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ECF has helped Action for Healthy Communities assist over 200 newcomers by providing guidance on planning, launching and growing their own businesses. ECF helped these individuals fulfill their dreams.

— **Abdoulaye Barry**

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PHOTOGRAPHY: KESARA KIMO

TINA THOMAS

CEO, Edmonton Community Foundation

than 800 charities and 700 students and we are on track to distribute close to \$40 million in 2024. This includes \$1.6 million granted to Indigenous students and Indigenous-led and serving organizations, including the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards (BBMAs).

The BBMAs were established at ECF in 2001 by Dr. Herb Belcourt, Orval Belcourt and Georges Brosseau, KC. BBMA recipients can use this funding for tuition, fees, textbooks and supplies.

This summer, we were saddened by the passing of Georges Brosseau. Georges believed in the importance of post-secondary education for Métis people so they can achieve self-sufficiency, realize their highest potential and enrich their lives and the lives of their community. During his lifetime, Georges saw the BBMAs distribute more than \$10.5 million in awards to over 2,600 Métis students, making it one of the largest non-governmental sources of funding for Métis students in Canada.

On September 21, we will honour the achievements of the latest BBMA recipients at the annual BBMA Celebration at the Edmonton Inn & Conference Centre.

In July, we watched in disbelief as a wildfire swept through Jasper National Park, a place dear to many Albertans. The blaze, the largest in a century, damaged 30 per cent of the town's structures, destroying 358 of 1,113 buildings.

In response, ECF is working with the Northwestern Alberta Foundation and the Banff Canmore Foundation to mobilize the Northern Alberta Resiliency Fund, supporting long-term community needs not covered by government aid or insurance. ECF is matching donations to this fund up to \$100,000.

Additionally, recognizing the large number of hospitality sector workers in the region, a group of local hospitality leaders reached out to ECF to create the Jasper Hospitality Fund. Restaurants, cafés and others in the sector are creating pop-up events, donating proceeds from their businesses and rallying support for their colleagues in Jasper. Both initiatives are dedicated to directly aiding Jasper's recovery and ensuring that the communities most impacted by the fires are the ones making decisions about how the funding is used.

Throughout my tenure, I have consistently heard from donors, grantees, current and past Board members and other stakeholders that ECF is Edmonton's best kept secret. The people who know us understand the incredible work we are doing, yet many people are unaware of our impact. In fact, increasing our visibility was the top suggestion from our 2023 Donor Perception Survey.

Over the past six months, ECF has engaged in conversations with donors, grantees, staff, board and other stakeholders to gather insights on our identity, community value and unique strengths.

We've been using this input to reimagine how we present ourselves both internally and externally. We are excited to enhance our visibility and awareness in Edmonton and I look forward to sharing what we've done when we launch our refreshed brand later this year. ■

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

In June, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) hosted 500 donors and community partners at our Annual Luncheon. This event reminds me of how far ECF has come since its establishment in 1989, thanks to the combined investment of \$15 million by John and Barbara Poole, George and Rae Poole, and Robert and Shirley Stollery on behalf of their families. In 1990, we began granting and distributed \$1 million to charities and students in the greater Edmonton area.

Fast forward 35 years to 2023, and ECF's assets under management reached \$795 million. We provided a total of \$33.2 million to more



Breaking the Language Barrier

AN EDMONTON PROGRAM HELPS ASYLUM
SEEKERS WITH THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE
THEY FACE — LEARNING ENGLISH

By **Lisa Catterall**

Moving overseas, away from family, friends and support networks, is a difficult thing to do at the best of times. But it's infinitely harder when the relocation was unplanned, and done out of necessity for survival to escape conflict, persecution or discrimination.

“Being a refugee claimant is a very vulnerable state and a hard place to be in,” says Anne-Marie Kallal, Executive Director of the Cultural Connections Institute — The Learning Exchange (CCI-LEX), an Edmonton-based non profit which offers language and cultural education to newcomers. “Refugee claimants are coming here seeking asylum, and they’re often overlooked in terms of the services that are actually available to them.”

For more than two decades, CCI-LEX has been helping newcomers to Edmonton, including refugee claimants, gain the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to settle into their new homes and communities.

“If you imagine you’re new to Canada, you need English. If you don’t speak very much of it, you probably don’t have a high income, and a lot of formalized English-language training programs have waiting lists to get into,” says Kallal. “Without English, how can you move forward with building your life here?”

Unlike other newcomers, who may have planned for years to move to a new country, those claiming refugee status have often done so under accelerated timelines. Their statuses as refugee claimants are intended to be temporary while they wait to find out if they will be able to obtain permanent residencies. The problem is, access to many settlement supports — including many English-language training programs — is often limited to those with permanent resident status.

“Historically, our government funding always said we prioritize permanent residents and citizens, but if there’s space available, we can put refugee claimants and asylum seekers into our classes,” says Kallal. She explains that over the last two years, CCI-LEX has seen a significant increase in demand overall for its language training programs. The increase had a significant impact on refugee claimants, who were only able to enrol in the classes if no one else was on the waitlist. “We’ve always accepted refugee claimants when we can, but we’ve never seen demand like this.”

The increased demand meant refugee claimants would often be left waiting more than nine months for a spot to open in the language training classes. The wait for those with permanent residency status, meanwhile, was only about three months.

Sheida Azimi, Program Manager at CCI-LEX, notes that the lack of services available to refugee claimants ultimately delays their ability to settle into their new communities.

“More than 60 per cent of these refugee claims are accepted and they become permanent residents,” she explains. “But when they arrive here, they have these three or four years of no support, where their needs are not being met, so they’re not really being set up for success.”

Thanks to funding from Edmonton Community Foundation, CCI-LEX was able to expand its offering of affordable English classes for refugee claimants and asylum seekers, who otherwise would have limited options for language study. In September 2023, CCI-LEX began offering two basic-level afternoon classes for refugee claimants.

The classes filled up almost immediately, and stayed full throughout the year. Since then, the average wait time for refugee claimants to get into these classes has dropped to two and a half months.

And for newcomers with refugee claimant status, that reduced wait time can make all the difference.

