

# **"BECAUSE OF THE COLOR"**

**A Study of Racial Tension In Northeast Edmonton**

**Edmonton Social Planning Council  
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# **1.0 Executive Summary**

The Edmonton Social Planning Council embarked on a study of racial discrimination in Northeast Edmonton over the last four months. The Northeast was cited in many reports of racial incidents and was therefore targetted in our project with a sample of seven neighborhoods. In all, over 140 people and organizations provided input into the study. There are problems in the areas of Dickinsfield (Evansdale), Glengarry, Londonderry, Clareview, Belvedere, Beverly and Abbottsfield and this summary will touch on some of the important issues.

About 75 questionnaires were sent to people who expressed an interest in the subject and 56 of those were completed and returned. Other contacts were made by interviewing service providers, community leaders, and school personnel, as well as having two large group discussions and a survey of service agencies in the area.

There were incidents of racial discrimination and feelings of tension in neighborhoods and in schools.

## **In the Neighborhood**

Out of the 56 questionnaires returned to us 87 per cent of respondents said they had either experienced or witnessed a racial incident. Racial tension was sensed by 56 per cent of the questionnaire respondents, while the other half were split between sensing unfriendliness or not sensing any racial tension at all.

Of the people interviewed in person, all said they had also witnessed a racial incident and all agreed there is a strain in the neighborhood due to both racism and poverty.

Interviewees said visible minorities seldom get involved with the community recreation programs. Community leagues and the City of Edmonton parks and recreation department were mentioned as failing to reach out to immigrants. Although many questionnaire respondents said they were aware of the community league programs a survey of agencies showed 71 per cent indicated racial minorities had little or no involvement. The agencies also showed there to be little involvement of minorities on boards, or as staff.

When visible minorities try to find a place to live they are often turned away with explanations there is no vacancy. The smell of their foods, being native or being on welfare are cited as being the major reasons for the inaccessibility to decent housing.

Of the questionnaire respondents 53 per cent indicated they were not informed about employment programs and training at their local manpower office. Respondents said in their job searches they encountered problems related to being immigrant or a visible minority, such as lack of ESL (English as a Second Language training), no Canadian experience, or no recognition for foreign qualifications.

### **In Schools:**

Fighting between minorities and white students because of their color, looks, or cultural background is common. Parents, students, school personnel and community workers say racism is a problem in schools. Of the 28 questionnaire respondents who answered the questions relating to racism in schools, 50 per cent felt teachers treat minority students less respectfully than "white" students. Almost half those responding to questions of how the schools handle racism, said the schools do not address the subject. Almost all the people interviewed said the schools could do more to address the problems. School personnel acknowledge there are some problems but they say there are only a few limited programs to meet the need.

### **Key Recommendations:**

- The City of Edmonton set up a blue-ribbon task-force to conduct a city-wide survey of racial discrimination and its impact.

- Committees made up of ethnic and minority group members, social service and recreation planners, community league representatives, and other community members should be set up in each of the neighborhoods covered by the study. The Edmonton Social Planning Council would be prepared to help in the establishment of the committees. These committees will be responsible for the following:

- a funded program to assist in the education (sensitization to cultural diversity and racial differences and issues around them) of staff and volunteers from social service agencies, community leagues, landlords, etc.

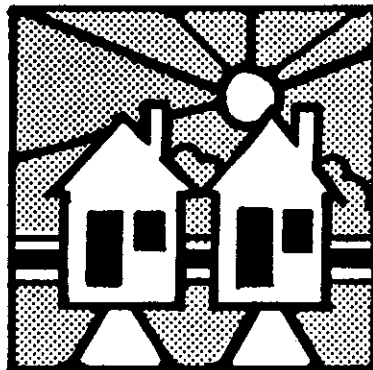
- the organization of activities that allow for people of different backgrounds to get together.

- That service agencies, community leagues, and other recreation facilitators, recruit members of ethnic and racial minorities as staff and volunteers (Boards of Directors etc.). This will ensure their participation in the development and implementation of appropriate programs and services.

- That the school boards also institute a funded program to sensitize teachers, counsellors and other school personnel in the area, about cultural and racial issues, which would enable them to deal more effectively with racial incidents in schools. The program will also be responsible for organizing anti-racism activities for students to combat the name-calling, ridiculing, fighting etc.

••That area police expand race relations training to become sensitized to cultural and racial issues and effectively handle cases that deal with aboriginals and other racial minorities.

