Date: _____
Phone: _____ Referred From: _____
Address: _____ Information taken by: _____

Service Required: (Check off and explain below)

Listening/Advice: _____ Information /Resources: _____
Advocacy: _____ Referred to other Agency: _____
Other: _____ Follow Up: _____

Information and Action taken:

Poverty In Action

Workshop

Evaluation Form

1. How did you hear about this workshop?

2. Did you like the way this workshop was presented?

_____ Yes _____ No

3. Have you ever been to any of our other workshops?

_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, which ones?

4. What did you find most helpful about this workshop that will help you in your community?

5. What did you find least helpful. What can we do to improve?

6. What other workshops would you like to see presented?

7. Did you find the following helpful:

Childcare	_____	Yes	_____	No
Transportation	_____	Yes	_____	No

8. Any other comments:

**Thank you for taking the time to fill out this evaluation
and attending this workshop.**

Poverty In Action

Training Session Evaluation Form

1. How did you hear about this Training Session?

2. Did you like the way this Training Session was presented?

_____ Yes _____ No

3. Have you ever been to any of our other Training Sessions?

_____ Yes _____ No

4. What did you find most helpful about this Training Session that will help you in your community?

5. What did you find least helpful. What can we do to improve?

6. What other Training Sessions would you like to see presented?

7. Did you find the following helpful:

Childcare _____ yes _____ no

Transportation _____ yes _____ no

8. Any other comments:

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this evaluation
and attending this Training Session.

Poverty In Action Questionnaire

1. How did you hear about Poverty in Action? _____

2. Have you ever or are you presently involved in a community committee or board of directors?

3. Has Poverty in Action had impact on the way you communicate with :
Government _____
Family _____
Community _____
Other _____
4. Has involvement with Poverty in Action helped increase your self-esteem and sense of self-empowerment. _____

5. As a new member did you feel welcomed and did you feel encouraged to contribute?

6. Have the workshops addressed issues you see as important? _____

7. Has your involvement with Poverty in Action increased your knowledge and understanding of poverty issues? _____

8. Other comments: _____

POVERTY IN ACTION
Membership Survey - January 1998

The Poverty in Action Advisory Committee would like to hear from you in order to plan for the next six to 12 months. Please take a few minutes to answer this survey. Please feel free to add comments, suggestions or anything else that you would like us to hear.

We have been meeting every third Saturday of the month.

What do you think the purpose of the Saturday meetings should be (mark all the items that you think apply):

- updates on Poverty in Action activities
- education/workshops
- opportunity for committees to meet
- social events

How often would you like to meet?

- once a month only - the third Saturday afternoon
- twice a month on Saturdays
- once a month, plus an evening workshop

Other?

The **Mentoring Project** has planned for three of the six Saturdays to be focused on educational and skill development workshops. The plan for the **February 21st meeting is to focus on understanding SFI benefits and the appeal process**. Please give us some feedback about the type of workshops that you would be interested in. These are examples only, Please put a check beside anything that interests you:

Social Issues:

- Poor Bashing
- Poverty Industry
- Family Violence
- Impact of Poverty on Children
- Human Rights - Knowing your rights and how to protect them
- Landlord and Tenant Rights and Issues
- Child Welfare - how it really works
- Understanding how the Government works
- History of Social welfare

Other:

- Skill Development:**
- Lobbying
 - Advocacy
 - Organizing skills
 - Popular Theatre techniques

Other:

- Personal Development:**
- Keeping Healthy
 - Stress reduction
 - Habit Breaking
 - "Real Life "Budgeting - how to survive on little
 - How to deal with "chaos"
 - Assertiveness

Other:

We will be offering more intensive training for people in the following areas as part of the Mentoring project , please let us know if you are interested:

- public speaking
- advocacy skills

Periodically we get requests from anti-poverty groups to involve people in focus groups on particular issues. Would you be interested in being contacted for involvement with focus groups?

If yes, could we give your name to groups looking for interested people?

Members have been involved in trying to develop different committees. Are you interested in any of the following:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| - Social Issues | - Research |
| - Advocacy | - Fundraising |
| - Public Education | - Transportation |
| - Media Relations | |

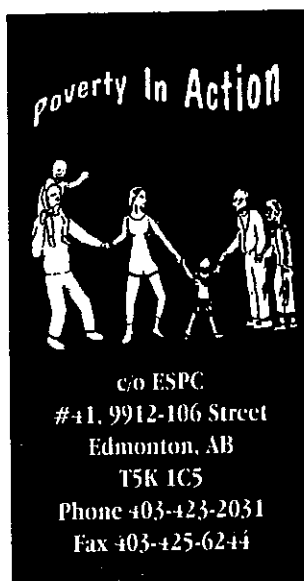
If you want to be contacted for anything in this survey, please fill out the following:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

When is the best time to contact you?:



POVERTY IN ACTION

NEWSLETTER

_____FEBRUARY 1998_____

Can you believe it is already February? Poverty in Action has just come through an incredible few months and the next months promise to be just as busy and exciting.

We began in October with the launch of the Zero Poverty Campaign in coalition with N.A.P.O. (National Anti-Poverty Organization). The launch was held at A.V.C. (Alberta Vocational College) and began with opening comments from Pam Barrett, Brian Bechtel, Midge Cuthill, Regina Parker, Deana Shorten and Linda Sloan. After the opening comments, Midge and Regina were given the opportunity to make a presentation to the Federal Government Standing Committee on Finance at the Ramada Hotel.

Several different agencies and organizations were given the opportunity to share information with the media and students at the college through an info-fair in the lobby. We also had the opportunity to share our stories and experiences as well as enjoy some wonderful entertainment.

In November, we were busy preparing for a workshop on Public Speaking and Media Relations with our presenters Mel Hurtig and Kathy Daley. The workshop was held at Mount Zion Lutheran Church and we had about 30 people in attendance. Through this workshop, we learned some basic skills and techniques on how to speak effectively in public.

To Share, To Empower, To Educate

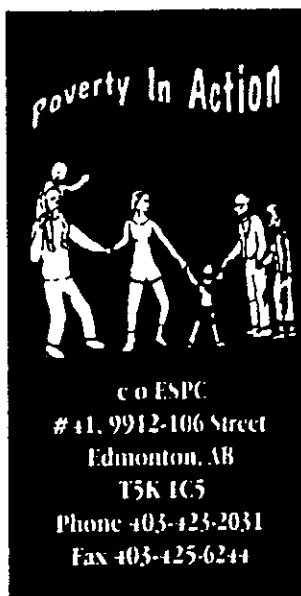
December came along and like everyone, we were thrown into a frenzy preparing for the holidays and Poverty in Action's Holiday Celebration. As it turned out, all of the hard work paid off. It was the most wonderful party of the season. All of the children, approximately 70, were matched with holiday angels who made sure that they had gifts.

As always, our events are brought about through our Advisory Committee and many community partners. We would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their support: Robertson Wesley United Church, The Unitarian Church, Alberta Medical Association, Rotary Club International, Beth Tzedek, Mount Zion Lutheran Church, Alberta Vocational College, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Alberta Teachers Association, Edmonton Food Bank, Health Canada: Health Promotion and Programs, Edmonton Social Planning Council and all the other groups and individuals too numerous to mention.

Our meeting in January was a time to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year. We received funding from Health Canada to develop our Grassroots Mentoring Project. As part of this, we have developed a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee to work on implementing this project. We will be developing a self-help resource manual covering SFI policies, How to access different goods and services and where to find needed resources. There will also be an Advocacy training course developed for people who are interested in learning advocacy skills.

The second part of the Mentoring Project covers public education and media relations and we are working on the development of a speaker's bureau. This will take the form of training workshops, speaker's resource booklet and information package for people interested in having one of us come and speak to their group.

We continue to meet as a group on the third Saturday of every month at Robertson Wesley United Church, 10209-123 Street from 1-4 p.m. Our meeting on February 21st will take the form of an informational workshop covering the topic of SFI policies and procedures as well as the appeal process. Anyone interested in attending this workshop, please let us know as soon as possible. There will be transportation and childcare available.



NEWSLETTER

_____March 1998_____

Last month's workshop "S.F.I. Policies and Procedures", was very successful. We had very good attendance and all participants found the information very valuable. Special thanks go to Sandy Rankin who did a terrific job of getting us through the mountain of information. The S.F.I. Policy manual is at the office and available for use if anybody needs information.

The next general meeting is Saturday, March 21 at Robertson Wesley United Church, 10209-123 Street, from 1-4 p.m. These meetings are open to everyone, so please bring a friend. If child care or transportation is required, please call the office.

We would like to address an ongoing problem. **Poverty in Action** strives to remove some of the barriers that exist for people who wish to participate in our group activities. We do this by providing trained child care professionals to watch our children during meetings and workshops. These professionals are paid out of our budget. As well, transportation is provided by volunteers who take time out of their day to provide this service free of charge. We would ask you to please keep this in mind and if you have registered and need child care and/or transportation, let us know the day before the workshop or meeting if you are unable to attend.

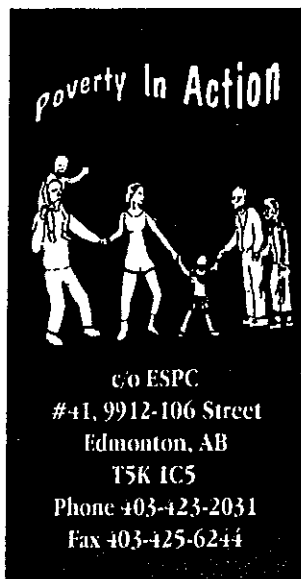
We receive calls regularly from a variety of groups and the media requesting speakers. With this in mind, we are working on a Speaker's Training Program and a Speaker's List. If you are interested in being part of this, please contact Deana at the office.

This group is a living organism and as such is constantly growing and changing to adapt to the needs of the membership. We want to hear your ideas and views, since this will help us continue meeting those needs. To this end, we are requesting submissions in short essay format (500 words) on the title "What Poverty in Action means to me". Please send your entries to the office by the deadline, April 15, 1998. All essays will be entered in a draw (it doesn't matter how well you can write, we want to hear from you) for a gift certificate from the Bay. The draw will be held at the April 18th workshop.

