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Cover photo by Laughing Dog

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON PEDERSEN

TINA THOMAS
CEO, Edmonton Community Foundation

It's hard for me to believe that I have just passed one year at the helm of Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF). One thing that is clear to me in the meetings I've had with donors and community partners alike: Regardless of background, we ALL want a city where vulnerable people are cared for, children flourish, the sick are treated, artists contribute to a dynamic community and our beautiful city stays beautiful for the long term.

An essential part of a vibrant Edmonton is the next-generation of community builders — the focus of this issue of *Legacy in Action*.

As illustrated in our 2020 Vital Signs Report, Edmonton is the youngest city in Canada with a median age of 36.3. Ensuring young Edmontonians are equipped and supported at every stage of their development into adulthood is critical to the future of our city.

This support comes in many forms. On page 8, we visit the Edmonton Public Library's Ready. Set. READ! program. This initiative helps develop early childhood literacy by gifting books to families to ensure that kids receive the foundational building blocks they need to excel in school and later in life.

As children grow, they will meet many wonderful mentors and teachers, including people like Rhema Kennedy. Rhema works with young Indigenous

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

students in the Braided Journeys program at St. Alphonsus School.

Last year, she mentored her students as they applied for a Young Edmonton Grant (YEG) at ECF. The funding provided a mental health break for the kids as they emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. You can find Rhema's story in the YEG series starting on page 18.

ECF provides funding to many junior high and high school students. However, as they graduate, the reality of post-secondary tuition costs can be a massive barrier.

Many of ECF's donors are stepping up to help: Orval Belcourt, Dr. Herb Belcourt and Georges Brosseau Q.C. founded the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards (BBMA) at ECF in 2001. Since then, the BBMAs have provided more than \$11 million to approximately 2,000 Métis students, making it one of the largest sources of non-governmental funding of Métis students in Canada. On page 12, learn how the BBMAs helped Steele Bailey complete a business and entrepreneurship program at NAIT.

The goal of supporting future generations is to help them realize the value of giving back to their communities.

Bashir Mohamed is a wonderful example of this. Bashir's family moved to Edmonton from a refugee camp in Nairobi, Kenya when he was three years old. After receiving funding from ECF to complete his political science major at the University of Alberta, Bashir has returned to volunteer on a few of our granting and student award committees. His volunteerism has helped provide funding to hundreds of young Edmontonians. Find his story on page 28.

I hope you enjoy this collection of stories about the wonderful work of young Edmontonians. As the mom of two teens, I know I will be sharing them with my girls for inspiration and to help them see the truly remarkable things young people are doing. I hope you do the same! ■

A LIBRARY OF THEIR OWN

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, A BOOK IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A GIFT

BY LIAM NEWBIGGING

FOR ELAINE JONES, the evidence is clear. Books in homes help nurture and grow children's minds. As the Youth Services Manager at the Edmonton Public Library (EPL), she has been at the forefront of early literacy outreach for well over a decade. In the past, EPL has participated in a number of programs that get books into the homes of families with young children. Jones has seen the impact they make.

"That first five years is really critical in terms of learning and setting the foundation for their lifelong achievement and school success," she says.

So, in March 2022, EPL announced its partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the start of their Ready. Set. READ! program, which gifts books to families with children in that critical 0-5 age group. Each participant receives one age-appropriate book, selected by experts, every month until the child graduates from the program at the age of five. With the Imagination Library's partnership, EPL can now get books in the homes of more children than it could have before.

The Dolly Parton's Imagination Library handles the sourcing and shipment of the books. "They negotiate the steep discounts, they select the books, and then they ship them out directly and maintain a database as well," says Jones. But she says EPL still has to find the funds for the books and organize the outreach for families.

This is why the program is always seeking funding and why partners like



“WE TRY TO INSTILL THE LOVE FOR BOOKS AND READING IN OUR CHILDREN. WE FEEL THAT THROUGH READING, **OUR CHILDREN DEVELOP THEIR IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND NEW DREAMS**”

– LILIA GLUKHA

Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) have been critical to the program’s success. Jones says ECF is “well respected” and that when people hear about the organization’s support, it goes a long way in getting others to donate.

ECF has supported Ready. Set. READ! for two years including \$50,000 in funding in 2023.

“We understand how vital early childhood literacy is at the Foundation,” says Tina Thomas, ECF’s CEO. “Many of us have children of our own and we know firsthand the richness that reading brings to people’s lives and the value that literacy brings to creating a society where everyone can learn and be successful.”

For EPL, this support has been key to the program’s sustainability. “It’s quite significant because we need ongoing funding,” says Jones. “We don’t want to pull [children] in for a year and then say, ‘Oh, we ran out of money to support this.’”

The steady funding helps keep the books coming to families like the Glukhas. Lilia Glukha, a mother of two, says her family’s reading journey started with EPL. After seeing a poster advertising the program at the Londonderry Branch, Glukha signed both of her children up. Roughly eight weeks later, the family received their first book, *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper.

“We try to instill the love for books and reading in our children. We feel that through reading, our children develop their imagination, creativity and new dreams,” says Glukha.

While families can see the impact of these programs first-hand, there is also strong research

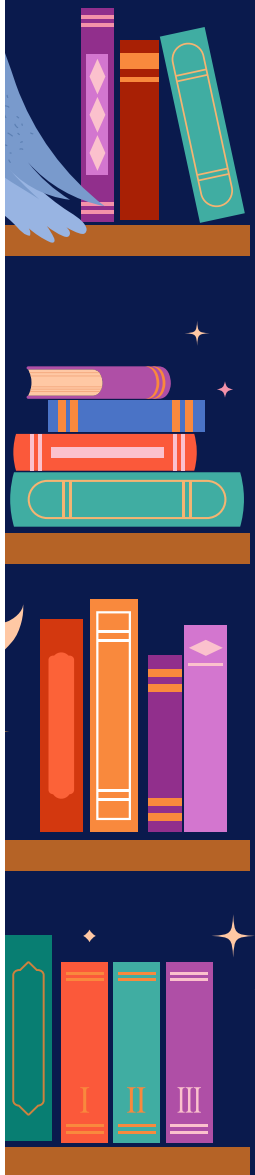
to back it up. In a 2020 study in *Review of Educational Research* that researched book giveaways, the study found they resulted in “more interest in reading and children scoring higher on measures of literacy-related skills” both before and after they started school.

Another 2014 study from Sheffield Hallam University found strong evidence that suggests book gifting can positively affect children’s enthusiasm for reading, and parent’s personal attitudes on sharing books as well. The study also found supporting evidence that these programs are more effective when “based on repeated gifts rather than one-off events,” just like the program at EPL.