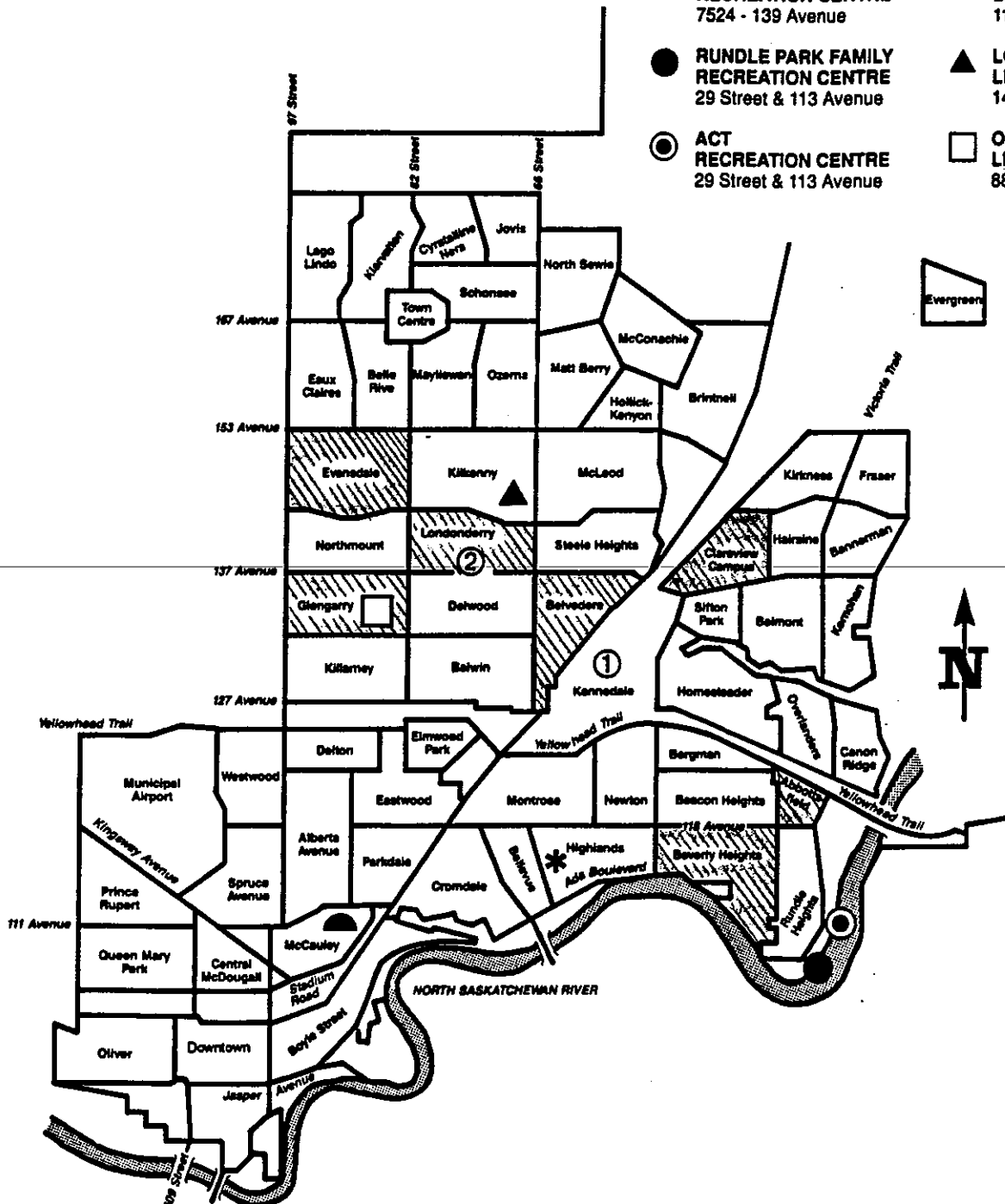
••Government, business, labor, religious groups, and community leaders develop a Community Action Program For Employment (CAPE) to create job opportunities or work experience in areas such as home management and improvement, day-care to allow neighborhood people to get together, or other remedial employment programs for citizens in the area.



## NORTHEAST DISTRICT

## LEGEND

- |   |   |    |  |
|---|---|----|--|
| ① | <b>NORTHEAST DISTRICT</b><br>12830 - 58 St. 428-5817                          | 🏟️ | <b>COMMONWEALTH STADIUM</b><br>11000 Stadium Road      |
| ② | <b>NORTHGATE LIONS SENIOR CITIZENS RECREATION CENTRE</b><br>7524 - 139 Avenue | ✳️ | <b>EASTGLEN LEISURE CENTRE</b><br>11430 - 68 Street    |
| ● | <b>RUNDLE PARK FAMILY RECREATION CENTRE</b><br>29 Street & 113 Avenue         | ▲  | <b>LONDONDERRY LEISURE CENTRE</b><br>14528 - 66 Street |
| ⦿ | <b>ACT RECREATION CENTRE</b><br>29 Street & 113 Avenue                        | □  | <b>O'LEARY LEISURE CENTRE</b><br>8804 - 132 Avenue     |



Source: City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department

## 2.0 Introduction

*"Because of the Color"* is a short study of racial tension in Northeast Edmonton. The Edmonton Social Planning Council conducted the study because there were several reports of racial incidents in some of the neighborhoods. The defined areas of the study include Dickinsfield (Evansdale), Glengarry, Londonderry, Clareview, Belvedere, Beverly, and Abbottsfield.

The purpose of the study was to obtain information from residents and workers in these communities, that would expand our knowledge of racism in this part of the city. It was also meant to document the feelings, and opinions of people in the area, in an effort to identify some general goals for reducing problems.

As we began work on the study, several areas of concern were identified. They were:

- **Racial incidents in neighborhoods and schools**
- **Community interaction**
- **Participation of ethnic and racial minorities in community programming**
- **Employment and housing**
- **The roles of social agencies, community groups and schools**
- **The role of the police**

The report will be released to people who participated in the survey, service providers, and advocates for minority communities. It is hoped that it will be used as a discussion paper to generate further conversation and to stimulate development of other ideas in efforts to address the issue.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is prepared to work with the community to establish a project in Northeast Edmonton to follow up on the findings. The Council encourages feed-back on the report and participation in the development of activities from people in Northeast Edmonton.

## 2.1 Methodology

In order to capture the experiences and perspectives of members of the various communities in this research, a primarily qualitative methodology was used. It included questionnaires/surveys, individual interviews with mainstream service providers and ethnic/immigrant aid agents, and mixed discussion groups.

Two different questionnaires were distributed. Seventy-five questionnaires focused on gaining input about racial discrimination in the area. These were given to individuals who expressed an interest in the subject; 56 were returned. Seven mainstream service agencies were surveyed about the participation of ethnic and racial minorities on boards and staff of the agencies. Five agencies responded.

Two group discussions with a mixed group of clients were arranged for us. Interviews were conducted with 20 individuals from mainstream service agencies, schools, ethnocultural groups, the police, and Edmonton's parks and recreation department. Generally speaking, the group discussions and personal interviews followed the questionnaire outline.

For a listing of participants, please refer to appendix "C."

## **2.2 Strengths and limitations of the study**

We received co-operation from several mainstream social and recreational planners. The information we collected through our conversations with them, strengthened what many members of the ethnic and racial groups had to say. The small group discussions arranged for us through these agencies facilitated information sharing and generated ideas for problem solving.

Efforts were made to include the perspectives and experiences of the diverse racial groupings of residents; however time was a constraint and as a result only a portion was involved in the process. Sensitivity to the issue of racism was another problem. Many people were reluctant to discuss the subject, and a number of questionnaires were not returned. There was difficulty arranging interviews with police in the district. Some minority parents feared talking.



## **3.0 Findings of the Study**

Many people are confused when talking about racism. They are not certain which incidents were racially motivated. Yet almost all participants expressed concern about occurrences in their neighborhood. There are concerns about incidents regarding gangs and fights in schools; tension between neighbors; attitudes; stereotyping, and other behaviors in the community that are, in most cases, discriminatory and racially motivated.

Many participants felt there was a relationship between racial discrimination and other life conditions. Poverty and unemployment were cited as directly relating to racism. Some experienced racism in their search for adequate housing. Others yet, felt the refusal by mainstream groups to accept new immigrants coming to Canada, are causes of frustration. It was felt that all these factors resulted in stress for individuals and tension and ill will in the neighborhood.

