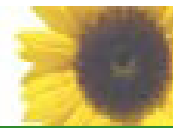


IN THE
NEWS:

- Premier Klein has announced an increase in Alberta's minimum wage to \$7.00
- The City of Calgary is examining the feasibility of a discounted transit pass program for low-income Calgarians
- An announcement regarding changes to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) Program is expected soon

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VCC in action!

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2005

Vibrant Communities Calgary turns 2!

Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) is celebrating its 2nd birthday with the inaugural edition of this quarterly newsletter.

VCC is a diverse multi-sectoral group of local community leaders working collaboratively to reduce poverty in Calgary. We are part of a national network of communities across Canada who share ideas, practices and policies that strengthen their community-based poverty reduction initiatives.

VCC exists to ignite new community action to create and implement bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through col-

laboration and education.

VCC believes all Calgarians have a right to full participation in the family, social, economic and political life of their communities. We recognize that poverty limits this full participation.



VCC develops and supports creative and innovative poverty reduction strategies in Calgary, knowing that combined diversity of experience and expertise will

achieve results none of us could achieve individually.

United Way of Calgary and Area and MCC Employment Development are the co-convenor organizations for Vibrant Communities Calgary. The VCC Steering Committee is co-chaired by representatives from The City of Calgary and Calgary Health Region.

VCC also has a number of issue-specific Action Teams, a Management Team, and Standing Committees. Please see page 4 for a complete list of our current volunteer members.

Call for Fair Fares heard by City Aldermen

The VCC Fair Fares Action Team has been working since 2000 to establish a discounted transit pass program for Calgarians living on low incomes.

On October 6, 2004, Fair Fares members met with Calgary Alderman Bob

Hawkesworth to discuss supporting a motion to subsidize transit passes for people on low incomes.

On November 24, 2004, Fair Fares met with Alderman Ray Jones to request a delay in the proposed \$5 increase to transit passes.

On December 6, 2004, members of Fair Fares spoke at a City Council meeting where Aldermen Jones and Hawkesworth made a motion requesting a report on discounted transit passes for low-income Calgarians.

(Continued on page 2)

Over 41,000
Calgarians over
the age of 25 are
trying to support
themselves on
less than \$9.00
per hour.

VCC celebrates minimum wage increase

The Premier's announcement of an increase in minimum wage to \$7.00 – bringing us from the lowest in Canada to the fourth highest – is a move to be celebrated.

Many Calgarians are asking questions about the effect this will have on businesses, workers, their families and our community.

For example, what about the fact that only 1% of Albertans actually make minimum wage?

While it is true that only about 1% of Albertans (including Calgarians) earn minimum wage, raising the minimum wage will have a ripple effect on other low wages.

According to Statistics Canada, in addition to the 1% earning minimum wage, another 15% of Calgarians earn between \$5.90 and \$9.00 an hour.

An increase to minimum wage will have a positive effect on these wages as well.

But what about the fact that most minimum wage workers are teenagers?

The frequently heard remark that the only minimum wage earners are teenagers living at home with their parents is inaccurate.

Statistics Canada reports that of the 82,000 employed Calgarians earning less than \$9.00 an hour, less than half are under the age of 25. This leaves over 41,000 Calgarians over the age of 25 who are trying to support themselves – and perhaps one or more dependants – on low wages.

As for young Calgarians, are they less deserving of a decent wage? Alberta's youth are the future of this province and

we should support them through adequately paid employment as they gain independence.

VCC believes that people who work for a living should not have to live in poverty. They should earn a decent wage that does not force them to take on two or three jobs to make ends meet, or turn to social service agencies for assistance.

No Albertan should have to make tough choices like paying the rent or putting food on the table.

Though \$7.00 is certainly not a living wage, it is a positive step forward for this province and will go some way towards improving the lives of the working poor.

Premier Klein should be congratulated for this positive step forward.

Fair Fares

(Continued from page 1)

The Report is to be submitted by City Transit to the Land Use Planning and Transportation Committee on March 16, 2005. Fair Fares has been working with the City Transit staff responsible for the Report.

It is expected that the Report submitted on March 16 will be an interim report, and a request will be made to further investigate the financing of a discounted transit pass program and submit a final report in the fall of 2005.

Great work Fair Fares!

Did You Know?

- **Incomes of the poorest 10% of Calgarians averaged 13,000** in 2000, whereas average income of the top 10% was \$248,000
- In Calgary, **31.8% of the visible minority population and 50.6% of people of Aboriginal identity live in poverty**
- **The poverty rate among immigrants in Calgary is 27%** compared to 19% among Canadian born residents
- **16.4% of all seniors and 46.2% of unattached seniors were living below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs (LICO)** in 2000
- In 2001, **Aboriginal people were more than twice as likely to be living below LICO** than non-Aboriginal people
- In 2004, there were **over 2,500 homeless Calgarians** in the biennial count
- **14.8% of Calgary children lived in poverty** in 2002, up from 11.1% in 2001
- **One in four Calgary households (renters and owners) are spending greater than 30% of their gross household income on housing costs** and therefore are at risk of becoming homeless
- **48,311 Calgarians received food hampers** in 2002, up 11% from 2001

Poverty is the condition of a human being who does not have sufficient economic and other resources to live with the dignity, choices and power which support full participation in society.

