

VCC in motion!

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

WINTER 2006

IN THE
NEWS:

- The City of Calgary is the first Alberta municipality to implement a Low Income Transit Pass Program
- January 23 is federal election day—don't forget to exercise your political voice!

INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:

Affordable Public Transportation	1
Living Wage	1
Living Wage cont.	2
CHR funds Living Wage Researcher	2
Did You Know?	3
Who Are Calgary's Poor?	3
Contact VCC	4
VCC Partners	4

Calgarians Celebrate Affordable Public Transportation

For the first time ever, Calgarians living on low incomes are now able to purchase monthly transit passes for \$35, instead of the full adult fare of \$70.

Beginning January 2, 2006, The City of Calgary became the first municipality in Alberta to implement a Low Income Transit Pass Program, allowing thousands of Calgarians to participate in the economic, social and family life of their community.

According to Ramona Johnston, Manager of Vibrant Communities Calgary, this program is critical because affordable public transportation increases self-sufficiency and improves lives by facilitating access to employment and training opportu-

nities, volunteer work, medical appointments, recreational activities and community services.

Says Ramona, "Individuals who are able to work because they have access to affordable transportation give back to the community through increased purchases of goods and services, payment of income tax, and reduced dependence on social services."

Affordable transportation also benefits employers by increasing the labour pool and reducing turnover.

The Low Income Transit Pass Program began for AISH recipients on August 1, 2005, and within the first three months over 2,000 people living on AISH purchased \$35 passes. That's 2,000 Calgarians better

able to participate in our community thanks to The City of Calgary's leadership and support. It is expected that thousands more will use the program now that it has been expanded to other people living on low incomes.

To qualify for the program, applicants must be 18 years of age or older and a resident of Calgary for the past 12 months. Applicants must also produce photo identification and last year's tax assessment showing total single or family income of less than 75% of Statistics Canada's low income cutoff.

For more information or to obtain an application form, call Calgary Transit at 262-1000 or visit:

www.calgarytransit.com

Living Wage Seeks to Make Poverty History

2005 marked the inception of the biggest global anti-poverty movement ever. By raising awareness about poverty in Canada and around the world, the Make Poverty History Campaign moved thousands of people from apathy to action. Almost 300,000 Canadians signed

petitions and sent letters to their government representatives asking them to take concrete steps to Make Poverty History.

Across the country, thousands of Canadians took part in a series of global White Band Days, and on December 10 the Alberta

Council for Global Cooperation brought Albertans together to discuss poverty and our role in making it history. The Albertans CAN Make Poverty History! Conference provided an excellent opportunity for Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) to share our

(Continued on page 2)

Living Wage

(Continued from page 1)

vision for sustained poverty reduction in Calgary and to introduce our exciting Living Wage work to the community. At the conference, Jessica Leech, VCC's Living Wage Coordinator, and Jenny Saarinen, Chair of VCC's Living Wage Action Team, presented an engaging workshop on VCC's multisectoral collaboration and the progress of our Living Wage initiative to date.

The fundamental principle underlying the Living Wage initiative is the belief that Calgarians who work for a living should not live in poverty.

VCC believes that employers who understand the link between poverty and issues that impact their business or organization will begin to see themselves as part of the solution, and contribute by raising wages to a living wage level, offering employee benefits and introducing other progressive workplace practices.

In the fall of 2005, the Living Wage Action Team developed a strategic plan to guide the future work of the Living Wage Initiative. Within the next five years, the Action Team hopes to see Living Wage policies created, implemented and sustained by The City of Calgary, Calgary businesses, non-profit organizations and funders, post-secondary institutions and other key institutions within Calgary and Alberta.

Several significant developments in 2005 make us optimistic about the future of Living Wage in Calgary.

The first is the launch of a Social Purchasing Portal (www.sppcalgary.org), a website that facilitates ethical purchasing. The website links Calgary businesses who want to purchase goods and services (e.g. office supplies or catering) with suppliers who pay their employees a Living Wage.

Additionally, Calgary City Council has approved fund-

ing for the development of a Sustainable Environmental and Ethical Procurement Policy. This policy will focus on ensuring that The City takes ethical and environmental concerns into account when purchasing goods and services. Although the scope of this policy has yet to be determined, the policy may include provisions to ensure ethical purchasing of items like "No Sweat" uniforms and fair trade coffee. VCC will work with The City and the No Sweat Coalition to support provisions that ensure goods and services purchased by The City are produced by workers who are paid a Living Wage.

As we welcome the new year, VCC is excited to continue moving forward with our Living Wage work. We hope that 2006 will be the year we move one step closer to Making Poverty History by ensuring that all working Calgarians are paid a Living Wage.

"Basic transportation is a necessity to participate in community life. For people who are destitute, bus passes are essential."
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, November 2005

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

CHR Funds Living Wage Researcher

The Calgary Health Region (CHR) has boosted VCC's Living Wage initiative by providing staff on a part-time basis to assist with research. In January, VCC welcomed Neera Datta, who will be working with VCC two days a week for three months.

Neera will be working with VCC's Living Wage Coordinator, Jessica Leech, and key partners to explore the issue of low wages in the non-profit sector.

Says Jessica, "We know low wages are an issue for many non-profit employees, and our partners—both agencies and funders—have been urging us to extend the Living Wage initiative to this sector. However, without this additional staff support we may not have been able to address this issue for another year."

Please join us in welcoming Neera and thanking the Calgary Health Region for their ongoing support of poverty reduction!

Did You Know?

