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who are walking the talk



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Cover by Mat Simpson

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Martin Garber-Conrad
Martin Garber-Conrad
CEO

It's been more than a century since the first International Women's Day celebrations were held in Europe. The event became a global phenomenon in 1975 when the United Nations (UN) declared March 8 International Women's Day, and it is now an official holiday in 27 countries.

Many of us know International Women's Day as a celebration of women's achievements, but the event is also a call to action. Around the world, gender equality remains an elusive goal. Globally, women are 26 per cent less likely to be employed than men and the gap has only shrunk by two points in the last three decades (according to the International Labour Organization). UN statistics show that women still make 77 cents for every dollar made by men and the gap is wider for women of colour, immigrant women and mothers. Women's inequality is also apparent in the prevalence of gender-based violence. It is estimated that 35 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence.

Fortunately, efforts are being made around the world to empower women. In our city, we see this movement in the many non-profits and agencies focused on the needs of women and families — particularly those in the most precarious situations.

Edmonton's women's shelters offer a safe haven for abuse survivors and their children, and community programs to help them move forward. Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) has supported many of these organizations over the past year, as you'll see in the article about Hilltop House's history as a women's shelter.

Other ECF-supported organizations offer resources including education, counselling, financial help and community to women in need. The Global Stitches Program, which empowers refugee women, is a wonderful example. Run by the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) in partnership with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and Futurpreneur Canada, the program offers training in sewing, embroidery and entrepreneurship to help women sell their handmade products and start businesses. You can read more about that program in this issue.

In the pages to follow, you'll also see other ways in which ECF is building for the future with its partners and donors. We hope these stories serve as a gentle reminder that while inequality persists, there's plenty of good work being done to make the world a safer and more equitable place. Although equality for women remains elusive, there are reasons for hope.

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BECAUSE A CRISIS DOESN'T ALWAYS HAPPEN DURING OFFICE HOURS

Access 24/7 is the name – and the promise – of a new centre to help people with addictions or mental health issues

BY CARISSA HALTON

Twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, help is now only a phone call away for people with addiction and mental health concerns in the Edmonton area.

“Just like any crisis, you never know when a mental health crisis will occur,” says Jason Brown, program manager for Access 24/7. “While many medical services are only open Monday through Friday, things happen outside of those hours. Support has to be available and accessible then, too.”

Launched in June 2019 by Alberta Health Services (AHS), Access 24/7 offers a single point of contact for adults seeking help with addiction and mental health issues. Access 24/7 helps them navigate the system and connect with local supports.

“WHILE MANY MEDICAL SERVICES ARE ONLY OPEN MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, THINGS HAPPEN OUTSIDE OF THOSE HOURS. SUPPORT HAS TO BE AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE THEN, TOO.”

— Jason Brown

Mental health clinicians conduct triage screening and assessments to best match an

individual's need(s) to available services and programs. They have access to a wide

“... ACCESS 24/7 IS ABLE TO TRIAGE AND DIRECT PATIENTS TO APPROPRIATE SERVICES, IT PLAYS AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN DECREASING THE BURDEN ON EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS.”

— Jason Brown

range of services, with its centralized hub of psychiatrists, healthcare professionals and peer-support staff. People needing these services can find it challenging and overwhelming to determine the most appropriate services for themselves. Access 24/7 makes this far more simple.

“People may walk into Access 24/7 or clinicians will go out to the individual in the community,” says Brown. “We are able to bridge them to provide support and connect them to other programs within AHS or supports by other community agencies based on the identified needs.”

In the past, individuals experiencing addiction or mental health issues generally

ended up in the emergency room, unnecessarily. After a long wait for assessment, many would be discharged and asked to follow up with a mental health clinic the following day. “Because Access 24/7 is able to triage and direct patients to appropriate services, it plays an integral role in decreasing the burden on emergency departments,” says Brown.

Since its inception, Access 24/7 has seen a steady increase in calls and walk-ins. Located in the renovated Anderson Hall across from the Royal Alexandra Hospital and staffed by more than 100 healthcare professionals and physicians, its clinicians address nearly 7,000 calls a month and see 400 walk-ins throughout the day and night.

ACCESS 24/7 HAS SEEN A STEADY INCREASE IN CALLS AND WALK-INS. ITS CLINICIANS ADDRESS NEARLY 7,000 CALLS A MONTH AND SEE 400 WALK-INS THROUGHOUT THE DAY AND NIGHT.

Access 24/7 was created by an amalgamation of AHS teams in Edmonton.

With financial support from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) of \$222,000 over three years, plus a fundraising effort undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation and Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, it has hired four peer and four family peer-support workers to work alongside the clinical teams. ECF hopes the peer-support team will prove its value in the next three years, resulting in the positions being permanently funded by AHS.

These peer-support workers have already proven to make a huge difference for families and individuals who may be experiencing the medical system for the first time. They know the difficulties of mental illness and addiction, and draw on their experiences to provide empathy and practical advice as they help others through some dark times.