### **3.1 Questionnaire Results**

In the needs assessment questionnaire which was distributed in the area, we asked participants to give us feedback on racial discrimination in the area.

#### **A- Community understanding of racism and discrimination**

Respondents seemed to have a good understanding of the two terms. They defined the words in terms of hate, pay inequity, rejection due to color of skin, denial of dignity, prejudice, inequality, making fun of others, teasing and putting someone down.

**"Some white people hate black people."**

**"I think because of the color."**

**"Discrimination means white people have more salary than black people."**

## **B- Racial tension in the neighborhood**

Although some respondents feel that people get along well with their neighbors, the majority answered with "yes" when asked about the existence of racial tension in their neighborhoods. Many of them believe it exists either because of the way people communicate or because they don't communicate. Individuals speak to each other in bad language. They either show no respect or don't talk to each other at all. Poor attitudes exist and some favor one group over another. Isolation and frustration ensue. It was felt too, that low social and economic status add to the anger and resentment.

**"Yes, there is a lot of racial tension in my neighborhood."  
"Yes, there are people in the neighborhood that talk to each other in a bad language."  
"Lots of racial tension with native children. Employers tend to favor certain races. Social services does favor natives and discriminates against white single moms."**

## **C- Interaction of visible minorities with mainstream Canadians**

There is a low level of interaction between visible minority groups and mainstream Canadians in the neighborhood. A number of individuals from ethnic groups stated both verbally and in the questionnaire that some neighborhoods are not safe, and that there is lack of trust among neighbors. On the other hand, there are some who believe they relate fairly well to one another. They spoke enthusiastically of their good relationship with some immigrants in the neighborhoods. Others wanted to mind their own business.

**"The neighbors are friendly and helpful, but the community is not good. I have two bicycles stolen and a car with a broken window. I don't do anything in the community."  
"Very little connection except being at the recreation parks."  
"Its alright, but we don't connect with each other much. It is like a closed world; everyone lives in their own little world."**

## **D- Racial incidents in the neighborhood**

Eighty-seven per cent (87%) of the respondents stated there is a high number of racial incidents in their neighborhood, especially among teenagers. Although racial incidents were more prevalent during the Middle East Gulf War, they continue to take place regularly. Incidents vary from fights in schools to prejudiced teachers underestimating the ability of minority students. They include neighbors not respecting each other, and the denial of access to housing, employment and community league programs. They extend to incidents of rejection because people are on welfare or are native, and to incidents of name calling, verbal criticisms, and vandalism.

Many incidents were described.

**"My parents are racists. My sister was going out with a black guy and my parents didn't approve it and now they don't talk to her."**

**"I have been told that I'm not too good to live in neighborhood with others."**

**"One day I got out of my place and I saw the word "nigger" in big letters painted on my car's hatchback."**

## **E- Racism in Schools**

Respondents had great concern about the high level of racial incidents in schools. Fighting between minorities and white students because of their color, looks, or cultural background is very common. Community leaders and other people are also concerned about victimization of minority students and the formation of little gangs to fight back.

**"A black person and a white were fighting because the white called the black (nigger). The black guy hit the white guy with a baseball bat."**

**"A white guy gave a Lebanese guy a dirty look and starts arguing over what nationality is better and then started a fight."**

## E.1 How are minorities treated in schools by teachers and others

Half the questionnaire respondents stated that some teachers discriminate against minorities in schools. They expressed concerns about teachers who discredit the efforts of minority students. There is a need to acknowledge the special difficulties some minority students face. A smaller percentage feel minority students are treated fairly, on an equal basis with whites.

*"The teachers in most cases assumed that minorities are not intelligent enough as whites. Some students, despite their high academic knowledge, still had to work as hard as their white counterparts to be recognized in class by teachers."*

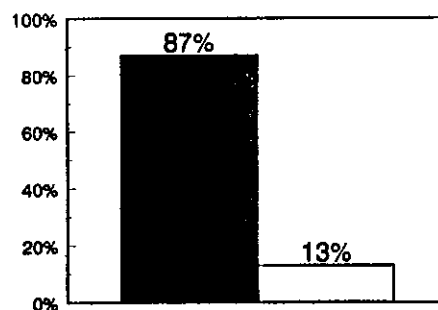
*"My nephew always get hit by other students and my sister-in-law taught him to hit back harder so that no one hits him again."*

## E.2 Do schools address racism?

Most respondents are not certain if schools address racism, but think that if they do, it is not addressed as effectively as it should be. Some junior high students stated that they talked about racism in class through discussions, workbooks, or through educational handout material and pins that say "Let us stop racism."

*"No they hide it like a sore thumb."*

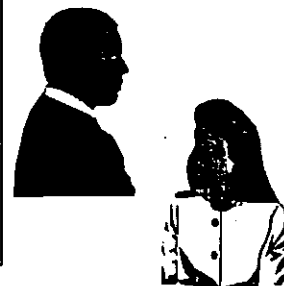
## Have you seen or heard of racial incidents in your neighborhood?



■ Yes □ No

n = 51

Six respondents did not respond directly to the question; their responses were excluded.



### **E.3 What kinds of programs do schools offer in an attempt to eliminate racial tension among students?**

Some respondents feel that school curriculums do not include any multicultural programs that deal with racism directly. Many of the comments state that schools do nothing to eliminate racial tension. Schools carry out multicultural events from time to time, people stated, but it is not focused on eliminating racial problems.

**"Our school here don't offer any kind of programs related to this issue."  
"I think they don't have anything that deals with it."**

### **F- Community participation in recreational programs**

The City of Edmonton's parks and recreation department and Community Leagues can play major roles to facilitate community interaction. Most of the main recreation programs are planned by these two bodies, but they are obviously not effectively getting mainstream Canadians and minorities to know each other. Often it is too expensive to participate in recreational programs. Often too, the racial attitudes of some community league members towards immigrants keep minorities away. It is a factor that contributes to minorities organizing their own recreational activities and associating with people of their own culture.

A large number of visible minorities have concerns about the cost of recreational programs and the people who plan and make decisions for others who are never consulted. A lot of immigrants, for example, do not participate in programs, despite the cost, because the programs do not meet their needs or interests.

#### **F.1 Recreational programs**

Forty-five per cent (45%) of the respondents indicated they don't participate in recreational programs because they don't know about them or because it is too expensive. Another 37 per cent say they usually take part in swimming programs, baseball and other events at Rundle Park.

