

RAT CREEK PRESS

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City checks in with residents on renewal

Elmwood Park and Eastwood renewal team share design with residents



Janis Irwin, MLA for Highlands-Norwood, discusses implications of neighbourhood renewal with Dnyanesh Deshpande, a member of the city's project team. | Kate Wilson

KATE WILSON

After a year of collecting public feedback, the City's Great Neighbourhoods team has pulled together a design for infrastructure renewal in Elmwood Park and Eastwood.

The design, still considered a proposal, was shared with residents at two drop-in evenings in October and November. The City sought feedback in three areas: parks, bike routes, and pathways.

Building Great Neighbourhoods was formed to take a different approach to neighbourhood renewal, explains Jen Rutledge, supervisor of planning and development.

"Before, the focus had been street lights, sidewalks, roads. Now we're taking into account things like parks and open spaces, bike routes," she says. "Our approach is to take a look at the neighbourhood and listen to people, see what they

value [because they] live here and work here."

The end goal is to ensure Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods are in good shape by 2039.

Residents of the two communities gave their input at two drop-in sessions in May, as well as online and even by phone to the project manager. The project team also consulted agencies such as local police and did a walk-around with residents last fall.

"The communities saw the importance of accessibility, connectivity, and also [had] a lot of pride in the natural beauty, the parks, the trees," says Rutledge.

The design includes adjustments to align with citizen and police concerns about attracting unwanted or illicit activities in some locations. Proper lighting and line of sight need to be taken into account.

"Always, if you create a space, you have to be very thoughtful

about what kind of activity you are attracting. We hear that a lot in other neighbourhoods as well."

Benches are not included in James Kidney Park due to a past history of illicit activities associated with benches there. The proposal includes a pathway, lighting, new shrubs, and landscaping at both ends, but no gathering spaces.

A possible toboggan hill at the north end of Eastwood Park was another concern. While it was favoured by some residents to encourage winter activity, others were worried about a return of illicit activity behind the hill.

One citizen noted that the hill was a gathering place for soliciting and drug dealing before it was removed in the early 2000s. The team is looking into building a soccer field instead.

For the small park at 123 Avenue in Elmwood Park, most citizens did not favour closure of the 75 Street

access, in order to keep access to Fort Road. The City's proposal is to extend the park to the north by closing 123 Avenue between 76 Street and Fort Road. Access to Fort Road at 76 and 75 Street will be maintained, but realigned for safety.

Another issue that garnered lots of feedback was bike routes, with key concerns being on-street parking and that the number of bike users doesn't justify the expense.

The design proposal includes a bike route along 119 Avenue between 89 Street and the shared-use path at 75 Street, and two one-way bike lanes from 89 to 86 Street. Parking will be maintained where possible, and continue to be reviewed.

"We're excited to show what we are proposing based on public input," says Rutledge. "This is a check-in. Did we get it right?"

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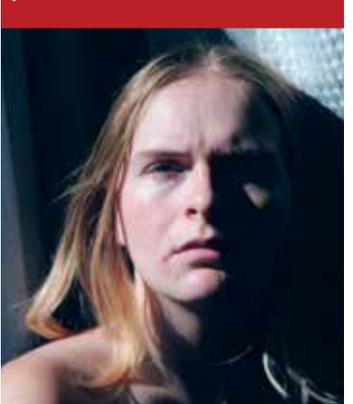
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City checks

con't from page 1

The project team is reviewing all final feedback before finalizing the design. It should be ready and shared with both communities in the spring.

The full What We Heard/What We Considered report is available on edmonton.ca/BuildingEastwoodElmwoodPark.

Kate took up the reporter's pad and pen while living in northern Alberta. The writing bug stuck, and the next 20 years were spent covering everything from local politics to community happenings. She lives in Eastwood.

FOR YOUR INFO

The City pays for neighbourhood renewal from a reserve fund; however, there are cost-sharing items such as decorative street lighting and sidewalk reconstruction.

Those costs are shared between the City and property owners adjacent to or near the local improvement.

All property owners have the right to petition against a local improvement. Tax payers in the neighbourhood have one more chance to petition against a local improvement when local improvement tax notices are sent out in the new year.

Construction of Elmwood Park and Eastwood renewal starts next spring and continues over the following two years. It includes road rehabilitation, street lighting, curb and gutter repairs, and connecting missing sidewalk links where possible.

Vanguard College hosts program

Youth nights at Vanguard forge strong relationships

KATE WILSON

The quiet spaciousness of Vanguard College's brightly lit gymnasium suddenly bursts into activity, as three mid-teen boys surge through the doors. They immediately grab hockey sticks and start puck-handling a small orange ball.

Another Friday evening of sports and camaraderie with the City Youth Group has begun.

"It's fun. You get to know different people and it's good to just get out of the house," says Dryden Ferchoff, one of the regular participants. "There's enough structure to have a set day and time, but also lots of different activities."

A partnership of City Centre Church and Vanguard College, the weekly youth program has been growing ever since it was started by Kurtis Fricker, who started studying at Vanguard in late 2018. Fricker, who is enrolled in the pastoral major, said he wanted to give his two younger brothers some engaging activity. Their church didn't have any programs and his

brothers weren't part of a youth group, so he decided to change that.

"They had nothing to do Friday nights, so my thought was, let's go play some hockey or basketball at the gym. Let's find a safe place to hang out."

As more teens started showing up, the activity level expanded. It has now become a regularly scheduled youth program for Grades 7 through 12. A typical evening draws between 12 and 20 eager attendees.

The intent was always to create a safe space for youth to have fun, to build community, and to forge lasting relationships, explained Chloe Lemieux, one of the youth group leaders.