We would like to introduce the twelve member Advisory Committee of Poverty in Action, and which meets monthly to discuss issues relating to the organization. Members are: Midge Cuthill, Deana Shorten, Regina Parker, Lorraine Gregoire, Marlene Mann, Mary Ann Baxter, Cec Garfin, Lina Hempel, Jan Sakowicz, Wilda Hurst. Receiving our funding has enabled the Advisory Committee to set up a sub committee to activate the Mentoring Project. The afore mentioned resource manual is one part, as is a brochure for the group, setting up the speaker's registry, and developing this newsletter. All these, and future, parts, come together to "help people help themselves".

Plans for the April workshop are underway, with the topic being "Poorbashing". Further information will be in the next newsletter. Just to let you know, the meeting in May will be held on the 4th Saturday instead of the third due to a conflict in scheduling. More information will follow.

In the interests of maintaining an up to date address/phone list, please let us know if either of these changes. We want to keep contact with all members of the group.



NEWSLETTER

-----April 1998-----

Spring has sprung, and as the weather begins to heat up so do the issues! There are a few things beginning to happen in and around Edmonton that you may or may not have heard about.

Notices

1. Friday, April 17th we will be building a display for the **CANS festival** at West Edmonton Mall in support of the Food Bank. Set up time is from 3pm to midnight. If you would like to participate just come to the Mall and find us in Phase One between Eaton's and The Bay.
2. **Poverty in Action** is presenting a workshop on Poor-Bashing on April 18th from 1-4 p.m. at Robertson-Wesley United Church at 10209-123 Street. You will find a notice enclosed. We encourage you to come and bring a friend. Transportation and childcare can be arranged, call the office if you need either one.
3. **On May 1 & 2** Mill Woods will be having a Roundtable on Poverty if you live or know someone who lives in Millwoods and is interested in attending or would like more information please call Pat Edmonds at 414 - 1000.
4. There will be a soup line demonstration at the Legislature on May 3rd at 2:00pm. The theme will be **Stone Soup** and will help to bring attention to the fact that there are people in our city and province who don't have enough to eat. Please plan to attend and show your support. There will be speaker's and entertainment as well as some soup. A notice is enclosed for you to share with others.

6. If you are living in subsidized housing through Capital Region Housing, and are experiencing difficulties or concerns there is a group called Tenants on Subsidized Housing (T.O.S.H.) that meets regularly. If you would like some more information please call Laurie Dwinnell at 436-3133.

Just a reminder... The contest "What Poverty in Action means to me" has extended its deadline to May 15th. Remember the contest is a **draw** from all entries submitted. You can write a poem, song, essay or even draw a picture showing what Poverty in Action has meant to you and/or what you would like to see it become. So send in or drop off your entries for a terrific prize!

We have just completed our brochures and will be sending them to the printer. A rough draft will be available at the workshop for you to take and share.

Opportunity to help!

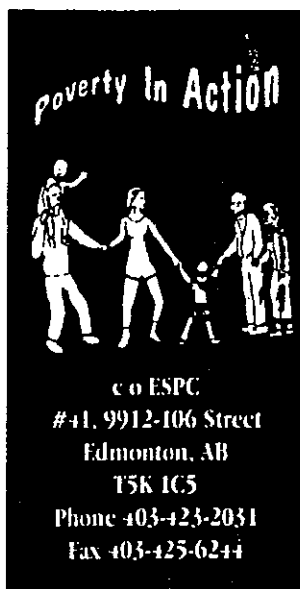
If there is anyone interested in volunteering in the office to help with the newsletter, answering phones, and general office support for the group please call Deana at 423-2031. This is an excellent opportunity for anyone who wants to brush up on their computer and general office skills.

Important Reminder

Due to a scheduling conflict, our meeting in May will be held on **May 23rd** **NOT** May 16th.

Poverty in Action has formed a partnership with the Advocacy Group. We will be working together closely to provide Advocacy and Advocacy training to individuals. If you need assistance or are interested in training please call 423-2031 and ask for Midge or Deana. We will be putting out a notice for the advocacy training at a later date.

Be Angry, Be Sad, Be Passionate.
But don't be Silent.



NEWSLETTER

-----May 1998-----

How about this weather! It's hard to believe that it is only May, it feels more like July. Poverty in Action has been keeping very busy with speaking engagements, workshop planning, the Millwoods Roundtable's on Poverty, advocacy, development of a resource manual, organizing the Stone Soup Sunday Service and working on plans for the next six months.

Our workshop on April 18th talking about Poor-Bashing was very well attended and showed us that it is not just the people who are financially secure that discriminate against the poor, we also do it amongst ourselves. The working poor feel that the welfare poor have it too easy and we are constantly making judgments about each other; the way we're dressed, the furniture we have, where we live, etc. The theme that really became obvious out of that workshop was that until we can stop fighting between ourselves, we will not be able to come together to fight the real issue...Poverty.

During the next few weeks, we will be focusing our office time on fundraising in order to make sure that we can continue to do the important work that we have been doing. If you have any fundraising ideas or would like to make a donation to our worthy cause please call us.

Opportunity to help!

If there is anyone interested in volunteering in the office to help with the newsletter, answering phones, and general office support for the group please call Deana at 423-2031. This is an excellent opportunity for anyone who wants to brush up on their computer and general office skills.

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Notices

IMPORTANT !!!

Our meeting in May is **May 23**, 1-4 p.m. at Robertson Wesley United Church 10209 - 123 Street.

1. The topic of our June workshop will be information on landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities. Presented by Katherine Weaver. We will provide more information in the June newsletter.
2. If you are living in subsidized housing through Capital Region Housing, and are experiencing difficulties or concerns there is a group called Tenants on Subsidized Housing (T.O.S.H.) that meets regularly. If you would like some more information please call Laurie Dwinnell at 436-3133.
3. A group called A.I.S.H. roc (A.I.S.H. Recipients Organizing Committee) is trying to get a meeting organized in order to respond to possible changes to A.I.S.H. Call Trevor at 909-0425 for more details.

Just a reminder...

The contest "What Poverty in Action means to me" has reached its deadline of May 15th. Remember the contest is a **draw** from all entries submitted. The draw will take place at the May 23 meeting.

The first Advocacy Training session will be held on June 19, 20, 21 and 27. Please see the enclosed brochure for more information. Please remember that space is limited to 15 people and we will not accept registrations over the phone. So make sure that you get your forms to us as soon as possible by either mailing or dropping them off at the office. Thank You!

During the month of July we will not be meeting in order for families to have a holiday **BUT** watch for our newsletter in June and July with information about our celebration plans in August.

Hooray! Our video "What can poor people say" from the Conference is ready to be viewed in the office. We have a couple of details to complete before its ready for distribution.

**"My Silence is too high a price to pay,
for your approval".**



NEWSLETTER

-----June 1998-----

Opportunity to help!

If there is anyone interested in volunteering in the office to help with the newsletter, answering phones, and general office support for the group please call Deana at 423-2031. This is an excellent opportunity for anyone who wants to brush up on their computer and general office skills.

Notices

IMPORTANT !!!

Our workshop in June is **June 20**, 1-4 p.m. at Robertson Wesley United Church 10209 - 123 Street.

1. The topic of our June workshop will be information on landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities. Presented by Katherine Weaver. We will cover a variety of topics relating to the rights and responsibilities we have as tenants, the rights and responsibilities landlords have.
2. If you are living in subsidized housing through Capital Region Housing, and are experiencing difficulties or concerns there is a group called Edmonton Tenants Association that meets regularly. If you would like some more information please call Laurie Dwinnell at 436-3133.
3. A group called **A.I.S.H roc** (A.I.S.H. Recipients Organizing Committee) is trying to get a meeting organized in order to respond to possible changes to A.I.S.H. Call Trevor at 909-0425 for more details.
4. Don't forget, if you have registered for the Advocacy training session, they begin on Friday, June 19 at 7:00 pm. The location is 10876-97 Street.

THE FEDERAL CHILD TAX BENEFIT

In July, there will be an increase in the Child Tax Benefit and the Provincial Child Health Benefit. The amount of this increase will depend in whether you were employed during 1997 and how many children you have.

Here is an overview of key issues to consider:

- The amount of the increase will be deducted dollar for dollar from welfare cheques.

- The money being deducted from welfare cheques will be given to low-income working families.

- The coverage from the Provincial Child Health Benefit will only cover the children in the family. Parents will still have no medical coverage.

- To be eligible, your families net income must be below \$20,921 regardless of the size of your family.

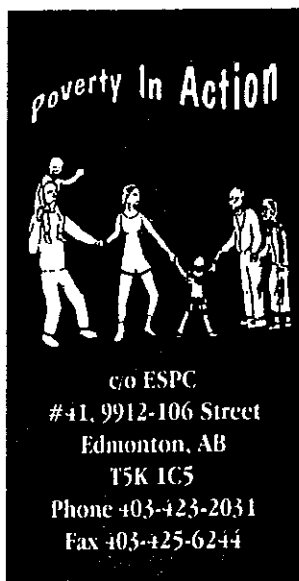
- For prescriptions and dental, families will have to pay between 20-50% of costs depending on their income levels.

- Anyone receiving student loans is not eligible for the Provincial Health Benefit.

This is part of a 5-10 year joint plan by the provincial and federal government that will see yearly increases in the Child Tax Benefit for the working poor and decreases in Alberta welfare cheques so that eventually there will no longer be children listed on the welfare roles; only the parents will be welfare recipients.

Write letters to Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Social Services; and to the Editors of the Sun and the Journal to express your concern over this program.

Be sure to come out to this month's workshop and bring a friend. We will be taking a break in July and in August, we will be having a celebration. Details in next month's newsletter.



NEWSLETTER

-----July 1998-----

Hi everyone! With summer being a time of relaxation, Poverty in Action has decided there will be no meeting in July. So use the third Saturday of July as a break from all the hard work you have done and set aside that time for a rest.

