

1997



1997 Community Calendar Project

# VOICES IN ACTION

\$5



## IN ACTION

I grew up in poverty and I thrived and into poverty. Most of my life was spent watching others having and doing things. I felt that I did not deserve that same right. I spent a lot of time daydreaming and wishing for greener pastures. Finally, I realized I was on the "outside looking in." This wanting and needing led me to a life of alcohol and the addiction only made things worse when I had a family. I remember the disappointment on my children's faces when I had to say "no" to things that we could not afford. My little children tried humbly to accept these disappointments and went without many things that others could afford. The pain of alcoholism and poverty dampened my heart and my spirit and caused great anguish. Feelings of resentment and anger surfaced which led to ideas of suicide. Fortunately, the human spirit is resilient. Gradually, I began to reach out to others. I developed awareness of my spirituality and of my culture and this led to my healing. I was able to take courses to get me off of welfare. For me education and healing was a way out. I realize now that you must do everything to fight and not let poverty take over your life, because poverty can kill the spirit if you allow it to.

*Elisa*

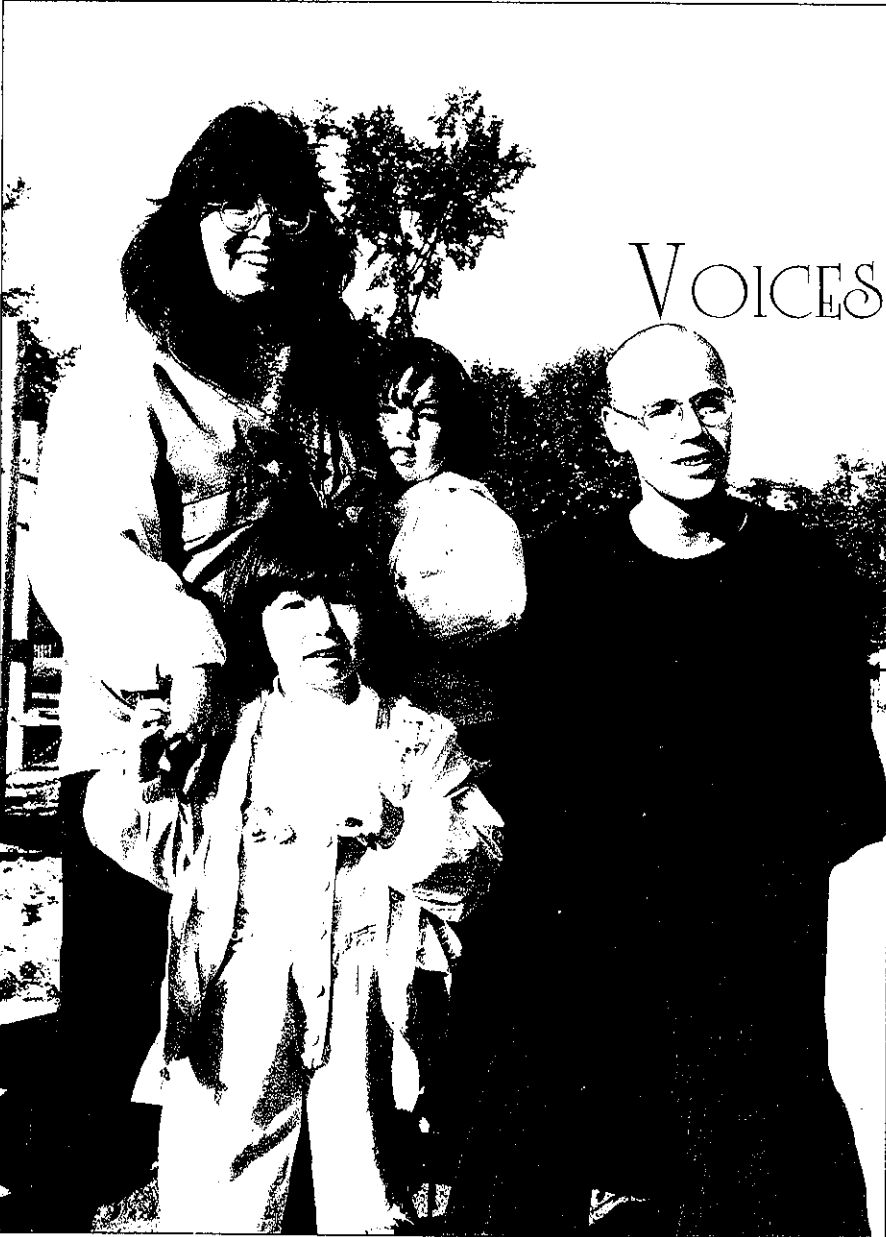
# VOICES IN ACTION



My name is Snjezana and my husband and I and our three children arrived in Canada in October of 1994. We emigrated from war-torn Bosnia and we were relieved to come to a safer country. I was an economist in Bosnia and my husband was an electrical engineer. He is now attending English classes so that he will be able to work in Edmonton. I decided I would like to operate my own day care centre because I love children and I knew I could offer something special to them. With the help of the Mennonite Centre I developed a business plan and obtained information about operating a small business. With a small loan from the Edmonton Community Loan Fund, I opened a day care centre. Currently, Snow White Day Care Centre (Snjezana means Snow White) is located in my home and I am caring for four children including my youngest daughter. We are determined to build a future for our family and we are grateful to be able to do so away from the violence of war.

*Snjezana*

The Edmonton Community Loan Fund is a non-profit organization which provides small loans to low income individuals in order to establish a small business. For more information about the loan fund please call 944-1558.