Brown says family members of people in crisis frequently call or walk into Anderson Hall, seeking assistance. The peer and family peer-support workers assist patients and/or their families through the process alongside healthcare professionals.

PEER-SUPPORT WORKERS
KNOW THE DIFFICULTIES
OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND
ADDICTION, AND DRAW
ON THEIR EXPERIENCES
TO PROVIDE EMPATHY
AND PRACTICAL ADVICE
AS THEY HELP OTHERS
THROUGH SOME DARK TIMES.

While help is available on-site, teams also make home visits and can even be dispatched to first responders' calls.

Brown remembers a call the team went on to the home of a woman who couldn't access services in the community. She called 911 and first responders connected her to Access 24/7. She was under a lot of stress — raising a grandchild, working a difficult job, experiencing challenges with her medication

— and didn't know where to turn. The Access 24/7 team met with her in her home and developed a treatment plan. "The team followed up with her for a few days over the phone and at her house. She was seen by psychiatry for consultation and was referred back to her family doctor," Brown says.

Her story is one of many that demonstrate the importance of getting the right help at the right time. Access 24/7 makes it easier than ever for individuals, family members and loved ones to seek support, guidance and assistance.

IF YOU OR YOUR LOVED ONE ARE EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH OR ADDICTIONS ISSUES, KNOW YOU ARE NOT ALONE. YOU CAN CALL (780) 424-2424 TWENTY-FOUR SEVEN. ■

BY CAITLIN CRAWSHAW

A SUSTAINING CAREER

AFTER NEARLY FIVE DECADES IN THE NON-PROFIT WORLD, LARRY DERKACH LEVERAGED RETIREMENT TO CREATE A NEW ENDOWMENT FUND.

When Larry Derkach was a university student eyeing a career in medicine, he took a summer job in Edmonton's inner city that changed the path of his life.

"For the first time, I was encountering people who didn't have the same access to opportunities and services that I had in my life," he says. "I saw an opportunity to make a real difference."

Derkach had been hired to run youth recreation programs for the Bissell Centre over the summer, a position that involved working with kids and families in one of Edmonton's poorest neighbourhoods. At the time, few organizations offered similar

"I SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE."

– Larry Derkach



programming for youth. It was the early 1970s and many of the city's inner-city non-profits — like E4C and Boyle Street Community Services — were still in their infancy.

This was satisfying work for a young adult with a strong social conscience. “Being in that environment really sparked something in me that made me want to continue doing that kind of work,” says Derkach. It was an easy switch to a career in the city's non-profit sector.

After that summer, he ran youth recreation programs at the Bissell Centre for several years. He briefly returned to university for an after-degree in education — thinking he'd become a school teacher — but before he had a chance to begin teaching, he learned that the Bissell Centre's executive director was dying and the organization faced big staffing challenges. He pressed pause on the after-degree to help out with public relations and volunteer co-ordination. Once again, Derkach liked the job too much to return to his studies. Two years later, he stepped into the role of executive director, where he remained for 15 years.

As much as he loved the work, the time came when Derkach was ready to try something new. He tried consulting for a while and — briefly — politics. When the MLA in his riding, Pam Barrett — also the leader of the Alberta New Democratic Party — suddenly retired, a good friend convinced him to run for the party nomination. “It was a brief thing, but it was a really interesting experience,” says Derkach, who lost to Brian Mason. “I ended up being really glad I didn't win. It would have squeezed out a lot of the other things I really love doing.”

It was fun, but Derkach realized he missed the community relationship that comes from working within an agency. One day, he spotted an opportunity at Jewish Family Services (JFS), a secular, non-profit organization offering a range of social services to people of all faiths or none. At that time, JFS had been around for nearly five decades, but it was a far smaller organization than the Bissell Centre. Derkach knew of the organization and was curious to explore how the inner workings

“BEING IN THAT ENVIRONMENT REALLY SPARKED SOMETHING IN ME THAT MADE ME WANT TO CONTINUE DOING THAT KIND OF WORK.”

– Larry Derkach

of a smaller organization might compare to a larger one like Bissell.

But would they consider hiring someone who wasn't Jewish? “I talked to them and they said, ‘We've never hired a non-Jewish executive director before, but we're looking for someone with values that align with ours,’” says Derkach, who threw his hat in the ring and got the job. Over the next 17 years, he helped JFS grow its services and extend its connection into the wider community.

It was interesting to Derkach to see how nimble the organization could be; organizational decisions could be made quickly and protocols could be adjusted to meet the needs of clients. The downside was that JFS lacked the capacity of a larger organization due to its smaller budget. Securing funding was an ongoing concern, with the focus on current — not future — needs. “Larger organizations tend to carve out money for fund development capacity,” he says. “Smaller organizations generally tend not to. But it's a missed opportunity.”

As retirement approached, Derkach wanted to do all he could to ensure JFS would thrive well into the future. He signed up for Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) Endowment Sustainability Program to build JFS's fundraising capacity via endowments.