AUGUST CELEBRATION

On Saturday, August 22, from 10 am to 4 pm, we will meet at Paul Kane Park for a barbeque. The plans include games, craft table, and lots of great food. If it should rain that day we will hold our celebration in United Robertson Wesley Church. For those of you with children in school, we have a special something for them but need you to register by July 15. As well, if anyone needs transportation please contact the office by July 15. See you there!

IMPORTANT

If you are receiving **financial assistance** from the provincial government and also receive **The Child Tax Credit Benefit**, you will be receiving **an increase** on your Child Tax Credit cheque **this month**. Please note the amount of the **increase** from your previous Child Tax Credit cheque will be **deducted dollar for dollar** from your **financial assistance cheque** at the **end of the month**.

It's not what you are that holds you back, it's what you think you are not.

Denis Waitley
(taken from Deana's
"Inspiration for Living")

Midge and Deana will be taking some time off in the summer, but the office will still be open in case anyone has any questions or concerns.

Please find enclosed a very important questionnaire, we need you to complete it as soon as possible so we can include your feed back to potential funders. Remember without you we would not exist.

Have a great July and we'll see you at the Barbeque celebration Saturday August 22!

Upcoming Workshop
November 29, 1997
10:00 - 4:00
Mount Zion Lutheran Church
11533 - 135 Street

Poverty in Action invites you to participate in the first of a series of workshops to assist people in poverty to build confidence and self-esteem.

The goal of this workshop is to give people the skills to feel confident when sharing their stories with one person or many. Thereby gaining both self-confidence and self-respect.

PROGRAM

10:00 - 11:00 Mel Hurtig
Tools for effective public speaking

- 1) Topic considerations - how to identify the best way to reach your target audience
- 2) How to draft your notes - preparing your information, keeping on topic, ensuring that you keep audience interest
- 3) Tips on keeping calm and focused - how to get over the jitters and maintain your focus.
- 4) How to speak to the audience - making sure you get the message across.

11:00 - 12:00
Practice through role-playing

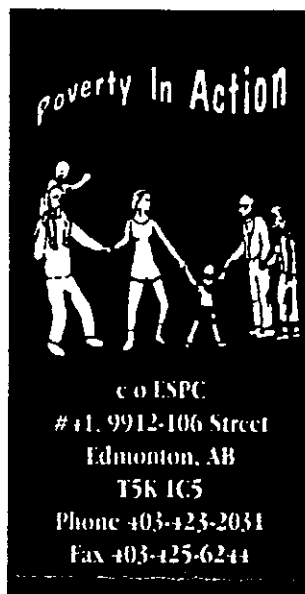
12:00 - 1:00
Lunch

1:00 - 2:00 Kathy Daley
Media relations - How to keep your foot out of your mouth

- 1) Understanding what draws the media - how to bait the hook.
- 2) How to prepare for an interview - what you can do on short notice
- 3) How to clarify the purpose of the interview - don't be caught off guard.
- 4) What to say when you don't know the answer - how to deflect uncomfortable questions,
- 5) How to be selective in interviews given - knowing when to say no.

2:00 - 3:00
Practice through role-playing

For more information and to register, please call
Poverty in Action at: 423-2031
R.S.V.P. by November 20, 1997



Upcoming Workshop

February 21, 1998

1:00 - 4:00

Robertson Wesley United Church

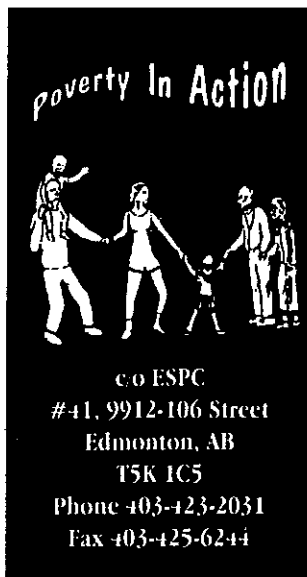
10209-123 Street

"Wading your way through SFI and the Appeal Process"

Join Poverty in Action for an afternoon workshop to learn your rights and responsibilities under the rules that guide welfare policies. As well, we will be discussing the appeal process to learn the necessary steps needed to get through this process.

This workshop is being presented by Sandy Rankin of the Edmonton Food Bank who has many years of experience in the policies and procedures of the Social Services Department.

For more information and to register, please call Midge or Deana: **Poverty in Action at: 423-2031**



March 27, 1998

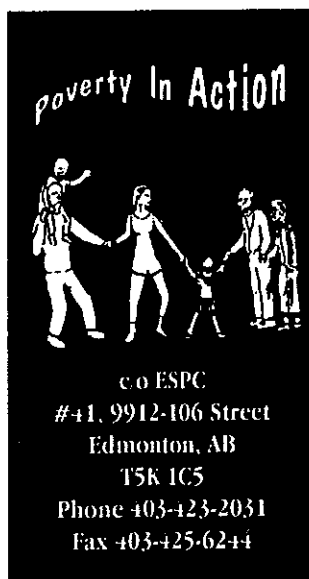
Attention: Community Events/Public Service
Announcements

Poverty in Action will be presenting a workshop entitled "Think Again - Challenging attitudes about poverty".

This workshop will discuss the myths and realities about living in poverty and share some information about the current situations faced by those living in poverty.

The workshop will be held at Robertson Wesley United Church, 10209-123 Street on April 18th from 1-4 p.m.

Childcare and transportation can be arranged. Please call Poverty in Action at: 423-2031 for more information and to register.



Upcoming Workshop

April 18, 1998

1:00 - 4:00

Robertson Wesley United Church

10209-123 Street

"Think Again, Challenging attitudes about poverty"

Join Poverty in Action for an afternoon workshop to learn about some of the myths and realities about poverty and what it means to be poor. We will spend the afternoon identifying different ways that people living in poverty are discriminated against and how we can challenge the attitudes of society and government.

This workshop is being presented by Midge Cuthill, Coordinator and founding member of Poverty in Action, as well as a board member of the National Anti-Poverty Organization. The workshop will be co-facilitated by Deana Shorten, a long time anti-poverty activist and Project Assistant with Poverty in Action.

This workshop will be of interest to anyone who wants to gain more insight about the realities faced by those of us who deal with the issue of poverty in our daily lives.

For more information and to register, please call Midge or Deana: **Poverty in Action at: 423-2031**

TOUGH TIMES HANDBOOK & SOCIAL SERVICES SURVIVAL GUIDE

Project Description

The Tough Times Handbook, published by The Support Network, was first distributed in 1988. The Handbook is a guide to services for low income and unemployed persons. In addition to information on topics such as preparing for job loss, securing basic needs such as food and clothing, and employment search strategies, there are also sections focusing on preventative measures such as symptoms of stress, coping mechanisms, and support resources in the community. Produced approximately every 18 months, over 205,000 Handbooks have been distributed through community agencies, employment centres, and social service offices.

The Social Services Survival Guide has been designed to help individuals understand their rights, responsibilities and eligibility when applying for social assistance. The information is designed to address the confusion and frustration that can be experienced by people accessing social services. Designed in a user-friendly, easy to read format, the guide will also serve as a tool for community agency staff who work with people in poverty. The Guide has been developed through a consultative process with individuals who have personally experienced the social service system.

The design of the publication features the Tough Times Handbook on one side and the Social Services Survival Guide on the flip side; giving each set of information a profile and distinctiveness. The goal of the project is to publish and distribute 50,000 copies of the Tough Times Handbook & Social Services Survival Guide. Contributions of the partners to date have been the review and rewrite of the Supports For Independence manuals and, design and typesetting of the material. Distribution costs are minimal; the guide is available free of charge to agencies and offices who then distribute them to their clientele. In the past the supply of 50,000 copies is depleted within 8 - 10 months. There are currently over 40 agencies on a waiting list for distribution of the next publication. Both the Support Network and Poverty in Action have received, and continue to receive many requests from individuals and agencies for the information contained in this guide.

Outcomes

Comprehensive, accurate information is an essential component for people accessing services needed to address their issues. The Tough Times Handbook was last published in 1992 and since that time there has been considerable changes in the information. Most notably, there has been an increase in self help groups and support such as collective kitchens. Typically, such initiatives are at a grassroots level and not well publicized and the Handbook serves to ensure awareness among individuals in need of such services. Often persons living in poverty experience isolation and anxiety

and information on services and programs that can assist helps to minimize the impact of these feelings. Ultimately, *the goal is to empower people to help themselves.*

Budget

Printing	9,900.00
Graphic Design(Cover)	600.00
Distribution/Promotion	500.00
Total:	11,000.00

The Partners

The Support Network and Poverty In Action began discussions to collaborate on a single publication in the early spring of 1998. Because both publications share a similar target audience and common purpose, many positive outcomes of a collaborative effort were identified and include:

The information on social services would enhance the Tough Times Handbook and be value-added for current users of the Handbook.

Collaboration provided a mechanism for feedback from consumers of the Tough Times Handbook.

A sharing of resources is cost-efficient and effective.

Poverty In Action, formed in 1996, is a grassroots organization of people currently living on, or have lived on, limited incomes and resources. Coming from many diverse cultural and social backgrounds, members come together to fight the stigma of being poor. The mandate of Poverty In Action is "To Share, To Empower, To Educate". Activities of the organization include: monthly meetings, peer support training programs, and workshops and public education. The Social Services Survival Handbook was conceived to help persons use their skills and resources to empower themselves. By being proactive and collaborating, Poverty In Action strives to be part of the solution to end poverty in our society.

The Support Network, Edmonton Distress Centre, is committed to strengthening the community by supporting individuals in distress or crisis and linking them with the resources they need. In 1960, the Information & Referral program was established to be a central source of human service information for persons wanting to access resources. Programs of The Support Network include: The 24 Hour Distress Line, Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team, Suicide Prevention Program, Single Session Counselling as well as the Community Service Referral Line and Publications program.