**"I have not participated in any programs because I don't know nothing about the programs."  
"My neighborhood doesn't have any recreational programs."**

## F.2 Community leagues

Although many questionnaire respondents stated they get informed about community league programs, either by mail or by word of mouth, the study shows that many people in the neighborhood do not participate. Thirty per cent (30%) of the respondents say they have never participated in community league programs, mostly because they don't know of them.

There appears to be an obvious disapproval of the manner in which the community leagues operate. Some people expressed concerns about community leagues selecting the kind of people they want to serve and not advertising their programs to everybody in the neighborhood. They fail at reaching out to new immigrants, who in turn feel excluded.

An example of conflicts between minorities and community leagues is reflected in the current situation in the inner-city. At a recent meeting with the president and other members of the league, one member stated vehemently that immigrants made the neighborhood look like a "slum" or a "ghetto." It was also stated the area has had enough of immigrants, and that they hated the social service agencies that "push the immigrants to live in our neighborhood."

*"Immigrants who are disadvantaged and other poor people, in most areas, don't identify themselves with community leagues"*

*"Community leagues seem to be exclusively for middle class people."*

*"Individuals who run community leagues are mostly Caucasian."*

## G- Other Areas of Racism

In the community needs assessment questionnaire, we asked people two questions regarding other areas where they may experience racial discrimination: employment and housing.

### G.1 Employment

Fifty-three per cent (53%) of the respondents indicated they were not informed about employment programs and training at their local manpower office. Twenty-three per cent (23%) of the respondents said they were aware of them. We also asked people about the kinds of problems they encounter in their search for jobs. Many of the problems are related to being immigrant or visible minority.

"Lack of ESL, no Canadian experience, rejection because of color" were frequent responses. It is clear that in many instances immigrants and minorities are forced to work for low paying jobs where their past experiences are not used. The other problem is the non recognition of foreign qualifications that make it difficult for minorities to pursue their careers.

"I can't speak English very well. I can't find a job."  
"Discrimination due to speech."  
"Some people look at my color and say we are not good looking people."  
"Because I am a woman, I am old, and I am Spanish speaker."  
"Employers would not tell you because of your color or look we don't want you, so they say the position is filled, or you are not qualify for the job."

## **G.2 Housing**

While most of the respondents indicated they have had no problems finding decent housing, it is a problem for some who are on social allowance. Tenants sometimes complain to landlords about the smell of ethnic foods and the way minority residents associate with people and friends who are visiting - "crowds and noise" etc. For reasons like these, landlords reject minority tenants.

## **H- Community suggestions for the elimination of racism**

Since racism exists in the neighborhoods, what suggestions do you have to eliminate it? A large number of people felt community education is key. Cross-cultural education through workshops to enlighten young children to become aware of other cultures would be a step in the right direction. Cultural activities and events in schools and in their neighborhoods would also be appropriate. Community members, especially parents, have to become more knowledgeable about multiculturalism.

Other suggestions include more Boys' and Girls' Clubs, family support programs, and programs that teach religious values.

*"Education would be the right thing, however, education alone without the real willingness of the white community to learn about different people will fail. Willingness and understanding will help."*

*"More education, more religious values, and parenting classes because the cause is the families who never give support and love to their children."*

## **I- Perception of an ideal community**

Respondents described the ideal community as one which is peaceful, loving, respectful, safe, clean, and harmonious. They would like to see people living "as one family" enjoying each other, caring for each other. They wish people would get along, that there would be no fighting, no crime, no drugs or alcoholism. The neighborhoods would be friendly, quiet, and full of happiness with "everyone working." It would be a community with knowledge, education, and understanding of one another. It would be "a community like heaven." Only two respondents described the ideal community as an "all German Nazi community" and one that is filled "with lots of white people and very few of other kinds of nationalities."

*"I wish my community live like a family."*  
*"A community like heaven."*





## 3.2 Key Interviews And Conversations

### A- Mainstream service and recreation workers

#### Participant One



This participant works with families. At the time of the interview, the agency had no clients from any visible minority group. At one time about 10 per cent of the clients were native, Chinese and Chilean. The participant feels that it is very difficult for someone to be the lone minority parent in a support group with mainly white parents. For this reason, the agency always tries to find another family from the same culture to give support.

She stated that she deals regularly with clients who are denied housing because they are on supports for independence. Most of the clients are advised to report the incidents to the Human Rights Commission.

#### Participant Two



This person is a community youth worker. A youth needs assessment was conducted by the agency, to identify teenager problems and to involve them in working out solutions.

Racial tension among youth in the Dickinsfield area was identified as a problem because of the high concentration of immigrant youths. It is a high density housing area that consists of mixed cultural groups such as Arabs, Poles, whites, a few blacks, natives, and Oriental families. This participant feels that the situation is compounded because of the high number of families on supports for independence or have low incomes. She talked about the effects of peer pressure on the lives of children, and of the need to keep them away from hanging around the malls, the LRT stations etc.

The participant feels racial tension results in the formation of "school gangs" to "fight back." Some incidents end in violence which raised the concern of a lot of residents in the area. She mentioned a particular incident where a gang of Lebanese boys tried to beat up a girl on the street.

The participant feels that community leagues are particularly ineffective in involving people from the ethnic groups as members. She was aware though that some effort had been made to do so. She informed us of the Arab community's proposal to Queen Elizabeth High School for an Arabic language program. Many people in the neighborhood opposed the program. When Queen Elizabeth School was contacted regarding this program there was an angry demand to know who told us of the program and no other information was given.

**"Community Leagues are particularly ineffective in involving people from the ethnic groups as members."**

### Participant Three

This worker has observed that there are always racial incidents in the Dickensfield area. A large number of minorities are Lebanese families. The participant said that racial problems have started to snow ball. She described an incident that took place just a few days prior to our interview:

*Some Lebanese children beat up a white child. The Lebanese kids called their parents who got involved which angered the white parents against the Lebanese parents. It was a big crowd with everyone just watching.*

The participant stated that their agency is working toward the hiring of some immigrants from visible minorities to facilitate programs designed for minorities. She spoke of a Lebanese woman who worked in a successful program for the Lebanese community and their children. This participant talked about the need for awareness programs for immigrants to be knowledgeable about the resources available, such as welfare policy, legal aide, UIC, etc.

