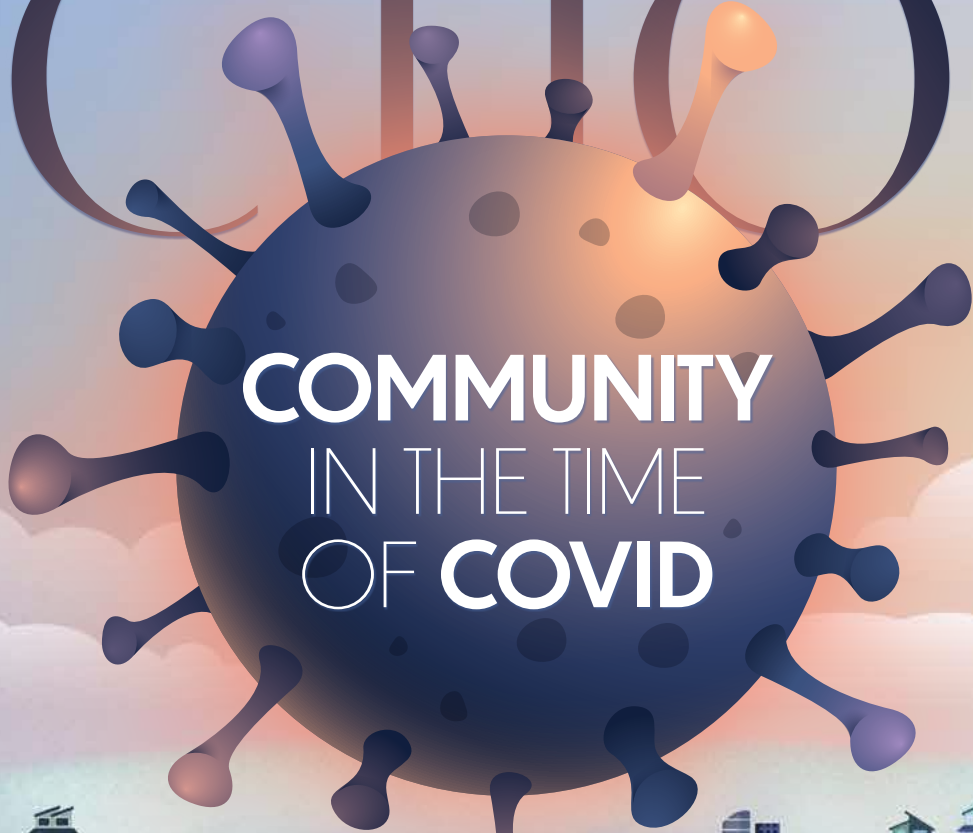


LEGACY IN

SPRING
2021

ACTION



COMMUNITY
IN THE TIME
OF COVID





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4 CEO MESSAGE

Edmonton Community Foundation granted more than \$4 million to date to organizations providing relief and assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6 AND ON WITH THE SHOW

Artists and arts organizations get creative during the lockdown.

8 GIVE WHERE YOU LIVE

From personal and corporate donations to dollar-matching programs and piggy banks.



11 TAKING A TOLL

Intimate-partner violence calls have increased during the pandemic, but organizations geared to helping those individuals are adapting.

14 AN ADAPTING COMMUNITY

Local organizations assist Edmonton's South Sudanese in adjusting to challenging times.

18 TECH FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Local organizations provide the technology tools and resources to keep vulnerable individuals connected.

21 WEATHERING THE STORM TOGETHER

A by-the-numbers look at the impact of COVID-19 in Edmonton.



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Cover by Odvod Media




Martin Garber-Conrad

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

The virus has touched most aspects of our lives. As we reflect on this year under lockdown, we are amazed and delighted by the acts of generosity from the community.

Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) established the COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund (RRF) on March 25, 2020, with \$500,000 of our discretionary funds. That amount soon grew to more than \$1 million, thanks to everyday Edmontonians like Raina Shah. When Raina heard about the RRF, she asked her dad if she could donate her chore money to help Edmonton's most vulnerable. We are inspired by Raina, who is only seven years old! You can read Raina's story in the donor profile series starting on page 8.

To date, we have granted more than \$4 million through the RRF and the Government of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund. Trends emerged as we flowed the money into the community. The need for technology support was the largest by far.

On page 18, we show how technology support is helping organizations across multiple sectors provide critical services. An RRF grant to the United Way's All in for Youth program provided 420 Chromebooks to low-income students so they can continue their education online. Tablets and laptops are helping seniors at the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre stay connected with their families. And another grant, to the Multicultural Family Resource Society,

is providing devices to 50 families in the Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Ivorian and Syrian communities.

Newcomers are particularly vulnerable during these times. In the fall of 2020, leaders in Edmonton's South Sudanese community approached ECF. More than a dozen of their community members had died from complications due to COVID-19 and they could not afford to bury them. On page 14, read about how ECF stepped up to cover funeral costs to help their families.

The arts community was also hit hard. Not only were live events cancelled *en masse*, but adjacent industries that artists rely on, including cafes and restaurants, were also decimated by COVID-19. On page 6, you can see how funding to the Edmonton Arts Council and the Citadel Theatre has helped keep artists working during the pandemic.

As provincial restrictions around gatherings and travel ebb and flow, many of us take for granted the privilege of isolating in the safety of our homes. On page 11, we highlight three organizations working with adults and children surviving domestic violence during the pandemic.

It was a challenging year and there is hope ahead. Nevertheless, we know that the need for RRF assistance will continue in 2021. I invite you to consider participating again this year, as you are able. Your contributions make a difference.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Legacy in Action*.



REGINA AKOK

Regina is a South Sudanese Canadian, mother, freelance writer, journalist, high school teacher and graduate student at the University of Regina. She explores writing and research to help advance peace, social justice and stability in her community, and the world.



DAVID BERRY

David is a writer from Edmonton whose work has appeared across Canada. His first book, *On Nostalgia*, was published by Coach House Books in July 2020.

EMILY CHU

Emily is an award-winning illustrator, specializing in editorial and commercial illustration. Her clients include *Reader's Digest*, the City of Edmonton, Telus and ATB Financial, to name a few. In her spare time, Emily loves to draw in her sketchbook and actively vends at Art & Design markets.