"Our hope is that the time we have together can be used to build healthy relationships with them," she said, noting that early meet-ups were pretty simple, focusing on basketball or hockey.

Since then, programming has expanded to include not only sports and games, but also outings and life sharing.

"We now have themes like dodgeball night, and in good

weather we play capture the flag outside," said Fricker. "We've been to the corn maze, we have a swim night."

The leaders, all students at Vanguard, started adding more devotional aspects as the interest grew.

"We started sharing stories about our experiences, teaching them about the Bible, anything they want to know about," explained Lemieux. "As leaders, we want to share some Christian values. But we never want to force it on them, just share what it teaches us."

The supportive and encouraging atmosphere is showing results. Fricker says he sees how many of the youth are learning how to behave and treat others with respect.

"A big change I see is the relationships happening between the kids and with our leaders," he said. "We want to create a space where they can feel safe, where they know someone cares about them."

The City Youth program welcomes any youth who would like to attend. The hope is that more will participate

from neighbouring communities such as Westwood, Spruce Avenue, and Alberta Avenue.

Fricker and Lemieux met with Westwood Community League in November to explore ways to generate more local interest.

That shouldn't be a big challenge, feels Kyle Fricker, who has been attending from the start.

"The leaders, they make us feel welcome," he says. "You meet new people, make new friends."

The City Youth Group meets at 7 pm every Friday at the Vanguard College gym, located at 12140 103 St. No registration is required; just drop in. Find out more on Instagram @youthcitycentre, on Facebook @city youth, or by emailing youth@citycentrechurch.com.

Kate took up the reporter's pad and pen while living in northern Alberta. The writing bug stuck, and the next 20 years were spent covering everything from local politics to community happenings. She lives in Eastwood.



From the left, back row: youth leader Callie; Meleah, a participant; and youth leader Chloe Lemieux. In front: youth leaders Kelsey, Kurtis Fricker and Kerri Lehman. | Kate Wilson



Kurtis Fricker and Kerri Lehman set up equipment for a game of nine square in the air at a youth night in November. | Kate Wilson

RAT CREEK PRESS ASSOCIATION 9210 118 AVENUE, EDMONTON, AB T5G 0N2 | T: 780.479.6285

ABOUT US

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Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

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Jessica MacQueen, Joe Wong, Patricia Dunnigan, Alita Rickards, Mariam Masud, Muriel Wright, Steven Townsend, Virginia Potkins and Sean MacQueen. The board may be contacted at board@ratcreek.org.

PRODUCTION STAFF

PUBLISHER Karen Mykietka info@ratcreek.org
EDITOR Talea Medynski editor@ratcreek.org
DESIGNER Lorraine Shulba design@ratcreek.org
ADVERTISING ads@ratcreek.org

CONTRIBUTORS

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DELIVERY

The paper is delivered by Canada Post to all houses, apartments, and businesses in the seven neighbourhoods listed above including those with no unaddressed mail notices. For the most part, delivery begins on the last Wednesday of the month.

People are meant to connect with each other

The Great Disconnect explores the effects of social isolation

STEPHEN STRAND

On Nov. 21, students of MacEwan University's social work program, in conjunction with Alberta Avenue Community League, hosted a screening of *The Great Disconnect*, a documentary about loneliness and the need for social connection and community.

Tamer Soliman, the director, producer, and co-writer, travelled to a small village in the Blue Mountains in Jamaica and witnessed happiness and a sense of community like none other found in North America. This sense of community seems to be lacking in North America, where nearly 60 million people suffer from loneliness. This number has doubled from what it was only decades ago.

Soliman seeks to answer why we're so lonely.

Within the first 30 seconds of the film, writer and co-housing advocate Douglas Tindal announces: "We have, in North America particularly, exalted personal independence to an almost God-like state. There

is no higher value than independence." These are the first two lines spoken in the documentary, right after someone sings the opening lines of Raffi's *The More We Get Together* over the opening credits. Those two statements together helped showcase how we strive for independence and our deep-rooted loneliness caused by independence.

Soliman showcases how people have been sold on the idea of independence and how we are spending more time alone. But social isolation takes a tremendous toll on our well-being. It is the medical equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and has the same impact on health as diabetes. The documentary also featured interviews with medical professionals. Some of those interviews revealed that those with fewer people to confide in are more likely to catch a cold and other illnesses.

But social isolation isn't necessarily our own fault. Expanding cities develop outwards, creating suburbs and freeways, causing people to drive further distances. This development

isolates people and disconnects them from family and friends. People work more, on average, than before. And most North Americans own smartphones, linking them to social media platforms where people shape and rewrite a happier version of their lives. Through social media, people tend to surround themselves only with those with similar opinions, blocking or unfriending those with whom we disagree, allowing people to become entrenched in their own opinions. Smartphones also connect us to news agencies selling only bad news, which lead people to distrust others. Trust, as is explained in the documentary, is required to build happiness.

There is hope, though. Green spaces and nature help relieve loneliness. As Ron Finley, LA-based fashion designer and urban gardener explains in the film, if all you see is despair, then that becomes normal. The gardens he grows in vacant lots have helped shape and grow communities because it brings people together.

The Great Disconnect states that the people need to return to

face-to-face communications. On average, people check their phones 47-82 times a day. It's time to put down our phones, eat meals with family and friends, and be open to meeting new people. Think about the future and ask what kind of community you need to survive. Think about the South African term ubuntu: "I am because we are."

After the documentary was over, the MacEwan social worker students held a group discussion to talk about the movie and people's experiences with loneliness. I spoke with Terri, a Delton resident who thought the movie's message was spot on.

