

The Mayor's Symposium on Poverty

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

March 20, 2014
Shaw Conference Centre



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Introduction

“This may be the most extraordinary Make Something Edmonton of all time.”

Mayor Don Iveson

Members of the new Mayor’s Task Force on Poverty, the former Poverty Elimination Steering Committee and community experts gathered on March 20th 2014 for the Mayor’s Symposium on Poverty. The goal of the Symposium was to launch the work of the Task Force, and to tap in to the wisdom of the community to set the foundation for that work. Ultimately, the Task Force aims to build on efforts already under way in the area of poverty elimination, and so the Symposium was designed to lay out the context.

The Symposium consisted of Mayor Don Iveson’s address, in which he thanked the Poverty Elimination Steering Committee for their work, officially welcomed the new Task Force and reiterated his commitment to ending poverty; insight from the keynote speaker Dr. John Rook in a speech entitled ‘The City that will End Poverty’; and a briefing from Anne Smith Co-Chair of the Poverty Elimination Steering Committee on behalf of that group, detailing the work that is already under way. Around 130 Edmontonians broke into smaller discussion groups around the following themes:

- Children and Youth
- Living in poverty while working
- Poverty and Health
- Shifting the conversation
- Transit – getting around

Although the primary discussion points within each group were centered around what’s working well right now, main gaps, and best practices other critical inputs were raised - all of which are covered within the 5 respective theme areas stated below.

1. Children and Youth

Importance of early intervention

Research and evidence-based decision making form the foundation in working towards poverty elimination. The research clearly shows that early intervention, as young as possible, creates a path for vulnerable babies and children to become successful adults. That means working with moms and families before the baby is born, being there from the baby’s earliest days to offer parenting support, involving, if possible, dads as well. There are many examples of programs in Edmonton which do this (*Head Start, AHVNA*), programs which could be expanded, as well as programs which have become defunct because funding was cut. Measuring results, with tools such as EDI, is also important, so that all program delivery is evidence-based.

Childcare came up again and again, in each discussion group, as a major issue, and childcare was considered in the context of early intervention as an essential access point to identify vulnerable babies and toddlers.

Program/ services that are *accessible*

There are many positive programs out there, but they can be inaccessible for a variety of reasons: the complexity of getting in to the program because of the red tape involved; difficulties in physically getting there; the program/ service is too expensive; or families simply don't know about the programs that exist. Some specifics of affordable services that children and families living in poverty have difficulty accessing:

- Childcare and after-school care
- Recreational programs
- Healthcare, dentistry, eye care

Using hubs, rooted in the community in locations where people naturally gather, is one way to address accessibility. *Schools as Community Hubs, Partners for Kids and Parent Link Centres* provide successful examples.

However, it also comes down to the principal of which services qualify as essential services for children – a common frame of reference for what children and their families need, and then the commitment to meet those needs with wrap around services delivered in a holistic way.

Meeting vulnerable youth where they're at

Progress has been made in putting resources into place for youth that allow them to move forward and excel. Key to success is creating a safe, non-judgemental environment, allowing kids to discover and build on their strengths. Examples of this are *i-Human, Nova House, Youth Restorative Justice Committees*.

A significant adult/ peer in the lives of vulnerable youth can be transformational. That significant person could be a teacher, youth worker, mentor or other role model, who develops a trusting relationship with the youth and his/ her family. *City of Edmonton Park programs, Boys and Girls Clubs* provide opportunities for positive relationships to develop.

Participants also talked about the importance of bringing youth to the table, hearing their voices, and involving them in solutions. There are many alternatives for engaging youth, particularly by using social media.

Community involvement

The point was also made that the most successful recreational programs are often community driven – the example used was *Free Footie*, a soccer league for kids who can't pay, which was started by one committed volunteer. Another example was Mark Cherrington's use of twitter to connect kids in need of specific items with community volunteers.

Several discussion groups talked about how to involve businesses and industry, meaningfully, in the movement to end poverty – specifically in the context of children and youth by providing positive mentors.

Community involvement ensures that programs and services are delivered within the appropriate cultural context, which has the potential to strengthen the supports offered to children and youth.

2. Living in poverty while working

Navigating the system

Red tape, incomprehensible forms to fill out, repeated demands for the same information – the barriers to receiving support can be formidable. Sometimes, people aren't aware of the services that are in place. Other times, new immigrants or refugees find language a barrier – translation of materials and forms would be useful. Or Aboriginal people coming in from a reserve find it difficult to know where to start or find the cultural barriers overwhelming.

A system navigator would help; or a one stop shop, offering key government and community supports. The suggestion was made that there could be a role for community leagues here.

Putting in place the essentials

- Safe, secure housing
- Affordable, quality childcare
- Accessible transportation

These all are pre-conditions for working – for sustainable employment.

Involving business leaders

The involvement of business and industry is particularly important: to ensure that workers are paid a living wage, to consider innovative solutions for workplace training or childcare on site and to advocate with government for policies conducive to a living wage. Research and best practices, again, form the foundation of a compelling business case. Community, particularly business, buy-in for the Plan to End Homelessness was cemented by data: \$100,000 per homeless person to maintain the status quo versus \$35,000 to house and support that same person.

The collective impact model

While collaboration between agencies and government at various levels has improved, there is still progress to be made. REACH Edmonton shows what can be achieved through meaningful collaboration. The political will exists in Edmonton right now; there is a shared agenda; a backbone organization for poverty elimination would provide the impetus for action.

Defining success

The reality is that there is no straight line to employment: a person may need support getting a job, and then further support in keeping that job. Or help in picking themselves up and starting again if that job doesn't work out. So measuring outcomes, defining success, may involve a complex formula.