“It’s about giving learners that bit of confidence to start being able to interact and do things on your own, like being able to go and order that coffee, or go get a haircut. Those things are a big deal for people when they do it for the first time,” says Kallal.

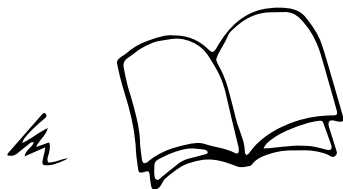
But the classes are about more than just learning a new language.

“It’s a safe place where you can learn, you can make mistakes, you can laugh. You can celebrate together,” says Azimi.

“It’s the whole experience and community that’s built here, where people feel belonging and comfortable, and they don’t have to think about some of the other challenges they’re facing at the moment.” ■

“Without English, how can you move forward with building your life here?”

— Anne-Marie Kallal



Green Days



Ensuring special places are preserved for generations to come

BY JASLEEN MAHIL
PHOTOS STEVE GLEN

Since 1970 the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has protected 455,000 hectares of Alberta's land and water.

NCC, a national non-profit organization, partners with individuals, corporations, Indigenous communities and governments to protect and steward natural regions.

Through donations, purchases and conservation agreements, NCC acquires properties to preserve them. Conservation projects around the Edmonton region include Beaver Hills, Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary and Bunchberry Meadows.

"It's kind of in this transition area between the aspen parkland and boreal forest."

— Sean Feagan



“I think getting people out into nature is the single most important thing to ensure people care about conservation.”

— Sean Feagan



Looking at the surrounding landscape now, there's been quite a bit of change even over the last nine or so years. I think it's an ecological jewel, just in Edmonton's own backyard.”

Edmonton Community Foundation provided the organization with an \$80,000 grant in 2023. The grant not only helped to secure new land donations but also increased NCC's ability to engage with Edmontonians through events and property visits.

“There's a long list of benefits that conservation provides to nature in the region, but also to people,” says Feagan. “There's ecological benefits, so things like clean water, clean air, well-being through access to land. I think helping us conserve land and creating these opportunities for people to get out into nature has an immense value to our society. And for that reason, we're very grateful for [ECF's] support.”

NCC encourages residents to connect to nature through its various volunteer programs. The Trail Stewardship Program recruits volunteers in the community to help monitor regions and the Adopt-a-Patch Program has volunteers protect designated areas from invasive weeds.

“I think getting people out into nature is the single most important thing to ensure people care about conservation,” says Feagan. “These programs create real benefits on the ground. And we hope that that can translate into more people getting involved with conservation, supporting conservation, encouraging their friends and family to support conservation, or even just get out for an event.” ■

Bunchberry Meadows, located near the University of Alberta Botanic Garden, houses some of the only old-growth forests in Alberta. In 2015, the owners of the land sold it to NCC at half its value to ensure the area would be conserved for people in and around Edmonton to enjoy. Today, it is one of NCC's most visited areas.

“It's kind of in this transition area between the aspen parkland and boreal forest,” says NCC Media and Communications Manager Sean Feagan. “Any time you're on one of those interfaces between two natural regions there's really high biodiversity. And I think we're just really happy that it's very frequently used.”





Transforming Loss into Legacy

Kaylyn Medeiros will live on through a fund in her honour

BY HIBA ZAIDI
PHOTOS SUPPLIED

IN THE AFTERMATH of profound loss, Kaylyn Medeiros's family figured out a way to transform their grief into a lasting legacy.

In June 2023, Medeiros's life was cut short at just 25 years old by a rare autoimmune disease called Takayasu's Arteritis, which causes blood vessel inflammation. Grappling with this heartbreak, her family created a beacon of hope for others, establishing the Kaylyn Elisa Medeiros Fund at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

The fund was born from a desire to raise awareness about Takayasu's Arteritis and autoimmune diseases at large. "Right after she passed, I turned to my brothers, my family, her dad and my husband, and I said, 'We need to start something just to get the awareness out,'" Anna Olivieri, Medeiros's mother, recalls.

The fund aims to assist people experiencing autoimmune diseases and their families, while also supporting medical research into

these conditions, with a special focus on Takayasu's Arteritis. It has been a resounding success, raising nearly \$25,000 in the first year — a target chosen to match Kaylyn's age when she passed. This exceeded expectations for the fund.

As Olivieri explains, "\$10,000 was what they said we had to do over 10 years." The \$10,000 threshold is the amount a fund must reach before it begins granting. This ensures the longevity of endowments so that they can continue to grow and give in perpetuity.

Olivieri recalls her daughter's compassion, specifically towards animals. She was a dedicated foster mom for dogs, working with organizations like Paws Up. Inspired by this love for animals, her family is working to establish a scholarship through ECF to support students pursuing veterinary studies. "Whether it be a veterinarian, a vet assistant, anything to do with animal care, we want to help students in