## VOICES IN ACTION

I'm a single mother of three children and I come from a background of drug use and abuse. For six years I lived in a place deep in my stomach where a never-ending war of shame, guilt, rejection and loneliness consumed me. I was walled away from any positive thoughts of life and thought the only way to free myself was death. As a result of my suicide attempt my children were apprehended by child welfare and I was told to overcome my drug addiction. After 10 months of treatment and hard work my children were returned to me. Within three weeks I realized my family had no respect or understanding of each other and I had no parenting skills to help. I was ready to quit and go back to my old ways. Then I was introduced to KARA Family Support Centre where I attended parenting and life skills classes. For the first two or three weeks I closed my mind, thinking this place had no hope to offer my family. Then one day the loneliness in my heart made me realize I needed to feel life in a positive way. So I opened my mind, heart, soul and eyes to the families and staff at the centre. Using the skills that KARA taught me my family became closer and more trusting of each other. Today the war in me is over and my family is united. Now I'm working towards becoming a drug and alcohol counselor and maybe one day I can help someone else overcome the war within them.

*Dikwa*

# VOICES IN ACTION



Since I joined a collective kitchen in May of 1996, my experience has been delightful. The ability to prepare a healthy meal is essential to my well-being. It has given me great enthusiasm to create. It has taught me the eagerness to accomplish tasks. I enjoy working with the group and it has been a pleasure to be associated with so many warm-hearted people.

Collective kitchens are working in many communities. Cooking together as a group can be an enlightening experience. It builds self-esteem through friendship, sharing ideas, shopping wisely, learning new recipes and making a commitment to the group. By caring and sharing we cook fresh, healthy meals for our loved ones. An additional benefit is the convenience of having meals prepared in advance—freeing up quality time to spend with family.

*Liane*

*Marlene Linda*

*Kim*

*Catherine*



## VOICES IN ACTION

I was born in Ft. Resolution, NWT and moved to Edmonton when I was young. I left school in grade nine. About three years ago I started coming to the Learning Centre so I could upgrade my reading, writing and math skills and in the process I have learned to use the computer. I volunteer at the Learning Centre as a receptionist, do peer tutoring and help with fund raising and other activities. I served on their board of directors for two years. Now I am a student representative for the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy and the Movement for Canadian Literacy. I go to meetings to talk about what students can accomplish and I give input on how to make programs better. I also volunteer at the Boyle Street Community Services Co-op--answering phones in the drop-in and working at bingo's. There I meet new friends and learn how to do new things.

