Poverty in Red Deer

A Needs and Opportunities Assessment

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Poverty Reduction Alliance
Know. Inspire. Act.

Research and documentation prepared by
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FOREWORD

The City of Red Deer established a Social Policy Framework (SPF) in 2015, defining Poverty Prevention and Reduction as one of ten (10) community goals to be addressed in achieving its vision of social sustainability. Toward its vision of poverty reduction, The City made funding available to the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) to undertake a needs and opportunities assessment for The City.

The purpose of the needs and opportunities assessment was to actively engage individuals experiencing poverty in Red Deer, enhance the knowledge of poverty related issues in the community, increase intentions for action, and inform future strategies to prevent and reduce poverty in Red Deer. It is noted that the purpose of this research was to glean an understanding of community and individual experiences of poverty in Red Deer from people who have lived experience, rather than from organizations that serve these individuals.

It was important to the project that a distinction was made between the outcomes of a needs and opportunities assessment and the outcomes of a strategic plan. While there may be strategic actions emerging from the literature, focus groups and/or key informant interviews, this document is not intended to be a strategic plan. A key distinction is that as a needs and opportunities assessment, this report will highlight what has emerged as noticeable needs and potential opportunities for action in Red Deer. It will not try to answer how these opportunities might be achieved, or by whom. Certainly, there will be aspects of how and by whom that will be touched upon, but it is not the focus or aim of this document to elaborate on those at this time.

To oversee the project, and to provide local knowledge and direction, the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) formed a Project Steering Committee. The Committee was tasked with the responsibility of formulating the Request for Proposals, advertising, receiving, and evaluating the submissions, and ultimately awarding the contract. *bassa* Social Innovations was selected as the consulting

team responsible for the project. Regular meetings occurred throughout the project to ensure that information and findings continued to reflect the interests and objectives of CAPRA.

Overall, a community-based approach was and is critical to the successful mitigation of complex social issues such as poverty. In conjunction with the Steering Committee, the project team worked to maximize success potential by involving as many individuals as possible in conversations and solutions (persons with lived experience, business owners, newcomers, etc.) and attempted to avoid survey fatigue and redundancy by engaging new and relevant participants. Community engagement generates buy in, which in turn creates the enthusiasm to move innovative ideas forward.

We are grateful to the people who participated in the focus groups and the key informant interviews--for their trust, openness, courage and willingness to tell their stories. As a result of these stories, and the research and input from community agencies and Red Deer College, how poverty is experienced by Red Deerians is more clearly understood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

bassa Social Innovations would like to thank the people that brought their passion, insights and perspectives to this work and helped to create a unique and local perspective on the topic of poverty.

Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance - Needs and Opportunities Steering Committee

Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association - focus group host

Family Services of Central Alberta - focus group host

John Howard Society - focus group host

The Golden Circle - meeting space and focus group host

Turning Point - focus group host

Meeting Waters Coffee + Roastery - great coffee and space for key informant interviews

Key informants and focus group participants

HeuerDesign - graphic design

The City of Red Deer - project funding

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1.0
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty is an expression used to describe a human experience, not humans.

In Red Deer, 13% of the population lives with a household income of less than $30,000/year. At greatest risk are single parents and children between 5-9 years of age. Almost half of the 4860 households experiencing poverty in Red Deer are one person households (2410). At greatest risk for poverty in Red Deer are young children, single parents and single people living alone.

Red Deer's focus on poverty, to date, has largely been the result of collaborative efforts coordinated by the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA). This network of agencies, community members and government have focused on research, programs and policy direction for almost a decade. The participants have engaged in both provincial and national strategies to advance the current dialogue on poverty in Canada.

Through a series of focus groups and key informant interviews, *bassa* Social Innovations has assembled existing research and strategic policy information, and combined it with the views and perspectives of both people experiencing poverty and those experiencing community within which poverty exists. The result is a needs and opportunities assessment that begins to highlight potential next steps toward a comprehensive strategic direction for the community.

Themes that emerged from the dialogue with focus group and key informant participants include:

- **Polarity -** there is a strong sentiment that Red Deerians are not unified in their thoughts and beliefs related to poverty.
- **Social connection -** the polarity that exists creates a sense of "us" and "them". While social connection alone won't lift someone out of poverty, few have the ability to change their experiences with poverty without having meaningful connections with others.
- **Understanding -** there would appear to be some agreement that poverty isn't simply a condition of income, but that poverty can be a reflection of limited options due to lack of economic means, social connection and/or spiritual wellbeing.
- **Challenge with systems -** many of the systems (including both government and not-for-profit) are siloed and incapable of supporting individuals and families without significant barriers and rules. Prevention and early intervention are expressly desired.
- **Observations about Red Deer -** three conditions continued to be documented as a result of interviews and focus groups — the apparent fear that people have about engaging with community members experiencing poverty, the high cost of living in the community, and the irony of seemingly wealthy people in the community living with stress, anxiety and social isolation akin to those with limited economic means.

The combination of research, strategic community plans completed by other communities, and the voices of Red Deerians resulted in four categories of need:

- **Basic Needs and Low Income -** for Red Deerians experiencing poverty, access to basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, childcare and education is challenging. First and foremost, people need assurance that they can meet their basic human needs.

- **Leadership -** the narrative about poverty in Red Deer is largely negative and leadership is necessary to better engage the community, establish a convening body on poverty, and incite encouragement and hope for a better future.
- **Systemic Change -** simply stated, systemic change is needed to provide more appropriate, timely and comprehensive supports earlier. Systems need to be administered with less rules to reduce complexity and enhance navigation.
- **Social Capital -** barriers between people are limiting opportunities for those experiencing poverty and restricting their ability to associate with others outside their social class.

The **Poverty in Red Deer: A Needs and Opportunities Assessment** report is not a strategic direction. A logical next step for Red Deer to address poverty in the community would include the commitment to establish a convening body, encourage broad community engagement, establish a strategic direction and take action. As poverty is a dynamic condition, no amount of local research and analysis will ensure absolute accuracy, though action requires continuous evaluation to ensure continuous improvement.

This is our moment / C'est notre moment...to end poverty in Red Deer.

2.0

INTRODUCTION

Poverty isn't a new topic of conversation in Red Deer, nor will this report satisfy and resolve the topic. Many dedicated people have been working collaboratively on a variety of initiatives that are both directly and peripherally related to poverty. There is no shortage of information available to the community, and the time for coordinated and intentional action is now.

Engagement and consultation with the community reveals a deepening level of polarity on the topic of poverty and related social concerns including addictions, homelessness, and mental health. Debating the merits of conservative economic policies or progressive social policies isn't changing the living conditions for Red Deerians experiencing poverty. The divergent perspectives pulling against one another require leadership focused on finding values common to the mission of improving quality of life in the community.

Action on poverty will be achieved by organizations committed to change. The status quo is not delivering a positive result. The pathway is not clear, and there is no amount of research on the topic that will pave the way. Positive social change is an iterative process that requires ongoing action, measurement, analysis, correction and response. Players in social change are committed to the purpose and accept the risks of not getting it "right." Social change is a dynamic system.

Poverty in Red Deer: A Needs and Opportunities Assessment, is a logical next step toward focused and cohesive action.

3.0

GAINING CONTEXT

In this first section of the report we have engaged with the body of knowledge that already exists. There are many things that we should recall from what has already taken place in Red Deer, from what others have learned and implemented across the province, and from what is happening across the country. Building on the growth and rich learning of others who are targeting poverty in their own communities allows us to more effectively determine what is working, what needs improvement, and what needs to stop.

3.1 Enhancing our knowledge of poverty: Locally

What are we talking about when we talk about poverty?

Poverty is a not a single thing, and due to its complicated and contextual nature, it will, by necessity, differ from place to place and time to time. It is a dynamic expression of the human experience. Articulating an understanding of poverty in Red Deer requires acknowledging the various approaches and knowledge of poverty elsewhere, especially in similar contexts, with a focus on listening to people in Red Deer who are experiencing various types of poverty here.

One cannot talk about poverty without talking economics. In the global west, economic thinking, rationality and prioritization are how most decisions are made. This trend has developed and been entrenched over hundreds of years, to the point where economics is often considered a priority over ethics. How something will impact the "bottom line" often takes priority over the social impact for those who will be most affected. As long as orders of government and decision makers in the corporate world are incentivised to increase profits over ensuring quality of life for people, the common good will continue to suffer.

The monetary costs of not doing anything and continuing along the same path will continue to rise. In 2012 the costs of poverty in Alberta were between $7.1 billion and $9.5 billion[1]. This translates to each Albertan contributing between $2,700 and $3,600 per year to make little, if any, progress toward solving the problem. As broad calculations these numbers are striking. The approach that has been taken is one of managing poverty, rather than seeking to end it. In plain terms the status quo approach ensures that a continual investment is necessary year after year. A proactive approach would require an increased investment in the short term, but would have the intended effect of permanently reducing the yearly costs related to poverty.

Red Deer is now Alberta's third largest city, and is at risk of lagging behind other cities across the province in developing robust leadership networks, strategies and action plans to materially intervene in the poverty cycle of Red Deerians[2]. Poverty is intertwined with many of the priority issues in Red Deer such as community safety, homelessness, and the preventative approach to social wellbeing. Significant progress in reducing poverty would have positive ripple effects into each of these important community concerns.

Finding a balance between the global and macro factors at play in the cultural and economic drivers that influence poverty, and the micro every-day circumstances that make up poverty, is necessary toward naming needs and opportunities that are going to be both relevant and aspiring. A single mother who relies on public transit and cannot afford childcare (while paying 40% of her income for rent) has some significant barriers that other parents in Red Deer do not. Meanwhile both this woman and all others in her neighbourhood are feeling the effects of the global change in oil prices and its effect on the local economy.

That is not to say that things are continuing to get worse for the lowest earning populations. There have been great strides in ensuring a minimum standard of living for all citizens in our country and province, and overall, the 'social safety net' is working as designed. The GDP continues to grow, and while the additional

money mainly goes to the "job producers" within the top earning bracket our province does have good services for those who need them. The rise in the minimum wage in Alberta, for example, seems to have had the intended effect. The research manager at the University of Alberta's Parkland Institute writes that "in 2017, these two sectors [accommodation and food-service sector and wholesale and retail trade sector] added a further 17,400 jobs. These jobs were created despite the minimum wage increasing 33 per cent from 2015 to 2017[3]." He concludes by saying, "All in all, minimum-wage hikes don't hurt our economy; they help more working Albertans share in the province's prosperity[4]."
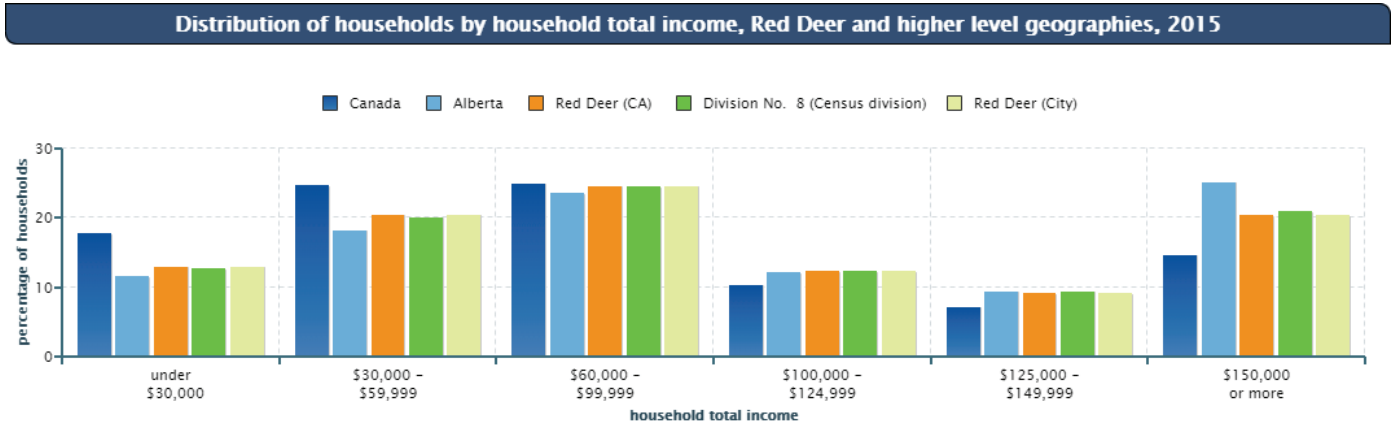
What do we need to know about the work that has already been done in Red Deer?