- In 2003, approximately 161,000 Calgarians were living in poor households, a 25% increase over 2002 (Statistics Canada)
- Over 20% of Calgary children lived in poverty in 2003, almost double the rate of 11% in 2000 (Statistics Canada)
- 113,000 low income individuals in Calgary were not receiving any kind of provincial or federal income support in 2003 (City of Calgary)
- 43,000 children in Calgary lived in poor households in 2003 (Statistics Canada)
- The poverty rate in Calgary was 17.2% in 2003, a dramatic increase from 13.7% in 2002 (Statistics Canada)
- Wages and salaries in Calgary declined by 2.7% between 2002 and 2003 (Statistics Canada)
- The average total income of Calgarians declined by 1.4% in 2003 (Statistics Canada)
- Average earnings in Calgary declined for the third year in a row, falling 1.9% between 2002 and 2003 (Statistics Canada)
- In 2003, 19% of Calgary parents with children age 2-9 and 16% of parents with children age 10-17 did not have enough money to buy food for their family all the time (Calgary Health Region)

For these and other statistics see: The Calgary and Region Socio-Economic Outlook 2005-2010 (www.calgary.ca)

“We still don’t seem to grasp the connection between slashing social supports and social breakdown, including violent crime.”

- Linda McQuaig in *The Toronto Star*, Jan 1,

Who Are Calgary’s Poor?

During Calgary’s current economic boom it is easy to believe that everyone in Calgary is benefiting from the roaring economy.

Unfortunately, not everyone in Calgary is enjoying economic prosperity.

According to recent statistics, roughly 160,000 Calgarians are poor. Who are they?



A recent City of Calgary *Perspectives* article reports that some Calgarians are more likely than others to be poor:

- One-third of persons with disabilities in Calgary are poor
- Over half of all Aboriginal persons in Calgary are poor
- Almost half of all recent immigrants to Calgary are poor
- Close to one-third of all visible minority persons in Calgary are poor
- Over half of all single parent families in Calgary are poor
- Over one-quarter of the elderly in Calgary are poor
- One-fifth of Calgary’s children are poor

As Derek Cook from The City of Calgary explains, “In short, the poor are predominantly

those who have the least influence, the least voice, and the least power. It is not necessarily that such persons lack a voice or power because they are poor, but rather, that they are poor because they lack a voice or they lack power. They do not have the influence to direct the decisions that most closely affect them.”

Now more than ever, Calgarians need to be reminded that the rising tide of economic prosperity does not necessarily lift all boats. As people living in poverty continue to experience inequality and social exclusion, they continue to experience poverty, even in the midst of plenty. Now is the time we must work diligently to address the growth of “Prospoverty” in our City.

Source: *Prospoverty: on Being Without, in the Land of Plenty* City of Calgary, Fall 2005




1227 Kensington Close NW
Calgary, Alberta T2N 3J6
E-mail: info@vibrantcalgary.com
Fax: (403) 283-2105

Ramona Johnston, Manager
Phone: (403) 283-2122
E-mail: ramona@vibrantcalgary.com

Jessica Leech, Living Wage
Phone: (403) 283-2197
E-mail: jessica@vibrantcalgary.com

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
Fund Development
Communications
Living Wage
Fair Fares**

Vibrant Communities Calgary Partners

Cathy Abel, *RBC Financial*
Amy Alexander, *City of Calgary*
Barb Ames, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Kristi Baron, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Andrea Blaikie, *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*
Derek Cook, *City of Calgary*
John Currie, *Calgary Homeless Foundation*
Neera Datta, *Calgary Health Region*
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*

Elliot Hewitt, *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*
Walter Hossli, *MCC Employment Development*
Samantha Hubka, *Killfish Media*
Colleen Huston, *Disability Action Hall*
Patricia Jones, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*
Noel Keough, *Sustainable Calgary*
Paula King, *Anadarko Canada Corporation*
Candice Koch, *Aspen Family and Community Network Society*
Michelle Kristinson, *Multiple Sclerosis Society*
Lynda Laughlin, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*
Carol Lawson, *Public Interest Alberta*
Sylvia Loewen, *Calgary Health Region*
Jeff Loomis, *Federation of Calgary Communities*
Lorraine Lundquist, *Calgary Housing Company*
Bob McInnis, *Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids*
David McInnis, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*
Bill McIntyre, *Governors' Council*
Donna McLeod / Varina Russell, *The Calgary Children's Initiative*
Koji Miyaji, *Calgary Transit*
Bill Moore-Kilgannon, *Public Interest Alberta*
Tim Moro, *Ipsos Reid*
Maryam Nabavi, *Sustainable Calgary*

Carol Oliver, *United Way of Calgary and Area*
Bonnie Pacaud, *Community Volunteer*
Karen Paulitzki, *Community Volunteer*
Rev. John Pentland, *Hillhurst United Church*
Gayle Peters, *Governors' Council*
Wanda Randles, *YWCA of Calgary*
Fred Robertson, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*
Ken Rukiidi, *Community Volunteer*
Jenny Saarinen, *MCC Employment Development*
Karoline Sandhurst, *Calgary Food Bank*
Yvonne Schmitz, *United Way Board Member*
Paula Shaw, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*
Bev Sheckter, *Jewish Family Service*
Maureen Sheppard, *Innovention Inc.*
Mona Smart, *Wildrose United Church*
Leanne Squair, *City of Calgary*
Carmen Sparrow, *MCC Employment Development*
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*
Cameron Warren, *MCC Employment Development*
Tom Wildey, *Community Volunteer*
Stephanie Won, *City of Calgary*
Joy Zerke, *City of Calgary*



Click here to visit the Tamarack website for more engaging content! www.tamarackcommunity.ca