Tough Times Handbook

Introduction

Applying For Assistance

- * Your Rights
- * Your Responsibilities
- * Office Locations
- * Making Application for Assistance
- * Appeals

Supports for Independence (The Rules)

- * Programs
- * Supplement to Earnings
- * Employment and Training Support
- * Transitional Support
- * Assured Support
- * Emergency Support

AISH

- * Applying for AISH

Special Categories

- * Limited Eligibility
- * Ineligible Persons
- * Immigrants and Refugees
- * Students

Benefits

- * The Basic Allowance
- * The Standard Allowance
- * The Shelter Allowance
- * Health Benefits
- * Allowable Income and Assets
- * Recoveries

Continuous Supplementary Allowances

- * Handicap Allowances
- * Special Diet Allowance
- * Child Care
- * Additional Shelter Allowance
- * Transportation Allowance
- * Personal Support Services

One Time Only Allowances

- * Damage Deposits
- * Employment Related Allowance
- * Moving for Confirmed Employment
- * Natel Allowance
- * Utilities
- * Non Emergency Travel
- * A.A.D.A.C.
- * School Expenses
- * Emergency Allowances

Common Questions Addressed

DRAFT

Tough Times Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in Action is a group of people living or having lived on limited incomes and resources who have realized the need to challenge poverty from a grassroots level.

We are dedicated to sharing our stories and using our skills and resources to help empower others living in similar circumstances. As such, we have put together this manual in order to share information about basic Social Service policy.

There has been a growing concern that people needing social assistance do not have enough information about their rights, and about the rules and regulations that administer those rights. What follows is an overview of the general guidelines of policy presently being used by the Alberta Family and Social Services Department. The regulations that govern this department are complicated and are not readily available to people in need of income assistance. We hope that this simplified description of these services will help people in need, and hopefully answer some commonly asked questions.

This is not a government document and has no status within Social Services offices. Alberta Family and Social Services has a policy manual which all staff use to administer income assistance. Nothing that you read in this section should be relied on as legal advice: it is not. The purpose is to offer what we feel is correct information about the Social Service benefits system at the time of the publication of this handbook. Anyone involved in producing this guideline should not be held liable for any errors or omissions that may occur. Always check with your worker or the department to verify any regulations that may concern your situation or any issues that need to be resolved.

APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

YOUR RIGHTS

In Alberta the government has the responsibility to assist all persons who find themselves without funds and to ensure that a consistent and decent level of income is made available to support health and welfare. The Social Development Act describes this right which belongs to all Canadian citizens. It is your right to expect that the basic necessities of life will be provided under this Act.

The Act states:

Basic Necessities means:

- food, clothing, shelter, heat, light and water
- the things, goods and services authorized by the Director that are essential to health and well-being, including essential surgical, medical, optical, dental and other remedial treatment, care and attention and any things, goods and services considered to be basic necessities, from time to time, by the Director.

Section 5 of the Social Development Act addresses the issue of your privacy. It states that information that you give to Alberta Family and Social Service about your personal history and current circumstances must be kept confidential. The workers can, however, share this information between government departments and with agencies or authorities that the government uses to do its work (i.e., work programs). It can also be used at appeal hearings and legal proceedings. As well, an MLA (elected Alberta Government official) can use it if you give that person permission to do so. Any person who breaks this rule and gives information about you to someone outside the above

Tough Times Handbook

circumstances is liable to a \$500 fine or to a prison term of not more than 90 days.

This means that your worker cannot share information about you with anyone such as a physician without your permission.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

When you receive Social Assistance the government expects you, if you are employable, to co-operate with their services and programs designed to get you back to work. You may be denied benefits, cut off or have your benefits reduced if you :

- have not given the department all of the information they have asked for or if you have given them false information
- refuse to take advantage of appropriate training or take rehabilitation
- refuse to look for a job or accept a job offered at a reasonable wage (minimum wage)
- quit a job you could have stayed at according to department guidelines
- have access to income from another source and do not take it
- leave the province of Alberta

If you are receiving assistance you **MUST** tell the department of Family and Social Service of any changes in you circumstances or you can be fined up to \$1000.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Every Social Service office covers only a certain area of the city or rural district that you may live in. Before you go to an office, phone

first to ensure that it is the office that can assist you. Give them your address and postal code. In Edmonton the office locations and phone numbers are:

Family and Social Services Information

Phone:..... 427-3734

105 Street District Office

#301 - 10242 - 105 Street

Phone:..... 493-7511

North District Office

13415 Fort Road

Phone:.....

South District Office

6325 - 103 Street

Phone:..... 438-8111

West District Office

12323 Stony Plain Road

Phone:..... 482-9511

APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

When you go to the Alberta Family and Social Services offices you will be given an application to fill out, and once it is completed you will be given an appointment to see an Intake Worker.

Filling out the application

To fill out this application you will require:

- photo I.D. of yourself with a signature,
- proof of identification for any dependents that

Tough Times Handbook

you have (i.e. Alberta Health Care cards, birth certificates),

- rent confirmation of some description proving you have shelter
- a copy of your bank statement if you have a bank account
- you will also be asked to fill out an employment history. A resume is helpful if you have one.

If you don't have a bank account, you will be asked to open one. Social Services will give you a letter to do this. The department prefers to use direct deposit, but there are some circumstances under which they will allow checks to be mailed or picked up. If you do not want direct deposit, please tell your worker your reasoning. They may make an exception.

You will need a letter from your landlord or a Lease Agreement that confirms your address and the amount that you pay for rent. You can get rent confirmation sheets at the office for your landlord to fill out. If you own your own home you can show them your mortgage papers, agreement for sale, condominium fees, taxes, etc., to prove ownership.

If you have no photo I.D. and no place to live, tell them your situation at the reception desk. The department may help you to obtain some identification and may help you with a shelter arrangement for a **SHORT** time until you find somewhere to live yourself.

You will be given an appointment time to see an Intake Worker for an interview. This appointment time will depend on how busy the office is. Various personal experiences have demonstrated that every district office is different. Some people have had to wait two weeks for an appointment. Other people have been told to go and drop off 100 resumes before they will be given assistance. Many are told they will have to attend an employability program first. When you do go to your appointment, take all of the application information with you. You

should try to get it photocopied so that you can keep your application for your own records. The office does not photocopy for you so you must do this for yourself. You should try to photocopy all letters and documents relating to your file while on assistance. Only photocopies go to the department. Keep the originals for yourself. Make sure you stamp both with the date the department received the copy.

The purpose of the intake interview is to decide whether you are eligible for income assistance. The worker will look at all of your information and discuss your situation with you. If you are eligible, the worker will decide which category of assistance that you qualify for and how much income you will receive each month while you are eligible. How much money you receive each month will depend on this category, how many dependents you have, and if your dependents have any special health requirements. The department has set amounts of assistance for each category and so assessment is required. The rules will be explained to you, and you will be asked to sign a document stating that you understand these rules and will follow them. Always ask questions about anything you don't understand and always **READ** what you are signing, **FRONT** and **BACK**.

The client reporting card that you **MUST** return every month that you are eligible will be explained to you. The process for issuing a cheque will begin. If you are in an emergency situation ask for **IMMEDIATE** assistance.

You will be given the name and phone number of a Financial Benefits worker (FBW). This person will be your contact with the department and will handle decisions regarding your file and circumstances.

If you are told that you are not eligible for financial assistance, the worker must clearly state why. You have the right to appeal this decision. You may ask for an Appeal Form, fill it out and leave it at the front desk. It will be

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reviewed by the Income Support Supervisor and you will be contacted.

When you are appealing eligibility, YOU DO NOT receive any assistance while you wait. Try to find other resources.

APPEALS

The Social Development Act allows you the right to appeal ANY decision that is made regarding your relationship to the department of Social Service whether you are on SFI or AISH.

For instance, if you believe that you have been placed in the wrong category or you feel that your needs have not been properly assessed and you are not receiving enough income, you may appeal.

Should you wish to use your right to appeal you must fill out an Appeal Form (available at Social Services offices) stating the reasons why you do not agree with a decision made about your situation or request. You must fill out the Appeal Form and return it to the office within 30 days of the original decision.

The appeal will be reviewed by the Income Support Supervisor of the office. This is called an Administrative Review. The Income Support Supervisor will talk to your FBW and SHOULD contact you as well with regards to the situation. If the Supervisor agrees with the FBW's decision the Appeal Form will be returned to you with a written explanation of the reasons why the Supervisor has chosen to uphold the decision. You do not need an appeal form; you may send a handwritten letter to your worker requesting an appeal. Then, if you choose, you may ask for a Citizens Appeal Hearing. It is

your right to do so. You must sign and date Section 2 of the Appeal Form that has been returned to you. You will be contacted and informed of the date, time and location of the Appeal Hearing.

Read the back of the Appeal Form CAREFULLY. It outlines what will happen at the Appeal Hearing. It is very important that you have written information that you wish the Appeal Panel to review. BEFORE the hearing you must send it to them. Make sure to keep copies for yourself. On the day of the hearing take someone with you either to speak on your behalf (an advocate) or just for support.

Advocates are available in the community. Try not to arrive early. Sometimes the representative will be waiting with you and it might make you uncomfortable. Ask if they have received the information before you proceed with the hearing.

The address of the Appeal Secretariat is:

6th Floor - Centre West Building

10035 - 108 Street

Edmonton, AB T5J 3E1

Phone: 422-3615, if you have any questions

The Appeal Panel is made up of three people appointed by the government to hear your side of the situation. They can reverse any decision your worker has made that is appealable. (Some matters are not appealable; e.g., you must report income tax rebate. This is the law. You cannot earn more than the standard exempt income every month. This is the law. They can only hear about how it has been applied: fairly or unfairly by the department.)

If you do not agree with the appeal panel's decision you may contact the Ombudsman at (403) ???-???? and request an investigation into the decision. You may also request that

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the Court of Queens Bench do a judicial review of the appeal. Be aware that there is a cost attached to the filing of this request. The cost is \$200 per file plus legal aid to do it or student legal services. You may also wish to contact your local MLA.

SUPPORTS FOR INDEPENDENCE

PROGRAMS

Supports For Independence is the name given to the Social Service income assistance program of the Government of Alberta. It is commonly known as welfare. The Supports For Independence does not administer Child Welfare or Student Finance. These are separate departments.

When you apply to the Supports For Independence program for income assistance you will be placed in one of its sub-programs. The program that you will enter will be decided based upon your needs. These needs are assessed according to the department regulations. There are sub-programs, each of which has categories. When you are placed in a program and a category, ask your worker any questions that you may have if you are not sure that it is the correct one.

