

Words from the Executive Director

Our Sisters' Cry

A few weeks ago, following a late meeting, I decided to drop in at the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre (WEAC) and see for myself what the evening routine was like and who these women are. I arrived a little after seven o'clock and introduced myself to the staff and let them know that I just wanted to visit and observe for a while – to get to know the staff, the routine, the environment and the women who use WEAC. I had no idea what I would experience or how it would affect me.

Seven years ago was the last time that I visited WEAC. Seven years ago I was serving as the interim Executive Director when my predecessor was on sabbatical.

WEAC houses seventy-five to eighty or more women every night. This is no longer just a number for me. The women are no longer some anonymous group. I can still hear their voices; I can still see their faces. I can see how they move through the common room and the cafeteria, heads lowered, not making eye contact.

I'm not sure why this visit made such an impact on me. After all, I'm a "seasoned professional", having worked with homeless, addicted and abused people. As well as the victims and the perpetrators of violence. What I do know is that sometime during the visit I changed from being a visitor and an observer to being something else. I admit that I lost my "professionalism" in this change. I became someone compelled. Someone unable to "accept" the way things were.

What caused this? Was it the apple doll faced, white haired grandmother? Was it the woman in the wheelchair? Was it the woman



with the tortured face who sat by herself, quietly talking and crying to someone who wasn't there. Was it the young girl, barely a woman, who told me about the new stepmother who wouldn't have her under the same roof? Maybe it was the woman who came to the door of the staff area saying, "I haven't eaten today. Do you have some crackers or bread?"

"Was it the woman with the tortured face who sat by herself, quietly talking and crying to someone who wasn't there."

I began to see every woman and every face differently. They had become something other than an anonymous group of women or even that easy to say phrase, "homeless women". They became women with hopes and dreams that they, deep in their souls, no longer hold as possible, with memories and relatives that are a fading and distant past, precious but growing dim and more removed over time.

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The New Envoy

As you can see the Envoy has a new look. With our new Executive Director, Michael Farris, on board E4C is moving in new and challenging directions. Along with his vision for change our newsletter must also grow so that we can serve our clients, donors, supporters and friends more effectively.

If you have any comments or submissions for the newsletter please feel free to call, write and/or email the Envoy editor, Judith Paquin. Phone: 424-7543, E-mail: judith@ecccc.org or write to 9321 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5H 3T7

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Our Community

Eye Screenings at the Women's Emergency Accommodation

The Community Ophthalmic Outreach Program (CO-OP)

On July 15, WEAC welcomed a team of medical professionals and volunteers to conduct free on-site ophthalmic screening for residents. Imran Jivraj, a research student with Alberta Retina Consultants, organized the day, "The inner city population is one of the most medically underserved. CO-OP would screen them for eye diseases that could obscure their vision or are impairing their sight. We also gave out free prescription glasses through the Lenscrafters 'Gift of Sight' program."

For one day, an eye clinic was constructed in the resource room at WEAC. Eye screening was provided to all interested WEAC residents and residents at other E4C programs. Jivraj reflects, "It was a major success as we screened 30 women. We are extremely satisfied because we were able to restore significant vision to many WEAC residents." CO-OP is a collaborative effort of Alberta Retina Consultants, the Royal Alexandra Hospital Eye Clinic, and the University of Alberta Department of Ophthalmology. Its visit to WEAC



Photo by Jonathan Chan

Patricia Lo, a retinal photographer, explains results to a patient.

was made possible by Dr. Tennant and his team of volunteers.

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They dealt with the staff and each other throughout the evening with patience, humility and consideration. Even when lined up eight deep to use the phone for brief calls to some friend or family member or someone that might offer some possibility beyond what they have now. Some helped others less mobile. Many helped those less able. All need our help!

"I began to see every woman and every face differently."

I don't want to give you the wrong impression. Many of these women were tough, "street wise" people. They are survivors. But they all had no where else to turn, no where else to go.

Here, at WEAC, they accepted and respected that common condition and knew that cooperation would help see everyone through. They treated one another as sisters in a time of trial and trouble.

I saw the staff rushing to meet the schedule and the requests, to give

acceptance and respect, to get clothes washed and dried, to feed the hungry, to make each important call. There was one staff for every forty women and I thought, "Could I do this job? Could I work under such conditions among such needs?"

Once torn from the state of "professional distance", I began to listen without judgment, to hear what each person said. I dug into my pocket and sent someone to pick up apples and bananas and oranges from a late hours market so that no one had to ask for crackers.

I made notes about the broken down leased washing machines that the leasing company hasn't repaired. I made notes about shampoo and personal care items that might bring a little comfort to the situation—if I could find a company or a group to donate it. I made notes about socks and shoes and where we might get donations of those. I made two pages of notes.

I made a promise to myself. This was not acceptable. I needed to do something. These women are my sisters. That apple doll face grandmother is someone's mom and grandmother. The young woman is

someone's daughter and sister.

I realize now why I am here with E4C. I am here to change "what is" for the grandmother, the daughter, the sister. I am here to find others who share the thought that "what is" is not acceptable and must change.

The grandmother should not be hungry. She shouldn't be in a "shelter". She shouldn't have to ask if it's her turn to use the washer to launder her one set of clothes

WEAC has a purpose: to help women in need. But right now we are the emergency shelter for more than seventy-five women every night. Right now we urgently need the resources to make sure that no one has to ask for crackers because they haven't eaten today. What we need is enough staff to hear each person and to help them to make a first step away from being homeless.

Right now, right this minute, I need to find others who will share my sense of what needs to be done. Now, I'll write this article for the newsletter, then I'll contact a service club that could help a little and maybe ask...what are you going to do?