She said there is a need to bring people together through groups and workshops. She is one of the facilitators of an Arabic Women's group (initiated and proposed by an immigrant serving agency of the inner city). It teaches them about resources and how to deal with issues affecting their lives and their families. Arabic women felt safe to join the group. It is a very good example of getting people out to know and support each other.

**"There is a need to bring people together through groups and workshops."**

### Participant Four

This program co-ordinator at a social service agency reported on incidents of racial tension in the Beverly and Abbottsfield areas. A lot of incidents take place at junior high schools and even some elementary schools where the students are predominantly Spanish and native. The children get beaten up and there is a lot of name calling.

The participant talked about the large number of families on supports for independence and indicated that poverty prevents people from interacting with others in the community. People have to pay high fees for programs for adults and sports programs for children. Even free programs, organized by parks and recreation, are not well attended because these programs are not developed to fit the particular interest and needs of minorities. This participant stated that: "Community leagues are exclusively for middle class people and therefore, minority groups and poor people do not identify themselves with any community league in the area."

**"Even free programs organized by parks and recreation are not well-attended because these programs are not developed to fit the particular interests and needs of minorities."**

### **Participant Five**

This participant is another youth project worker in the area. He stated "Kids in kindergarten and elementary levels are color blind," but he understands well the problems for students at the junior high school level. He thinks that the formation of junior high school and neighborhood "gangs" is one way students try to protect themselves.

### **Participant six**

This participant is a parks and recreation employee at the Northeast office. She stated that the department offers a variety of programs and activities for adults and children in the community. Some of the programs for children, for example, are themes developed around different issues to help children make the right choices and to become aware of their leisure time. The participant stated that people do not complain about the nature of the programs and they do participate in them. Sometimes there are problems among children that show prejudice and discriminatory behaviors. For example in sports, some children refused to join teams where immigrant children are involved.

**"Some children refuse to join teams where immigrant children are involved."**

When asked about the level of participation of visible minority groups in programs, the participant stated that a lot of immigrants do not respond or show up for programs and do not pay attention to what is going on around them. This is why it is hard to know what their needs are. She gave an example of programs made for the Vietnamese community in central Edmonton neighborhoods where the Vietnamese did not show up.

**"A lot of immigrants do not pay attention to what is going on around them."**

## B- Immigrant service agents, ethnic and aboriginal leaders



### Participant One

This service provider believes minorities in Canadian society suffer racial discrimination in different ways. Racial tension is very common in schools and in neighborhoods, but people try to avoid it or ignore it. "People start to complain when the problem goes so far," she said. She stated very strongly "Something has to be done to stop racism."

The participant spoke of immigrants living in such "turmoil," because they are afraid of the police and any government authorities. That is the reason they rarely report racial incidents. She gave an example of refugees. Because they suffered back home from such authoritative bodies, it is difficult for them to complain. "Some of them are not Canadian citizens yet, and feel they have no right to complain," she said. She blamed the media for the increase of racism.

The participant also said "white Canadians" always talk about multiculturalism and immigrants and how they want to help immigrants, but there is no meaningful consultation or involvement of minorities in the talking or planning.

The participant mentioned the lack of trust and safety in the neighborhoods. She talked about people not knowing each other, about the hate, the stereotyping, and the labelling by people who contribute to the problem. The informant stated that people from different backgrounds in the community should start to know each other and feel safe. "They have to create opportunities to get together as one community and to interact and participate in ethnic and cultural activities and share ethnic foods etc., then trust will come" she said.

**"Something has to be done to stop racism!"**

When asked about racial incidents, she expressed concern about the disregard with which police appear on the scene. At times it is frightening to see more than one police vehicle on the street. As well, she was frustrated by the judicial system; she felt some judges take the side of white people. This participant occasionally represents Salvadoran families on police matters, and in court cases regarding racial incidents.

She related the following stories:

- *White kids from grade six tend always to beat up immigrant kids from grade two. This problem has gone so far that the police were quite often involved. A Salvadoran family was involved because their kids got beaten up many times. The Salvadoran parents got involved to protect their kids during the fight. The Salvadoran parents reported the matter to school teachers, but nothing was done to stop it. Then the Salvadoran parents called the police, and after investigating,*

*the police believed the white parents, not the Salvadorans. One day the Salvadoran father became angry and tried to strangle one of the white kids from grade six. The police were involved again, and this time it resulted in a court case. The Salvadoran father was charged with assault.*

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- *A Salvadoran family lives next door to a white family. The white family has a young daughter who is a friend of the Salvadoran boy who is younger than the daughter. One day the white parents called the police and accused the Salvadoran boy of sexually abusing their daughter. A number of police cars appeared in the neighborhood to investigate the incident. The scene was frightening to neighbors. After investigating, the police found that neither the boy nor the girl had done anything wrong.*

## **Participant Two**

This participant is a leader in the Arab community. He stated there are a lot of racial incidents in schools and in the neighborhood. Arab children and their parents are under a lot of pressure, as they are harassed everywhere in the neighborhood. "The Canadian society is based on discrimination," he said. He stated that many incidents happened during the Gulf War in the Middle East when Arab people, especially women were harassed, assaulted, and called names.

- He related this incident about people's attitudes towards Arabs. The incident was about a children's story book that was placed in the public library. The book contains a picture of a camel and a caption "Do you know why Arabs lost the Gulf War? Because they are stupid." Arab parents felt offended by these comments and complained to library officials requesting the removal of the book. The participant commented angrily that insulting comments should not be put in children's books. Children need to be taught good things "It seems" he continued "that this kind of attitude towards Arabs never stops."

Arabs, he felt are always labelled "terrorists"; Arab women are isolated and criticized by other people because of their culture and the perception that they are dependent on men. Arab Canadian born children are confused and surprised when they are called names, as they think of themselves as Canadians who should be treated fairly.

The participant agreed that low income and poverty increased tension and frustration. He's aware of about 60 Arab families who are on supports for independence. Many of them lack education. Some need ESL. Their unemployed status creates bad feelings as they are unable to provide for their own needs.

He stated that a lot of minorities don't get jobs "not because of the lack of qualifications, but because of the color of their skin," he said. He talked about the

difficulties for immigrants even when they get jobs. He used the example of the Arabic taxi drivers who experience discrimination because of their brown color. He said that some drivers came to him to complain about people who say things like: "Are you a Paki?"; "You Arabs take our jobs." He stated that Arab drivers are offended by those comments when this is not the case. "Although Polish drivers are immigrants and have an accent" he continued, "nobody discriminates against them because they are Europeans and white."