KYLE HACK

Kyle is a freelance illustrator from Edmonton, Alberta. He graduated from the Edmonton Digital Arts College with a degree in digital illustration and sequential art.



SERENA TANG

Serena is a Hong Kong-Canadian illustrator and is passionate about visual artwork to tell the stories of Edmontonians and their changing surroundings as the city evolves.



Finished products on display at SNAP Gallery, →
one of four local arts organizations that created
the local artist showcase *Art from Here*.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

CREATIVE MINDS ARE GIVEN A BOOST
FROM ECF TO CONTINUE CREATING

BY DAVID BERRY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CURTIS TRENT & DANIEL WOOD



There are silver linings, lessons learned and perhaps even new ways of doing things that will help the community recover more quickly, but there is no way to sugar-coat or sidestep the basic fact: The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating for Edmonton's arts community.

The uncharacteristic quietude of festivals and venues speaks for itself, but the below-the-public-eyeline effects are no less dire: audiences and revenues down by as much as three-quarters; jobs both in the arts and adjacent to the sector evaporating; professionals, amateurs and aspiring artists alike left with almost nowhere to perform, practise and learn on a consistent basis.

"It's been crushing, both from a creative standpoint and a mental-health standpoint, a joy standpoint," Chantell Ghosh, executive director of the Citadel Theatre, says. "From the moment we had to cancel shows, I think, we all kind of realized that we were starting a journey through the steps of grief, and I guess the good news is that we were able to reach a point of acceptance."

Precisely what that form of acceptance looks like has varied widely, from organizations hunkering down and hoping to weather the storm, to artists setting up stages anywhere they could find enough eyeballs to safely watch them, whether that was on a porch or online.

"The artistic community is extraordinarily creative and resilient at finding ways to share their expressions," says Stephen Williams, director of grants, awards and support

programs at the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC). As the body that distributes the city's arts grants, the EAC saw demand for individual artists' funding triple in 2020 — and though that's partially a result of most other avenues for artists to make money disappearing, it also speaks to the fundamental need Edmonton's artists have to keep creating.

"We pivoted pretty hard this year to supporting individual practitioners, but we didn't set up any kind of income support: We support artists so they can pursue their practice," explains Williams. "And this past year will have yielded the greatest number of artists we've ever funded. They might not have always had a chance to show it this year, but artists were still making work."

That kind of resiliency was evident at an institutional level as well. The first thing the Citadel did after it got to its acceptance stage, says Ghosh, was find a way to get performers performing with its *Stuck in the House* series, made possible in part by funds from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

"Our plan was to have one a day until the pandemic ended, although that was before we realized how long it might go on — but we got to 80 shows, which was a lifeline for our performers and our audience," Ghosh explains, adding that

“THIS PAST YEAR WILL HAVE YIELDED THE GREATEST NUMBER OF ARTISTS WE’VE EVER FUNDED. THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE ALWAYS HAD A CHANCE TO SHOW IT THIS YEAR, BUT ARTISTS WERE STILL MAKING WORK.”

– STEPHEN WILLIAMS



“WE’RE GOING TO BE VERY HAPPY TO WELCOME PEOPLE BACK, WHICHEVER WAY THEY WANT TO COME BACK.”

– CHANTELL GHOSH

the experience also encouraged them to create a filmed version of the Citadel’s renowned holiday staple, *A Christmas Carol*.

Other organizations found ways to share work that might prove to be more permanent. Latitude 53, the Mitchell Art Gallery, Ociciwan Contemporary Art Collective and SNAP Gallery pooled resources from ECF’s Digital Arts Funds and EAC grants to create *Art From Here*, showcasing, paying and helping lead a discussion about a different local artist each week. It has been a chance to not just maintain some of the ties so essential to an artistic community, says Latitude 53 executive director Michelle Schultz, but to help grow that community.

“While the online programming certainly wasn’t a replacement for the experience of visiting the gallery, we did immediately recognize that this form of programming allowed a much greater reach than our gallery exhibitions ordinarily do,” she explains. “It allowed this work and these conversations to reach audiences across the country and internationally.”

That kind of connectivity gives Schultz hope that things in the arts community won’t just return to normal, but come back better and stronger in an environment that promises to challenge artists even after the pandemic has subsided. It’s a bit of resilient optimism that Ghosh echoes, too, and is perhaps proof that, no matter how bad things might get, artists will do what they can to pull through — as much for their audience as themselves.

“It has been a great shift in viewpoint,” Ghosh says. “Both in terms of bringing some flexibility to an industry that often isn’t, and in terms of providing access and removing barriers that we hadn’t always considered before.

“We’re going to be very happy to welcome people back,” she adds, “whichever way they want to come back.” ■

← Chantell Ghosh, photographed at the Citadel Theatre before the pandemic.



LEADING THE WAY WITH THE COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE FUND

**INSPIRING
EDMONTONIANS
& CORPORATIONS
TO GIVE WHERE
THEY LIVE**

BY **LISA CATTERALL**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **EMILY CHU**

It's been nearly a year since the COVID-19 pandemic upended the world in many ways. In the 12 months since 'Coronavirus' became part of our daily lexicon, everything from the ways we get around, to the ways we work, gather and celebrate has changed. As public-health measures evolved throughout the last year, many local charities found themselves facing gaps in services and funding as a result of increased and changing demand for services.

The uncertainty of last year was challenging for many, yet Edmontonians came together in community spirit to support their neighbours in need. Whether giving their savings from a piggy bank or using an employer-matching donation program, these Edmontonians stepped up to make a difference by contributing to Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) COVID-19

Rapid Response Fund. What's more, many of these early donors to the Rapid Response Fund were able to take advantage of a matching program provided by the Alberta government, increasing the impact of their contributions.

Individual donations

When fitness centres and gyms closed down in the early days of the pandemic, Kyler Costucci found himself looking for new ways to stay active and healthy. As a young professional with a passion for healthy living, he knew that staying active was an essential way for him to manage the increased stress and challenges brought on by the pandemic. With temperatures warming, Costucci turned to the great outdoors and took up a new hobby: running.

**“IF WE ALL
MAKE A SMALL
CONTRIBUTION,
COMPOUNDED
OVER TIME
WITH A WHOLE
BUNCH OF
OTHER PEOPLE,
THAT'S WHERE
THE ACTUAL
PROGRESS
COMES IN.”**

– KYLER COSTUCCI

One day while out on a run, Costucci had an epiphany. What if he could use his newfound hobby as a force for good?