A necessary starting point in seeking a contextual understanding of poverty in Red Deer requires taking a detailed look at the data available from the 2016 federal census. The data tells a compelling story about who is experiencing poverty and where they live.

The following charts from Statistics Canada Census 2016 display a few fundamental facts about the current state of poverty in Red Deer in comparison to other geographical areas (Canada, Alberta, Central Alberta).[5]

Distribution of household income. Figure 1.0 shows the distribution of household income in Red Deer. The highest proportion of income distribution in Red Deer (24.6% of the population) are households earning between $60,000 and $99,999 per year. A nearly equal proportion of people are making over $150,000 (20.5%) and between $30,000-$59,999 (20.4%). **Importantly, for our analysis, the proportion of households making under $30,000 is 13%.** This proportion is higher than provincial proportion (11.6%) but lower than the National proportion (17.8%). The remainder of households make between $100,000 and $149,999 per year.

Fig 1

Distribution of households by household total income, Red Deer and higher level geographies, 2015

■ Canada ■ Alberta ■ Red Deer (CA) ■ Division No. 8 (Census division) ■ Red Deer (City)

It is important to keep in mind that the people who experience poverty are not randomly selected, but certain demographics are much more likely to be represented. The category of age, for example, shows that proportionally **children (ages 0-19) are more likely to experience a low income household than any other age group in Red Deer.**[6]

Fig 1.1

Percentage of persons in low income by five-year age groups, Red Deer, 2015
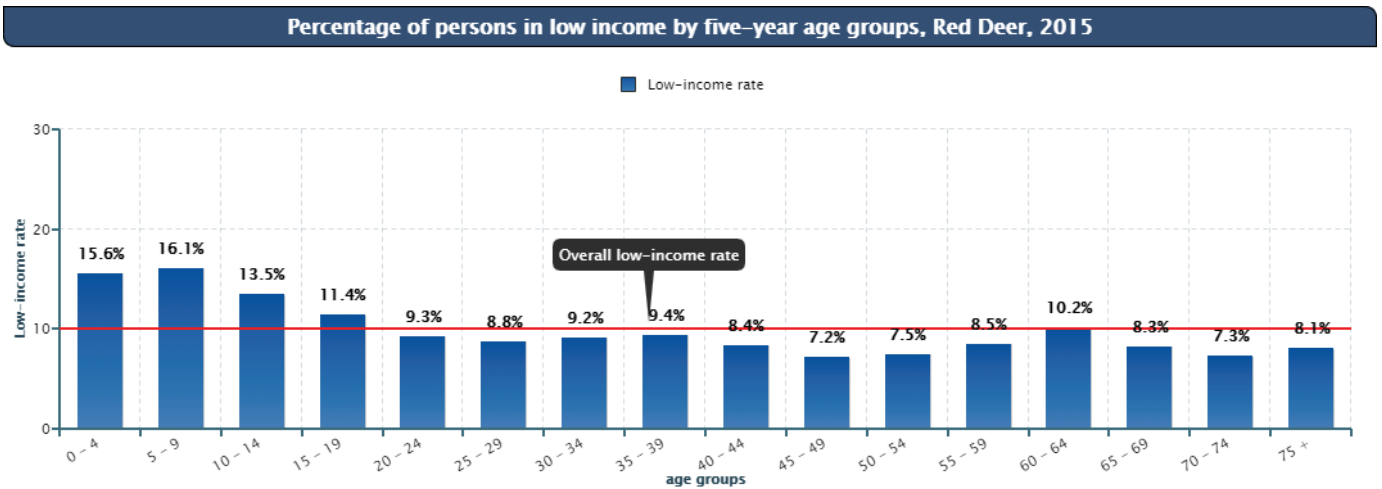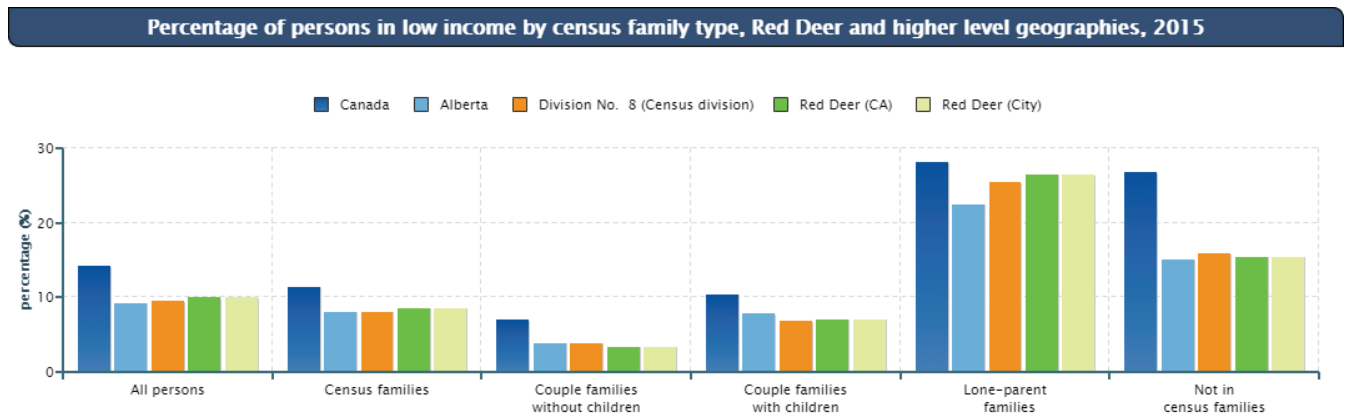
■ Low-income rate

Percentage of persons in low income. The numbers in Fig. 1.1 are closely linked with household type in Fig 1.2. Single parent households have a **significantly higher proportion of low income** than other household types.

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At 26%, this family structure stands out locally as having the most risk of low income in the community, which is related to why children are at a much higher risk than others to experience poverty.

👉 Figure 1.1 shows that the highest proportion of people by age below the low income threshold (LICO-AT) are children aged 5-9, at 16.1%.[7]

Fig 1.2

Percentage of persons in low income by census family type, Red Deer and higher level geographies, 2015

Looking at the data through another lens, the low-income cut offs, after tax measurement (LICO-AT)[8], there are 1,180 "economic families" experiencing low income in Red Deer[9]. Of this total number, 655 are one parent families, compared to 495 couple families.[10] These numbers do not include people who live alone, another related demographic that is overly represented within the low-income category.

👉 People living alone make up nearly half of the households experiencing low-income in Red Deer. Stated differently, of the 4,860 households living in low-income in Red Deer, 2,410 of those are one person households.[11]

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👉 Considering income levels, there are three main demographic populations that stand out as being **more likely to experience poverty in Red Deer: 1) Children 2) Adults living alone, and 3) Single parent families.**

Location:

One of the benefits of the census program is the ability to look at the geographical meaning that can be made with the data. By looking at the data from specific neighbourhoods, we can begin to see where in the city there is a higher prevalence of poverty risk. Core housing need, another indicator of poverty, is based on three factors for housing: suitability, adequacy, and affordability.[12] A quick look at the core housing need in Red Deer neighbourhoods will start to point to certain areas where the need is more pronounced.

Overall, Red Deer has a core housing need rate of 12.1%, which is similar to the National rate of 12.7%, and slightly higher than the Provincial rate of 11.4%. Two census tracts stand out as having a significantly higher core housing need, primarily because of the rates of unaffordability.

👉 The first and most pronounced area of the city with housing unaffordability is census tract 4- South Hill.[13] This area has a core housing need rate of 33.3%, and a rate of unaffordability at 40.1%. This means that 40% of households in South Hill cannot reasonably afford the housing they live in. The second is downtown, where the rate of core housing need is 24% and the rate of unaffordability is 32.9%. This information helps determine where to focus efforts in the future, especially with a concern for affordable housing.

This brief look at some of the data around low-income in Red Deer provides a firm quantitative context for the rest of the report which will highlight some of the qualitative aspects of the experience of poverty in Red Deer.

Engaging with Poverty: ACTIVITY

Based on the demographic profiles provided, identify five people in your life that may be experiencing poverty or at risk of poverty either because of their age, marital status, or life circumstances - you don't have to limit your thinking to people in Red Deer.

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The beginnings of poverty research in Red Deer: CAPRA

Locally, the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance has been a collaborative team working on poverty reduction in the region since 2010. Since that time, there has been a significant amount of knowledge creation and work that is worth recounting here.

Living wage. A major ongoing project for CAPRA has been the research and calculation of the local living wage. Initially calculated in 2014, it has been updated in both 2016 and most recently in 2018. Based on the calculation of expenses, taxes, and available government subsidies, it results in a target wage that allows people and businesses to understand how much it requires to have a minimum standard of living locally. The living wage is calculated for three different social contexts -- a couple with two children, a lone parent with one child, and a single adult.

👉 The living wage calculation provides some great contextual information for what appropriate wages need to be in Red Deer.

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Fig 2.0 Living Wage for Red Deer by Year

	2014	2016	2018[14]
Single Adult	$11.59	$13.68	$15.11
Lone Parent 1 Child	$14.75	$14.10	$17.44
Couple 2 Children	$13.11	$13.81	$17.74

Understanding a living wage benchmark is a key factor in helping employers understand the contextual minimums for affordable living. "Living wage policies and programs can work alongside benefit and subsidy programs to ensure that households are able to achieve a decent standard of living and, in doing so, living wage can bring other benefits to individuals and families, employers and business, and the broader community."[15] CAPRA has facilitated this important work to resource the community with this information.

A series of community discussions in 2012 and 2013 identified the following priorities as critical to reducing poverty in Red Deer:

1. Define and creatively show the face of poverty in Red Deer and Central Alberta;
2. Research shows that those affected most by poverty are women, people with disabilities, aboriginals, and recent immigrants;
3. Age-ism is an area of discrimination that can also lead to poverty;
4. Supports for Lone Parent Families: The breakdown of marriages/relationships can lead families to experience poverty. Statistically in Red Deer, lone parent families headed by a female earn approximately $30,000 less per year than lone parent families headed by a male (2006);
5. Multi-Sectoral Recruitment: The voices of government, businesses, the voluntary sector and people currently experiencing poverty are necessary to a poverty reduction initiative. Individuals are needed to contribute to the conversation and ensure that Central Alberta is a vibrant community for all.[16]

As a result of this work, five action committees were established, each focused on putting actions in place in the following areas: a) living wage; b) food security; c) literacy; d) transportation; e) financial literacy. Each of the action committees has pursued actions (events and initiatives) to raise awareness and build a community response in each of their respective domains.

Lastly, a recent piece of work that must be mentioned is the collaborative project between CAPRA, Red Deer College (RDC), and Alberta Health Services (AHS). A two stage project including a survey and focus groups were conducted over the last two academic years. The survey was a "poverty awareness survey", conducted by Melissa Hillman and supervised by Dr. Anomi Bearden of RDC. The survey had the specific task to "better understand community views and opinions of the nature, prevalence, and perceived impact of poverty in Red Deer."[17] A full review of this survey can be found on the CAPRA website. For the purpose of this paper, we will provide a few highlights to offer context before looking at how other communities have been addressing poverty.

