

ISSUES & RESULTS • 2009

OUR EFFORTS ... OUR COMMUNITY
UNITED WAY OF THE ALBERTA CAPITAL REGION

UNITE



United Way
Alberta Capital Region

ISSUES & RESULTS • 2009

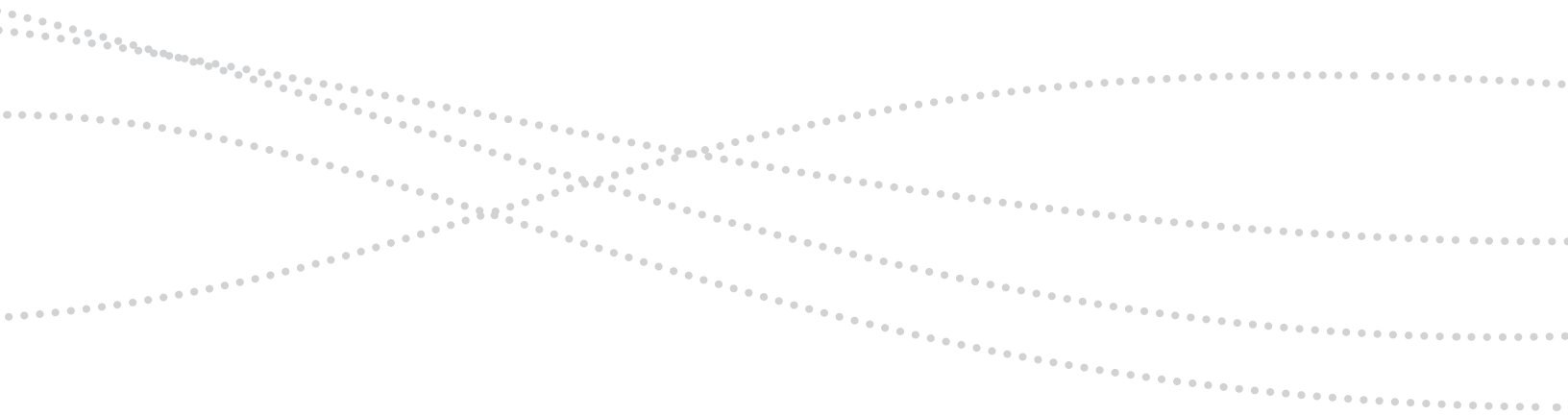
OUR EFFORTS ... OUR COMMUNITY
UNITED WAY OF THE ALBERTA CAPITAL REGION



United Way
Alberta Capital Region

Contents

Poverty in Edmonton	1
Homelessness and Affordable Housing in Edmonton	4
Family Violence in Edmonton	7
Challenges Facing Immigrants and Refugees in Edmonton	11
Challenges Facing Seniors in Edmonton	14
Challenges Facing Edmonton's Growing Urban Aboriginal Population	17
Early Childhood Development in Edmonton	20
Success in Edmonton's Schools	24



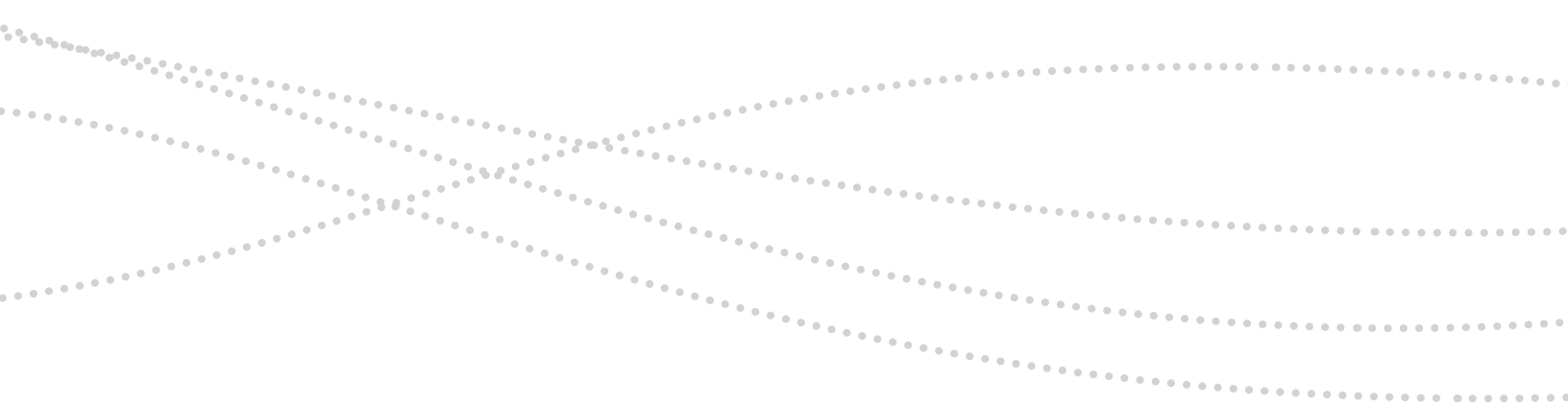
Poverty in Edmonton

Poverty is spoken of and understood in many different contexts. Officially, there is no true measure for poverty. However, there is a measure that helps to gauge the incidence of poverty. The ‘low-income cut-off’ (LICO) is calculated by Statistics Canada and is based upon the amount of money a family will spend on its basic needs (food, shelter and clothing). Families spending more than the calculated threshold for basic needs is said to be in poverty. Although much has been done to reduce poverty across Canada, 7% of Albertans and 7.1% of Edmontonians are still living below the after-tax LICO¹.

