Edmonton
Social Planning Council

INFORMATION PACKAGE

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Edmonton Social Planning Council

WHO WE ARE

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, social action organization, which has been influencing the development of social services and community groups in Edmonton since 1940.

WHAT WE DO

APPLIED RESEARCH: assisting social agencies by collecting information on the latest social trends; carry out research contracts for social agencies and governments; evaluate existing programs and services

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY ANALYSIS: acting as a "broker" in the community, convening "like-minded" organizations and individuals in order to promote discussion of current issues and prepare appropriate responses or actions

TRAINING AND CONSULTATION: assisting volunteer organizations in planning and managing their activites more effectively; providing "how-to" resource materials (eg.The Board/Staff Workbook); training workshops for volunteer boards

WHERE WE'VE BEEN INVOLVED

For 49 years, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has been involved in promoting public awareness of social issues and helping people take collective action. Some of our **recent activities** have included:

* a pilot project that provided support services to people who were unemployed
* the development of of a network of individuals and agencies providing advocacy assistance to people receiving social allowance benefits
* publishing a Directory of Libraries in Edmonton which contain social issues information
* participating as a member of the Community Needs Assessment Working Group in identifying future trends for seniors and youth in Edmonton
* presenting a paper on the "Future of Health Care for Albertans" to the Premier's Commission on Health Care in the fall of 1988
* publishing quarterly a factsheet on Alberta, *Alberta Facts*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about the Edmonton Social Planning Council, call or write us at:

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A Continuing Commitment to Community

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Profile and Perspectives on Poverty in Edmonton

Peter Faid
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INTRODUCTION

Periodically our society rediscovers poverty. When we do our attitudes towards the poor generally reassure us that poverty is really the result of individual shortcomings and that our collective responsibility is quite limited. When we see poverty in our midst, we reassure ourselves that there is a comprehensive safety net of income security benefits and community agencies that will always be there to relieve the worst of the financial hardships that the poor must face. When poverty makes it reappearance, we feel reassured by our provincial governments officially prescribed optimism that 'we are poised for years of steady growth and job security'. We learn that just a gentle massage to the province's economy and another round of tax concessions to major companies will once again see unemployment and poverty drop to insignificant levels.

In the past few years, many of us in this community have again rediscovered poverty. But this time I am optimistic that our responses will be different. We have begun to question our well worn assumptions about the causes of poverty and the plight of the poor. We have begun to openly challenge the economic and social prescriptions offered by our governments. We have begun to educate ourselves about the extent of poverty in our city and its many damaging manifestations. We have begun the long process of seeking change in our public policies and our community attitudes so that the lives of those who live day by day with the cruel uncertainties of poverty might be improved.

As we begin this important workshop on Poverty and the Schools, I see it as my responsibility to contribute to our collective questioning, challenging, educating and changing. How accurate are our perceptions of poverty and the poor? What do we understand about the impact of unemployment and poverty on families and communities in Edmonton? How appropriate are our current responses to poverty in Edmonton? What is the profile of poverty in this city; especially for our families and our children? Finally, what actions must we as a community of the concerned be prepared to take if we are to deal effectively with the problem of poverty in our midst?

OUR PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

It has been suggested that the most important things that we can ever learn about any society are the things that it tends to take for granted. We tend to take poverty and unemployment for granted because the assumptions we make about those who are poor or unemployed help us to explain away the condition. Why is it when the evidence of the damaging consequences of poverty and unemployment to our families and our communities continues to mount that our attitudes as a society seem to become even harsher? In the words of Martin Rein, the iron law of welfare comes into play; so that those who need help the most do in fact receive the least.

So what are these assumptions about poverty that we have to be prepared to question? Poverty is a manifestation of individual failure. We must all be responsible for our own welfare for to do otherwise would be to weaken individual initiative and make us a burden on the rest of society. If we replace our individual responsibility with a network of publicly funded and operated human services we will simply reward improvidence and encourage laziness. Governments do have a role, but only a very residual one. First call must be on our own resources and those of our family. Then we may call upon the community for help if our own resources are not sufficient. While we all recognise that we do have individual choices to make it is nevertheless abundantly clear that the increases in unemployment that we have seen in the last few years have not been the result of personal inadequacy. The greatest majority of those who have lost their jobs did so because of corporate and business decisions that were quite beyond their control. Yet we persistently reinforce the notion that our unemployed are in their predicament because of some individual failing. Consequently we in turn propose solutions to the problem of unemployment and poverty, such as introducing cuts in already inadequate welfare benefits because of our unchallenged belief that this will somehow restore individual responsibility. Not only are these solutions likely to prove ineffective in responding to the needs of the poor, they are in fact likely to be detrimental and actually increase human suffering. As part of a community response to welfare cutbacks in 1983 a single mother with three children commented:

> "The actions of the provincial government make me wonder if I might be cut off completely one day. It is scary to know they don't care about those of us who are living in poverty. I now feel more put down than ever before and it will just make it so much harder to work towards becoming independent sometime in the future."

The second critical assumption, that is obviously linked to the first, is that the poor and the unemployed do not really want to work. We would like to believe that they prefer to remain dependent upon unemployment insurance and welfare. Of course should we ever raise the level of welfare benefits any will they had to work like the rest of us would be completely destroyed.

Again we assume that the fault lies not with society but with the individuals themselves. Studies that have been carried out on the question of the willingness to work of the poor and the unemployed have demonstrated time and time again that they do indeed want to work, that their incentive to work is not destroyed by the receipt of benefits and that whatever changes occur in their attitudes towards work are the consequence of being poor and unemployed and certainly not the cause.

This attitude about the unwillingness of the unemployed and the poor to work also feeds a further obsession. That is the argument that the poor will do all they can to cheat on welfare. The stories about the limited abuse that does exist become exaggerated with every telling and quickly enter the realm of urban myths. Benefit systems and their ministers rush to reassure we taxpayers that they intend to increase their vigilance so that our dollars will not be squandered. Almost invariably when abuse is investigated it is found that the problem lies much more with inappropriate discretionary judgements, poor policies or administrative error. Because of our societal obsession with abuse we take a much more serious view of it than we do tax evasion.

In examining the impact of these assumptions it is important to acknowledge that poverty is not a thing a part. It is, in fact, a condition created by an affluent society which believes that a certain level of poverty is acceptable, and even necessary, if the rest of us are to continue to enjoy our present standard of living.

THE IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

Although we often reassure ourselves that there is a comprehensive safety net of unemployment insurance and welfare to relieve the worst of the financial hardships, there is little doubt that it is the rising levels of employment which have been the direct cause of the alarming increase in family poverty in this province over the past five years. The financial hardship which accompanies unemployment is clearly the major source of distress for the unemployed and their families. However, it must be remembered that work is among the most pervasive of human activities. Consequently, besides the loss of a paycheque, unemployment can bring with it the abandonment of ambition and purpose, the destruction of self worth and accomplishment, the loss of social participation and contribution and the constriction of one's self and family image. Work is therefore the critical link between the family and the larger system. While we may be spending a lot of effort in strengthening family life, we have often failed to appreciate the connection between occupational status, job satisfaction and family stability. The evidence is now quite convincing that decent employment opportunities and adequate incomes are necessary preconditions for achieving family stability.

Not surprisingly the ability to cope with the psychological stress of joblessness will vary from one individual, or one family, to another. However, generally speaking the more prolonged the period of unemployment the more damaging are the effects on the well being of all concerned. It has also been demonstrated that the degree of stress experienced by a family where the male breadwinner is looking for work will depend very much upon the particular stage of the family cycle that they happen to be in. For example, a young family is much more likely to be less stable economically and perhaps more fragile in terms of relationships and as a result the stress brought on by a prolonged period of unemployment can lead to the total collapse of a once stable marriage. However, the most critical mediating factor in coping with unemployment is the extent to which an unemployed person's need for affection, esteem and approval are met through a social support network of family and friends.

It is also evident that for some families, at least in the short term being without work can lead to an enrichment of their lives, with increasing time together, additional opportunities to follow up particular interests and improved cohesion as they rally together to respond to the stresses and strains of unemployment. However, for the majority of families, the loss of a job brings with it severe economic and psychological tensions which will inevitably threaten the stability and well being of the family and its members.

So what then are these tensions that can destroy a family? A basic assumption is that families are responsible for supporting themselves through work, in order to enable them to purchase necessary goods and services. Unemployment disrupts this important economic function, particularly for families headed by a single parent or those for whom unemployment is a frequent visitor. The loss of a stable and sufficient income leaves families to suspend or give up such family goals as home ownership, higher education for children or retirement plans. As well, families by necessity must reduce their expenditures on food, gasoline, entertainment, recreation and such necessities as dental care.

As well, the symbol of the male breadwinner and family provider remains strongly entrenched despite the major changes in sex roles that have occurred in recent years. Unemployment for a male breadwinner requires a change in role and often a critical adjustment in power relationships, authority and self image. Where the traditional views on role expectations remain strong, the loss of work can inevitably lead to strains in the marital relationship. However, research suggests that unemployment tends to reinforce the closeness or the distance that exists in a relationship before the loss of work. For those relationships that are already fragile, anxiety over finances, the loss of self esteem, the altering of family roles can begin the slide down the slippery slope to marital dissolution. Although the research evidence is rather contradictory, there is growing concern that extended periods of unemployment tend to increase the probability of divorce. In a recent study of marital complaints cited by women as reasons for their divorce, employment problems, including loss of employment, ranked in the top third of all reasons offered for marital breakdown. It is also suggested that the stresses brought on by unemployment rather than leading to the breakdown of a marriage may instead be internalized, with the result that violent behavior between family members becomes a more likely occurrence. The frustration and anger brought on by unemployment, the reorganization of family roles and status and the tension generated by increasing parent–child contact has also been shown to be linked to an increasing risk of child abuse. As a recent report from the United States commented:

"Children become the special victims of their parent's unemployment. Serious decline in school performance, increase in child abuse and domestic violence and a worsening of parent–child relationship are all real testimony to the costs paid by unemployed families."

As rejection letter follows rejection letter the hope becomes weaker, a sense of futility sets in and a disequalibrium appears in the family relationship. The management of the family's financial resources becomes more problematic and every expenditure becomes a major decision and a potential source of conflict. The wife begins to look for work which fosters feelings of inadequacy in the husband because he senses that he has failed to fulfill his central duty in life – to be the family provider. A husband's sense of demoralization may be increased if his wife manages to find a job, and new prestige, and soon he begins to project his problems onto his children and his wife. If none of the family members are working again within the next few months, domestic conflict can be intensified, with pressure from creditors, the loss of friends and a growing sense of personal failure. With the right intervention and consistent support from family members there can be a readjustment within a family and the gradual acceptance of new standards. Without this adjustment physical and mental health problems begin to appear: tension, sleeplessness, increased alcohol use, depression and irritability.

It's here that frequently the human service worker – a doctor, a school counsellor, a psychologist, a social worker, a volunteer is brought face to face with the stark reality of unemployment. It is the middle aged man who visits your office complaining of being irritable and depressed. After initial discussion he mentions that he hopes the service you are providing is free because he is having difficulty stretching his money to pay all of his bills. It then emerges that he was laid off from his job almost nine months ago, he's had to sell his car and now his house is on the market. He begins to talk about what a failure he's been in life, how he's never worked up to his expectations or those of his family. He expresses shame and anger because he feels that at this point in his life he should be able to provide an adequate living for them. In describing his life he tells how he doesn't seem able to perform the home chores that he previously took responsibility for, he mentions that he spends most of his time watching television, eating and reading the newspaper. Oh yes, he's been applying for jobs but with so many rejection letters he's not sure it's worth it to apply for any more. No, he hasn't been back to see the personnel department of his previous employer. In fact he hasn't seen any of his former co–workers for three or four months because he doesn't go out much. As he talks it becomes apparent that his unemployment crisis has now become a family crisis.

What does unemployment mean to the other family members? At the beginning it meant that the woman's routine was completely thrown off. She didn't mind this to begin with because it was a bit like a holiday – they were spending more time together. She fully expected he would be back to work in a few weeks and in the mean time some of those jobs around the house were getting done. As the weeks rolled into months her pleasure at having him around the house has diminished; money is now scarce, they are irritable with each other. She hasn't followed her own routine for some months, she misses having time to herself during the day and resents him for questioning her about her day time activities. He seems to think he knows how to run the house better than she does – but he isn't willing to share the work load. Now, instead of enjoying being together more they are fighting with each other during the day.

She will have to go back to work, even though she hasn't had a job in over 15 years and the part-time job she will be able to get will hardly be enough to survive on once his UIC runs out. Not that she really minds having to go out to work. It is just that she will have to work hard both outside and inside the home, while he sinks further and further into a depression.

Of course, all of this tension and conflict has begun to affect the children. The teenage daughter was used to keeping up with the latest styles, buying make-up and having money to go out with her friends. She was looking forward to getting her drivers license so that she could go into town to visit her friends, without her parents. Now she isn't allowed to buy new clothes or cosmetics, and the family car has been sold. And if that wasn't bad enough they are always nagging her and yelling at her. It has reached the point where she doesn't want to go home after school. She has started to stay in town after school. One of the older boys who has a car drives her home just in time for dinner. Instead of avoiding conflict, this seems to be aggravating it.

The 11 year old boy is really mad at his parents. He lives, breathes and dreams hockey. His social life in the winter is all centered around being on the hockey team. He can't believe he won't be allowed to play on the team this year. He doesn't know what he has done wrong that his parents are punishing him this way. His weekends are boring and he has started to hang out with a rougher crowd. Last weekend the police brought him home. He had been caught vandalizing the community centre.

The family which used to be close, which used to enjoy life, which used to participate in the community, is now characterized by conflict, stress, isolation and poverty.

THE MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY

Fundamental to our understanding of poverty in any community, is the method we choose to measure it. As is certainly true of other aspects of our welfare policy, how we decide to measure poverty will be heavily influenced by what we as a society think of the poor and what we believe are our obligations to assist them. The two basic approaches for determining poverty are an absolute measure – that attempts to establish an objective absolute minimum that any household requires for food, clothing and shelter – and a relative measure, where poverty is defined by looking at the standard of living enjoyed by others in the community. The most widely used poverty lines in Canada are those produced by Statistics Canada. In attempting to establish a relative measure of poverty, Statistics Canada discovered that Canadian families spent an average 38.5% of their income on food, clothing and shelter. Since it was apparent that poorer families spend proportionately more of their income on these three basic necessities, a low income cut off was established at 20

percentage points above the average. This effectively has meant that the bottom 20% of those on the income ladder are generally below the low income cutoffs. In order to make their poverty lines even more relative, Statistics Canada takes into account the size of the family and the place of residence. This series of poverty lines is updated each year acording to the change in the cost of living. The 1989 low income figures for Edmonton families are shown below.