"I think what it did is encouraged us to really believe that community is important for health and in other ways. I think you have to start there," Terri explains. But she doesn't think loneliness is a new thing. "I was born in the '50s and I don't think that my neighbourhood was necessarily any different, as far as getting to know strangers, I think it was the same." She says people may have been more involved

in extended family than now, but that loneliness has always existed. "Especially people that don't have the ability to get out. Whether you were born in the '50s, '60s, '70s, or now. You are still disadvantaged that way."

She says she's noticed people starting to reduce their time using electronics. "People talk about technology being such a big thing, but I think more and more people are realizing that it is harmful."

Terri adds that people need to take more of an initiative to connect with others and not just wait for events to draw them out.

"I think we, as individuals, need to make decisions to get involved."

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun. He can be seen walking through the neighbourhood.

Connect with neighbours on ca.Nextdoor.com



The Great Disconnect states that social isolation is bad for our health. | Stephen Strand



Independence is valued too much in North America. It's time to return to face-to-face communications. | Stephen Strand



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Yule Ave brings the community together

Take part in family-friendly and free holiday activities

TALEA MEDYNSKI

Yule Ave will once again be bringing some holiday cheer to Alberta Avenue from Dec. 21 to 22. Here for its eighth year, the festival will be featuring favourites that everyone loves.

Frank Zotter, the creator and one of the main organizers, is currently a graduate student of acting at the University of British Columbia. Needless to say, he's busy but has the help of two dozen people involved in planning the festival.

"The moving parts are all in place," says Zotter.

Enchanted Antlers will also be staged at the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts. Mark Henderson, artistic director of Theatre Prospero, produces and administers the festival with Zotter and Alberta Avenue

Community League. He describes the play as "a gentle, whimsical, funny story about three friends with antlers meeting in Elk's home or 'wallow' in the winter woods, for the most important hooved holiday of the year: All Ungulates Eve, where they share warmth, stories and food, celebrate under the stars, and 'look ahead through the trees' at the year to come. This year, maybe Elk's friend Beaver will finally come!"

The play is written by local playwright Jennifer Spencer.

"Last year we commissioned it especially for the festival and the community and gave a staged reading to a standing-room only audience on the Saturday of the festival. This year we are doing a full production, with significant rewrites, and a little tour to three Avenue

area schools!" says Henderson.

On Saturday, organizers will once again be cooking the free turkey dinner. Last year, the dinner was so popular they had to turn people away. This year, admission is by any community league membership or by donation.

Unsilent Night will also be making a return on Sunday, Dec. 22 at dusk (4:30 pm). Described as "a luminous soundscape played by the audience on [phones or musical devices] carried through city streets," composer Phil Kline wrote it specifically to be played outdoors in December.

"It creates this beautiful, harmonious, evocative soundscape," enthuses Zotter.

Unlike previous years, this year will not have any snow carving due to the uncertainty

of having snow in time.

Happily, participants can still enjoy a ride through the streets on the popular horse-drawn wagon.

"Santa is back, he volunteers his time. He tells kids that the horses won't go unless they sing," Zotter says.

As usual, the Yule Ave a Blast concert on Saturday will feature a variety of acts after dinner, including the return of belly dancers and a flute player.

On Dec. 21 from noon to 4 pm, people of all ages can build their very own gingerbread house. On both days, participants can create a holiday ornament at the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts.

And if you're a fan of holiday movies, take in a free movie on Saturday at Alberta Avenue Community League.

"It'll be *Home Alone*," says Zotter. The movie will screen at 4 pm.

Of course, there will be the Giving Tree, so if you have extra clothing to donate, hang it on the tree and it will be available for those who need it.

So come on out and enjoy Yule Ave with your neighbours and with Zotter, who possibly loves it most of all.

"It's the best, stereotypical Christmas you can have at my age. The festival is like Christmas to me, but it's for the whole neighbourhood. It's a really positive experience."

Talea is the Rat Creek Press editor. She loves sharing the stories of our diverse neighbourhoods.



Make your own gingerbread house at Yule Ave. | Supplied



Make your very own Christmas ornament. | Supplied

Horse Drawn Wagon Rides

Through the Historical Highlands Neighbourhood

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December 13, 14, 20, 21, 22 & 23
starting at 5 pm and every hour until 9 pm

December 26
starting at noon and every hour until 5 pm

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starting at 5 pm and every hour until 9 pm

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11:00 am—4:00 pm

12325 88 Street NW

Santa will be coming! Concession Available!

8' tables available for rent

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Holiday fun abounds in our communities

Celebrate the season with a variety of activities this December

TALEA MEDYNSKI

This holiday season, local residents will have plenty of opportunities to celebrate winter and Christmas.

Westwood Community League

If you love holiday baking, look no further than the baking swap on Saturday, Dec. 7 from 1-3 pm at Westwood Hall.

Kate Hayes, community league board director, says, "We're inviting the neighbourhood to come together and share in some great baking and hoping we can recreate the recipes in the future."

Community members are invited to bring cookies, squares, or any other baked goods to the event to share with others. Bring the recipe in case people want to try it out.

"Bring your best cookies and hopefully leave with other stuff," explains Hayes. "It's drop-in. It's casual. Hopefully people show up and celebrate the season."

Delton Community League

Delton residents are lucky because their league is planning three holiday events: a craft sale on Dec. 8, a gingerbread house-making event on Dec. 15, and a New Year's Eve party on Dec. 31.

The craft sale, running from 11 am to 4 pm, will feature a variety of vendors. Shoppers can also buy food at the concession run by Minutemen, a non-profit group. Santa may also make an appearance.