Jones says the Ready. Set. READ! program doesn’t start and end with a book in a child’s hands. The Library works with the families and encourages them to get involved with classes and events at their local libraries. For families like the Glukhas, it’s the start of a lifelong relationship with a community resource that they can grow with and rely on throughout their parenting journey.

“We found the Family Literacy Programs. They are amazing,” says Glukha. “We were glad to attend these programs every week. We saw huge benefits in our son’s development.”

While the program has been a large success with over 5,000 families having now received nearly 16,000 books, there still isn’t enough funding to reach every child in the 0-5 age group. EPL has currently put a pause on intake due to high demand. Jones says the feeling is “bittersweet.” ■



FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

A NEW PARTNERSHIP PROVIDES EDUCATION SOLUTIONS FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

BY DANIELLE PARADIS



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES HAVE been closing the gap in higher education. Slightly over half of the Indigenous population has some form of post-secondary schooling, according to Statistics Canada.

Still, for rural and remote communities, getting education beyond high school — or even junior high — can mean that it is necessary to move away from home.

This can be an expensive endeavour, especially with the rising cost of housing. So the Athabasca Indigenous Investments (AII) organization has been working to create a fund to provide students with financial awards to help with higher education.

“More and more communities are striving for ways to connect their individuals with post-secondary education,” says Justin Bourque, president of AII, a partnership of 23 First Nation and Métis communities in Alberta that purchased seven pipelines from Enbridge in 2023.

AII, working as a community collective, is taking steps to make sure that there is funding for its students and has been working with the Bank of Montreal (BMO) to spread awareness of the fund to potential post-secondary students.

“We were at a celebration and were surprised and delighted when BMO announced that they would donate \$100,000

to the education of 23 Indigenous communities,” says Bourque.

He was born and raised in the community of Anzac, Alberta, to a family with a proud, traditional Métis heritage. He is the third generation owner of the family trapline.

“This is a great opportunity for us to provide a solution for education,” says Bourque.

After deciding on the funds, Bourque says AII considered how to develop the program and selected Edmonton Community Foundation to help set up and administer the fund.

He says that the fund is being designed to be versatile and meet a diverse set of learning goals.

“That’s one of the special things I would say about this endowment fund is that it does support folks going to university or post secondary, but it also supports individuals that are looking to enhance their career path, whether it be through skilled trades or schooling for those types of activities as well,” says Bourque.

Chief Greg Desjarlais of Frog Lake First Nation agrees that this is an important step forward for making

sure there’s funding for youth in the community.

“Education is the First Nations people’s new Buffalo that will provide for many young members and families,” says Desjarlais.

“Being educated will open doors for those seeking to enhance future growth of our nations.”

Other Indigenous leaders agree that this is an important step forward.

“The Athabasca Indigenous Investments bursary program is a remarkable initiative that will empower students connected to the AII communities to pursue their dreams of higher education,” said Ron Quintal, the president of the Fort McKay Métis Nation.

Ron said that when it comes to education, it is important to think about the prospects it brings to future generations. That’s why he is excited to work with AII and BMO.

“This program embodies our commitment to fostering educational growth and empowering Indigenous youth by providing opportunities for generations to come,” he said. ■



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ABOVE PAR

THE BELCOURT BROUSSEAU MÉTIS AWARDS ARE CHANGING THE WORLD FOR MÉTIS ALBERTANS

BY **JASLEEN MAHIL**
PHOTOGRAPHY **AARON PEDERSEN**

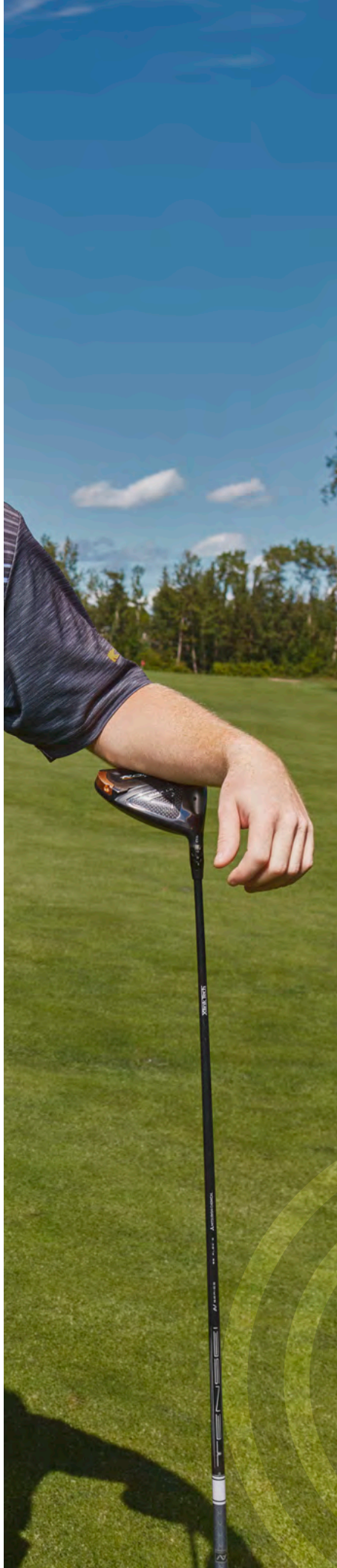
ORVAL BELCOURT, Dr. Herb Belcourt and Georges Brosseau Q.C. have long been advocates of education within the Métis community. They saw post-secondary education as a way to support the long-term success of Métis Albertans. This is why in 2001 they created an endowment fund at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) called the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards (BBMA).

Today, the awards program has provided more than \$11 million to approximately 2,000 Métis students in Alberta.

Theresa Majeran, communications and marketing consultant at BBMA, calls herself a “cheerleader” for Métis students. For the past 17 years, she has seen firsthand the success the program has had on many levels.

“We’re changing the landscape of how the world is going to be for upcoming Métis people. And with that, we’re creating a huge sense of pride. A sense of pride is more valuable than the money they receive to help pay tuition. Because many come to us not knowing what it really means to be a modern, urban-based Métis person. They’re not so much practising traditional ways of being Métis like trapping. So, they need to know that they can participate in a modern society and still be a cultural, Métis person,” explains Majeran.





The endowment fund, which started with \$13 million, has grown to \$20 million. It has become one of the largest sources of non-governmental funding of Métis students in Canada.

“ECF has been integral in ensuring that we never ever in two decades had a year where we didn’t have a profit in our interest margins. Plus, they’re just very supportive. And as the Indigenous landscape has grown over 20 years, ECF has embraced the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action,” says Majeran.

Steele Bailey, a BBMA recipient, completed a business and entrepreneurship program at NAIT this past January. He credits BBMA with being one of the main reasons he was able to pursue a post-secondary education.