For most, when speaking of poverty, the first images are of the homeless individuals looking for emergency shelter, the “pan-handlers” on Jasper and Whyte Avenue or the line-ups at the community soup kitchen. The idea that poverty is only a result of not having a job is a myth. There are many individuals and families in the community that are considered to be the “working poor”. Often these individuals need to choose between putting food on the table or a roof over their head. Simply put, it’s about making ends meet.

Poverty is more than not having money. Not having the money to make ends meet is merely the symptom of larger underlying root causes. Multiple factors contribute to poverty. These include, but are not limited to: language barriers, lack of education, mental and/or physical disabilities, increases in cost of living, low minimum wage, lack of transportation, a fixed income, addictions, and/or family violence. Our Member Agencies partner with United Way to tackle these root causes of poverty.

In order to address the issue of poverty, we as a community need to address these factors that perpetuate the cycle of poverty from one generation to the next, from one neighborhood to others, from today to tomorrow.



¹ Statistics Canada. Table 202-0802 – Persons in low income, annual, CANSIM (database) and Catalogue No. 75-202-X.

What is United Way Doing to Address the Issue of Poverty?

United Way works with and provides funding to a network of social services that become a “safety net” for individuals to help prevent those in poverty or at-risk of falling into poverty. There are agencies that support mentally and physically challenged individuals, provide counselling, help provide necessities for life, and provide skills and opportunities to improve the quality of life. For example, United Way invests donor dollars into Food Banks in Edmonton, St. Albert and Leduc. However, having a “safety net” alone will not end poverty. To reduce poverty to the end of eliminating it, a collective effort needs to be made to address the root causes of poverty.

Collaboration and partnership is a cornerstone of United Way. Together with numerous partners, United Way is involved with Families First Edmonton. Families First Edmonton is a research project aimed at determining the outcomes achieved through the coordinated delivery of health, family support and recreation services to low-income families. Families First Edmonton seeks to determine the most cost-effective, efficient use of resources to proactively assist families.

Poverty is a complex social issue that will demand energy and resources. There is no easy solution to such issues, but by working together we aim to change lives and improve the social conditions of our community for today, tomorrow and forever.

The Difference We Make

- Edmonton’s Food Bank distributed over 48,000 food hampers and Leduc & Area Food Bank provided food to 4700 individuals and families to help relieve hunger.
- The Financial Plus Collaborative brings more than 15 agencies together to promote and teach hundreds of families financial literacy and asset building skills that will help them move out of living in poverty.
- Families First Edmonton is working with 1200 low-income families as part of a research study. The results will influence changes to practice and policy and help to determine how best to provide recreational and social support programs.
- Two separate programs were working to assist low-income individuals move out of domestic violence situations and provide homeless individuals and families furnishings as they transitioned into market housing. United Way connected these programs, which brought about the amalgamation of resources and services, making a single program which was more efficient and sustainable.

Back on His Feet

At 2 p.m. on a Friday, a man came into an intake office to make a long distance telephone call to his family on the east coast. The intake worker sensed some frustration and asked about his situation. He replied that he was living a tough life on the streets of Edmonton, occasionally making \$10 per hour even though he was a skilled pipe fitter capable of making much more. The trouble was he did not have suitable clothes, any tools or any money to do a camp job. He was able to use our fax machine to contact employers, and to receive a job confirmation. With the job confirmation and with the help of the program manager, he was able to access an Alberta Works fund of \$500 to help him return to his trade with dignity the next Monday morning.

What Can You Do About Poverty?

Each of us has a role to play in solving the issue of poverty. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about poverty and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Edmonton Social Planning Committee (www.edmspc.com)
- Families First Edmonton (www.familiesfirstedmonton.ualberta.ca)
- E4C (www.e4calberta.org)
- Bissell Centre (www.bissellcentre.org)
- Boyle Street Community Services (www.boylestreet.org)
- Hope Mission (www.hopemission.com)

Homelessness and Affordable Housing in Edmonton

By definition, homelessness refers to the condition of lacking a fixed, regular and adequate residence. This definition covers the broad spectrum of homelessness. The continuum of homelessness ranges from the chronic homeless that are unable to maintain employment and residence to the homeless that have lost their home to disaster (e.g. fire). In between these extremes is a variety of unique circumstances and factors, but the number of stories are ever increasing.

Individuals become homeless for many reasons. Some of these include: leaving an abusive relationship, loss of employment, death of a major income earner, physical or mental disabilities, addictions, disasters (fire and flooding), “runaway” children/youth, re-integration into society after incarceration, increased housing costs and falling incomes.

Homelessness has become more prevalent throughout the country, but especially in urban centres. In 2008, the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing conducted their bi-annual “Homeless Count”. The count recorded an increase of 17.6% in the number of homeless compared with 2006². In 2008, 3079 homeless people in our city were counted, of which 1862 are absolute homeless (without permanent shelter). Furthermore, 8.4% (259) of the homeless counted were children and youth under the age of 18.

A major factor for homelessness is the lack of employment. For some individuals, finding and maintaining a job can be very difficult. This can be especially true for those who may have either physical/mental health concerns or addictions. There may be stigmatization from coworkers or an uncooperative workplace. Without employment, many individuals rely on government assistance. For those who do find work, the rate of pay is typically insufficient. In Alberta, the minimum wage was increased to \$8.80 per hour in April 2009³, but the low income cut-off is equivalent to a wage of \$10.00 per hour⁴. With just under half of those with low wages being the major income earners in their family, it's easy to see how those in this situation are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless.

A review of the housing market in Edmonton shows that rental vacancy rate is 2.4%, but the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$1034 per month⁵. In addition to rent, one needs to consider utilities, transportation, food and clothing.

² Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing. Homeless Count 2006 and 2008.

³ Government of Alberta. Employment, Immigration and Industry.