RDC collaborative paper highlights: In total, 90 of the 526 responses to the survey identified as having a lived experience of poverty. Their responses help provide context to the perspective of what the experience of poverty is like in Red Deer. As the Participant Action Research (PAR) model was used as a guide to design this project, the voice of those with lived experience is of particular relevance to this task.

The top three issues of importance to people with lived experience in Red Deer were health and wellbeing, affordable housing, and education & literacy. The largest difference between the priorities of people with lived experience and all other survey respondents revolved around the issue of affordable housing, an issue that was significantly more important to people with lived experience than other community members. Similarly, in another question, respondents were asked how well Red Deer is addressing various poverty related matters. Affordable housing and health received the lowest scores amongst people with lived experience.

The basic needs of a person are the essential building blocks for a full life, and the ability to have health and a home that one can afford are affirmed in this survey as prominent needs in Red Deer. One final note from the survey was the disconnect between people and information about available supports and services. Despite living in the information age, people are still very often unaware of the local supports available in times of need. This need was something that came up again in several focus groups and remains a problem across the social services sector.

Engaging with Poverty: ACTIVITY

Identify a time that you experienced a period of illness, a significant life change, unstable housing or low income. As these are examples of risk factors for poverty, what prevented you from slipping into poverty or helped to ensure that your experience with poverty was short lived?

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Research in Red Deer

There have been numerous reports and studies done in Red Deer over the last number of years that are helpful to note here. Because poverty is a common risk factor or more colloquially known as a 'root cause' — many specific areas of focus have relevance to understanding the whole Red Deer picture of poverty. There is no need to recount the findings of each of these reports, but rather to highlight these documents as reminders of the work done to learn about aspects of poverty in Red Deer.

City of Red Deer
- **Social Policy Framework**
- **Housing**
  - Success Stories
  - The Experience of Homelessness in Red Deer (2015)
  - Everyone's Home - 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness
  - System Framework for Housing and Supports
- **FCSS**
  - FCSS Annual Reports (2014-2017)
- **Community Safety**
  - Toward a Vision for a Safe Red Deer

The Leadership Centre of Central Alberta
  - The Movement Towards Transportation Equality (2013/14)
  - The Single Parents Affected by Poverty: A Community Profile (2011)

CrossRoads Church
  - CrossRoads Church Social Needs Assessment Report (2012)

United Way Central Alberta
  - 2018 Impact Report

Primary Care Network Red Deer
  - Community Impact Report 2017-2018

While by no means exhaustive, this short list calls our memory to the important work that has been completed in Red Deer. When researching poverty and

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its related factors we are not starting from scratch, and there are many accomplishments to be thankful for in recent years. Red Deer is full of people who, both personally and professionally, work hard on many of the complex issues related to poverty and poverty reduction. By continuing this work and building on what has come before, Red Deer can make measurable impacts for and with those fellow citizens experiencing poverty.

3.2 Enhancing our knowledge of poverty: Provincially

What do we need to notice from what is happening in our neighbouring communities?

Poverty is not an isolated conversation, and there is much to learn from both past and current collaborative research within Alberta municipalities and communities. There are several municipal movements underway. Cities are the drivers of change for confronting poverty, and Alberta municipalities have taken charge.[18] Alberta's poverty reduction strategy, Together We Raise Tomorrow: Alberta's poverty reduction strategy, released in June 2013, was not implemented and has since expired — and municipal strategies are filling the void. Since approximately 2012, municipalities have engaged in mobilization efforts to form strategies — with varying goals, actions, outcomes, and implementation plans across Alberta.

Community mobilization has consistently been identified as crucial to the success of these movements. A community approach includes larger collaborative initiatives and smaller actions to be shared amongst the community at large. "Fulsome community support" serves to ensure that ending poverty and addressing well-being are shared priorities for all people within communities, including residents, businesses, and government.[19] A community call to action requires poverty to be kept on the public agenda, leveraging all forms of media, engagement, and community mobilization strategies. Poverty Costs 2.5: Investing in Albertans acknowledges the significant role that communities play in poverty reduction and recommends a community or place-based approach, recognizing that communities are best positioned to know their own needs and assets and provide a vision of the social infrastructure and human capital necessary.[20]

A place-based approach rests on three key principles: 1) robust methods for measuring, monitoring and evaluating poverty reduction at the local level; 2) the creation of place-based joined-up systems; and 3) cooperative implementation of a strategic plan. The strategy also recommends two parallel, province-wide networks for poverty reduction to ensure inclusive, comprehensive, transparent, and accountable implementation of a provincial strategy. One network would be inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, and the other would be inclusive of all other groups.

A number of neighbouring Alberta cities have engaged in poverty reduction work, and it is worth highlighting some of what they have accomplished so that Red Deer can learn from what they have done.
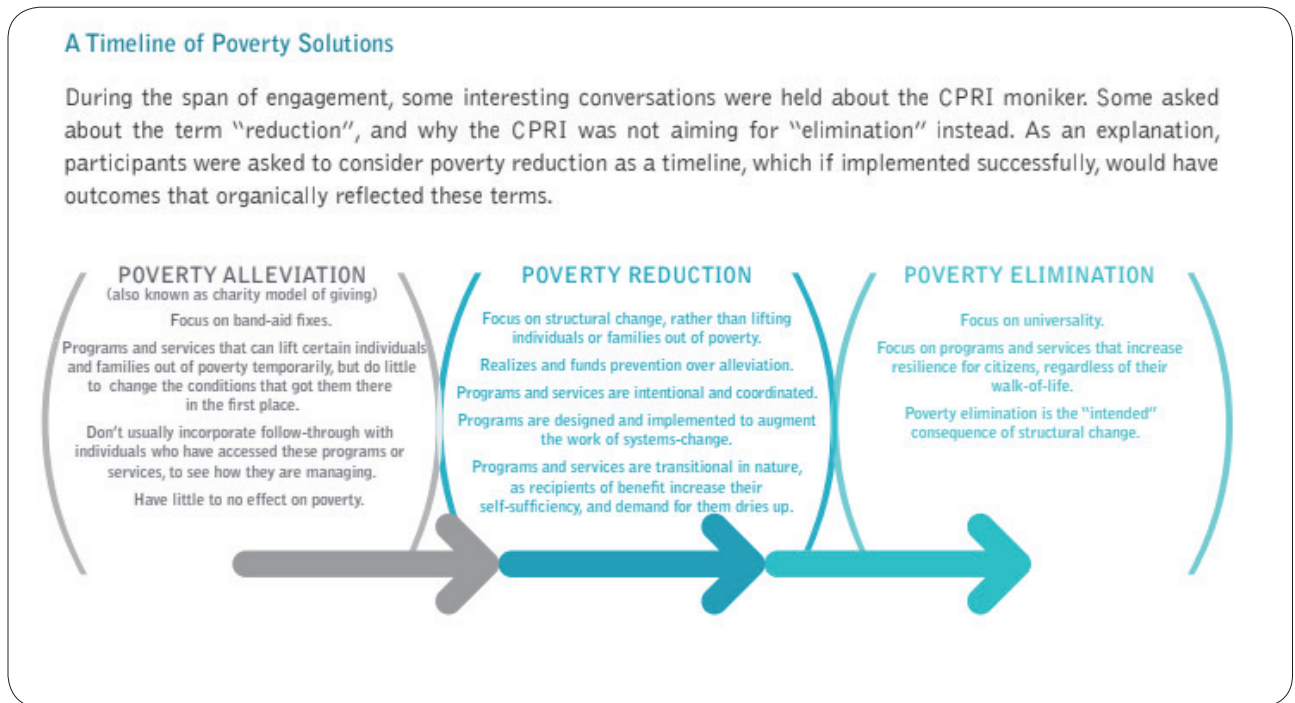
Calgary:

The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative (CPRI) launched in January 2012 is led by the City of Calgary and United Way. Overall, the resulting Calgary poverty reduction strategy, Enough for All (E4A), reflects Calgarians' belief that they already have the assets needed to thrive. The strategy aims to redirect resources rather than seek new ones, to build on existing initiatives, and integrate these into existing structures and operations.

Based on the premise that poverty is best reduced through activities aimed at strengthening communities, Enough For All offers a suite of inter-connected actions, recommending four key priority areas for action: 1) Calgary communities are strong, supportive and inclusive; 2) everyone in Calgary has the income and assets needed to thrive; 3) everyone in Calgary can easily access the right supports, services and resources; and 4) all Aboriginal peoples are equal participants in Calgary's prosperous future. Community hubs are a key initiative. Specific actions address the vulnerabilities that lie at the root of poverty through key policy initiatives, strategic program investments, and service enhancements or procedural changes. The Calgary Poverty Reduction Strategy aims to address the root causes of poverty to **eliminate rather than alleviate it.**[21]

Continued implementation of the strategy transitioned to Vibrant Communities Calgary in January 2015. Overall, the E4A strategy utilizes a collective impact approach, with Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) as the backbone. The strategy is implemented by a series of teams governed by a Stewardship Board and supported by a staffed Secretariat.

Fig 3.0[23]

A Timeline of Poverty Solutions

During the span of engagement, some interesting conversations were held about the CPRI moniker. Some asked about the term "reduction", and why the CPRI was not aiming for "elimination" instead. As an explanation, participants were asked to consider poverty reduction as a timeline, which if implemented successfully, would have outcomes that organically reflected these terms.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION
(also known as charity model of giving)

Focus on band-aid fixes.

Programs and services that can lift certain individuals and families out of poverty temporarily, but do little to change the conditions that got them there in the first place.

Don't usually incorporate follow-through with individuals who have accessed these programs or services, to see how they are managing.

Have little to no effect on poverty.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Focus on structural change, rather than lifting individuals or families out of poverty.

Realizes and funds prevention over alleviation.

Programs and services are intentional and coordinated.

Programs are designed and implemented to augment the work of systems-change.

Programs and services are transitional in nature, as recipients of benefit increase their self-sufficiency, and demand for them dries up.

POVERTY ELIMINATION

Focus on universality.

Focus on programs and services that increase resilience for citizens, regardless of their walk-of-life.

Poverty elimination is the "intended" consequence of structural change.

Continued implementation of the strategy transitioned to Vibrant Communities Calgary in January 2015. Overall, the E4A strategy utilizes a collective impact approach, with Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) as the backbone. The strategy is implemented by a series of teams governed by a Stewardship Board and supported by a staffed Secretariat. The Stewardship Group is a decision-making board which provides direction and oversight, and is comprised of all three orders of government, the private sector, the nonprofit sector, academia, and persons with a lived experience of poverty. E4A is recognized as both a "network and an anchor that weaves and grounds all poverty reduction preventions and interventions in Calgary."

Edmonton:

The cornerstone action from the EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) strategy was the creation of a convening entity known as EndPovertyEdmonton. Notable in the process was the transition from a municipally supported Task Force to this broad-based community entity, as well as the evolving role of The City, from catalyst of EPE (2014-2016), to champion, advocate, partner, and investor. The ongoing work of EPE comes from the five-year Road Map that emerged from a multi-year strategic planning process. The road map provides a community-wide action plan to fully engage all citizens to broadly mobilize for change. Evaluation of key research and best practices identified six key areas ("Game Changers") that will make a realizable impact to people living with poverty: eliminate racism, livable incomes, affordable housing, accessible and affordable transit, affordable and quality child care, and access to mental health services.