In addition to educational sessions on planned giving, endowments, donor relationships and more, the program gives organizations \$1,000 toward the creation of a new endowment fund. For Derkach, retirement presented an opportunity to build the fund. To that end, JFS ran a mini-fundraising campaign, soliciting donations online and at Derkach's retirement gala.

Although JFS had three years to reach the \$10,000 funding threshold ECF requires, the goal was reached in just two months. “I think it was amazing that this happened so quickly,” says ECF Donor Advisor Noel Xavier. “That's a testament to how much Larry is respected by clients and supporters of JFS.”

Derkach is now retired — at least, partially. “I'm not a golfer and I'm not one to sit in a rocking chair either,” he laughs. He continues to contribute to Edmonton's non-profit sector, both as a consultant and volunteer. These days, he sits on the board of a half-dozen organizations, including Our Parents' Home, St. Stephen's College and Tuxis Youth Parliament. “There are lots of things that still interest me.” ■

“I THINK IT WAS AMAZING THAT THIS HAPPENED SO QUICKLY, THAT'S A TESTAMENT TO HOW MUCH LARRY IS RESPECTED BY CLIENTS AND SUPPORTERS OF JFS.”

– Noel Xavier

Stitching a new

BY CAITLIN CRAWSHAW
PHOTOS MAT SIMPSON

Global Stitches empowers refugee women with advanced sewing skills and business acumen

As a young girl growing up in Syria, Hodan Abdullah loved to sew clothes for her Barbie dolls. She began with big, beautiful princess dresses and moved on to making blouses and jackets — outfits she could imagine herself wearing.

But this wasn't just childhood play; Abdullah was teaching herself the sewing skills she'd need to become a fashion

designer. The dream followed her into adulthood and she began making plans to get the education she needed to make it happen.

"In Syria, they didn't have a college for fashion design, so my plan was to go to Lebanon, because there are lots of opportunities there when it comes to fashion," she says. "That was the plan before the war started."

A snag in the plan

Abdullah's dream was put on hold when she and her family found themselves in the midst of civil war for the second time since she was born. The family fled violence in Somalia when she was a toddler and settled in Syria because of its high-quality, public education and the work opportunities available to her father, a veterinarian.

f u r

This time, the family fled to Canada as Abdullah's mother had a friend in Edmonton. They arrived in 2015 and, once again, began building a new life in a very different place. At first, Abdullah focused on improving her English and found a retail job at Sears. Then, she completed a program to become a healthcare aide. Although she liked the work and the income, "it wasn't my dream," she says.

Last year, she learned about a program that could help her finally make her dream a reality and eagerly signed up for one of the 20 spots available.

Mending dropped threads

Launched in the summer of 2018, Global Stitches has been teaching refugee women in Edmonton how to sew and embroider clothing and other textiles — skills they can use to earn income for their families. The program also offers entrepreneurial training to give participants the knowledge they need to launch a sewing business and provides each graduate with a sewing machine and other tools to get started.

The program is an initiative of the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA), which offers spiritually and culturally appropriate social services to Edmonton's Muslim communities — but supports all refugee families regardless of their countries of origin. Rola Mustafa, an IFSSA refugee support manager of Global Stitches, explains

that the program was created after a number of clients expressed an interest in developing sewing skills to earn income.

"In many of the refugee camps — like those in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon — it's common practice to teach women to sew, so they can learn new skills and generate income," says Mustafa. It made sense to do something similar in Edmonton, where refugee women also face barriers to financial independence and full participation in the community.

Like newcomers, refugee women can't work without strong English-language skills, which can take time to acquire. And in some cultural communities, refugee women face social barriers, including the expectation that they stay home to care for children. Some women also care for in-laws and parents. "A traditional job wouldn't fit them," says Mustafa.

By a stroke of luck, IFSSA also had clients with advanced sewing skills, including two women who ran a clothing factory in Syria, where they trained other women to work for them. It was an ideal situation. "We had women asking to learn skills and women who had the skills and could teach the skills," Mustafa explains. >

"WE HAD WOMEN ASKING TO LEARN SKILLS AND WOMEN WHO HAD THE SKILLS AND COULD TEACH THE SKILLS."

– Rola Mustafa

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Business skills to overcome barriers

For the business side of the course, Mustafa consulted with then-IFSSA board member Hussam Tungekar, who works for Futurpreneur Canada — a national not-for-profit focused on youth entrepreneurship support — which became a project partner. Tungekar, the organization's Alberta team lead, helped shape the business curriculum, taught sessions and offered his expertise to students.

"I'm a strong believer in empowerment, specifically economic empowerment, as a way for people to become self-reliant and create a second life," he says. "I'm also an immigrant and saw my parents struggle when they came to Canada." Tungekar believes entrepreneurship can help refugees overcome barriers to economic independence and full participation in society. However, the business world has lacked resources geared toward refugee women, who face unique barriers.

In fact, Global Stitches was designed to reduce as many barriers to participation as possible. Each student is provided with complimentary bus tickets and childcare is available for those with young children. Sessions are held at Eastwood School in north Edmonton, where many refugees already go for English-language classes. The facility is operated by the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), a project partner that has been donating space for the program.