⁴ Statistics Canada. Low Wage and Low Income. Cat. #: 75F0002MIE

⁵ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation – Edmonton CMA. February 2009.

What is United Way doing to address homelessness and affordable housing?

United Way works with and provides funding to a number of community agencies that offer residence and help for the homeless. Member Agencies such as Canadian Red Cross, E4C and Youth Emergency Shelter Society (YESS) offer temporary emergency shelter, while Terra Association, Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton and YMCA offer transitional housing opportunities. Operation Friendship Seniors Society is able to provide permanent residence and a housing registry to inner city seniors. While there is some support to provide shelter for the homeless, the demands far outweigh the supply.

Other United Way Member Agencies provide assistance so that having a home is possible. Services provided by Edmonton's Food Bank, SAGE, Bissell Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and Edmonton John Howard Society can help low-income individuals afford shelter or assist in finding employment.

In December 2008, there was a growing concern over the staggering numbers of individuals utilizing the services of drop-in centres at the Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Co-op, and Boyle McCauley Health Centre. United Way convened with key partners to address the community's needs. Stakeholders, Alberta Employment & Immigration and Homeward Trust left that meeting with specific actions towards a united effort to address this issue. This situation clearly illustrates the other roles United Way sometimes plays in our community – that of facilitator and convener.

United Way President and CEO, Anne Smith, sat on the Mayor's Committee to End Homelessness, which released its report and recommendations January 2009. The report has been received very positively throughout the Region and media has been supportive. Most importantly the Government of Alberta committed to supporting the establishment of a Homeless Commission. The Commission will oversee and champion an effort to end homelessness in Edmonton by 2018. City Mayor, Stephen Mandel invited Anne Smith to Chair the Commission and with the support of United Way Board of Directors and staff, she accepted this important responsibility.

The Difference We Make

- Through the Bissell Centre's Drop-in programs, 325 individuals per day were given the opportunity to do laundry, have a shower, make phone calls, receive mail and check e-mail.
- Youth Emergency Shelter Society housed 23 homeless youth and supported them in becoming self-sufficient.
- In October 2008, 40 agencies and 200 volunteers came together at the Shaw Conference Centre to host the Homeless Connect event. As a result, 1500 homeless individuals received basic care services and were connected to resources to improve their living conditions.
- In 2008, over 8400 individuals living below the poverty line were able to get help from The Family Centre's Counselling & Therapy Services, which helped them address personal issues.
- Edmonton's Homeless Commission has raised public awareness of homelessness and the effects it has on people's lives.
- The Housing First Model housed over 500 individuals and families and supported them with wrap-around services to help them maintain their homes.

A Safe Place to Call Home

Melissa was living at an emergency shelter and actively involved in prostitution. After deciding to change her lifestyle, she was connected with an outreach worker who supported her through many efforts to find affordable housing. Her worker enabled her to find a safe and stable home and taught her the skills she needed to be successful. Melissa is now off the streets and independently supporting herself in her own home.

What can you do about homelessness and affordable housing?

Each of us has a role to play in solving the issue of housing. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about homelessness and affordable housing and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Edmonton Social Planning Committee (www.edmspc.com)
- Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness Society (www.ecohh.ca)
- Edmonton Housing Trust Fund (www.ehtf.ca)
- Bissell Centre (www.bissellcentre.org)
- Boyle Street Community Services (www.boylestreet.org)
- Housing Support Services Hub (e-mail: hub@hubhousing.ab.ca)
- Y.M.C.A. (www.edmonton.ymca.ca)

Family Violence in Edmonton

“Family Violence” is a term that includes the many forms of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, or neglect between adults and/or children in an intimate or dependent relationship.

Physical violence involves using physical force to injure, confine or restrain and is typically more visible. Psychological abuse such as social isolation, stalking, name-calling, degrading, and manipulating are also very destructive while typically remaining less discernible. Exposure to family violence is also considered a form of abuse, especially for children witnessing the events.

Children exposed to family violence are at higher risk of criminal offences later in life. For example, 63 percent of adolescent sex offenders were a witness to family violence during their childhood⁶.

Sexual abuse is a combination of physical and psychological abuse as it forces a person to participate in unwanted or unsafe sexual activity while displaying dominance over the individual. Children who are victims of sexual abuse are highly vulnerable and have greater risk factors in life.

Seniors are another group that can be highly vulnerable to all forms of abuse including financial abuse. Financial abuse can include stealing from or defrauding, denying access to finances, withholding money, financial exploitation, preventing a person from working or controlling choice of employment.

Neglect can also affect children, adults and seniors alike. Neglect is often a recurring incident. It includes the failure to provide a child or dependent adult what is required for physical, psychological and emotional development and well-being. It is also failing to provide or denying the basic needs, protection from harm, or sense of being valued or loved.

Statistically, one in four Canadian women is a victim of domestic violence; 51% have experienced either physical or sexual assault since the age of 16 and are 7 times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than by a stranger; 21% of abused women were assaulted during pregnancy⁷.

Realistically, the prevalence of family violence is difficult to determine as many incidents go unreported. Individuals may be reluctant or unable to report cases of family violence for a number of reasons including: fear of the perpetrator; feelings of shame and guilt; stigmatization; geographic or social isolation; cultural or language barriers; and economic dependency. Alberta is ranked highest in the rates of domestic assault, homicide-suicide, stalking and second in domestic homicide⁸.

⁶ Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters. Research Trends and Implications for Practice: The State of Alberta’s Children.

⁷ Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2005 or 2006.

⁸ Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005, Catalogue no. 85-224-XIE, July 2005.

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) research indicates that in Alberta from 2000 – 2006 over 170 homicides were identified as domestic related, representing about one third of all provincial homicides⁹.