*Helena*



## OUR VOICES IN ACTION

Four years I've been in Edmonton. Here I've had to learn to live with osteo-arthritis, acute allergies, hernias and other conditions which have forced me out of many job markets. I had to go on social assistance, supplementing this income with money made as a freelance journalist for five local papers, one of which is *Our Voice* (formerly *Spare Change*). I've earned money by selling *Our Voice* on the street and I've worked my way up to being the assistant editor. I have the will to succeed despite infirmities. I am lucky to have graduated from two top Canadian universities and I have enough life experience to know that life can be a lot worse. The goodwill of individuals I've met in Edmonton has helped me regain a rationality and perspective on life when indeed at times I was almost in despair over my situation.

Tom

# VOICES IN ACTION



We are a family of five and have lived in Alberta for the past five years. My husband and I moved from Toronto and came to Edmonton with our children because we wanted to build a better life for them. My husband has worked at many temporary jobs and he continues to search for something permanent. After years of struggle, working in many volunteer jobs as an advocate for myself and others living in poverty, I got a terrific job as a program supervisor for an early intervention program. All was going well and it seemed that we had finally gotten on the right track. Then, in January of 1996, our family was struck by a series of uncontrollable events which resulted ultimately in the loss of my job. However, I am still maintaining many of my volunteer commitments as it was through them that I gained skills which helped me to find work. We are currently fighting to control our spiraling lives. However, we are hopeful that with perseverance, love and hard work, we can gain control and rebuild from the bottom again.

*Deana*



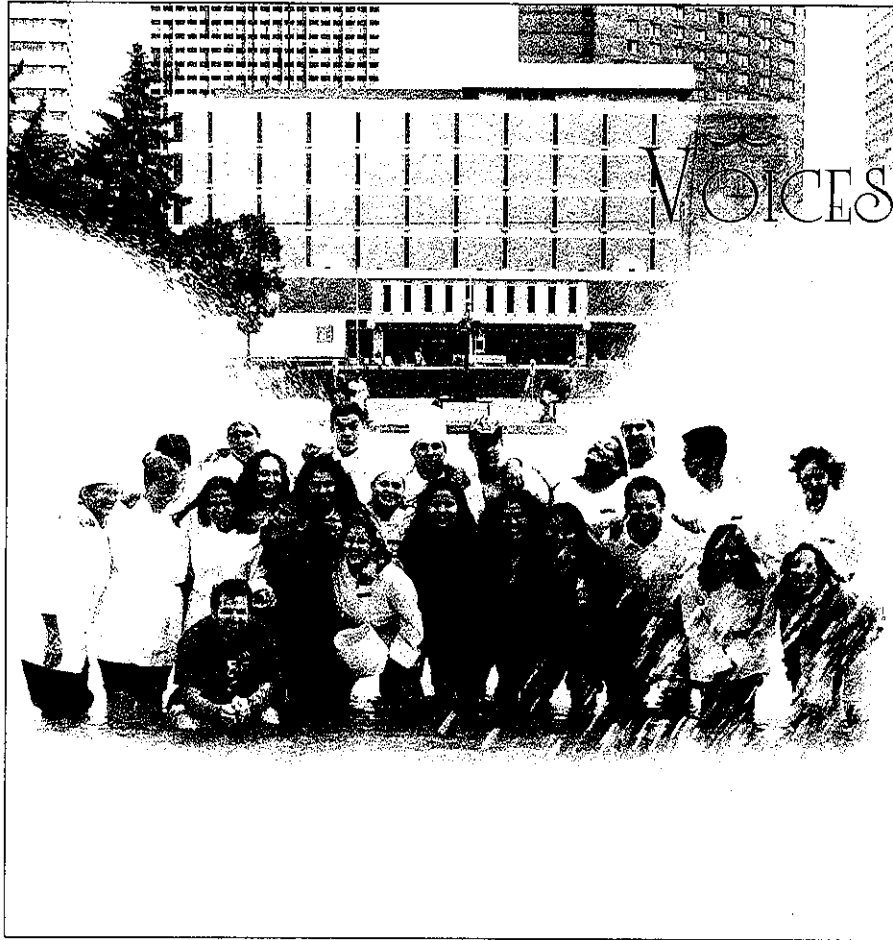


photo courtesy of Kids in the Hall

## VOICES IN ACTION

We are all part of the program called Kids in the Hall. This program is designed to help youth who come from a disadvantaged background to become empowered and more independent.