Overall, the strategy outlines 35 sequenced actions and identifies potential partners and investment necessary to advance the community wide effort to end poverty; the City will lead on some, partner on others, invest to activate a number and continue to play a key role in the governance model. The bold vision is to end poverty in Edmonton within a generation (30 years). Decisions regarding governance and accountability, scope, and shared investment have allowed this work to move forward, and five community tables have been created, each with a distinct role and diverse membership. All tables are supported by a Secretariat to ensure work is supported and aligned. Tables will convene on a regular basis, to review and report on progress, assess emerging issues and foster new partnerships that support change. [24]

Lethbridge:

After the Vibrant Lethbridge Community held focus groups in 2013, a report was presented to City Council and the Government of Alberta. The mandate of Vibrant Lethbridge, an initiative of the City of Lethbridge Community and Social Development Committee, is to elevate the profile of poverty in Lethbridge, engage multi-sectoral partners, and identify community assets and systemic and/or programmatic interventions that could strengthen the community's response to

poverty related issues. Today, the Vibrant Lethbridge Committee continues the process of moving poverty reduction initiatives into the implementation stage. They have committed to keeping research participants (vulnerable niche groups) involved in the planning and development of new initiatives. [25]

Medicine Hat:

The THRIVE strategy emerged from work that began in 2013, as partners in the Medicine Hat Poverty Reduction Leadership Group began work on a community-based effort to reduce poverty in Medicine Hat. Fundamentally, the strategy believes that to end poverty, they must prevent it in the first place. Six priority areas to address poverty were identified, and, significantly, this was seen an important starting point from which to develop a common understanding of local poverty and move forward to build an action plan. The engagement of Medicine Hat residents remains key to this "community call to action" to end poverty and increase wellbeing. Building on this early work, the vision for the THRIVE Strategy is that by 2030, Medicine Hat will have ended poverty in all its forms, ensuring wellbeing for all. As a result, everyone will have the resources and opportunities needed to achieve a standard of living that allows full participation in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and political spheres of society. "Thriving" communities are identified as having better outcomes across the board, including strengthened performance in the economic sphere, decreased pressure on public systems like policing, emergency health services, or child intervention, and enhanced overall quality of life.

Overall, the THRIVE Strategy identifies three meta-outcome areas, each with their own set of indicators and measures. These include developing a coordinated community system, ensuring access to basic needs, and building a thriving community. Notably, the coordinated community system includes a Council of Champions to drive strategy implementation, and the creation of an independent backbone organization to support the Council of Champions and drive strategy implementation. As the Council and new backbone organization move into the implementation phase, refinements will be made on an ongoing basis.[26]

Successful implementation of a poverty strategy is based on a consistent cornerstone action — the presence of a convening entity.

For Alberta municipalities the cornerstone action for the successful mobilization and sustainability of a poverty movement has been the creation of a convening entity, a stewardship structure, or a coordinated community systems approach. Poverty is a complex issue, and cross-sectoral collaboration and leadership are essential for both addressing poverty and increasing well-being for Albertans.

Consistently, the initial work of a convening entity focuses on the introduction and/or implementation of a new vision for organizing efforts to address poverty in a community. The benefit to the community is the creation of a single, identifiable platform for leadership, advocacy, collective action, and engagement related to poverty. The entity is not a new stand-alone funding organization, nor does it aim to duplicate or compete with existing organizations for funding, resources, or donors. Instead, it holds the space to bring people together for a common cause. This collective impact approach to community change is premised on the belief that shared knowledge, resources and actions yield greater impact than individual efforts.

It is worth noting that these local efforts require additional levels of government support to successfully implement collective impact approaches, support the development of collaborative round tables, and design and deliver local poverty reduction strategies. To maximize their effectiveness, reach, and impact, they must be allocated sufficient time, resources and capacities to achieve transformational impact. [27]

The key focus of the primary steward of the poverty movement is to build wide and deep connections to the community; to "convene, coordinate, and broker innovative partnerships, advocate for policy change, and to build capacity for a community-wide movement to end poverty.[28] Although poverty reduction

strategies across Alberta and Canada vary in terms of structure, targets, goals, and success rates, those strategies that include targets and timelines, public reporting, legislation, and commitment through policy and financial investment are more effective.

There is a call for provincial policy responses to poverty. Researchers recognize that although poverty is "persistent" in Alberta, individuals and families experience poverty differently over time. Measuring poverty, access to data, and identifying targets for policy are three key areas for policy-makers' consideration.

Measuring Poverty. Collaborative research on measures of poverty points to the need for an Alberta (provincial) public policy response that more efficiently targets income support to where it is most needed and is most effective. There is a need for different policy responses to the varied experiences of those in continuous poverty versus those who dip in and out of poverty. Research points to "many holes that prevent advocates and policy-makers from obtaining a clear picture of who is in poverty and the depth of that poverty." Establishing a single 'poverty line' would be instrumental in creating alignment across initiatives, municipalities and provinces and territories.

Access to data and better information. Related to this goal of being better able to measure poverty is the ability to access data and better information. Quite simply, researchers and decision makers need better access to information to inform and target poverty policy. Much of this data is already well known to researchers, but is not widely available or used to determine the appropriate design of policy responses (Hicks, 2018).[29] Proper data describes the experience of poverty by individuals and their families over time and their movements into and out of poverty, and enables the calculation of very accurate measures of the number of people experiencing poverty, the prevalence of poverty, the persistence of poverty, and the severity of poverty.

Identifying targets for policy. Policy makers need simple targets at which to aim anti-poverty policies, recognizing the "imperfect nature of these efforts." Specifically, the Market Basket Measure, adopted by the federal government to gauge its anti-poverty policies, is considered the most useful of the three poverty-line measures produced by Statistics Canada because it is the most sensitive to local conditions. Currently, Alberta evaluates its policies using a measure of poverty that allows no consideration that costs of living might vary by community.

3.3 Enhancing our knowledge of poverty: Nationally

What do we need to notice from what is happening in broader poverty reduction across Canada? The poverty discussion at the federal level has reached new levels of significance within the social policy context. New discussions are emerging in government as a result of the place-based, collective impact, and research approaches happening throughout the country over the past decade or more. There is a role for federal support and unifying strategies to help guide future direction in poverty reduction.

Federal responses to poverty. In 2018, the Government of Canada released the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. This document acknowledges that Canada is a land of prosperity, while at the same time there are many Canadians unable to share in that prosperity. Following a significant consultation across the country, there were a number of themes that emerged:

- **Inability to meet basic needs** - at the top of the list the report identified affordable and appropriate housing as a significant barrier for Canadians, followed by food security, healthcare and the ability to make a better life for children.
- **Challenges with joining the middle class** - there is a general sense amongst people experiencing poverty that they are looking for the means and methods of moving beyond their current situation by accessing education and employment. Barriers include the high cost of childcare and advanced education. There is a need for support to extend beyond current timelines and limits to provide an opportunity to get established.

- **Risks of slipping into poverty** - people currently living above the poverty line feel that they are at risk: at risk of becoming unemployed, having to deal with health or family crisis, or simply living paycheque to paycheque. People are dealing with the significant stress of facing poverty.
- **Experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Metis** - it is acknowledged that Canada's relationship with its Indigenous People needs to change. Poverty exists within the realm of significant other challenges including education, conditions within remote communities, racism, child welfare, justice and employment. Urbanism is a reality that creates its own level of barriers for Indigenous populations.
- **Service delivery** - knowing what supports exist, how to access those supports, and then feeling 'judged' by people delivering the supports was identified as a significant issue.
- **Targets and indicators** - common measurement tools and accountability to a national poverty reduction strategy are needed to determine the extent to which change is happening.

The report provides a good start to a national conversation on poverty, but does not indicate any strategies that might be undertaken by the Government of Canada on behalf of those experiencing poverty in this country. A supplementary report was published by the Government of Canada in 2018 is entitled Opportunity for All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. Here, poverty is defined as:

The condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.

The report builds on the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy and establishes three pillars upon which the Government of Canada will address poverty:

1. **Dignity:** Lifting Canadians out of poverty by ensuring basic needs are met such as safe and affordable housing, healthy food and health care;

2. **Opportunity and Inclusion:** Helping Canadians join the middle class by promoting full participation in society and equality of opportunity; and
3. **Resilience and Security:** Supporting the middle class by protecting Canadians from falling into poverty and by supporting income security and resilience

Opportunity For All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy establishes the market basket measure (mentioned above) as the standard by which poverty will be measured across the country - recognizing that regional differences have a significant impact on the price of goods and services and the resulting income required to maintain a modest quality of life. On a global level, the report acknowledges the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and, in particular, the first goal of "no poverty." While the United Nations is striving to achieve its objective to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" by 2030, the Opportunities for All report sets a target of reducing poverty by 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030. This falls short of the United Nations targets, but would result in the lowest levels of poverty in Canadian history.

Finally, the report commits to establish a National Advisory Council on Poverty, and to introduce legislation in the form of a Poverty Reduction Act. This legislation will entrench the official measures of poverty, the targets, and the National Advisory Council on Poverty into law. First reading of Bill C-87 (The Poverty Reduction Act) was given in the House of Commons on November 6, 2018.

National movements and studies in response to poverty.

The Tamarack Institute: Place-based poverty reduction strategies. Also at the national level, the Tamarack Institute continues to lead a collective impact movement for place-based poverty reduction strategies. Beginning in 2002, Tamarack initiated an action-learning experiment called **Vibrant Communities Canada.** Following the success of the 13 pilot communities located across Canada, the initiative was scaled-up in 2012 and became **Cities Reducing Poverty**. At that time, Red Deer became a member of the movement and has been represented by CAPRA. In their 2018 publication, the State of Cities

Reducing Poverty, Tamarack outlines significant advancements made in the collective efforts in every corner of the country.

Game-Changer Approaches to poverty. Within the Vibrant Communities Canada (VCC) learning environment, the concept of "game-changer approaches" have emerged — actions that profoundly impact the poverty experience with positive outcomes that ripple beyond the original action. Eight emergent practices include Housing, Transportation, Education, Health, Income and Jobs, Food Security, Financial Empowerment, and Early Childhood Development; which are not dissimilar to the priority areas established by CAPRA. VCC also identifies that game-changer actions need to go deep, as opposed to scratching the surface with a number of "thin" ideas that have limited impact. [30]

The Canadian Poverty Institute, established in 2014, is the only national academic institute dedicated to the elimination of poverty in Canada. This interdisciplinary Institute, housed within Ambrose University in Calgary, Alberta, seeks to heal poverty through teaching, research and public education. The Institute works with non-profit organizations, churches and government to provide opportunities for scholars, non-profit organizations and students to learn and research poverty and to seek and share solutions for the betterment of all Canadians. The Canadian Poverty Institute understands poverty to be multidimensional, involving material, social and spiritual poverty.

1. Material poverty exists where people lack access to, or the skills to acquire, sufficient material and financial resources to thrive.
2. Social poverty exists where people are isolated and lack the formal and informal supports necessary to be resilient in times of crisis and change.
3. Spiritual poverty exists where people lack meaning in their lives and connection to a faith community that sustains them. [31]

The Fraser Institute's inquiry (2019) into the causes of poverty frames poverty itself as a "circumstance of serious deprivation where a person lacks one or more basic needs—as opposed to a condition of inequality."[32] The study asks: Why do some people find themselves in a circumstance of serious deprivation and, more importantly, why are some able to escape poverty fairly easily while others

endure persistent, long-term poverty? Overall, it presents two broad categories of "initiating causes" of poverty: bad luck and bad choices. A third factor, important in explaining persistent, longer term poverty, is described as enablement from support organizations and government.[33] Overall, the author concludes that bad choices are the dominant initiating cause of poverty in countries like Canada and the United States, and suggests that a useful framework for understanding poverty is to look at bad luck and bad choices as the proximate causes, and enablement as the key explanation for persistent and enduring poverty. [34]

This article offers a different perspective and demonstrates the diverse opinions and research that exist today on the causes of poverty. For people experiencing poverty, there are important questions about luck and choices that should be considered with an open mind. Further, for organizations supporting people experiencing poverty, the question as to whether current practices and policies hold people in a state of dependence is an important consideration to be addressed. Understanding the position of this author presents an opportunity to more deeply address the underlying perceptions of poverty. As a credible research institute, this article uses research and data methods to present a different perspective on poverty, and challenges existing support organizations to reflect on their practices as a key to better engaging that portion of the population that subscribes to the philosophy.