What is United Way doing to address family violence?

United Way works with and provides funding to a number of community agencies that address the effects of family violence. Strathcona Shelter Society, Youth Emergency Shelter Society, SAGE, Edmonton John Howard Society and E4C, all offer emergency shelter facilities.

Other Member Agencies offer services for victims and perpetrators of family violence. The Support Network and the Sexual Assault Centre provide 3 different 24-hour help lines, including one specifically for seniors. Member Agencies such as The Family Centre and YWCA offer counselling for family violence.

Programs through Changing Together, Edmonton John Howard Society, Strathcona Shelter Society – A Safe Place, The Family Centre and YWCA offer help and support to those that have witnessed family violence. Combined these services offer a diverse safety net of services to people in need. Sadly, there are gaps to all of these efforts. Last year in Alberta 26,000 women and children were seeking shelter after leaving an abusive relationship and 14,000 had to be turned away due to unavailable space¹⁰.

United Way is a participating member of the Community Initiatives Against Family Violence (CIAFV) and is represented on the Leadership Team. One aspect of CIAFV work is to provide guidelines and train service providers with skills to screen, identify, assess and intervene with victims, abusers and their families. Other aspects include: health and employment; impact and implications; training and public education; community advocacy; and bullying.

United Way has helped to start the Aboriginal Circle of Safety, an initiative in partnership with Aboriginal Consulting Services of Alberta. The program provides support, education and skill development; increases knowledge of safety and risk-related behaviours and explores family violence through the use of Aboriginal traditions, teachings, and ceremonies. The content of the program reflects what has been proven successful in mainstream family violence programs and has adapted to incorporate an Aboriginal focus.

United Way also participated in the development of the, Today Family Violence Help Centre (formerly the Domestic Violence Centre) through funding and representation on the steering committee. The Today Family Violence Help Centre will be a new facility for victims of family violence providing a "one-stop" referral process.

⁹ http://www.acws.ca/annual_stats.php

¹⁰ Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Fiscal Year Statistics: 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

The Difference We Make

- Strathcona Shelter Society answered 2000 calls and supported these individuals through a domestic violence situation.
- Elder Abuse Program (Victorian Order of Nurses) helped 407 seniors to deal with medical, emotional, physical and financial problems thereby reducing stress and improving their quality of life.
- Over 3000 individuals dealing with violence and abuse were connected to support through the Distress Line (The Support Network), empowering them to resolve issues that will improve their lives.
- United Way's support of the Today Family Violence Help Centre helped leverage resources to find office space and begin to address family violence through coordinated services.

Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

A 42 year old woman had experienced sexual abuse as a child by an adult family member. She had been struggling with headaches, low self-confidence and unwanted memories from her childhood. In order to “numb” the memories, she had developed an addiction to drugs and alcohol. She felt “unworthy” of being in a healthy relationship and gravitated towards abusive men. After recovering from a suicide attempt, she a 24-hour crisis line and found a supportive “listener”. The volunteer who answered her call referred her to a counselling program. She began individual counselling and then began group counselling. This woman now reports, “I feel more whole, I understand what happened was not my fault, and I now have the confidence to be the person I want to be. She has been clean and sober for six months. She has been able to secure employment and has decided to remain “happily” single until she finds a partner who also wants a mutually respectful and emotionally supportive relationship.”

What can you do about family violence?

Each of us has a role to play in solving the issue of family violence. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about family violence and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Community Initiatives Against Family Violence (www.ciafv.com)
- Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (www.acws.ca)
- Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying (www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca/pfbv)
- Edmonton Women's Shelter – Win House (24 hour Crisis Line: 479-0058)
- Child & Family Services Region 6 – Crisis Unit (child abuse/neglect; 24 hour: 422-2001)
- The Aboriginal Circle of Safety - Aboriginal Circle of Safety
- Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (www.sace.ab.ca)

Challenges Facing Immigrants and Refugees in Edmonton

In 2006, there were 189,775 immigrants in Edmonton (CMA), with 31,910 people immigrating between the years of 2001 and 2006 alone¹¹. According to Statistics Canada, the Edmonton (CMA) is even more diverse than Alberta (14.9%) and Canada (18.4%) as a whole, having immigrants comprise 21.8% of the population. In addition to international immigrants, the previous economic boom in Edmonton also led to the migration of immigrant populations from other provinces in Canada, especially Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec.

The immigrant experience is widely diverse as individuals come with different cultures, religions, expectations, hopes and fears. For all immigrants, adjustment will take time as they traverse Canadian culture, government systems, weather and daily life. For some it will be easy while others will have great difficulties due to personal and systemic barriers.

Language is one of the greatest barriers facing immigrants. About half of the immigrants living in Edmonton do not speak either official language¹². This creates difficulties for immigrants who try to access government systems (health care, education, government assistance, etc.), use public transportation, or simple daily events such as going to the grocery store.

Immigrants also face challenges in the form of isolation, loss of community and personal supports, intergenerational conflict, racism, and different cultural norms. These barriers are reflected in the fact that recent immigrants in Edmonton have a higher unemployment rate (7.6%) compared to that of Canadian-born individuals (4.6%)¹³.

There are sub-groups of immigrants who face additional challenges. During the boom, an ever-increasing number of Temporary Foreign Workers had arrived in the province. This is cause for concern, as Temporary Foreign Workers do not currently qualify for settlement and integration services. Currently it remains with the individual employer to provide assistance with adjustment to life in Canada. Within this group of immigrants, human trafficking is a growing concern as women are being subjected to prostitution under the guise of “Temporary Foreign Workers”.