The gingerbread house-making event on Dec. 15 starts at 1 pm and costs \$15 each or \$25 per family with two kids. Visit deltoncommunity.com/programs to register.

"There's an online registration but you can pay at the door," says Angela Nice, communications chairperson.

And on Dec. 31, the league will be hosting a New Year's Eve party. It's an adult-only party and tickets cost \$40 for league members and \$50 for non-members.

"We are doing dinner," says Nice, "They usually get in a DJ and door prizes. They have a ton of fun."

Buy tickets from Annette: 780.237.5781.

Eastwood Community League

Eastwood residents are in for a treat with a Christmas party at the league.

On Dec. 13, the party starts at 6 pm. The event will be a cozy affair.

Christy Morin, the league's networking director, explains residents can enjoy making a gingerbread house, decorating cookies, or making other crafts. Chili, hot chocolate, and coffee will also be available.

That same night, The Carrot Coffeehouse is hosting Jingle Jammin' Christmas Carolling, starting at 6 pm. Anyone who wishes to sing Christmas carols can go to The Carrot at 6 pm, where organizers will recite an excerpt from *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. Chili will be available for carollers to eat before heading out.

Morin urges, "Wear warm socks, good footwear, gloves. Dress with layers."

Carollers will first sing around the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood.

"Once The Carrot carollers are done, those who want to continue will head to Eastwood."

Any Eastwood carollers will then leave the league at 8 pm. "It's almost like a relay race," laughs Morin. "We do provide flashlights and singing charts. You don't have to be a good singer. It's for all ages." Those who have flashlights are urged to bring them.

After carolling is finished, there will be free skating at Eastwood's rink.

And on Dec. 22, Edmonton Police Service's (EPS) Northwest beats team will be holding a friendly shinny game with community members at the Eastwood skating rink. The game starts between 1-2 pm. EPS will be providing gifts for children, and food and beverages will be available.

Spruce Ave Community League

On Friday, Dec. 13 from 5 to 9 pm at Spruce Avenue Hall, the holiday potluck will be all about Latin American food.

"We had a Harvest Festival in September and that's when the idea came up," explains Cindy Leavitt, a member of Spruce Ave's Neighbourhood Watch and Abundant Community. "I talked to friends who are from Chile and Cuba and they said, 'let's do it!'"

Leavitt explains the potluck

is meant to engage people who may not normally come out to an event. And no pressure: you don't have to bring Latin American-specific food.

"I talked to a Chilean neighbour about foods specific to Christmas and she said, 'This is all about sharing. The food is secondary to the friendship.'"

Participants can also bring a toy or a Food Bank donation "for those who find Christmas to be a tough time."

Parkdale-Cromdale Community League

On Saturday, Dec. 14 from 2:30 to 6:30 pm, Parkdale-Cromdale Community League will be treating residents to a day of outdoor and indoor fun.

Sarah Dotimas, one of the organizers, explains there will be horse-drawn wagon rides around the neighbourhood. And depending on the weather, ice skating may be a possibility.

"We'll have some food and drinks when they come back from their wagon rides," says Dotimas.

At 3 pm, kids can look forward to a Christmas-themed story time and book swap in the league. Santa will also make an appearance during the day.

Food will be simple yet hearty. "We'll be preparing soup and bannock and some hot cocoa, tea, and coffee."

The league is looking for volunteers and for book donations for the swap. For more information and updates, check the league's Facebook page: facebook.com/PCCLYEG/.

Elmwood Park Community League

For the first time in a long time, Elmwood Park Community League is hosting a Christmas party on Dec. 14 from noon to 3 pm.

"We've just confirmed our special guest of Santa," says Gillian Daley-deGroot, league president. Residents can take photos with Santa and make holiday crafts. "There will be snacks and food, including a weenie roast outdoors."

If there's enough snow, there will be some snow games such as snow art, snow shoeing, and snow fort building.

"The big draw is the horse-drawn sleigh," she adds.

And sometime in January, the league is planning a clothing swap.

"It's going to be a busy year of fun events."

Alberta Avenue Community League

On Dec. 21-22, Alberta Avenue Community League will host the annual Yule Ave. Highlights include a turkey dinner, holiday movies, gingerbread house making, and ornament making. Participants can also enjoy a concert, take a ride on a horse-drawn sleigh, or participate in Unsilent Night. See page 4 for more information about Yule Ave.

Talea is the Rat Creek Press editor. She loves sharing the stories of our diverse neighbourhoods.



Parkdale-Cromdale Community League during one of its holiday events. | Supplied



Residents enjoy some holiday story time at Parkdale-Cromdale Community League. | Supplied

OPINION

The impact of the budget on education

Cutting the budget is compromising the quality of education

SHAREE ALUKO

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” - Malcolm X

In October, the United Conservative Party government released its provincial budget. For kindergarten to Grade 12 education, funding will be frozen at \$8.2 billion. This is a problem because enrolment in schools is expected to increase, so teachers must make due with less funding.

Considering the new budget, is Alberta adequately preparing for the future?

As we all know, education is not cheap. The new budget has presented a situation of uncertainty among students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. It also begs the question: what impact will this cut have on the education system and the quality of education being provided to students?

Trisha Estabrooks, Edmonton Public Schools board chairwoman, shed some light on this issue. “As a result of the most recent provincial budget, Edmonton Public Schools is facing a funding shortfall of \$34.4 million. This comes as a result of the province’s elimination of three crucial sources of grants to our district, as well as other reductions. While a one-time transitional grant was provided, it made up only about one-third of the funding we lost in the three grants.”

The education budget will be frozen for the next four years.

“If our funding is frozen while our student enrolment continues to grow, our budget shortfall will grow even more.