### **Participant Three**

This participant is a professional from the aboriginal community, who works in the area of multiculturalism. He is very concerned about racism and the suffering of aboriginal people. He feels that natives are not accepted even by immigrants who suffer rejection themselves. He is angered by the typical stereotypes of natives that persist, and the labels of lazy, drunk, etc. that are usually ascribed to them. He related the following incident:

- He and his wife went to a restaurant around 118th Ave. and 81 St. One person in the restaurant started laughing with his friends and made jokes about Indians. He told the person, "I am offended by your taste of humor." Shortly after, that person and his friends left the restaurant, and he followed them. He saw them go into a Highlands area school. Since he had been previously invited to talk to students about multiculturalism at that school, he complained to school officials about the restaurant incident. He never received any response. Not even a letter of apology.

The participant spoke generally of racism in hospitals. He felt that doctors, nurses, and security guards as well as ambulance personnel treat native Indians poorly. Concern was expressed about the high number of native people in prisons and native youth at the Young Offenders Centre. "Natives" he said "are jailed as result of hatred and discrimination against Indians by various levels of governments and other people in the community." He thinks the attitudes of many non-native police officers are racist.

This participant feels a sense of sadness about his people not being given a fair chance to participate in the community. Funding by provincial or municipal family services toward native programming is very limited.

**"Natives are not accepted even by immigrants who are rejected themselves."**

A number of native families and individuals are scattered in different areas of the Northeast he said. He talked about many incidents and complaints of people who do not want to live next door to aboriginal people. Also, when there are vacant houses in the neighborhood, neighbors like to see other families occupying those residences rather than aboriginal families. Aboriginals hear residents say to

landlords: "I hope you are not bringing a native Indian here!" This participant also said that "Some people build high fences so as not to see their Indian neighbors."

**"Some people build high fences so as not to see their Indian neighbors."**



#### **Participant Four**

This person is a multicultural program co-ordinator who has had a lot of experience working with immigrants. She stated emphatically that there is a lot of racial tension in Northeast Edmonton. "Some Canadians discriminate against others in a polite way. They make excuses." She gave an example of landlords who reject people when they apply for an apartment by saying: "Sorry we have too many applicants" or "No vacancy." She feels that "Canadians are prejudiced but they hide it. Racism here is masked by "politeness" and it is "passive." She thinks there is a need for people to talk about racism openly and share experiences in order to educate themselves and other people and to give them a chance to know about other cultures.

The participant believes that it matters not if immigrants are highly educated and qualified. They still suffer discrimination, especially dark people. She knows a well educated dark man who teaches at the University of Alberta, but on the street he is called "Paki." This makes him feel degraded. She also spoke of poor people who have no power, and who can easily be pushed around and of employers who refuse to hire immigrants, most particularly black people.

The participant pointed out that racism also exists among immigrants themselves. At the agency the Japanese and Europeans do not want to associate with black people.

**"At the agency, the Japanese and Europeans do not want to associate with black people."**

#### **Participant Five**

The co-ordinator of an ESL program at an immigrant serving agency gave this example of a story shared by one of her students:

*The student is an East Indian woman who immigrated from Kenya. She applied for an apartment but was rejected because the landlord didn't want people of her kind living in the building. He complained of the smell of their food and, therefore, he stated he had had enough. The woman never laid a complaint against him as she is new to Canada and was afraid to be in trouble.*

## **C- School Personnel**

### **Participant One**

This school counsellor stated there are no racial problems at his schools, yet children claim there are. However, he indicated that a native student had recently given notice to leave his present school to attend Ben Calf Robe Junior High, which is for natives only. The counsellor stated there were no complaints against teachers. He also believed that "racial tension happens because of lack of support from parents and the community." The counsellor described some programs that his school offers to ease racial tension. Some of these programs are religious in nature. He felt the ESL programs offered, and materials translated in different languages, both assist in creating an open environment at the school.

### **Participant Two**

This is another school counsellor at a different school in the area. He stated that racial incidents occur occasionally where he works. Concern was expressed about another school (in Abbotsfield) at which he is also counselling. He said "there are more racial incidents in that area because many of students are from the visible minority groups (native and Spanish).

The counsellor spoke at length about a Ukrainian bilingual program at the school. While the program is very successful because of the support it receives from Ukrainian parents, it has created a lot tension in the school because it is designated for one specific group. The resentment is reflected in the negative manner in which the non-Ukrainian students refer to the children in the program. They are often heard saying things like: "The Ukrainian class...!" or "Those Ukrainian kids...!."

### **Participant Three**

A school principal stated there is less racial tension at his school now than there was in the past. In his experiences with racism at another school, teachers tried to inform the parents, but the problem increased because parents started blaming each other for being racists. "The school started to deal with students directly without telling their parents" he said. He stated that this technique works better. The principal stated that racism can be addressed in classes, but the school has no special programs that directly deal with racism.

### **Participant Four**

Many residents pointed to a particular elementary school as having a lot of racial tension. The principal spoke about survival as the number one issue for most



people living in the neighborhood. "Many families are on welfare or have low incomes" she said "so tension in the area of Abbottsfield and Beverly is common. People don't pay attention to racism." She sees the problem not as racism or discrimination but linked to poverty and frustrated people. She said a lot of people in the neighborhood lack education. There is a need for ESL. Immigrant children like to speak their own languages and this sometimes offends and frustrates the others.

While she had not witnessed or heard of racial incidents in the community, she understood that there is a lot of fighting in the apartments. When racial incidents take place at the school, individual teachers deal with the students involved. Students are suspended for three days. When asked about cross-cultural education, the principal said they have to stick to curriculums, but the school hosts some cultural events. She talked positively about the native awareness program which the school supports. Non-native students participate and get to know native culture. The school plans to initiate a similar program with Spanish students. The Principal stated that Spanish and native children seem to get along well at the school. She feels there is a need for programs to better meet the needs of Spanish and native students.

The principal felt community leagues do not help the community very much. "Disadvantaged minorities and others with low incomes are not aware of available services, nor how to access them" she said. She too expressed concerns about the cost of programs that prevented some children from participating. She mentioned the issue of the safety of children. Children stay away because parents are not always available to take them to the programs.

