

- The Calgary Downtown Association launches a campaign urging Calgarians to donate money to local charities, rather than giving spare change to panhandlers
- The Alberta government announced planned distribution of a projected \$1.4 billion to individual Albertans in the form of a "prosperity bonus" cheque
- The 2005 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey states the average hourly wage in the province has climbed to \$21.39 per hour.

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VCC in motion!

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AUTUMN 2005

VCC releases StatsCan low-wage data

New figures from **Statistics Canada** (StatsCan) challenge previous assumptions about low-wage earners in Calgary. And Calgarians are beginning to take notice.

VCC released the 2004 StatsCan figures, showing more than 112,000 Calgarians earn under \$10 per hour. "Nearly one in four working Calgarians is earning below StatsCan's low income guideline for an

individual with no dependants in Calgary," says VCC manager **Ramona Johnston**. "Of those, nearly half (54,600) are over the age of 25, and more than 34,000 of them are women."

The VCC release has sparked lively discussion in the media, prompting articles, editorials, and letters in the Calgary Herald, Dose magazine, and Fast Forward weekly. "We've had some critical feedback, but for the

most part the coverage supports our call for action on the issue of low wages," says Johnston.

Johnston believes debate over the most appropriate method for measuring poverty can be used to minimize or excuse the levels of poverty in our community. It's a form of denial. "It doesn't matter whether there are 100,000 Calgarians living in poverty, or

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Fair Fares implementation progresses

Calgary Transit's Low-income Transit Pass program, launched August 1 2005, has made great strides, but still has more work ahead.

As of September 16, over 2,200 applications had been received for the first phase of the low-income pass program, aimed at provincial AISH recipients. Transit anticipates receiving about 5,000 applications in total during this phase.

Once the program is expanded to all low-income Calgarians, projected for January 2006, Transit expects sizeable interest from more than 36,000 eligible Calgarians earning below 75 per cent of StatsCan's

low-income cut off line.

The timetable for initial launch this year and expansion early next year is ambitious. City of Calgary and Transit administration and staff put in long hours to get the program up-and-running in only three weeks between City Council approval and the Aug. 1 deadline. The strains put on systems not designed to handle a program of this nature led to steep learning curves throughout the City's structure. Efforts continue to develop new methods, or adapt processes already in use for the larger implementation in January.

VCC's Fair Fares Action Team, led by co-chairs Col-

leen Huston and Bonnie Pacaud, congratulates the Land Use Planning and Transportation Steering Committee, City Council and all our partners at The City of Calgary and Calgary Transit who have, in their words, "worked a miracle." Many individuals and departments contributed to a courageous and aggressive implementation plan. The City's next challenge is further research into how the cost of the program will be covered. The Fair Fares Team will continue to be involved in the effort. If you wish to contribute to the team's work, please contact Ramona Johnston at VCC (see page four for contact information).

VCC Living Wage efforts forge ahead

This quarter has seen many exciting developments in our work to make earning a Living Wage a reality for Calgarians. VCC had an opportunity to share our vision for the future of employment in Alberta with Alberta Human Resources and Employment in their review of the *Employment Standards Code*. An ad hoc committee of dedicated VCC volunteers collaborated to create a VCC response and a guide for others to use in responding to the AHRE Review. We would like to congratulate the ad hoc committee on a job well done and to thank the community for taking the time to make submissions.

VCC has also continued its collaboration with The City of Calgary and their partners, meeting with City representatives and the No Sweat Coalition to discuss how to make Living Wage a part of future City policies. Currently, The City is in the planning stage of their "No Sweat" Sustainable Environmental and Ethical Procurement Policy. If funding for further policy development is approved by Council in November, VCC hopes to participate in further exploring the possibility of including Living Wage provisions.

VCC has also been working to engage the business community in poverty reduction and Living Wage.

Jessica Leech, VCC's Living Wage Coordinator, recently sat as a panel member discussing the issues at the Provincial Conference for Business Revitalization Zones. Additionally, VCC co-convenor MCC Employment Development (MCC-ED) is in the process of developing a Social Purchasing Portal. This Portal will use a website to help connect businesses who want to purchase socially responsible goods and services with suppliers who pay a Living Wage to their employees. VCC is excited to work with MCC-ED on this initiative, further inspiring community support for a Living Wage in Calgary.