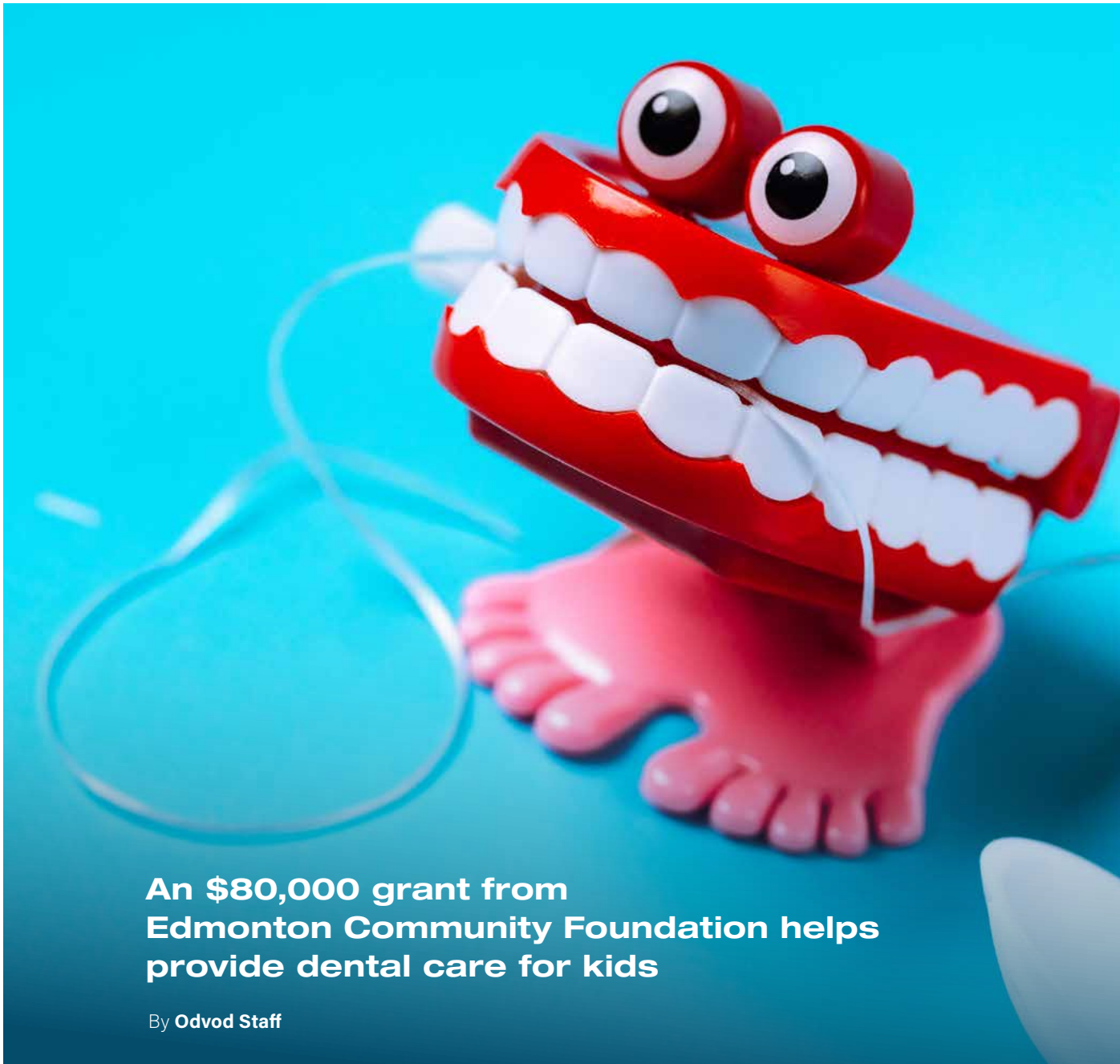
Kaylyn's name," Olivieri says.

The journey to set up and run the fund has been emotional yet rewarding. Olivieri describes how, with the help of her brothers, one of whom is a retired lawyer, they navigated the process of setting up a fund with ECF. "It continues to be emotional and heartwarming, knowing how many people continue to support this, and how they continue to contribute," she says. In the first week of September, the family plans to hold a walk in St. Albert's Lions Park, a continuation of last year's successful event that raised funds and collected donations for dogs in need.

For Olivieri and her family, the fund is not just about raising money, "It's mainly about bringing awareness to this disease and keeping my daughter's name and memory alive," Olivieri says. "As time goes on, we keep thinking about what else we can do with this. I just want to keep making noise." ■

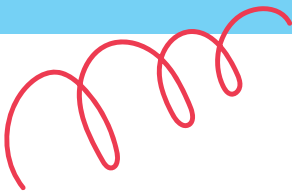


Health Starts with a Smile




**An \$80,000 grant from
Edmonton Community Foundation helps
provide dental care for kids**

By **Odvod Staff**



**"WE DIDN'T HAVE THE MONEY
TO CONTINUE PROVIDING
TREATMENT PRO BONO FOR
THESE KIDS."**

— Dr. Ida Kornerup



One of the most miraculous things about being a kid is that sometimes all it takes to make a new friend is a smile. But if you've ever suffered from a toothache — or any other oral health condition — you know that smiling can be a lot harder than it appears.

Ensuring Edmonton kids have the opportunity to smile with confidence — and all the benefits that go along with that — is priority number one for the University of Alberta's School Visit Program.

Running for the past three decades, the School Visit Program provides comprehensive dental care for Edmonton students who otherwise might not have access to it. And the best part? It's free.

"We think of the [University of Alberta's] School of Dentistry as our dentistry angels," says Shauna Stelmaschuk, the principal of St. Catherine Catholic Elementary/Junior High School. "They've had such a huge impact on so many of our students."

Until recently, the School Visit Program saw the university's dental faculty travelling to several Edmonton-area schools each academic year to provide in-house cleanings, screenings and dental procedures. But, in recent years, funding concerns forced the program to alter its operations, according to Dr. Ida Kornerup, the discipline lead of pediatric dentistry with the University of Alberta.

"We didn't have the money to continue providing treatment pro bono for these kids," Kornerup says.

Faced with the reality of potentially shuttering the program, Kornerup and the university reached out to a handful of partners — including Edmonton Community Foundation, who provided an \$80,000 grant — to alter the way the program was delivered and ensure its sustainability for students in need.

"We stopped doing the school visits and instead the students come to us in smaller groups at the oral health clinic here at the university," Kornerup says. "Because of that money they gave us, we've been able to continue the program."