There are four sub-programs that you can be placed in if you are eligible:

1. Supplement to Earnings

If you are working but your income does not meet your basic needs the department may "top-up" your income to its minimum stand-

ard. If you are working in a sheltered workshop this will not apply to you.

2. Employment and Training Support

If you are able and available to work or to be in an educational training program, or are currently in a training program you will be placed in this program. Your FBW will refer you to an Employment and Client Support Services (ECSS) worker to help you begin job searching or to select a suitable training program.

3. Transitional Support

If you are able to work but have a temporary health problem (mental or physical) or are responsible for the care of an infant under 6 months of age or have to care for a disabled family member, you may be placed in this program. Any situation that is temporary can be approved if the department chooses.

4. Assured Support

If you have a severe handicap, a persistent mental or physical health problem, or have several barriers to employment that are beyond your control, you may be placed in this program. Serious barriers to employment may include a lack of formal education (Grade 8 or lower), social skills that are not considered to be acceptable in the workplace, work history, age or other social factors that cannot be overcome.

Assured Support is not AISH. If barriers can be overcome and employment can be secured you will be moved to another program.

EMERGENCY SUPPORT

You may receive emergency support, a one-

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time issue of assistance, if:

- you are not a resident of Alberta and do not intend to stay in the province, but are in an emergency situation.
- or
- you are a resident of Alberta, are not on assistance and do not need assistance for a full benefit period (one month).

You will NOT receive emergency support if:

- you have a home that you can second mortgage
- can use your car as loan collateral
- can sell or receive a loan on household goods (e.g., stereo, TV, VCR)

AISH

Eligibility for AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) depends on your meeting EVERY requirement of this category.

- Severe disability.
- Your disability must be the main reason that you cannot work. Age, education and employment opportunities are not considered as reasons for being placed on AISH.
- You must have a permanent disability. If there is a treatment for your condition that would make a difference and allow you to earn a living, you must seek the treatment.
- If there is work that you can do then you MUST do it. You are not allowed to quit.
- You must be over 18 years of age and not qualify for Old Age Security.
- You must be a permanent resident of Alberta.
- If you are living in an institution where all of your needs are met, you DO NOT QUALIFY.

Whatever your income is and whatever its source, you must declare it, including all income from your spouse or dependent children. Ask for a list of things that are not considered and the income sources that will affect the amount of benefit that you receive.

Examples of income sources that will affect your level of benefits are RRSPs, GICs, stocks, pensions (including widow's).

Your marital status must be declared as well as your spouse's income source. If you are divorced or widowed you must give documentation of proof.

Both your and your spouse's assets will be taken into consideration when eligibility and level of benefit is being decided.

If you are a sponsored immigrant you *are not* eligible for AISH. You may apply when your sponsorship ends. You will be asked for proof.

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When receiving AISH, in addition to Alberta Health Care coverage, you will receive a medical card that allows for conditional coverage for prescription drugs, glasses, dental work and land ambulance services.

You have 30 days to appeal AISH's decision and 90 days for the CPP decision.

APPLYING FOR AISH

Before you can apply for AISH you must apply for Canada Pension Plan Disability, and it is a good idea to do so in advance of contacting:

Alberta Family and Social Services
Assured Income of the Severely Handicapped
200 - 12323 Stony Plain Road
Edmonton, AB T5N 4A9

Canada Pension Plan..... 1-800-277-9914

To apply for AISH:

- Call the AISH office: 482-9664 and request an application form.
- You will be sent a pre-application package.
- You must fill it out and return it with any extra information you are asked to send (e.g., medical reports).
- You **MUST** prove that you have applied for Canada Pension Plan.
- You will be phoned or written and told whether or not they will consider your application and given an interview.

If you are turned down for CPP Disability or AISH you may appeal these decisions. Ask for a Citizens Appeal form at the AISH office. Canada Pension Plan requires a letter requesting an appeal, and then they will contact you.

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SPECIAL CATEGORIES

LIMITED ELIGIBILITY CATEGORY

You may find that your situation places you in a limited eligibility category with the department. Limited Eligibility is applied in circumstances where there are:

- other programs to provide assistance
- other persons to provide assistance
- a person has placed themselves in a self-employed situation and they cannot support themselves
- the department is limited by regulations or policy

Each one of these categories has its own guidelines. Ask the intake worker to go through them with you to make sure that your situation is clearly understood.

Limited Eligibility applies to:

- self-employed persons and farmers
- people on strike who are locked out or refusing to cross picket lines
- people unemployed due to someone else's strike action
- people in the Fine Options Program
- women and children in battered women's shelters
- people in Alberta Hospital or Ponoka Hospital
- people in auxiliary or active treatment hospitals
- families receiving Handicapped Children's services
- off Reserve Status/Treaty Indians
- non status Indians

- families whose children have been removed by Child Welfare

INELIGIBLE PERSONS

Some people are not eligible for income assistance from SFI. They are not eligible because there are other people or programs that are supposed to provide total assistance.

You are not eligible for any assistance if:

- You are not in Alberta (unless you are looking for work and it has been approved by the department for a maximum of one month or are accessing medical treatment)
- If you are an inmate in a provincial or federal prison.
- If you are released from prison into a community residence centre.
- If you are a Treaty/Status Indian living on the reserve (you may receive emergency benefits under certain conditions)
- Visitors to Canada, e.g., temporary workers, students, tourists, ministers, permit holders, people in Canada illegally
- Sponsored immigrants and refugees ARE eligible under certain conditions and time periods
- Foster and adopted children (Child Welfare covers the financial needs of foster children and has a post-adoption support program)

STUDENTS

If you are in the Supplement to Earnings, Employment and Training, or Transitional Support programs of SFI, further education and training may be part of your employment plan. Your employment and client support services worker (ECSS), after working with you on a

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plan, will refer you to the appropriate facility or agency.

Student Finance does not normally fund you while you are in further training unless you are in a short term study program of 9 weeks or less. If you are, you will remain on SFI and SF will pay the cost of books and tuition on the recommendation of your ECSS worker. Otherwise your new worker will refer you to the Student Finance Board for financial assistance.

Depending on the type and length of training you are requesting, you will receive either a grant or a loan (does not need to be repaid) from the Student Finance Board.

If your ECSS worker has recommended you for Basic Foundational Skills (BFS), SF will grant you financial assistance. You must be recommended by your ECSS worker for BFS training.

Basic Foundational Skills needed to increase the opportunity of employment include:

- Academic upgrading (Grades 10-12)
- English Language Skills
- Literacy (Grades 0-6)
- Adult Basic Education (Grades 7-9)

You do not need to be recommended by your ECSS worker to SF for full-time skills training or post secondary education. You can apply yourself.

Any other form of full-time training and education is financed through Student Financing's loan system or a combination of loans and grants.

When you have been referred by your ECSS worker to a program funded by SF or if you have been accepted for full-time study, you will no longer be financially funded by SFI. You will, however, continue to receive SFI until the SF funding comes through. Once it does and you are a full-time student you are NOT eligible

for welfare. While a student, your only resource is Student Finance. You will be expected to pursue employment between school terms.

16 and 17 Year Olds

If you are a 16 to 17 year old living with a parent or guardian (Child In Need) receiving SFI you will not be referred to SF. You will remain on SFI file until you are 18 years of age. If you are a 16 to 17 year old living independently on SFI and going to school full-time you will remain on SFI until you are 18.

At 18...

If you are living in a family that receives SFI, are in school and turning 18, be aware that at 18 you will be taken off of the SFI file. You will not be eligible for SFI assistance to stay in school. You are expected to access other means of support. If you can't and you wish to stay in school, you should ask to be recommended to SF and make application for financial assistance. You do not have to go through SFI to go to the Student Finance Board. You can apply on your own.

Persons with Disabilities

If you are physically disabled or have a learning disability, you may apply for a Transitional Vocational Program. Depending on the program and arrangements made, funding will come through Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons and SF and SFI.

AISH

If you are on AISH and wish to get more education, check with your AISH department worker.

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Part-Time Students (less than 60% normal course load)

You can receive SFI and receive part-time SF in the form of a bursary or part-time Canada Student Loan. You may apply for a \$600 bursary and up to \$4,000 in a loan to cover expenses (tuition, books, etc.). If you are a part-time student receiving these funds you **MUST** report it on your client reporting card.

Apprenticeship Students

If you are in an apprenticeship program, funding will be a combination of SFI, SF, and EI. Check with your worker.

Off Reserve Treaty Status Indians

Funding for students depends on agreements made between individual bands and District Offices of AFSS. AFSS offices will direct you to the resource that you need to go to.

Health Benefits

When you are a full-time student receiving SF, you are not eligible to have SFI cover your health care costs. There are three things that you can do to get coverage:

1. Apply to Alberta Health Care Insurance for a Premium Subsidy.
2. Ask that your medical expense insurance premiums be included in money you receive from student funding.
3. Apply for a Blue Cross Non-Group Subsidy for prescription drugs through Alberta Health Care. You must apply within 30 days of the arrival of SFI.

If you are a student with a family member who has special health needs due to a disability, your family can apply to the Interdepartmental

Student Aid Committee. If approved, your family will receive personal supports and a medical services card for the family unit.

If you have applied to SF for assistance, you will be expected to fulfill all of the requirements of the SFI program. This means that you will have to continue to seek employment while you are waiting to enter your program, and you will still be asked to offer proof of your job search.

Once in school, you will not be automatically eligible for SFI between periods of attendance. When you are in school and the term ends, you are not automatically eligible for welfare. You have to look for work or find other resources. SFI will only help you if you can prove that you can't find work and have no other resources. In other words, you must meet ALL department criteria and prove that SFI is a "last resort."

If you find that SF is not covering all of your financial needs you must appeal to Student Finance Board for a review of your needs. You are not eligible for SFI. If you are in a financial emergency you may apply to a Career Development Centre for assistance.

If you have a difficulty or an issue arises that needs to be resolved with SFI and SF that affects your circumstances, you may contact the Interdepartmental Student Aid Committee.