Building on programs that work

Examples might include *Empower You*, as financial literacy is critical. *Women Building Futures* is a model that could be duplicated and tailored for specific groups.

3. Poverty and health

Dealing with the whole person

The social determinants of health make it clear that each individual's health is dependent on a complex web of issues. Therefore an approach that places each person at the centre of the services they need, specific to the issues they face, is fundamental. The difficulty is in breaking down systemic barriers to truly allow that approach to emerge.

Investing in prevention

Ensuring people's wellbeing means thinking broadly. Some of that is already happening in Edmonton with, for example:

- Free library cards
- Outreach workers in libraries
- Mobile mental health programs

Prevention includes investments in well-planned communities with good transit access and mixed housing – communities that encourage social connections and relationships.

Accessing basic needs

These are multiple:

- Dental and vision care: most families living in poverty don't have extended benefits.
- Mental health supports: it can take families up to a year to access mental health programs for their child in need.
- Prescriptions: the cost is often just too high.
- Medical care: an ID is necessary at a Medicentre – some people who are homeless don't have an ID. Edmontonians who come here as refugees are no longer funded for healthcare.
- Affordable housing: vacancy rates are low, rents are increasing.
- Healthy lifestyles: community sports programs, fitness or rec centre passes, are usually beyond the means of a family living in poverty.
- Nutrition: healthy food choices aren't always affordable.
- Resources for school: supplies, necessary technology and books are expensive. That means that kids living in poverty go to school disadvantaged.

Changing perceptions

Many people living in poverty live with shame, isolated, on the margins of society. They feel that others are intolerant of poverty and homelessness. NIMBY'ism is still an issue in Edmonton. Some participants felt that there is a need for public education on the realities of poverty, to increase understanding of what it would take to give people the tools they'd like to build on their own resources – and to ensure Edmontonians understand how eager their fellow community members are to use those tools to lift themselves out of poverty.

4. Shifting the conversation

Building on momentum

A significant amount of work is already under way in re-thinking the way that we approach poverty. The social sector has been strengths based for some time, and front line workers have already shifted the conversation they have with their clients. Now is the time to begin moving that conversation out into the mainstream, particularly into the business community, and encourage people to think of the role they can play in leading social change. It cannot just be a government or not-for-profit responsibility. Poverty simulations are a great way to encourage people to confront the realities of living in poverty.

Telling the right story

Belief in the goal of ending poverty is a powerfully mobilising message – it inspires confidence that change is possible. Sharing the stories of what people experiencing poverty are able to achieve, given the resources, is inspiring, and motivates others to join the effort.

Language is important in telling the story: joining the movement to end poverty means *investing* in our community. *Prevention* is as important as intervention – helping Edmontonians to understand the importance of supporting those living on the edge before they fall over the precipice.

The return on investment

Exploring the costs of poverty compared to the price of intervention adds weight to the narrative. The discussion group reminded us here of Dr. John Rooke's example of the young mom who was \$10 short to fill a prescription, ended up in an ambulance on the way to emergency and her children were taken into care. An ambulance, a hospital bed, foster care all cost significantly more than the \$10 which could have avoided the crisis.

Social policy rooted in investment involves long term thinking, participants said. We have seen in our city that this kind of thinking does work with REACH Edmonton and the Plan to End Homelessness. Both of these initiatives provide lessons for approaches that achieve measurable results.

Expanding the conversation to the neighbourhood level

The permanent supportive housing debate in this city has shown that some Edmontonians resist solutions in their own neighbourhoods. Participants said that the onus is on us to reshape the conversation to build on Edmontonians' innate sense of community and discuss what truly *rich* communities might look like – where healthy social networks form the foundations.

5. Transit – getting around

Public transit as a priority

Over the last few years transit has clearly emerged as a political priority in the city:

- LRT is being expanded
- Donate-a-ride helps out some people living in poverty

- Security in off hours is good
- The transit security office links youth to social supports
- U-pass in partnership with the University of Alberta helps out students
- Predictive analytics address service needs, in particular around special events
- Good connections exist to the *core* of the city
- Buses are more accessible and multi-modal – with bike racks
- Passes are offered for families, people on low incomes and seniors

Affordability

There are still, however, many low-income families and youth who can't afford the fares; *Donate-a-ride* just doesn't cover the extent of the need. But many youth, in particular, have no option for getting around except by transit. This predicament guarantees criminal behaviour, and, by extension, criminalizes poverty, because there is no alternative to ticketing and fining somebody who is riding without a fare.

While some bus drivers are sympathetic to youth in need, others aren't. Their attitudes, in fact, sometime reflect the wider community attitude to poverty. The suggestion was made that if we were to divert some of the funds used to police transit into education for transit workers, youth might more effectively be directed to the supports they need with a multi-disciplinary response.

Low-income transit passes, funded through a tax levy, were also proposed as an option to consider.

Taking people where they need to go

Using transit to get to a job outside of the city core, particularly in the industrial areas, or at the other end of the city from where you live, is complicated and time-consuming. Getting to affordable grocery stores, usually on the periphery of the city, is also difficult. Participants talked about the overwhelming task for a mother with young children of getting to a grocery store and back with bags of groceries – particularly if that mother is new to the city and doesn't speak English.

Ideally transit should be an enabler – not a barrier. And it should enhance social inclusion, attracting everyone to use it, building community.

Conclusion

Many of the best practices that participants talked about are taking place here in Edmonton. In some instances it is a question, then, of taking what is working well and expanding on it.