We know that independence is the key to our success. Many of us come from abusive and neglectful backgrounds and have made some poor choices in the past. We are here to learn skills that will help us be successful in our personal lives as well as our work lives. We are here to gain knowledge about possible careers and gain skills that we can market to employers. While we are at Kids in the Hall we are developing a base that will help enable us to make decisions that are right for us as individuals. We are here to empower ourselves—knowledge and independence are the keys!

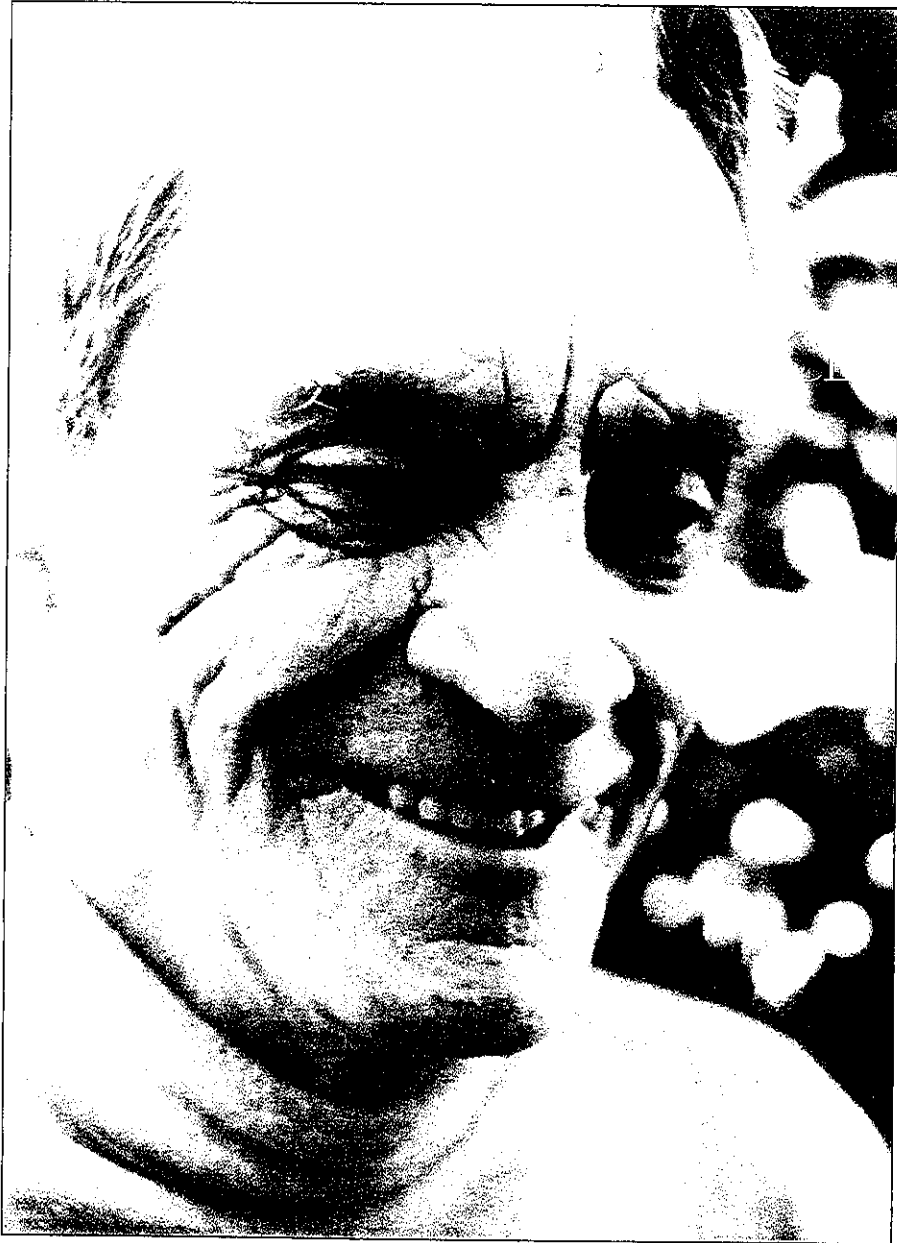




## VOICES IN ACTION

I'm a single mother of two very special young boys. For years I worked in part time low-paying positions, sometimes working two jobs in order to make ends meet. Occasionally I have required some supplementary income from social services on top of my wages. Minimum wage just doesn't cover the cost of raising two children, especially when you have to pay for childcare. Finally, I decided to upgrade my education so I'd have a better chance of finding permanent work. I got a loan through the Students Finance Board to go to college and take a secretarial course. I was doing great until I was in a car accident and had to drop out in order to access rehabilitation. I have been through government training programs and work placements and for the past year I have worked at two jobs and have managed to pay our bills without requiring social assistance. For three years I have been involved with the fight against poverty. I am determined to help people understand how frustrating and demeaning it can be to have to rely on assistance. I hate the stereotypical image of a welfare bum, because I am not lazy and I do not know anyone who wants to rely on assistance as opposed to having a decent paying job. I am determined to break the cycle of poverty for my family.