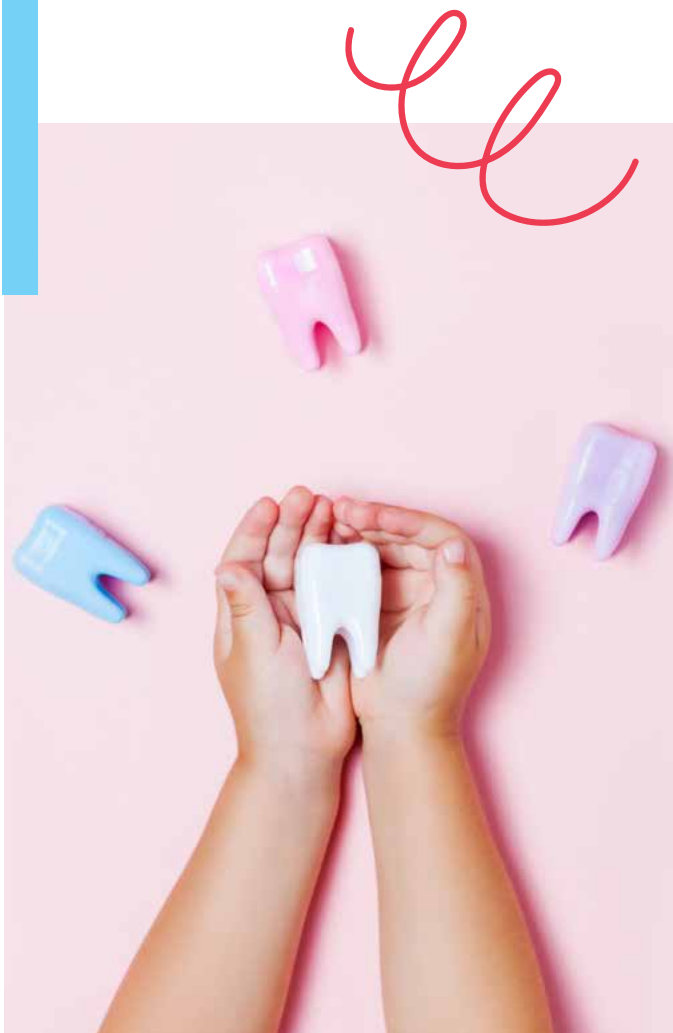
And continuing the program has proved very much in need in Edmonton, based on the number of students the faculty has been able to help this year.

Initially, those involved with the School Visit Program set a benchmark of providing care for 500 students in the 2023-24 academic year. They've since eclipsed that goal, having provided 5,300 procedures for about 800 students.

And those procedures have very real and very tangible benefits, not the least of which is ensuring the health and >

"If you've ever had a toothache, you know it's one of the most annoying pains imaginable."

— Dr. Ida Kornerup



development of Edmonton's children, which Kornerup says can be seriously impacted when dental health concerns aren't addressed in short order.

"It can be cyclical. If [kids] are experiencing pain, then they're not eating as well. They can become malnourished. That can lead to other problems, too. Problems like stunted growth, lower brain development, abscesses and infections," Kornerup says.

Not all of those potential outcomes can be prevented with just a simple fluoride-and-floss routine. Many of those the program helps are suffering from more than minor cavities. That's why the program offers truly comprehensive care.

"Radiographs, exams, treatment plans," Kornerup says. "We provide everything from root canals to fillings to extractions, education and oral health training. The only thing we don't do is braces."

That can make a big difference in the lives of those who are struggling to access dental care, which, as Kornerup points out, can be a difficult task for more than just monetary reasons.

"It's not always an economic issue that can inhibit a child's access to outside dental care," she says. "There are issues of transportation, childcare concerns, conflicting work schedules. There are a lot of barriers against the treatment of pediatric dentistry that make programs like this one important."

And it's not just physical health that depends on the work Kornerup and her students provide. Proper oral health can have big impacts on academic performance and even social development in kids and youth.

"If you've ever had a toothache, you know it's one of the most annoying pains imaginable," Kornerup says. "You can't function. When you're a kid dealing with this, you can have trouble paying attention. That can lead to poor performance at school and even social issues with peers."

As an educator, Stelmaschuk has seen students struggle to manage both health concerns and academics and the benefits of the care the program provides are evident to her.

"When students are coming to school and experiencing pain from dental issues, this program gives them that relief and comfort so they can focus on other things confidently and more comfortably," she says.

And that outcome is something worth smiling about. ■



Circle of Trust

A Somali newcomers' support group offers a place of hope for women

By Lauren Kalinowski

Illustration by Amanda Goddard

WHEN A SERIES of physical assaults upon Black Muslim women wearing Hijabs happened in Edmonton five years ago, many were fearful and sought to create a self-defence group. The Somali-Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization (SCERDO) stepped up and created a free women's self-defence class.

This has morphed into the Haweenka Support Circle, for all women, from young girls to older adults, to create community and talk about issues that are important to their everyday lives. With funding support from Edmonton Community Foundation, it has become an essential safe space for so many on their integration journey in Canada.

The Somali community has created access to all sorts of supports like education, legal, employment and cultural programs through SCERDO. "What we try to do is always focus on our core values, which >

are collaboration, inclusivity, empowerment, accountability and innovation,” says Program Coordinator Awo Hassan. She facilitates youth employment programs, but, like many non-profit administrators, she wears many hats.

From there it has grown to a monthly meeting, “where women can talk about any type of issues that affect their everyday day-to-day lives, whether it comes to integration, whether it comes to their settlement journey, when it comes to getting legal advice, when it comes to motherhood or mental health.”

The group brings in guest speakers, and the meetings are free to participants who may not have the means to attend otherwise. This includes experts like divorce lawyers, mental health workers from the Black Therapist Network and a similar support group, Unbreakable Sisterhood, to collaborate and create conversation. “We come together, sit together, and are able to deep dive into a topic.” Some topics are heavy but gatherings might also be a breather, a break from busy life, like a paint night or a collaborative work session.

The Haweenka Circle has been a life-changing place for many women who have taken part. Hassan tells a story of a young woman and her mother who came to her after a session dealing with domestic violence. They discussed the rights and

“We come together, sit together, and are able to deep dive into a topic.”

— Awo Hassan

“What we try to do is always focus on our core values, which are collaboration, inclusivity, empowerment, accountability and innovation.”

— Awo Hassan

responsibilities of living in Canada. A young woman and her elderly mother, who had a rough upbringing in a refugee camp in Somalia, had come to Canada and finally found some relief after the Somali Civil War.

They could “finally experience some semblance of peace and safety... and what was really impactful with this family, her daughter had been in a long-term abusive relationship. She had an ex-fiance who would constantly harass her and do just a lot of different things. But it was actually having this conversation with an expert, somebody who was highly educated in domestic violence and spent a lot of years working in domestic violence, where the daughter and the mother actually understood at the time that they actually had a legal right to do something about this person who had been harassing them.”