Edmonton's Low Income Lines for 1989

Family Size:	*Gross income:*
1	12,037
2	15,881
3	21,245
4	24,481
5	28,526
6	31,157
7 or more	34,294

It should also be noted that the income referred to is gross, rather than after tax, income and it includes all wages and salaries, investment income, as well as transfer payments such as family allowance, old age security and pensions.

Taxpayers who hear the current poverty lines are frequently given to complaining about the generosity of the Statistics Canada low income figures. Surely a family of four can live quite comfortably on $24,481 a year, is the cry! However, in 1988, a Gallop poll asked Canadians what they considered to be "the least amount of money a family of four – husband, wife and two children needs each week to get along". The average amount was $452 a week. By way of comparison, the average weekly poverty level for a family of four in 1988 was $399. On an annual basis, the average poverty line income was almost $3000 below the Gallup average minimum income identified by Canadians.

Besides questions of generosity and adequacy, there are other important concerns about establishing a low income measure for poverty. We must also appreciate when we set our demarcation line that poverty also has a depth dimension – that many households have incomes that are far below the poverty line. For example, it has been estimated that a quarter of all poor families earn less than half of the poverty line income, while another 27% fall between half and three quarters of a poverty line income. A further dimension of poverty that we must consider is the length of the poverty experience. We know from recent research on unemployment that it is the long grinding periods of low income living that bring with it the most damaging aspects of poverty.

The Statistics Canada low income lines are therefore at best a rough guide that allows us to measure the number of poor and any changes in the numbers that may have occurred over time. As well these poverty lines are used by welfare administrators as a relative guide for establishing benefits levels and by welfare advocates to demonstrate how inappropriate the established benefits levels are! What is particularly important in establishing a measure of poverty is that it must be based on the bed rock of community standards – what a family requires to allow it to be full participating members of a community. It must never be linked to mere physical survival. In the words of Peter Townsend, one of Britain's poverty experts:

> "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong."

The setting of these community standards should ideally never be left in the hand of the so called experts but instead should be determined by the community members themselves. By way of illustration a recent study in Britain attempted to find what degree of community consensus existed with respect to various indicators that would constitute a minimum standard of living and participation. The study showed that two thirds of those surveyed agreed on eighteen indicators that were considered to be necessities. These community-based indicators included such things as:

- a damp free house
- bed for everyone in the house
- a warm waterproof coat
- three meals a day for children
- special celebrations, such as Christmas
- a hobby or leisure activity
- presents for family members once a year

Should not we, as a community, be working to establish a list of basic necessities and determining whether our social allowance payments are sufficient to cover them?

Of course we should also appreciate that our obsessive concern with the subtleties of definition and measurement are of little interest to those who are, in fact, poor. For them, living with a low income is just one aspect of the poverty package. It is not just the level of income that is important but the security and the source of that income and the expectation for improvement in one's economic circumstances that are so critical to economic well-being. Interwoven then with the poverty of income is the poverty of spirit: the social and psychological damage that results when the struggles of daily existence seem almost too much to bear, and the poverty of power, where full citizenship and freedom of choice are automatically denied.

People with persistently low incomes do not simply live scaled down versions of middle class life. They are in fact required to live markedly different lives. The paradox is that the poorer a family the more they are likely to be misunderstood, rejected and excluded by the many, yet at the same time they are dependent on the many – neighbours, employers, teachers and welfare staff. Their lives become frighteningly dependent on the kindness, the good humour, the understanding, the sense of justice and the morality of others. They become dependent on a society that is prepared to intervene in their daily lives, often without their invitation or their consent. Is it any wonder that with this state of fragile precariousness, this feeling of exclusion from ever being a contributing member of a community that the very poor often appear to adopt for themselves the very image that society

has of them?

OUR POVERTY PROFILE

In 1987 three and a half million Canadians – one in seven – were living on a low income. This number included 777,000 families, one million single people and close to a million kids. Despite these high numbers the country's poverty profile has shown gradual improvement since the peak of 1984 when over four million Canadians were living below the poverty line.

Here in Alberta the same gradual improvement is also evident: from a 1984 level of just over 100,000 poor families to a present level of 66,000. Living in these poor Albertan families are 94,000 children. Of this number 34,000 live in a single parent family headed by a woman, giving the startling poverty rate of 51% for families of this kind. By contrast Alberta's children living in two parent families are five times less likely to be living in poverty than their single parent counterparts.

It is also worth noting that a family led by someone who did not get to high school is four times more likely to be poor as one headed by a university graduate. As well, contrary to popular belief, most poor families are headed by men and women who work. In 1986 56% of low income families were headed by a person in the labour force. However, families whose head works part–time runs a five times greater risk of poverty as families led by full time workers, while families whose head was out of work in the previous year were twice as likely to be poor as those in which no member was unemployed. Occupationally it has been shown that families that are headed by workers in service industries, a heavy employer of women, have the highest risk of being poor at 20%.

When we focus our attention on our own city we quickly discover that many of these features of poverty among families and children are much in evidence. While 14% of Edmonton's families are living below the poverty line, half of our single mother headed families are in this situation. It is estimated that almost a quarter of Edmonton's children under the age of 18 (22.8%), or 41,000 are presently living within low income families. *(See attached map)*

When we examine Edmonton by community we find that low income families tend to be concentrated predominantly in the city's north east, with other disturbing pockets in the west end and in Millwoods. In order to take a closer look at the characteristics of our communities that have an above average number of low income families the following table examines the large concentration in Edmonton's northeast and contrasts it with Edmonton as a whole.

Edmonton's Concentration of Low Income Families

	Low Income Communities[1]	*Edmonton*
Incidence of Low Income		
Families	30%	14%
Singles	50%	37%
Employment		
Full-time males	44%	57%
Part-time males	56%	43%
Unemployed males	14%	9%
Full-time females	42%	42%
Part-time females	58%	58%
Unemployed females	8%	6%
Education		
< Grade 9	22%	10%
< Grade 13	31%	29%
Incomplete University	8%	10%
Complete University	5%	12%
Marital Status		
Singles	30%	22%
Married	41%	48%
Widows	6%	4%
Divorcees	6%	4%
Families		
Two parents	81%	87%
Lone male parents	4%	2%
Lone female parents	17%	13%
Children < 6 years old	30%	29%
Children 6–14 years old	30%	37%
Housing		
Owned	35%	57%
Rented	65%	43%

[1] Includes the communities of McCauley/Boyle Street, Central McDougall, Queen Mary Park, Spruce Avenue, Norwood, Parkdale, Northlands, Delton, Eastwood, Alberta Avenue, Westwood, Sherbrook, Balwin, Delwood and Kennedale.

The table shows that almost a third of the families and half of all single people are living below the poverty line, that unemployment is much more prevalent and that the number of single-parent families is higher than the city average.

When we focus even further on the poorest of our communities we find that Boyle Street and McCauley present the most disturbing picture: the lowest median income in the city, the highest male unemployment, the lowest level of education, and the highest number of female headed single-parent families.

Highest Poverty Community: Boyle Street/McCauley

	Boyle Street McCauley	*Edmonton*
Employment		
Lowest median income	$10,367	$32,440
Lowest full-time male income	$15,560	$33,026
Lowest part-time male income	$6,651	$13,733
Lowest part-time female income	$5,754	$8,563
Highest male unemployment	19%	9%
Education		
Lowest education < Grade 9	40%	10%
Marital Status		
Highest % of singles	43%	22%
Lowest % of married	27%	48%
Greatest % divorcees	10%	4%
Greatest % female lone parents	20%	13%
Housing		
Greatest % of apartment dwellings	44%	7%

TAKING ACTION

How have we responded to this human tragedy that now confronts us? What should we be able to expect from our human service workers?

It is surely a sad and bitter irony that we have for all too long remained silent about the impact of poverty when its cruel outcomes can be so vividly seen in the children and families who seek help at our doors. We must be prepared to use the evidence we have before us to demand that greater public attention be focussed on the appalling human costs of poverty. We must speak out about the mounting evidence of financial, family and health problems that will inevitably follow a prolonged period of poverty. We must be prepared to educate ourselves about the causes of poverty and the political and economic attitudes and actions that allow such a human tragedy to occur. We must become knowledgeable about the policy alternatives that are available to us as a caring humane society, and be willing to demand of our decision makers that greater recognition be given to the social consequences of our economic policies.

Above all then, we must be prepared to forego the conventional, the respectable and the expedient, and in its place be prepared to accept a role that is still at the very heart of human services. We must accept the challenge of advocacy – to work hard for improvements in the lives of individual families while at the same time be willing to use our positions in the community to press for broader social changes. If we are all to do our part in mounting the necessary community response to this most tragic of human conditions we must all be prepared to become "partisans for the poor."

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to be with you on this occasion.

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[Presented to the *Workshop on Poverty and the Schools,* May 12, 1989 at the Centre for Education, Edmonton, AB]

For more information about the contents of this paper, or to comment on the issues raised, contact the author:

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For more information about the *Workshop on Poverty and the Schools,* contact:
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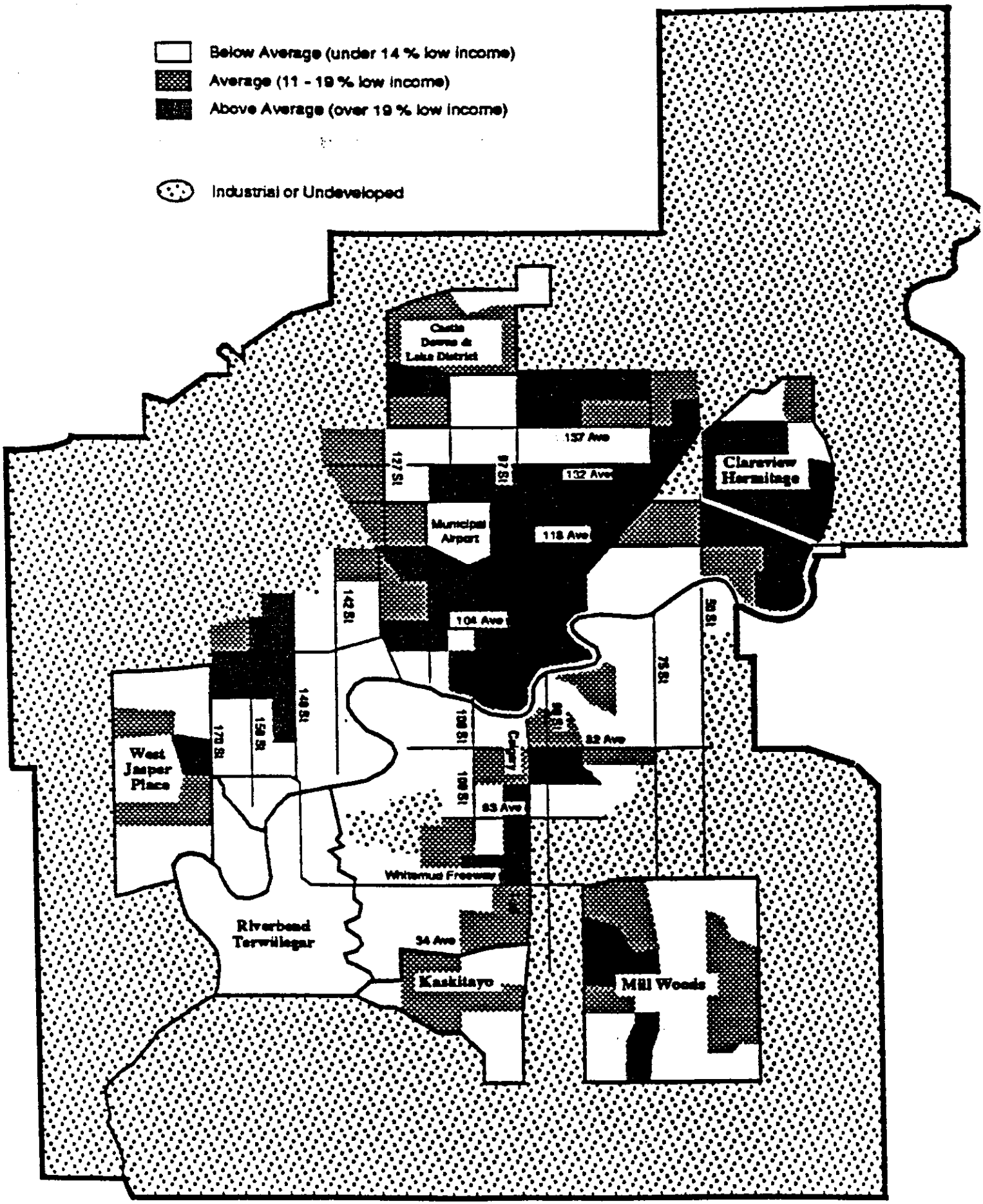
Incidence of Low Family Income in Edmonton (1986)



Source: Family and Community Services and Statistics Canada, Edmonton Profile (Part 2).

ALBERTA FACTS

Number 6 | Published by the Edmonton Social Planning Council | May 1989

Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In

We live in a country where everyone's needs are met, at least those of children — right? **Wrong! In Canada, one child in six lives in poverty.** One child in six does not have basic needs met. In Alberta, one child in six means that **93,600** children live in poverty.

One Child in Six Lives in Poverty

What does being poor mean to these children?

What being poor means to Jenny

The average girl living with her mom stands a 50-50 chance of being poor. Jenny's mom doesn't make much money: she earns minimum wage. She can't always afford nutritious meals, so Jenny gets sick a lot.

Jenny and her mom move around often, and Jenny feels she's always changing schools. She finds it hard to have to make new friends all the time.

Jenny has one pair of jeans, and she doesn't have a bike or get birthday presents or have neat snacks to take to school. Sometimes Jenny finds it embarrassing.

But what Jenny finds hardest about being poor is that *she feels different* from all the other children.

What is a poor family?

According to Statistics Canada, a family is considered "a low income family" if they spend more than an average of about 60 per cent of their income on food, clothing and shelter (depending on where they live and the size of family). According to The National Council of Welfare, these families "live in poverty."

For example, in an Albertan city, the poverty line for a family of four is $23,521 (before deductions); for a family of three, the poverty line is $20,411(before deductions).