In 2018, the first cohort of 10 women met every Saturday for five hours of sewing, embroidery or business instruction. Initially intended to run for eight months, the class was extended for another two-and-a-half months at the request of participants who wanted additional sewing training. In 2019, a second cohort began with 20 women and will wrap up in early spring; this time, Business Link — an Edmonton-based entrepreneurial support — delivered



"I'M A STRONG BELIEVER IN EMPOWERMENT, SPECIFICALLY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, AS A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO BECOME SELF-RELIANT AND CREATE A SECOND LIFE."

— Rola Mustafa

industrial sewing machine. Funds will also help pay for a pop-up shop — featuring items made by both cohorts — later this year.

Stitching new patterns

As she prepares to graduate from the program, Abdullah is coming closer to realizing her dream. With her new skills, she'll apply to a fashion program at a local college. After that, she hopes to start her own business, designing clothes with a specific niche in mind.

"As Muslim women, we can't usually find dresses that are beautiful, so we can wear them to events, but that also cover our body," she says, adding it's especially difficult for plus-size women.

"I want to make every woman feel that she can find everything she wants. Something that's beautiful, fits her body and modest." ■

PROUD FUNDING

With an endowment fund, the organization you're supporting gets dependable cash flow – and you get the satisfaction of making a big difference.

BY LISA CATTERALL

Non-profit organizations have vital, meaningful missions but even they have to pay the bills. And when funding isn't steady, it can be hard to achieve their goals.

Thanks to Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) and its Endowment Sustainability Program, charitable organizations are learning skills to develop a strong endowment and planned giving program, knowledge that will help them achieve a dependable source of income that will allow their organizations to grow.

And the program has produced an unexpected silver lining. After learning about the impact of endowments, attendees are creating their own funds and taking pride in establishing a permanent connection with community agencies that matter to their families.

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PAM WIGHT

*Noni Lee Conservation Fund
Conserving natural ecosystems
and biodiversity*

Pam Wight's love of nature began during her childhood years while exploring the Scottish countryside where she grew up. Thanks to her mother, Constance (Noni) Lee, the woods, creeks and fields around her became a fascinating classroom.

"Noni was what I would call an amateur naturalist," Wight reminisces. "She would always encourage my brother and sister and I to be outside, and she'd teach us about the world around us."

These formative experiences ignited Wight's lifelong passion for environmental work. She would go on to complete a bachelor's degree in geography at the University of Aberdeen before coming to Edmonton to complete a master's in the same subject. She became an international consultant, with her work taking her around the world. During one of those trips, she became ill and returned to Edmonton to recover. She then happened upon an opportunity to work at the Edmonton and Area Land Trust as its executive director. The role sounded ideal.

"HAVING BUILT THE ORGANIZATION FOR MORE THAN 11 YEARS, I REALLY UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE GIFTS. BUT WHAT MANY PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND IS THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A BILLIONAIRE TO OPEN AN ENDOWMENT FUND."

— PAM WIGHT

"The Land Trust was working to conserve natural areas, which are essential for sustainable development in and around the City of Edmonton. I was encouraged to apply for the posting and I'm so glad I did," she says.

At the time, the Land Trust was a brand new organization, with little funding or resources and a broad mandate. Over the next 11 years, Wight helped build the organization, increasing public awareness, and securing conservation lands throughout the Edmonton region.

As part of her role, Wight enrolled in Edmonton Community Foundation's Endowment Sustainability Program. The program enabled her to speak to potential donors about the importance of endowment funds.

It also inspired her to open one of her own.

"Having built the organization for more than 11 years,

I really understand the need for long-term, sustainable gifts. But what many people don't understand is that you don't need to be a billionaire to open an endowment fund," she says. "You can take time to build it up, and make it a family and friends' effort, so everyone is playing a part."

Wight decided to name her family's fund after her mother, Noni Lee, who passed away in 2008. With this fund, her name and legacy could continue, giving in perpetuity to help the Edmonton and Area Land Trust protect natural areas for future generations to enjoy.

"Naming it after my mother just seemed like the best fit," says Wight. "My children are far less environmentally inclined than I am, but they're on board with this and it gives me great pleasure to see them giving to the fund and helping to continue their grandmother's legacy."

PHOTOS BY COOPER & O'HARA

DON AND HEATHER BOONSTRA

PHOTOS BY COOPER & O'HARA

Don & Heather Boonstra Family Fund Putting families first

There are few things more important to Don and Heather Boonstra than family. As parents to three university-aged children, the couple has spent the better part of the last two decades supporting their kids' healthy development and success. But in addition to family ties, the Boonstras are deeply passionate about the value of community. So when the topic of estate planning came up last year, their two most important priorities were clear.

"WE FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO NOT ONLY TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN CHILDREN BUT ALSO OUR COMMUNITY."

— DON BOONSTRA

"We felt it was important to not only take care of our own children but also our community. That's something that Heather and I are very much aligned on, and something we've believed in for years," says Don.