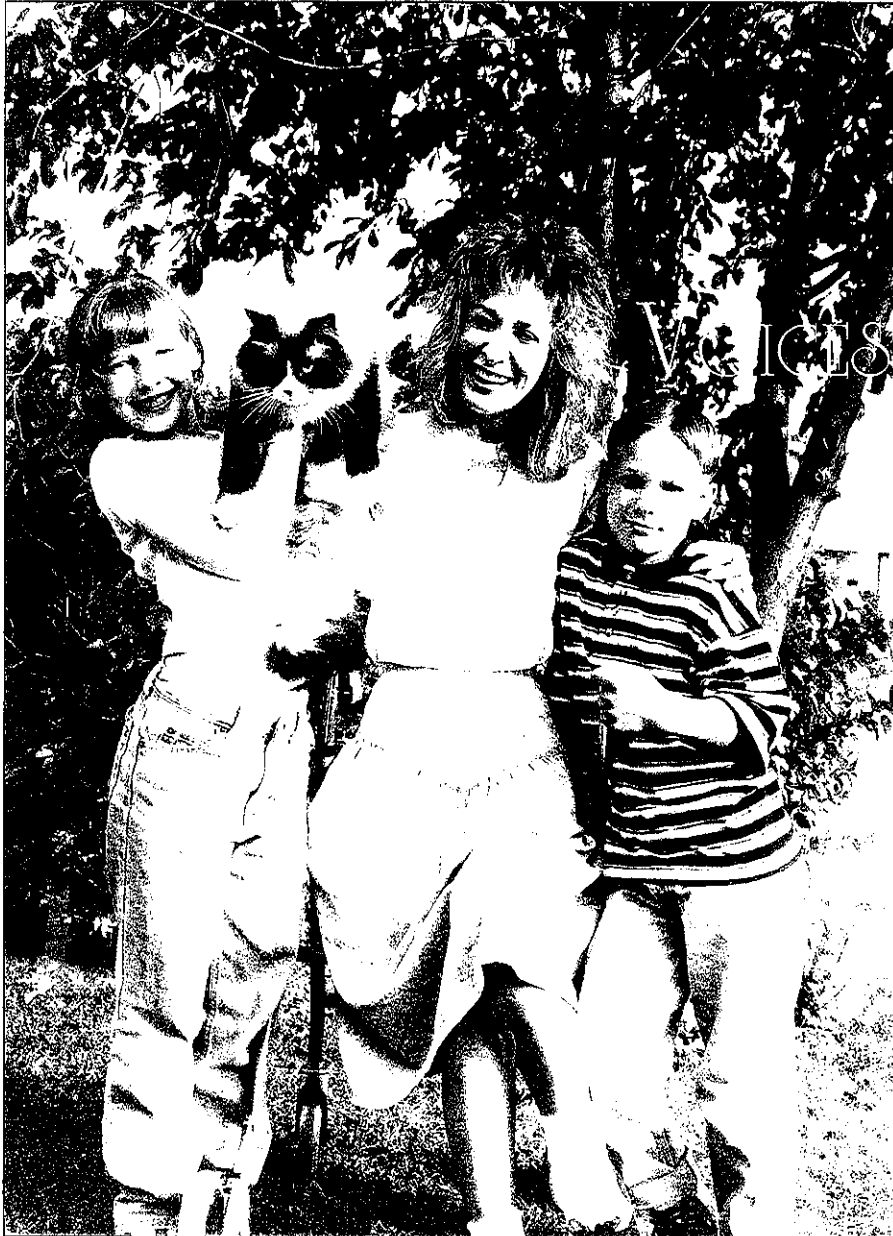
*Midge*



## IN ACTION

You learn many ways to stretch a dollar when you've had to live on a limited income as long as I have. Since 1950 I have been on a disability pension because of my osteoporosis (which is a painful bone disease). I was a painter by trade, but without being able to lift even a paint can I couldn't find much work to supplement my income. You have to make hard choices in order to meet your basic needs. For instance the only meat I'm able to afford is hamburger and even then I only buy it occasionally. My prescriptions are costly and I'd often only take half the recommended dosage so that I could make it last longer. I was thankful to turn 65 recently because my monthly income went from \$600 a month to \$1,000 and it felt like I'd won the lottery. I live in a rooming house where I have to climb a steep flight of stairs, so now that I've turned 65 I can look for a better place—hopefully with an elevator. I've volunteered at Operation Friendship for five years now—washing dishes three times a day. I've met a lot of people in similar circumstances and by coming here we can eat a nutritious meal, visit with people, play cards and pool. I always try and stay busy—you can't get depressed if your mind is occupied with something else.

*William*



## VOICES IN ACTION

Shortly after I was married, I was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy (a disorder that causes the ongoing deterioration of my muscles). Physically, I went from being able to lift my baby out of a crib to now having someone lift me out of a car. My ability to perform daily activities as a wife and a mom declined. Four years ago my husband and I separated and with no family close by to help I was terrified. How could I possibly make it on my own with two children who depended on me? I turned to social services and the Supports For Independence Program (SFI). I'll never forget my first cheque - I've still got a picture of it on my fridge. It allowed me to take my first steps towards being independent. SFI and the grace of God gave me the courage to make it on my own. Two years ago when I began receiving maintenance payments, I was able to go off SFI. With the help of a personal care attendant and my wheelchair, scooter, walker and canes, I am able to retain some independence and this gives me confidence and self esteem. The care I get affects the care I can give to my children who are most precious to me.