“It’s a lot easier to go to school when you’re not having to worry about the burden of money. And that was a big thing for me. That really pushed me to go to school otherwise I honestly didn’t see myself going. The cultural connection they brought me and the warmth and the passion that they showed me and how it’s led my career in a good direction is great, fantastic in fact,” he explains.

Bailey, who has always had a passion for golf, received his golf Pro Card this summer. Currently he works in the back shop at Edmonton Golf and Country Club. In the

future he hopes to teach golf and his “biggest dream” is to have his own golf course.

“Trying to combine both business and golf is kind of my goal. Also, to be involved in the Métis world. If I can combine all three into one that’s the dream right there,” he says.

In addition to financial support, BBMA helped foster business connections throughout Bailey’s post-secondary education.

“It’s been great. It brought me even closer to my culture. Now, I can say that in return, part of my passion is to give back to my community one day,” says Bailey.

One of the events BBMA hosts every year is the Sash Ceremony. The ceremony, held in September, ushers in new students and lets them know there is a whole community supporting them.

“The Métis Sash is a strong symbol, the minute that these students all have the same symbol around their waist or over their hearts, they know they are part of each other and they start networking instantly. And it goes far beyond anything trackable, because I see them on social media telling each other I just had a baby...I just got a brand new job at a big corporation. So, I know that we have formed that Métis community that Herb, Georges and Orval had dreamed about, which was our people helping our people. It’s not a handout, it’s a hand up, as Herb always said,” explains Majeran. ■

“TRYING TO COMBINE BOTH BUSINESS AND GOLF IS KIND OF MY GOAL. ALSO, TO BE INVOLVED IN THE MÉTIS WORLD. IF I CAN COMBINE ALL THREE INTO ONE THAT’S THE DREAM RIGHT THERE”

– STEELE BAILEY



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Work with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) to ensure your charitable giving is set-up for long term growth and can make a difference in the community.

ENDOWMENT FUNDS offer permanent investment of charitable gifts to provide ongoing support to organizations in the community.

When you and your business are thinking about giving back, consider what you'd like to accomplish. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- ♦ What would you like to do to make your community a better place?
- ♦ Would you like to engage your employees and/or your clients to transform the future of our community?
- ♦ How will you define the legacy of your business and what impact would you like to make on those around you?



Founders of the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards (from left): Dr. Herb Belcourt, Orval Belcourt and Georges Brosseau, Q.C.

STEP ONE

Our Donor Advisors will help you answer these questions and more. We specialize in matching your interests with organizations whose goals mirror your own. Grants can be made to any registered Canadian charity, which means you're not limited to local causes. You can provide ongoing support to your favourite causes in Edmonton, across Canada, and around the world. We'll be happy to work with you to realize your vision for a better community.

STEP TWO

Once you've defined the objective of your fund, we'll create an agreement that captures your intentions. This is a straightforward document that explains, in writing, 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 THREE

After the agreement is in place, it's time to make your gift. People tend to equate endowment funds with millions of dollars. With ECF, you can create your endowment with \$10,000. You can donate it all at once or take up to three years to reach that amount. This flexibility allows you, your staff and your clients the opportunity to contribute to the fund, and ultimately to our community, in a meaningful way. The money in a fund is not immediately granted. Instead, your gift is invested, and a percentage is disbursed according to your charitable intentions.

STEP FOUR

Once your fund is ready to grant, your level of involvement going forward is your choice. Many businesses seek feedback from employees, clients or customers as to what causes to support each year. This can become a very powerful tool for your business to showcase its commitment to making our cities a better place now, and for generations to come. You can also get creative with future fundraising efforts like special events, golf tournaments, corporate matching programs for staff and clients or a commitment to donate a portion of your sales to building the fund and creating even more impact as time goes on. ■

To learn more, visit ecfoundation.org.

A Look at **Food Insecurity**

It's on the rise:

In 2011, **12.3%** of Albertans were experiencing food insecurity. In 2022 that number jumped to **20.3%**.

Some experience it more than others:

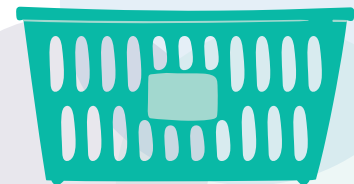
21.7% of children (people under the age of 18) lived in food insecure households in Alberta. (2021)

28.9% of Black households living with food insecurity compared to **11.1%** of white households. (2017-2018)

30.7% of Indigenous households in Canada were experiencing food insecurity, twice the amount of white households. (2022)

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.


Food insecurity is when a household has inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.



10th Anniversary Edition!

Discover more about food insecurity in our city with Vital Signs. **Read Now.**





“THE REASON WHY I
STARTED THE PROJECT
IN THE FIRST PLACE
WAS BECAUSE I WENT
TO MY PARK AND I
WAS LIKE, ‘WOW, THAT
TRASH CAN IS SO UGLY.
WHY IS THAT THERE?’”

– GEORGE XIE

A splash of colour

TURNING A TRASH CAN INTO A COMMUNITY TREASURE

BY KEVIN MAIMANN
PHOTOS LAUGHING DOG

Grade 11 student George Xie at Lillian Osborne School got help from Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) Young Edmonton Grants (YEG) program this past spring to beautify trash cans at elementary schools around the city. Bothered by the ugly receptacles in his neighbourhood, Xie had an idea to start painting them as a way to brighten up green spaces.

After mulling it over for a couple days, the 16-year-old reached out to ECF, who awarded a grant that helped provide art supplies to local schools for the project.

"The reason why I started the project in the first place was because I went to my park and I was like, 'Wow, that trash can is so ugly. Why is that there?'" says Xie.

"What we had the students do was paint the trash cans on the theme of preserving nature, and we're going to be placing them in parks around these communities. We wanted to inspire others to be more invested in naturalization and the environment in general, and just feeling that beautification in the neighbourhood is incredibly important."

Xie's project has helped young students transform 25 trash cans at various schools. He hopes to keep going, eventually covering every school in the city, as well as parks in underfunded areas.

ECF Grants Manager Cassandra Lundell says Xie's application had "good, detailed plans" that brought students together. The YEG program began in 2011 as the Youth Empowerment Program, with the goal of supporting youth leadership, and was re-named in 2013. The program has granted more than \$600,000 to over 300 projects

since its inception, in partnership with local charities, with a maximum grant of \$3,000 to each individual project.

Some examples of past grantees have included a cooking club, a mural, an "eSports" video gaming league, and the Edmonton Ice Swap, which helps families afford equipment for kids playing hockey and ringette.

A small team of youth between the ages of 13 to 24 reviews applications for projects that aim to help the community and are initiated, led, and organized by young Edmonton and area residents. The committee meets at least twice per year to review and discuss the applications, ultimately awarding grants to applicants who best fit the criteria, and gives them guidance for achieving their goals.