Poverty Line in Alberta

Family size	*Income before deductions*
Family of four	$23,521
Family of three	$20,411

SOURCE: 1988 Poverty Lines, National Council of Welfare

Families of Poor Children

Female-headed single parent families	1 in 2
Families with parents under 25 years old	1 in 4
Families with three or more children	1 in 3

SOURCE: Poverty Profile 1988, National Council of Welfare

Poor families mean poor children

Poor children are most likely to live in families:

- headed by female single parents
- headed by a parent under 25 years old
- with three or more children
- of Native people

Most low-income families are the "working poor." Although these parents have jobs, they and their families just manage to get by.

For example, a single parent with one child who earns minimum wage has an income more than $6,000 below the poverty line. *This means this parent would have to work 68 hours per week to support a child at the poverty line.*

The Working Poor

Minimum wage = $4.50 per hour

x 40 hours per week = $180 per week

x 50 weeks = $9,000 (gross) per year

$15,258 (poverty line, 2 person family)
−9,000 (income at minimum wage)
$6,258 BELOW the poverty line

Poor children often are sick children

Babies from poor families die at almost **twice** the rate that babies from wealthy families do. For babies from Indian families the picture is much worse. They die at a rate almost 4 1/2 times greater than other Alberta babies.

And, poor children suffer more from cancer, respiratory diseases, congenital anomalies and pneumonia than other children.

These higher disease and death rates are closely tied to nutrition, health care, and housing conditions.

Are housing costs really accommodating?

The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton was $482 in October, 1988. After paying rent, the single parent with two children, earning minimum wage, has $238 left. With this money, she must pay utilities, household, laundry, child care, prescriptions, and travel expenses PLUS buy food and clothing for her children.

This family qualifies for a social allowance subsidy of about $500 per month. Often people are unaware of this subsidy. Others, who may be aware of the subsidy, wish to avoid the social allowance system because of the stigma attached.

Does money affect education?

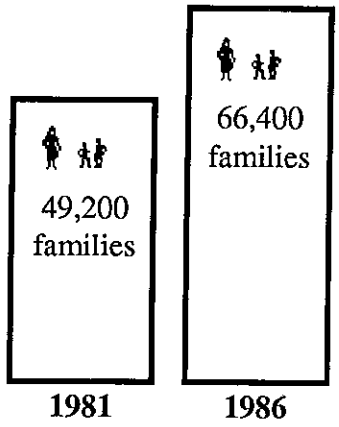
Children from wealthy families are far more likely to finish high school and continue their education than children from poor families. Children from poor families skip school twice as much as children from other families.

Studies point out that family income affects how well children do in school and how much they join school activities.

While no figures exist for all Native people, only 20% of Indian students finish high school—compared to a national average of 70%.

What does this mean for children? People with less education have a greater chance of being out of work and therefore a greater chance of being poor. In other words, poor children are more likely to become poor adults.

Alberta's Poor Families Increase



SOURCE: Poverty Profile 1988, National Council of Welfare

Are families a priority for the Alberta Government?

The typical cost of feeding and clothing two boys, aged 10 and 11, was about $310 a month in December, 1988, according to Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Social allowance provides about $225 for food and clothing for these two children. Foster care provides about $415. Why do parents living on social allowance and caring for their own children receive less than the estimated cost for food and clothing? (And nothing for toys, books, or Christmas and birthday presents.)

Why is there such a gap between what natural parents receive for their children and what foster parents receive for other people's children?

The Alberta Government says it believes in families and wants to help them. How are they supporting poor families?

"It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."

– Hon. Connie Osterman

When a school lunch program was suggested in the Legislature in April, 1988, the then Social Services Minister Connie Osterman said, "It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."

Average Family Incomes

$49,797
Married

$37,869
Male Single Parent

$23,108
Female Single Parent

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, Income Distributions by Size in Canada #13-207, 1987

The future: more than a family affair

The number of single parent families grew by almost 50 per cent in the 10 years from 1971 to 1981. Single parent families represented 13 per cent of all families by 1986. The number of two-parent families also increased, but only by 22 per cent.

If these trends continue, it is likely that more and more children will grow up poor.

What responsibility do *we* share for all Alberta's children?

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the future consequences of providing less than minimum care for Alberta's children?
2. The Alberta Government says it wants to help families. How do you think it can best do this?
3. Who will advocate for Alberta's poor children?
4. How would we all benefit if fewer children grew up poor?

What can you do?

- Support raising social allowance benefits to ensure that children can be adequately fed and clothed.
- Support equalizing wages between men and women so single mothers can support their children.
- Write letters to your Member of Parliament (MP) and your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to encourage the above changes.

Recommended Reading

Baum, Gregory. *Ethics in Economics*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1984.

Campbell, C.C., et al. *Hunger, Poverty and Malnutrition: The Nutritional Implications of Food Insecurity in Canada.* Toronto: Food Advocacy Coalition of Toronto, 1986.

Canadian Child Welfare Association, Canadian Council on Children and Youth, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Institute of Child Health, Child Poverty Action Group, Family Service Canada, and Vanier Institute of the Family. *A Choice of Futures: Canada's Commitment to Its Children* [a series of five fact sheets]. Toronto, 1988.

Canadian Council on Social Development. *Not Enough: The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty in Canada.* Ottawa, 1984.

Clarke, Michelle. *Wasting our Future: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development.* Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Children and Youth, 1988.

Deroo, Remy. *Witness of Justice.* Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979.

The Child Poverty Action Group. *A Fair Chance for all Children: the Declaration on Child Poverty.* Toronto, 1986.

Waxman, Chaim I., *The Stigma of Poverty.* New York: Pergamon Press, 1983.

Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In is one of a series of fact sheets on social issues produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. This edition was produced with financial support from the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation. Copies are available in bulk for classes and study groups.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit social action agency which seeks social justice through policy analysis, applied research, community development, and training and consultation.

For more information about the Council, its regular publications ***First Reading*** and ***Alberta Facts,*** or other publications, please contact:

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A United Way Member Agency

first reading

Vol. 7, No. 4 June 1989

a publication of the Edmonton Social Planning Council

Council elects new board in April

A 15-member board of directors was elected at the Edmonton Social Planning Council's annual meeting.

Returning to the board are: **Al Harris**, senior consultant for the Alexander Consulting Group; **Terry Lind**, project supervisor with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission; **Pat Hagey**, Enersystems Limited; **Joan Munro**, sessional lecturer at the University of Alberta; **Bev Downing**, Grant MacEwan Community College's Consumer Education Project; **Alyson Lavers**, child welfare consultant for Alberta Social Services.

Board members beginning a second term are: **Elvira Leibovitz**, an extremely active volunteer for numerous Edmonton area social service agencies; **Jeffrey Pearson**, manager in the Planning Branch, Alberta Municipal Affairs; and **Beverley Decore**, a volunteer with the Junior League and the Alberta Foundation for Research and Education in Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

New board members are: **Michael Phair**, manager of settlement services with Alberta Career Development and Employment; **Iris M. Sulyma**, of Price Waterhouse; **Gordon F. N. Fearn**, professor of sociology at the University of Alberta; **Meg Hagerty**, social worker at the Grey Nuns Hospital; **John Copoc**, of Creative Management Limited; and **Carolyn Pettifer**, executive director of the Metis Children's Services Society.

The board will elect its executive at its organizational meeting in May.

What role does media play in public policy?

Most reporters and editors don't think very much about the role of the media in public policy, *Edmonton Journal* Editor Linda Hughes told those attending the Edmonton Social Planning Council's annual meeting April 19.

"Producing a newspaper every day is a hectic proposition. Every evening, in an eight-hour shift, we produce the equivalent of a short novel with information from every corner of the world. We don't have the luxury of time to reflect on the policy implications of every story we write. We don't see that as our role and frankly we are not the ones best able to judge the impact we may have on public policy," said Hughes.

Hughes went on to talk about some of the complexities involved in a newspaper's coverge of public policy. "The first and simple point is that the media doesn't always know that much about what's going on in the community. It sounds like a terrible admission to make but it's true. . .The public tends to think we know everything that's going on in the city and we only choose to print a tiny bit. We really don't...we only know what people tell us and there's an awful lot they don't tell us in this city."

"Once we know about stories, we don't always have the time or the resources or sometimes the inclination to report them in the depth that some readers or interested parties would like."

"What a good reporter has to be able to do is a quick study of an issue and be able to write about it in a way that will be fair, accurate, and understandable to the vast majority of newspaper readers who know even less than the reporter...Very seldom do reporters ever actually dig up raw information themselves. When they do it's usually a pretty good story, but the media generally rely

(continued on page 11)

Editorial

Celebrate Council's past, envision its future

This issue of *First Reading* departs from the usual practice of looking outward at pressing social issues. Instead, we look inward at the Edmonton Social Planning Council itself and the work it does.

This seems appropriate as the Council begins its 50th year of influencing Edmonton's social fabric. Celebrating anniversaries means looking back at past accomplishments, but—and perhaps most importantly—also capturing a vision for moving forward.

"Celebrating anniversaries means looking back at past accomplishments, but—and perhaps most importantly—also capturing a vision for moving forward."

In this issue, we share the Council's vision through articles on the Council's role as change agent and a look at its varied projects. And we look at members and their importance, and how it's all funded. It's a way of answering questions often directed at the Council by members and others alike.

As the new editor of *First Reading*, I have a vision for a dynamic, exciting, and varied publication on social issues that is a "good read." The best publications are those whose editors know what good marketers know: how to "stay close to the customers." I want to know more about you, our readers, and what you look for in *First Reading*. So I implore you to take a few minutes to complete the readership survey on Pages 9 and 10. And I encourage you to submit letters to the editor—which will become a standing feature of *First Reading*—and suggestions for topics and issues you would like *First Reading* to explore. *First Reading* can become a vibrant interchange between its readers and the social issues of the day.

By this fall, you can expect a whole new look for *First Reading*. This new look will reflect and contribute to a readable, timely, provocative publication on social issues. And if you think *First Reading* is NOT readable, timely, and provocative, I want to hear from you! I'm an editor who believes there's nothing that can't be improved, and I'm always seeking new ideas.

Beckie Garber-Conrad, ABC

First Reading (ISSN 0824-197X) is an Edmonton newsletter on current social issues published six times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, social action agency which seeks social justice through applied research, policy analysis, community development, and organizational training.

To receive this publication, write *First Reading* at #41, 9912 – 106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5 or phone (403) 423-2031. Direct correspondence to the *First Reading* Editor at the same address.

Contributions on current social issues are welcomed. When submitting manuscripts, please type them, double-spaced, and provide a brief biography. If you want the manuscript returned, please enclose an addressed, stamped envelope.

The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions to conform to space and style restrictions. *First Reading* adheres to a clear, concise reporting style and the specifics outlined in *The Canadian Style, A Guide to Writing and Editing*, published by The Department of the Secretary of State of Canada.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Edmonton Social Planning Council or of its funding bodies.

Publisher: Peter Faid, Executive Director
Editor: Beckie Garber-Conrad, ABC

A United Way Member Agency

Edmonton Social Planning Council serves as community change agent

"The principle of people having the right and opportunity to speak up on the issues affecting them drives the work of the Edmonton Social Planning Council," says Executive Director Peter Faid.

Today the Council is primarily concerned with the social consequences of public policies. What happens to people, their ability to cope, their quality of life, because of policies and policy changes? What can be done to improve matters? How can those affected most become involved in the process to change things?

Because it looks at issues from a community-wide perspective, the Council draws in a wide cross-section of people. It deals with issues that touch all of us in an atmosphere of constructive public debate. More and more, the Council has become (and is seen as) an agency that can represent the socio-economically deprived. The Council has developed as an advocate, a voice, for those unable to organize and to represent themselves and their needs to government.

"The principle of people having the right and opportunity to speak up on the issues affecting them drives the work of the Edmonton Social Planning Council."

The Edmonton Social Planning Council serves as an agent of community change, a social action agency. As a social activist, the Council plays many roles: researcher, community worker, educator, lobbyist.

As an independent, non-profit, community organization, it provides a unique perspective on the life of the total community. The Council does its work by:

- conducting applied research
- providing policy analysis
- facilitating community development
- offering training and consultation.

Research at the council draws people in to talk about the issues affecting them. It involves them in a therapeutic, empowering experience as they come to see what can be done. The Council does much of its research out of a community base, and then leads from the front and from behind (nudging and support) as community groups develop lives of their own.

And, as Faid says emphatically, "It is important to have community groups putting forth alternative points of view. The Council often becomes involved in acting as the messenger to government. It needs to get these messages to government in an effective way and work closely with government without being co-opted by it."

"The Council is considered an honest broker of information on social policy," said Vice-President Terry Lind. "People know they can come to us and get a considered opinion based on solid research and the principles of positive action and community involvement." Her view is supported by the average of 15-20 daily inquiry calls and Peter Faid's average of a call a day from the media.

"I think the Council has become a very credible social conscience in the community, " says President Harvey Krahn. "It's expected to comment on the social issues of the day after looking for the facts, making some kind of analysis, and taking a position. The research the Council does is directed at a policy or issue with a clear, underlying goal to use what's discovered, to lobby it, move on it.

"The Council is tied into an incredible number of community agencies and often speaks with a very common voice," said Krahn. "Over time, it has developed a very strong network."

The Council tells the community what's happening and has proactively gone out and advocated on behalf of social services, said Hillel Boroditsky, executive director of the United Way of Edmonton and Area.

"As a product of the voluntary sector, not of government, it's responsible to the community rather than to any one funder. Doing it right and doing good is a great strength."

"The Council is playing a leadership role in pulling

Beliefs and values guide Council's work

The Edmonton Social Planning Council states its mission:

The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that all people should have the social rights and freedoms to live and work in an environment that enhances individual, family and community growth without restricting the same rights and freedoms for others.

The Council seeks to create, to advocate, and to support changes in policies, attitudes, and actions in order to enhance these social rights and freedoms.

together a broad number of government and community agencies, said John Lackey, General Manager of Edmonton Social Services.

"Its outward reaching, cooperative, and collaborative approach has touched very many people and organizations. And it has acted responsibly and with integrity."

As people often say, the Council serves as the "voice of the voiceless." As an advocate for those who cannot—through lack of information or ability—speak for themselves, the Council involves them. Through consulting and organizing people, the Council enables them.

"It helps them figure out the system," said Krahn, "And it also organizes them and helps them do it themselves—through training, prodding, leading, and cajoling."

The Council's impetus for work comes in different ways. Partly, it seeks to identify gaps in services and find some strategy for filling them. The Council is sometimes the catalyst, sometimes the support, but is never the lone carrier of the ball.

Some projects, many of them long-term ones, grow out of its own commitment to issues of poverty, employment and unemployment, and the provision or abandonment of services. Others start with a request for assistance from an agency or community group. Still others originate as a proposal on some research contract that will also earn money to help the Council meet its budget. If the varied projects ever seem scattered or nebulous, the underlying goal remains clear: to change things.