Threats of being deported, losing permanent residency and worrying about their status in Canada were barriers for this family. It is why they didn't immediately ask for help. After attending the Haweenka Circle with a professional, they could stand up for themselves. With the aid of law enforcement, they no longer had to live in a constant state of fear.

These moments of realization are the reason SCERDO keeps the Haweenka Circle going. Education and awareness can change lives. Some things that a person who has lived in Canada their whole life will think of as simple, might be a transformation piece of informational for someone unfamiliar with the country, laws and language.

There are few female-only places where women can gather, and when they are able to get together with a diverse set of experiences and ages, knowledge can be shared, and community is built. ■



Chand Gul
Program Manager with
Canadian Zalmi Society

Accelerated Assimilation

New program helps newcomer
families integrate together

By Cory Schachtel
Photos Eric Beliveau





any barriers that people face when they move to a new country are obvious: a new language, a new job, a new culture. But some barriers aren't obvious until you live them.

"When I came to Canada, I started volunteering with Edmonton Immigrant Social Services Association, and I asked the coordinator where to get the bus to my house," says Chand Gul. "He told me where, but I didn't know which side of the road I had to be on, so [my kids and] I took the opposite side and ended up on the opposite end of the city."

Gul was born and raised in rural Pakistan, and immigrated to Canada with her young family in 2012. Before she left, she became a clinical psychologist and did her best to help her community, especially women, most of whom she says don't have many options in life. She worked for the United Nations where she prepared workshops focused on settlement, employment and self-growth, in order to give back to her rural community.

"Giving positivity to the community, for me, is community development," she says.

Gul laughs about her bus mishap now, but it's never far from her mind in her new home, where she spread positivity almost immediately after landing by volunteering for various organizations. She's since mentored hundreds of new immigrants shortly after they've arrived in Canada. "I'm a natural people person," she says, "and I love to excel integration, specifically immigrant women, to aid their assimilation into the Canadian fabric."

Today, Gul is the Program Manager for the Canadian Zalmi Society (Zalmi means "youth" in the Pashto language). The charitable organization started in 2018 and helps newcomers do what Gul's helped them do since she arrived: integrate into their new homes. "Research shows [it] will take five to 15 years, but when we provide the right resources and the opportunity, the assimilation and the integration time can be much shorter," Gul says.

The society started small, focusing on computer literacy programs for newcomers, but has since expanded to over 100 volunteers providing nearly 1,000 newcomers with over 100,000 pounds of food and household items, along with classes on mental and physical health.

The society builds community alongside other organizations, and received funding from Edmonton Community Foundation, which provided a small grant to support the Canadian Zalmi Society's Parenting Workshops for Afghan Newcomers in Canada.

The workshops — originally slated to host 36 participants but expanded to 55 due to demand — provided positive discipline strategies, and discussed family dynamics and child development based on the Canadian cultural norms and curriculum, as well as parental and child rights and responsibilities. From June 2023 to March 2024, the society ran three phases of workshops. Each phase included four classes in which instructors explained the Canadian law system and how that system affects the participants. They instruct in the participants' own language and cultural communication style, which is something that, looking back once again on her own arrival experience, Gul knows is key.

She tells a story of meeting her coordinator's friend, who struck her as a nice person. "So I complimented [my coordinator], saying, 'Oh, your friend is very simple.' And she smiled because she knows me, and she asked, 'Can you explain the word 'simple'?' And I said he's nice, he's genuine. And she said, 'You are right, but in Canada, don't use the word simple.' Simple was a compliment in Pakistan, but in Canada, I found that it's not."

Gul further explains that these Afghan refugees who fled to Canada came from "a suppressed culture" and a social-political situation that is the "opposite" of Canada's. And that while a family may arrive together, they don't necessarily integrate concurrently. A father may find work, while a child goes to school, where both become immersed in the new culture. "But the mom, they are sitting at home and they're lost — they've lost the language, they've lost their communication with their kids. This is making a gap between families, so we are trying to fill those [gaps] so they can assimilate together."

Gul is obviously grateful for the opportunity her new home provides, but knows that if newcomers don't reach out to even newer newcomers, that opportunity can be wasted. "We need to share the resources, the support to uplift each other. Uplifting each other is most important in any community, anywhere in the world. And to bring peace in the world, to empower — that is my dream." ■



“Giving positivity to the community, for me, is community development.”

— Chand Gul



TANKED

THE AQUATIC BIOSPHERE PROJECT IS REIMAGINING WHAT — AND WHERE — CANADA’S NEXT AQUARIUM MIGHT LOOK LIKE

BY TOM NDEKEZI
PHOTOS MAT SIMPSON

AT FIRST GLANCE, Edmonton doesn’t seem like the obvious choice to build a state-of-the-art aquarium. A landlocked city thousands of kilometres from the nearest ocean, Edmonton wouldn’t appear to offer much when it comes to understanding the story of water.

Paula Polman, however, couldn’t disagree more, and with the help of the Aquatic Biosphere Project, she wants to make Edmonton the next national hub of aquatic and marine storytelling.

“We [Edmontonians] have one of the rare origin stories of water,” says Polman, who founded the Aquatic Biosphere Project in 2014 with the goal of promoting aquatic education and conservation. Having grown up in the marshy prairies of Manitoba, Polman understands the duality of living in a place that is at once almost entirely landlocked but also incredibly water-rich. In the case of Alberta, though, our uniqueness comes from the Columbia Icefield and the

glacial origins of much of the province’s water.


“We [here in Alberta] are the headwaters to many of the freshwater feeds to the Arctic Ocean,” Polman says, speaking to Alberta’s critical place in the national — and possibly even global — water cycle.

“Right now, you go home and brush your teeth with water that’s 10,000 years old. You’re flushing the toilet with water that’s 10,000 years old. You’re cooking with it, you’re cleaning with it. That’s our water. Ancient glacial water.

“When those glaciers disappear, we will have to revert to seasonal water,” she adds, speaking to the looming water insecurity that has already started to affect communities in Southern Alberta.