As the executive director of Fort Saskatchewan's Families First Society, Heather had recently completed Edmonton Community Foundation's Endowment Sustainability Program. She was already acutely aware of the need for sustainable funding and, through the program, she discovered how simple setting up an endowment fund could be.

"What I learned was that opening a fund is more achievable than many people might think," she says. "I came out of the program really excited to set up one of our own, because I know just how vulnerable non-profits with limited revenue are to funding cuts and fluctuations. Opening a fund from our family was our way of providing some extra assurance for the future."

The Boonstras chose to start off by having the fund support the Families First Society, but plan to grow the fund to include other organizations over time. Doing so gave them

a way to offer sustained support to an organization they're passionate about as well as demonstrate their commitment to friends, family and neighbours.

"It's a way of showing how important we think Families First is in our community," says Heather.

Ultimately, Don and Heather are confident their decision will help further instill the value of philanthropy in their children.

"A big part of the value of setting it up now is that we're modelling this behaviour for our kids. They've already got a strong social conscience and they've grown up around these kinds of efforts," says Don. "This is just taking it one step further." >



TODD READE

Todd Reade Fund Assisting locally and nationally

Todd Reade has dedicated his career to non-profit work. Over the past two decades, he's been involved with organizations ranging from Deaf & Hear Alberta to the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, and the Lifesaving Society. Yet no matter which organization he's been working with, he knows that long-term planning and investment are always at the core.

"My personal approach is to focus on long-term giving and sustainability," says Reade. "Some of the organizations I've worked with haven't had endowment funds, others haven't been investing them well. But without doing so, you really can't plan with any certainty."

"AS I WAS DOING THE PROGRAM, I STARTED APPLYING THE CONCEPTS TO MYSELF AND IT SORT OF BECAME OBVIOUS. IT WAS A NATURAL FIT TO WALK THE TALK ON THIS."

— TODD READE

For the past two years, Reade has used his expertise to support the Alberta Association of Landscape Architects as the organization's executive director. Through this role, he was introduced to Edmonton Community Foundation's Endowment Sustainability Program, which he completed in early 2019. The five-month program enabled Reade to fine-tune his approach to discussing long-term giving with donors, but it also inspired him to make changes of his own.

"As I was doing the program, I started applying the concepts to myself and it sort of became obvious. It was a natural fit to walk the talk on this," he says.

He opened the Todd Reade Fund, which, when mature, will support agencies in Edmonton and Toronto. "I chose causes that are important to me: the Recreation for Life Foundation, the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, and Rainbow Railroad — an organization that helps members of the LGBTQ community escape violence and persecution in their home countries," he says.

Reade is also quick to point out that an endowment fund is a practical way for donors to focus their giving. "The reality is if you're giving \$1,000 annually to charity, you can make it happen," he says. "And the greatest part of having a fund, for me, is knowing that it's a chance to make a larger difference. Rather than the shotgun approach of giving \$20 or \$30 here or there for a walk, run or bike ride, this is a way to focus those dollars into something that will have a more significant, longer-term impact." ■



IMAGE SUPPLIED

THE SAFE HOUSE THAT SAVED MARY

SHE DIDN'T KNOW HOW
TO LEAVE HER VIOLENT
HUSBAND OF 27 YEARS.
UNTIL SHE JUST DID IT.

BY THERESE KEHLER
PHOTOS PAUL SWANSON



Last December, a 78-year-old woman hefted her walker onto a city bus and headed downtown to the Edmonton Community Foundation offices where she made a most unusual request.

Would it be possible, Mary asked, to go upstairs and see her old bedroom?

Staff welcomed her inside, made tea and took Mary on a tour of Hilltop House, the century-old mansion that has been the Foundation's home since 2005.

It was a decidedly different experience from her first arrival at the house on a December day 33 years earlier. Frightened and dazed, the middle-aged mother of two grown children had just made her "great escape," fleeing her northeast Edmonton home and more than 27 years in an abusive marriage. She was promptly given a new name — Marg — and became the newest resident of Edmonton's oldest halfway house for women.

Hilltop House wasn't an easy place. But Mary was determined not to return to her old life. "I felt so strong."

ACTION IS THE MAGIC WORD

Mary's unannounced visit was sparked by a magazine article that detailed the storied history of the spectacular mansion at 9910 103 Street. Built in 1913, it had been the family home of John and Sophie McDougall until 1953, after which a variety of organizations were housed under its roof.

The Hilltop House women's shelter was there from the late '70s to its closure in 1987. But Alberta Social Services created the organization in 1965, locating it first in a building near the Legislature before eventually relocating it to the McDougall home.

By 1970 — the year Edmonton's first official women's shelter opened — Hilltop House had helped about 2,200 women from all walks of life, reported the *Edmonton Journal* in an article that began: "She is any woman with any problem that she can't handle on her own, and she's at the door of Hilltop House because she wants help ... she wants to try to solve that problem."

A 1983 government document said

women paid \$8 a day for accommodation, practical help and counselling to help them develop life skills and regain self-respect.