"The fiscal worries of governments will put more pressure on social programs," predicts Krahn. "And the types of issues facing the Council are likely to be classic: the poor and downtrodden rather than fine-tuning legislation."

An organization some call the "best kept secret in Edmonton," the Council has demonstrated an ability to bring people together who might not come together otherwise.

Such skills, and the Council's reputation for being impartial and helpful may be increasingly crucial as governments fiscal concerns put more pressure on social programs.

What ESPC sets out to do

The Council's goals are to:

- *undertake research* into the nature and magnitude of social issues in the community
- *increase* public awareness and understanding of current social issues and to exercise an independent voice in the community
- *encourage* greater public participation in the development of social policies and in the implementation of programs.

"...the underlying goal remains clear: to change things."

Council has "vision" that clarifies action

At a retreat last spring, ESPC board and staff wrestled with the question of what shared vision should mould the Council's work as it moves into the next decade. The themes emerged into a vision statement, which Executive Director Peter Faid says often serves as a reference point during board deliberations.

- The Edmonton Social Planning Council in the 1990s will be the leading non-political social policy organization in the Edmonton area, with a reputation for commitment to the facilitation of social, economic, and environmental improvement in the community, through increased understanding and constructive public debate.
- We will be critics, facilitators, catalysts, instigators, researchers, advocates, and publicists.
- Individuals and groups who influence and/or are impacted by social policy will seek our services as a community partner.
- Government will look to us as the voice of the community conscience.
- The Edmonton Social Planning Council will take a strong stand on current social issues.
- We will therefore seek and gain respect for our honesty and thorough research rather than acceptance of our position.
- The Edmonton Social Planning Council will be a leader in the community, not a follower.

Council's pursuit of social justice varied

In its pursuit of social justice, the Edmonton Social Planning Council undertakes varied projects, many of which fall into the general areas of poverty issues, the provision or abandonment of services, and unemployment and employment.

Tackling poverty on many fronts

Much of the Council's work takes a community development approach to people's problems. It brings people with common problems together and enables them to take positive action.

Last year, forty-five people participated in three Welfare Advocacy Training Workshops to help recipients and non-profit agency staff advocate effectively with the social allowance system. Out of these workshops grew the Community Advocates Network (CAN), which seeks to ensure that social allowance recipients receive maximum benefits under the current system.

The Council participates in an interagency Income Security Action Committee. Through its efforts, the food allowance rate increased in the 1988 provincial budget and people receiving social allowance were allowed to keep 100 percent of their low income federal sales tax credit. This committee seeks a full public review of Alberta's social allowance system and social allowance rates based on actual cost of living. It also encourages people on social allowance to advocate for themselves.

The Council also participates in the Food Policy Committee, another interagency group, which will identify who has difficulty getting nutritious food and why, and then make recommendations to governments, communities, and business.

In 1988, the Council published a down-to-earth guide called *The Other Welfare Manual.* Alberta Social Services has since purchased 30,000 copies for distribution through their offices and is negotiating a contract for another 75,000. The success of this guide has led the Council to investigate the feasibility of similar manuals on such programs as unemployment insurance, native social allowance, and child care.

This year, the Council is researching child poverty in Edmonton, with plans to educate others, make recommendations, and establish child poverty action groups. It has just released an issue of Alberta Facts on Children and Poverty and plans two more issues this year on poverty-related topics.

Through Council support and research, a lobby group Disabilities Unlimited developed. This issue was raised in 1987 when a man receiving social allowance and Canada Pension Plan disability benefits approached the council. He was living below the poverty line because the Alberta government deducted dollar for dollar the amounts he received from the Canada Pension Plan from his provincial welfare payments. Research showed that this also happened to those receiving money from Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped and the Widow's Pension Plan. Related work is under way with another lobby group, Pensions Unlimited.

The business of briefs and studies

Initiated by the United Way, the Community Needs Assessment Project will produce a five-year cycle of reports on community trends.

The first section will deal with such broad trends as income, employment, population, families, and health.

The second will identify present and future trends that have impact on services for youth and for seniors. In the years ahead, part two will deal with different sets of client groups.

Promised to be accessible and readable, the first document is scheduled for June. The Council joins with the City of Edmonton Social Services, Alberta Family and Social Services, the Edmonton Board of Health, Alberta Mental Health Services, and the United Way on this project.

The Council also participates in the Edmonton Inter-Agency Youth Services Association aimed at working cooperatively towards promoting improved services to street youth and youth at risk between the ages of 10 and 18. One of this year's projects is a directory of available youth services.

The Council presented a brief on the future of health care in Alberta to the Premier's Commission called "Health Care for Albertans: Making a Good Health Care System Better." In working with other concerned groups and associations, the Council cultivated contacts with whom it will continue to work for innovative changes in the health care system.

Often the Council is contracted by governments for research and other projects. Some such work is "Volunteering in Alberta" and "Rural-Urban Differences in Volunteering," two monographs being prepared for the Secretary of State.

To work or not to work—and the consequences

The Unemployed People's Support Project (UPS) began last spring to bring unemployed people together to better cope with life without work and to find find work again. The ESPC, in conjunction with the Family Life Education Council and the City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department, coordinated seven groups.

Through eight sessions in four weeks, participants learned how to find help, maintain self-esteem, handle family and personal stress, and use job search techniques and recreation. Participants say they feel less alone. They report feeling encouraged by meeting others in the same situation and socializing with them, said Sidney Pollock of the Family Life Education Council, which has groups under way until June and hopes to continue the program.

After several years of research into unemployment and

its social implications, the Council became part of the Canadian Council on Social Development's **Work and Income in the Nineties** project. Focus groups across Canada were used to gather information that will be discussed in a national forum this month. A network has been established to develop strategies and projects to promote meaningful job creation.

Other projects for this year include efforts to:

- increase awareness among the public and among policy makers of the social and psychological costs of unemployment
- deal with the changing nature of work in Alberta and Canada, looking at such issues as unemployment, the working poor, low paying service sector jobs, and other work issues
- research changes in the labour force, growing inequalities and future trends for work in the next decade
- look at how legislation and the workplace can be modified to better integrate people's major roles of work and family
- investigate a community- based alternative investment fund for socially responsible investment.

"Sharing the wealth"

Every year, the Council provides training and consultation services to community agencies. This includes workshops for volunteers and staff, program evaluations, and confidential assistance to senior agency staff and executive members of agency boards.

In the past year, the Council:

- conducted board/staff planning workshops for Edmonton Women's Shelter Society and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
- made presentations and briefs on midwifery, work and the family, voluntarism, and privatization to the Canadian Cancer Society, the New Democratic Conference on the Family, and the Solicitor General of Canada and
- conducted program evaluations for Planned Parenthood Association of Edmonton and Family Service Association of Edmonton.

The Council continues to make the community more aware of current social issues through:

- its regular publications *First Reading* and *Alberta Facts*
- brown bag lunchtime forums on social issues and
- presentations to community groups on voluntarism, privitization, and work and the family.

For more details on the Edmonton Social Planning Council's work in 1988, contact Carmen Brady at 423-2031 for your copy of the annual report.

Council's library research haven

There's no shortage of information in our society, and that can be a problem in itself. Sometimes the distance between desperately needed information and its source can seem overwhelming. When it comes to information on social issues, however, help comes through the Edmonton Social Planning Council with its Roger Soderstrom Resource Library.

The library's over 2,000 items cover such social issues as social services, health, poverty, income security, pensions, family, children and child care, women, and seniors. In addition, it deals with non-profit organizations, transportation, housing, urban issues and community development, law and crime, employment and unemployment in the labour force, and research and methodology.

An especially valuable collection of local information, the library files periodicals from non-profit agencies and other social planning councils. It also maintains provincial and some federal government statistics and provincial and federal budget information. Open weekdays 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., the library provides limited workspace and photocopying at 10 cents a copy.

ESPC looks back 50 years

For over 50 years, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has been influencing the development of voluntary social services and community groups in Edmonton.

Councils were common throughout North America after the turn of the century. As with most of them, Edmonton's Council of Social Agencies helped existing agencies avoid service gaps and overlaps.

Generally, the councils also took action to establish new services to meet changing or emerging needs. Creators of the councils looked to them for centralized planning in the health and social services area. And the concern for centralized financial planning for private agencies saw community chests emerging to conduct joint funding campaigns.

Social planning councils developed differently around the continent. In Edmonton, the council's work emphasized applied research and planning by the 1960s. It tackled such issues as day care, the problems of aging, the juvenile court system, the needs of families, and social problems in the inner city.

By the 1970s, the Council became involved with community development projects, working with neighbourhood groups and advocacy organizations.

Among the legacy of the Edmonton Social Planning Council's 50 years of work are prominent community organizations it helped to establish: United Way of Edmonton and Area, Family Services Association of Edmonton, Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, Community Connections, Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre, Family Life Education Council, Boyle Street Co-op, Alberta Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled, and Sexual Assault Centre.

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One Child in Six Lives in Poverty

What does being poor mean to these children?

What being poor means to Jenny

The average girl living with her mom stands a 50-50 chance of being poor. Jenny's mom doesn't make much money: she earns minimum wage. She can't always afford nutritious meals, so Jenny gets sick a lot.

Jenny and her mom move around often, and Jenny feels she's always changing schools. She finds it hard to have to make new friends all the time.

Jenny has one pair of jeans, and she doesn't have a bike or get birthday presents or have neat snacks to take to school. Sometimes Jenny finds it embarrassing.

But what Jenny finds hardest about being poor is that *she feels different* from all the other children.

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$6,258 BELOW the poverty line

Poor children often are sick children

Babies from poor families die at almost **twice** the rate that babies from wealthy families do. For babies from Indian families the picture is much worse. They die at a rate almost 4 1/2 times greater than other Alberta babies.

And, poor children suffer more from cancer, respiratory diseases, congenital anomalies and pneumonia than other children.

These higher disease and death rates are closely tied to nutrition, health care, and housing conditions.

Are housing costs really accommodating?

The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton was $482 in October, 1988. After paying rent, the single parent with two children, earning minimum wage, has $238 left. With this money, she must pay utilities, household, laundry, child care, prescriptions, and travel expenses PLUS buy food and clothing for her children.

This family qualifies for a social allowance subsidy of about $500 per month. Often people are unaware of this subsidy. Others, who may be aware of the subsidy, wish to avoid the social allowance system because of the stigma attached.

Does money affect education?

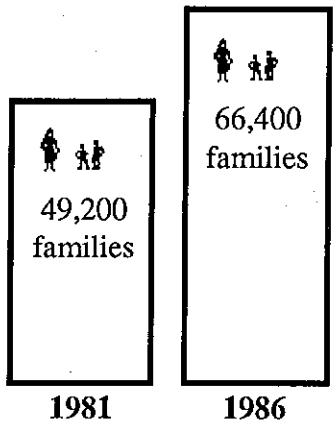
Children from wealthy families are far more likely to finish high school and continue their education than children from poor families. Children from poor families skip school twice as much as children from other families.

Studies point out that family income affects how well children do in school and how much they join school activities.

While no figures exist for all Native people, only 20% of Indian students finish high school—compared to a national average of 70%.

What does this mean for children? People with less education have a greater chance of being out of work and therefore a greater chance of being poor. In other words, poor children are more likely to become poor adults.

Alberta's Poor Families Increase



SOURCE: Poverty Profile 1988, National Council of Welfare

Are families a priority for the Alberta Government?

The typical cost of feeding and clothing two boys, aged 10 and 11, was about $310 a month in December, 1988, according to Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Social allowance provides about $225 for food and clothing for these two children. Foster care provides about $415. Why do parents living on social allowance and caring for their own children receive less than the estimated cost for food and clothing? (And nothing for toys, books, or Christmas and birthday presents.)

Why is there such a gap between what natural parents receive for their children and what foster parents receive for other people's children?

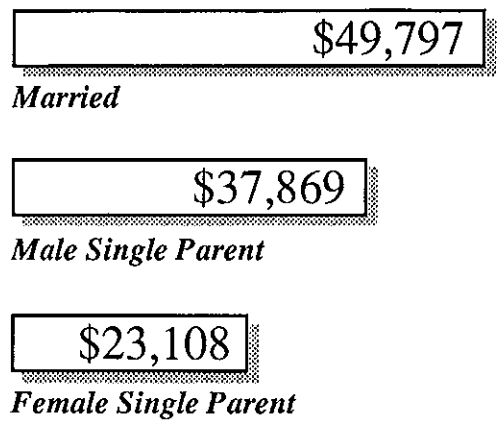
The Alberta Government says it believes in families and wants to help them. How are they supporting poor families?

"It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."

– Hon. Connie Osterman

When a school lunch program was suggested in the Legislature in April, 1988, the then Social Services Minister Connie Osterman said, "It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."

Average Family Incomes



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, Income Distributions by Size in Canada #13-207, 1987

The future: more than a family affair

The number of single parent families grew by almost 50 per cent in the 10 years from 1971 to 1981. Single parent families represented 13 per cent of all families by 1986. The number of two-parent families also increased, but only by 22 per cent.

If these trends continue, it is likely that more and more children will grow up poor.

What responsibility do *we* share for all Alberta's children?

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the future consequences of providing less than minimum care for Alberta's children?
2. The Alberta Government says it wants to help families. How do you think it can best do this?
3. Who will advocate for Alberta's poor children?
4. How would we all benefit if fewer children grew up poor?

What can you do?

- Support raising social allowance benefits to ensure that children can be adequately fed and clothed.
- Support equalizing wages between men and women so single mothers can support their children.
- Write letters to your Member of Parliament (MP) and your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to encourage the above changes.

Recommended Reading

Baum, Gregory. *Ethics in Economics*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1984.

Campbell, C.C., et al. *Hunger, Poverty and Malnutrition: The Nutritional Implications of Food Insecurity in Canada.* Toronto: Food Advocacy Coalition of Toronto, 1986.

Canadian Child Welfare Association, Canadian Council on Children and Youth, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Institute of Child Health, Child Poverty Action Group, Family Service Canada, and Vanier Institute of the Family. *A Choice of Futures: Canada's Commitment to Its Children* [a series of five fact sheets]. Toronto, 1988.

Canadian Council on Social Development. *Not Enough: The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty in Canada.* Ottawa, 1984.

Clarke, Michelle. *Wasting our Future: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development.* Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Children and Youth, 1988.

Deroo, Remy. *Witness of Justice.* Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979.

The Child Poverty Action Group. *A Fair Chance for all Children: the Declaration on Child Poverty.* Toronto, 1986.

Waxman, Chaim I., *The Stigma of Poverty.* New York: Pergamon Press, 1983.

Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In is one of a series of fact sheets on social issues produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. This edition was produced with financial support from the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation. Copies are available in bulk for classes and study groups.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit social action agency which seeks social justice through policy analysis, applied research, community development, and training and consultation.

For more information about the Council, its regular publications ***First Reading*** and ***Alberta Facts,*** or other publications, please contact:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912–106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 1C5
(403) 423-2031

A United Way Member Agency

Council's publications worth adding to library

Often, although not always, the Edmonton Social Planning Council's research finds its way into print.

The Other Welfare Manual uses a compact 50 pages to lead clients and helping professionals through the social allowance maze. This manual helps people understand their rights and responsibilities, deal with the system, and receive the maximum benefits available to them.

The tone throughout this guide is "stand up for yourself." It shows how to become actively involved in the process: ask for your entitlements, know that you can appeal, keep records.

Copies are available for $4, but are free to social allowance recipients. Organizations requesting multiple copies for use with clients should check with Carmen Brady for details.

Another recent publication *Doing it right!* is a practical workbook on needs assessment. Designed especially for social service agencies and community organizations, *Doing it right!* provides practical, straight-forward information.

It helps readers understand how a needs assessment can benefit an agency or group as it plans. Then it asks the reader questions designed to help him determine whether a needs assessment is needed.

Finally, it uses a workbook approach for a learn-by-doing approach to actually conducting a needs assessment.

For your copy, send $9.95, plus $2 for shipping and handling.

If you're a social researcher, have we got the book for you!

The *1989 Social Research Directory* contains detailed listings for eighty libraries, resources centres, and similar collections of social information in the Edmonton Area.

This guide is useful to both those doing indepth research and those needing concise, current information quickly. Its intended users include community organizations, public servants, librarians, individuals, educators, and students.

The libraries included meet three criteria:

- all collect information about the individuals and groups that make up society, their welfare, and their interactions
- the public has access to the collection, although material may not circulate and hours and service are limited
- all are located in Edmonton.

Each copy costs $9.95, plus $2 for shipping and handling.

Other recent reports by the Edmonton Social Planning Council include *Health Care for Albertans: Making A Good Health Care System Better* and *Facing the Future: The Economic and Political Realities of Voluntarism in the 1990s.* Each publication costs $2, plus $2 for shipping and handling.

"Tracking the Trends: Future Directions for Human Services in Edmonton" will be available this summer. It is the first report of the Community Needs Assessment Project undertaken by the Council, the United Way, City of Edmonton Social Services, Alberta Family and Social Services, Edmonton Board of Health, and Alberta Mental Health Services.

Be up to date! Order your publications from the Edmonton Social Planning Council today.

Edmonton Social Planning Council Order Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____

Postal Code _____

Note: 15% off for members.
Postage and handling: 1-3 copies, add $2; 4-6 copies, add $3.50; 7-10 copies, add $5; 11+, add $6.50

Title	Number of Copies	Price per copy	Total
_____	_____	_____	= _____
_____	_____	_____	= _____
_____	_____	_____	= _____

Send this form, plus your cheque or money order, to:

Carmen Brady
Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912 - 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5

Members crucial to Council's work

People working together to make better lives, better communities, is at the heart of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council gets people involved in many ways—one of which is through membership. Nearly 200 individuals and groups belong, and there's room for more!

Joining the Council is a way to:

- support its work
- receive *First Reading* and *Alberta Facts*
- receive notice of new publications (and get a 15 per cent discount on purchases) and
- connect with other socially conscious people.

Who joins? A recent survey showed that the average individual member is 35 to 44 years old, has a masters degree, and works in social or related agencies. Members belong to a wide range of other organizations and professional associations and participate in a wide range of activities.

The single most important reason they gave for joining is support for the Council's work. Secondly, they wanted social planning information, *First Reading*, and *Alberta Facts*. For organizational members, the desire for information outranks even their stated strong support of the Council's work.

Perhaps the least developed aspect of membership is networking. "I would like to hear more from members," said Carmen Brady, Publications and Membership Secretary. She encourages members to drop in for coffee, to use the library, to talk abut their expectations of membership. Brown bag lunch forums, scheduled to start again this fall, give members and guests a chance to deal with current social issues.

Part of the Council's strength is its solid base of members. If you aren't a member, please consider joining. If you already are a member, please renew when the time comes. And, in the meantime, pass this along to someone else you feel may wish to join. For more information about membership, contact Carmen Brady at 423-2031.

Donations support essential community work

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's status as an independent, non-profit organization lends something to its widespread credibility.

Unlike many other community agencies steeped in service delivery, the Council can devote its time to researching community needs. Unlike government research units, the Council can criticize social policies and programs. Unlike research units, the Council can use its research as a basis for advocacy and community development.

It has a unique track record in working successfully with diverse groups, for taking an impartial and informed viewpoint, and fostering debate without creating animosity.

Not only is this an unending challenge in itself, but also the Executive Director faces the perpetual puzzle of putting together enough funds each year. Half the Council's money comes from the United Way of Edmonton and Area with the rest coming from municipal, provincial, federal, and foundation grants, combined with donations, membership fees, and fees for service. Approximately 40 percent of the Council's $290,000 budget comes from contracts, grants, fee for service work, and private donations.

Can you turn your support of the Edmonton Social Planning Council into a donation this year? Send your cheque or money order right away. You can expect your tax deductible receipt by mail.

YES, I want to help the Edmonton Social Planning Council!

Here is my cheque or money order for:

$50 $100 $150 $250 Other_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____

Postal Code_____

Member _____ Non-member _____

Return to:
Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912 – 106 Street, Edmonton, AB T5K 1C5

Tell us what **you** think about *First Reading*

Dear Reader,

You receive *First Reading* from the Edmonton Social Planning Council six times a year. *First Reading* is part of the Council's efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of current social issues.

Please help make *First Reading* the kind of publication you want and need by taking a few minutes to compete this brief questionnaire. **Do it now,** and mail it so that your views are part of the planning for the "new, improved" *First Reading!*

1. When *First Reading* arrives, I usually read it:

- ☐ Immediately
- ☐ Within a week
- ☐ Within a month
- ☐ Eventually
- ☐ I don't read it at all

2. *First Reading* provides me with information that is:

- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Generally useful
- ☐ Somewhat useful
- ☐ Useless

3. The language and writing style in *First Reading* is:

- ☐ Very difficult to read and understand
- ☐ Difficult to read and understand
- ☐ Easy to read and understand

4. The articles in *First Reading* tend to be:

- ☐ Too long
- ☐ Too short
- ☐ About right

5. For me, *First Reading* is:

- ☐ A primary source of information about social issues
- ☐ One of a few sources of information about social issues
- ☐ One of many sources of information about social issues

6. *First Reading's* coverage of social issues tends to contain:

- ☐ Too much detail
- ☐ About the right amount of detail
- ☐ Too little detail

7. *First Reading* contains about the right type and mix of information.

☐ Yes (Please skip questions 8 and 9)
☐ No (Please answer questions 8 and 9)

8. *First Reading* needs <u>more</u> information about:

☐ Edmonton Social Planning Council activities
☐ poverty and unemployment in Alberta
☐ government social policy
☐ taking action on social issues
☐ other. Please specify _____

9. *First Reading* needs <u>less</u> information about:

☐ Edmonton Social Planning Council activities
☐ poverty and unemployment in Alberta
☐ government social policy
☐ taking action on social issues
☐ other. Please specify _____

10. Who should receive *First Reading*? (Check as many categories as you feel apply.)

☐ Edmonton aldermen
☐ MLAs
☐ MPs
☐ public libraries
☐ media
☐ educational institutions
☐ human service organizations
☐ human service professionals
☐ business leaders
☐ other. Please specify _____

11. Please add any comments you wish to make about *First Reading* and how it might be improved.

Thank you for participating and for providing your stamp and envelope.

Return your completed questionnaire to:
Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912 – 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5

What role does media play in public policy?

(continued from page 1)

on institutions to tell us what is new.

"I have often said that newspapers don't print the truth. We print what people tell us. And it's often not true. Walter Lippman, a great American journalist said this long before I did and said it more eloquently. 'The function of news,' he said, 'is to signalize an event; the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act.'"

Lippman suggested that news could be expected to coincide with truth in only a few limited areas: the fact of a hockey score or an election result. In the complex and ambiguous areas of public policies and politics, news stories cannot be expected to present a full and true picture.

"A simple example may be a new piece of legislation; let's say it's social service legislation. The reporter gets a copy of the bill and goes to the minister responsible and the minister says this will mean wonderful progressive changes in the system. Then the reporter goes to the opposition MLAs and they say, 'no this is terrible.' Then we go to the social planning council and they say, 'well, this part is good but that part is bad' and then we go to the Chamber of Commerce and they say, 'No, that part is good and this part is bad.' And the reporter writes the story quoting everyone.

"If you know something about the subject, you can probably wade through all the remarks and draw some conclusions. If you are an average reader, I'm not sure the story has been very helpful."

"The greatest concern I have is not whether the media plays an appropriate role in public policy issues, but, rather, whether anyone really cares very much any more."

Even when the media has great information and understanding of the issue, our readers may not be very interested, said Hughes. "We have to constantly weigh what we think is important with what we think our readers will find interesting and relevant." She said it's a balancing act between what is in the public interest to know and what the public is interested in knowing about.

"Nevertheless, the media obviously plays a crucial role in public policy debate. In the simplest terms, there often wouldn't be any debate if it weren't for the media." She said governments consider the media part of the process in making policy decisions and announcements, but the media is much more than simply a forum for announcements. "We also disclose and expose policies that government and institutions would prefer not to see in the public limelight."

Hughes called the media a sounding board for information and for public opinion, but said its greatest role in a democratic society is not simply to report what those in power have done and what those with vested interests have to say, but to be a public watchdog.

"When the media goes beyond the 'he said, she said' of news reporting and digs into the real effects of public policy on real people, that's when the media can have it's greatest impact on public policy.

"You may remember the story of Richard Cardinal, the native teenager who spent his life in more than 20 different foster homes. He committed suicide and left a diary which was given to the *Journal*. The stories we wrote about Cardinal led to a public inquiry into his death. On the basis of the inquiry's findings, significant changes were made to the Child Welfare Act in an effort to ensure other children should not suffer the same fate as Richard Cardinal.

"More recently, and partly in response to the Cardinal case, the social services department began a policy of repatriating native foster children back to their reserves. But that policy has had mixed results and the *Journal* and other media have again focused attention on the problem by writing about the tragic and traumatic stories of children taken out of happy foster homes and placed in new and frightening environments. The stories have again sparked a re-examination of department policy."

Hughes noted many examples where the media has brought injustices and inequities, or perceived injustices, into public focus. "It's not that the media forces policy change but it can push the public into paying attention and if the public cares, the policy change will come."

"The greatest concern I have is not whether the media plays an appropriate role in public policy issues, but, rather, whether anyone really cares very much anymore."

Hughes cited declining newspaper readership across North America. In the United States, 54 per cent of adults read a daily paper—down from 73 per cent 20 years ago. Among 18 to 30 year olds, 33 per cent read daily newspapers, down from 60 per cent 20 years ago. She cites readership surveys which give a sense that younger people care little about politics, the economy, and what's going on around them. They want things short and quick, easy to read, and easy to understand. For them radio, television, and tabloid journalism suffice. Add in the problem of illiteracy—the one in five Canadians (one in four Edmontonians) considered functionally illiterate.

"All in all, we can paint a pretty dismal picture for the future of journalism, at least more thoughtful journalism. Without thoughtful journalism, we will not have an enlightened electorate. Without an enlightened electorate, we cannot have a functioning democracy.

"So our greatest concern in the future may not be how the media affects public policy, but whether the media can make the general public care at all about that public policy."

On the Council Agenda...

- Casino, July 12–13, ABS Casino, 10161 – 112 Street
- Watch for brown bag lunch time forums this fall!
- Watch for **50th Anniversary** plans!!

From: Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 1C5
Phone: (403) 423-2031

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To:

• SOCIAL SHORTS •

Edmonton volunteers

Edmonton's Volunteer Action Centre recruited nearly 2,500 volunteers in 1988. Although most volunteers fall between the ages of 21 and 40, 95 young teenagers (aged 13-17) volunteer as well as about 90 people over 61.

The Centre's own 95 volunteers accumulated approximately 7,700 hours as referral counsellors, office support staff, special projects staff, and board trainers for other agencies.

For more information—or to volunteer!—contact the Volunteer Action Centre, 9844 – 110 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 1J2, phone: 482-6431.

Know your rights

Know Your Rights! A Handbook for Women in the Alberta Workforce is a new handbook available from Edmonton Working Women. It covers employment standards, discrimination, sexual harassment, and remedies for workplace problems.

For a copy, mail $1 (for postage) to Edmonton Working Women, #30, 9930 – 106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 1C7.

About children...

Numerous publications for and about children are available from the Canadian Council on Children and Youth. For more details, request the brochure *Publications* from the Council, Suite 14, 2211 Riverside Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1H 7X5.

Family violence defined

Family violence is in the news, but how is it defined? Ontario social worker David Rivard calls family violence a "generic term" referring to any threat or use of physical force on one of several members of a person's family. This is often combined with acts of coercion, manipulation, exploitation, and control tactics. In essense, abuse involves a perpetrator, typically male, who does something against the wishes of more vulnerable family members. Abusive behaviors fall into four categories:

- physical: hitting, kicking, slapping, punching, and physical play that hurts
- emotional: name calling and verbal abuse often including derogatory remarks
- sexual: exposure, sexual touching, attempted or actual sexual acts (including marital rape)
- psychological: threats of suicide or fear of violence.

first reading

Volume 7, Number 5 | Edmonton Social Planning Council | September, 1989

Literacy increasingly important

In 1986, a Toronto Star article predicted that by 1990 "anyone with less than a Grade 12 reading competence will have little or no opportunity to enter the work force." In the United States, Xerox Corporation projects that by 1990 three out of four jobs will require some post-high school education.

...4.5 million Canadians are illiterate and another 1.7 million are only marginally literate.

Research shows that blue collar workers read an average of 97 minutes daily on the job. General Motors says employees now must work with robots and lasers which demand much higher literacy level than before this technology was in place. And in 1987, the United Nations declared 1990 National Literacy Year.

Today, according to the Southam Report on Literacy, 4.5 million Canadians are illiterate and another 1.7 million are only marginally literate. An estimated 500,000 functional illiterates are not included in the total of 4.5 million because of those not included in the survey: prisoners, transients, the mentally retarded, natives on reserves, people living north of the 60th parallel, and all immigrants unable to speak either official language. For a *third* of Canada's population, then, the printed word poses some problems. (Measured by the UNESCO definition in 1981, 4 million Canadians have less than Grade 9.)