And while Alberta’s special place in the story of water might be overlooked, according to Polman, it’s symptomatic of a wider issue when it comes to water education.

“We do a terrible job in this country talking about water and the importance of it,” Polman says. “Scientists do their academic work — which is fabulous — but it doesn’t connect with regular folks.”

An underwater scene showing a single fish swimming in clear, blue water. The fish is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame.

What does connect, however, is spaces where people can see, touch and experience aquatic life, which is exactly what the Aquatic Biosphere Project wants to achieve by making Edmonton the site of Canada's next world-class aquarium. The project is still in its conceptual stages, but the vision is to harness creative engineering, direct conservation initiatives and the power of technology to build an aquarium that is at once ethical and engaging. Picture self-sustaining miniature reefs alongside immersive VR-powered whale exhibitions. You can experience a whale without a captive whale, and understand its connection to Alberta.

"Even your space definition for a building like that is much different," Polman says. "It means you can become a lot more adaptable in creating exhibits and experiences and also means we can take some of that stuff on the road too. So you're not fixed."

The project's fully realized dream is likely still several years away, with the board focused on education and promotion in the meantime. The centrepiece of those efforts is a mobile >





exhibition trailer affectionately dubbed “The Minnow,” which was funded in part by the Edmonton Community Foundation and has been fitted with solar panels, fish tanks, microscopes and an interactive wrap-around decal developed in partnership with computing science and business students at the University of Alberta. After debuting at the Edmonton Boat and Sportsmen Show in March 2024, the trailer has been featured at festivals, schools and conservation events.

“People like a place where they can come and learn about fish or learn about their ecosystems and entertain their kids,” says Lee Burton, who serves as the secretary to the board and oversaw the development of The Minnow.

“What we envisioned was families coming up, exploring the water and learning about what’s in it. There are exciting things in our wetlands and ponds, what is a water tiger... or a scud? What do they tell us? That’s exactly what the exhibit is for.”

Burton — who is a professional scuba diver and is responsible for filling The Minnow’s fish tanks with water from nearby local ecosystems — is one of several volunteers who has helped keep the Aquatic Biosphere Project afloat in the decade since it was founded. As a fully volunteer-run initiative, the organization is mostly run on board member’s free time (or as Polman puts it, off the side of their desks). That also means that the Aquatic Biosphere Project was hit especially hard during the pandemic, which tested each board member’s individual and institutional resolve. Thankfully, the organization was able to rely

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– Paula Polman



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– Lee Burton



on the Edmonton Community Foundation, this time to help pandemic-proof the operation.

“We were entertaining classrooms and talking about aquatic insects and doing virtual scuba dives [but once the pandemic hit] we had to decentralize and move everything online,” Burton says. “ECF was critical in hammering [The Minnow] home, getting students involved and getting us to showcase this dream of an aquarium on the prairies.”

And if the organization’s vision of a world-class aquarium in Edmonton is still a dream for now, the crowds of curious children and adults alike that flock to The Minnow are proof that when it comes to the story of water, you often have to experience it to understand it.

“People are tactile and sensory. We have to see, touch, feel, taste and use something to really understand it,” Polman says. “And that’s what a place like this does. It’s a place to be able to personally ask those questions, personally interact with some of the animals, see them in their natural environment, and understand how our culture and our practices and our attitudes impact those spaces as well. And how even little changes can make a difference.” ■

Harnessing WILL Power



By **ECF**

HAVE YOU HAD THE TALK with your parents? You know, the talk about end-of-life plans; what they want, what you want and the roles you and others play in various circumstances?

Emotions run high when we are faced with the illness or death of a loved one. That's why it's important to have these important conversations early and consider some of the documents that will help you all navigate the future.

1. **A Personal Directive:** This outlines your parents' non-financial wishes if they are temporarily (e.g., a hospital stay) or permanently (e.g., loss of mental capacity) unable to act for themselves during their lifetime.
2. **An Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA):** Similarly, this document applies during temporary or long-term inability to act on their own during their lifetimes, but it relates to financial and legal matters. Do you know how difficult it is to deal with everyday items like bills, telephone, utilities, etc. if there is not an EPA that names you as the person to act?
3. **A Will:** The will outlines what is to happen with all of your parents' belongings, and who has the authority to handle the estate, bank accounts, home, etc.

When the time comes that you need to act on any of these documents, you'll know that you are fulfilling your parents wishes.

It can be an awkward conversation to start, so let us help you begin the discussion.

During Edmonton Community Foundation's Wills Week, you'll be able to attend many free presentations on the importance of maintaining an up-to-date will. Attending with your parents will provide a great opportunity to have important conversations, even asking them candidly:

- when they last updated their will;
- if they made sure to have a personal directive and EPA prepared too; and
- where these documents can be located

There may be cultural or language barriers that have delayed preparation, or they may have based their knowledge on articles written that apply in other countries or provinces. Being prepared to listen to parents' concerns and to help them through the necessary steps (like booking a meeting with an estate lawyer) will go a long way in making life easier for you.

Invite your parents to join you for one of the Wills Week presentations which are specifically based on Alberta law and presented for free by Edmonton lawyers. ■



DO YOU OR YOUR LOVED ONES HAVE A WILL?

Edmonton Community Foundation presents *Willpower Wills Week!*
Attend FREE online and in-person seminars on the importance of having a valid, up-to-date will.

Session topics:

- Wills & Estates 101
- Family Maintenance and Support Claims
- Tax Considerations When Planning Your Estate
- Fighting Terms of the Will

Did you know?

If you don't have a will, Alberta law dictates *who* will get *what* from your estate.



To register for an online session or for more information, visit [ECFoundation.org/initiatives/wills-week](https://ecfoundation.org/initiatives/wills-week)

Registration is required for online sessions.
Sessions are subject to change.