Mary has kept the typewritten house rules, a handbook describing a facility that would nourish, protect and support its residents, but fully expected them to work hard to rebuild their lives.

"Action," it says, "is the magic word at Hilltop House."

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Mary was in high school when she met her husband-to-be at a Halloween dance in a central Alberta town. "He was very possessive then," she says. "But I didn't know. I really had no clue about how they're jealous and possessive, hot-tempered." >

The abuse was rarely physical — “He didn’t do things where you’d see it” — but there were regular outbursts, irrational demands, tantrums, smashing things and threats. At a doctor’s visit on Dec. 15, 1986, she was urged to get out.

Mary didn’t know how to leave.

“I still went home and spent the night. Somehow I still stayed in the same bed with him. And that’s when he said, ‘I wish you were dead.’”

“I GUESS BECAUSE I FELT SAFE. THEY SAVED ME FROM HIM.”

The next day, a friend helped her stuff clothing and other possessions into garbage bags and then called a cab to take Mary to the Royal Alexandra Hospital’s pastoral care unit. “I would’ve been out there by the bus

stop, waiting to go,” Mary says ruefully. “I didn’t know how to call a cab.”

At Hilltop House, her valuables were locked up to keep them safe from other residents. All the girls were expected to pitch in with chores. If you went out on an overnight pass, you weren’t guaranteed a bed on your return.

Mary flips through a sheaf of notebook pages, her careful handwriting filling both sides with journal entries that detailed her days at Hilltop House. Vacuuming. Window-washing. The morning her glasses were gone. “A terrible start to [the] day, cried a lot,” Mary reads. She looks up from her pages. “I cried a lot.”

But she also grew a lot, making purposeful decisions to rebuild her life. Within days, she’d set up a Blue Cross account and found a lawyer. “On Dec. 18, I had an appointment with Manpower,” she says, amazement in her voice. “What was I thinking?”

Action had become the magic word.

On Jan. 10, 1987, 26 days after her arrival, she moved to an apartment in the west end. Six months later, she was divorced. After that, she began volunteering with seniors, which eventually became a full-time job at St. Michael’s Extended Care Centre.

“So thankful for all they have done,” she wrote about the Hilltop House staff in that day’s journal entry. She adds, “I guess because I felt safe. They saved me from him.”

FINDING A FUTURE

From the front porch of Hilltop House, you can see the Connors Hill building where Mary now lives. Her third-floor bedroom at the shelter is now the communication director’s office. And a firm friendship has grown between Mary and Anita Bauman, a former finance associate at Edmonton Community Foundation, who offered the tea and tour last December.

Bauman feels lucky to have spent an hour-and-a-half with Mary that day. “It’s a hard



“THEY TELL YOU TO LEAVE, BUT WHERE DO YOU GO?”

subject matter,” says Bauman. “But she is so forthright in telling this story ... She speaks wonderfully and you can’t help but be enthralled with her story. It just kind of left me weak in the knees.”

During the visit, Mary also learned about ECF’s work that, much like the Hilltop House shelter, is about building better lives for people in Edmonton.

In the past 20 years, the Foundation has allocated more than \$2.9 million to city agencies that help women experiencing family violence, including the Edmonton Women’s Shelter, the Wings of Providence Society, Sage Seniors Association and the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS).

Mary also supports the ACWS and carefully reads through the letters they send her. The most recent letter included a troubling statistic: Last year, Alberta shelters turned away 23,247 women and children because they didn’t have room. “They tell you to leave,” she says. “But where do you go?”

She’s also circled a piece of heartening news, that 96 per cent of women and seniors don’t return to their abuser after a stay at a shelter. Mary knows that she is fortunate to be among that group.

“I believe in angels,” she says, her gaze shifting to shelves that overflow with family photos and treasured mementos. “If you look around, I’ve got lots of angels.” ■



“I BELIEVE IN ANGELS. IF YOU LOOK AROUND, I’VE GOT LOTS OF ANGELS.”

◆ WOMEN’S SHELTERS




The Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (acws.ca) and WIN House (winhouse.org) websites offer extensive information about recognizing domestic abuse and what to do. Both websites include a quick escape button that immediately closes the page on your browser.

Other information can be found on the Alberta government’s Family Violence website (alberta.ca/family-violence-get-help.aspx)

◆ ALBERTA-WIDE HELP LINES

- 1-866-331-3933: Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters crisis line will connect you with a nearby shelter
- 310-1818: The Alberta Family Violence Information Line offers help in more than 170 languages.

◆ EDMONTON SHELTERS AND CRISIS LINES

- WIN House, 780-479-0058, 24-hour crisis line 
- Lurana Shelter, 780-424-5875, 24-hour crisis line 
- La Salle, 780-471-1122, second-stage shelter 
- Wings, 780-426-4985, second-stage shelter
- Sage Seniors Safe House, 780-454-8888, 24-hour support line, for individuals aged 60 and older

◆ FINANCIAL AID

If money is a concern, there are government programs to help with the costs of leaving an abusive situation, including the immediate expenses to reach safety and breaking a rental lease.