Illiteracy rates vary from a low of 17 per cent of the population in British Columbia to a high of 44 per cent of the population in Newfoundland. Alberta's illiteracy rate of 21 per cent means some 360,000 people struggle with reading and writing. About 18,000 of them, or 5 per cent, are taking literacy classes.

For those who are illiterate, it may be impossible to find an amount on an income tax table, find a store in the Yellow Pages,

(continued on page 4)

It must be a strange state to be like Jo. To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language — to be, in every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb. It must be very puzzling to see the good company going to church on Sundays, and with their books in their hands, and to think (for perhaps Jo does think at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how come that it means nothing to me?

– Charles Dickens
Bleak House, Chapter 16

Response

Readers comment

According to the recent readership survey, 80 per cent of the respondents read *First Reading* immediately or within a week. About a third find the information "very useful," with the other two-thirds rating it "generally useful."

Respondents were unanimous in finding the language and writing style easy to read and understand, although one commented that it is "sometimes poorly edited." Another said, "An excellent newsletter; clear, concise, and constructive style."

Nearly 90 per cent of respondents felt the length of articles was "about right," with the others opting for "too long."

Only 16 per cent of the respondents considered *First Reading* a primary source of information about social issues. For 46 per cent, *First Reading* is one of a few sources and for the rest, it is one of many sources.

One reader wrote, "*First Reading* gives bird's eye view of issues that I haven't time to read about otherwise. It also takes emerging local and provincial issues and puts them into perspective." Another said, "your information covering poverty and related issues is indispensible."

Nearly 90 per cent of respondents find *First Reading*'s coverage of social issues contained "about the right amount of detail." And over 60 per cent felt *First Reading* contains about the right type and mix of information.

One reader said, "I would like to see more stats on Alberta and Edmonton regarding income, labor force participation, lone-parent families, etc."

Respondents indicated that *First Reading* should be widely circulated, with most saying Edmonton aldermen and provincial MLAs should receive it. One respondent commented that "with the high credibility *First Reading* has, as wide a distribution as possible is best, with focus on opinion makers."

Two respondents commented specifically on the June issue. One wrote, "I enjoyed the article that reported Linda Hughes' talk on the role of the media in public policy-shaping. I think the June issue presented a clear and detailed description of the goals and the work of ESPC. Excellent!" The other liked the "better, clearer writing and shorter articles of the June issue. I liked the information about ESPC but want only new information every issue. I want it to be more than just a newsletter about the Council."

The survey response rate was 5 per cent, and it was augmented by a number of phone interviews to individuals and organizations on the mailing list. The phone and written responses showed a similar pattern.

First Reading (ISSN 0824-197X) is an Edmonton newsletter on current social issues published six times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, social action agency which seeks social justice through applied research, policy analysis, community development, and organizational training.

To receive this publication, write *First Reading* at #41, 9912 – 106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5 or phone (403) 423-2031. Direct correspondence to the *First Reading* Editor at the same address.

Contributions on current social issues are welcomed. When submitting manuscripts, please type them, double-spaced, and provide a brief biography. If you want the manuscript returned, please enclose an addressed, stamped envelope.

The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions to conform to space and style restrictions. *First Reading* adheres to a clear, concise reporting style and the specifics outlined in *The Canadian Style, A Guide to Writing and Editing*, published by The Department of the Secretary of State of Canada.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Edmonton Social Planning Council or of its funding bodies.

Publisher: Peter Faid, Executive Director
Editor: Beckie Garber-Conrad, ABC

A United Way Member Agency

What exactly *is* literacy?

Although literacy is a commonly used term, many people may be uncertain what it means—and with good reason. As Alberta Advanced Education's Keith Anderson put it, "illiteracy, like poverty, is difficult to define precisely. Whatever definition is adopted, it is also difficult to estimate its true incidence." And literacy and functional literacy are common terms within literacy circles. Several frequently used definitions may help.

"...a person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her daily life."

The UNESCO definition is used statistically and for international comparisons. It says "a person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her daily life." An illiterate person cannot do this, and usually this means less than Grade 5 schooling.

Functional literacy involves a more advanced level of learning and coping skills. According to UNESCO, "a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his or her own and the community's development. Completion of Grade 9 is normally considered necessary for functional literacy.

...the incidence of illiteracy is staggering: 24 per cent of Canada's adults...

Still, census data in which people report their grade attainment in schooling may or may not reflect their actual literacy level. In 1987, Southam newspapers conducted a competency-based study of literacy in Canada. It measured people's literacy levels through random sampling, utilizing a battery of test items.

Regardless of definition, the incidence of illiteracy is staggering: 24 percent of Canada's adults are illiterate. (In Alberta, the rate is a slightly better 21 percent.) In 1981, using the UNESCO measure, 1 million Canadians were basic illiterates (less than Grade 5) and another 3 million were functional illiterates.

There are two major discrepancies between the two measurements. According to the Southam survey, 1.7 million Canadians *with less than* Grade 9 proved functionally literate. And 2.4 million adult Canadians *with* Grade 9 or more proved functionally illiterate.

The $295,000 Southam Survey tested nearly 2,400 adults 18 or older with more than 40 literacy-related questions.

Since the United Nations declared 1990 as International Literacy Year, new literacy projects have been launched. In 1988, the department of the Secretary of State announced $110 million over five years: 45 per cent for partnership agreements with provinces and territories; 45 per cent for the voluntary sector; and 10 per cent for the national literacy secretariat.

Conference set

The 1990s have been declared a decade of literacy, and a literacy conference will be held October 9-12, 1990 in Edmonton's Conference Centre.

For more information, call Dr. Pat Fahy at 422-0663 or write Albera Vocational Centre, 224, 10215-108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 1L6.

Literacy increasingly important

(continued from page 1)

circle the charge on a telephone bill, or even read product names in the stores.

Without a doubt, their illiteracy costs them a lot personally. But it also costs Canada as a nation. According to the report of the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, illiteracy results in $4 billion of direct costs to Canadian business and an estimated $10 billion to Canadian society as a whole annually. Illiteracy-related industrial accidents account for another $1.6 billion.

...illiteracy results in $4 billion of direct costs to Canadian business and an estimated $10 billion to Canadian society as a whole annually.

This task force found that only 2 per cent of Canadian jobs required no reading or writing. It found that most jobs require at least two hours of reading per day. And, furthermore, it found that the average work place requires people not only to read, write, and compute, but also to use these skills to solve problems.

In the United States, the Business Council for Effective Literacy has a brochure calling illiteracy a "curable ill" that costs society billions of dollars a year. It says illiterate employees cost companies daily through low productivity, workplace accidents, absenteeism, poor product quality, and lost management and supervisory time.

...the average work place requires people not only to read, write, and compute, but also to use these skills to solve problems.

Up to three-fourths of the currently unemployed are functionally illiterate, which reduces the pool of competent people to hire. Those illiterates unable to qualify for today's highly technological work represent a loss of potential customers for products and services.

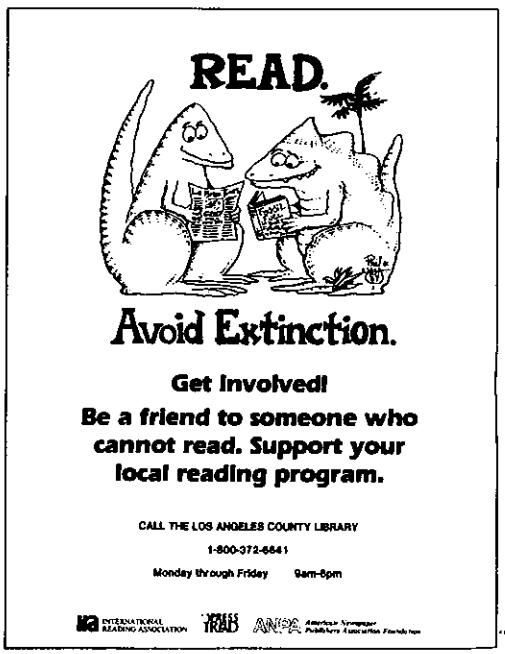
This brochure challenges companies to make grants to local adult literacy programs, provide support to national offices of literacy groups, get on literacy coordinating councils and agencies, fund centres for literacy research, encourage employees to volunteer as tutors, and set up basic skills programs.

Up to three-fourths of the currently unemployeed are functionally illiterate...

In Canada, "Broken Words," the Southam Literacy Survey, says economists "can't possibly estimate the myriad of small costs imposed by illiteracy: gas wasted because delivery drivers can't read street signs, house gutters installed upside down by illiterate handymen, midsdirected mail, misunderstood instructions, chemicals improperly mixed at a factory, airplanes not serviced correctly ... the potential list is endless."

Yet the Southam study says that perhaps the biggest cost is the "straitened lives" of those who are functionally illiterate. It quotes Senator Joyce Fairbairn, who launched Parliament's only literacy debate, "The internal emotional loss for individuals, the stress, the wreck it makes of their lives —and particularly the lives of their children—is really a cost that I don't think any country can afford."

...perhaps the biggest cost is the "straitened lives" of those who are functionally illiterate.



CAPPILL unique to Edmonton

Program tackles prevention

At least one local literacy instructor says that "Johnny may have come back to school, but he still can't read." Rolf Pritchard, who heads Edmonton Public Schools' Adult Basic Education program, says that it is extremely difficult to "cure" illiteracy in adults. He says it's time to look at prevention as well as cure.

"The adult illiterate is at the end of a very depressing road from a background deprived educationally, culturally, and familially," says Pritchard. "They are victims of lost opportunity and often the inability to take advantage of opportunity.

"Though no one denies that adult literacy problems do yield some gains in reading level and student self-esteem, in fact, the number of illiterates who ever achieve the point of functional literacy is dismayingly small," says Pritchard in the rationale for his proposed new approach Combined Agencies Project to Prevent Illiteracy (CAPPILL).

CAPPILL starts with the assumption that illiteracy is a symptom of a deeper social malaise of poverty and its attendant deprivations and disadvantages. It acknowledges that the crucial stage of human cognitive development (of which literacy is a part) takes place between birth and eight or nine years. And it looks at combining the efforts of many agencies for poor families whose children are "at risk."

CAPPILL sees literacy as a family affair. It seeks to intervene in a way that might break the intergenerational cycle of undereducation by:

- improving parents' basic skills and attitudes toward education
- improving children's learning skills and providing them with a better cultural background of experience before they begin formal schoooling
- improving parents' child-care skills and
- uniting parents and children in a positive educational experience.

...it's time to look at prevention as well as cure.

First, target families will be identified: families in which conditions exist that seem likely to negatively affect their preschoolers from later doing well in school. These families are likely to be headed by a functionally illiterate single parent and be second or third generation welfare.

The program will promote parenting skills through several means. A Parent Centre will promote and develop social and cultural activities and study. Locally, there will be classes and study groups in parenting, consumer education, nutrition, cooking, grooming, self-image, personal growth, budgeting, and other life-coping skills. In addition, the parent will receive literacy tutoring and instruction in reading materials for preschoolers and activities that pass on the cultural legacy of Western Canada. At the same time, volunteers will provide pre-literacy activities and games—and provide books and stories—to the preschoolers at home.

As its name suggests, CAPPILL brings together several agencies to attack illiteracy (and its development) on these different fronts. It uses Edmonton Public Schools' early childhood and continuing education departments, social services, public libraries, and the city Board of Health. It started this spring in Edmonton's Belvedere community and will begin this fall in Millwoods. (In this first year, perhaps a few dozen families will participate, although the project could expand if requested funds from the Secretary of State are granted.)

Pritchard and colleague Helen Yee developed the CAPPILL plan over the past five or six years, as they reflected on the difficulties their adult literacy students face. They note that these students often achieve a gain of only one or two reading levels—and that acquiring literacy as an adult seems much more difficult than acquiring it as a child through

(continued on page 6)

Program tackles prevention

(continued from page 5)

good pre-literacy experiences and ability to benefit from early schooling. In looking at hundreds of literacy students, they found less than 10 per cent reached functional literacy and far fewer progressed to a point where they could enter vocational or other such courses.

"Children are the key to the future and to breaking the cycle of illiteracy."

"We started thinking that there must be a better way," said Pritchard. And the better way that emerged was to work with families at risk so that children reach school ready to benefit. "Partly, this is something we've always known: that children from middle class families do better in school than those from poorer families. So, to break the cycle of illiteracy, we need to put poorer children on a more equal footing with their middle-class peers.

Essentially, CAPPILL aims to enrich children's home setting, and thus their ability to take advantage of schooling when they reach school. Part of how this enrichment occurs is though work with parents and their literacy and life coping skills. Prtichard speaks graphically of "improving the *texture* of the home background."

As far as Pritchard and Yee know, CAPPILL is unique in Canada, and only a few similar programs operate in the States. Their investigation last year of the few operative programs showed very encouraging results. "It's taken educators awhile to realize that illiteracy is not simply an educational problem but a *symptom* of a social problem," said Pritchard. "The solution isn't an educational one." And so, CAPPILL serves mores as a "focusing agency" working largely with existing courses and facilities and bringing them right into the homes of families at risk.

Pritchard and Yee are adamant about not writing off adult literacy work, but say that "children are the key to the future and to breaking the cycle of illiteracy." And the environment of a child's early life play a critical role in subsequent linguistic and cognitive development. "It's easier to *prevent* illiteracy than to *cure* it," says Pritchard. "The events which culminate in adult illiteracy undoubtedly take place in early childhood, and probably in the preschool years. This is not to say that the die is irretrievably cast by age six or seven but certainly, in the case of the socio-economically-deprived Grade 1 student, the school system is an uphill struggle."

Likewise, adult literacy is an uphill struggle, perhaps in part because the adult lacks the acute language development orientation of the young child. "The probability of an adult illiterate attaining functional literacy is in direct positive correlation to the literacy level at which the student commences the program," notes Pritchard. "Out of nearly 800 students over the past seven years, in every single case where the student has achieved functional literacy, that student entered classes here with a reading level of seven or above." He says it would take many adults working two or three afternoons a week 10 years or more to achieve literacy, but children prepared to benefit from school need never face this struggle.

This led Prtichard and Yee to CAPPILL, which they call a "fairly unique program" although none of the component theories are radical.

Edmonton Social Planning Council

From our bookshelf to yours...