The overarching goal of ending poverty, however, is an ambitious one. The importance of advocacy and lobbying with all orders of government surfaced throughout the discussion groups, because in many cases a wholesale policy shift will be necessary in creating the kind of change that participants talked about. Ending poverty ultimately involves addressing systemic barriers at multiple levels. Participants pointed out that agencies have begun to collaborate effectively around program delivery. That same level of cooperation would be useful in creating advocacy as a collective – one voice with impact.

All groups also talked about how to involve the business community in a meaningful way – defining what that looks like. In order to engage Edmontonians more broadly in the movement to end poverty, they said, we need leaders from multiple sectors. Participants welcomed the Mayor’s Task Force as a positive step in that direction.

Above all, the point was made repeatedly that many of the best solutions lie in communities. Aboriginal Edmontonians, new Edmontonians, young people all must be involved in surfacing solutions, their voices clearly reflected in decision making.

All participants in the symposium were clearly energized by Mayor Don Iveson’s determination to end poverty, hopeful that the goal is truly realistic, and determined to get on with the hard work involved in creating a road map under the leadership of the Task Force.

Updates from the Task Force’s work will be available at http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/eliminating-poverty-in-edmonton.aspx

Appendix 1: Symposium Agenda

Mayor's Symposium on Poverty

Thursday March 20 2014

Shaw Conference Centre, Salon 9/10 (lower level)

8:30 – 2:00 pm

AGENDA

8.30 – 9.00	Breakfast/ registration
9.00 – 9.10	Welcome
9.10 – 10.00	Mayor Don Iveson
10.00 – 10.20	Setting the context Anne Smith, President & CEO, United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
10.20 – 10.30	Break
10.30 – 11.30	Keynote speech Dr. John Rook, Interagency Council on Homelessness Basic Income Canada Network
11.30 – 12.15	Lunch
12.15 – 1.15	Breakout discussion groups
1.15 – 1.50	Report back from discussion groups
1.50 – 2.00	Closing

Appendix 2: List of participants

Vivian	Abboud	Government of Alberta
Mandie	Abrams	ECVO
Rob	Agostinis	
Jane	Alexander	Task Force Co-Chair
Erick	Ambtman	Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Kris	Andreychuk	City of Edmonton
Justin	Archer	Berlin Advertising & Public Relations, Task Force member
Carol	Aubee Girard	
Tesfaye	Ayalew	Africa Centre
Joan	Baker	YMCA Edmonton
Ratna	Basappa	Indo Canadian Association
Caitlin	Beaton	
Marjorie	Bencz	Edmonton Foodbank
Danisha	Bhaloo	Boys & Girls Club Big Brothers Big Sisters
Jeff	Bisanz	University of Alberta, Task Force member
Jane	Bisbee	Social Enterprise Fund
Lyll	Brenneis	City of Edmonton
Sandra	Bromley	iHuman
Gloria	Chalmers	
Kourch	Chan	E4C
Jeff	Chase	City of Edmonton
Yvonne	Chiu	Task Force Member
Linda	Cochrane	City of Edmonton
Heather	Collier	Alberta Human Services
Joan	Cowling	John Humphrey Centre for Peace & Human Rights
Tamara	Dabels	
Julian	Daly	Boyle Street Coop
Susanne	Debney	YESS
Joseph	Doucet	Task Force Member
Sarah	Eadie	Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Task Force member
Karen	Erickson	Native Counselling Services of Alberta
Bev	Esslinger	City of Edmonton - Councillor
Bruce	Fafard	Edmonton and District Labour Council
Peter	Faid	Community Services Consulting Ltd.
Roxanne	Felix-Mah	
Jacqueline	Foord	YMCA Edmonton
Jan	Fox	REACH Edmonton
Janine	Fraser	Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd.
Jay	Freeman	Edmonton Homeless Commission
Martin	Garber-Conrad	Edmonton Community Foundation

Ann	Goldblatt	Goldblatt Consulting
Jonna	Grad	Centre for Family Literacy
Cherene	Griffiths	
Kate	Gunn	City of Edmonton
Brian	Henderson	Edmonton and District Labour Council
Mark	Holmgren	Bissell Centre, Task Force member
Sandra	Huculak	ATB Financial, Task Force member
Eugene	Ip	NorQuest College, Task Force member
Jenny	Kain	City of Edmonton
Agnes	Kamela	Wecan Cooperative
Lindsay	Kelly	
Shahriyar	Khan	City of Edmonton
Kristin	Klein	Alberta Health Services
Donald	Langford	Metis Child and Family Services
Darlene	Lennie	Metis Capital Housing Corp
Tiffany	Linke-Boyko	Startup Edmonton, Task Force member
Mack	Male	
Pilar	Martinez	Edmonton Public Library
Maria	Mayan	University of Alberta, Task Force member
Don	Mayne	
Julia	McGarvey	Volunteer Youth Alberta
Susan	McGee	Homeward Trust Edmonton
Bob	McKeon	Catholic Archdiocese
Carmen	McNary	Dentons Canada LLP, Task Force member
Elaine	McPhee	NorQuest College
Janice	Melnychuk	Task Force Member
Jaimy	Miller	City of Edmonton
Bill	Moore-Kilgannon	Public Interest Alberta
Susan	Morrissey	Edmonton Social Planning Council
Jefferson	Movold	Wecan Cooperative
Lawrence	Muganga	Edmonton Multicultural Coalition
Alfred	Nikolai	Habitat for Humanity Edmonton
Christina	Nsaliwa	Edmonton Immigration Services Association
Ian	O'Donnell	Id Group
Peter	Ohm	City of Edmonton
Liz	O'Neill	Boys & Girls Club Big Brothers Big Sisters
Lucenia	Ortiz	City of Edmonton
Michael	Oshry	City of Edmonton - Councillor
Nick	Parkinson	YMCA of Northern Alberta
Nancy	Peterson	Edmonton Public Schools
Michael	Phair	
Sheena	Phillips	Metis Capital Housing Corp
Sandra	Prefontaine	Boys & Girls Club Big Brothers Big Sisters
Kathleen	Quinn	CEASE: Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation

Bavie	Sara	Boyle McCauley
Edgar	Schmidt	Concordia University College of Alberta
Christopher	Sikora	Alberta Health Services
Judy	Smith	City of Edmonton
Anne	Smith	United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
Christopher	Smith	
Amarjeet	Sohi	City of Edmonton - Councillor
Zahra	Somani	Task Force member
Rhonda	Spence	Enoch Wellness Centre
Barb	Spencer	E4C
Gordon	Stewart	City of Edmonton
Mary	Sturgeon	Make Something Edmonton
Bernadette	Swanson	Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women
Roger	Thomson	E4C
Allan	Undheim	United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
Renee	Vaugeois	John Humphrey Centre for Peace & Human Rights
Trish	Webb	City of Edmonton
Shan	Yang	City of Edmonton
Dilara	Yegani	A Centre for Immigrant Women
Wendy	Yewman	Edmonton & Area Child & Family Services
Sofia	Yaqub	Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities
Imtiaz	Zainul	Islamic Family & Social Services

Appendix 3: Keynote Address

The City that will End Poverty

John Rook, B.S.L., B.A., M.Div., D.Phil (Oxon)

The great Nelson Mandela once said, “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

Mr. Mayor and distinguished friends. It is an honour to be with you today and to see the excellent work being done in this great city. I have had the privilege of working in the field of homelessness and poverty including on the national scene where I was able to witness the development of provincial and municipal poverty strategies from NFLD to Alberta.

Solving poverty requires policy and strategy changes. It is the necessary, albeit a complicated next phase in your initiative. Such an initiative is always about people. In your 18 focus groups you did listen to people in poverty. You now know the categories. Now you must get the policy and strategy right. That is your current task.

Mr. Mayor, I have read the documents on poverty since you came to office. It is impressive that you are taking the lead here. Edmonton is so fortunate to have a mayor who is making poverty elimination a priority. I know with your bold leadership that Edmonton will be a city where poverty is not an enigma: a problem with no solution. Together you have outlined a clear vision, achievable goals and measurement tools. All of you working together will lead to a conclusion where poverty as we know it will be a thing of the past. Everyone should be able to live in dignity. Everyone should be able to live above the poverty line.

The newest document from the Tamarack institute quotes you as follows, “Many are afraid to tackle it. But I am not. I will elevate the profile of poverty elimination by bringing the weight of the Mayor’s office.”¹

Today, we will also focus on a single task. And in this hour together, one striking fact remains: in this brief hour 875 children will die in our world from poverty. A staggering and sobering fact.²

I grew up poor. My dad had childhood polio and lived with a deformed leg and a built up shoe. He never went to high school and he worked at a parts counter in an automotive business. He never drank a drop of alcohol, never smoked, he was the Sunday School superintendent, he found a home to buy for \$4,000. He loved my mom.

¹ Creating Shared Prosperity, 2014.

² <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>

Beside mom's bible on the kitchen table was a piece of paper with numbers on it. It was always there. When I got a bit older, one day I asked mom what it was. She told me it was our budget. "Would you like to see it?" she asked. Nodding yes, she sat beside me. At the top it said "Dad's pay" and beside that number it said \$37.50. Underneath were words with numbers beside. The first line said "Tithe: \$3.75." Below that were items like mortgage, food, milkman, and so on. The bottom line said, Children's Sunday school offering. In pencil was written 12¢. Mom told me that after all the bills were paid, whatever was left over the children could take to SS. I was born into a family of faith, love and respect. We never owned a car or television, we never had a vacation. We walked 3 miles each way to church twice on Sunday in all sorts of weather. We had patches on our clean clothes, we ate meals together. We each had a 5¢ library card. I remember my youth as happy. Our only poverty was economic.

The day after my birth, another but very different birth event was taking place, just outside the city of Halifax NS. A fourteen year old girl, who had been raped nine months before, was giving birth in a small rural cabin. Lots of people were there. The teenage girl had lived a horrible life and with this pregnancy coming to an end, it would get even worse. At 14 she was already a heavy drinker. After the final push, her friend put a slimy baby boy on her breast. She put her arm around him and gazed into his eyes. Overwhelmed, her coping skills pushed to the limits, she looked away, the story goes, and on the shelf beside her she saw her former comfort. Reaching out with her free hand, "Johnnie Walker" she exclaimed. She wanted a drink so bad. Her friend handed her the bottle and she drank deep. Holding both the baby and the bottle close to her breast, the baby had a name. "Johnnie Walker" "Johnnie Walker" she said over and over. That day was the beginning of Johnnie Walker's journey into poverty.³

\$37.50 a week... about \$16,000 a year in today's money. Thank God my dad didn't drink. Thank God my parents didn't have a mental illness. Thank God my dad had work. On that piece of paper it showed their mortgage at \$7.50 per week. It was modest but we had a home.

I met Johnnie Walker in a homeless shelter. It was a cool April morning and he was out for a smoke. I was checking security cameras with a few staff and he looked interested. I smiled at him and he stuck out his hand. "You the big boss?" he said. "I'm John. I work here" I said. One of the staff said, "Yup, he's the big boss." Johnnie Walker asked me if I ever talk to clients. I asked him what he needed and if he wanted to talk right then. "Sure" he said with a toothless grin. "Buy me a coffee!"