**"Immigrant children like to speak their own languages.  
This sometimes offends and frustrates the others."**

### **Participants Five and Six**



Through telephone interviews, two key participants from the Edmonton Public and Catholic School Boards stated that racism should be addressed in social studies program, religious studies program (Catholic schools only), and the health studies program. The "pro-social" skills programs offered at some schools would also be an avenue to address the issue. One of them said that schools can choose to deal with racial problems incidentally but would leave it to each individual school. The other participant stated that teachers and staff are sensitive about dealing with this issue.

## D- Miscellaneous comments by participants

- One key participant stated that Arabic students face frequent harassment and discrimination at schools in the Dickinsfield area.
- One participant talked about how people feel they are “economically depressed,” and sometimes they even feel too depressed to go for free swimming lessons.
- Another key participant stated that students are given assignments that deal with negative issues about aboriginals. He feels it is important to have students learn about positive aspects of native history and culture, so the influence on young natives will be positive too.
- An ESL student mother from Lebanon at an immigrant serving agency came with her family to Canada about two years ago. She told this story about her 13-year old daughter who attends a junior high school in Castledowns.

*According to Arab tradition, women and men must not have any kind of relationship before marriage,” she said. Her daughter acts accordingly, but this was creating tension for her. Boys and girls criticized her behavior. She was called names and they offended her culture. The mother stated that her daughter is not safe at school and that her son went to school to complain about what is happening to his sister. He was even involved in fights with other students to protect his sister.*

- A community leader spoke of immigrant children of South-Asian background being called “Pakis.” She said that when students complain to teachers about it, teachers ignore it and take no action to stop it. This person feels there are gaps in school curriculums in terms of multiculturalism. She feels that children of refugee families suffer at schools trying to cope with many problems such as English as a second language. She said teachers seem to be unaware of their particular problems, and often label them as “slow learners.” She also said that immigrant children are afraid to have their parents accompany them to school because other students laugh at their parents.

**“Immigrant children are afraid to have their parents accompany them to school because other children laugh at their parents.”**

### 3.3 Group Discussions



#### A: Group Discussion One



The participants of this discussion consisted of a number of staff members of a social service agency in the Londonderry area. They reiterated that many racial incidents took place during the Gulf war. There was name calling and fighting in schools. They talked about gangs of minority students who fought back, and of the Arabic women who were criticized for allowing their husbands to take full control of their lives. They feel the situation is made worse because working parents have not enough time to monitor their children's behavior.

One member stated that racial problems occur mostly among junior high students, and overcrowding at the schools creates racial tension. Agency staff agreed that schools are playing no effective role in eliminating racism. Another staff member observed that most parents don't have control of their children. Discipline is very lax in the homes, therefore, school staff can do little to influence them.

One staff member felt that racial incidents take place because of the lack of communication between visible minorities and mainstream Canadians. The language barrier is seen as a contributing factor. Another member told of her own experience of being harassed by neighbors because she is married to a black person. Her kids were called "niggers" and "darky." She wishes that people would respect others and look for their inner values instead of making judgements on skin color alone.

**"Schools are playing no effective role in eliminating racism."**

#### B: Group Discussion Two

The staff members of this agency work with everyone in the neighborhood including visible minority immigrants such as the Lebanese, Asians, aboriginals, and Hispanics. Most of the people with whom they come into contact are on supports for independence. Staff here also indicated that major problems and incidents of racial discrimination took place during the Middle East Gulf War. Many Arabic people were harassed. Children played war games and demonstrated racist behaviors and attitudes. For example, staff members heard Canadian children say "We are the Americans and we are going to win the war." After the war ended, Arab children were heard saying "War is over and the bad guys won." There are still a few cases of racial incidents that take place in the neighborhood and the agency intervenes to resolve the problems.

In the discussion focusing on community interaction, staff mentioned that a lot of people in the neighborhood attend and participate extensively in summer events. They feel that crowding during programs and other activities is one main reason that immigrants often do not attend these neighborhood events. Some staff members noted that immigrants have more of an interest in ethnic foods and in other languages.

One staff member stated that her children get along well with the children of her Spanish neighbor. They share things and food, but she stated that the Spanish parents didn't allow their children to come to her house and stay for a long time. She doesn't know why, but thinks maybe it is a "cultural thing."

**"Major problems and incidents of racial discrimination took place during the Middle East Gulf War."**

### **3.4 Racial Tension and the Police In the Community**

Although the residents and community workers gave strong evidence of racial incidents in the area, police contacted stated matter-of-factly they get no complaints of racism. Two resource officers attached to schools in the area, were contacted. They stated clearly that everything is fine and there are no complaints of racial problems in the area.

One Constable from the Multicultural Relations Unit at the downtown police department indicated they haven't heard of nor received complaints regarding racism. He mentioned that he sits on committees of ethnic communities that deal with issues such as racism. He talked about the role of the unit in reaching out to communities and working with them closely to develop understanding and a good relationship with police. They also provide schools with information about different issues, and offer suggestions for effective solutions.

There are some reasons why police may not receive discrimination complaints. Immigrants are afraid to report to police because of their experiences back home. This is especially true for refugees. For some it is because of their immigration status in Canada. Another factor is that immigrants are afraid to see the police in the neighborhood. Also there is some indication they are disappointed in the way police handle the matters.

### **3.5 Survey of Agencies**

A survey of seven agencies was conducted to determine the level of participation of visible minorities, as well as the efforts agencies make to hire minorities. Results are only estimates. Five of the seven agencies surveyed show very minimal participation of minority members on their board of directors and in the development of service programs. Only one agency has roughly 33 per cent of its staff from visible minorities and the others have almost none. Each of the agencies has a low percentage (less than 25 per cent) of minority members.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The study shows clearly that racism and racial discrimination exist in North-east Edmonton. Racial incidents take place in schools and in the neighborhoods. Some of these incidents are violent and result in the formation of "school gangs." Members of racial minorities are harassed and their property vandalized. Neighbors are disrespectful to each other and name-calling is common. Moreover, many see racism as the reason for their poverty and unemployment.

The study also points to a low level of interaction between visible minorities and mainstream Canadians. Participation of minority groups in social and recreational programs is poor. The high cost of recreational programs often prevent children from participating in neighborhood activities. Minorities are rarely consulted when developing neighborhood programs and so the programs often do not meet the interests and needs of many minorities.