FAMILY

* **Foster Care and Adoption in Canada**
H. Philip Hepworth
This first national study of two key elements of the child welfare system provides an analysis of major developments in the field between 1960 and 1977, and describes key issues facing public and voluntary agencies in the care and placement of children outside their own homes. $10.00 CCSD

* **One in a World of Two's** (April 1976)
A report on one-parent families in Canada and the economic and social problems they face in the labour market, child care services, welfare, housing and social services.
Free NCW

* **Stepmothers: Exploring the Myth (A Survival Guide for Stepfamilies)**
Kati Morrison, M.D., & Airdrie Thompson-Guppy, with Patricia Bell
This publication is a practical guide for step-mothers. It deals with issues of discipline, economic responsibility, custody and caring for the children of these extended families.
$7.95 CCSD

* **What will tomorrow bring? (A Study of the Aspirations of Adolescent Women)**
Prepared by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, this publication looks at the thoughts and beliefs of adolescent women in the areas of education, work and their personal lives and relationships.
$4.95 CCSD

* **Family Law in Canada: New Directions**
This volume examines family law from a feminist perspective. It addresses such issues as joint custody, legal treatment of common law spouses, and the implications of invitro fertilization. It also discusses the complicated structure of family law in Canada, defining the area under federal and provincial control and the many "grey areas" between the two. Published by The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. 1985
$4.95 CCSD

HEALTH

* **Community Based Health and Social Services**
This report outlines the central issues and themes to emerge from the three-day CCSD conference on Improving the Delivery of Community-based Health and Social Services held in Ottawa in November 1985. Also discussed is the future of these services as well as shared problems and goals.
$4.95 CCSD

* **Medicare: the public good and private practice** (May 1982)
An account of the purposes, achievements and development of national health insurance, the health gap facing low-income Canadians, and the threat to medicare posed by user charges and health premiums.
Free NCW

* **Deinstitutionalization: Cost and Effects**
The case for the cost-effectiveness of deinstitutionalization is most difficult to consider when community living is promoted as the only alternative. But in April 1984 researchers and advocates of deinstitutionalization met at an international symposium to try. Consumers and academics presented papers on deinstitutionalization, which affects the lives of persons who are physically, mentally or psychiatrically disabled. The revised and edited papers cover a spectrum of viewpoints on this complex subject. 1985
$15.00 CCSD

* **Health and Home: Women as Health Guardians**
This study examines one kind of work women do - guarding the health of their families. It has two aims: to record for public recognition what constitutes the women's health guardian role, and to point out the implications of this role for public policy. Published by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
$4.95 CCSD

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

* **The Nuts and Bolts of Community Based Economic Development**
Represents selected theme papers from a 1982 conference held in Edmonton. The papers are of special interest to readers concerned with community initiative and Community Development Corporations. (1982)
Free ESPC

* **From the Roots Up: Economic Development as If Community Mattered**
Explains the growing importance of an informal economy, as an alternative to our formal economy. The authors describe informal economic activities such as co-operative enterprise, small business,voluntary activity and barter, and explain the reasons why economists have overlooked this vital sector of all industrial societies.
$10.95 CCSD

* **New Age Business: Community Corporations that Work**
Greg MacLeod
Through three case studies, New Dawn and J.A.L. in Canada and Mondragon in Northern Spain, MacLeod identifies the strengths and weaknesses of community development corporations.
$10.00 CCSD

POVERTY

* **Organizing for the Homeless**
Jim Ward
This publication is intended to provide guidance to those who are interested in effectively organizing the homeless. It is both a "how-to" book and a book which provides a broader philosophical and sociological theory to work with the homeless. 175 pp.
$15.00 CCSD

* **Income Supplements for the Working Poor**
This book presents the background papers and proceedings of a conference on the subject of income supplements.
$10.00 CCSD

* **Guaranteed Annual Income: An Integrated Approach**
These background papers and discussion summaries from the Nuffield Canadian Seminar present a wide range of factual information and informed opinion on the major issues to be considered with a guaranteed annual income. 333pp.
$15.00 CCSD

* **Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 1989**
David Ross, Richard Shillington
This fact book describes the various definitions of poverty used in Canada and provides a breakdown of the latest poverty figures according to various demographics. It also includes an analysis of the effect of second earners on the poverty rate, a section on the distribution of income in Canada, and comparable poverty rates in other industrialized countries. This book is an updated version of one of CCSD's most requested publications.
$13.00 CCSD

* **Not Enough: The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty in Canada**
This publication provides a range of detailed information on the extent, depth, and length of poverty in Canada. 96 pp.
$7.95 CCSD

* **The Canadian Fact Book on Income Distribution**
David Ross
This study examines the facts behind Canadian income distribution and assesses how government spending and tax policies have affected this distribution since 1951. 106 pp.
$7.00 CCSD

* **Sixty-Five and Older** (February 1984)
A comprehensive study of the economic situation of elderly Canadians. The report emphasizes the inferior economic status of elderly women, particularly the large and growing group living alone.
Free NCW

* **Poverty and Unemployment: Assumptions, Responsibilities and Choices**
Graham Riches presented this paper on poverty and unemployment at the 1987 Annual Meeting Workshop of the Family Service Association of Edmonton.
$3.00 ESPC

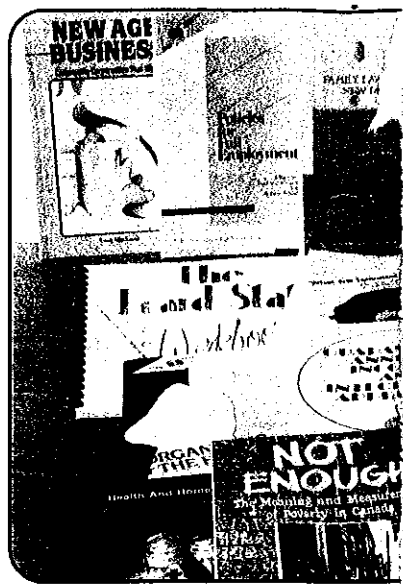
* **Surviving on Welfare - A No Frills Flight**
A description of the practical consequences of living on welfare monies through the eyes and mouths of social allowance recipients. The report examines recipients' financial limitations, experiences with welfare officials, and treatment by the community. Nine recommendations directed at improving the social allowance system are tendered in the report's conclusion.(1986)
$3.00 ESPC

* **A Poverty Profile** (Annual)
Tables and explanatory text on the most recent statistics on poverty, average income and income distribution in Canada. The report analyzes both recent and long-term trends, and highlights groups with an above-average risk of poverty.
Free NCW

* **1989 Poverty Lines**
An explanation of Statistics Canada's low-income lines, with National Council of Welfare estimates for 1989.
Free NCW

* **Welfare in Canada: A Tangled Safety Net**
This publication is the "first comprehensive national analysis of social assistance programs operated by the provincial, territorial and municipal governments ..."
Free NCW

* **The Other Welfare Manual (October 1987)**
Presented in a short, concise, easy to understand format, this 48 page booklet outlines the rights and responsibilities of social assistance recipients in Alberta. Widely used by both recipients and social workers, this publication de-mystifies the Alberta Income Security Program.
$4.00 ESPC
Free to people on social assistance



TAX SYSTEM

* **The Refundable Child Tax Credit: What it is...How it Works** (December 1978)
A background paper describing the newest part of Canada's income support system for families with children and how it assists ow and middle-income families.
Free NCW

* **Bearing the Burden/Sharing the Benefits(March 1978)**
A study of taxation and income redistribution which describes how parts of Canada's existing tax system place their heaviest burden on the poor and how the tax system can be changed to benefit the poor.
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* **Family Allowances for All?** (March 1983)
An analysis of the costs and distributional effects of the family allowance child tax credit and children's tax exemption. An account of the arguments for and against universal family allowances, and a proposal to reform federal child benefits.
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OTHER

* **The Social Research Directory 1989: a guide to libraries and resource centres in Edmonton**
A directory of 80 Edmonton libraries and centres that collect social issues information.
$9.95 ESPC

PENSIONS

* **A Pension Primer** (April 1984)
A description and critique of Canada's complex retirement income system. The study is geared to the lay reader with no specialized knowledge of the pension system.
Free NCW

* **Financing the Canada Pension Plan** (December 1982)
This report explains how the Canada Pension Plan is financed and the use of surplus funds to provide loans to the provinces. It examines future demands on the CPP and proposes a gradual increase in contribution rates and a move to pay-go financing.
Free NCW

* **Pension Reform** (April 1984)
A review fo the three major approaches to pension reform - regulatory reform of private pension plans, mandatory private plans, and expansion of the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.
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* **Better Pensions for Homemakers** (May 1984)
A critique of the homemaker pension proposal of the Parliamentary Task Force on Pension Reform. The report explains the homemaker pension proposal and summarizes the arguments of its supporters.
Free NCW

* **Future Directions for Pensions:** An address by Crawford E. Laing
The text of a speech given April 16, 1986 which reviews developments in the pension reform process since 1979. Economic and political questions are raised about both public and private pension schemes. The author concludes with his speculation regarding future trends and innovations.
$2.00 ESPC

ORGANIZATIONAL

* **Evaluating Social Development Programs**
Novia Carter, Brian Wharf
This publication provides practical strategies and techniques for improving the evaluation of social change projects. 161 pp.
$8.00 CCSD

* **The Board/Staff Workbook**
Explains the principles of effective organizational structure. The workbook offers self-discovery exercises suitable for organizational use. (no date)
$6.00 ESPC

* **Organizing for Social Action** (April 1975)
A description of three successful organizing experiences and, analysis by those who participated in them, why they were successful.
Free NCW

* **Bookkeeping Handbook for Low-Income Citizen Groups** (October 1973)
A guide for use by both new and advanced citizen groups, this report describes a bookkeeping system which can be used by groups and illustrates the system by tracing the bookkeeping history of a sample group.
Free NCW

* **Helping You Helps Me**
A practical guide to starting and maintaining a self-help group. Leadership, membership, recruitment, fund-raising, problem-solving and decision-making are among the more than twenty topics covered. 1983 80pp
$3.50 CCSD

* **Access and the Policy Making Process**
Explores the traditional theories of participatory and representative democracy in relation to the Canadian political system. The report provides a careful review of the key federal decision-making structures. 1978 62 pp
$4.00 CCSD

* **Voluntary Action: Provincial Policies and Practices**
Jean-Bernard Robichaud
Conducted in 1985, this study compares various provincial policies and practices which support voluntarism in the field of social services and community health throughout Canada.
$8.95 CCSD

* **DOING IT RIGHT! A Needs Assessment Workbook**
An easy to read publication it will provide you with a clear understanding of what a needs assessment is, why one should be done and how to get started. It includes 5 worksheets and additional references to assist you.
$9.95 ESPC

EMPLOYMENT

* **Part-Time Work in Canada**
Harry MacKay
This CCSD submission to the Advisory Council of Employment and Immigration Canada discusses the status of part-time work and examines both the obstacles to and benefits of part-time work. 19pp.
$4.00 CCSD

* **Employment Opportunities for the '80's**
Harry MacKay, David Ross
This brief argues that the major employment problem in the '80's is not a shortage of critical skills, but a lack of jobs. Expanding job opportunities through work redistribution, for example, or payment for the care of children and elderly in their own homes, are two of the recommendations discussed. 45 pp.
$5.00 CCSD

* **Manpower Programs: Equity and Integration**
This wide-ranging examination of manpower policy in Canada includes specifics of manpower programs, as well as discussion of the broader issues of education/training, worker participation, and the relationship between manpower and other social and economic policies.79 pp.
$4.00 CCSD

* **Unemployment: Reaping the Costs**
Using standard economic concepts, this report estimates that unemployment costs Albertans $14 billion in 1983 and 1984 alone. If the social costs of unemployment were factored in, the total would be higher. An incomplete assessment of unemployment costs by government could be seen to result in misdirected an ineffective economic policies. (1986)
$1.00 ESPC

* **Counting the Costs:** A Literature Review of the Social and Psychological Costs of Unemployment
This report documents the impact of unemployment on the family, on physical and mental health, and on the incidence of suicide and crime. (1985)
$10.00 ESPC

* **Employment and Social Development in a Changing Economy**
The three papers presented in this publication provide an overview of the issues pursued at CCSD's Workshop '88. The focus of the workshop centered around the "existing scope for local measures to combat continuing high rates of unemployment."
$4.95 CCSD

* **Policies for full employment**
The selections in this publication were initially presented at the Symposium for Policies for Full Employment, fall 1985 which was organized by the Income and Employment Committee of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton. These essays argue that full employment is essential and explain the policy options available to reduce unemployment.
$15.00 CCSD

HUMAN SERVICES

* **Free Trade and Social Policy**
Glenn Drover, Editor
This publication was the result of a seminar on Free Trade and Social Policy sponsored by CCSD. The papers presented here examine the issues, both for and against, from an academic viewpoint and that of labour and business. 168 pp.
$15.00 CCSD

* **Social Concerns for the 1980's: Thought and Action In Social Policy**
Helga Nowotny, Editor
This book summarizes the many changes which have occurred in social concerns over the past decade. As several of the contributors to this volume point out, political and moral concerns with equality have been eclipsed by the goals of achieving and maintaining security.
$19.95 CCSD

* **Women and Housing: Changing Needs and the Failure of Policy**
This report presents an analysis of consumer need drawn from a statistical profile of Canadian women constructed from the most recent national data sources available and placed in a social context. February 1984
$7.95 CCSD

* **Privatization and the Non-Profit Sector: How Should Community Agencies Respond?**
The text of a speech given October 3, 1986 which examines the privatization of social services in the Alberta context. An exploration of underlying motivations and likely impacts is essayed in the speech. A concluding section suggests strategies which non-profit agencies can use to prepare for privatization.
$2.00 ESPC

* **Native Children and the Child Welfare System**
An in-depth study on the treatment of Native children within the Canadian welfare system with a detailed description of past practices and current provincial and territorial policies. 1983
$9.95 CCSD

* **Food Banks and the Welfare Crisis**
Graham Riches
This new work documents the recent proliferation of emergency food services in Canada, and argues that food banks represent more than an upsurge of charity in tough times; they are the signposts of the collapse of the social safety net.
$11.95 CCSD

* **Perspectives on Social Services and Social Issues**
The selections in this volume were drawn from the proceedings of the Second Conference on Provincial Social Welfare Policy held at the University of Calgary in May, 1985. Major categories include "Initiatives in Social Services Delivery", "Sex Related Social Issues", "Client groups and the Service Delivery System", and "Indian Child Welfare".
$19.95 CCSD

* **Community Multi-Service Centres**
Examines community resource boards in B.C., local community service centres in Quebec, regional health centres in Manitoba and other Canadian systems for the delivery of health and social services at the local level.
$5.50 CCSD

First Reading

First Reading is a bi-monthly publication produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. It addresses a wide range of current social issues through articles written by individuals in the community. Subscriptions to First Reading are free of charge.