An hour later, I had heard most of his life story. I heard about his mom, how he got his name, and all about his growing up years. He told me about being raped by one of his mom's clients when he was about 5, how he would steal money from her purse, how he started drinking heavily around 8, how a foster dad smashed his thumb with a hammer (it didn't bend at the

³ I have not given you his last name to protect his identity.

joint now) and how he really wanted to be a chef. Like my dad, he had finished grade 8 but Johnnie Walker finished his Grade 8 in Juvenile Hall. He laughed when he said that in Juvenile Hall it was the only time he didn't play hooky! "If I told you why I was in, you probably wouldn't want to talk with me anymore," he said.

He told me about the men who abused his mom, who left her crying and refused to give her the money that she believed was rightfully hers. He told me about stealing from the wallets of men when they were with his mom so that they could buy food. He never took it all... just enough so that the man wouldn't miss it. He told me that he never had a proper toilet and clean clothes until he went to jail the first time. He told me about feeling worthless and sad during his growing up years and of never having any trustworthy guides through life.

"My name fits me man!" he said. "Most of my life I've been high." He told me about the Presbyterian priest who raped him when his mom thought he should sing in the boys' choir, the school teacher who broke his arm, the boss at a logging camp that struck him with a knife and left a 4 inch scar on his cheek. He told me about raping women, stealing to live, about doing time for armed robbery and forgery. He told me that this was the 23rd shelter he had lived in. He told me about being married for about 3 months and trying to clean up his life 20 years before. He told me he believed in a God, but he wasn't sure why.

I saw a book in his pocket. I asked him what he was reading and to my surprise, he pulled out a pocket sized copy of Karl Marx's Das Kapital. When I told him I'd read it, he lit up. "Makes good sense, doesn't it?" he exclaimed, hoping by the way he said it that I would agree with him. I asked him what he liked about the book. "Helps me understand rich bastards." He paused. "The Capitalist goal is to exploit."

I asked him what that meant. Johnnie Walker looked at me with a bit of annoyance. "Pretty simple," he said. "Capitalism is built on greed and exploitation." "If I'm a capitalist, then it is all about me. I will deny you an appropriate wage so that I can fill my pocket." "I only care about you if you can fill my pocket."

I waited.

"Let me tell you what happened to me once," said Johnnie Walker. "I was at cash corner [a place in Calgary where homeless people hang out and contractors drive by to find day workers] and a capitalist picked me up to do some drywalling." "How do you know he was a capitalist?" I said.

"He promised me \$10 an hour and I said OK." "When he dropped me off at the Mustard Seed that night, I had worked 9.5 hours." "He handed me \$75." "You are \$20 short," I said. "Don't think so my friend," he said. "You took a couple of smoke breaks and I drove you to the job and back." "You owe me time back for the smoke breaks and gas money."

“Capitalists! I took a couple of 10 minute smoke breaks, ate my bag lunch which I got at the shelter on my time, and he says *I stole time from him.*” “He’s a capitalist.” “He made a lot of money on the job, did almost no work, and found a way to put \$20 of my money into his pocket.”

On May 13th 2008 I had a really nice birthday cake and small party with my family. The next day, Johnnie Walker’s birthday, I took some cake to the homeless shelter to share his birthday with him. He had checked out. I never saw him again.

All stories of poverty have common themes but also very many differences. It is some of the differences that show us the way out. You can guess what these might be, but I want to talk briefly about one you might not guess. It is **Relational Intelligence**.

Relational Intelligence is the fusion of social skills and relational wellbeing. It’s being clever about how we love and influence others and being intelligent in how we generally engage within relationships. Relational Intelligence can further be described as the ability to learn, understand, and comprehend knowledge as it relates to interpersonal dynamics.⁴

Johnnie Walker would score low on the relational intelligence scale. He trusted no one, and had no friends. He never if anyone ever loved him. He was suspicious of everyone always assuming that an encounter would result in more abuse and/or pain.

I grew up poor too but I would score much higher on the relational scale. I had what Johnnie Walker didn’t: loving parents, strong kinship attachments, a connected church community, and a great deal of personal praise from family and community for who I was and what I could become. My family knew every family on our street and I felt comfortable in their homes. We had community: relational intelligence.

So what does this have to do with Edmonton and the task at hand?

Edmonton has lots of Johnnie Walkers. Your statistics show that in Edmonton:

- 1 in 9 live in poverty
- 28,000 of these are children
- The teen pregnancy rate is 10 times higher for low income than high income teens
- 16,800 of these children live in a household where one or more persons work full-time
- 150,000 Edmontonians have not graduated from high school
- 1 in 5 Albertans work for less than \$15 an hour
- Over 2000 Edmontonians are homeless
- 60% report a mental illness
- The aboriginal population is significantly overrepresented in both poverty and homeless numbers⁵

⁴ Adapted from <http://www.stevesaccone.com/blog/faq-on-relational-intelligence>

⁵ Adapted from http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/EdmontonPovertyFactSheet.pdf

Edmonton is full of Johnnie Walkers.

And many of them would agree with Mother Teresa that “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

We know what is wrong with our world. We know poverty will make you sick. We know that the income gap is unethical. We know that most people work from a deficit base. We know that most poor people want to work and many work harder and put in longer hours than we do.

What then are some solutions that this municipality can consider?

This afternoon you will be breaking into groups which you can see on your agenda. Let me add some points for you to consider as we deliberate.

