

**Vibrant Communities Calgary: Creating Local Conditions for Successful Poverty Reduction
December 2003**

Convened by: United Way of Calgary and Area, and MCC Employment Development

Background

Since the fall of 2002, United Way of Calgary and Area and MCC Employment Development have worked to build a strong foundation for a collaborative, multisectoral Sustained Poverty Reduction initiative for the city of Calgary.

The definition of poverty through which we have chosen to conduct this work is:

Poverty is the condition of a human being who lacks the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency and meaningful participation in society.

To date we have: hired a full-time staff person dedicated to the Sustained Poverty Reduction work, held a number of successful community consultations and poverty discussion panels, participated in the Pan-Canadian Learning Community, presented our work at the Alberta Community Economic Development conference, convened a Committee of United Way's Board dedicated to poverty reduction, convened a multisectoral Sustained Poverty Reduction (SPR) Working Group, developed draft outcomes and umbrella strategies, and conducted research and action around a variety of issues, including social capital, public policy, means testing, public awareness and living wage.

The purpose of the SPR Working Group is:

To generate interest in, commitment to and planful action directed at systemic, comprehensive and collaborative sustained poverty reduction endeavors addressing the root causes that contribute to the depth and breadth of poverty.

Members of the SPR Working Group include three low-income community members and participants from the following organizations:

MCC Employment Development
United Way of Calgary and Area
Human Resources and Skills Development
Canada
Alberta Human Resources and Employment
Calgary and District Labour Council
Alberta Coalition Against Poverty
Healthy Public Policy, Calgary Health Region
Alberta Children's Hospital, Calgary Health
Region
Policy & Planning, City of Calgary
Community and Neighbourhood Services, City
of Calgary
Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Department of Community Health Sciences,
University of Calgary
Health and Community Care, Bow Valley
College
Calgary Homeless Foundation
The Calgary Children's Initiative
Calgary Catholic Family Service
Jewish Family Service
Calgary Urban Project Society
Feeding Calgary's Children
Governors' Council
Alexandra Community Health Centre
YWCA Calgary

We are actively seeking to engage the business community in this long-term work as well.

Intent

MCC Employment Development and United Way of Calgary and Area wish to become a Trail Builder member of Vibrant Communities. We aim to strengthen our capacity to lead this work and share our learnings with other communities through the Pan-Canadian Learning Community.

Community Engagement

We see our role as convenors as one in which we engage the community and inspire hopefulness about changed futures, organize and facilitate, and leverage influence and funds. We will continue to engage the community in building the local conditions for success through multisector community consultations to share in the articulation of outcomes and strategies, as well as involving participants from each sector in leading and sharing in the work itself. Increased community engagement is one of the intended outcomes of a comprehensive public awareness campaign to heighten understanding of poverty in Calgary.

Consultation

The members of the Sustained Poverty Reduction Working Group recognize that we will work together in this collaborative initiative, knowing that our combined diversity of experience and expertise will achieve results none of us could attain individually. Participants will honour and respect the accomplishments, current commitments and investments made by each sector.

We will continually involve and engage the community throughout both the planning and implementation of sustained poverty reduction endeavors, to ensure the outcomes and strategies meet the community's needs and expectations. We will conduct focused sessions with members of particular marginalized populations to ensure that their voices are included and that the language used is accessible to all.

We are in the process of researching the economic costs of poverty to assist in building a strong business case for poverty reduction. This will better enable us to engage participants from the business community and various levels of government, as well as create social, political and community will.

Workplan

The following is a draft workplan:

1. Build a collaboration of partners

Effective poverty reduction requires dedicated resources and knowledgeable individuals with a high level of skill and credibility within the community. United Way of Calgary and Area and MCC Employment Development will continue to convene a multisectoral group of partners who have the desire and capacity to work towards long-term poverty reduction. These individuals need to have the time and ability to work beyond the mandate of their own organizations and within the terms of involvement. The United Way staff associate responsible for the Sustained Poverty Reduction initiative organizes meetings and facilitates communication between partners. We will continue to work with the partners to develop

terms of involvement to ensure that expectations are clear. As this is a community initiative, there is no end date to building a collaboration, and we will work to continually engage partners from each sector.