“I was just thinking about everything that was going on and what I could do about it. I kind of thought back to when I was younger and we did things like the Terry Fox Run, and just, this idea came to me very powerfully that maybe I could do a fundraiser and use it to help people in need. I'm a faith-based person and it just felt like God put this idea in my heart of how I could help,” he says. “So I went home, I found ECF online and saw the kinds of things this fund was supporting, and that was it.”

Almost immediately after learning about ECF's COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund, Costucci reached out to his networks via social media. He called his initiative “KM for COVID,” with the goal of running every day from April 20 – May 20, 2020. Over that time, and despite suffering an injury, he ran 137 km, finishing the 30th day of his campaign by running his first-ever marathon. He raised more than \$1,000 for the fund. Although he was pleased with the amount he raised, Costucci notes that his efforts were about more than just raising a specific dollar value.

“I knew that the money would be great

in terms of a contribution to the fund, but I think the real impact I wanted to have was in raising awareness of what we can all do at a personal level,” he says. “If we all make a small contribution, compounded over time with a whole bunch of other people, that's where the actual progress comes in.”

Corporate giving and community investment

Edmonton-based corporations also saw ECF's COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund as a way to support local organizations that faced increased need as a result of the pandemic. While corporations like EPCOR and Capital Power were already well aware of the importance of community investment, they recognized the immediate and unprecedented need many community members faced in the wake of the pandemic.

EPCOR, which contributed \$150,000 to the fund, has long understood the value of community. As the full impact of the pandemic became clearer, EPCOR stepped up its efforts to support Edmontonians hardest hit by the pandemic by investing in community programs such as ECF's Rapid Response Fund to help Edmontonians in need. >



“This donation was provided to address the immediate and long-term community needs related to the pandemic,” said Stuart Lee, EPCOR President and CEO. “Edmonton Community Foundation was well-positioned to do more to help community charities deal with urgent needs resulting from the pandemic, including providing food hampers, youth-support workers, digital mental health-supports and more.”

Capital Power also recognized the increased need for community support as a result of the pandemic. In late April, the company launched a two-week employee-giving campaign to support COVID-19 community relief. Employee contributions to the campaign, which totalled \$40,075, were matched and topped up by Capital Power for a total donation of \$101,813.

“We want to contribute to the communities where we work and operate — that’s something we would be doing in any year, and we’re proud that our employees take that step as well,” said Sian Barraclough, Vice President of Strategy and Sustainability with Capital Power. “As a company providing

essential services, we’re very fortunate that our jobs haven’t changed through the pandemic, but we recognize that’s not the case for everyone and we wanted to make a difference in the lives of those in our community who were most affected by COVID-19.”

Individual donors

At just seven years old, Raina Shah might be among the youngest donors to support community relief efforts in the wake of the pandemic. But for the Shah family, charitable giving is a family value, instilled from a young age.

“We’re immigrants — we just came to Canada 15 years ago, so we know struggle and difficulty,” says Dhaval Shah, Raina’s father. “I’m self-employed, and when I started my insurance business back in 2009, I decided to give back to the community and support other people in whatever way I can.”

Dhaval had long hoped to instill the values of community and charitable giving in his two young children, Kevin and Raina. He was pleasantly surprised when his youngest, Raina, suggested she wanted

to make a difference. When she saw a story about people in need during the pandemic, Raina turned to her father and suggested she wanted to donate the contents of her piggy bank to help. Kevin has also donated his savings to local charity during COVID-19.

“I did some chores and my parents gave some money for my birthday and I was saving up for some toys like dolls and Lego,” said Raina. “But I wanted to help the people in need and make them smile.”

Dhaval began looking for community organizations working to specifically address the needs brought about by the pandemic. When he learned about the COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund, as well as the chance to have donations matched by the provincial government, he made arrangements to help Raina make the donation. He couldn’t have been more proud of her decision.

“It’s very important that kids learn to give from an early age, so they will remember throughout their lives. We don’t have to be rich to give, but we can give what we can, and that’s enough to make a difference,” said Dhaval. ■





**ANSWERING
THE** **CRISIS
CALL**

**SUPPORTS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE ADAPTED FOR OUR
CONSTANTLY CHANGING WORLD >**

BY DANIELLE PARADIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KYLE HACK



“THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO APPROACHED US, SHE JUST WALKED IN FROM THE STREET. SHE REPORTED THAT HER HUSBAND HAD WALKED OUT ON HER AND SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HE HAD DISAPPEARED WITH ALL HER VALUABLES AND JEWELRY AND LEFT HER STRANDED IN A RENTAL PROPERTY.”

– SADIA SAMEEULLAH



The COVID-19 global pandemic has created a crisis within a crisis. In lockdowns around the world, the movement restrictions in place to stop the spread of the virus have correlated with a rise in more severe incidents of domestic violence.

The trend in Edmonton is the same as elsewhere. During the pandemic, domestic-violence calls to the police have increased, and mental-health incidents that involve the police are on the rise.

Now more than ever, vulnerable women are relying on community-based organizations for assistance. Katherine O'Neill, chief executive officer for YWCA Edmonton, says that responding to this crisis has been challenging. “Normally, a crisis comes and goes quite quickly, but we are going to be in a crisis situation for a year or longer. This is extraordinary for a non-profit to keep on top of,” she says.

O'Neill says the increase in domestic violence “comes down to the fact that there is a lot of stress in the home economically, and having the children in the home more [...] When you put all that together in an unhealthy relationship, it can lead to violence.”

Groups such as the Indo-Canadian Women's Association are rising to the occasion. It was established in 1984 with the goal of ensuring newcomers to Canada have representation and equal opportunities for integration in their new homeland. Over time, the association has specialized in research on issues such as honour-based killings, and a preference for male children. These are issues around which the Indo-Canadian Women's Association has a lot of experience facilitating conversations, says executive director Sadia Sameeullah.