Call 1-877-644-9992 weekdays, 1-866-644-5135 weekends, evenings and holidays.

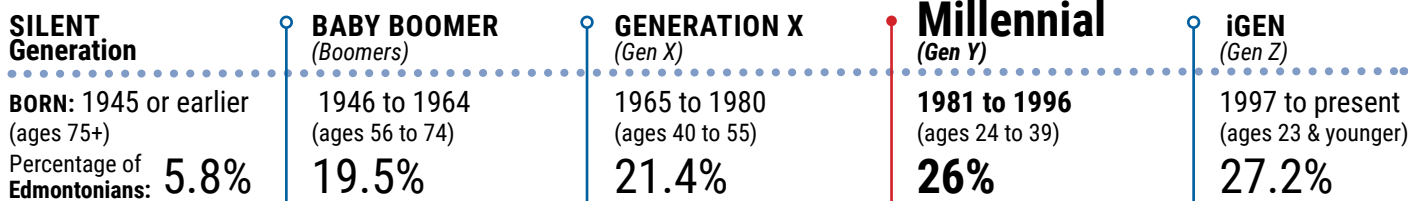
FINANCIAL REALITY OF MILLENNIALS in EDMONTON

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

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

EDMONTON'S GENERATIONS

According to the latest municipal census, millennials are Edmonton's largest voting cohort.



INCOME

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING refers to the ability of households to meet their needs, to accumulate assets and build wealth.

MEDIAN INCOME
Millennial tax filers in Edmonton (2017)
\$45,500

MEDIAN AFTER-TAX HOUSEHOLD INCOME

At a similar point in each generation's life, adjusted for inflation (2016 dollars)

Millennials (in 2016) **\$44,093**
Gen Xers (in 1999) \$33,276 Boomers (in 1984) \$33,350



What is a Gig Economy?

- Part-time or contract jobs that are needed to make ends meet.
- Millennials are often affected as they have less work experience for the jobs available.

Canadian millennials are:

- The most highly educated generation in Canadian history. **70% hold a post secondary certificate, diploma or degree.**
- "Digital Natives." They are the first generation to have grown up with digital technology. **96% own a mobile phone.**
- **Economically precarious** due to a highly competitive labour market, corporate downsizing, and a "gig economy."
- **Having children later in life.** The average age of a first-time mother in Canada in 2016 was 30.8. The first time it has surpassed women in their 20s.
- **More ethnoculturally diverse and inclusive** than previous generations. Millennials are more likely to have gone to school with others who are culturally different and been exposed to messages of diversity and inclusion.

MULTIPLE JOBS

In the decade prior to 2018, the number of Canadian workers who **held more than one job at the same time** increased from 704,100 to more than **1 million people**.

- 65.7% of multiple-job holders work full-time in their main job.
- Multiple-job holding is most common in the female-dominated sectors of healthcare, social assistance, and educational services.
- Those with lower weekly earnings are more likely to hold multiple jobs.
- 6.5% of multiple-job holders are age 25 to 29, second only to those age 20 to 24.

MILLENNIAL WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS

- 87% believe that the success of a business should be more than just its financial performance.
- They experience a greater amount of job and organization changes than previous generations.
- 64% of millennials would work from home and 66% would alter working hours.
- 90% of millennials want more feedback from their boss to make sure they're on track.
- Millennials indicate a strong preference for work/life balance.
- Half of millennial employees want to work for a business that has ethical business practices.



HOUSING

According to Abacusdata among Canadian millennials in 2019:

27%

Own the homes they live in

40%

RENT

33%

Live with their parents

Top 2 reasons millennials are living with their parents:

FINANCIAL – low wages, looking for stable employment, and saving for a house.

CULTURAL – it is expected of them or to help with family obligations.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) *affordability* means not spending more than 30% of pre-tax earnings on housing.

In order for the average home in Edmonton to be 'affordable:'

- Average home prices would need to fall by one-fifth (\$76,000) or typical full-time earnings would need to increase 25% (\$72,000/yr).
- It takes a typical millennial 9 years to save a 20% down payment for average-priced home in Edmonton.
- In 1976 it took 5 years to save a 20% down payment.

A generational comparison of homeowners and mortgage debt:

Major household earner between age 30-34	Millennials (2016)	Gen Xers (1999)	Boomers (1984)
Home-owner percentage	51%	51%	55%
Median mortgage compared to after-tax income	2.5X	1.89X	1X

NET WORTH

Millennials have the **highest debt to after-tax income ratio** among the generations measured at any point in their life, at 216%. This is more than 1.7 times young Gen Xers and 2.7 times more than young Boomers.

- While millennials were relatively more indebted, their assets yielded a stronger outcome in overall net worth.
- Millennials who enter the housing market have much higher levels of wealth, as do those with a university education.

According to a Manulife Bank of Canada poll of Canadians with a household income of \$40,000 or more:

60% of Baby Boomers are better off financially than their parents were at the same age, only **49%** for Millennials.