Timeline: January 2003 – Ongoing

2. Develop an organizational structure

The Sustained Poverty Reduction Working Group will design an organizational structure best-suited to effective and long-term poverty reduction, taking into consideration the need to include active representatives from all sectors, governance issues and the ability to secure sustainable funding and broad community support. In order to maintain an environment conducive to a successful sustained poverty reduction initiative, we feel it is important to remain flexible and allow the organizational structure to evolve as the work progresses. Please see the draft organizational structure on page 6.

Timeline: September 2003 – March 2004

3. Develop a community plan

The Sustained Poverty Reduction Working Group presently represents a diverse range of sectors including all three levels of government, labour, faith communities, health, education, non-profit and people living in poverty. The Working Group members will use their extensive knowledge of poverty issues and their community to identify the barriers to poverty reduction and develop a comprehensive community plan to reduce poverty.

To date, the draft outcomes articulated by the Working Group are:

- Calgarians earn enough for they and their families to be economically self-sufficient
- Calgarians have a comprehensive, integrated network of supports
- Calgarians have improved mental, physical and dental health
- Calgarians have their basic needs met (food, clothing, etc.)
- Calgarians have safe and affordable housing
- Calgarians have higher levels of education success
- Calgarians decrease the wealth gap
- Calgarians increase social capital and build stronger neighbourhoods
- Calgarians have heightened awareness and understanding of poverty
- Calgarians have heightened community engagement and civic pride
- Calgary's political agenda is more balanced between economic and social values

To date, the draft umbrella strategies articulated by the Working Group are:

- Support healthy perinatal development and stimulating early childhoods
- Promote economic well-being and progressive workplace practices
- Enhance neighbourhood capacity and develop social capital
- Reduce policy and procedural barriers
- Build public awareness and citizen engagement
- Increase availability of affordable housing

Timeline: November 2003 – June 2004

4. Establish Action Groups for each of the umbrella strategies and identify specific actions to carry out the community plan

Members of the Working Group will form Action Groups around each of the umbrella strategies. Each Action Group Chair will be responsible for gathering members for the Action Group, and coordinating meetings to oversee the work of the Action Group. The Action Groups will develop specific strategies to achieve the relevant outcomes.

The Working Group will coordinate, oversee and support the work of the Action Groups. The Working Group will be comprised of the Committee's Co-Chairs, the Chair of each Action Group, the Executive Director of MCC Employment Development, the Director of the poverty reduction work from United Way of Calgary and Area, and the Staff Associate for the Sustained Poverty Reduction initiative. The incoming Co-Chairs of the Working Group are from the Calgary Health Region and The City of Calgary.

Timeline: April 2003 – April 2004

5. Take action!

The following are our present sustained poverty reduction initiatives:

We are interested in helping to enhance the capacity of the voluntary sector to influence **public policy**. As a demonstration project, we have convened a public policy pilot project around the redesign of a provincial support, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). The purpose of this AISH Public Policy Initiative is to build capacity among the voluntary sector in the area of public policy and mutual problem-solving, and to provide meaningful input into the redesign of the AISH program. We are holding a community consultation with 80 participants on March 4 to review the group's draft recommendations to government. It is anticipated that policy recommendations will be sent to government by the end of March.

We are helping to plan and support a collaborative research project across Calgary – with a focus on the Bowness community – that will examine **social capital**. Our long-term interest is learning how to *grow* social capital, how to *replicate* this growth, and how to convert *horizontal* social capital to *vertical* social capital. This will facilitate the building of social networks between people of different socio-economic levels, a factor we believe to be key to sustained poverty reduction.

We are investigating and disseminating information regarding **living wage**. Following well-attended initial and follow-up community consultations held in March and April of 2003, we determined that more information was required in order to advance this issue of great importance to low-wage workers in Calgary. We have recently completed a comprehensive research project that is being distributed to interested stakeholders. We are holding a community consultation on March 31 to share the results of the research and plan the next steps. With the help of Tamarack, the results of this research will be used to develop a community case (including both economic and social justice arguments) in support of a living wage for Calgary.

We have partnered with the YWCA and the Calgary Health Region to develop a comprehensive list of services that require a **means test** as a qualification for access. The

purpose is to determine the feasibility of developing a single annual test of income, which would be less demeaning for low income Calgarians.