The Government of Canada has begun to show momentum in the development of social policy related to poverty reduction. The work of local initiatives, provincial strategies, and research and policy institutes are contributing to, and providing critical information to help form national approaches. At all levels of investigation, program, and policy delivery there is a critical role for engagement and action. Progressive and conservative approaches exist in this country and neither has the ability to fully address the complexity of poverty without a balance of strong economic and social policies.

4.0
THE CHANGING CONVERSATION

The conversation around poverty is changing. Poverty isn't a new concept for Canadians; however, the face of poverty and the nature of poverty has been changing over the past two generations. The approaches to address poverty continue to change, research continues to emerge, and best or promising practices are being identified. Consistent with other social conditions, there is tremendous value in networking and sharing new information between communities to advance practices for all.

The definition of poverty is changing. When people define "poverty" they most often define a measure that is based on income. The availability of income is, after all, what makes shelter, food, clothing, and other essentials available to us. [35] Poverty is also defined by lines: Statistics Canada calls this LICO (low-income cut-off). Calgary's strategy describes poverty as "the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power to acquire and maintain self sufficiency while being able to be an active participant in society." [36] This lack of income, choice and power affects the ability of many Calgarians to participate fully in the life of our community — not just those living below an arbitrary poverty line. Edmontonians experience poverty when they lack or are denied economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community.[37] However, living in poverty is beginning to be understood to include more than not making ends meet each month; it is increasingly being linked to a loss of culture, traditions, language and spiritual connection. [38]

Focusing on one factor alone, or in isolation, is not enough. The provincial movement to end poverty and increase well-being for Albertans recognizes that each individual has a unique and complex story to share. We cannot look at the contributors of poverty in isolation. Poverty research within Alberta points to the need for a transformational and systemic approach to social issues and building systems that support people, offering an opportunity to do more than just survive. Because the causes of poverty are many, we need to reconsider, realign,

and provide coordinated supports to people within our communities, so support is not fragmented, disarrayed, or difficult to access.[39]

Ending poverty is the right thing to do. EndPovertyEdmonton's Year One Progress Report (2017/18) confirms that Edmontonians agree that ending poverty is the right thing to do—economically, socially and morally. Most assert that the economic, human rights, and public opinion cases to end poverty have already been made, and now is the time to act. There is a strong sentiment that we can do better, and we must; a new way of thinking and acting is essential, and possible. In Edmonton, for example, the goal of the movement is to change the conversation from managing poverty to ending poverty, with three objectives: 1. Enable Edmontonians to re-frame how they see and respond to poverty; 2. Mobilize Edmontonians to be part of or take actions on solutions; and 3. Engage other Edmontonians to join the EndPovertyEdmonton movement.

5.0
THE RESEARCH PLAN

For this needs and opportunities assessment the consultants worked with the CAPRA steering committee to design the community engagement plan to: a) determine the right perspectives to target and b) access key community contacts to ensure success. Because participant action research (PAR) was highlighted as a key methodological consideration from the outset of this project, the research team included many of these key principles in the process of the project. In a phrase, the project was conducted to be with and by people experiencing poverty and not simply for them. Another key consideration was the relatively open ended inquiry with which we engaged in the conversations. In contrast to having a hypothesis and looking for proofs or disproofs, we allowed the experiences and perspectives of the research participants to form the conclusions presented below.

The process of generating local information and perspectives was based on a consultation program that included key informant interviews and focus groups. A central purpose of the key informant interviews was to get a perspective from people not directly engaged in poverty reduction, as a method of trying to understand different perspectives on the topic and pursue new opportunities from folks not as engaged in the current system of support. On the other hand, the focus group sessions were designed to gather thoughts and perspectives from a wide variety of people who have some kind of lived experience of poverty.

Ten key informant interviews were conducted with eleven people (six females and five males). Interviewees included a former downtown business owner, a leader in the faith sector, a single person who is currently street involved, a political leader, an executive director from a local not-for-profit organization, people in the community health and safety sector, a media representative, two single parents, and a restaurant manager.

Five focus group sessions were conducted. Four sessions were promoted by the host organizations at the Golden Circle, the Central Alberta Immigrant Women's

Association (CAIWA), Family Services of Central Alberta (FSCA) and the John Howard Society. The fifth session involved a group of local artists. Participants offered a variety of perspectives including those of single parents, seniors, new Canadians of diverse ethnic backgrounds, Indigenous values, men and women.

The interview and focus group approaches were built on a sense of trust and openness. This method allowed participants to engage with each question based on their own experiences and perspectives that they heard in the community. To some extent, the information gathered in one interview or focus group allowed for a deeper discussion in subsequent interviews, and pointed to other important issues to be explored. To protect the confidentiality of the interview and focus group participants, there are no specific references to the individual, their role in the community or the focus group they attended.

6.0
COMMUNITY VOICES

Poverty can easily be invisible. Increasing awareness and understanding of the faces of poverty begins when we recognize poverty in the experiences of our neighbours, colleagues or friends.

Through the engagement processes we met with people having various experiences and perspectives on poverty in Red Deer. We wanted to give you an opportunity to hear from the voices of your neighbours, four Red Deerians who have experienced living in poverty. To protect their privacy their names have been changed.
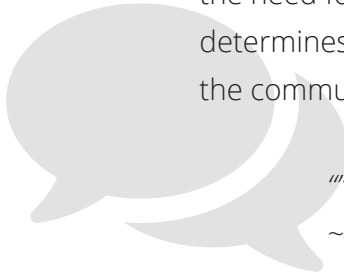
MEET KATIE

Katie is currently experiencing poverty. She moved to Red Deer three years ago, and is a single mother with three young children, who now live with their Dad. The oldest of five children, Katie's father was an alcoholic and her parents were divorced early in her life. She got her first job at age 12, and juggled multiple jobs throughout her teenage years. She attended college to become a land surveyor, and held a variety of physical labor jobs to support herself and her kids. Katie describes herself as a high-functioning addict, as for 10 years she was able to hold a job, until she was laid off. Many of her struggles relate to a cycle of insecure housing and employment. She now sleeps in apartment stairwells, in 20 minute increments, and struggles to find consistent access to shower and laundry facilities. Although she knows she has many problems of her own to solve, she is interested in how she can help others who feel trapped and stuck in their current circumstances.

> *"I start the day with six plans. I don't want to live like this. I go through building myself up so many times—I get to the point of... I can't do it anymore." ~ Katie*
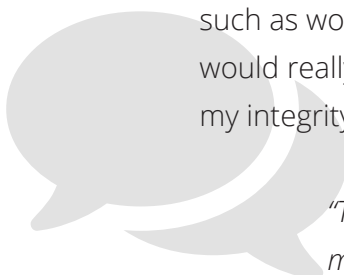
bassa
SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

MEET AARON

Aaron is currently in the criminal justice system. As his re-entry date approaches, he is anxious about the missing links he feels are crucial for his successful reintegration into society. Although he is appreciative of his network — the "family" that he has depended on during his incarceration and transition, he is eager to return to work. His future as a skilled mechanic is in question, as he continues to recover from substance use and a major heart surgery last year. He is not sure if he will be able to re-enter the workforce as he knew it because of his pacemaker and several health and safety employment regulations for re-integration. He recognizes that he will need to make significant lifestyle changes, including retraining or re-educating himself; he appreciates that this is his responsibility alone. Aaron has never had to use public "supports" before, and he's concerned that there will be barriers to a smooth transition, such as the need for a physical address to receive a cheque from Alberta Works, as he determines what is next for him. Aaron talks about the importance of bridges to the community as key to his success.

> ""Either go [back] to jail OR things work out; either way you're roofed."
> ~ Aaron

MEET JOANNA

Joanna is in her 60s, single, and semi-retired. She still works a bit and says she presents as "a professional" in the "capitalistic world." Joanna talks about the challenges of living with multiple chronic conditions, and the difficulty of trying to keep her driver's license because of issues with her eyesight. For her, most days just "to show up takes a lot of creative problem solving." Since moving to Red Deer she has found it tough to fit in, and she wonders why it seems so hard to find the right connections. Often she doesn't know what to ask, how to ask, or who to ask for help. Joanna knows that connection is key, and thinks grassroots initiatives, such as women's sharing groups, sharing talents and expertise (e.g. pet sitting), would really help those trying to survive in Red Deer. She wonders: How do I keep my integrity in the face of poverty?
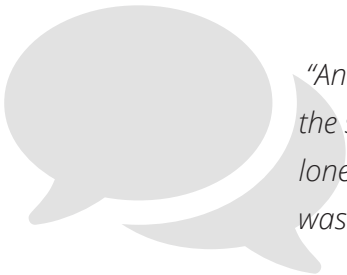
> "The closer you are to 'the line,' the more you will help your brother. The more 'things' people have, the less they will help." ~ Joanna

bassa
SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

MEET CARISSA

Carissa is a 36-year-old single mom with two children who are currently in middle school and high school. She says she's doing better now, after "much, much, hard work." Her biggest challenge when moving from southern Alberta was locating affordable rental accommodation suitable for raising her kids. In her first townhouse, she experienced several break-ins to her house and car, which left her scared for her kids' safety outside. Carissa runs her own house cleaning business and lives payment to payment, with barely enough for rent and utilities. She describes two sides to poverty: the financial side and the loneliness side. She left her husband with $1.87 in her bank account and, for years, felt the stress of not having money to provide for her kids — for simple things like milk and for gas in her car. She remembers telling her kids that it wasn't always going to be like this. Single-parenting left no room or time for her own emotions and baggage. To complicate things, during a time when her daughter was hospitalized for one year between Edmonton and Calgary children's hospitals, she relied on the generosity of a GoFundMe campaign set up by friends.

Carissa is looking into short-term post-secondary opportunities to improve her family's quality of life. Four years ago she received a bursary to finish grade 12, and she has applied for grants and scholarships to help with the costs of furthering her education. Taking on student loan debt is not an option for her at this time.

Carissa is very thankful for community resources, such a single mom's group that offers connection to peers, training, support, and services. Having a really good friendship circle and support group has been key to building a better life in Red Deer.

> *"And there's the loneliness—the mental aspect of [poverty]. No money, and the stress of not having the money to provide for my kids... and then the loneliness of not being able to go out and connect with others because I wasn't even able to support myself and my kids." ~ Carissa*

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Responses

Through the engagement plan we sought a variety of perspectives on poverty and the experience of poverty in Red Deer.[40] Overall, there was a sense of support and compassion for those experiencing poverty in our community. This may be one of the greatest opportunities to address poverty in Red Deer – the openness to authentic conversation on the subject.

For some, issues of street involvement, homelessness, and substance use could easily be viewed as the face of poverty. Others, however, were able to identify that social disorder may be related to poverty but acknowledged that poverty is a much broader topic with varying degrees of effect.

Specific to Red Deer, the current economic downturn has resulted in more "riches to rags" stories than ever before - those individuals and families who have experienced prosperity in the past and are now struggling financially. According to one key informant, the prevailing perception about poverty amongst those experiencing this new financial distress is grounded in an "overwhelming sense of entitlement in Alberta - people live outside their means and then cry when they can't sustain it; people are able to dig themselves into a hole that they can't climb out of." Acknowledging that this is a generalization, there was a recognition that amongst this group of people there are some willing to accept help, but others who refuse because of pride or because they don't want to risk their personal integrity by "becoming one of them." The opportunity to bridge understanding and empathy between those experiencing financial difficulty over the long term and those feeling the effects of the current economy doesn't appear to be happening overall.