46% of Millennials say their spending is increasing faster than their income.

42% of Millennials are worried they'll never be debt-free.

Student Loan DEBT

According to a 2019 Credit Karma report, the average **student loan debt** in Alberta is **\$14,472**.

Percentage of student loan debt among the one million Canadian Credit Karma members:

14.42%

iGENS (most of this cohort is still in school)

14.62%

MILLENNIALS

4.22%

GEN Xers

1.53%

BOOMERS

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION COSTS

- The average cost of tuition in Canada (before books, supplies, travel) is **\$6,500 per year**. Some programs could cost up to **\$22,000 per year**.
- **Tuition fees increased 3.1%** for undergraduate programs in 2017/2018.
- As of Jan. 1, 2020, Alberta post-secondaries will be allowed to raise tuition in individual programs by **30% over the next 3 years**.

STUDENT AID

- As of March 31, 2018, approximately **38% needed to access** Alberta's Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP).
- On average, Alberta student loan borrowers repay their loans within nine years.
- According to a 2017 survey of Alberta student loan borrowers, **4% of their monthly income** is used for Alberta student loan payments.

Public Spending SINCE 1976

Government investment per person has grown **4.2 times faster for seniors** than for those under the age of 45.

- Social spending for seniors grew 6% faster than economic growth, but for those under age 45 grew 29% slower than economic growth.

CHILD CARE

According to a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Edmonton's median monthly childcare costs (2018):

\$835/pre-school age **\$975**/infant

Millennial Spending Habits

- Time is a commodity.
- 43 fewer trips to the store per year than the average Canadian household.
- More trips to restaurants than other age cohorts.
- Buy more easily prepared foods than Boomers.
- 22% look online to make purchasing decisions, compared to 6% of Boomers.
- 20% more likely to consider socially responsible or environmentally friendly products and 30% more likely to consider organic than the average shopper.

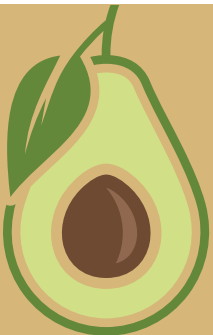


It's not about Avocado Toast

Millennials have been widely criticized for spending their money on things like lattes and avocado toast. Cutting out a latte will not change the fact that costs are increasing, and jobs are not only difficult to find, but are often short-term or contract.

Generally, this cohort:

- is working and studying more to have less.
- has a higher education, but also higher student debt.
- is squeezed by stagnant incomes and difficulty finding good jobs.
- struggles with high costs for things like housing and childcare.
- spends too little time at home.
- faces mounting debt.



WISDOM FOR THE AGES

A seniors association customizes services for the elderly

BY: MARIANN ROBERTS

There is a misconception that seniorhood is a one-size-fits-all experience.

Sage Seniors Association (formerly known as Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton) is working to demolish this misconception by recognizing that the experiences of older adults vary widely.

Sage provides more than 20 formal services to senior citizens in the Edmonton area, building meaningful relationships with each participant.

“It’s really about making a connection with that individual and getting to know them well enough to understand how we can best support them, but also really leverage their strengths,” says Karen McDonald, executive director at Sage.

One of those programs is the Seniors Financial Empowerment Network — a collaborative program that provides financial literacy workshops to seniors in the community. The program is designed to provide senior citizens with information to help protect themselves from financial abuse, exploitation and fraud. It also helps them prepare for the future.

“IT’S REALLY ABOUT MAKING A CONNECTION WITH THAT INDIVIDUAL AND GETTING TO KNOW THEM WELL ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE CAN BEST SUPPORT THEM, BUT ALSO REALLY LEVERAGE THEIR STRENGTHS.”

– Karen McDonald

The program is composed of seven workshops created by community partners. One of those community partners is Eric Storey, a volunteer with Sage.

“I think we can say with confidence that we are delivering information out into the community that the community is telling us they need,” says Storey. “The materials we are presenting are well-researched, accurate and we regularly ask for feedback on it.”

However, essential community programs often come at a cost. Recognizing the need for financial support, Sage reached out to Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) for a helping hand. As a result of ECF’s funding, Sage is able to offer training sessions for volunteer facilitators, as well as the necessary materials for the workshops themselves.

“It has always felt like a very supportive relationship,” McDonald says about working with ECF. “ECF is very well-attuned to the challenges and opportunities that exist within the voluntary sector.”

As a result of these workshops, seniors are able to learn, ask questions and protect themselves from financial mishaps in a judgment-free environment, regardless of

how much financial experience they have.

“In all the presentations I have given, I have always received positive feedback,” says Storey. “Talking with the other presenters, that seems to be a common theme. You can never have too much information.”

“I THINK WE CAN SAY WITH CONFIDENCE THAT WE ARE DELIVERING INFORMATION OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY THAT THE COMMUNITY IS TELLING US THEY NEED.”

– Eric Storey

Storey adds that he believes small projects such as these make a large impact on the community. “This is information that we think all seniors should have,” reiterates Storey. And knowledge, at any age, is power. ■



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