Boosted by the YEG grant, Xie was inspired to help other like-minded youth realize their goals for bettering the city and joined the YEG committee in May, where he has already helped approve a new round of eight grants out of 14 applications.

"Everybody on the granting committee is definitely somebody who's passionate," Xie says.

Xie says he was more "cutthroat" than his fellow committee members going in, but has learned to appreciate ECF's mandate of encouraging growth and allowing youth to learn and exercise their entrepreneurial spirit through the process of executing their ideas.

"I think the priority of Edmonton Community Foundation is just to foster youth development. And even if [the youth] make mistakes, I think that they

wanted to encourage that kind of growth through learning from your mistakes, as opposed to getting everything right at the start," Xie says.

"I'm glad that in Edmonton there's that kind of attitude, and especially with these kinds of organizations ... What's important is to have a good vision at the end of the day, and to be able to continue to work towards that vision."

Edmontonians aged 13 to 24 can apply for YEG funding through the ECFoundation.org. Applicants must partner with a registered charity, which can include their school. The final application deadline for 2023 is October 15. ■



May not be exactly as shown

EDMONTON GAME CHANG



THESE PASSIONATE YOUTH ARE BUILDING A MORE POSITIVE, INCLUSIVE FUTURE, WITH THE HELP OF ECF'S YOUNG EDMONTON GRANTS

BY **LISA CATTERALL**
ILLUSTRATION **AVERY BLAIR**

THEY'RE PASSIONATE, INSPIRED and motivated to create positive change. They're the young leaders who are working to help Edmonton grow as a more inclusive, supportive and sustainable community. From supporting mental health and wellbeing, to creating a stronger sense of belonging for students of diverse backgrounds, these young people are working to build a brighter future for Edmonton.

They are some of the recipients of Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) Young Edmonton Grants (YEG) program, and are working hard to help Edmonton become the community they want to be a part of, for the long term.

ALBERTA GSA CONFERENCE 2023

University of Alberta

For more than a decade, the Alberta GSA Conference has been helping gender and sexual-diverse youth from across the province come together to gain knowledge they can use and bring back to their home communities.

"For some students, it might be the first time they ever get to feel safe in their life, which is massive," says Evan Westfal, education coordinator at the Fyrefly Institute for Gender and Sexual Diversity at the University of Alberta.

Many of the youth who attend the conference come from rural areas, and don't have access to many of the supports and resources that would be available in larger centres.

"We get to have many youth and teachers from rural areas of Alberta, they get to feel affirmed in their identity, and feel safer and connected. It has a positive and profound impact on their life," he says.

The 2023 conference, set to be held on November 4, also comes at an important time for 2SLGBTQ+ youth across the province.

"There have been a massive

amount of hate crimes in Alberta in recent years. It's really scary," says Westfal. "So this is a really important way for people to learn and develop some safety skills, and to build some community support intrinsically, so we can help the youth navigate spaces that might be less safe and give them strategies to be safer and healthier."

Inclusivity is a core tenet of the GSA conference, and support from YEG allowed conference organizers to strengthen that mandate. ECF provided \$3,000 to support ASL interpretation during the 2023 AB GSA conference — funds which Westfal says helps to make the event more inclusive by default.

"We don't want a student to have to email us and say, 'Hey, I need this, this, this and this, otherwise I can't come.' We would rather just have that exist and be there, 'cause for a lot of students who live with disability, that's gonna be a barrier," he says. "So it's exciting for us to get this grant because it removes a really big barrier in entry for folks who experience disability." >



Image supplied

BRAIDED JOURNEYS PROGRAM MENTAL HEALTH BREAK

*St. Alphonsus Junior High School,
Edmonton Catholic Schools*

As the Braided Journeys program coach at St. Alphonsus School, teacher Rhema Kennedy is used to working with young Indigenous students and helping them to succeed in the classroom. Her role is to encourage students in the program to develop their leadership abilities.

“We’re committed to assisting student success by cultivating a caring, welcoming and positive place for Indigenous students,” she says.

As part of her work with the Braided Journeys program, Kennedy wanted to encourage the students to come up with their own incentives to motivate their success. Early in the school year, she asked the 25 students in the program what they would like to get out of it.

“One of the things that came up was how being in the inner city they’ve been feeling the effects of COVID and mental health and feeling like they’re disconnected. It’s like they don’t get to have fun with each other as much,” she said. “So

I asked, what ideally would you want to be able to do? And they said, ‘Could we go to Galaxyland?’ And I said, ‘Well, maybe!’”

A field trip to Galaxyland wasn’t a typical outing for these students, so Kennedy saw it as a great motivator. She encouraged them to apply for ECF’s YEG program, and over the next few weeks, helped them develop their plans and a pitch for the trip.

As part of the application process, they discussed the motivations for their trip as a mental health break. They developed project management skills, researched prices and options for the trip, and created a budget — all while working together.

In the end, their hard work paid off with a day of fun. ECF awarded the students \$1,585 for an afternoon at Galaxyland at West Edmonton Mall.

When the day finally arrived, the kids were thrilled. And Kennedy says, it couldn’t have gone better.

“They loved it. Those were some of the biggest smiles I think I’ve ever seen them have,” she says. “They were really great about it. It was just so exciting to see how receptive and excited they were for it.”



YOUNG CLIMATE LEADERS CLIMATE SUMMIT

Edmonton Public Schools

After hearing about student-organized events to promote sustainability, Michelle Jiang was inspired. As a Grade 11 student at Lillian Osborne High School, she wanted to create a similar event in her own school community. She brought the idea up to some classmates, and before long, that spark of an idea became a reality.

“It originally started with me and one of my friends, but over time it grew to be a club with a bunch of us,” she says. “It was all a huge team and we all worked together to facilitate everything from speakers to activities to help people learn about sustainability.”

The group planned a one-day event to be held in the library at the school: the Young Climate Leaders Climate Summit. The goal was to educate students about the effects of climate change and the actions they could take to improve sustainability.

It was all made possible thanks to a \$3,000 grant from ECF through its YEG program.