“Domestic violence has spiked during these times and we wanted to create a safe platform for women to approach culturally appropriate services to reach out for help,” says Sameeullah. During the pandemic, they hired a ‘systems navigator’ with the help of funding from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

ECF granted more than \$300,000 to assist organizations supporting vulnerable people experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic. The funding comes from the Foundation's Rapid Response Fund and the Government of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF). The ECSF was established by the Government of Canada and the Foundation has been collaborating with the Canadian Red Cross, Community Foundations of Canada and United Way Centraide Canada to flow ECSF support to those who need it most.

“I am so immensely grateful for the funding. There has been an exponential increase in calls and the women calling us sometimes have language barriers [...] The person we have hired is fluent in a few South Asian languages — she speaks



Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Gujarti,” says Sameeullah. The systems navigator works with women in understanding how the legal system in Canada works, as well as helping women who are looking to leave a domestic violence situation create a safety plan. Leaving an abusive relationship can be tough, and a safety plan helps to ensure that a victim knows who to contact, and has a back-up plan for a place to stay.

Sameeullah shared a story of a client they had been able to assist during COVID.

“There was a woman who approached us, she just walked in from the street. She reported that her husband had walked out on her and she didn’t know what to do. He had disappeared with all her valuables and jewelry and left her stranded in a rental property. We supported her in reporting the crime and got her into transitional housing. Now she’s actually pursuing an employment and career development program and she’s looking at healing and finding a job,” says Sameeullah.

Funding from ECF also assisted the organization Little Warriors — which offers support to children and families



healing from the trauma of sexual abuse — with the creation of an online counselling program called “Be Brave Bridge” or BBB.

“Because of COVID, we basically had to shut everything down and send all the kids home from mid-March until mid-June. We also had to lay off most of our staff. Because the kids were in our care however, we couldn’t just abandon them ... so we used this time to develop something that had been on our radar for a very long time — online programs for caregivers, teens and children which they could access from their home,” says Laurie Szymanski, CEO of Little Warriors.

The Little Warriors team of therapists used the time that the centre was closed to create three programs: one for families, one for teens and one for children.

One of the parents who had recently completed the BBB program found it immensely helpful. “The BBB online program felt like a light at the end of the tunnel and that I was not alone and had something to hang on to [...] like a lighthouse,” says the parent, who was not named for privacy reasons. “I have taken many parenting programs, but the difference with the BBB program was it was so specific to the issue; it was written in a way that made sense. Having an online coach helped with self-reflection and working through mindful parenting practices.”

As the lockdowns continue, so too does the work of these organizations. They’ve worked to become adaptive to the new normal which they find themselves in. Although there is a light at the end of the tunnel thanks to vaccines, much of the work to heal the trauma of the pandemic will remain. ■

As of November 19, 2020, Edmonton Police are reporting a 16% increase in intimate-partner violence calls.

The total number of reported intimate-partner violence calls this year is 7,931, compared to Edmonton’s three-year average (2017-2019) of 6,851 calls.

The number of intimate-partner assault charges this year remains mostly static, down 1% (1,332 in 2020 — compared to our three-year average of 1,344). However, there has been a significant increase in the severity of those assaults — a 38% increase in aggravated assaults and a 56% increase in bodily harm/weapons-related offences.

Paul Gregory, Staff Sergeant for the Domestic Offender Crimes Section, says the numbers are very concerning since we know that intimate-partner violence offences are vastly under-reported.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT PHONE NUMBERS

Community and Social Services Helpline: 211

Edmonton Police Complaint Line: 780-423-4567

Alberta 24-Hour Mental Health Line: 1-877-303-2642

CMHA Edmonton 24-Hour Distress Line: 780-482-4357

Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre 24-Hour Crisis Line: 780-423-4121

Alberta ONE LINE for Sexual Violence: 1-866-403-8000



SEARCHING FOR SOLACE



EDMONTON'S SOUTH SUDANESE COMMUNITY ADAPTS TO THEIR NEW HOME IN A MOST CHALLENGING TIME

BY REGINA AKOK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ESTA BEE PHOTOGRAPHY

DO YOU FEAR contracting COVID-19 at work and bringing it home to family members? Are your kids adjusting to online learning? Do you have to manage child-care issues? Have you lost your job? Are you struggling to pay your rent or mortgage? Are you battling depression or other mental disorders triggered by social isolation?

You're not alone.

"Not only has COVID exposed the underlying problems that our community faces," says Dr. Mawien Akot, a South Sudanese physician residing in Edmonton, "but it has magnified them. Sadly, one of our community leaders died in February.

"In July alone, we lost six people. In September, we lost five and just a few days before the end of 2020, three more lives just perished. Some of these deaths, though not directly COVID-19-related, have been expedited by pandemic-related stressors, but mostly youth under 30 so far."

People from South Sudan arrived in



← Asha Anihiri A., independent researcher and senior policy analyst with the Government of Alberta.

“IN ADDITION TO BEING ESSENTIAL WORKERS, SOME COMMUNITY MEMBERS LIVE IN COMPACT HOUSING TO SHIELD THEIR RELATIVES OR FRIENDS WHO HAVE NO PLACE TO LIVE, WHICH CREATES A CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR SPREADING THE VIRUS AMONG THE COMMUNITY AT THE HIGHEST SPEED.”

– DR. MAWIEN AKOT

Edmonton as landed immigrants in the early 1990s from countries that hosted them as refugees from the Second Sudanese Civil War. Today, Edmonton is home to more than 5,000 people from South Sudan. Alberta alone houses almost 30,000, the largest South Sudanese Canadian community in the country, says Deng Akol, a community leader who, at the University of Calgary, studied Alberta's South Sudanese cultural dilemmas. Here, many South Sudanese work in nursing homes and meat-packaging plants. These were severely impacted by COVID-19.

“In addition to being essential workers, some community members live in compact housing to shield their relatives or friends who have no place to live, which creates a conducive environment for spreading the virus among the community at the highest speed,” says Dr. Akot.