Our district has a modest surplus to cushion the shortfall, but it will not be enough to make up the shortfall this year, nor will we have surplus for future years.”

Estabrooks explains the school board will take steps to try to alleviate the circumstances.

ations we planned from the start of the year. Our district will begin with central cost-saving measures to help keep as many dollars in the classroom as possible.”

But when the school board receives the new provincial budget this spring, they will need to re-evaluate their strat-

support high leverage strategies that are making a difference for kids,” says Estabrooks.

The timing of the budget cut makes it even more difficult to cope with the change. Swift action is needed to deal with such a challenge.

Estabrooks explains, “As you know, we began the school year

late October, we were able to look more closely at the impact on our own budget and the reductions needed for our district. We will be taking immediate action to find efficiencies and cost savings wherever we can.”

This plan includes a hiring freeze for central departments, a new process requiring approval for hiring staff for new positions, eliminating unnecessary travel or professional development, and reducing spending from the district’s equity fund and external contractors in regards to student assessments.

Although the school board has a plan, if the resources needed to educate our children are significantly reduced, the quality of education will inevitably be compromised. With less money available to hire teachers whilst the student population continues to increase, there will not be enough staff to effectively teach the students. Similarly, if there is a decrease in professional development opportunities, teachers may be less equipped to deliver high quality instruction.

The fact is, education funding is not something you want to freeze or cut. A solid education system is essential to society. After all, according to Benjamin Franklin, “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” Therefore if our government allocates enough funding to educate our students, we will reap enormous benefits by creating a stronger economy.

Sharee has a Masters in Business Administration and is passionate about sharing information.



Education isn't cheap, but it's worth it. | Pixabay

“Despite the funding reduction, we are not re-opening this year’s school budgets and will continue to operate with the staffing levels and current allo-

egy. “We’re going to do everything we can to support students. But, together, we’ll have to examine our priorities and

without a provincial budget. As such, we had to develop our 2019-2020 budget under a number of assumptions. When the budget was announced in

The Alberta Avenue Community League Presents

The Brain Architecture Game

The Brain Architecture Game is a tabletop game that builds understanding of the powerful role of early experiences on brain development - what promotes it, what derails it and what consequences may result for society. A special presentation by Aynsley Graham, Behaviour Consultant will follow the game.

In Partnership with the City Centre Early Years Coalition

Register on Timecounts
<https://timecounts.org/alberta-avenue/events/23721>



ELMWOOD PARK

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SAT DEC 14 12-3PM

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Thinking about Christmas gifts differently

Bringing the intangible into a sustainable Christmas

GILLIAN KERR

In my culture, I celebrate Christmas. As an adult, Christmas is more about family, friends, and community. However, over the decades Christmas has become associated with high consumerism: buying tangible gifts. According to Wikipedia, “Consumerism is a social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts.” This unsustainable model is one that we have the ability to control and change.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, in the four weeks leading up to Christmas, household

waste increases by 25 per cent. In the US, that amounts to an extra 100 million tons of trash making its way to landfills each week! Canadian consumer patterns aren’t that different; it’s an absolutely shocking amount of waste. This waste affects our environment, our health, and our world’s future.

A great related article this month in RCP by Sarah Dotimas is about being a conscious consumer. Dotimas provides some great suggestions for this practice. In one of her examples, she talks about alternatives to using plastic straws. If a transition to glass or metal straws is of interest to you, one local option is to look up Edmonton’s Diana Glassworks on Etsy: etsy.com/ca/shop/DianaGlassworks. In addition, Ten Thousand Villages not only provides the opportunity to buy ethically-sourced beautiful gifts, but also developed an A-Z list of ideas for a more sustainable Christmas (tenthousandvillages.com/mosaic/more-sustainable-christmas) that incorporates numerous intangible ideas. It is a great read.

I choose an intangible and sustainable approach to the holiday season. Sometimes giving an experience means more than giving a tangible gift. You can be creative, with the gift being a potluck, shoveling someone’s walk for a month, a concert, babysitting children, and so on. In chatting with locals this past month, one innovative gift idea is to recommend (free) or

purchase a sustainability app from Google Play or the app store of your choice. There are numerous apps on reducing food waste, recycling, and other topics to live more sustainably. Many are free and those for purchase are usually less than \$5. Nice!

A few years ago, a friend leaving Alberta gifted us a large nativity scene that we set up on 95A Street between 112 and 113 Avenues. Since then, we have made it a bit of a neighbourhood event to put them up together. This year, we are hosting a potluck and nativity set-up party in late November. It is a way to enjoy the outdoors, celebrate with neighbours, and chat about what is going on in Norwood. Instead

of gifts, we bring food and catch up with one another, sharing and laughing. Making this an annual event builds community and contributes to waste-free celebrations.

I want to take a minute to thank the two people who sent suggestions for articles and wish you all a festive December.

Gillian has lived in Norwood since 2006 and loves the community. She worked for the Ministry of Environment for 12 years. She currently is an environmental consultant, researcher, and teaches environmental issues. She is also an avid volunteer. If you have any ideas or questions you would like an article to focus on, email gilliankerr@fastmail.fm.



For the past few years, Norwood residents gather together to put up a large nativity scene, and, as a result, spend time with one another. | Supplied

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Problem properties addressed at city meeting

Council promises to announce an action plan in March 2020

TEKLA LUCHENSKI

On Oct. 29, community members attended a meeting at city hall with the Urban Planning Committee. Concerned citizens included Alberta Avenue resident Virginia Potkins and local resident Rickshaw Dave, who lives next door to a notorious landlord's property.