“We knew we really wanted to put on a big event and be able to have an impact

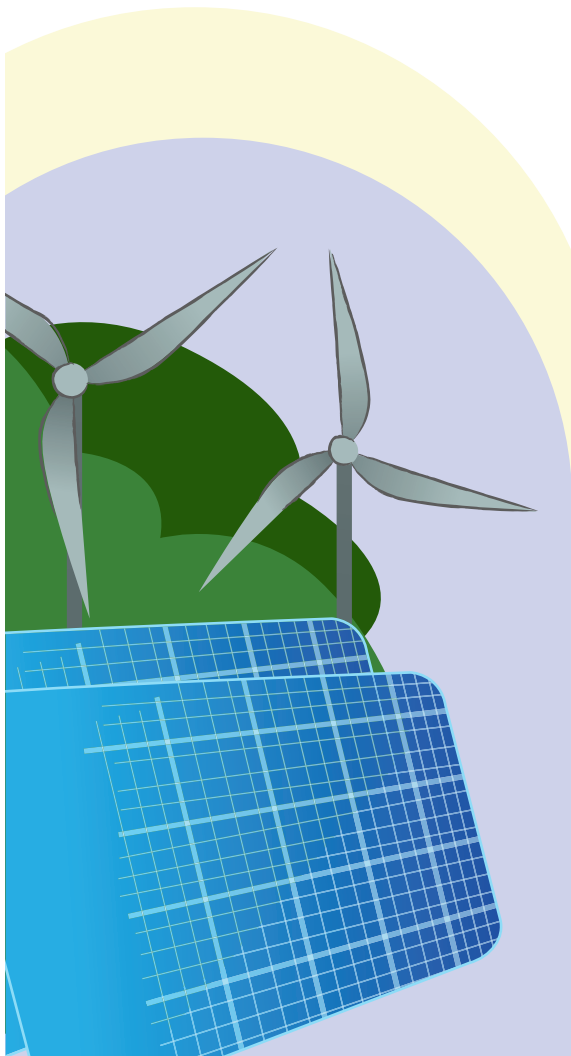
in our community, and because we got the grant, we could do that,” she says.

“We could teach a bunch of students from our high school about sustainability, about our current climate situation, but also let them learn from the different perspectives that are within our community.”

About 50 students registered for the event, but Jiang estimates there were closer to 100 in attendance. At the event, they heard from community leaders, including Dr. Paulina Johnson, a University of Alberta professor who shared a presentation on Indigenous perspectives on climate change, and students who were starting their own sustainability-focused businesses.

The summit was a success, but Jiang isn’t done yet. She hopes the summit will repeat in future years, as the first of what she calls a ‘lasting legacy’ of sustainability-focused initiatives at the school.

“Since we have some Grade 10s in our club, as well as some Grade 12s who have graduated, we want to be able to carry this on through the school generations,” she says.





MY FAVOURITE HOLIDAY CHILDREN'S BOOK

Edmonton Public Schools

As students at Old Scona Academic high school, Ameena Taher, Nabeeha Irfan and Jonelle Li have all excelled in their studies. But through their experience in the public school system, they have also come to realize one common issue they often faced: they never really felt included in much of the content they studied.

“We were having a conversation about racism in the school system, and about how some of the curriculum we’re fed is alarmingly Eurocentric,” says Taher. “What we wanted to do was change that, and work to foster a sense of multiculturalism and helping students feel like they belong in their school system.”

The three attended the Building Schools that Listen: Cultures of Belonging summit — an event where Edmonton

Public School Board (EPSB) students were given the support and resources to develop an antiracism project. At the meeting, they came up with the concept of creating a book of belonging — a children’s book which could be taught in elementary classrooms, and better reflect the diverse backgrounds of students in Edmonton.

“Fostering that sense of community at a young age is so important and powerful, because it makes you feel like you can do things and you deserve to be in that space,” says Irfan.

They settled on creating *My Favourite Holiday*, a 20-page children’s book which showcased eight popular holiday celebrations from different communities, including Eid, Diwali, Lunar New Year and Indigenous Peoples Day. It’s the type of book Li says was missing from her own

early education.

“It would have made a really big difference to see Lunar New Year or other holidays included in our curriculum,” she says. “It shows representation. It shows that you belong in this school, and in this country.”

To bring the book to classrooms, they applied for a Young Edmonton Grant. The funding will be used to create physical and electronic versions of the book, which can be used as a teaching resource in schools across the city. Ultimately, it’s about helping students feel like a part of the greater community.

“Planting these seeds early shows that you’re an important person, and that you belong here.

It means you’re not growing up with internalized racism,” says Taher. ■

“FOSTERING THAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY AT A YOUNG AGE IS SO IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL, BECAUSE IT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN DO THINGS AND YOU DESERVE TO BE IN THAT SPACE”

– NABEEHA IRFAN



Photography Mat Simpson

A photograph of a basketball court during a game. In the upper left, a basketball hoop and backboard are visible. The court floor is polished wood with white lines. In the background, a large crowd of spectators is seated in the stands, many holding flags. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

“WE ALWAYS

PLAY, GROW, RE

**THE AL RASHID YOUTH CLUB IS TURNING
PLAY INTO A FIRM FOUNDATION**

BY TOM NDEKEZI



YS TRY TO SCHEDULE A TALK FOR THE YOUTH”

– MOHAMMED YOUNES

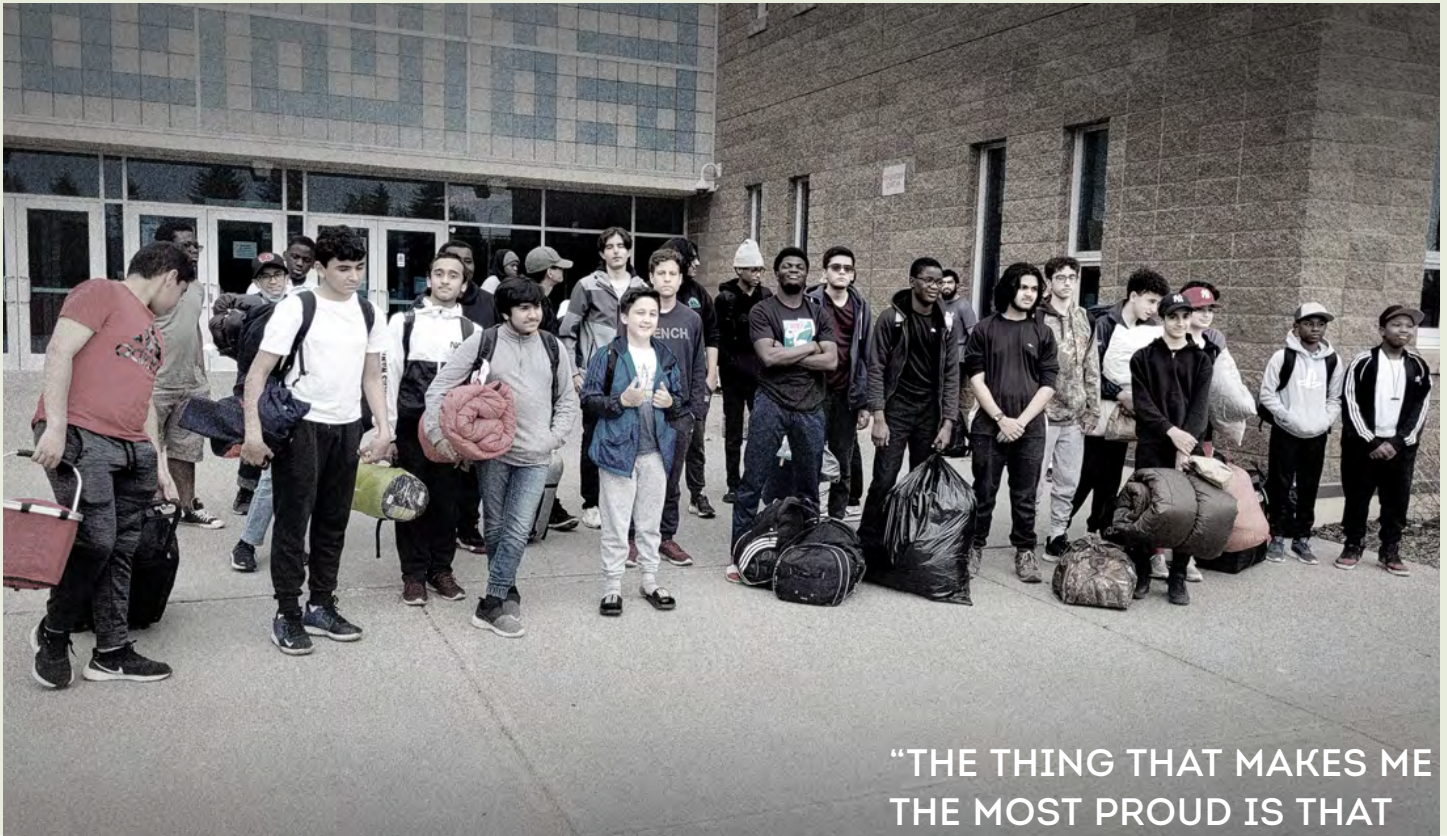
IT'S DIFFICULT TO trace the history of the Al Rashid Mosque's Friday Night Lights program, which is a testament to how deep its roots run in Edmonton's Muslim community.