Write to:

Director, Employment and Training Initiatives
Income and Employment Programs
Alberta Family and Social Services
14th Floor, Seventh Street Plaza
10030 - 107th Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4

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BENEFITS POLICY

BASIC ALLOWANCE

When you are on Social Assistance you will normally receive what is called a basic allowance. This includes money for shelter, health benefits coverage, and a standard allowance. The Family and Social Services Department will use this policy in determining the amount that you will receive monthly. The monthly amount will be decided by which category you are in and a review of your or your family's needs.

SHELTER ALLOWANCE

Shelter Allowance regulations to be aware of:

If you are **RENTING**:

Your maximum shelter allowance is intended to cover the cost of:

- rent
- fuel
- utilities
- lot rental for a mobile home
- damage deposit

If you **OWN** your own accommodation:

Your maximum shelter allowance is intended to cover the cost of:

- payments on a mortgage
- municipal taxes
- fire insurance
- condominium fees
- lot rental for a mobile home
- maintenance costs

If you are single and do not have a place to live you may be asked to go to a singles hostel before they will issue you a shelter allowance.

There are certain circumstances where additional shelter allowance is made available (e.g., your rent is too high, but a move would endanger your health). Please check under "Non-Continuous Supplementary Benefits".

If you are on SFI and if you are living with a relative in a room and board situation, you will NOT receive the shelter portion of money in your basic allowance. This does not have to be a blood relative. It could be a step-parent, an adopted parent or an adopted child.

If you are sharing shelter you will receive only your proportion of the rent paid (e.g., if four of you are sharing an apartment).

Your shelter allowance should increase 3 months before the birth or adoption of a child.

If your family size decreases (someone leaves) your shelter allowance will decrease after one month.

If you have joint custody of a child/children, only one parent will receive shelter allowance. If the parents cannot determine who will receive the benefit, the worker has the authority to make that decision.

If Child Welfare has a plan to remove a child from the home for more than 3 months, the shelter allowance is decreased. If the child is not going to be gone for more than 3 months it will stay the same.

Foster and/or adopted children are not counted in the shelter rate. Adopted children who receive money under the Post-Adoption Support Regulations are not covered in the shelter rate either.

If you are caring for a Child in Need (CIN) you can choose to have the child covered in your shelter rate.

If your utilities increase you may ask for

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an increase in your rate. It must be reported on your client card, and you must prove the increase by producing the bill. Remember to keep your bills.

STANDARD ALLOWANCE

The standard allowance you or you and your family receive is expected to cover all of the following:

- food
- clothing
- household needs (furniture, appliances and household supplies included)
- telephone (including installation and operating costs)
- laundry
- transportation (school transportation, vehicle operating expenses, moving costs within Alberta except for moves to confirmed employment)

Standard allowance regulations to be aware of:

- If your telephone is in arrears or has been cut off SFI **will not cover** the cost.
- Standard allowances are the same in all categories.
- If you are out of food money you may ask for food vouchers.
- If you live in a nursing home, auxiliary or active treatment hospital and do not receive a handicap benefit you will receive \$56 per month as a standard allowance.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Health benefits for you and your family are included in the basic allowance. This means that Alberta Health premiums are paid for by social assistance for you and your family. You will receive a medical card that allows you to receive the basic necessities of Health Care. You are entitled to visit a physician and receive essential health services. Your medical card allows you to receive most prescription drugs, glasses, dental services (for surgery you may be required to pay additional costs of an anesthetic), ground ambulance, and funeral services.

- Ambulance service is paid for only in emergency situations. SFI does not pay for taking a patient from one hospital to another.
- SFI will only pay for ambulance service to the nearest hospital that can supply the service.
- Standard and supplementary dental treatment covers basic services such as extractions, fillings, denturist services and annual checkups for children
- Hearing Aid Services are available as a benefit. Some services are partially paid for by Alberta Aids to Daily Living and some portions by SFI.
- If you are diabetic (non-insulin and insulin users) your medical supplies will be provided. Check with your worker to make sure if **all** of your needs are covered.
- Alberta Aids to Daily Living and SFI will supply medical and surgical supplies. You need to ask which supplies will meet your particular needs.
- Children can receive new eye glasses every 12 months.
- Adults can receive new eye glasses every two years.
- Contact lenses are available through SFI if you have aphakia, corneal irregularity or an astigmatism which cannot be corrected by eye glasses. They can be replaced every 2 years for adults and every year for children.
- S.F.I. will cover eye examinations for adults on Assured Support, AISH, or widow's pension

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ONLY. If your health is at risk and it is verified by a doctor or an ophthalmologist, an exam can be arranged. Alberta Health Care no longer covers the cost of eye exams for people between the ages of 19 and 65.

- Your prescriptions will be covered by your medical card, but the drugs will be generic. It is possible that the drug prescribed to you may not be on the list of drugs covered by the health benefit. If this is the case, you may ask your doctor to write a letter to Blue Cross, giving the reason that the drug is necessary and ask for special authorization for the pharmacy to provide it to you. Doctors and pharmacists have the list of drugs covered. If the drug that you need is authorized by Blue Cross it will be yours and your doctor's responsibility to reapply for it every 12 months. The non-smoking patch is not paid for by SFI or AISH.
- Over the counter drugs are not on the health benefit list of drugs with a few exceptions. In the case where over the counter drugs are less expensive than the prescription substitute, or children and pregnant women are in need, then authorization may be given.

have no more than \$1500 in assets and no more than \$50 in cash.

If you are a family unit in this category and have at least one adult receiving a handicap benefit, you may have \$5,000 plus \$500 combined cash and liquid assets for each dependent including the spouse.

- If you are in the Transitional Support or Assured Support category but not needing a handicap benefit and you are single, you may have combined cash and liquid assets of \$1,500.

If you are a family unit you may have no more than \$2,500 cash and liquid assets.

- If you are in the Assured Support Category with a handicap benefit, a single adult may have no more than \$3,000 combined cash and property items you can sell.

If you are a family unit and have at least one adult receiving a handicap benefit you may have \$5,000, plus \$500 combined cash and liquid assets for each dependent including the spouse.

Ownership of vehicles, furnishings and owned housing:

- If you own a vehicle that is not worth more than \$4,000 you may keep it. If it has a value of more than \$4,000 and it is not a vehicle adapted to a handicap, you will be asked to sell it. You may replace it with one worth less than \$4,000 and the difference will be considered a cash asset for you. You may have 2 vehicles that combined are not worth more than \$4,000.
- Household furnishings and appliances of reasonable value are exempt.
- A home of reasonable value is exempt. If it is of more than reasonable value, you will be asked to sell it and provide proof that you are attempting to do so.

ASSET EXEMPTIONS

Personal property and income you can keep

Am I able to have assets and income and still receive assistance?

Yes. Depending on what category of assistance you are in, the amount of income and assets you are allowed to have will vary.

- If you are in the Employment and Training Support category or the Supplement to Earnings category, and if you are a single person, you may

Suggest this question format be changed. It's the only one.

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CONTINUOUS SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFITS

Depending on your need and circumstances, you may apply for what is called a continuous supplementary benefit. These extra benefits are not standard, must be requested, and can, at the discretion of your worker, be withdrawn.

HANDICAP BENEFIT

If you have a severe handicap that falls within the criteria of AISH and you are not eligible to receive the Old Age Security Benefit, you may request a supplementary benefit of \$175 per month. Your condition will be assessed by the AISH administrator before it is issued.

SPECIAL DIET ALLOWANCE

- High protein, gluten free or pregnancy diet
- Restricted sodium diet
- Infant diet

A letter verifying the need for this dietary allowance must come from a doctor, public health nurse or a registered dietitian. You will receive different amounts depending on your special diet requirement. For instance, if you are on a restricted sodium diet, you will receive \$12 per month. If you are a diabetic who needs an extra 1500 calories, you will receive \$14 per

month; 2000 calories, \$36; 2600 calories, \$66.

CHILD CARE

As soon as your youngest child is six months old, you will be asked to return to work or begin a training program.

Child Care is available while you are receiving social assistance. It is only available if you have no family or friends who can assist you. You will be asked to seek the least costly form. Daycare is preferred over a private babysitter since it normally costs less.

You will have to provide a written confirmation from the daycare provider that states the cost and the provider's signature. Daycare or babysitting costs are NOT paid to family members. If changes in your childcare arrangements take place you MUST report it on your client reporting card. Child care costs are covered only for the hours required for travel, interviews, etc.

You will receive child care assistance if as an adult member of a family or as a guardian of a Child In Need if you:

- are working part-time, full-time or seeking employment. Child care needs must be in your employment plan. If the requirements of the employment plan are not followed, child care will be discontinued. Guardians do not receive an employment plan.
- are in some type of program less than 50 hours per month, required in your employment plan.
- are in full or part-time education or training and no other support or financial assistance is helping you out with child care.
- are eligible for funding from the Child Care Subsidy Program.
- have confirmation (written) from a doctor that a family member has physical health problems that makes child care a necessity.

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- have confirmation (written) from a psychiatrist or a psychologist that the mental health of an adult member of the family makes child care a necessity. This child care is only available for the hours (travel time included) that the adult is receiving treatment.

If the cost of your child care is more than your social assistance cheque, you will still be asked to work. It is more important to the department that you work towards financial independence than stay home to take care of your children.

ADDITIONAL SHELTER ALLOWANCE

You can receive more money to pay for shelter if you can demonstrate need under the following conditions.

Health:

- If your physical or mental health would be endangered by a move to more affordable shelter given your current shelter allowance. You must provide a written opinion by a doctor or psychiatrist to confirm this. The doctor or psychiatrist must also offer an opinion as to when the condition may improve.
- If approved, you can receive up to \$300 a month for a 3 month period. This can be renewed if no improvement has occurred.

Adapted Shelter:

- If a family member is disabled, the shelter has been adapted for this condition and your shelter allowance is not enough to cover the cost, you can ask for additional allowance. If approved, you

may request up to \$300 a month for 12 months, renewable if no change occurs.

Large Families:

- If your family has six or more members and the maximum shelter allowance does not allow you suitable shelter you may request more allowance. If approved, you could receive up to \$300 a month for 12 months, renewable if your circumstances have not changed.
- If you receive an additional shelter allowance you must be told one month in advance before it is discontinued to give you time to make other shelter arrangements.