Asha Anihiri A., a South Sudanese Canadian, is an independent researcher and senior policy analyst with the Government of Alberta. “Like everybody else, we are stuck at home,” she says about the pandemic. “In March, when the country started to restrict gatherings to help limit the spread of the virus, it was so confusing especially among South Sudanese, who are a community-oriented people. It has been tough not to celebrate our children's

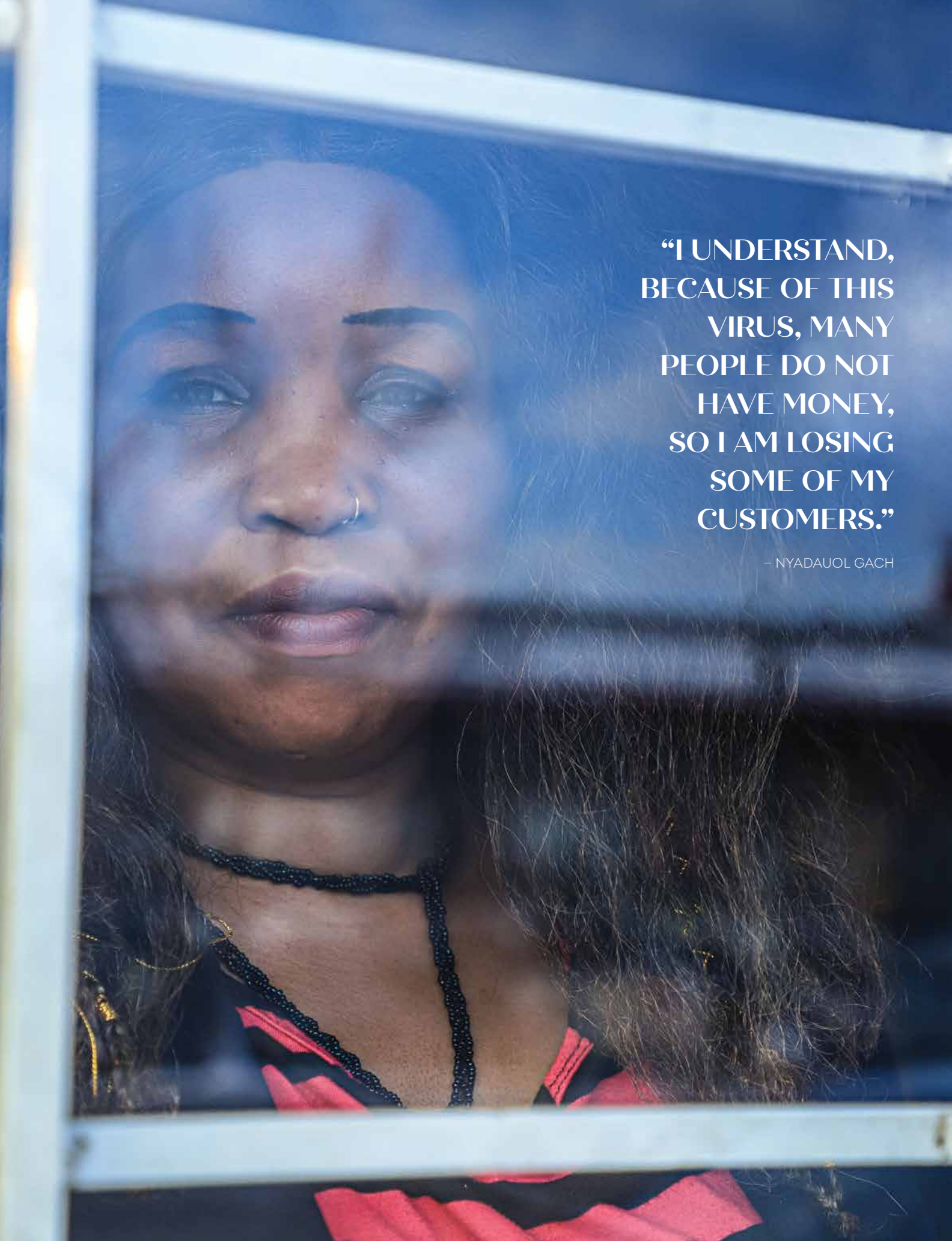
birthdays, to not spend time with our friends, and not to support our community during sickness and death.”

Nyadaul Gach, a small-business owner and single parent of five, tells how her business has slowed down since the pandemic. “I understand, because of this virus, many people do not have money, so I am losing some of my customers,” she says. Gach's shop sells a wide variety of items including “things you can't find in any average Canadian stores.” She sells food from African and Middle Eastern countries, beauty products, as well as Islamic and African clothes for women and men.

Atoj Deng is a medical assistant, completing her bachelor's degree in healthcare management from the National American University in Rapid City, South Dakota. Deng was already studying online from her home in Edmonton, but has been experiencing cuts in her paycheque due to reduced working hours. However, she is more concerned about kids in her community.

“I noticed in our [Sudanese] community that many kids' performance at school has suffered especially because of the remote learning and language barrier,” Deng says. “It's hard for some parents to help their children with schoolwork and especially with online learning.” Many community members speak good English, but it is a different story when helping children with schoolwork.

Community and local organizations including Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op (MCHB) and Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) play key roles in supporting members of the community. ECF, for example, funded some of the burial costs of those who died of COVID-19. Usually, the South Sudanese community collects money to support >

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair and a nose ring. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is wearing a black top with a red collar and a black beaded choker. The image is framed by horizontal metal bars, suggesting she is behind a fence or in a vehicle. The lighting is somewhat dim, with a blueish tint.

**“I UNDERSTAND,
BECAUSE OF THIS
VIRUS, MANY
PEOPLE DO NOT
HAVE MONEY,
SO I AM LOSING
SOME OF MY
CUSTOMERS.”**

– NYADAUOL GACH

the family that lost their loved one, but many are dazed by the number of deaths in such a short time — and the financial strains created as a result.

The MCHB is currently supporting 23 senior citizens from the community with food items and prepaid cell phones to help prevent additional social isolation. The MCHB also provided gift cards to purchase food and helps those who need special diets due to chronic illnesses like diabetes. Similarly, the EMCN assists in housing and the Multicultural Family Resource Society is helping community members facing eviction.

While it is important to focus on financial needs during the pandemic, mental health also deserves more attention than ever. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that “[because of the pandemic] and given past experience of emergencies, the need for mental health and psychosocial support will substantially increase in the coming months and years.”

Anihiri A. agrees. “Mental health is not dealt with well in our communities because it is still a stigmatized topic, even though we have gone through years of wars that have left many traumatized,” she says. “Yet, we still don’t accept mental illness as a real thing. If people are made aware that it’s an illness like any other physical condition, people will take it seriously and stop treating it as a personal failure.”