Economic Costs of Poverty in Calgary

There is no question that poverty, particularly sustained poverty, imposes loss of well-being on those who experience it. In addition, poverty also imposes costs on members of society beyond those deemed "poor."

Poverty has been associated with increased spending resulting from greater need for health care, reduced high school completion rates, the need for more early childhood and special education services, additional demands on the criminal justice system, and costs associated with the provision of income and social support.

In an effort to determine these "external" costs of poverty in the city of Calgary, and to use this information to help build a compelling case for sustained poverty reduction, United Way of Calgary and Area commissioned a report by the Centre for Health and Policy Studies at the University of Calgary.

The external costs of poverty represent the potential savings that could be realized were Calgarians to implement an effective and sustained poverty reduction initiative. They are just one component of the social benefits of poverty reduction. The existence of these costs provides one component of a case for a comprehensive

poverty reduction initiative, even if one is not convinced of the need for such a program on the grounds of social justice alone.

The report's findings suggest:

- Increased costs of health care in Calgary of at least \$3.35 million per year and possibly as much as \$16.3 million
- Increased costs associated with the schools system of at least \$4.9 million and perhaps as much as \$7.9 million
- Costs elsewhere in the economy could amount to as much as \$32.6 million per year

For the full report, please visit: www.calgaryunitedway.org



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

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
Communications, Public Awareness & Social Marketing
Living Wage
Fair Fares
Standard Eligibility Testing

Vibrant Communities Calgary Members

Amy Alexander, *City of Calgary*
 Wayne Backer, *Calgary Region Community Board*
 Julie Ball, *Calgary Chamber of Commerce*
 Wanda Bogdane, *Kidsport Society of Alberta*
 Donna Bonertz, *Calgary Drop-in Centre*
 Greg Campbell, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*
 Debra Carnat, *Alberta Children's Hospital*
 Gord Churchill, *Living Spirit United Church*
 Gordon Christie, *Calgary and District Labour Council*
 Murray Crosby, *Disability Action Hall Volunteer*
 Caren Clouston, *Calgary Family Services*
 John Currie, *Calgary Homeless Foundation*
 Carlene Donnelly, *CUPS Community Health Centre*
 Caroline Fairbrother, *Alberta Human Resources and Employment*
 Michael Fitzpatrick, *Business Volunteer*
 Lorie Friesen, *The Calgary Children's Initiative*
 Cori Ghitter, *YWCA Board Member*

Susan Gillies, *Women's Centre of Calgary*
 Jane Gray, *Calgary Self-Help Volunteer*
 Stephen Hansen, *Calgary Transit*
 Elliot Hewitt, *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*
 Walter Hossli, *MCC Employment Development*
 Robin Houston-Knopff, *Bow Valley College*
 Colleen Huston, *Disability Action Hall*
 Ramona Johnston, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
 Patricia Jones, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*
 Michelle Kuiken, *Community Volunteer*
 Ruth Kohut, *Calgary Health Region*
 Carolyn Koltutsky, *Governors' Council*
 Sylvia Loewen, *Calgary Health Region*
 Chris MacFarlane, *Alexandra Community Health Centre*
 Laura MacKinnon, *Calgary Homeless Foundation*
 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*
 Jennifer Myers, *United Way of Calgary and Area*

Bonnie Pacaud, *Community Volunteer*
 John Pentland, *Hillhurst United Church*
 Joanne Pinnow, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
 Mardy Roberts, *United Church*
 Fred Robertson, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*
 Jenny Saarinen, *MCC Employment Development*
 Karoline Sandhurst, *Calgary Inter-Faith Food Bank*
 Yvonne Schmitz, *United Way Board Member*
 Bev Sheckter, *Jewish Family Service*
 Maureen Sheppard, *Business Volunteer*
 Luke Shwart, *Calgary Health Region*
 Jackie Sieppert, *University of Calgary*
 Carmen Sparrow, *MCC Employment Development*
 Leanne Squair, *City of Calgary*
 Christina Stebanuk, *Disability Action Hall Volunteer*
 Tim Stock-Bateman, *CUPS Community Health Centre*
 John te Linde, *City of Calgary*
 Brenda Wadey, *Sunrise Community Link Resource Centre*
 Shandra Smiley, *YWCA*
 Stephanie Won, *City of Calgary*
 Joy Zerke, *City of Calgary*