Refugees are a highly vulnerable population. In addition to the barriers and challenges of adapting to a new life in Canada, they bring with them memories and experiences that few could possibly imagine. Refugees fleeing a war-torn country may have witnessed friends and family members tortured and/or killed. Other may have escaped the aftermath of a natural disaster leaving all their belongings and memories behind. The psychological effects of the refugee experience can be extensively damaging.

¹¹ Statistics Canada. 2006 Census.

¹² Statistics Canada. 2006 Census.

¹³ Statistics Canada. 2006 Census. Catalogue No. 97-562-XCB2006008.

With the sheer volume and such an array of complicated situations, local community agencies are becoming overwhelmed. For example, immigrants arriving from around the world speak a combined 58 plus different languages, other than English and French¹⁴. Finding community leaders to help immigrants make the transition is proving to be a daunting task.

What is United Way doing to address the challenges facing immigrants and refugees?

United Way works with and provides funding to a number of community agencies that assist immigrants with the transition to Canadian life. Member Agency, Changing Together is an organization founded and operated by immigrant women with the mission of helping immigrant women and their families overcome personal and systemic barriers that keep them from participating fully in Canadian society.

The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers offers immigrants a network of services including English language classes, a variety of community services and career development workshops and resources.

SAGE (Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton) has further recognized the dual barriers for immigrant seniors as being unaddressed. Seniors who are immigrants and that have been sponsored by family members are not eligible for pensions or government assistance for 10 years. This situation increases their potential for vulnerability as they may be dependent on their sponsors for financial support. As a result, SAGE offers the Multicultural Outreach Program to proactively connect with this group.

The Difference We Make

- Through Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS), 348 individuals were tutored to learn English and overcome a major barrier to living in Canada.
- Changing Together had 298 immigrant/refugee volunteers contributing back to the community by helping other newcomers adjust to Canadian culture.
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers' Family Connections Program helped to connect 170 families to resources and support, reducing isolation and giving them a sense of belonging.
- United Way is helping to bring Out-of-School programs together to collectively determine how best to support immigrant/refugee children during out-of-school hours and have them be successful in life.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. 2006 Census.

Breaking Barriers for Critical Care

A Sudanese family arrived at the University of Alberta Hospital with a two month old baby boy who needed heart surgery. This type of surgery was extremely intensive and took two full days. The family was already experiencing financial hardships and did not speak English. An interpreter was provided at no cost to the family and was able to the family communicate with the social worker. As a result, the family received vouchers for food and other essentials. While at the hospital, many tests were run on the baby and all surgical information and consents provided to the family. The interpreter was present for it all and stayed with the family on each and every interaction they had with the doctors and nurses. Thanks to the interpreter, the family was also able to express concerns and ask questions to the physicians. This helped to alleviate some of their concerns and worries. At last report, the family and the baby boy were doing well.

What can you do to help immigrants and refugees?

Each of us can play a role in helping immigrants and refugees. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about the challenges facing immigrants and refugees and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Changing Together (www.changingtogether.com)
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (www.emcn.ab.ca)
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association (www.eisa-edmonton.org)
- Edmonton Multicultural Society (www.edmontonmulticultural-ems.org)
- Immigration Canada (www.immigration.ca)

Challenges Facing Seniors in Edmonton

As the “Baby Boom” generation ages, our community faces an increase in the numbers of seniors. Currently in Edmonton, there are over 115,000 people over the age of 65, which make up 11 percent of the population¹⁵. Over the next 15 to 20 years our senior population is expected to double and by 2031 one in five people will be considered a senior¹⁶.

The issues facing seniors will thus be compounded by this increase unless we prepare our community to be able manage the additional needs of this growing demographic. A healthy community needs to address issues that affect seniors in six areas:

1. Community supports
2. Fitness and recreation
3. Health and wellness
4. Transportation
5. Diversity
6. Personal safety

We understand that issues facing seniors can affect more than one of these areas at any given time. Services and social/recreational programs need to be in place to promote seniors to live a healthier lifestyle. It is important for seniors to maintain a social network and/or physical activity as research has shown this to lower risk factors of death¹⁷. It should be noted that senior’s value socializing in environments focused at seniors rather than inter-generational recreation centres. These factors contribute to the overall wellness of seniors, but consideration also needs to be given to the health conditions associated with the elderly, such as arthritis, vision/hearing loss, osteoporosis, etc. Furthermore, there is also concern regarding seniors’ mental health - dementia (e.g. Alzheimer’s), depression, anxiety disorder, delirium and psychosis.

Transportation is another important issue that needs to be addressed. As seniors age, their ability to drive or take public transit is limited by finances, health and safety concerns. However, mobility is crucial for seniors to attend community services or medical appointments, go grocery shopping and visit friends and family. The alternative is isolation and a lack of a sufficient quality of life for seniors.

Provisions also need to be made for the diversity of seniors, some of which who may not speak English or may not find current programming suitable due to cultural differences.

Seniors can also be a highly vulnerable population and targets of financial and elder abuse by strangers as well as family members or caregivers. For this reason, many seniors fear for their safety and well-being.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. 2006 Census.

¹⁶ Alberta Seniors & Community Services. Demographic Planning Commission – Findings Report. December 2008.

¹⁷ Glass, Thomas A. Population based study of social and productive activities as predictors of survival among elderly Americans. *BMJ*. August 21, 1999: Vol. 319, 478-483.

What is United Way doing to address the challenges facing seniors?

United Way supports a number of Member Agencies who provide direct service to seniors. Senior's Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE) is an agency devoted to the health and well-being of seniors, providing a variety of home, health, and educational services. For example, SAGE offers a Seniors Abuse Help Line (454-8888) to give support to seniors, family and friends who face elder abuse.