“Mental health must be addressed based on an informed and cultural way of different ethnic groups in the country because this one-size-fits-all approach does not work for everybody or every community and, certainly, not our community.”

There is also a structural component that prevents South Sudanese people from getting treatment: A study by the University of Alberta found that Black youth in Edmonton have difficulty getting the support they need for mental-health problems.

A similar study conducted in Ontario revealed that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected racialized minorities and those who live in low-income neighbourhoods in that province. Kwame McKenzie, CEO of the Wellesley Institute and a psychiatry professor at the University of Toronto, told CBC: “Some people thought that COVID would be the great equalizer. COVID-19 is not a great equalizer — it discriminates.”

Anihiri A. and Akot agree that assisting communities begins by understanding their dynamics, values and cultural contexts. South Sudanese are community-based, live based on collaboration, and need language and skills training to access sustainable jobs, affordable housing, psychologists and resources to help with traumas and mental illnesses, while at the same time addressing systemic racism. ■



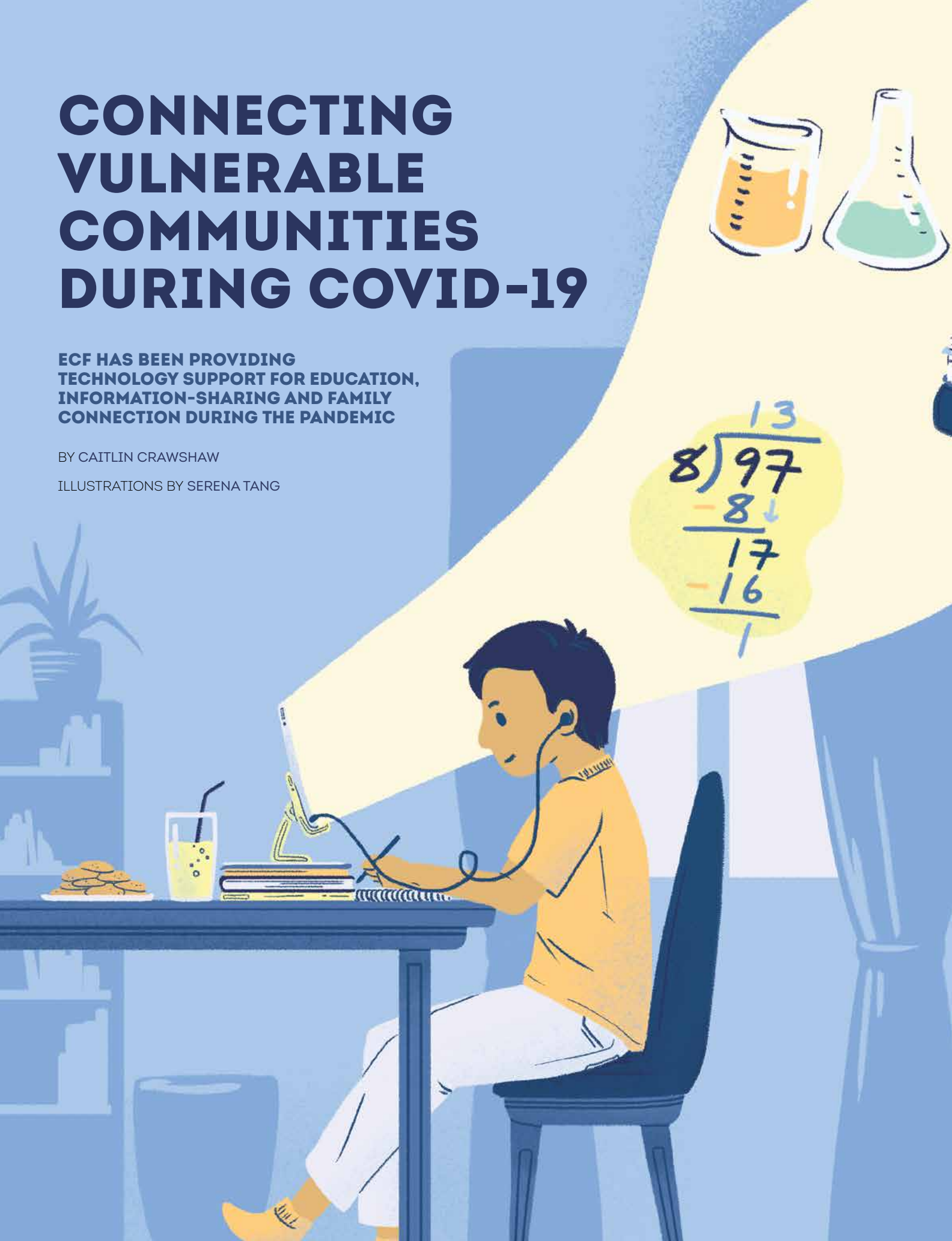
Nyadaul Gach, owner-operator of South Sudan →
Beauty Supplies in downtown Edmonton.

CONNECTING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

ECF HAS BEEN PROVIDING
TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION,
INFORMATION-SHARING AND FAMILY
CONNECTION DURING THE PANDEMIC

BY CAITLIN CRAWSHAW

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERENA TANG





Technology is ubiquitous — it’s everywhere around us, and often a part of our daily routines. From phones and laptops, to smart watches and even toothbrushes and coffee makers. But what happens when you don’t have access to what we may refer to as “basic” technology, like the Internet or a smartphone?

We grumble about Zoom meetings and online schooling as we navigate through life during a pandemic, but should consider those who feel increasingly isolated due to a lack of Internet access. “The pandemic ramped up existing problems in our society — including technology gaps,” explains Rob Yager, President and CEO of United Way of the Alberta Capital Region.

As pervasive as digital technology may be, not everyone has access to hardware such as computers and tablets, or high-speed Internet — tools that have become necessary during the pandemic. Digital technology keeps us connected to family and friends, and allows us to gather information about the pandemic (including social supports), succeed at school, work or look for work opportunities, and more. For these reasons, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) has invested more than \$580,000 to support information technology (IT) for marginalized populations needing tech help during COVID.