Some of these categories require federal and/or provincial policy changes. For those items, you must become passionate and articulate advocates. In your reports there is mention of supporting a federal poverty reduction plan. Good work is being done by the Caledon Institute, Canada Without Poverty, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Citizens for Public Justice and the Basic Income Canada Network. Together we are always stronger. Work with these organizations.

At the federal level, examine party policy. At the recent Liberal Policy convention, they introduced the concept of a Basic Income.⁶ This only came into being because people believed it was important. People who believed in it made it a major issue in their public education plan. Whether the issue you want addressed federally is basic income, health transfer payments, or a national housing strategy, passionate, articulate advocacy is necessary.

The same is true at the provincial level. When I first began working in the homeless field years ago, the talk was about how many more shelters do we need and how many more can we build? Fourteen years ago, the federal and provincial governments put major funding into two large shelters in Calgary. Now, we have a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. No more capital is being targeted for shelters. One smaller shelter in Calgary has closed. Another is being converted to Single Residence Occupancy suites. The concept of Housing First receives provincial capital and operational funding. Four ministries [Human Services, Municipal Affairs, Health and Justice] all sit at the Interagency Council on Homelessness. In the past 14 years, people in this room have educated the government to a better, more dignified way to care for vulnerable Albertans.

⁶ See Resolution 100 at <http://www.liberal.ca/100-priority-resolution-creating-basic-annual-income-designed-implemented-fair-economy/>

So put on your thinking caps as we look for solutions! In a session like this it is more important **how** you think than **what** you think! Climb outside the box of your day jobs and here we go!

CHILDREN & YOUTH. [aka, Prevention]

About 10 years ago I was Director of Children and Family Services for the SA in Calgary. At that time we built the Healthy Families program and connected to AHVNA⁷ which is located here in Edmonton. AHVNA is the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association and connects families who have a vulnerable baby to appropriate supports. They do training for parents through the Nobody's Perfect⁸ program and through intensive in home support. AHVNA trains provincial agency staff in motivational interviewing and parenting programs. Their goal is ensuring vulnerable families are strengthened and resilient. Improved, healthier parent-child relationships are the marks of the program's success. And while they don't use the terminology of relational intelligence that I used earlier, it is relational well-being that is being impacted.

From their website we read,

"Every week I learn a little more about my baby's development, nutrition and my own health. I've learned coping skills that helped me stay sober for another week. I get connected to a web of resources so never again do I have to feel alone."

Families that participate in the program may face multiple challenges that place their children at risk and prevent them from developing to their full potential including some of or all of the following:

- low income
- social isolation
- no family or community support
- low education
- family history of abuse and neglect
- day to day living struggles
- age and experience
- substance abuse
- mental health issues

Jayne Forster, who I hired to work in that program in Calgary many years ago, is now the Manager of the program. Here is what she says,

⁷ See www.ahvna.org

⁸ See <http://nobodysperfect.ca/>

*We do need to **mother the mothers**.... We are the voice of the child for mothers who truly can't hear the call yet.*

A beautiful quote!

We know that intensive home visitation leads to success. Think about what might have happened if Johnnie Walker's mom had been given a home visitor those many years ago. Lives might have been changed. **Relational Intelligence**.

There is a story from the United Kingdom that illustrates this so well.

A young girl and her mother got off the train in London. They had needed to leave Liverpool and here they were, alone and afraid. The little girl put her hand in her mom's and looked up and smiled.

Seeing them standing there was a Salvation Army officer in uniform. He was an outreach worker and was about to take the train home. Feeling compelled to approach them he asked if he could assist. The mother had a brief conversation with him and he remarked, "So you are homeless." The girl, hanging tightly to her mother, replied, "No sir, we aren't homeless. We just haven't found a place to put it yet."⁹

So for those of you in this group, I believe prevention strategies are the avenue you will want to explore. Look at programs like AHVNA, Success by Six, and at the work of Dr. Gina Browne from McMaster on recreation. If you don't know of Gina's work, then ask me and we can explore it in the brainstorming. We know that children can **succeed** when their parents have good income, when they have a decent education, when they have quality health care.

LIVING IN POVERTY WHILE WORKING (aka, Income & Employment)

Alberta's minimum wage is \$9.95 an hour. That is \$20,696 annually. Well below the poverty line. That means that I should pay no more than \$569 a month for my accommodation if we use the 1/3rd rule. With these figures in mind, I decided to see if I could find a cheap apartment in Edmonton. I found one for \$625 on Kijiji but when I called, it was no longer available. Then I found a bachelor suite with Capital Region Housing Corporation for \$575 but having to pay a \$500 deposit could exclude someone with low income. And I must say the task of filling out pages and pages of paperwork which I needed to fill out to apply was daunting.

Having a job in Edmonton does not guarantee that you will be out of poverty or be able to afford accommodation. This form of poverty is **Income Deprivation**. Years ago there were cries from all across Canada to make the minimum wage a living wage. My good friend, Mark

⁹ Story told to me by Colonel Doug Moore.

Chamberlain former chair of the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable, was here in your city three years ago and challenged Edmontonians to think about living wage. He noted that 68% of employed Albertans making the minimum wage are over 20 years of age, and 64% making minimum wage earners are women. Wage alone is a clear poverty trap. Mark also says that if you refuse to give workers at the bottom a raise, then why do you give those at the top, especially the CEO, a raise?