Many area residents agree that schools do not address racism as effectively as they should. Community leagues could definitely play a role in bringing people together through recreational or multicultural programs.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

- 1.** The City of Edmonton set up a blue-ribbon task-force to conduct a city-wide survey of racial discrimination and its impact.
- 2.** That major funding bodies facilitate a one-day workshop to develop an inventory of social services and recreational programs in the area. The workshop will also determine how aboriginals, ethnic and racial minorities are or are not accessing these programs.
- 3.** Committees made up of ethnic and minority group members, social service and recreation planners, community league representatives, and other community members should be set up in each of the neighborhoods covered by the study. The Edmonton Social Planning Council would be prepared to help in the establishing of the committees. These committees will be responsible for the following:
  - a funded program to assist in the education (sensitization to cultural diversity and racial differences and issues around them) of staff and volunteers from social service agencies, community leagues, landlords, etc.
  - The organization of activities that allow for people of different backgrounds to get together.
- 4.** That the proposed program (#3) and all other programs be developed in consultation with minority group leaders.
- 5.** That government, community leagues and service agencies become involved with the program (#3), and explore ways of sharing their buildings and other resources to assist in the implementation of this program.
- 6.** That all mainstream agencies, staff and volunteers discuss, develop and commit themselves to serve equally the diverse racial and cultural populations of Northeast Edmonton.
- 7.** That service agencies, community leagues, and other recreational facilitators, recruit members of ethnic and racial minorities as staff and volunteers (Board of Directors etc. ). This will ensure their participation in the development and implementation of appropriate programs and services.
- 8.** That the school boards also institute a funded program to sensitize teachers, counsellors, and other school personnel in the area, about cultural and racial issues, which would enable them to deal more effectively with racial incidents in schools. The program will also be responsible for organizing anti-racism activities for students to combat the name-calling, ridiculing, fighting etc.

**9.** That area police maintain records of calls and incidents that relate to racism and ensure citizen access to these records. This will assist in the monitoring of racial incidents in these neighborhoods and in the development and change of programs.

**10.** That area police expand race relations training to become sensitized to cultural and racial issues and effectively handle cases that deal with aboriginals and other racial minorities.

**11.** That Canada Employment and Immigration and other relevant agencies establish outreach efforts to inform citizens in the area about training and employment programs. These efforts should include plans to recruit visible minorities as participants.

**12.** Government, business, labor, religious groups, and community leaders develop a Community Action Program For Employment (CAPE) to create job opportunities or work experience in areas such as home management and improvement, day-care to allow neighborhood people to get together, or other remedial employment programs for citizens in the area.



## **6.0 Appendices**

- A. Community Questionnaire Results (Supplied upon request)**
  - B. Agency Survey Questionnaire Results (Supplied upon request)**
  - C. Participating Agencies**
  - D. Sample Questionnaire**
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# Appendix C

## Participating Agencies

- The Candora Society of Edmonton.
- Beverly Community & Family Social Services.
- St. Sophia Elementary School.
- St. Maria Goretti Elementary School.
- Elizabeth Seton Elementary and Junior High School.
- Neighborhood Activity Association of Belvedere (NAAB).
- Dickinsfield Amity House.
- Arab Canadian Friendship Association.
- Unity Centre.
- Glengarry Community & Family Social Services.
- City of Edmonton Parks & Recreation (North-East Office).
- Belvedere Community Police Office.
- Kara Family Support Centre.
- Ben Calf Robe Junior High School.
- Salvadoran Social Services.
- The Metis Nation of Alberta.
- Changing Together Centre for Immigrant Women.
- Edmonton Immigration Services Association (EISA).
- The Multicultural Relations Unit of the Edmonton Police Department.
- Edmonton Public School Board.
- Edmonton Catholic School Board.
- Queen Elizabeth High School Resource Officer.
- O'Leary High School Resource Officer
- Alberta Human Rights Commission Office.

# Appendix D

## Edmonton Social Planning Council

### Community Needs Assessment

This survey is being conducted in different parts of North-East Edmonton. It is meant for people to give opinions and observations on different issues and problems in the area. The study pays specific attention to discrimination experienced by racial and ethnic minorities in the following areas: employment, schools, social services, access to recreational programs, youth programs, housing, community and multicultural events, and generally in the activities of daily life. It also makes an attempt to gauge the level of community interaction between minority groups and mainstream groups in the community. Your answers will help us identify your needs.

1. Where are you originally from?
2. Do you feel racial tension in your neighborhood, or do people get along well with each other?
3. How do you connect with your neighbors and your community?
4. What is your understanding of the words racism and discrimination?
5. Have you witnessed or heard of any racial incidents, in schools or in your neighborhood? Can you describe one or two:

6. Have you or your family ever participated in events organized by the community league? How do you come to know about community league programs and events?
7. What types of programs would you like to see in your community?
8. If you are currently unemployed, have you been made aware of employment and training programs available at your local Manpower office?
9. What kinds of problems have you encountered in your search for work?
10. If you feel that discrimination exists in your community, what kinds of solutions would you suggest to eliminate the problem?
11. Have you ever experienced discrimination in your search for housing? If yes, please describe what took place.

12. Do you or your children participate in the recreational programs in your neighborhood? If not, why?

13. How are minority students treated in the schools by teachers and other students?

14. Do schools address racial problems?

15. What kinds of programs do schools offer in attempts to eliminate racial tension among students?

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16. If you were to describe the ideal community, how would you describe it?

17. Are you between the ages of: "please circle one"

under 18	{ 18 - 25 }	{ 25 - 30 }	{ 30 - 35 }	{ 35 - 40 }
{ 40 - 50 }	{ 50 - 60 }	Over 60 years old.		

18. Are you: {male} {female}

## Edmonton Social Planning Council

### Agency Survey

This survey is a follow up to the Community Needs Assessment questionnaire, we distributed earlier this summer. It is directed to mainstream and immigrant aid agencies that serve immigrants. It will help us identify the number of minority groups in each area and the numbers of ethnic and racial minority individuals who work in these agencies.

1. What is the name of your agency?
2. How many members does your agency have?
3. How many members of your agency are from ethnic minority groups?
4. How many members are the agency's Board of Directors?
5. How many staff members do you regularly employ: (permanent F/T, permanent P/T, contract, grants etc.)
6. What percentage of your clients are from minority ethnic groups?  
Actual % \_\_\_\_\_ Estimate % \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the level of participation of ethnic and racial minority individuals in the area that your agency serves? Give numbers:

_____ Staff members	_____ On the Board of your society
_____ Developing service programs	_____ Students (E.S.L.)
_____ Advisory committee	_____ Social Activities
_____ Fundraising	_____ Volunteers