The Al Rashid Youth Club was founded in 1995 and since then has been operated by a board of eight to 12 elected youths. Somewhere along the way, the idea of boys' Friday night ball hockey sprung up and soon enough it was a weekly staple. As the ball hockey nights grew in popularity, they also outgrew the gym at the mosque and had to be moved to the larger gyms at the Edmonton Islamic Academy. The program's popularity further meant that in 2011, the organizers decided to create a program specifically for girls. They needed a name to distinguish the boys' program from the girls', and given the program's time and ambitions beyond being just a ball hockey night, the name Friday Night Lights seemed like a perfect fit.

“If you call it ‘Friday Hockey’ you limit yourself to just hockey. So we decided to find a name that would work,” says Mohammed Younes, a medical student and former president of the Al Rashid Youth Club. “I'm not sure if [the Youth Club member who suggested the name] had recently seen the movie and was inspired by that, but that's how the name came up.”

Despite sharing a name, the similarities between the Youth Club's weekly gym night and the sports movie franchise all but end there. For the long-running youth program, the objectives are a lot more intrinsic than state championships and gridiron glory. When the lights turn on and the crowd of excited boys floods into the gymnasium, winning and losing doesn't matter as much as having fun and learning a few lessons along the way.

“We always try to schedule a talk for the youth,” Younes says, reflecting on the educational element the ▶



“THE THING THAT MAKES ME THE MOST PROUD IS THAT FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS WAS THE ENGINE TO CREATE SO MANY OF THE OTHER PROGRAMS AT THE AL RASHID YOUTH CLUB.”

– MOHAMMED YOUNES

Youth Club began integrating into the gym nights. “So that talk would be something inspirational, whether it’s sharing a story or going over an Islamic lesson on the importance of not wasting food, for example.

“That was one of the big benefits a lot of parents wanted when they would send their kids. They loved that their kids were being active and playing sports, but they also really wanted to make sure that their kids were praying and taking away some kind of Islamic benefit.”

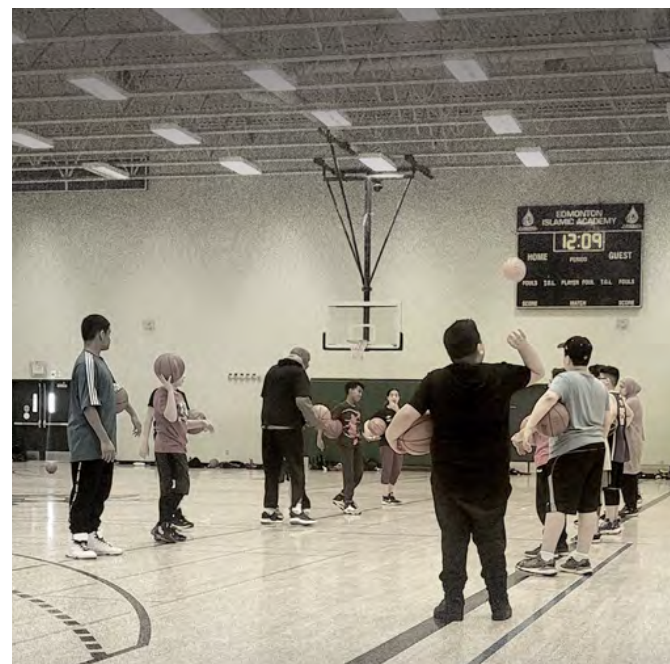
Recent years have seen the Youth Club take on more responsibilities in addition to the gym night, including organizing socials and outings and overseeing the Al Rashid Hockey League. This past April also saw the Youth Club mark the end of Ramadan with an Eid Carnival that attracted over 3,000 guests for an evening featuring bouncy castles, carnival games, fireworks and a petting zoo. The carnival was the result of weeks of planning, and just the latest outgrowth from the Friday Night Lights program.

“Friday Night Lights has always

been our foundational program,” says Younes. “The thing that makes me the most proud is that Friday Night Lights was the engine to create so many of the other programs at the Al Rashid Youth Club.”

Part of what makes Friday Night Lights so foundational is the sense of responsibility it instills in the program’s participants. As the participants get older and age out of the games and activities, they’re often encouraged to assume mentorship and coaching roles for the program’s younger attendees. It was that steady progression that eventually led Younes to assume a leadership role within the Youth Club and it is a tradition that continues to this day.

“I encourage high schoolers to come, but I give them some responsibility,” says Imran Qureshi, current Youth Director at the Al Rashid Mosque. “I’ll tell them to go and collect the drop-in fees, make sure everybody is paired up, make sure everybody is picking up after themselves. So even as young as the 10th Grade we’re trying to give them experience as well.”