MEDICAL ALLOWANCE

- If you or a member of your family have a severe health problem that is life threatening or will have a permanent disability effect without ongoing treatments you may request an additional travel allowance. The treatment must be covered by Alberta Health and you must use the nearest medical service. If public transportation cannot be used an allowance of 9 cents per kilometer is issued. You must provide a letter from your doctor confirming the medical need, how long and how often it will be required.

PERSONAL SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

- If you or a member of your family has a disability and you require support that will allow a level of independence in the community, you can request personal support services. These services are managed by Services to persons with Disabilities, a department of Alberta Family and Social Services.

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ONE TIME ALLOWANCES

There are benefits you can receive if you can prove that you have no resources to turn to and the need is immediate. They are called non-continuous supplementary benefits.

DAMAGE DEPOSITS

You may request a damage deposit if, and only when, you need to move to leave a spouse because of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse. The abuse can be directed at you or a dependent child. You must provide evidence of this abuse. This can be:

- confirmation from a womans shelter
- confirmation from a doctor, psychologist, mental health professional or some other appropriate professional.
- a copy of a restraining order
- a copy of a police report charging the abuser.

EMPLOYMENT RELATED EXPENSES

If you are looking for work in an employment preparation program or are starting a job and can prove a need for a specific item related to this activity you may request an additional allowance. The request must be related to money needed for working clothes, tools, grooming, meals, or transportation. You can receive up to \$300 per 12 month period.

NATAL ALLOWANCE

This is an allowance for items needed for the birth of a child (e.g., clothing, cribs, etc.) that can be issued. You can request this allowance from the 36th week of your pregnancy, up to when the child is 1 month old. You will be given \$350 for the birth of your first child and \$125 for each subsequent birth. A letter from your doctor confirming your due date or a document confirming the birth of the child will be needed for your worker.

MOVING FOR CONFIRMED EMPLOYMENT

If you have a confirmed job, full or part-time, in another area of Alberta you may request a moving allowance. A professional mover is not normally allowed. You will be given a voucher for a truck rental. Confirmation of employment must be made available to your worker.

MOVING OUT OF ALBERTA

Costs of moving out of the province will be issued under the following conditions:

- If you have moved to Alberta and want to return to your home province for financial and social support.
- If you want to move to another province because you can receive financial and social support.
- You have confirmed employment in another province.

You will be issued the cost of a bus ticket or rental trailer or truck. If for medical reasons

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or age you cannot pack yourself, you may apply to get extra money to pay for help.

Be aware that if you return to Alberta and reapply for SFI within 12 months, if the cost of the move is worth more than one month's benefit, it will be recovered from you. If the cost is over \$1,000 you will be required to sign a recovery agreement.

- You need to go to court for a maintenance hearing or as a witness.
- You have to have a court ordered blood test.
- You need to return home or go to a safe place due to circumstances not related to a serious health risk.

UTILITIES

If you require an allowance to have water, power, or heat connected, you may request it ONCE. You must produce a utility bill or statement for the actual cost. This cost will not be recovered from you.

If your utilities have been disconnected due to late payment or arrears you may request the department to pay the cost of reconnection. This request can only be made ONCE and the cost to the department **WILL BE RECOVERED** from your benefits. It will only be issued after it is clear that the utility company will not accept payment by installment and reconnect your utilities.

A.A.D.A.C. ALLOWANCE

If you need alcohol or drug abuse treatment in a residential facility you will receive an allowance of \$15 per day. You may also request the cost of transportation to this facility. The facility must be one operated by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

SCHOOL EXPENSES

Alberta Family and Social Services provides school expenses for each child in a family. You can receive \$50 per school year for each child in elementary school and \$100 per year for each child in junior or high school.

NON EMERGENCY TRAVEL

You may request an allowance for non-emergency travel that will cover the cost of transportation, food, shelter and child care under the following circumstances beyond your control:

- You need a health service in another location that is covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act.

EMERGENCY ALLOWANCE

An emergency allowance can be issued to you or a member of your family if your circumstances meet ***all of the following*** conditions:

- there must be a serious health risk
- waiting is not possible
- there is nowhere else to go for help

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- what has happened was unforeseeable and beyond your control

If you are able to confirm ALL of the above you may apply for an allowance to cover food, shelter, clothes, transportation, child care, and repairs to your home or major appliances.

- **Food:** adult \$22 per month, child \$14 per month, CIN \$22 per month
- **Shelter:** the cost of a hotel, motel, or other shelter, for a maximum of two weeks
- **Clothing:** adult-\$214, child-\$160, CIN-\$160
- **Transportation:** cost of public transport or .09 cents per km of private transport
- **Child Care:** child care will be provided. Family members will not be paid to provide child care
- **Repairs:** essential repairs to home or major appliances if you own your own home. If you rent, the landlord must pay.

To receive these benefits you must verify them as follows:

- proof of fire
- proof of theft
- proof of medical condition (in writing from a doctor)
- proof of abuse (letter from doctor, police, restraining order)
- proof that repairs are essential to home or a written estimate on appliance repairs
- for all other emergency allowance written or verbal confirmation required

COMMON QUESTIONS

Can I do volunteer work and still receive income assistance?

This depends on what category you are in. It also depends on whether the volunteer work could lead to employment or is developing job skills you will be able to use in a job market. If the volunteer work is not related to future employment, the department will consider it a waste of time and will most likely tell you to stop.

Can I apply to SFI while working [waiting??] for EI?

Yes, but the money you receive from SFI while you wait for EI will be retrieved from you as soon as your EI payments begin at a monthly rate.

What happens if I have to stop my training or employment plan?

If you have to stop a program for *any* reason tell your worker immediately. If you do not tell your worker you will be considered non-compliant and will most likely be cut off assistance. There are acceptable reasons for interrupting your employment plan, e.g., sudden ill health, a death, a family crisis, etc. The important thing is to *stay in touch with your worker*.

If I am cut off assistance, can I reapply?

Yes you can reapply. You can reapply in 30 days if your situation has changed or gotten worse. you can reapply *every* 30 days.

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What is the purpose of the Family Maintenance Program?

The program is in place to make sure that the parent who is supposed to pay child support does so. The department "subrogates" the responsibility for making sure payments are made. All support payments are taken off the basic allowance you will receive. You will be asked to sign a form allowing the department to do this.

When I apply, will I be asked to go to an orientation if I am in the employable category?

Yes.

Will SFI pay for transportation to visit a sick relative?

No.

Does the department collect the money?

No, the department does not collect the money. The Maintenance Enforcement Program is administered by the Department of Justice.

Will you be referred to the Maintenance Enforcement Program whether you are currently receiving support payments for your children or not?

Yes.

Can Supports For Independence request a trustee to handle money given to an individual on assistance?

Yes, Alberta Family and Social Services department may appoint a trustee to handle funds for a client.

Will SFI replace lost or stolen cash?

No.

Will SFI health benefits cover the cost of psychological counselling?

No. Health benefits will only pay for psychiatric care.

2015

Anti-poverty activists^{Oct 18/97} pour out their hearts to Commons committee

JACK DANYLCHUK
Journal Staff Writer

Edmonton

Eliminating poverty, not tax cuts for the wealthy, should be the federal government's budget priority, the Commons finance committee heard Friday.

"We have seen what the government can do if they are motivated," anti-poverty activist Midge Cuthill told the committee on its one-day stop in Edmonton.

"We are asking the province and federal government to be as passionate and energetic about achieving a target of zero poverty by the millennium."

Most presenters echoed the message from the recent Alberta Growth Summit that placed re-investment in people ahead of tax cuts. They also said they want Ottawa to maintain a strong presence in social programs rather than give control to the provinces.

Committee chair Liberal MP Maurizio Bevilacqua said the lack of support for anything but tax breaks targeted for low-income families has been the dominant theme of the hearings, being held to aid the government in defining priorities for the next federal budget.

"Business and social groups are talking about building a stronger society and investing in health care and education," he said.

"That speaks to issues of values that are held dear by Canadians. There is no support for an across-the-board tax cut; now people are talking about targeted tax cuts for low-income Canadians. That's quite a change."

Cuthill had not been scheduled to speak, but Rev. Bruce Miller of the Quality of Life turned his time before the committee over to her and a woman who had just lost her social services benefits.

Addressing the committee from her wheelchair, Regina Parker said she lost her housing allowance because she moved in with her 21-year-old daughter, who is buying a condominium instead of renting.

"I live on \$400 a month; my medication is \$428 a month. I have no money to buy even a coffee. I am not to blame. I have worked. I have been a foster par-

"We have seen what the government can do if they are motivated. We are asking the province and federal government to be as passionate and energetic about achieving a target of zero poverty by the millennium."

— anti-poverty activist Midge Cuthill

ent. But I'm being penalized with a sub-standard life in one of the richest provinces in Canada."

Parker said she can't afford the medications, but can't stop taking even one without winding up in hospital and costing the government even more.

"They have no respect for the poor in this province," she said.

"There are children who haven't eaten anything but spaghetti for days. Nobody can afford hamburger. I know people who are contemplating suicide. Something has to be done."

Cuthill said the poor "aren't looking to be rich or anything."

"We're looking to make sure food is on our table, we have a roof over our head and there is child care so we can go to work."

The committee applauded the two women, but United Church of Canada moderator Bill Phipps wondered if the message would get beyond the hearings.

"A lot of time it has no effect, but I hope this time it does," said Phipps, who was in the audience for the presentations.

"The people who are most affected by cuts and poverty aren't often at these forums. I hope the committee listened and heard. Alberta is one of the richest jurisdictions in the world and it's a total obscenity that there is anybody in poverty."

Reform MP Deb Grey was also skeptical about how much weight will be given to the submissions.

"These people pour their heart and soul into this, so I hope the government does listen, but I haven't seen a lot of proof over the years," she said.

The politics of poverty

Advocates say number of poor Albertans growing

By AMANDA MORRALL
Staff Writer

Edmonton's poor pleaded with federal politicians for help yesterday, saying Alberta has turned its back on them.