One of the first recipients of this funding was the

United Way’s All in For Youth program, which supports socially vulnerable youth at five Edmonton schools. In the early days of the pandemic, funding from ECF helped the program provide 420 laptops to K-12 students lacking technology for home-schooling. “In many cases, not only did these kids not have anything they could bring home with them, because their schools weren’t equipped, but no one in their households had devices either,” says Yager.

The devices have also been critical for the well-being of the program’s students. When the lockdown began, students who were already struggling in school found themselves without the educational and social support the program provided while navigating COVID-related stress in their households. Laptops and Internet access ensure kids remain connected with their classmates and teachers, as well as mental-health supports and mentoring.

The pandemic has also put the city’s immigrant and refugee population at a much greater risk of social isolation. Ese Ejebe, a project coordinator with the Multicultural Family Resource Society (MFRS), says many newcomers lack adequate access to digital technology because of financial and language barriers.

“There was definitely a need [for greater technology >

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“THERE WAS DEFINITELY A NEED [FOR GREATER TECHNOLOGY ACCESS] BEFORE THE PANDEMIC AND IT JUST BECAME SO MUCH MORE OBVIOUS DURING THE PANDEMIC BECAUSE OF THE NEW NORMAL – THE NEW WAY OF DOING THINGS.” – ESE EJEBE

access] before the pandemic and it just became so much more obvious during the pandemic because of the new normal — the new way of doing things,” she says.

Many MFRS clients live in multigenerational households where the available devices are in high demand by children attending school online, parents researching government supports and grandparents checking on loved ones abroad, for instance.

Ejebe is the project coordinator of the Technology Ambassador project, which received funding from ECF to distribute devices and support digital literacy for 50 families in the Eritrean, Ethiopian, Ivorian and Syrian communities (which are connected to MFRS through various programs and services). MFRS has hired four youths to act as technology ambassadors by liaising with specific families, identifying their technology needs and helping them make the most out of the devices they eventually receive. “We don’t just want to provide devices, but information for families on how to use them,” says Ejebe.

ECF funds are also assisting the elderly residents of Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre to stay connected with loved ones during COVID-19. The centre has been able to buy tablets and a laptop,

a cable to connect the devices to a larger screen, as well as Pocket Talkers (assistive devices to help hard-of-hearing residents communicate over video) and disposable covers to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

Joanna Yu, the centre’s activity/volunteer coordinator, says virtual ‘visits’ have become critical to the well-being of residents. “Most of their families can’t come in to visit them, so we can only do virtual visits,” she explains. These visits are not only lifelines to family abroad, but also to loved ones nearby, as outside visits are restricted and sometimes, not possible at all (such as during an outbreak of COVID-19 this past winter). These virtual conversations are just as crucial to family members, too, particularly when they can’t be at the bedsides of their loved ones at the end of their lives.

As people in Edmonton and around the world get vaccinated, life will return to normal — or, at least, a new normal. Yager points out that we’re unlikely to revert back to old ways of using technology, which means it’ll be just as important to close the technology gap for marginalized populations moving forward. “From most indications,” he says, “we’ve got a lot of work to do as a community.” ■

Vital Topic

COVID-19

IN EDMONTON

We are all in the same storm...



Edmonton Vital Signs is an annual checkup conducted by Edmonton Community Foundation, in partnership with Edmonton Social Planning Council, to measure how the community is doing. Vital Topics are a quick but comprehensive look at issues that are timely and important to Edmonton.

Unless otherwise stated, "Edmonton" refers to Census Metropolitan Area and not solely the City of Edmonton.

Disclaimer – We have done our best to provide up-to-date information but the situation is changing rapidly. Wherever possible we have provided a date that is associated with when the facts occurred.

COVID-19

An infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. The World Health Organization (WHO) first learned of this virus on December 31, 2019. It reached Canada on January 27, 2020.

- Variants of SARS-CoV-2 appeared in Canada on December 26, 2020.
- Although more infectious, the vaccines are expected to be effective on the variants.

PANDEMIC – A worldwide occurrence affecting a large number of people. On March 11, 2020 the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic after 113,000 people world-wide were infected and more than 4,000 had died.

VACCINES – The first dose in Canada was given on December 14, 2020.

- The vaccines approved in Canada are **Pfizer-BioNTech** and **Moderna**.

... but in different boats.

Although more than half of Canadians report that the pandemic is having a significant impact on their households, the virus disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

Ethnicity

Visible minorities are at greater risk of COVID-19 due to higher poverty rates. They are more likely to live in overcrowded housing and work in jobs with greater exposure to the virus.

Note: much of the data collected on ethnicity is self-reported as the medical system does not regularly collect or report on ethnicity.

African, Black and Caribbean Canadians

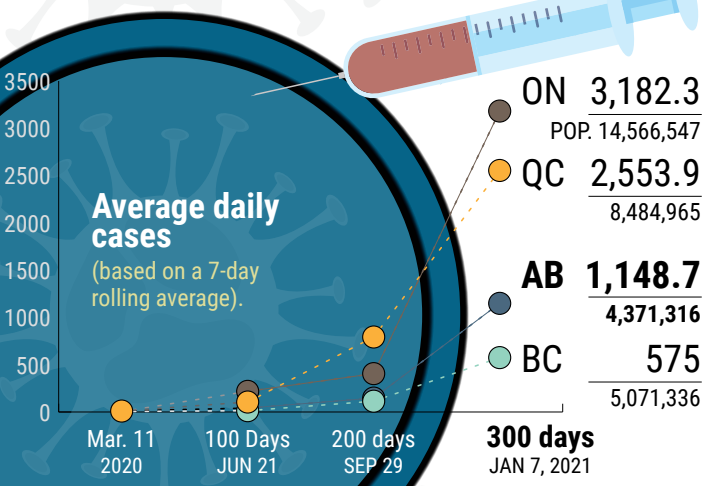
- Compared to the Canadian average, Black Canadians are more likely to report COVID-19 symptoms, and **3x as likely to know someone who has died.**
- **1.9x more likely to report difficulty paying rent.**
- 2.6x are more likely to experience food shortages.

Asian Canadians

- People of South Asian heritage report higher instances of COVID-19.
- **Two of the largest outbreaks in Alberta were at two meat processing plants.**
 - 70% of Cargill's employees are of Filipino descent.
 - 33% of JBS employees are from East Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.
- **Police across Canada have reported an increase in hate crimes targeting Asian populations.**

Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)

- **Report higher instances of COVID-19 (particularly Métis).**
- Indigenous Peoples are **2x as likely to report inability to pay rent** during the pandemic.
- First Nations people have a **high prevalence of underlying health conditions** that could increase severe outcomes of COVID-19.