Plato and Aristotle had a conversation a long time ago in which they debated whether the top person should make 4 or 5 times more than the bottom person. JP Morgan, the so called robber baron, thought 20 times should be the difference. The Mondragon cooperative experiment in Spain has an average of 5:1 times.¹⁰

Now let's talk about a Canadian situation. A Canadian bank reported recently that its CEO (ONLY!) received a 1% increase in 2013 over his 2012 earnings. That was a mere \$93,000 raise! Now I understand that this is an important job and there is lots of risk involved. That being said, he earned \$1.5M in salary and with a cash bonus of \$3.12M and shares of \$4.68M, his total package was \$9.3M. That means he made 4,471.15 per hour!

I looked on line¹¹ and discovered that the pay range for a bank teller in that same bank is \$10.05 to \$14.64 per hour or \$20,944 to \$30,690 per year. There are benefits and a few weeks' vacation added on. But the ratio of difference from the bottom to top is an astounding 1:445!

This sort of income inequity should be viewed as completely unacceptable to us. The work of Wilkinson and Pickett¹² demonstrated that such income inequality leads to all sorts of social ills. On CNN we even have the staunch republican, Newt Gingrich saying, "I think every Republican should be concerned about inequality. I think when you have places where there are billionaires living in a city with 22,000 homeless children, anybody who has a sense of decency has to be concerned."¹³

I support a basic income. Switzerland will soon vote on a universal basic income. It will be funded by their social insurance system and is two-fold. First, all adult citizens will receive a monthly income of 2,500 francs (\$2,800). Second, they will limit executive compensation via a 1:12 ratio. So if I am the bottom paid employee at \$10 an hour, the CEO is limited to \$120 an hour which calculates to a fairly nice annual salary of \$249,600.¹⁴

Detractors have said that a Guaranteed Annual Income is not affordable, and is a disincentive to work. Neither of these arguments hold water. Detractors should look at the calculations of our conservative Senator Hugh Segal who determined that a basic income for Canada could save us

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mondragon_Corporation

¹¹ http://www.payscale.com/research/CA/Job=Bank_Teller/Hourly_Rate

¹² Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger

¹³ <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/07/260564596/republicans-pipe-in-about-poverty-and-inequality>

¹⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-swiss-pay-idUSBRE99300620131004>

billions each year in poverty costs.¹⁵ Consider the evidence of Dr. Evelyn Forget on the Mincome experiment conducted by the federal and Manitoba government in the 1970s. Dr. Forget discovered that basic income was an **incentive** to work. Basic income in the project in Dauphin MB produced a higher rate of high school graduates, less police involvement, few trips to the hospital. It did produce a higher divorce rate as a result of women generally having the means to exit abusive situations.¹⁶ What might have become of Johnnie Walker had this been available for his mom.

And for other detractors, it should be remembered that our basic income for seniors, which we call Old Age Security, is the envy of the world.

In the last provincial budget we learned that a Social Innovation Endowment Fund [SIEF] was being developed. It will be an endowment fund of \$1B in 2015 taken from our \$19B Heritage Trust Funds. The interest at 4.5% will produce annual revenue of \$23M. Some say this is modest, **but it will be available forever.**

The government website says:

*The \$1 billion Social Innovation Endowment will deliver on the goals, vision and principles, defined by Alberta's [Social Policy Framework](#) and will strengthen and renew Alberta's social and cultural sector.*¹⁷

This is good news. I went on record last fall in a speech to the Interagency Council on Homelessness suggesting that \$5B of the Heritage Trust fund would solve the problem of the housing crisis in Alberta in short order. \$5B invested at a 4.5% will produce close to \$100M annually. In the first year, **all** repairs needed in **all** social housing including seniors care facilities, could be brought up to code. From then on, housing could be built across the province in along a strategy designed to match the current need and future growth. This would be at no additional cost to taxpayers and the work it would create would provide additional taxes flowing into the treasury. If Edmonton received 1/3rd of the money annually, that would bring in \$30M annually for housing. At \$200,000 a door, that would provide additional funds for 150 units of affordable housing every single year! I believe that we need to pressure the provincial government to entrench a Housing Endowment in legislation so that housing can be provided forever.¹⁸

For those of you in this group, think about how Basic Income and the use of endowments could change the landscape.

¹⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/hugh-segal/guaranteed-annual-income_b_3037347.html,
<http://www.niagaraadvance.ca/2013/11/21/segal-cdn-annual-income-a-solution-to-poverty>,
<http://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2012/12/scrapping-welfare/>

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mincome>

¹⁷ <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/social-innovation-fund.html>

¹⁸ Interagency Council on Homelessness, December 3, 2013. Not published dinner speech.

POVERTY AND HEALTH

There is no universal definition of poverty. There is an emerging consensus that poverty should be viewed as a **violation of human dignity** arising from a deprivation of access to resources, capabilities, freedom of choice necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living.

According to the UN World Summit for Social Development, poverty is characterised by and arises from lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services;

This leads to: increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion.

Poverty is also characterised by a lack of participation in decision-making in civil, social and cultural life.¹⁹

What I like about this definition is that it is not only about **income poverty** or **income deprivation**, but sees one's standard of living to include poor housing, poor education, poor health, discrimination, vulnerability and social exclusion. This **is** a human rights issue.

There are obvious associations between homelessness and ill health. Ill health is both a cause and consequence of homelessness and poverty. For example, ill health can cause homelessness by reducing a person's capacity to obtain or maintain an adequate income. Similarly, mental health problems can cause family fragmentation and loss of the social and economic supports necessary to maintain stable housing. Identified health-related consequences of homelessness include low self-esteem, social isolation and mental health problems. According to recent studies, homeless people experience significantly higher rates of death, disability and chronic illness than the general population. Identified chronic health issues for people experiencing homelessness include blood borne viruses (particularly Hepatitis B and C), skin infections, cardiovascular disease, depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, malnutrition, dental decay and tooth loss.²⁰

An anti-poverty strategy that includes a targeted and comprehensive health care program is critical for people experiencing poverty. The Alex in Calgary delivers portable healthcare via a health bus.²¹ They also have a portable dental bus. These are staffed by doctors and nurses and make the rounds to shelters and schools. This is a good example of an effort to reach marginalized people. The Housing First model fits with all of this perfectly!