"They have no respect for the poor in this province," a tearful Regina Parker told a house of Commons standing committee on finance.

Anti-poverty advocates, who earlier kicked off a Zero Poverty Campaign as part of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, told the committee Alberta's poor are growing in number, despite the province's economic boom.

"We, the poor, have had to pay a disproportionate price as a result of deficit cutting," said Midge Cuthill, spokesman for Edmonton-based Poverty in Action.

The committee, with MPs from all federal parties, is one of two travelling the country this week seeking input as Finance Minister Paul Martin prepares what may be the first balanced federal budget in 30 years.

Cuthill urged all levels of government to be committed to wiping out poverty as they have been to eliminating budget deficits.

She said funding cuts to social services, reductions in employment insurance, and reductions in provincial child-care subsidies and minimum wage levels have pushed more and more families into poverty.

"Most people I know are one or two paycheques away from living in poverty," said a single mother of two, a former welfare recipient.

Alberta Family and Social Services spokesman Bob Scott defended the province's record on poverty, arguing it has lowered the welfare rolls through job creation. "We're doing better than any other province in the country," said Scott.

But the Edmonton Social Planning Council said the province's poverty problem is no illusion.

Statistics Canada figures show that the number of children living in poverty in Edmonton grew by 15,000 between 1993 and



— ROBERT TAYLOR, AP

Relying on friends, food banks and free clothing enabled the Longtin family to make ends meet on \$12,000 in income last year. From left, Janette, Kelly, Steven and Andre Longtin in their Edmonton home.

1995 and that one in 20 residents lives in poverty.

"I challenge anybody to suggest poverty isn't getting any worse," said planning council spokesman Brian Bechtel.

Parker, whose \$400-a-month disability cheque doesn't even cover the cost of her

hold income totalled \$12,000 last year, said food banks, friends and free clothing have become a way of life.

"That's how we live, we have to help one another," said Longtin, known among friends as the Mill Woods Source for her knowledge of charitable groups.

Her friend, Janette Longtin, whose house-

For this family of six living on \$18,000 a year, life is anything but easy

An endless stretch to make ends meet

Journal Staff

Edmonton

Poverty, Deana Shorten is the first to admit, is different in Canada than it is in the Third World.

Deana, 33, her husband Stephen, 37, and their four children ages 11 months to eight years, aren't living on the street or begging for their food. But their life is a constant struggle to make ends meet on a meagre \$18,000 a year.

They are the working poor.

The family lives in a five-bedroom house in McCauley. They have a washing machine, a colour television and a stereo. They are never hungry, the children are clothed and educated, and there is just enough money for cigarettes, cable-TV and sometimes a case of beer.

But there is no clothes dryer, no car to drive; no extra money for vacations, lessons for the kids, meals at McDonald's, upgrading courses for the parents, or the new glasses and dentistry that Stephen badly needs.

The rug in their home is tattered, the walls stained; the playpen is missing a leg, and the furniture is mostly of the type you see streetside in the better neighbourhoods on trash day.

Since he lost a job as an unskilled welder a year ago, Stephen, who has a Grade 10 education, stays at home with the kids, and says that it's not such a bad life most of the time.



Chris Schwarz, The Journal

Deana Shorten holds her 11-month-old son, David

■ Child poverty deserves more attention than it's getting from the province, says Lisac/A14

although he admits "your self-confidence all gets blown."

Deana, who isn't quite able to share her husband's equanimity, has a three-month contract as a project assistant for Poverty in Action, a publicly funded program that tries to encourage the poor to pull themselves up through positive thought and the aid of people from the workforce who can teach new skills and confidence.

She makes \$1,000 per month. Family allowance and the GST rebate pay another \$500 per month.

Seven years ago in Vancouver, Stephen had a \$50,000-a-year job as a video distributor. But his job ended, the savings declined, the family moved to cheaper Edmonton, there were two unexpected pregnancies and one day the family found itself poor.

Deana has had a few low-paying jobs — but they always seem to be on contracts that aren't renewed. Stephen got a welding job through the provincial workfare program last year, but his subsidized employer worked him 68 hours a week with no overtime and only a half-hour break per day. When the paycheques started bouncing, he quit, and severed all government aid.

Their eldest, eight-year-old Tiffany, has emotional problems that have manifested themselves in violent behaviour and the setting of fires. She's on medication.

Profile of poverty

A new study by the Edmonton Social Planning Council reports the city has a heavy concentration of the poorest Albertans.

The study was designed to look at changes in poverty in Edmonton since the provincial government reformed its welfare program in 1993 and cut benefits by 13 per cent.

The report refers to "absolute poverty," which it defines as an Edmonton family of four living on an annual income of less than \$15,700 in 1995.

Edmontonians in absolute poverty

	1993	1995
Children*	9,103	24,427
Single-parent families	1,518	4,788
Two-parent families	2,275	5,390

*In 1993, one-third of Alberta children living in absolute poverty were living in Edmonton. By 1995, that figure had grown to 57 per cent.

The family is in arrears on its medical insurance, and although Stephen doesn't believe the government should be providing food and shelter, he does think there should be basic dental and medical assistance for children.

Deana, who once worked on a campaign for Pam Barrett, the New Democrat leader, is a little more activist-minded. She believes "zero poverty" is possible, and says it has been done in Sweden — though she insists she isn't advocating socialism.

Please see POVERTY/A13

POVERTY

Continued from A1

Straight welfare isn't the answer, she knows, but money must be available where needed to bolster families, and to provide training and redirection.

Both she and Stephen think money should be provided to the one parent who stays at home while the other is struggling at a minimum-wage job.

"There's no appreciation of a stay-home parent whatsoever," says Stephen — except at home, where the four children are visibly close to their

tall, bearded and even-tempered father. "I love you, daddy," says one of them, out of the blue.

The children, says Deana, do not yet know that they're poor. They live in a neighbourhood without ostentation; their Catholic school provides them lunches and field trips free; money is somehow scraped together for birthday gifts; and Deana is able to find the kids presentable hand-me-downs through her networks.

When the clothes are outgrown, she passes them on to the various Boyle-McCauley agencies. She tells the children, "We're sending them off to help other people who are less fortunate."

Daydreaming about rare possibilities

Eight women voice concerns of Alberta's poor

Eight women would like to welcome you to their very own Alberta Growth Summit.

Go ahead, sit down. They met at Boston Pizza on Jasper Avenue on Wednesday to daydream out loud about an unbelievable future for Alberta.

First, the introductions. We'll begin with Lina Hempel, a fiery woman who confronted former Liberal MLA Mike Percy at a mini-summit last week. When Percy encouraged the crowd to have faith in Klein government's summit, Hempel asked why he hadn't appointed delegates to represent Albertans experiencing wrenching difficulties after the radical budget cuts.

Percy contradicted her. He pointed to a guest list that includes the president of the Alberta Association of Social Workers and Big Sisters agency.

"But those are the services, the industry of poverty," she replied in frustration. She sat down with Midge Cuthill and the rest of her friends, still waiting for her answer.

"They belong to Poverty in Action, a group they organized last year to speak out against poor-bashing. Some have low-income jobs; others are subsisting on what's left of social assis-

tance. What they have in common is a lack of money, but there's nothing poor about them. If will-power made people rich, they'd be on Easy Street.

Back to the pizza parlour now where eight women are daydreaming about rare possibilities in Alberta's future.

"I would want my own home," begins Danette, "an apartment or maybe a townhouse." She lives with her boyfriend in the bedroom of a friend's place. Her daydream is a place in Alberta she can call her own, and wages to pay the rent.

Lorraine's wish list begins with free health care for all Albertans. You thought we had it? She's talking about the impossibility of paying health-care premiums if your income rises "one dollar above the subsidy level." She's also talking about the prescription drugs, eye care and dental treatment too many Albertans can't afford.

Amanda daydreams about legal rights and benefits for part-time workers. A few years ago, she held two part-time jobs that paid \$600 a month in total. She says Alberta needs a decent minimum wage and protective laws for people without unions. "There are

a lot of people who are in the working poor category, and they need more help."

Marlene says Alberta needs better training programs for people like her. "I went through one work program, and it didn't work out, and now I'm back to square one," she said. "My wish is that somewhere in school, in junior high maybe, young people could be taught the life-skills courses they need." Surviving shouldn't be such a struggle in Alberta.

"I have only one wish," says Regina Parker. "I want to be able to live, not just exist." Parker expects to be cut off social assistance next Wednesday. In the lingo of the welfare office, she's categorized as "unemployable with multiple barriers." She is a severe diabetic who gets around in a wheelchair, and she depends on expensive medication.

She says she can't qualify for Alberta's disability pension, AISH, because she's "not quite limped enough." When she moved in with a daughter who works in a shoe store, her social worker told her she'd have to depend on her family for income. "My daughter makes about \$7 an hour. She doesn't earn enough to support me."

"There should be home care for everyone who needs it," she says, "and enough subsidized housing for the handicapped."

Lina Hempel offers another daydream: "I'm working toward the day when saying 'I'm poor' isn't a bad thing. It doesn't mean that you're defrauding the entire economy, or that

Open up your eyes. If you cannot see the obvious, it is because you choose not to.

Lorraine

you're the direct cause for the deficit. It just means you're another human being who deserves dignity, and a little pat on the back for the steps that you take."

Midge Cuthill thinks Alberta needs "a whole lot less judgment."

"They're talking about us, they're making decisions about us, but they're not consulting us." Last week, for example, Cuthill tried to obtain a copy of the Canada West Foundation's new report on Alberta welfare recipients. She was told she'd have to pay \$20.

"I said, 'We could not afford to pay for this. Why are we put in the position of having to borrow and beg?' This report is about us."

Angela Jellicoe daydreams about more co-operation in Alberta. "We have to look at ourselves, and find out what we can do for each other," she said, quietly. "We have to take care of one another."

As I typed those words, Lorraine called back. "Is it too late to add one more sentence?" she asked. She and her friends offer last-minute advice to delegates at the Alberta Growth Summit:

"Open up your eyes. If you cannot see the obvious, it is because you choose not to."



Linda Goyette

Sept 30, 1997