HIGHEST DAILY DEATH RATES from COVID-19 Canada-wide:



ECF@WORK

ECF in conjunction with individual donations, funds from the Provincial Government, and assistance from the Emergency Community Support Fund through the Federal Government, has issued well over \$5 million to help charities. Throughout this document you will see ECF@Work.

Other Socioeconomic Factors

Persons with disabilities

- More than 20% of Canadians have one or more disabilities.
- **36% reported losing work** (of the 66% that worked pre-pandemic).
 - **44% reported an impact on food** and 40% on personal protective equipment.
 - **71% reported impacts on their finances.**

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- **76% were very concerned about managing their children's behaviours**, and anxiety compared with 57% of parents of children without disabilities.

Socioeconomic factors continued on next page...



ECF@WORK ECF has provided 24 grants to greater Edmonton organizations and charities in the amount of \$580,000 to assist seniors during the pandemic.

Seniors

CANADIANS OVER THE AGE OF 60 ACCOUNT FOR

- **71%** of hospitalizations.
- **61%** of cases admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.
- **97%** of deaths.

OF THE 118 REPORTED OUTBREAKS IN EDMONTON

- (January 19, 2021):
- **29% were in long-term care facilities**
 - **44% were in supportive living/home living sites.**

CO-MORBIDITIES People with pre-existing chronic conditions are at higher risk of dying of COVID-19.

LGBTQ2S+ Canadians

Pre-existing inequalities in financial and housing security have made LGBTQ2S+ individuals even more vulnerable during the pandemic.

- LGBTQ2S+ youth may be forced to isolate at home with phobic family members.

Edmonton's homeless

Overall, the number of homeless in Edmonton has remained stable, however these numbers are expected to go up when the pandemic supports end.

In March 2020, Edmonton's homeless-serving sector opened a location for homeless to access services in a safe environment.

Quality of Life

53% of Canadians report that the pandemic has had a strong impact on their quality of life.

- **14% live alone which means spending days with limited social contact.**
- 24% of women and 21% of men are caring for children all day.

In 2018, average life satisfaction among Canadians was 8.09 (0-10 scale). In June 2020, satisfaction declined to 6.71.

- **Satisfaction was lowest among those aged 15 to 29 and highest for those 60+.**
- Satisfaction was lowest among Asian-born immigrants.

Food Security

ECF@WORK 55 grants > \$1.45 M to assist with food security.

In September 2020 Edmonton Food Bank reported that:

- **Home delivery for hampers was provided to 1,134 households between March and August 2020.**
- 46,807 individuals received a food hamper so far.

Food Security Canada-wide

- **1 in 7 Canadians were estimated to live in a food-insecure household** in May 2020. Of households with children it rises to 1 in 5.

The Economy

Many individuals have lost work due to the pandemic. According to Statistics Canada some groups reported higher unemployment rates:

- South Asian **17.8%** (South Asian women were at 20.4%)
- Arab **17.3%** • Black **16.8%** (18.6% for Black women)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AT THE 100-DAY MARKERS

	JUNE (100 days)	SEPT. (200 days)	DEC. (Jan unavailable)
Edmonton	15.8%*	13%	10.4%
Alberta	15.5%	11.7%	11.4%

*Highest of all the major cities.

Domestic Violence during the Pandemic

ECF@WORK 12 grants > \$290,000 towards stemming violence in the home.

- 10% of women and 6% of men in Canada are concerned about violence in their home during the pandemic.
- **Domestic violence-related calls to Edmonton police rose 16% in 2020.**

Mental Health

ECF@WORK 110 grants > \$1.8 M to assist with mental health supports.

According to a June 2020 Leger poll Edmontonians stated that **friends and family were the thing that helped them most during the pandemic.**

- 59% of Canadians indicate that their mental health has been negatively affected by COVID-19, 66% among women.
- Only 1 in 5 have sought healthcare for their issues.

Alcohol consumption

1 in 5 Canadians say they are drinking more since the pandemic.

21% drink at least once per day.

They say they drink more due to:

- **Stress and boredom (34%).**
- No regular schedule (29%).
- Loneliness (23%).

1 in 10 report drinking less.

Record Opioid usage

Beginning in March 2020, opioid use began to increase significantly.

As of June 2020:

- **2.5 people were dying every day in Alberta due to Opioids.**
- **284 people died from fentanyl-related poisoning** (130 the previous quarter).
- There were **3,028 emergency and urgent care visits related to opioids and drug use** (2,472 the previous quarter).

Fighting the storm...

Becoming complacent

Only 3 months into the pandemic Canadians started to change their habits:

- **40% say they are not keeping extra personal space from others.**
- 57% say they are not staying away from public spaces.
- **70% of Albertans felt that the worst of COVID was over.**

How are our medical professionals?

Infections among health care professionals

As of November 23, 2020, Alberta Health Services employees reported **2.66% had tested positive for COVID-19** including 2% of physicians.

Mental health among health care professionals

According to an on-going study by University of Alberta researcher Dr. Nicola Cherry:

- More than half the doctors now have very high levels of anxiety.
- Nurses and other healthcare workers have higher levels of depression.

How you can help:

Follow local guidelines – Wear a mask when indoors with those outside your cohort. Stay home whenever possible. Wash your hands frequently. Adhere to all local guidelines.

Check in on friends and family (safely) – Text, phone, or video check-ins. Don't forget about the people you know who may be in quarantine.

Support local – Small businesses are being hit hardest by the pandemic. Shop online or call for curbside pick-up.

Kindness counts – Grocery store employees, delivery personnel, and especially medical professionals are stressed. Be kind and compassionate.

Volunteer your time (even online) volunteerconnector.org

Well-being for the *Young and Young-at-heart*

We share a passion for healthcare and a strong commitment to family and faith and we wanted to find ways to support children, youth, and seniors in a meaningful way. ECF made it super convenient for us to help those in need while allowing us to share our values with our children so they will one day want to make a positive difference in our community.

Taam Family



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Call 780-426-0015 or visit our website www.ecfoundation.org

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