"Welfare can and should be reformed to improve work incentives for social assistance recipients. But it is not a substitute for a well-defined set of social policies, and when it's called upon to play that role, no one is well-served."
- Don Drummond, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, TD Bank Financial Group. Canada News Wire, Sept. 2005

VCC Annual Reflection sets direction

On Oct. 5 2005, VCC partners and volunteers gathered to share experiences and insights gained in our efforts so far, and to further develop strategies defining how we will continue to work together to reduce poverty in Calgary. Joining the local team were rep-

resentatives from The Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement. Findings from the session will form the basis for a strategic plan guiding the work of our Action Teams over the next 12 months.



Calgarians have a right to full participation in the family, social, economic and political life of their communities. Poverty limits this full participation.

StatsCan low-wage data

(Continued from page 1)

"only" 1,000. It's intolerable for anyone, teen, middle-aged, or senior, to live in fear and uncertainty."

Johnston is pleased with the recent public and media attention. "Now that we have credible facts on low wages in Calgary, we can think about how it affects all of us. The added costs to our social services, education, and health care systems come out of our tax dollars each year. If we want Calgary to be the first choice for people to invest, live, work and raise their kids, we need to take steps to reduce poverty in our community."

Calgarians can carry on our proud tradition of volunteerism and involvement by lending our talents to a service agency, by paying our employees fair wages and providing adequate benefits and by working with governments to make sure everyone has an opportunity to thrive in a prosperous Calgary. VCC encourages all Calgarians to exercise their power to make our community even stronger.

Did You Know?

- In Canada, the most widely used measures of poverty are Statistic Canada’s Low Income Cut-Offs or “LICOs”
- Based on data collected through a survey of family expenditures, Statistics Canada has determined that low-income families end up spending a larger share of that income on necessities than the average Canadian family
- According to Statistics Canada, a family spending 20% more than the average family on necessities lives in “straitened circumstances”
- LICOs are often used as an income threshold, and those who make an income below the LICO are said to be living in poverty
- An individual in Calgary with no dependants and working full time all year would need to earn \$9.78 per hour in order to reach the LICO

2004 Low-Income Cutoffs for Canadian Cities with 500,000+ Persons	
Family Unit Size	LICO
1 person	\$20,337
2 persons	\$25,319
3 persons	\$31,126
4 persons	\$37,791
5 persons	\$42,862
6 persons	\$48,341
7+ persons	\$53,821

“(Canada’s social services are) worse off now than... when we wrote the 1948 declaration of human rights... Social programs are in more jeopardy than they were ten years ago, and perhaps in more jeopardy than they were 40 years ago, and yet we’ve got vastly more resources.”
 - Armine Yalnizyan, economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Canadian Press, August 2005

Calgary’s forgotten children have nowhere to go

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Calgary children as young as 12 years old will have no place to call “home” tonight, and no easy way to find relief from their dilemma. That’s the conclusion of a new report released in September by McMan Youth, Family and Community Services.

The report, titled “Seeking Sanctuary: an exploration of the realities of youth home-



lessness in Calgary, 2005,” relates the experiences of 354 youth under the age of 18 forced by poverty, abuse, or neglect to live on the streets. These children, and the hundreds or thousands more the researchers could not make contact with, soon fall prey to fear, hunger, and despair.

Poverty is a major contributor to the problem. According to the report, “Inadequate housing, overcrowding, frequent moves, poor nutrition, lack of developmental opportunities, lack of child care, poor medical and dental care, low parental skill levels, lack of recreational opportunities and the overarching stigma that comes with being poor are all aspects of poverty that impact youth and increase their risk of homelessness...” Those interviewed made frequent reference to feeling lost, abandoned, or outcast.

Once trapped in life on the

street, it’s difficult to find a way out. While there are many youth-serving agencies in the city, children have little or no experience dealing with complex, overlapping and confusing systems. They rely on inaccurate and incomplete advice from other street kids, usually without satisfactory results.

The key to recovery goes beyond housing, employment or food. In order to grow up to become contributing adults in our society, they need social skills and habits they can’t learn on the street. Their sense of abandonment and desperation leads many to survival through illegal and dangerous activities including panhandling or the sex or drug trades.