Poverty, as exhibited by those experiencing street homelessness or dealing with substance use in the downtown, appears to be skewing the broader perspective

of poverty in the community. According to another interviewee, "folks are feeling saturated and defeated; their capacity to deal with it [poverty and other social issues in the community] seems limited and they get too overwhelmed to help others." One interviewee indicated that amongst those experiencing extreme poverty (ie. street involved), there is a perception that they are being enabled by agencies, that they don't appreciate the help and support from others, and squander away the supports that are provided. Some believe it's "easier to just lump people together and then dismiss them." The overall sense was that the social issue soundbites and negativity related to the dialogue is adding to the overall stress being felt in the community.

After all the engagement sessions were complete the dialogue with interviewees and focus group participants resulted in notes that were transcribed, sorted and themed. Many insightful conversations and diverse thinking resulted from the engagement processes, and a number of key community experiences and knowledge stood out above the rest. Five themes emerged: polarity, social connection, understanding, system challenges, and life in Red Deer.

Theme One - Polarity

While there is a sense that extreme views likely exist on the topic within the community, this didn't directly emerge through the consultations. Online media sites can reveal strong sentiments about such topics as personal responsibility, corrupt systems and people "cheating" the systems designed to help. A key theme that emerged was a prevalent sense of polarity regarding the topic of poverty. Polarity, in this case, refers to the opposite forces that dictate the terms of the conversation. Polarity was a consistent theme emerging from the key informant interviews, but agreement on the terms of polar opposites wasn't consistent.

One view of poverty related to work ethic emerged in the comments of several key informants: "Work harder - it worked for me." Another key informant shared a similar sense that this perception exists in the community, and offered that there's "lots of NIMBY [Not In My Back Yard]; why can't people just get a job - which in this economic climate seems weird since there are many people out of

work." This same interviewee was surprised that those recently unemployed as a result of the current recession had little empathy for those that have experienced generational poverty, citing that they don't want to be "one of those people" – ongoing evidence that people have a sense of difference from those experiencing poverty.

While there may be an underlying sense of resentment toward those needing (or accepting) public assistance, a number of interviewees also identified that their own past experiences with poverty didn't turn around without the help of others.

The causes of polarity are diverse and are the result of strong cultural and social forces, and can lead to a general disengagement from vital initiatives such as poverty reduction. However, there are latent possibilities for individuals and groups on both sides of the poles to effectively mobilize on different aspects of this complex and complicated problem. There are skills and assets from multiple perspectives that must be used in order for the situation to be altered for the better.

Poverty is not about Us-versus-Them. *The conversation about who is affected by poverty is beginning to change from 'us-versus-them' to a universal and inclusive conversation based on acknowledging human vulnerability. When we speak of poverty universally, we recognize that we are all vulnerable to some degree. The recent economic downturn in Alberta and the ripple effect on individuals and families has reminded us of that vulnerability. This financial vulnerability is the bedrock for poverty, and affects more families than is apparent at first. For example, should someone carrying a debt load suddenly lose their job, get sick (including developing a mental illness or an addiction), get divorced, have to change locations, or experience a recession, one could anticipate a series of domino events happening to this person. These are events that could happen to any one of us at any time—which are beyond our control.[41] Acknowledging and addressing these vulnerabilities, and changing the poverty conversation from alleviation to prevention significantly increases the opportunities for discovering viable solutions for all people at risk of or experiencing poverty.[42]*

Theme Two - Social Connection

A second theme that emerged through the key informant interviews relates to **social connection.** A number of key informants acknowledged that poverty, as a lack of financial resources, was one experience, and likely the most common understanding of poverty. Poverty of relationship was also a concern. There was a strong notion that isolation is a factor in the community, and impacts people of all ages and financial means. One focus group participant indicated, "social interaction is so important for lower income people."

Addressing relational poverty and isolation in the community may be an opportunity to bridge people of varied financial means and personalize the poverty experience.

At a personal and/or family level, it was shared that people don't seem to have the same level of connectedness to 'family' as in the past. For one interviewee, growing up in a home with a single mother, there was tremendous support available when needed from grandparents. In another interview, the experience of two different single-parent families receiving support from a church program highlighted the differences between the family that received support directly from the donors, and the family that chose to remain anonymous to their sponsor family. The family that chose support with connection found an ongoing relationship with an older couple that provides a far greater benefit than financial relief. For another interviewee, growing up in a family with limited means meant reliance on family to work through situations together was critical. "Everyone helped everyone else; we relied on our families."

On another level — there appears to be a high level of independence amongst people and a lack of interdependence.[43] "Family relationships here (in Canada) are very different — people are very independent," shared one immigrant focus group participant. As an example, they shared that when a child is born into a family where they came from, everyone would gather around the birth of the new baby to show support and to take care of each other; here they were surprised

that it is not the same. Amongst seniors, it was acknowledged that the acceptance of personal supports challenged or compromised their sense of independence. There would appear to be a sentiment that independence is socially more acceptable than interdependence in Alberta, and even Canadian culture.

For the focus group participants, there was a strong connection expressed between poverty and loneliness. One person commented that they were "shocked at how many lonely seniors there are with limited social connections." To another single mom, poverty, loneliness, and mental health were directly linked and, for her, often resulted in a lack of connection with friends and the community at-large.

A group of new Canadians identified a social norm that challenged the notion of 'it takes a village to raise a child.' Again, the tendency to favour independence over interdependence has an impact on children - the "culture [in Canada] is that everyone is on your own." Assuming this social norm is correct, the inability to develop and maintain strong social connections and/or accept help from others creates a stigma for people who need help to overcome poverty.

Several interviewees observed that social agencies appear to be assuming some responsibility for social connection and, while that provides an immediate outlet for people lacking personal relationships, it may seem to take the responsibility away from community members to build relationships — it seems "left to the agencies." For some focus group members, the "sense of community is seriously lacking [in Red Deer]." In fairness to local agencies, staff and volunteers provide an important bridge of connection — an outlet to share their experiences and begin finding supports. One community location identified by focus group participants as a space for natural community connections was Ross Street Patio, which "brings a cross section of people and context to be pleasant and friendly with one another."

Quality of relationships has a bearing on a person's ability to generate positive outcomes. "People need to be treated with dignity; when people are poor and treated poorly it seems to come from a place of judging them," said one key

informant. One focus group participant noted, "it's almost easier to be in a group and hold each other down as opposed to helping to lift you up." Relationships are also essential in the delivery of programs and services — as people conducting assessments seek to determine eligibility and qualifications. One interviewee noted a "lack of flexibility in programs and the ability to apply rationale or use an individual approach -- systems become about themselves and not the people they were designed to serve." For people experiencing poverty and seeking support, the ability to speak with people who treat them with dignity and respect is critical. Overall, personal connection, empathy, and a sense of hope for their future is significant.

For many interviewees, relationship, trust, and vulnerability were important considerations when the possibility of exiting poverty was discussed. "When you're IN poverty, it's hard to imagine getting out of poverty," commented one focus group participant. Trust was acknowledged as an important factor, and vulnerability was necessary on the part of both the people seeking supports and those offering supports — those who can provide and create a relational safety net. "It takes two parties willing to invest a bit," indicated one interviewee. "We need to realize how much we need and rely on one another."

Theme Three - Understanding

A third theme to emerge was evidence of a depth of understanding about poverty in Red Deer. While some interviewees acknowledged the effect that seeing poverty in Red Deer's downtown had on their perceptions of poverty in the community, most interviewees were able to see more broadly and articulate the complexities of poverty. Participants acknowledged that they see varying degrees of economic poverty, from those experiencing street life, to those with limited income and an inability to meet basic needs, to those feeling a sense of poverty due to minimal cash flow resulting from debt. Interviewees acknowledged that the ability to cope with economic poverty was a direct reflection of social poverty — individuals' lack of access to close family, friends and associates that can provide hope and support. As well, it was acknowledged that spiritual poverty,

or the limited access to inner nourishment, may be a consideration for some people. This was echoed by people within focus groups, citing that sometimes "money poor is not the worst kind" and that "we can be poor financially and still contribute to society." These results align with The Canadian Poverty Institute's understanding of poverty as multidimensional, involving material, social and spiritual poverty.

There was also an acknowledgement that poverty is **intermittent, and not forever.** Newcomers, in particular, noted that once they were connected to the right resources (material and human), they were able to stand on their own feet. Single moms noted that it took "much, much hard work" and strong networks to emerge from poverty situations. Statistics have shown that most low-income Albertans are in a state of insufficient income for less than two years, which suggests that the number of people affected by, or vulnerable to, poverty might be much greater than the current low-income population statistics. Many people have experienced poverty and have moved out of poverty, although they may cycle back in and out again repeatedly. Many more may be living above the poverty line, but risk becoming poor. [44]

As the key informant interviews progressed, a thread emerged relative to the role that **media** plays in the perceptions of poverty. Amongst a number of key informants, there was a sense that the media creates an image (stereotype) of poverty in an attempt to create association and interest. An interview with an experienced member of the local media in Red Deer was conducted to explore this emerging theme.

Social media and cable news networks have a significant impact on the way news is being delivered and digested. It was identified that social media tends to "chip away" at the edges of news stories and contributes to a sense of polarity. The unregulated cable news industry has changed the way media is delivered by selecting stories and angles tailored to their particular views.The public is invited to "choose the kool-aid they want to drink." Because of fundamental changes and cutbacks in reporting, live coverage of human interest stories is limited. On the upside, this provides tremendous opportunity for neighbourhoods and

community organizations to write their own news stories and offer useful and informative material to their community.

Theme Four - Challenge with Systems

The "challenge with systems" begins with gaining a better understanding of the difference between charity and systems-change.[45] Having only known a charity-model approach to poverty, most people are unfamiliar or even perplexed with the complicated notion of systems-change. In a nutshell, instead of hand-outs or band-aid fixes — **systems, or structural change**, is about recognizing people's vulnerabilities long before they hit a crisis point. This upstream approach is focused on "building a guardrail on the top of a cliff to stop people from tumbling down, when all other supports give way." This approach is different than solely traditional effort focused on funding "rescue missions."

When systems that aren't working (efficiently/effectively) are altered or improved, the positive consequences are experienced by everyone, not only those who are disadvantaged or marginalized. Economically this includes spending the money we currently invest into the social service system — between $7-9.5B a year in Alberta, in smarter, more efficient ways. Systems change is the only way to reduce the stigma that many disadvantaged folks in Red Deer experience.

Stories about people who had attempted to "do good" and felt blocked by the systems, regulations, and rules in place emerged as another theme. The best way to communicate this theme is by sharing two stories communicated to the research team:

- A woman who had worked all her life and owns her own home found herself in a situation wherein she lives on AISH. To help make ends meet and be kind to another person facing a similar situation, she opened her home to support someone else that lives on AISH. Because she owns her own home and was collecting rent, she exceeded the allowable income levels. She still doesn't have enough to live on and can't charge appropriately for rent within her home.

- A restaurant manager has employed people on assistance in the past, and would like to have more opportunities to do so in the future. In his experience, these employees can only work a certain number of hours due to the limitations on how much they can earn. They typically max out at 15-18 hours/week. As part-time is 20-24 hours per week, the employer wondered, "who do I hire to cover the other 5-7 hours/week for that part-time position?" The manager is frustrated that there's no incentive/advantage to work more if workers are interested and capable. They ask: "Wouldn't it be smarter to allow people to get ahead a little?"