Envoy Spotlight on...

Our Partners

6th Annual Memorial Innocence Lost

On August 14, 2005 the 6th annual memorial for those who have passed away as a result of their involvement with street prostitution was held at the Memorial Garden, located at Alex Taylor School.

Tragically, in the past 25 years 102 persons have lost their lives through murder, suicide, drug overdose and disease.

Hosted by PAAFE (Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton), approximately 100 people were in attendance, including Crossroads and Elizabeth House staff, clients and volunteers.

The Memorial for us...

I have attended this memorial for a number of years now and always find it to be a powerful, sad yet empowering event. At any given time approximately 30% of the residents at Elizabeth House have past involvement in prostitution. This fact brings the significance of the memorial home for the staff and residents alike.

Six residents from Elizabeth House attended this year's event with me and one of the residents wrote, "I'm glad the people were acknowledging the loss of these girls. I'm glad of the amount of people who showed up and the fact that no media was involved. It was very heartwarming."

All of us from E4C would like to thank PAAFE for this opportunity to grieve for those lost and to commit to ensuring it does not continue to happen to those most vulnerable in our society.

Del Marlow, Program Manager,
Elizabeth House



The memorial garden was moved to Alex Taylor School in 2004.

...We can hear the voice of our lost and loved ones. 'We are no longer in the ditch or the alley or the field or the trunk of your car. We are not even on the street corner. We are now present in the sun that shines, the stars that twinkle I the sky, the wind that blows and the rain and the snow that fall upon the earth. We have been transformed. Let the memory of our short lives be used for good so others can enjoy the peace and freedom that we were denied.'

"May our departed sisters (and brothers) rest in peace as their spirits carries us forward."

Kathy King
Parent

Gardens Bloom for the Home for Healing

The soggy, barren lots of H4H have been transformed to sidewalks, a deck, flower gardens all due to the efforts of our community. Hats off to the Village of Chipman for supplying our front sidewalks and for all the help hauling and levelling the earth, as well as their continuing offers of support.

H4H residents worked alongside teams of volunteers, with donated tools and plants, to bring glorious colour and

growth to H4H.

Our volunteers—eight organic gardeners from Vermilion, six deck builders from Sherwood Park, Cooking Lake and Edmonton and a crew of ten teens from Bruderheim.

Hanging baskets front and back came from Zone 3 Growers & Greenhouses, along with many of the plants in our deck flowerboxes and front gardens.

Susan Campbell, Q.C.,
Resident Manager



The Bruderheim youth hard at work .

Our Donors

New E4C Housing Projects completed

Today in Edmonton, many adults have no safe, secure and affordable place to live. To respond to this urgent need E4C has recently completed two affordable apartment buildings to help alleviate homelessness.

Both facilities are designed to provide supportive housing to single, low-income individuals who may be exhibiting signs of mental health issues and need supportive living, or for individuals who are at-risk of being homeless.



The 12-Unit apartment building, above, was made possible by a generous donation from the *No Room In the Inn* appeal sponsored by the Edmonton and District Council of Churches, The Archdiocese of Edmonton Office of Social Justice, and The Quality of Life Commission. Individuals were asked to share their Christmas Eve offerings to assist with building this low-cost facility. Over \$25,000 was raised by this appeal!



Stollery Place, an 18-Unit apartment building in the McCauley neighborhood.

This E4C affordable housing project was developed primarily with capital funding from the three levels of government, but would not have been possible without generous private donations from the **Stollery Charitable Foundation**.

One family can make a difference for people in need in our community.

The Poole Family Endowment Fund will provide ongoing financial assistance to E4C

Thanks to the generosity of John and Barbara Poole a \$100,000 endowment fund has been set up to help support E4C and its programs.

The fund is managed by the Edmonton Community Foundation and other people may contribute to this fund.

Each year E4C will receive funds that will be directed toward helping people in need.

Oliver Square Safeway helps ArtStart through its Because We Care Campaign

Over \$32 thousand was raised for ArtStart over two years by Safeway's Because We Care Campaign.

Oliver Square Safeway Campaign Chair, Adrienne Brown, and ArtStart Founder, Jacqueline Biollo, spent many of their Saturdays running fundraising ventures and promoting the program.

The monies raised have assisted the program to purchase art supplies, dance costumes, and instruments.

ArtStart is actively seeking new funding partners.



Jacqueline Biollo receives one of the many donation cheques awarded by Safeway

October 16, 2005

H4H will be hosting a 'thanks'-giving open-house to show our appreciation for the generosity we've received throughout this summer.

Friday, November 18, 2005

The 4th Annual Benefit Concert featuring Faith Nolan 7:00 PM - Edmonton Institution for Women
Tickets are \$20 each call 970-7587
The concert is in support of the Women's Reintegration Chaplaincy, that provides services and assistance to women returning to our community from prison.

Friday, December 2, 2005

Kids in the Hall Bistro's 8th Annual Christmas Luncheon
For more information please call 413-8060

We're Selling

Once again, the Kids in the Hall Bistro Program is selling Entertainment Books, and the new books have arrived. These books are still a bargain at \$40.00 each, and are available at the Kids in the Hall Bistro, located in City Hall

Items Needed

- 2 Working Fridges
- Infant/toddler car seats
- Cribs (CSA approved),
- Disposable diapers & baby wipes
- Kitchen 'starter' items (pots, dishes, can openers etc)
- Vacuums & microwaves
- Hammers, screw drivers, wrenches, pliers and other tools

For ArtStart

- Dance slippers (ages 5-10),
- Art supplies & white glue, scissors & plasticine
- Musical instruments (wind, brass, piano, etc.)

Please call the E4C office at 424-7543 for more information or to make a donation.