The study makes 37 recommendations for action to combat the problem. To view the entire study or find out how you can become involved in helping Calgary’s forgotten children, visit: www.mcman.ab.ca

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Vibrant Communities is a Pan-Canadian Learning Community convened and supported by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement, and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. Nationally, Vibrant Communities provides a process and a working environment where diverse community leaders from fifteen communities across Canada work together to share ideas, practices and policies that strengthen their community-based poverty reduction initiatives. For more information, please visit:

www.vibrantcommunities.ca

VCC NEEDS YOU!

VCC is looking for volunteers for the following initiatives:

Learning and Evaluation
Resource Development and Finance
Communications
Living Wage
Fair Fares
Standard Eligibility Testing

Vibrant Communities Calgary Volunteers

Cathy Abel, *RBC Financial*
Amy Alexander, *City of Calgary*
Mary Jane Amey, *City of Calgary*
Julie Ball, *Calgary Chamber of Commerce*
Yolanda Bilger, *Calgary Economic Development*
Andrea Blakie, *Calgary Health Region*
Donna Bonertz, *Calgary Drop-in Centre*
Casey Boodt, *Canadian Outcomes Research Institute*
Terry Bullick, *Bullick Writing & Communications*
Greg Campbell, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*
Debra Carnat, *Alberta Children's Hospital*
Lisa Caton, *MCC Employment Development*
David Chakravorty, *Canadian Mental Health Association*
Gordon Christie, *Calgary and District Labour Council*
Caren Clouston, *Calgary Family Services*
John Currie, *Calgary Homeless Foundation*
Tasha Dobrovolsky, *EnCana Corporation*
Michael Fitzpatrick, *Take A Break Catering & Fine Foods*
Richard Fries, *MCC Employment Development*
Lorie Friesen, *The Calgary Children's Initiative*
Audrey Gardner, *Bow Valley College*
Susan Gillies, *Women's Centre of Calgary*
Tanya Grierson, *Calgary Health Region*

Stephen Hansen, *Calgary Transit*
Elliot Hewitt, *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*
Walter Hossli, *MCC Employment Development*
Samantha Hubka, *Community Volunteer*
Colleen Huston, *Disability Action Hall*
Patricia Jones, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*
Noel Keough, *Sustainable Calgary*
Paula King, *Anadarko Canada Corporation*
Lynda Laughlin, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*
Carol Lawson, *Public Interest Alberta*
Sylvia Loewen, *Calgary Health Region*
Jeff Loomis, *Federation of Calgary Communities*
Loraine Lundquist, *Calgary Housing Company*
Chris MacFarlane, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Laura MacKinnon, *Community Volunteer*
Bob McInnis, *Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids*
David McInnis, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*
Bill McIntyre, *Governors' Council*
Neil McKinnon, *Calgary and District Labour Council*
Donna McLeod / Varina Russell, *The Calgary Children's Initiative*
Donna McPhee, *Alberta Coalition Against Poverty*
John Merriman, *City of Calgary*
Tim Moro, *Ipsos Reid*

Tanya Oliva, *Bell Canada*
Bonnie Pacaud, *Community Volunteer*
Rev. John Pentland, *Hillhurst United Church*
Wanda Randles, *YWCA of Calgary*
Fred Robertson, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*
Jenny Saarinen, *MCC Employment Development*
Karoline Sandhurst, *Calgary Food Bank*
Yvonne Schmitz, *United Way Board Member*
Paula Shaw, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*
Luke Shwart, *Calgary Health Region*
Bev Sheckter, *Jewish Family Service*
Maureen Sheppard, *Innovation Inc.*
Jackie Sieppert, *University of Calgary*
Carly Smith, *The KidSport Society of Calgary*
Carmen Sparrow, *MCC Employment Development*
Tim Stock-Bateman, *CUPS Community Health Centre*
John te Linde, *City of Calgary*
Billie Thurston, *University of Calgary*
Lori Villebrun, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Brenda Wadey, *Sunrise Community Link Resource Centre*
Stephanie Won, *City of Calgary*
Stephen Wright, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Joy Zerke, *City of Calgary*