Operation Friendship Senior's Society provides community-based preventative social services to seniors in the inner city. In addition to having over 100 units of subsidized housing, services promote seniors independence and ability to live in their own home for as long as possible. Health concerns are also addressed by agencies such as Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Arthritis Society.

An exciting partnership has been formed in the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. This council aims to communicate with all agencies providing services to seniors in order to organize and develop a strategic plan of quality service delivery. United Way is represented on the Board of Directors, which guides and advises the Council. The Board of Directors is composed of members from non-profit agencies and the City of Edmonton. By working collectively, the group hopes to leverage resources and improve the quality of life for seniors in Edmonton.

The Difference We Make

- The Multicultural Outreach Program (SAGE) served 200 seniors who reported having a better understanding of mainstream services, thus allowing them to be better connected.
- 900 seniors received healthy meals through the Drop-In Food Program at Operation Friendship Seniors Society.
- Over 1000 seniors were able to continue living in their homes by having assistance with home care (e.g. snow removal, lawn care) through SAGE.

A Little Help Goes a Long Way

“Jane”, an 85 year old lady, was unable to find anyone to shovel her sidewalk and became very concerned about getting a fine from the city bylaw office if her sidewalks were not cleared within 48 hours. She took matters into her own hands and attempted to shovel the walk herself with shovel in one hand and walker in the other. Unfortunately, she fell (luckily into a snow bank!), but was able to get up and make her way back to the house. Understandably upset, Jane believed she was going to have to sell her home and move. She called the Home Services program and was crying so hard it was difficult to understand what she was saying; she was in an absolute panic. Once she was able to convey her problems, she was immediately connected to snow removal workers, who cleared her walks for the remainder of the season. Soon after, she also began receiving housekeeping support each month to assist with vacuuming and some of the heavier cleaning jobs that had become too difficult. With only minimal support, Jane will be able to stay in her own home safely as long as possible.

What can you do to address the challenges facing seniors?

Each of us can play a role in helping seniors. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about the challenges facing seniors and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (www.mysage.ca)
- Operation Friendship Seniors Society (www.ofss.org)
- Arthritis Society (www.arthritis.ca)
- Canadian Mental Health Association (www.cmha_edmonton.ab.ca)
- Victorian Order of Nurses (www.von.ca)
- Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (www.seniorscouncil.net)
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports (www.seniors.gov.ab.ca)

Challenges Facing Edmonton's Growing Urban Aboriginal Population

Edmonton and Area's Urban Aboriginal¹⁸ population is growing and some sources predict that Edmonton will have the largest Municipal Aboriginal population as early as 2016¹⁹. The aboriginal population of Alberta increased from 156,220 in 2001 to 188,365 in 2006²⁰. In 2006, 21.9 per cent of the total aboriginal population lived on reserves while 77.9 per cent of those living off reserves lived in urban areas.

This increase in the Urban Aboriginal population will help to fill the employment and labour shortages occurring in the city as well as further add to the cultural richness of the city; however it will also cause some challenges to an already stretched system. Supports must be in place to help transition from Reserves to an urban lifestyle. Many Aboriginal people face barriers including poverty, discrimination, the after effects of residential schools, addictions, and low graduation rates. Increased counseling, mentoring, addictions treatment, housing supports, educational programs, vocational training and culturally sensitive programming services are required to help Aboriginal people thrive in an urban environment.

What is United Way doing to address challenges facing an Urban Aboriginal population?

United Way works with and provides funding to a number of community agencies that address challenges facing an urban Aboriginal population. Ben Calf Robe Society and Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton provide focused services and programs. Ben Calf Robe Society provides breakfast and lunch at its school (kindergarten to grade 9). The Breakfast Lunch Program also provides lunch for Ben Calf Robe Society's four Head Start sites. Elizabeth Fry Society offers an Aboriginal Women's Program that assists to break the cycle of violence, reconnect with aboriginal culture and reduce the likelihood of coming in contact with the legal system. It should be said that other Member Agencies are open to members of the Aboriginal community and are quite often culturally sensitive, having Aboriginal outreach workers.

United Way supports the Aboriginal Circle of Safety, an initiative of Aboriginal Consulting Services of Alberta. The program provides support, education and skill development; increases knowledge of safety and risk-related behaviours and explores family violence through the use of Aboriginal traditions, teachings, and ceremonies. The content of the program reflects what has been proven successful in mainstream family violence programs and has adapted to incorporate an Aboriginal focus.

¹⁸ Aboriginal identity is defined by Statistics Canada to include: North American Indian, Inuit, Métis, those reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those reported they were members of an Indian band or First Nation.

¹⁹ Edmonton native friendship Centre – Dave Brown. www.cbc.ca January 16, 2008.

²⁰ Statistics Canada. 2006 Census.

We have recognized the importance of working with the Aboriginal community to address issues and strive to work closely together with the non-profit sector, and governments to find appropriate solutions.

The Difference We Make

- Nearly 200 students were able to better focus on school work at the Ben Calf Robe School from being fed healthy breakfast and lunch on school days.
- The Aboriginal Circle of Safety's Teaching Circles helped 222 women and 172 children begin and continue the healing process after experiencing family violence and abuse.
- Elizabeth Fry Society supported nearly 2000 individuals from First Nations Reserves were empowered through the Adult Courtworks Program by providing them resources and helping them understand the proceedings.
- By sharing office space and support services, Wicihitowin is better able to coordinate, organize and promote Aboriginal initiatives and programs.