New legislation (Bill C-26) was introduced as a response from Albertans to some of the challenges that existed with past regulations as identified by interviewees above.[46]

Focus group participants shared a sentiment that the systems are designed for failure. There was a sense that a culture exists within some systems (ie. justice and income supports) based on an assumption that people won't change regardless of the supports being provided. "We are destined to fail." For some, poverty feels like a lifestyle of collecting payments, using the enabling agencies to meet basic needs, and stay stuck. The process of survival becomes a full time job that leaves little space for self improvement and advancement. Despite the need to access systems and supports, there is still a sense of pride expressed amongst focus group participants that they do not want to go into the Provincial Building, and wish that workers could meet with clients at other locations in the community.[47] The turnover in provincial staff also makes it hard for people to establish relationships with their workers - they never really get to be known for who they are.

Relative to the support provided by the Province of Alberta, public servants are guided by the Alberta Public Service vision and values.[48]

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Amongst immigrant focus group participants, there was a strong sense that the systems are designed for people to simply take and receive. There is a sentiment that people, including immigrants, have skills and abilities that they can give to their families and their communities, but that there is little recognition of, expectation that, or opportunities presented when they are receiving supports. "We have so much to give, but we just don't know how." To many, the systems feel like they are set up to make immigrants (and others) feel like they are a burden to society rather than potential contributing members.

Theme Five - Observations about life in Red Deer

People new to Red Deer or experiencing the community from a different perspective offer valuable observations, experiences, and insights. Careful to ensure that this report is reflective of the words shared by individuals and within groups, our fifth theme is meant to offer some additional insights.

High costs of living

Several parents who participated in focus group commented on child care and the cost of raising children in Red Deer. "We want to give kids the chance to participate, but children's activities are very expensive here." These parents acknowledged the protective factors that children's activities embed, and want their kids to be active, healthy and socially connected. For seniors, the reality of a fixed income requires significant choices to be made. Some seniors wished they had the opportunity to barter ie. a different form of having to pay for snow shovelling or lawn care, and expressed a desire to share their talents and experience with others this way.

Participants in the artists' focus group had a different perspective on possessions — "loving what you do makes it easier to make sacrifices on not spending."

For them, there was an underlying sense that satisfaction does not come from financial prosperity and possessions, but rather from creativity and a sense of community amongst artists. The group was careful to acknowledge that there is still a need to be paid as artists, and that their creativity has value. For them, and for many others, affordable housing continues to be a significant challenge.

A fear of poverty

A number of interview and focus group participants shared a sentiment that the general public is afraid of people experiencing poverty and homelessness - there is an there is an underlying belief that poverty and crime are inherently connected. One participant shared: "Physical attributes don't indicate danger." The group went on to express their desire for people to approach others with empathy and compassion as opposed to fear.

Seniors offered insight into a possible threshold related to fear and compassion. When considering the needs of others who were "close to the [poverty] line" they shared that people were more willing to help one another out. For people viewed to be experiencing homelessness, the sentiment shifted to a desire that we "need to get rid of them, need to clean them out." This may signify a challenge related to tolerance levels across the range of poverty in the community.

Wealth and poverty

Both focus group participants and key informants noticed that people with high incomes can also experience a form of poverty. This type of poverty was identified to exist in two different formats — poverty due to debt, and poverty of relationships.

Consumer debt in the form of houses, expensive cars, and vacations, leave some families feeling the same anxiety and stress as those struggling to pay for food, rent and childcare. According to one interviewee, "someone decided it is not okay to not have enough," and poverty arose from a sense of scarcity. The gap

between those who appear to live in prosperity, and those challenged to meet their basic needs, contributes to the sense of 'differentness' when, in fact, people may have more in common than they are willing to admit. A person who appears to have more than they need, but with significantly lower net worth than a person who appears to have very little demonstrates the irony of poverty. Anxiety and vulnerability exist in both situations.

A newcomer observed that people here [in Canada] "work, work, work to pay a bill and [have] less life and culture." This sentiment was their way of identifying the lack of connection between people because of their over-allocation of time to work and lack of family-work balance. This notion of relationship poverty had another interviewee pondering, "I don't understand how we got here. These are first world problems — sometimes the wealthy have more depression than people living on the streets." In their line of work, the occurrence of people who need immediate supports as a result of the economy and changes in financial status has reached alarming levels.

7.0
NEEDS and OPPORTUNITIES

The Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) has set out to identify a series of needs and opportunities that help to better frame the narrative and the current situation of poverty in Red Deer. As previously mentioned, this document is not meant to suggest strategic direction, but rather to offer an assessment that could provide value in future community strategic planning on the topic. This section has been written and organized in a manner that identifies needs expressed by participants and observed through the research, followed by possible opportunities available for people, groups of people, organizations and/or government. In addition, the needs and opportunities expressed in this report connect with the eight (8) priority areas identified by CAPRA (July, 2018).[49] Due to the interrelated nature of the poverty experience, each of the needs and opportunities in this section addresses multiple priority areas.

As stated earlier, while the opportunities may suggest action, there are no assigned responsibilities, timelines, or accountability measures that would typically be expected within a community strategic plan. To frame this needs and opportunities section, the following descriptions have been developed for contextual purposes:

Need - a circumstance that, if addressed, would provide an improved quality of life for people experiencing poverty.

Opportunity - a situation or change that is within the realm of possibility and has the likelihood to improve the quality of life for people experiencing poverty.

There is no particular order associated with the needs and opportunities listed in this section as people are experiencing poverty in a variety of ways. Some of the needs and opportunities address the topic at a personal level while others influence policy direction, planning and collaboration (systemic). Further, the opportunities identified are not meant to be exhaustive, nor do they assign

responsibility, timelines or measurements for accountability. This section reflects the ideas and perspectives from participants in addition to concepts emerging from the data and research.

1. Basic Needs and Low Income

There has been many aspects of poverty that have been highlighted throughout this document through the work that others have done, and what people in Red Deer are saying now. Something that is consistent throughout is that the ability to provide for the basic needs of your household is a basic standard of life that too many people in Red Deer are unable to consistently meet. Poverty includes more than the ability to meet basic needs, but if basic needs are unable to be met, poverty is present.

Needs:

- **Housing affordability** continues to be a major concern, especially in certain parts of Red Deer. In the demographics section of this report it was highlighted that over 40% of households in the South Hill neighbourhood were unaffordable (within the core housing need calculation). The concern for affordable housing was echoed throughout our consultation, from folks who chose intentionally to live in a more modest dwelling than their peers, to someone trying to afford an apartment with a few friends to avoid homelessness. If someone is spending more than 30% of their income on housing it creates significant financial pressures that have consequences for the rest of their lives.

- **Children** are more likely to live in low income households than any other age range in Red Deer. Poverty increases the likelihood of Adverse Childhood Experiences, subsequent toxic stress, and unfavourable health outcomes. What happens during childhood lasts a lifetime and there is a need to decrease the number of children in Red Deer who are unfairly affected by low income and poverty related experiences.

- **Single parents**, particularly mothers, are at a significantly higher risk of living in a low income situation. While there are already efforts and initiatives in place, such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the Alberta Child Tax Benefit, and local programs that offer subsidised or sliding scale fees for service, the need for additional day to day support remains. **Affordable childcare** is something that emerged through the consultations as one example of something that could help single parents with younger children. Mothers are often reticent to sacrifice time with their children or their children's well-being for employment, particularly if the employment opportunity is sub-par. The issue of retirement planning, while not an immediate concern for single parents with low income, is a concern that compounds as time passes.

- **Education and Literacy** are key components in the journey away from the limitations of lower paying employment. Literacy empowers people to engage with possible life options beyond the immediate examples.

Opportunities:
- Mobilize and coordinate community action on increasing affordable housing
- Continue to provide and seek out additional supports to children and single parents, e.g. free library cards, public transportation, recreation passes and park amenities.
- Work with public education providers to have financially accessible opportunities, and supports.
- Continue to advocate for the acceptance of a living wage in Red Deer's business sector.

2. Leadership

The need for more (or different) leadership was identified as a significant need in Red Deer. This need was not meant to diminish the current and ongoing efforts

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of people working on poverty in the community, but rather to acknowledge that leadership is necessary on many levels, and from numerous sectors to generate sustainable results.

Needs:

- Interviewees and focus group participants echoed the work of other communities in identifying the need for community leadership on the topic of poverty. There is a desire to hear **positive messages** of hope and collaboration from community leaders to help inspire action from within as opposed to blaming outside forces, agencies, or the people themselves for the social concerns being experienced in the community. Positive and encouraging messages from leadership — and to inspire leadership — were identified as a need in both focus group and key informant interviewees. As one focus group participant noted, we need "an alternate narrative of Red Deer as a good place." Positive messaging alone will not change things, but nothing can change without the presence of positive messages.

- The second form of leadership highlighted was the need for a **convening body** to lead the poverty movement in Red Deer. While the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) is viewed as a leading organization on the topic of poverty, there was also a recognition that members of CAPRA are attempting to move the needle on this massive topic without dedicated resources — "members appear to be doing this work off the sides of their desks." Membership in the alliance is largely comprised of social agencies and government and there is a need to involve other sectors in a convening body. This will require a renewed effort to elevate the significance and appeal of CAPRA to a broader audience, and explore potential new structures with dedicated resources and high level commitment from a broad range of people and organizations. A common thread amongst poverty reduction strategies was the need for a dedicated and resourced convening body. A strong and diverse convening body will not solve poverty, but poverty will not be solved without a strong and diverse convening body.

- Leadership on poverty needs to address **engagement.** While a convening

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Red Deer just hosted the 2019 Canada Winter Games and attracted upwards of 5000 volunteers — a tremendous show of collaboration, commitment and community spirit. What would it take to generate this type of leadership to address poverty?

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Opportunities

- Review and clarify the role of CAPRA as a convening body to coordinate local/ regional efforts.
- Determine whether poverty reduction will be undertaken as a local initiative or whether a regional approach is more advantageous.
- Assess the city's commitment to poverty reduction. A Guide for Cities Reducing Poverty offers ten key questions to think about to better understand your city's commitment to poverty reduction.[50] Encourage The City of Red Deer to determine its role in poverty reduction based on the Social Policy Framework, and in relation to the regional efforts underway through CAPRA.
- Dedicate ongoing resources focused on poverty reduction and alleviation. This may be in the form of funding, convening space, or dedicated staff from different organizations. It could include project funding and/or other resources to support collaborative efforts.
- Develop a poverty reduction strategy with ambitious targets, identified priorities, and measurable indicators and outcomes.

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- Be thoughtful and strategic about poverty-related communication and messaging. Develop key messages focused on a positive image of Red Deer, and have community leaders champion these messages. These messages should empower community leaders, mobilize citizens, and provide encouragement for community members experiencing poverty of some kind.
    - Control the messaging. Be deliberate about delivery of stories to convey the messages that reflect the narrative needed to reduce or eliminate poverty.
    - Target the messaging. Know who the audience is for each media source and customize accordingly.

3. Systemic Change

Systems change is a way to impact root causes — not symptoms — of complex social issues such as poverty by shifting how decisions are made about policies, programs, resources, and relationships. Essentially it is a change in how "business is done." The concept of working on systems change is often times dismissed as complicated, long term, and costly, with unknown variables that are seen as difficult to measure. Having said this, investments in systems change are gaining traction, as funders begin to recognize the benefits of investing in real and impactful community change solutions. Systems-change is recognized as the primary way to reduce the stigma that many disadvantaged individuals experience.

Canadians benefit from a strong history of social welfare dating back to significant policy decisions made in the 1960s. Without losing sight of the core values that brought these policies into effect, there is a need to carefully examine the delivery of supports and services to address stigma, access, complexity and delivery. The current systems are an evolution of social and economic policies important to Canadians that need to be preserved though reimagined.

The Fraser Institute notes that "welfare programs are bureaucracy-heavy, expensive schemes that maintain people in poverty rather than helping them move up and out of poverty. The most destructive feature of such programs is that the incentive structure is geared to ensure continued dependency."[51] Concerns about the current welfare systems were a recurring theme amongst interviewees and focus group participants. While there is a deep appreciation for Canada's welfare system, there is also a desire to make it work more effectively. A common sentiment is that the systems are designed to minimize fraud and the result is a system that penalizes people with legitimate claims for support.