Community members addressed safety concerns and frustrations. Many are worried that residents in the affected communities will start to leave because they are afraid in their own homes. Potkins says, "Being scared to go out in your front yard or walk out of your house at any time is ridiculous."

Speakers also pressed the committee to explain why, when there is a task force in place dedicated to solving the issue, problem properties still take a long time to shut down and eradicate.

Coun. Scott McKeen put forth a promise of accountability by the City to have an action plan in place by March 2020. Potkins says, "[March 2020 is] certainly a lot longer than I would have wanted—but there is hope."

Potkins explains the task

force has been in place since approximately 2008 and is intended to deal with issues in a

solid process in place. When speakers and city council members asked specific, sometimes

been shut down, and for how long.

Task force members also could not explain why the process of shutting down a problem property takes so long. One property in Alberta Ave, commonly known as The Castle, has been a problem for 13 years. Recently the City said that they were going to reinforce all access points to the house so that no one could resume squatting and using the property. The request was made six weeks ago; to date, there has been no action on the property.

Another part of the problem is the lack of accountability for property owners, especially absentee landlords who neglect their properties.

One suggestion to enforce accountability is to add any costs that these problem prop-

erties create to the property owner's tax roll. Potkins points out, "[Landlords] have walked away from their properties and walked away from their responsibilities. I believe that if they can't look after [their properties], then they should sell them." The costs incurred relate to things like having the City clean up damages and calling first responders.

In the meantime, Dave reports that the same night of the meeting, someone slashed the tires of one of his vehicles at home. Since then, he's had a total of four tires slashed on two vehicles. "I don't know," he says, "but I think it was related." Following my interview with him, he told me that three more were slashed on his truck.

The story of problem properties and their landlords is dark and complex in central Edmonton. The community waits for city hall to step up. Perhaps the time is coming this March.

Coun. Tony Caterina was contacted for a comment, but he did not respond.

Tekla is a freelance writer loving life in the Parkdale neighbourhood since 2013.



Recently, one landlord's home was devastated by fire. Its rubble lies next to two other problem properties, alleged to belong to the same landlord. | Tekla Luchenski

"timely manner." Potkins says, "I thought it would take a few months, not 13 years. Thirteen years is not timely."

Potkins also observes that the task force does not seem to have

pointed questions, members of the task force did not seem to have clear answers, if any. They could not provide statistics such as how many problem properties there are, how many have

erty owners, especially absentee landlords who neglect their properties.

Finding safe shelter is difficult for homeless

Exploring reasons why tent cities are safer than some shelters

VICTORIA STEVENS

Tent cities are on the rise in Edmonton, especially in the downtown core, and residents are taking notice.

According to the City of Edmonton, reports about tent cities have more than doubled since this time last year, increasing from 864 complaints or reports in 2018 to 1,900 this year. The reasons for the uptick are diverse and varied, such as an easier ability to report tent cities, issues in the shelters, lack of affordable housing, and visibility of the tent cities themselves. Tent cities are growing despite the fact that the rate of people experiencing homelessness has dropped by 42 per cent from its peak in 2008, and city shelters are operating at only 77 per cent capacity.

The reasons people experience homelessness are even more diverse. As more and more people live paycheque to paycheque, what may seem like small things such as a minor illness or an injury requiring time off from work can lead people to face unexpected homelessness. For those who are chronically homeless, mental health issues and substance abuse—which often go hand-in-hand—are some of the leading factors in them being unable to find stable housing.

The price of oil beginning

to skyrocket 15 years ago was the start of Alberta's latest, and most likely last, oil boom. With this boom came people from outside the province looking for work. As more people moved to the city, rent and housing prices increased. Many apartment complexes were converted to condos, removing them from the affordable rental market. As the costs rose, an increasing number of people not making oilfield wages

shelters.

Yet this spring, a homeless camp in the river valley consisting of nearly 500 people was dismantled, leaving the residents with nowhere to go. Many set up camp near 97 Street and 104 Avenue. According to Homeward Trust, 486 people are "sleeping rough", a term used to describe those who sleep outside each night, and 407 are in emergency shelters, intended as short-term housing. Over



Lately, tent cities (or camps) have increased in number. | Pixabay

could no longer afford housing and ended up on the street. According to Homeward Trust and Homeless Hub, homelessness peaked in Edmonton in 2008 and has dropped by 42 per cent to between 1,792 and 1,971. These numbers suggest the City's initiative to eliminate homelessness was working, and taking stress off the city's

1,000 were using precarious or provisional housing options, such as staying with a friend or housed in institutions such as addiction recovery centres.

Many people do not want to stay in the local shelters. A woman, who requested she not be named, says the safest place for her is in the tent cities (camps), not the shelters. She

cites theft and threats of violence as a couple of the reasons. As a single woman, safety is her main concern and a constant stress. Every morning, she tries to pack up her things so it doesn't look like she is permanently camping in the area to avoid bylaw officers seizing her belongings.

A young man, who asked to be referred to as K, says he has been stabbed numerous times in shelters and usually gets "rolled" (beaten up) for his medications, which he spends his days asking strangers for help to be able to afford. He now avoids the shelters as it is safer on the streets or in the camps.

Other people experiencing homelessness choose to sleep rough to keep their companion animals or to stay with their partners, especially within opposite gender relationships. Edmonton's shelters are gender segregated. This also causes concerns and issues for people who are non-binary or gender fluid, or transgender. A lack of storage and inability to keep their belongings is also cited as a barrier to people choosing to stay in the shelters.

Now that winter is here, these barriers to accessing shelters cause real problems. Last year, at least two people known to be chronically homeless froze to death in the Alberta Avenue/118 Avenue area. As it is difficult to properly count and keep track of those sleeping outside and many do go missing, that number may be far higher.