We are in early discussions with The City of Calgary and the YWCA Social Issues Committee about collaborating on a broad **public awareness** campaign regarding poverty in Calgary.

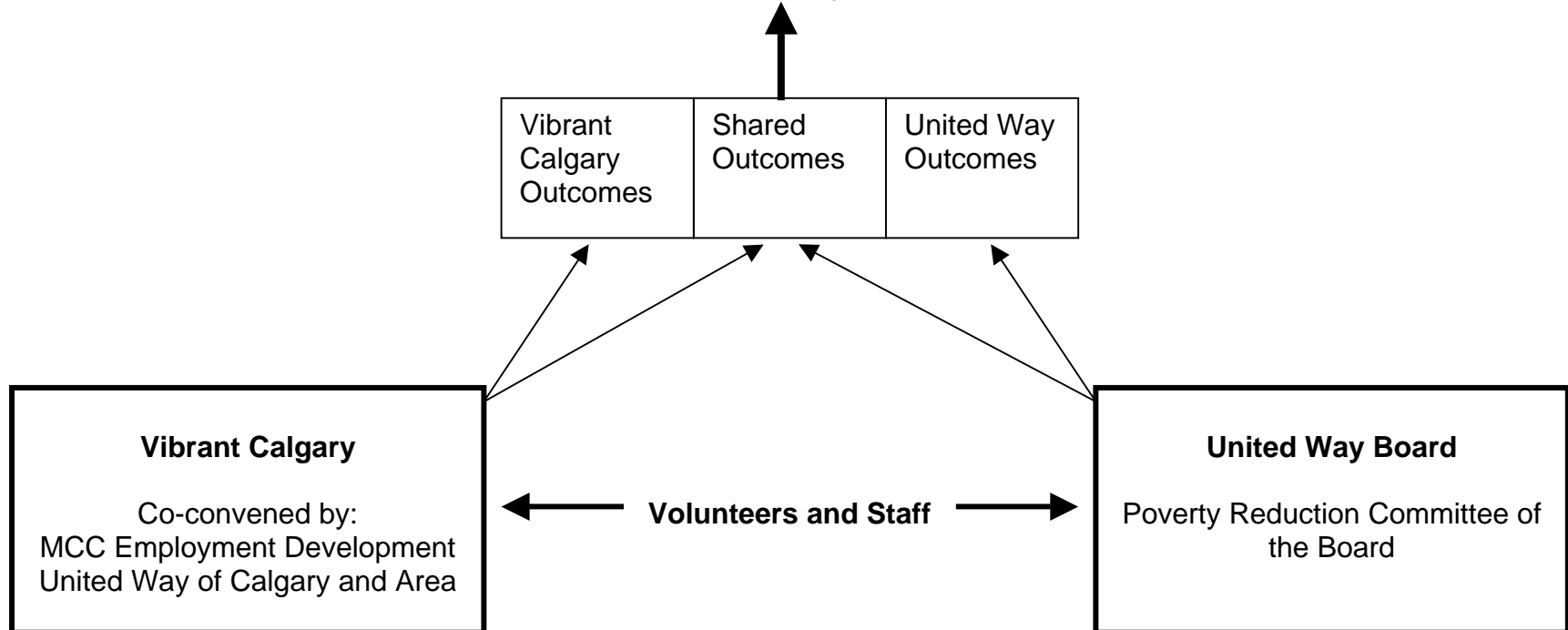
We have convened meetings between The City of Calgary, YWCA, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and the Calgary Health Region in an effort to develop collaboration around the various **information resources** (Tough Times Handbook, Street Survival Guide and AHR&E Benefits Information Book) for people living in poverty and service agencies.

We have contracted a University of Calgary health economist and a doctoral student researcher to gather data on the economic costs of poverty in Calgary. The costs of poverty will be one component of a **business case** for poverty reduction.

Timeline: April 2003 - Ongoing

DRAFT Organizational Structure

Sustained Poverty Reduction



- community plan
- helping United Way achieve its outcomes
- convening for implementation

- Way Forward agenda / United Way priorities
- Changed futures for marginalized populations: Aboriginal people, seniors, immigrants, people who have disabilities
- helping Vibrant Calgary achieve its outcomes
- influencing for community acceptance, finding champions
- determining other United Way roles in poverty reduction