Images supplied

FRIDAY NIGHTS

The success of the program also comes with added costs, particularly with regard to renting gym time, replacing sports equipment, paying for additional supervision and ensuring that youth in need of transportation have a safe ride to and from the gym nights. Support in the form of an Edmonton Community Foundation grant has helped cover some of those expenses and ensure that the gym nights are delivered at little to no cost for the program participants. The grant also helped kick start Generation of Change, the Youth Club's weekly girls program focused on sports and mentorship.

Although it started off as a weekly gym night, the hope is for Friday Night Lights to continue to expand beyond its regular time slot. This past year saw the Youth Club organize a hike up the Coliseum Mountain and a Pigeon Lake winter camp. Aside from giving the youth a chance to be in nature, the outings also taught them important lessons about teamwork, community and respect — in short, everything Friday Night Lights is all about.

“It’s a very multicultural community,” Qureshi says, speaking of the array of youth he has seen participating in the program. “We have Lebanese kids, Pakistani kids, Somali kids, Eritrean kids ... we’re not targeting any specific nationality or any culture. It’s a very mixed group.”

“So kids are welcome to bring their own neighborhood friends out as long as they know the three rules, which are respect the property, respect each other and respect the environment. That’s all they have to follow.” ■



Harnessing **WILL** Power

FALL 2023

ARE YOU WATCHING WITH TREPIDATION as your parents age, wondering what the next years will look like for them and for you? Do you have the tools you need?

You will play a role in both their wellbeing, and, ultimately, their estate. There are important 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.

Your life as an adult child will be so much easier with these tools in place. Your

parents may think all of this will magically be handled, someday, somehow, without appreciating what a predicament they are putting you in by not preparing ahead.

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.



Wills & Estates 101

Mon Oct 2 | 10:00am – 11:30am

West End Seniors Association, 9629 176 St NW

Mon Oct 2 | 2:00pm – 3:30pm

Central Lions Seniors Association, 11113 113 St NW

Tues Oct 3 | 10:00am – 11:30am

Southeast Edmonton Seniors Association, 9350 82 St NW

Tues Oct 3 | 2:00pm – 3:30pm

Offered in French, online session

Tues Oct 3 | 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Offered in French, La Cité Francophone, 8627 Rue Marie-Anne Gaboury

Wed Oct 4 | 10:00am – 11:30am

Online session

Wed Oct 4 | 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Millwoods Seniors and Multicultural Centre, 2610 Hewes Way NW

Thurs Oct 5 | 10:00am – 11:30am

ACT Aquatic and Recreation Centre, 2909 113 Ave NW

Family Maintenance and Support Claims

Mon Oct 2 | 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Online session

Tax Considerations When Planning Your Estate

Thurs Oct 5 | 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Online session

Fighting Terms of the Will

Fri Oct 6 | 10:00am – 11:30am

Online session

Family Feud

Fri Oct 6 | 2:00pm – 3:30pm

Online session

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 current details, visit [ECFoundation.org/initiatives/wills-week](https://www.ecfoundation.org/initiatives/wills-week)

Registration is required for online sessions.

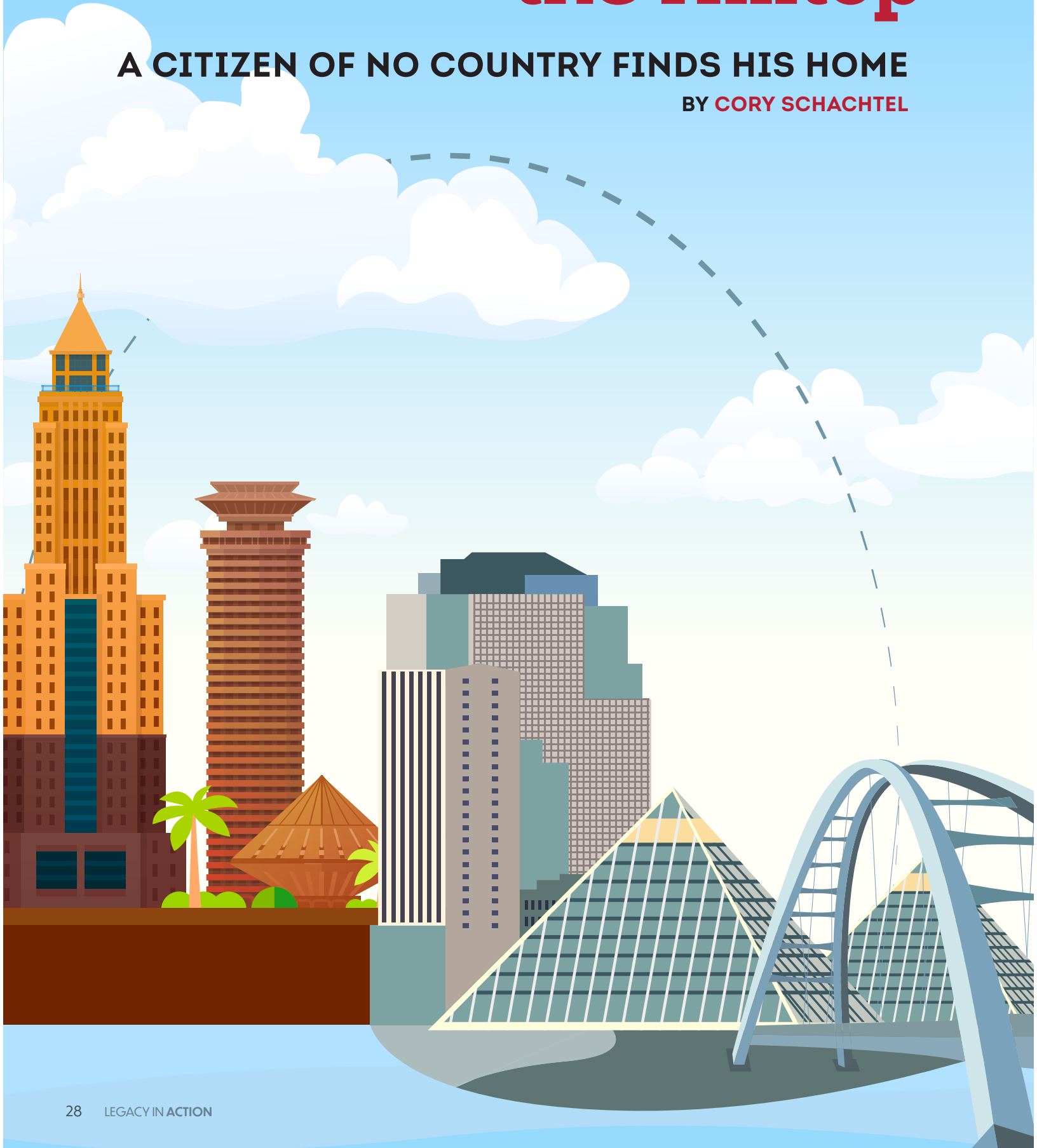
Sessions are subject to change.