Although the City has made strides to help the homeless in Edmonton, more still needs to be done. A recent bylaw change will make it easier to get approval for permanent, safe, and affordable housing, but further actions need to be taken quickly. Building housing takes time. Options for immediate help may include allocating specific sites for tent cities. Providing amenities such as toilets, water, campfire spaces, and supervision are all options that can be implemented immediately.

The issue of homelessness will be solved eventually. In the meantime, it behooves us to help those living on the streets with the safest and most accessible options we can.

Victoria is an entrepreneur, roller derby player, and basset hound lover living in the Delton area.

Landlords have important responsibilities

Recent cat house is an important lesson for landlords to monitor properties

RUSTI L LEHAY

The night Elizabeth Hall-Petry, owner of a three story walk-up and duplex, was interviewed for this story, a mystery leak in the three story walk-up flooded down from the third floor apartment into the two suites below, right into their power boxes. Hall-Petry says, “It’s a false economy to not have a resident manager on site. Sure, I could collect one more suite of rent but how much would I lose from not having quick action, someone to keep an eye on things?”

While Hall-Petry started calling for plumbers late Friday evening, the on-site manager turned off both hot and cold water, offered extension cords to power a lamp and the tenant’s fridge, along with two fans to dry out the power box. She then sent text messages and knocked on doors notifying tenants that

the building’s water was being turned off and that the landlord was seeking to remedy the situation as soon as possible.

Landlords with on-site management have more opportunities to check on things, but Hall-Petry also rents out and regularly visits a duplex to maintain the common laundry and furnace room area. Tenants will say hello. Observation on these visits of clean, tidy environments and happy tenants are all good omens.

Both Hall-Petry and Roxanne Litwyn, a realtor and landlord in the Alberta Avenue and Parkdale area, also prescreen potential tenants. “I try to prescreen by asking several questions ...before setting up viewingsand meeting with them,” says Litwyn. By personally delivering the rental application to potential tenants, Litwyn says she can better predict the kind of tenants they

will be. “I find how they take care of their current rental is a good indication of how they will take care of my property.”

In October, a house on 112 Avenue made the news when 55 cats were discovered living there in terrible conditions. Tragically, many cats had to be euthanized due to their ill health. The landlord, who lives out of town, had discovered the condition of the property after she evicted the tenants. She “had no clue” about the conditions.

This situation wouldn’t happen to Litwyn or Hall-Petry. Litwyn exercises her right to refuse tenants with an abundance of pets. Hall-Petry asks for applications to be completed for both people and pets, accompanied by vet papers for the pets. Tenants must bring dogs along with them for the viewing. Observing how the animals are cared for, their

social behaviour with people and other animals, and knowing they have regular vet care guides the landlord’s decision of whether or not to take that person on as a tenant.

Some landlords in this neighbourhood may just want the rent money, but Litwyn and Hall-Petry care about their properties. Litwyn has lived in most of her homes before she transitions them to rental properties. She says, “I attract good tenants by having my properties well-maintained. I prefer being proactive, avoiding the ‘something is broken’ calls that prior maintenance might have avoided altogether.”

Tenants also have rights and obligations beyond paying the rent. Hall-Petry discovers many tenants are totally ignorant of roles and responsibilities for both the tenant and landlord, nor do they know that there is specific legislation and an act

called the Residential Tenancies Act.

Hall-Petry always says, “There are two sets of rules, not just mine. A tenant agrees to do certain things and so does a landlord. This is all laid out in the act.” You can always call the Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board with questions. If landlords aren’t doing their job, tenants can take them to court. If more people knew their rights and reported bad landlords, many property owners would have to be more responsible.

In the meantime, choose landlords who take care of their property and you will have found a home.

A member of the Professional Writers Association of Canada since 2003, Rusti has been writing professionally since 1999. Her favourite word activity is immersion editing with memoir writers.



Roxanne Litwyn says she’s blessed to have Sandra & Mike who are avid gardeners as tenants in her Parkdale rental home. | Roxanne Litwyn



Elizabeth Hall-Petry owns an apartment building and a duplex. | Rusti L Lehay

Métis citizens have new housing programs

Services focus on rental support, home repairs, and down payment help

DALE LADOUCEUR

Métis citizens now have more access to housing programs.

Last year, Audrey Poitras, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) president, signed a 10-year, \$500 million Métis Nation Housing Accord. This accord will allow Métis Nation governments to design and deliver housing services to their citizens.

The MNA’s housing branch, Métis Capital Housing Corporation, has designed four new programs to support families and students in need of rental support, home repairs, and down payment assistance.

Métis Nation of Alberta citizens can apply for:

Down Payment Assistance Program: provides up to 5 per

cent of a down payment to a maximum amount of \$20,000 per approved applicant.

Home Repair Program: provides a maximum of \$20,000 per approved applicant.

Rental Supplement Program: pays up to \$5,400 per year, for a maximum of 24 months. Métis Capital Housing Corporation will also pay an applicant’s security deposit to a maximum of \$850 per application.

Rental Supplement Program for Students: pays up to \$2,400 per year, per approved applicant. Métis Capital Housing Corporation will also pay an applicant’s security deposit to a maximum of \$850 per application.

“These are very significant programs for a lot of our families out there,” enthuses Denise

Fayant, director of housing for Calgary and southern Alberta. “First of all, both of the rental supplement programs will be a big stress release with helping our Métis students and citizens get extra support so they can maintain their current housing situation. A lot of our students and families are struggling with not only finding a place to live but [also] with food and other necessities.”