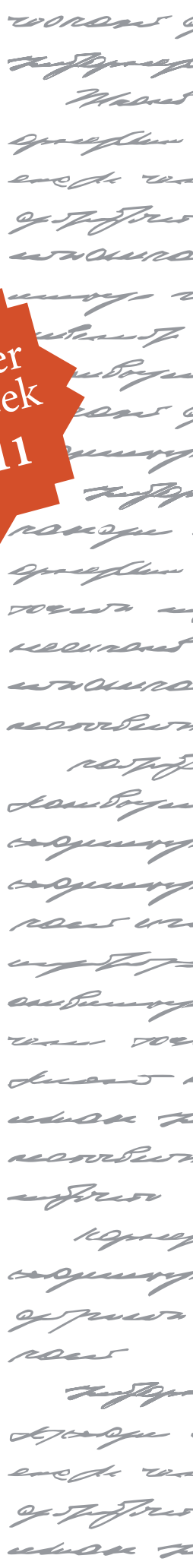




Image Supplied



ASK THE EXPERT:

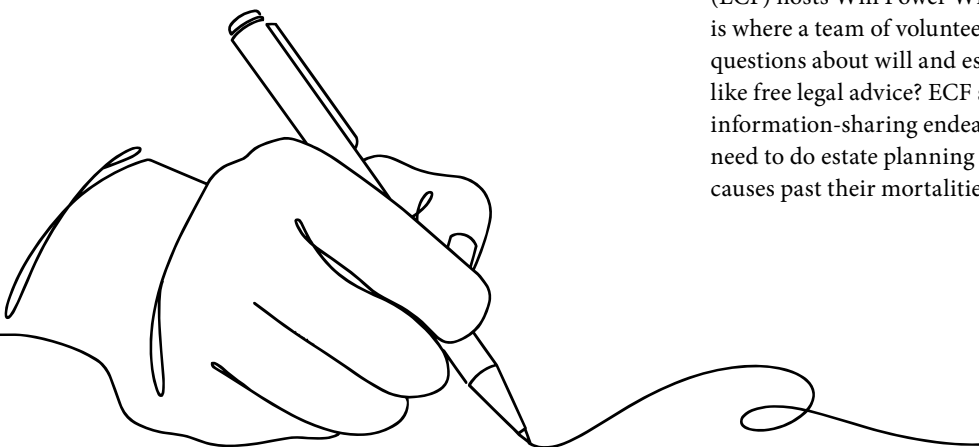
Leaving a lasting legacy through a bequest

Victoria Jones

Wills and Estates Lawyer at de Villars Jones LLP

AS THE LEAVES FALL and we prepare to hibernate, don't sleep on making sure your estate planning is exactly as you want it.

Every October, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) hosts Will Power Wills Week. This annual event is where a team of volunteer estate lawyers answer your questions about will and estate planning. Who doesn't like free legal advice? ECF supports this important information-sharing endeavour because so many people need to do estate planning and want to support good causes past their mortalities.



WHY

should I give?

Many people want to leave legacies behind through their wills. These often come in the forms of charitable donations to causes close to their hearts. Beyond the feel-good benefits of such a gift, your bequest can have a real impact in the world you're leaving behind. Plus, there's some nice tax planning benefits to charitable gifts (I see you a capital gains tax increase and raise you a charitable tax receipt to offset).

ECF has many funds that support a wide variety of causes. And if one doesn't already exist that fits with your charitable purpose or interests, you can set one up. You can leave and support an enduring legacy well past your death through your will.

HOW

do I give?

Cash can be king, but so too can stocks or shares. Depending on what assets you have, you may decide to leave an asset as opposed to money as your charitable gift. If that is something you are thinking of, make sure your will makes that clear. All the Wills Week lawyers have the appropriate wording for such a gift (and if your lawyer isn't part of that vaunted crew, ECF can certainly provide it).

WHAT

should I give?

Do not give a charity a percentage of your estate. That causes an endless cycle between giving the charity its percentage; it giving you a tax receipt; you getting a tax refund; you giving the charity its percentage of what's left... ad nauseam.

Instead, give the charity a specific amount or a specific asset. Alternatively, you could consider leaving the entire residue of your estate to your charity of choice. The residue is what is left over in your estate after all of your debts and costs of administering your estate is paid.

WHEN

should I give?

Although there are some very good reasons to hold off on giving — turns out we're living longer and may need our money to pay for our care — if you are able to give now, you should. Why not experience the impact your gift can have while you're still alive to see it? When you're dead, unless you want your spectre to walk this earthly coil, you aren't going to see the benefit of your gift. It's so much more satisfying to be alive to receive the thanks and accolades.

If you can manage it, I strongly recommend giving your charitable gifts before you die. The charitable tax receipt will be just as useful on a living tax return as on a dead one. ■



Intents and Purposes

Jim Ross's contributions to Edmonton will last long after his lifetime

By ECF
Photo **Bluefish Studios**

THE JAMES LORNE ROSS FUND at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) will be a testament to the legacy of Jim Ross's life, values and passions. Established through a will intention, this endowment fund is a meaningful way to channel one's resources into causes that resonate deeply, even beyond one's lifetime.

Ross's journey to creating his fund began with a significant personal loss — the passing of John Barron, his partner of 48 years. "We were set up for each other," Ross reminisces. When Barron died, Ross found himself contemplating the future of his estate. With no immediate heirs, he faced the question of how best to utilize his assets. "I realized I really had nobody to give my money to," he explains, leading him to ECF as a conduit for his philanthropic aspirations.

His connection to ECF, however, wasn't born out of his estate planning process alone. "I was aware of the foundation for years," Ross notes, crediting his long-term engagement with the arts and community events in Edmonton. From attending the symphony to participating in annual ECF events, Jim has been a regular supporter of the foundation's activities, making ECF a natural choice for his endowment.

Ross's career path is marked by a series of dynamic roles in public relations and communications within both government and media. Starting at CFRN, where he worked in radio publicity and promotion, his trajectory would eventually take him to City Hall. There, he worked for the City's Corporate Communications office for 23 years. For five of those years, he worked with the Mayor's Office. In this, and other assignments, he wrote event backgrounders for press conferences and community visits and organized councillors' events and public programming among



many other things. His career is a testament to his passion for helping others and navigating and resolving complex challenges.