The Light on the Hilltop

A CITIZEN OF NO COUNTRY FINDS HIS HOME

BY CORY SCHACHTEL



BASHIR MOHAMED HAS NEVER FELT FULLY IN CONTROL OF HIS OWN LIFE.

He was born in Nairobi, Kenya, where his parents had escaped to from Somalia and spent the previous three years in a refugee camp. This means “I was born stateless, a citizen of no country,” he says. In 1997, at three years old, his family received asylum in Canada and was placed in Edmonton’s north side — in the middle of winter. “My sister convinced me that snow was sugar, so I put it in my backpack, and it all melted. That was my first winter experience,” he recalls.

Living in wintery Edmonton surely beats being a stateless citizen (Mohamed’s not even sure if he was born in the Nairobi camp itself or a hospital), but being on the city’s north side still felt like a place he was put, and emphasized his lack of agency. “I feel like we never really picked Edmonton, we were put here by the government, and we didn’t really pick the north side, that’s just where social housing was.”

But Mohamed made his way in the only home he knew, and did well in the one thing he could control — his schoolwork. One day, his AP (Advanced Placement) English class teacher asked if he’d be interested in becoming a member of Edmonton Community Foundation’s (ECF) Young Edmonton Grants committee to help review applications for funding. “I’m not sure exactly what she saw in me, but that started a decade-long affiliation with the Foundation” that’s helped people like (and unlike) himself.

She probably saw the character of someone who volunteered for the school’s environmental club, fundraised for local charities and went classroom to classroom speaking about important causes like sponsoring children in war-torn countries. After high school, he worked with Black Lives Matter

Edmonton, “But that was pre 2020, when we were more controversial and kind of less accepted, doing work in response to things that the City and police department were doing.” All along, he worked with teachers and other students to help others and gain some control. “It wasn’t just me, it was the teachers who provided support and the other students, as well.”



“IT’S WONDERFUL TO SEE STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE FUNDING FROM ECF COME FULL CIRCLE AND VOLUNTEER WITH US TO HELP OTHERS FIND SUCCESS”

— ANNA OPRYSHKO

At the University of Alberta, he continued doing well, completing his Bachelor of Arts, majoring in political science with a minor in sociology, but still felt restricted by tuition costs, so he applied for ECF’s Hilltop Awards and Bursaries (then known as the ECF Awards and Bursaries), which were “for

students who have a connection to Edmonton, and financial need, and who will contribute back to the community.”

About a year later, he was asked to sit on the committee, which grants approximately 150 students between \$1,000 and \$6,000 each. “We would each review like 50 or 60 applications, and then deliberate for hours. And by the end of it, 100-plus students would receive potentially life-saving money that would help them fulfill their dreams.”

Anna Opryshko, ECF’s student awards associate, has seen Mohamed grow and give back to his community since he received his first student award from the Foundation.

“It’s wonderful to see students who receive funding from ECF come full circle and volunteer with us to help others find success,” Opryshko says. “Bashir has sat on various committees for more than a decade at ECF and we have enjoyed watching him grow as a person and give back to his community.”

Now, at 28, Mohamed says he’s grateful for the freedom and experience the Hilltop Awards provided him, which helped get him to where he is today: a member of the Royal Canadian Navy, living in British Columbia for the past three years. As his term with ECF’s Hilltop Committee comes to a close, he’s beginning to focus on himself — and the stars. “In many ways, my term ending around this time is a funny coincidence, because I think it’s time for me to really get into my passions, and find ways to connect those passions to community — like stargazing. Something I love doing is taking a telescope and standing on a street corner, and within minutes someone will come by and take a peek, and I’ll show them Saturn, my favourite planet. And their reaction is amazing, every time.” ■

Pursuing studies in the coming year? If you’re involved in your community and a resident of Northern Alberta, you could receive an award or bursary to help you with your schooling.

[ECFoundation.org/student-awards](https://ecfoundation.org/student-awards)



Youth Make a Positive Impact

OUT OF THE BOX IDEAS ARE THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS FOR RECIPIENTS OF YOUTH VOICE GRANTS.

BY THEODORA MACLEOD

THE FOUNDERS OF Youth VOICE (Vision Of Innovation for Community Empowerment) began with a clear objective: Give students the opportunity to get involved with their communities and make a positive impact.

Started by Grace Moe, who works in health systems redesign and innovation, and co-founded by Dr. Allan Bailey, with help from Dr. Keith McNicol, Youth VOICE aims to support “out of the box” initiatives. “Ideas other than another walkathon or bike-a-thon,” says Bailey.

The organization provides grants, held at Edmonton Community Foundation, to teams of Grade 7-12 students who aspire to create changes in their communities. This can be achieved by raising a community issue, addressing a community need or resolving an identified challenge in the community. The teams must be endorsed by a school and have a direct community partner. Though the grant was previously only available to students in the Tri-Region area (Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Parkland County and the surrounding First Nations), Youth VOICE has recently expanded its reach to include all of metro Edmonton.

Moe, Bailey and McNicol worked with Indigenous youth through their positions in the WestView Primary Care Network, and say Youth VOICE was born out of what they have learned in their roles and with encouraging support from the WestView Physician Collaborative.

Bailey also collaborated with a volunteer group in the Tri-region area known as ACT (Achieving Community Together) over the last six years. Through those experiences he was exposed to social innovation including the theory of collective impact. The framework of Youth VOICE evolved out of those experiences.

“We wanted to encourage kids to get out and be comfortable and confident talking to

people in the community, and to work with the community,” says Bailey. “The intention is that they get an opportunity to rub shoulders with social innovation, and to give them a positive early life experience that, hopefully, will encourage them on that pathway.”

While Bailey and McNicol are the doctors behind the project, they say Youth VOICE came to fruition because of Moe.

“She was the agent who enabled dreamers like Keith and I to see things come to concrete outcomes. She’s an innovator herself,” says Bailey.

“I think she just really loves helping youth meet their full potential... and I think this grant is just an expression of that,” says McNicol.

McNicol says teachers also play an important role. “I think there are real innovators in the school system that could benefit with linking students with this grant, and it will give the teachers an opportunity to mentor kids in a way that they might not otherwise be able to do. It gives teachers another tool to help kids with extra interests excel and learn and think outside the box.”

The most recent project Youth VOICE supported involved students meeting with local seniors and elders to record stories. The hope was to create “an intergenerational shared experience,” according to Bailey.

In the coming year, the program will support three projects with up to \$5,000 in funding each. Bailey, Moe and McNicol are eager to see the new ideas from eligible applicants. ■



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