Alberta Facts

Alberta Facts is a factsheet written in a concise, easy to read style. Available issues include 5 issues on poverty in Alberta and one on child care. These factsheets are free.

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Making a Difference!

Charitable sector watching sales tax reform closely

According to a recent United Way paper, there's been positive action on charities and the "goods and services tax."

The April 27 budget papers propose that:

- the special nature of services provided by registered charities was affirmed
- registered charities and substantially government-funded non-profit organizations will receive relief on the tax they pay on their purchases
- many sales of goods and services by charities and non-profits will be exempted from the new tax
- the federal government is committed to continuing to work with representatives of our sector in finalizing the details.

These same budget papers say "registered charities and non-profit organizations that are substantially funded by governments, will receive a rebate of 50 per cent of all tax paid on purchases."

The United Way document says that "overall, consultations with the Department of Finance to date have resulted in concrete provisions that are in the interests of the Canadian Voluntary Sector. The 50 per cent rebate on all taxes paid on purchases, for example, is a completely new provision."

The United Way continues to consult with the federal government to help ensure that the:

- administrative procedures developed are as simple as possible
- decisions made about exemptions from sales tax for selected goods and services provided by charities reflect an understanding of the voluntary sector and its operating values.

Some Canadians see UI as "paid vacation"

Almost three in four Canadians (74 per cent) believe a significant number of Canadians use the unemployment insurance plan as a way of getting a paid vacation and don't look seriously for work while benefits last, says a recent Gallup Poll. Nineteen per cent of Canadians disgree with this statement, and another 7 per cent "don't know."

This cynicism is lower than it was in 1976, when 85 per cent of the public believed unemployment insurance recipients used these funds as a way of gettting a paid holiday, while 9 per cent held the opposing view, and 6 per cent "didn't know."

Unemployment insurance changes make the poor pay

According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), money for retraining those losing jobs because of free trade will come from cutting benefits to the unemployed.

Here's an overview of the proposed changes. Most people will have to work longer to qualify for unemployment insurance (UI). Four out of five unemployment insurance recipients will have to work an extra six weeks in order to qualify—including Edmontonians.

Many people will receive lower benefits. Anyone leaving a job voluntarily without "just cause" will receive only 50 per cent of their earnings, instead of 60 per cent. "Just cause" is a judgement call of individual UI workers.

The maximum period most people can receive benefits will be reduced. Many people will be forced to take lower paying work because they have too little time to find a good job.

NAPO believes these changes spell bad news for poor people. These changes will hurt disadvantaged groups who already have trouble finding secure jobs because they are "last hired and first fired." They include seasonal workers, youth, native people, immigrants and visible minorities, and people with disabilities. Many people in these groups are already poor.

Some people will never

(continued on page 8)

Making a difference

(continued from page 7)

qualify for benefits, because they cannot find work for enough weeks. Twenty per cent of all those who receive UI benefits have found less than 20 weeks of work in the previous year. Many of these people already are poor, having earned less than $200 per week when they were working.

Many unemployed people will exhaust their benefits before they can find other work. Many individuals and families with a single earner may resort to social assistance. Two-earner families may not qualify for social assistance when UI runs out.

NAPO suggests that you spread the word about these concerns, and write or call your Member of Parliament about your opposition to these changes. Appear before the House of Commons Committee dealing with unemployment insurance if it reaches your community. Plan to participate in government consultations about job training. Finally, let NAPO know about your activities (456 Rideau Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 5Z4).

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is looking for people interested in working on both the goods and services tax and the unemployment insurance changes. If *you* want to participate, contact Peter Faid at 423-2031.

Literacy in Alberta

"In literacy, when a person says he 'can't spell' that implies a lot of things: he can't read, there are some lifestyle issues, poverty may be involved, and drug or alcohol use may be a factor," said Murray Lindman, dean at Alberta Vocational Centre and chairman of EACER's Literacy Subcommittee.

"Often these are people with dramatic personal problems from low self-esteem to drug dependency. Some have been in trouble with the law. Eighty per cent of the women have been sexually abused and many have prostitution in their past." For some, Grade 12 isn't the goal but rather generic literacy and life skills and improved self-esteem.

Lindman says the literacy and Adult Basic Education (ABE) effort need more coordination provincially and nationally. He fears the national literacy emphasis might concentrate on "quick fix" approaches without the support counselling and quality control needed to deal with the multi-faceted problem.

In Alberta, three government departments fund adult literacy work: Advanced Education through Alberta Vocational Centres in Calgary, Edmonton, Lac La Biche, and Lesser Slave Lake; Education through its extension, or continuing education, policy; and Career Development and Employment. About $45 million a year are funneled through these departments, according to Keith A. Anderson, Senior Consultant – Literacy for Advanced Education.

The myriad of volunteer tutor literacy projects—about 50 around the province—use another $1 million and relate to 85 Further Education Councils. In some communities, volunteer programs provide the only literacy training available and, in the cities, they provide alternatives.

Lindman cites a "tremendous need for some clear policy and articulation" in literacy work. "We don't even have a common definition of Adult Basic Education," he notes.

The practical, everyday "definition" of functional literacy varies by community needs, so it is different in Fort Smith and Edmonton. "One thing you can be fairly sure of in an urban and technological place, is that functional literacy and grade level tend to converge."

The province is making inroads in literacy work. Since 1987, says Anderson, Alberta has had more per capita literacy training than other provinces. Over the past five years, the province has matched literacy funding from the federal Secretary of State.

In January, work started on an Alberta Literacy Inventory Project to be completed by March. It will provide a data base for all literacy programs in the province and will be regularly updated.

A Literacy Policy Development Committee brings together 12 government departments to draft a policy on adult literacy ready to present in early 1990.

What can we do about illiteracy?

What can be done? From two sources, here are suggestions for overcoming illiteracy and its ill effects in society.

"Measuring the Costs of Illiteracy in Canada," a Woods Gordon business study is quite prescriptive in some of the things that can be done to combat illiteracy.

It says business associations can:

• formulate a literacy policy

• establish a literacy in the workplace committee

• liaise between members and organizations in the literacy field

• conduct research on literacy issues, including further research on the costs of illiteracy

• allow access to their members by literacy groups

• assist in literacy fundraising

• provide regional support for national literacy groups.

Governments could and in some cases should:

• establish and fund a realistic, 10-year program for reducing adult illiteracy

• provide national and provincial information clearing-houses for literacy information

• conduct appropriate communications programs to various targets such as business, tutors, learners, etc.

• encourage business and labor to work together on literacy issues

• enter into cooperative literacy programs with associations, business, and labor

• lead by example in readability of their own printed materials

• work with all groups in society to re-establish respect for the printed word.

Business can:

• indicate an openness to labor/management cooperation on literacy issues

• establish or arrrange for workplace literacy programs

• release learners and tutors for training on business time

• provide incentives to learners or tutors

• display literacy materials in the workplace

• donate in cash or in kind to national or local literacy programs

• endorse or join organizations promoting literacy and encourage executives to serve on boards of literacy organizations

• include literacy items in internal publications and customer mailing and literacy references in executive speeches

• provide printing and mailing support to literacy organizations

• allow these organizations access to the time of expert personnel in relevant areas (design, publicity, planning, etc.)

• set up literacy hotlines in the workplace

• lobby government for more effective literacy programs

Broken Words, the Southam Survey report on literacy, gave 15 tips gathered from its survey and from literacy experts that can improve literacy.

At home

• Read to children, read with children, reach out loud, read silently, read alone, read together. Discuss the story and talk about the meaning of words.

• Seize every chance to pass along tips about written language to children. For instance, point out the letters of their names on signs.

• Watching television is inevitable, so talk about the programs. Encourage children to call out letters on the screen.

• If you have trouble reading, consider cassette tapes with follow-along books for you and the children.

In the schools

• Ask questions. Of the teachers, the principal, the board officials, the school trustees. Ask how reading and writing levels compare between schools and how

(continued on page 10)

What can we do about illiteracy?

(continued from page 9)

the board fares on standardized evaluations. Demand that the provincial education ministry produce a layman's guide to what works in teaching and learning, as the U. S. Education Department did last year.

• Perhaps the school system baffles or intimidates you. There are others equally baffled. Form a discussion group and ask local social service agencies, trade unions, or community colleges for help.

• Volunteer as a teacher's aide in schools.

In the community

• Investigate the needs of the local literacy programs. Not everyone is cut out to be a literacy tutor but there are other ways to help.

• Encourage the library to stock books and cassette tapes for adults learners and to follow Winnipeg's example of pairing adult "bookmates" with preschoolers.

• Agitate for city hall to write public notices that are easily understood and also to offer literacy tutoring for municipal employees, as in Saint John, N.B.

• Churches, clubs, and professional associations are natural jumping-off points for a new literacy drive in the community.

• Look to your local newspaper for leadership. No one has a bigger stake in literacy. And ask what literacy program is available for the paper's own employees.

On the job

• Employers can get in touch with either Laubach Literacy of Canada or Frontier College for information about literacy tutoring in the workplace. Union members can demand more emphasis on adult education provisions in contract bargaining.

In the nation

• Write and inform federal and provincial representatives of your keen interest in literacy. Inquire when the government will start a literacy program for its own employees.

• Lobby governments to make Plain English the rule for all official publications. Return examples of bureaucratic gobbledegook. Demand to know why federal and provincial governments haven't yet established an independent national education commission to monitor educational standards.

DIGEST

The Community Survey Handbook is the latest publication of the Northern Alberta Development Council. The 61-page book takes a step-by-step approach to conducting community surveys: from "Before You Begin" to the plan, implementation, and follow-up.

Copies of the Handbook and the accompanying *Technical Guide* are available from the:

Nothern Alberta Development Council
Second Floor, Provincial Building
9621-96 Avenue
Postal Bag 900-14
Peace River, Alberta T8S 1T4.

Study compares rural and urban volunteers

Are rural Canadians more active volunteers than city-dwellers? Rural life is generally characterized as being slower and more accommodating, where neighbors have more time to help out or support a worthy cause. In cities, on the other hand, life is thought to be more impersonal, individualistic, and faster-paced.

Statistics Canada's *Survey of Volunteer Activity* (1987) shows that those who volunteer are more likely married, between the ages of 35-44, have small children, and have elderly parents. In addition, they are likely to be employed, have higher levels of education than their counterparts, and have incomes between $40,000 and $59,899.

Overall similarity appeared

What appeared most striking is not the difference between urban and rural volunteers, but their overall similarity. Most enjoyed good health, were of French or English heritage, held Catholic or United church membership, worked full time, and reported high satisfaction with their family's or their personal standard of living. Volunteers resembled the rest of society, with just their collective optimism and enthusiasm differentiating them from the rest of Canadian society.

Some small but important differences emerged. For example volunteers, like non-volunteers, in urban settings were significantly more likely than those in rural settings to have a university education and higher incomes.

Both urban and rural people who have completed high school or university are more likely to volunteer than those with partial schooling.

A third diffrence is that more rural volunteers (70 per cent) than urban ones (61 per cent) reported that they were either very or somewhat religious.

Why do urban and rural Canadians volunteer? Often they are motivated by personal enthusiasms. They are often considered altruists—those who give freely of themselves expecting nothing in return. Voluntary organizations contain individuals concerned about helping others with specific disabilities or who share a particular cause.

When asked why they volunteer, both urban and rural individuals said "helping others" (62 per cent). For both groups, the second most common response was "belief in the cause" (57 per cent urban and 61 per cent rural). But rural volunteers felt obligated to help 22 per cent of the time whereas urban volunteers felt obligated to help 13 per cent of the time.

Perhaps this difference reflects stronger community ties among rural volunteers. Rural volunteers also are more likely to feel religious obligations and more likely to feel indebted to the community than are their urban counterparts.

Rural volunteers were more likely than urban volunteers to know someone in the organization or have someone in the organization ask them to join. Urban volunteers were slightly more likely than rural volunteeers to choose to join the organization on their own.

What volunteers do

Urban volunteers reported their most common volunteer activity as provision of information (37 per cent). Rural volunteers, on the hand, were more involved with fundraising (44 percent). Also, rural volunteers prepared and served food 29 per cent of the time, compared with 15 per cent of urban volunteers.

Types of organizations

Rural volunteers most frequenty worked for religious organizations (21 per cent of the time). Second in line were leisure and sport organizations and third education and youth organizations.

For urban volunteers, education and youth organizations and religious ones were tied at 15 per cent, with leisure and sport organizations at 14 percent.

Reported Satisfaction

Both urban and rural volunteers indicated high levels of personal satisfaction, 84 and 86 per cent, respectively. A gain in interpersonal skills was reported by 46 per cent of urban respondents and 43 per cent of rural ones. Both reported similar gains in organizational/managerial/ communication skills (30–34 per cent).

This study is part of a series of fall publications by the Secretary of State.

Council Briefs

From: Edmonton Social Planning Council
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Second Class Mail Registration Number 6390

i.d.09/89

To:

Casino profits assist Council

Every volunteer hour at the Edmonton Social Planning Council's casino July 12-13 was worth $104! Forty volunteers garnered appproximately $26,000 for the Council's work over the two days at ABS Casino.

Bag bag forums become evening event

The popular brown bag lunch forums on social issues change from lunch time to 7 p.m. this year. The first in the series will be Rolf Pritchard, head of Edmonton Public Schools adult basic eduction, talking about literacy. It will be held September 20 at 7 p.m. at the Centre for Education, One Kingsway Avenue.

Mark your calendar now for the second forum November 15, and look for future announcements of the speaker and topic.

Phair elected president

Michael Phair became president of the Edmonton Social Planning Council at its June board meeting.

"I feel it's quite an honor to be the new president at this time as the Council moves into celebration of its 50 years of work in Edmonton," said Phair. "There's such an opportunity to look at the issues facing use from the vantage point of both looking forward and looking back." Phair lists children and poverty, homelessness, and the equitable distribution of wealth and services within society as among his key social interests.

In addition to his high-profile work with the AIDS Network of Edmonton, Phair has served on the boards of Nexus Theatre and the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, and as a member of the Gay and Lesbian Awareness Society.

The three vice-presidents are Al Harris, Alyson Lavers, and Jeff Pearson.

A senior consultant with the Alexander Consulting Group, Harris has a bachelor of commerce degree and has been actively involved in the United Way.

Lavers has her master's of social work degree and has worked extensively in the child welfare field. She has chaired the Edmonton Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect since 1987.

Pearson holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning, and has been involved in the United Way, Edmonton Symphony Society, and Phoenix Theatre.