Needs:

More support and less rules: A consistent message emerged perceiving there are two types of people accessing supports — those with legitimate needs, and those that abuse the system. The perceived result is a set of systems governed by an excess number of rules to protect the government against fraudulent claims, and a massive bureaucracy to catch offenders. People seeking supports find the systems unwieldy and confusing.

Earlier access to supports: A common theme surfaced about the need for early intervention support available for people before situations became desperate. From those seeking support, concerns were expressed about their situations lacking desperation — they weren't poor enough, homeless long enough, disabled enough or unemployable enough. A prevention focus designed to support people through challenging situations was felt to offer greater opportunity to avoid dependency and relieve ongoing financial stress.

Intercept points for people in transition: People experiencing major transitions in their lives are loath to reach out for financial subsidy due to their perceptions of people accessing the welfare system. Culturally, the social pressure to avoid discussions of finance and mental wellness (ie. stress and anxiety) works against people utilizing their existing networks to find advice and support. The stigma of asking for help begins to weigh on people until significant challenges begin to emerge. A solutions-based approach to supporting people through

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major life challenges (ie. job loss, divorce, childbirth, marriage, etc.) that could be consistently delivered through a variety of sources may help to remove stigma and increase timely access to prevent poverty from emerging.

Systemic Opportunities

- Offer client support training for service providers — the delivery of government and community supports is a challenging occupation. A poor experience for someone seeking support can turn them away from seeking further aid resulting in perpetual need.
- Explore peer advocacy — people that have successfully navigated support systems have much to offer others. A peer advocacy initiative supported by the systems themselves would be an opportunity to hear firsthand about barriers (perceived or real) and offer real time options to correct or redirect.
- Commit to deliver support services founded on the belief that helping people from where they are is better than requiring them to "hit bottom" before aid can be administered. This may take the form of advocacy for changes in the number of structures that are in place.
- Attend to the humanity of people seeking support to ensure that service recipients feel a sense of hope.
- Advocate with funders and donors who understand that policy advocacy and civic engagement, in combination with strategies such as coalition building and targeted research, will move beyond 'tinkering at the margins' to affect root causes. [52]

5. Social Capital

Bonding social capital exists when people of **similar** experiences and backgrounds connect with one another. Bridging social capital results when people of **different or varied** backgrounds connect and form relationships. Participants shared that polarity can be a resulting social condition when people only bond with others similarly experiencing poverty. Opportunities for those experiencing poverty to connect (ie. bridging social capital) with

those experiencing greater prosperity are limited in the community. There are places where this happens (such as some social serving agencies) but often in an unequal way that involves someone 'helping' and someone being helped. Workplaces are an equitable place that may provide other opportunities for social capital.

Needs:

Neighbourhood or place-based community development has been shown to be highly effective as it provides the opportunity for people to experience one another within the natural settings of community — the chance to bump into one another at local shops, schools, churches and public spaces. These forms of bridging social capital have the potential for sustainable relationships to be formed with lesser risk of dependencies, such as the relationships that can be formed within social agencies.

The ability to connect with people based on skills and abilities. Seniors and immigrants, in particular, highlighted the desire to improve their quality of life by offering their talents and assets to help one another. By connecting with others needing assistance and 'bartering' or exchanging supports, there is greater opportunity for connection and managing costs.

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List five people within your circle of family and friends with whom you would like to share this report.

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Opportunities for social capital

- Create or re-design environments and programs to intentionally encourage connection between people.
- Convene community dialogue to help bridge understanding and empathy between people with lived experience and others.
- Fund and support programming that pairs families or individuals of different monetary means.
- Support neighbourhood initiatives designed to help connect people living in close proximity to one another, and encourage helping hands for those in need with household chores (ie. snow shoveling, yard work, etc.)
- Help organizations re-imagine what support services for people experiencing poverty look like, with a focus on human connection and community building.
- Develop a community skills bank for people offering abilities and those seeking assistance. This opportunity would be particularly appropriate within established social networks such as clubs, organizations and neighbourhoods (ie. school councils, churches, neighbourhood associations, etc.)
- Create workplace environments to connect people from all levels of income and position, and avoid perpetuation of hierarchies.
- Continue engagement with people with lived experience. Resources to support poverty-reduction groups as they meaningfully engage people with lived/living experience are available, and "celebrate[s] the potential that can be unlocked when these individuals are included and empowered to drive anti-poverty work."[53]

8.0
CONCLUSION

This report has presented data from Red Deer, some information on what other municipalities across Alberta have done in response to poverty in their communities, and a brief look at what is happening across the country. The research team is confident that the combination of these pools of knowledge and understanding we have identified the necessary needs and opportunities for Red Deer as a community to take the next step toward the goal of reducing poverty.

Evidence supports the important role that local efforts play in reducing poverty, including collaborative and multi-dimensional research projects. Both the processes and the learning promote community-level, comprehensive, and multi-sectoral approaches to reducing poverty. This serves to most effectively raise the profile of poverty in the community, build a constituency for change, encourage collaborative opportunities, shift systems underlying poverty, and generate changes that support people to move out of poverty.[54]

There is, however, a paradox about poverty. Taking a **simple** view of poverty as a lack of money or resources may limit the understanding of the needs and opportunities necessary to address the issue. On the other hand, approaching poverty as a **complex** situation can render the community feeling helpless against its enormity, and feed a cycle of perpetual research. A balance is required that employs both action and evaluation.

Research about poverty in Red Deer has already determined there are needs, and the depth and type of needs are increasingly understood. Other communities in Alberta have advanced their poverty agendas to include the formation of convening bodies and development of strategic plans. The research exists and is readily available to the community. People in this field are willing and able to share the lessons they have learned.

Poverty is bigger than money. It's bigger than homelessness, and it's bigger than panhandlers on the street. In essence, it is a social problem as much as it is an economic one; it is about barriers to access. At its root, it is not having the same conditions or opportunities to succeed. [55]

It is time for commitment and action on poverty, and while forward momentum will be met with potential barriers, disagreements, and failures, those risks pale in comparison to the human risks associated with doing nothing. Ongoing research and evaluation will help to identify and minimize risks, and determine innovative and effective approaches to poverty reduction and elimination. The easy part is over. Making a bold commitment to eliminate poverty in Red Deer, and acting on it, is the next step.

Engaging with Poverty: ACTIVITY
List three things contained within the report that are sticking with you.

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Endnotes

1 A current calculation would like be a much higher number. Hudson, C.A. (2013). Poverty Costs 2.0: Investing in Albertans. Calgary: Vibrant Communities Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta. Retrieved from http://vibrantcalgary.com/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/PCosts_2_Investing_In_Albertans_web.pd

2 See the Poverty Cycle, http://www.reddeer.ca/about-red-deer/social-well-being-and-community-initiatives/the-poverty-cycle/

3 Hussey Ian, 2018. "Opinion: Minimum wage hike a success despite gloomy predictions" Edmonton Journal, September 18 2018.   https://edmontonjournal.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-minimum-wage-hike-a-success-despite-gloomy-predictions

4 Ibid.

5 'Central Alberta' in this case is referring to census division 8. Statistics Canada. 2017. Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001. Ottawa, Ontario. Data products, 2016 Census.

6 Household income is the combined income of a census family, see https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/fam004-eng.cfm

7 Low-income status is determined based on low-income measure, after-tax (LIM-AT). For a one-person household, the after-tax low-income measure (LIM-AT) was $22,460 in 2015. For larger households, this amount was adjusted upward by multiplying it by the square root of household size. Persons in a private household with after-tax income below this threshold were considered to be in low income.

8 Low-income cut-offs, after tax (LICO-AT) - The Low-income cut-offs, after tax refers to an income threshold, defined using 1992 expenditure data, below which economic families or persons not in economic families would likely have devoted a larger share of their after-tax income than average to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing. More specifically, the thresholds represented income levels at which these families or persons were expected to spend 20 percentage points or more of their after-tax income than average on food, shelter and clothing.

9 Economic family refers to a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. By definition, all persons who are members of a census family are also members of an economic family. See, Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016.

10 Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016136.

11 This measure is calculated using LIM-AT see, Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016134.

12 A household is said to be in 'core housing need' if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards). Housing standards are defined as follows: Adequate housing is reported by their residents as not requiring any major repairs. Affordable housing has shelter costs equal to less than 30% of total before-tax household income. Suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of resident households according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

13 Census tract geocode 8300004. Please note that the census tracts do not match what are considered to be the municipal neighbourhood boundaries.

14 One change in the 2018 report was the decrease in work hours calculated from 40/ week to 35 hours /week. This combined with an increase in expenses, and a decrease in government transfers resulted in the increased living wage. See, Haener Michel K., 2018 Living Wage Update: Red Deer, Alberta. November 2018, CAPRA. Accessed March 2019, http://capovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Red-Deer-2018-LW-Report.pdf

15 Ibid, 2.

16 See, http://capovertyreduction.ca/act/action-committees/

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19 THRIVE: Medicine Hat and Region Strategy to end Poverty & Increase Wellbeing. 2017.

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37 As identified in EndPovertyEdmonton. *Year One Progress Report 17/18. p.51.*

38 Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson's message is found in the EndPovertyEdmonton. *Year One Progress Report 17/18.*

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40 The community engagement plan was determined in consultation with and approved by the project steering committee.

41 This learning is summarized from The City of Calgary and United Way of Calgary and Area. *Capturing hope: Approach & Discoveries of a Multi-Sector Collaboration to Reduce Poverty in Calgary, Final Report of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, Volume 2. May 2013. p.11.*

42 Ibid.

43 Independence refers to the ability to sustain oneself (or one's family) with a primary focus on self (me). Interdependence acknowledges the self (or family) within the context of others (we) - ie. extended family, neighbourhood, community, etc.

44 The City of Calgary and United Way of Calgary and Area. *Capturing Hope: Approach & Discoveries of a Multi-Sector Collaboration to Reduce Poverty in Calgary, Final Report of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, Volume 2. May 2013. p.11.*

45 The systems-change concept shared in these first three paragraphs is borrowed from key learnings in Calgary's Capturing Hope, p.5.

46 New legislation (Bill C-26) was introduced by Community and Social Services, given Royal Assent on December 11, 2018 and enacted effective January 1, 2019. An overview of this legislation is available online at https://www.alberta.ca/social-benefit-rate-increases.aspx#toc-1 Albertans can get information, referral, and can apply for all Alberta social programs through click (myalbertasupports.com), call (1-877-644-9992) or come in (local offices).

47 In Red Deer, the Provincial Building houses many of the provincial government supports including income supports and addictions services.

48 The Alberta Public Service vision and values are available online at https://www.alberta.ca/advantages-working-for-alberta-public-service.aspx#toc-1

49 CAPRA has identified eight priority areas including Social Justice, Transportation, Social Environments, Health and Wellness, Wisdom and Knowledge, Economic Wellness, Thriving Children and Youth and Homefullness.

50 Brock Carlton and Paul Born. 10: A Guide for Cities Reducing Poverty. 2016. Tamarack Institute. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/316071/Resources/Publications/TEN/10_guide_cities_reducing_poverty_final_shareable.pdf

51 Christopher A. Sarlo. The Causes of Poverty. Fraser Institute, 2019.

52 Ersoylu, L. "Wicked Good" Systems Solutions to "Wicked Problems." National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers. A Tides Centre Project. July 31, 2017.

53 Homer, Alison. 10: Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience. A Guide for Including People in Poverty Reduction. The Tamarack Institute, 2019.

54 Mark Holmgren presented this argument on behalf of the Tamarack Institute – Vibrant Communities Canada, in A Game Changer Approach for Cities Reducing Poverty. February 27, 2017.

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