*Denise*



## VOICES IN ACTION

Mary Burlie believed education can stop the disease of poverty. Mary knew all about poverty—she grew up in a family of 13 in Little Rock, Arkansas where her father was a sharecropper. She moved to Edmonton in 1969 with her husband and their six children and began volunteering at inner city agencies. In 1973 she was hired by the Boyle Street Community Services Co-op and she remained there until her death July 13, 1996. It was said that Mary never turned anyone away—she took in foster children and people who needed a place to stay. She did what she could for people, from hugs to scoldings. She once said "We need to educate people as to how valuable they are," and indeed she taught what it means to have respect for people, to be supportive and just. She taught people to keep their power and strength, to do what's fair and what's right. Just weeks before she lost her battle with cancer Mary spoke out at The Women's March on Poverty in Edmonton where she addressed the crowds saying "The ones who suffer the most are the children...This is every man's, every woman's and every child's issue." This calendar is dedicated to the memory of Mary Burlie.

photo by Lester Foster

# VOICES IN ACTION

Community Calendar Project funding by:

The Wesley Trust Fund, Robertson-Wesley United Church  
The Clifford E. Lee Foundation  
Edmonton Community and Family Services  
The Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement

Research: Midge Cuthill

Design: Kathryn Valentine

Photography: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk  
except August photo courtesy of Kids in the Hall  
and December photo by Lester Foster

Editor: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk

Printing: Sunrise Printing Ltd.

*Voices In Action* was undertaken in 1996, the United Nations International Year for the Eradication of Poverty.

The Community Calendar is a project of  
The Edmonton Social Planning Council.  
Special thanks to the advisory group which included:  
Edmonton's Food Bank,  
Edmonton John Howard Society,  
and Edmonton Community and Family Services.  
Special thanks also to Holly Slavik for her creative input.

espc