¹⁹ Adapted the *UN World Summit on Social Development* 1995 [quoted on page 1 on Engaging Edmontonians to Thrive and Prosper, Jan 2014]

²⁰ *UN World Summit on Social Development* 1995

²¹ <http://www.thealex.ca/programs-services/health/health-bus-program/>

Denis Raphael, the author of Poverty and Policy in Canada,²² makes the point over and over that deprivation in childhood will make you unhealthier as an adult even if you work hard and achieve middle class status. Another interesting thing he says is that if all people were middle class or higher, we would save 22% of our healthcare budget. He continues that men who make less than \$30,000 have a 72% greater threat of contracting Type II diabetes. He also shows that crime, school failure and health are all directly related to inadequate income. We focus on the **behaviours** such as crime when we should be focusing on the **life factors**. It is simply a fact that countries with good incomes have better health, lower crime and shorter prison sentences. On a radio show recently, Raphael said that the **solution to poverty** was threefold: Income, Income, Income. So the way we end poverty is to prevent it in the first place, not by putting doctors, psychiatrists, training programs into homeless shelters, but by ensuring that people from birth to death have adequate income and social supports.

SHIFTING THE CONVERSATION [or looking beyond...]²³

The story is told of two groups of monks in the 12th century. One group wanted to build a cathedral. The other group wanted to plan a forest. The forest monks worked hard planting thousands of trees. The cathedral monks hired workers: architects, stone masons and laborers to start the build. The cathedral we are told, took several hundreds of years to build. Those monks, the architect and the stone masons never saw the task completed.

In the 18th century the cathedral monks noticed that some of the beams in the ceiling were beginning to rot and decay. They knew that for the cathedral to survive the next 600 years or so the beams would need to be replaced. Looking out the windows of the cathedral they could see what was now an amazing forest of 600-year-old trees. The cathedral monks went to the forest to speak with the forest monks to ask if they could use some of the trees in their repair project. The head monk smiled and said knowingly, “We knew you would come!”

Cathedral Thinking is described as “**A far reaching vision, a well thought out blueprint, and a shared commitment to long term implementation.**”

Cathedral Thinking involves the greater collective coming together with a shared vision for a better future. Collaborative advanced planning and the determination to build something strong and lasting. Building a world class city is no different. “Like cathedrals, world cities aren’t formed overnight,” says Rick Antonson, former President & CEO of Tourism Vancouver.²⁴ Shaping Edmonton into a world class city will take a lot of work – work based on a vision beyond our own times. And that means applying great forethought, taking stock of our resources and continuing forward even if we don’t experience the end result.

²² Dennis Raphael, Poverty in Canada: Implications for Health and Quality of Life

²³ For the concept of Cathedral Thinking, see www.catherdralthinking.com

²⁴ <http://catherdralthinking.com/cathedral-thinking-cities/>

The world is seeing the greatest movement of people to cities in history, creating both immense challenges and opportunities. 7 out of 10 now live in cities. It is the age of city building. How we build — and rebuild our cities — will define our global future. And it means we must embrace new technologies, new business partnerships, new ideas and innovative systems to design our future economy, our lives and our environment.

As we shift the conversation to forward thinking, we must test new thoughts and try new things. Cathedral thinking is troubleshooting and an integral tool related to **prevention**. Cathedral thinking means that our grandchildren and their grandchildren will reap the benefits of our decisions. Just like the stone masons who worked on the Cathedral who were long dead when future generations worshipped in it. This should be a major part of our poverty plan.

Adding new flexibilities in the approach to poverty solutions, take the words of the Alberta College of Social Workers, Public Interest Alberta, Edmonton Social Planning Council seriously when they say:

We therefore call on Albertans to:

- 1. Challenge our elected leaders to commit to a real comprehensive plan that will result in reducing the growing disparity in our province.*
- 2. Support the many organizations and people in our community who are working to address the root causes of poverty.*
- 3. Encourage others to speak out and become champions for achieving this promise.*

The task before us is tough work. It is easy to burn out and to give up. Care for each other. Honor each other's work like Homeward Trust did this week with the ROOPH awards and like we do in Calgary with the Arthur Smith awards.

And be proud that you live in this amazing city with a Mayor who gets it. Progressive thinking will change Edmonton. And you will be a world class example of a city where every citizen is valued and no one lives in poverty. I am convinced that you will do this. You will be the first city to eradicate poverty!

Finally, I'll compare the task before as is very similar to that of slavery. It needed to be eradicated not managed. President Abraham Lincoln, on the brink of Civil War and fighting the near 100-year long tradition of slavery in the United States dating back to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who by the way owned slaves, looked his situation and the future directly in the eye and said:

*"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present and future. As our circumstances are new, we must **think anew and act anew.**"²⁵*

²⁵ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamlin121071.html>

And so must we. We must do this for our Johnnie Walkers, our cities, our province, our world. For their sake, look at this **old issue** in a **new way**, not simply for today but to make our **Tomorrows** free of poverty, free of homelessness.

We cannot expect new generations to fly with wings clipped by poverty.

Since I began these remarks only a few minutes ago, 875 children died in our world because of the effects on poverty on their precious lives.