Value in Diversity

Since Claire was a young girl her mother told her to work hard, get an education and hold her head high. She left the reservation she grew up on and moved to Westlock where she was the first aboriginal to graduate from their high school. Claire rose above the racism she experienced and became a manager at a major telecommunications company, is a distinguished toastmaster and went to University as an adult to get her degree. Her goal is to give aboriginal women the tools they need to be successful contributors in their communities. Claire is now the Executive Director of Aboriginal Women's Professional Association (AWPA) and providing leadership, expertise and support to other Aboriginal women to overcome barriers as they progress through their careers.

What can you do to address the challenges facing Urban Aboriginals?

Each of us can play a role in addressing challenges facing Aboriginals in Edmonton. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about the challenges facing the Urban Aboriginal population and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Ben Calf Robe Society (www.bcrsociety.ab.ca)
- Canadian Native Friendship Centre (www.cnfc.ca)
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (www.bentarrow.ca)
- Edmonton Native Healing Centre (nativehealingcentre.tripod.com)
- Alberta International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations (www.international.gov.ab.ca)
- The Aboriginal Circle of Safety - Aboriginal Circle of Safety

Early Childhood Development in Edmonton

There is no doubt that the future of our society depends on the health and well-being of our children. At United Way, we believe that by investing wisely into generations of healthy children, the result will be a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

There is no doubt that development of a healthy child begins at conception. Without proper nutrition and prenatal care, the child may be born already at a disadvantage. In addition, toxins (e.g. alcohol, nicotine, illicit drugs) are known to affect fetal development causing birth defects and delayed development.

Based on the growing cache of anecdotal and scientific evidence, it is becoming more apparent that the first 6 years of life, starting at day one, are vital to raising a healthy child. Neurobiological studies of children have shown significant physical differences in brain structure between a healthy child and one who has been neglected or abused, for example.

For our children to have an opportunity to achieve their full potential, we need to focus on the early years of a child's life. Parents and educators have observed that the inability to comprehend and retain information, recognize patterns, and empathize with others are good predictors of emotional, behavioral, physical and developmental problems in the future.

The lack of accessible and affordable high quality childcare is of growing concern. Quality childcare facilities are typically quite costly and have long waiting lists. As a result, many turn to friends and family members for childcare. Ultimately, there is a lack of trained and experienced childhood educators.

Parents, educators and the broader community need to be made aware of the importance of early childhood development and the continuum of services provided by non-profit agencies, businesses and governments (municipal, provincial and federal). The continuum of services includes primary health care, early intervention programs, community programs (recreational, educational and social support), early education programs and childcare. If these programs are available and caregivers access them, we increase the likelihood that children will be healthy and successful in life.

What is United Way doing to address Early Childhood Development in Edmonton?

United Way works with and provides funding to a number of Member Agencies that foster early childhood development and safety, and education of parents/families with young children. The Centre for Family Literacy and Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS) focus on reading skills and the importance of reading. The ability to read correlates directly to success in school. By reading to our young children, we can instill the value and love for reading.

Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre offers three different programs directed at children between the ages of 0 and 6. These are child-focused play-based learning programs that open doors for parents and families to connect with each other and community resources. The Centre also engages in outreach services, parent-child literacy, nutrition services, and parent groups and workshops.

Additional resources devoted to early childhood development include St. Albert's Parent's Place Association that functions as a resource centre for parents with courses, programs, home visitations, and community events. Terra - Centre for pregnant and parenting teens, serves pregnant and parenting teens to provide assistance through support, service, and education. And the Edmonton Food Bank promotes healthy early childhood development by providing infant formula to low-income families through the Infant Formula Program.

United Way works with Success By 6® to bring awareness to the general public, policymakers, and service providers about the importance of the early years in a child's development. Success By 6® Director is the chair of the Aligning Early Learning and Care Services, bringing more than twenty partners together to create a stronger ECD sector. In addition, Success By 6® also sits on the consortium with other community partners to oversee the implementation of the Provincial Early Developmental Instrument (EDI).

The Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP) is a partnership between the University of Alberta and community members including United Way. CUP engages the community in research projects with University as one of many partners. The results are used to inform policymakers, practitioners, and service providers in an effort to improve the health of children. Within CUP, the Early Childhood Measurement and Evaluation Resource Centre (ECMERC) is devoted to projects studying young children and their development.

The Difference We Make

- Terra Association housed 48 teen parents and children and supported the development of positive parenting skills to more effectively nurture and teach their children.
- Young Dads Outreach Program (Terra Association) taught 92 young fathers to be better parents to their children.
- 603 parents and children attended the Books for Babies program (Centre for Family Literacy), which encourages reading skills that improve early childhood learning and strengthens the bond between parent and child.
- Over 2000 copies of the 2008 Edmonton's Report on Children & Youth were distributed to raise the awareness of the importance of early childhood development and to influence decision makers in changing practices and policies that will improve children's lives.

Huge Success in Baby Steps

An infant girl began attending the Early Start Program in the fall and shortly thereafter the staff began getting concerned. The infant was unable able to make sounds, follow movement or even crawl. After some time, the family made the decision to leave the program. A few months later, the family had decided to come back. The staff in the program worked with the girl intensely to develop her gross motor skills, so she was beginning to walk.

This young girl eventually became a toddler and had to transition into a different program. She began one day a week, but staff was nervous because they knew that they would eventually need to speak with the parents regarding the observed concerns affecting their child's development. Staff knew that they would need to be sensitive, but wanted to provide early intervention as soon as possible. The staff continued to work on many areas of development with this child, such as, her fine/gross motor skills, speech/language, and social development. This little girl was still not responding to noises, sounds, or even her name and was still unable to make eye contact.

After building a strong relationship, staff determined that they needed to find something that they and the family could work on successfully. Together, they decided to toilet train the girl. Before they all knew it, this girl was going to the bathroom on her own, with little to no accidents. Staff also continued efforts to help this girl reach her developmental milestones. Staff played more with her one on one and she started to repeat many words and actions.