Ross's decision to establish an endowment through his will is particularly insightful. Unlike a one-off donation, a will intention allows for a more structured and sustained impact. By allocating the residue of his estate to ECF, Ross will ensure that his contributions are managed professionally and directed toward his specified interests. This approach simplifies estate planning and maximizes the potential for long-term community impact.

The fund will support areas close to Ross's heart: the arts and animal welfare. A dedicated supporter of the symphony and opera, his love for classical music is a cornerstone of his identity. "My partner was a 50-year patron. When I got together with him 48 years ago from then, we were always supporters of the symphony." This deep-rooted appreciation for the arts ensures that his fund will continue to nurture Edmonton's cultural scene.

In addition to the arts, Ross's endowment will help animal welfare organizations. His fondness for pets, particularly his beloved Shih Tzus, underscores his commitment to this cause. "I've had four Shih Tzus since 2008," he says, recounting stories of their companionship and the joy they brought into his life. By supporting animal welfare, he ensures that his legacy will provide care and compassion for animals in need.

The James Lorne Ross Fund will be more than an endowment; it will be a narrative of love, loss, and a steadfast commitment to community.

"I'm a third-generation Edmontonian, and I want my money, anything that's left over to go back to the community." ■



YOU CAN START A FUND, TOO!

Work with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) to ensure your charitable giving is set up for long-term growth

MAKE A DIFFERENCE in your community. Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) can help ensure your charitable giving is set-up for long term growth and greater impact.

You can set up an endowment fund that provides a permanent investment of charitable gifts. You can determine your philanthropic wishes; decide what you want to accomplish; and define the legacy you want to leave. You can set up your fund for yourself, your family or your business!

It's up to you. Here's how it works:

STEP 1

Speak with one of our philanthropy advisors about your charitable interests to determine which fund options are right for you. You can choose to support important causes locally, nationally, or around the world.

STEP 2

Once you've defined the objective of your fund, we'll create an agreement that captures your intentions. It's a straightforward document that explains the goal of your fund, how involved you would like to be in allocating grants, and other relevant details. There's no obligation for you during this process — we simply want to ensure we've documented your wishes correctly.

STEP 3

It's time to make your gift. You can create your endowment with \$10,000 – donated all at once, or you can build to this granting threshold over time. This flexibility allows you, your family, staff or clients the opportunity to contribute to the fund in a meaningful way.

STEP 4

When your fund is ready to grant, your level of involvement going forward is your choice. You could seek input from your family. Many businesses include employees or clients in deciding what causes to support each year. This becomes a powerful tool to showcase your commitment to what matters. You can also get creative with future fundraising efforts like special events, golf tournaments, or corporate matching programs. ■

You make the decisions. We provide the information.

To learn more, visit ecfoundation.org.



SPEAK UP AND SPEAK OUT

THE SCREPNEK FAMILY HELPS PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME FIND THEIR VOICES

BY HIBA ZAIDI



Image Supplied

EVERY VOICE DESERVES to be heard, but, for many, finding their voices can be challenging. The Wade Screpnek Speech Therapy Fund is a beacon of hope for individuals with Down Syndrome, transforming their unsure whispers into strong, confident voices.

The fund was created in February 2023 by Betty and George Screpnek — a celebration of their son Wade turning 50. Its aim is to support families with the costs of accessing speech therapy, particularly through the Edmonton Down Syndrome Society. Wade, a compassionate and community-oriented individual, has made remarkable strides thanks to speech therapy.

The Edmonton Down Syndrome Society, which began informally with four families, now offers various programs, including speech therapy, to support individuals with Down Syndrome. The organization provides a safe and supportive environment where families can connect, share experiences and celebrate their loved ones' achievements.

Betty shared insights into Wade's journey with Down Syndrome, and emphasized the importance of speech therapy. "Speech was really, really important for him to get his message across. He really wanted people to understand him," she said.

The therapy helped Wade develop clearer speech, enabling him to express himself confidently and participate more actively in conversations. Betty noted the therapy's impact on Wade's self-confidence and social interactions, allowing him to connect more meaningfully with others.

"What the speech therapy did for him was give him a chance to step back, think about what he wanted to say, and then he could slow his speech down so he could get his point across," said Betty.

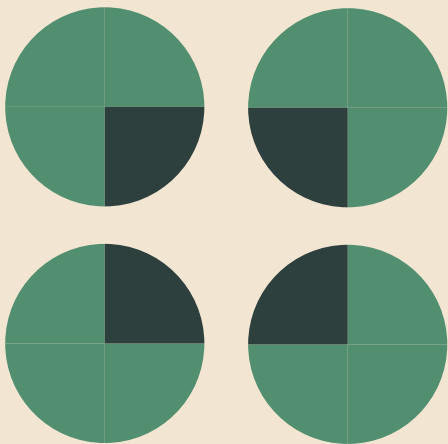
Janet Tryhuba, Executive Director of the Edmonton Down Syndrome Society, highlighted the significance of these kinds of endowment funds. "It means a great deal ... it helps create that pipeline of dedicated donors who have thought carefully about what their gift will do with our charity and give us that steady pipeline of funds for the future."

The Screpneks' fund ensures continued support for speech therapy, which is crucial for individuals with Down Syndrome to communicate effectively and build stronger connections within their families and communities.

They said it was difficult to access speech therapy services 50 years ago, noting the financial strain and lack of support available at the time. This personal experience fueled their desire to help other families facing similar obstacles. "Helplessness is certainly a feeling that often consumes me. And that kind of feeling, you either turn into a victim or you turn into a stronger person and do something about it." Betty said.

The Wade Screpnek Speech Therapy Fund is a testament to the power of community and the importance of giving back. As Screpnek put it, "pick one, pick two, and give while you can." ■

Invested in Edmonton.



For over a decade, our Edmonton-based advisors have worked with the Edmonton Community Foundation to help our clients transform our intelligent investing strategies into charitable action.



“

Thanks to the funding from ECF, Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre supports over 150 adults and 70 children with access to free counselling and mental health groups.

— **Laurie Fagan**
Executive Director,
Norwood Child and Family
Resource Centre

**Make a lasting impact
on the causes you care about
today and for generations to come.**

Find out how:
ecfoundation.org