Staff are now seeing this little girl in the program twice a week and are happy to have been part of her successes. She is now able to follow movements and actions to songs, respond to her name, and walk outside with another child. The staff and parents are very proud of the progress made, but they are especially proud of the hard work of this little girl.

What can you do to address early childhood development?

Each of us can play a role in improving early childhood services. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about early childhood development and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Success By 6® (Success By 6)
- Centre for Family Literacy (www.famlit.ca)
- Project Adult Literacy Society (Phone: 780-424-5514)
- St. Albert's Parent's Place Association (www.stalbertparentsplace.com)
- Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre (www.ncfrc.ab.ca)
- Terra Association (www.terraassociation.com)
- Community-University Partnership (www.cup.ualberta.ca)
- Inter-Agency Head Start (www.abcheadstart.org)
- Edmonton Public School Board (www.epsb.ca)
- Alberta Health and Wellness (www.health.gov.ab.ca/public/growing.html)
- Edmonton Social Planning Council (www.edmspc.com)
- Alberta Childcare Association (www.albertachildcare.org)
- KARA Family Resource Centre (www.kara-frc.ca)

Success in Edmonton's Schools

Only 79.5% of students graduate and receive their high school diploma within 5 years of entering grade 10²¹. It is therefore critical that we focus on ways to improve the success of children at school. Success is defined not just by academic achievement, but also by positive emotional and social development. There are two primary components to this issue. First, for those that are attending school, how do we assure that they are reaching their potential? Second, how do we ensure that all children attend and finish school?

For a child or adolescent to be successful in school, they must be provided the essentials that become the foundation for success. Intuitively, we know that for any individual to be productive the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing are needed. Logically, what follows is a positive family and social network for the child that encourages and acts as role models. Research has also shown that healthy minds depend on healthy bodies. Recreation and physical activity promote positive growth. These factors are merely the foundations for success in school.

There are many stressors that can hinder a child's ability to learn and ultimately their success. For example, schools are currently dealing with issues surrounding bullying. A child who is bullied and unable to get help can suffer self-esteem issues and "skip" school to avoid bullies. Other stressors may include physical and sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, gang influences and learning disabilities. Supports need to be in place to identify these issues and provide appropriate resolutions.

What is United Way doing to ensure children succeed in school?

United Way works with and provides funding to numerous Member Agencies that work directly with children and youth to enhance their lives and promote the skills and opportunities required to succeed in school. Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys & Girls Clubs provide services that foster positive interpersonal/relationship skills through mentorship, recreation and activities.

Other agencies like Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS) and Centre for Family Literacy focus on reading skills of families, which in turn help children to improve their literacy. Terra – Centre for pregnant and parenting teens, provides services for pregnant and parenting teens, assisting them to finish their education and reach their full potential. Although these agencies work directly with children and youth to promote success in school, the work of all United Way Member Agencies contribute to a better neighbourhoods and family environments for children and youth.

²¹ Alberta Education: Annual Report 2007-2008.

United Way's, Partners for Kids initiative is a collaboration including United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters, The Family Centre, E4C, and Edmonton Public Schools. This initiative pioneered new thinking by placing the school as the hub of community. In a number of high needs schools, community services were introduced to provide volunteer mentors, professional counseling and family therapy, and nutritious meals and snacks. Since 1997, this initiative has positively impacted the self-esteem and academic achievement of children in schools throughout our community. Today Partners for Kids is operating in eight schools throughout our community. Additional benefits identified include what families and schools have encouragingly described as a "different feel" to the educational experience.

The Difference We Make

- Through Big Brother Big Sisters Edmonton, 2800 children and youth had mentors that helped to build self-esteem, confidence, assist with homework and have fun.
- The School Lunch Program (E4C) fed 3800 students so they were better able to perform their schoolwork.
- Over 200 students attended YMCA programs that gave them opportunities to overcome difficulties in completing their education.
- For the first time since Partners for Kids began, 100% of eligible students from the Partners for Kids Junior High schools registered for High School.
- Kids in the Hall (E4C) worked with over 200 youth to find the help they needed and develop life skills for a hopeful future.

Success in School, Success in Life

Kassandra is a 16 years old girl currently in the Kids in Hall and Chimo Youth Retreat Solo Programs. A year ago, she was living a high-risk lifestyle – she was a substance abuser and had dropped out of school. In the past 6 months, Kassandra has changed her life drastically with the support and guidance of those at the programs. Having earned 43 credits in school, she is on her way to getting her High School Diploma and a bright future. Kassandra said, "All one needs to change is certain people to show you that you are worth so much - to be able to see it yourself". During one summer, Kassandra volunteered to go to Panama and work with people living in poverty. Today, Kassandra is successfully attending Fresh Start High School full time and working part time at a retail store.

What can you do to help children succeed in school?

Each of us can play a role in helping children be successful in school. At United Way, we offer you the opportunities to leverage your resources, expertise, connections, influence and resolve for change. To learn more about helping children succeed in school and what you can do about it, refer to the following resources.

- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region (www.myunitedway.ca)
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Society of Edmonton & Area (www.bbbsedmonton.org)
- Boys and Girls Clubs (Edmonton, Ft. Saskatchewan, Leduc, Strathcona County)
- E4C (www.e4calberta.org)
- YMCA of Edmonton (www.edmonton.ymca.ca)
- Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre (www.ncfrc.ab.ca)
- Terra Association (www.terraassociation.com)
- Edmonton Public School Board (www.epsb.ca)
- Alberta Health and Wellness (www.health.gov.ab.ca/public/growing.html)

UNITE

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

**INSPIRE • BUILD • CHANGE
COMMUNITY**