Fayant adds: “Being a homeowner myself and being in the same place for 17 years, things start to go. So that extra money would definitely assist a lot of our Métis home owners out there in achieving a safer, more secure home.”

Corrine Card, director of Métis Capital Housing’s Strategic Initiatives, is tasked with leading the design and

details of these exciting new programs. Card has years of experience working in the housing industry and has spearheaded many pivotal housing projects and programs.

Launching four major housing programs simultaneously, however, is not for the faint of heart. There can be difficult adjustments and unforeseen challenges in the first few weeks when launching any initiative, let alone four. Since the announcement, there’s been a steady influx of phone calls and applications.

“Oh my goodness, there has been so much interest,” enthuses Card. “Lots of questions, lots of excitement. We are hoping these programs can help many Métis citizens.”

But if these programs aren’t working for citizens, Card urges

people to share their challenges.

“We are always looking for feedback on what our citizen’s needs are. Share what those needs are because if you don’t, they may go unaddressed. The reality is we can’t help everyone, but we are going to continue to try with these programs and future programming.”

If you have questions on these or any other programs Métis Housing offers, visit metishousing.ca, which provides more details on programs or services. Or call toll-free: 1.877.458.8684.

Dale is the communications and marketing officer for Métis Urban and Métis Capital Housing. When not working as a journalist, Dale is also a musician and leatherworker (dale@crowtown.com).

Meet your community league board members

Spruce Ave's league has new and returning board members

SPRUCE AVE COMMUNITY LEAGUE BOARD

In October, Spruce Avenue Community League held its Annual General Meeting. Local residents may discover some new board members as well as some returning ones. Read the short biographies below to learn more.

President - Kate Boorman

Spruce Avenue has been Kate's home since 2012 and she has been active with the league for the past six years. She is returning to the board after a year abroad and is excited to see familiar and new faces sharing their energy and innovation with our community.

Past President - Verna Stainthorp

Verna moved into the community in 1967. With her husband Henry, they raised their three daughters and son in the area. In 1983, having outgrown their house, they rebuilt one of the first infills in Spruce Avenue. Verna has been involved with the community league since 1973. She was also involved

in the Girl Guides of Canada as a Brownie leader. The location of their meetings is now Workshop West Theatre. She has been on the community league board since 1994 as volunteer, secretary/treasurer, treasurer, and president.

Vice-President, Neighbourhood Development, Civics - Joshua Culling

Joshua is an urban planner working in a rural municipality adjacent to Edmonton. Josh lives in a semi-detached infill with his wife, son, and a Boston Terrier named Ricky.

Secretary & History Project - Wesley Andreas

Wesley relocated to Edmonton from Calgary specifically to get involved in the arts and community that the 118th Avenue area offers. With his husband, he has called Spruce Ave home since 2012. He became involved with the league in 2015 when he hosted the first Spruce Ave Jane's Walk and co-founded the community history project.

Treasurer & Casino Chair - Angie Klein

Angie has lived in Spruce Avenue since her family's arrival in Edmonton 18 years ago, and she has raised two children here. Angie has been on the board for many years, loves Spruce

Neighbourhood Watch - Cindy Leavitt

Cindy's focus in this role is helping neighbours connect with each other, bringing awareness to safety issues, and advocating with community partners.

Memberships - Irene Mortensen

Irene moved into the community in 1984. Shortly after moving in, she became involved with the Spruce Avenue Community League as a volunteer, interim president, and membership chair. Irene raised her three children in the area and supported them in their sports activities, particularly soccer.

Program Director - Ashley Ayume

Ashley comes from a small farming village in southern Saskatchewan, where everyone knows everyone. When she is not chasing her children around, she has a love of gardening, coffee chats, and baking. Ashley hopes

to instill pride here in Spruce Avenue.

Communications Director - Sabino Spagnuolo

Sabino has lived in Spruce Avenue for just two years. He and his wife saw the neighbourhood as a great place to put down some roots and start a family.

Volunteer Coordinator - Rebekah Prine

Rebekah has been in the neighbourhood since 1997. She has been involved with the league for five years and is a wizard in the hall's concession. She is looking forward to the next great programs/projects for our neighbourhood to come.

Hall Director - Henry Stainthorp

Henry has been involved with the league since 1994. He has worked for many years installing hockey and curling ice and as a building manager for Edmonton Northlands. He devotes many hours to promoting skating at the outdoor rink, particularly for students attending the local schools in the area.



Spruce Avenue Community League held a logo design and slogan contest this summer. Daniel Paszkiewicz's design was the winner.

Avenue, and is looking forward to the changes that revitalization brings to our community.

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Norwood Dental focuses on community

A business model that works for customers and the neighbourhood

KATE WILSON

A visit to Norwood Dental Centre, says co-owner Amanda Nielsen, feels more like a trip to your neighbourhood coffee shop or salon. You'll find that description is apt when you walk through the doors.

At the counter a lounge menu includes sparkling water, apple cider, and hot chocolate. Customers watch a TV screen in the waiting area. The hallway opens to a children's play room and a bathroom bursting with hand lotions, toothbrushes, and lip balms.

Located on the corner of 95 Street and 117 Avenue, the family dental practice demonstrates how service can be integrated with the idea of building broader connections. The practice fulfills a dream of Nielsen and husband Dr. William Chin, to offer a community-oriented service where patients not only feel they're cared for, but can also escape life's stresses.

"Many people are anxious about going to the dentist, or at the very least, don't see it as an experience they look forward to," says Nielsen, who grew up in Stony Plain.

"Our goal is to change people's minds as to what a dental visit feels like by showing it can be a relaxing, pleasant, and even fun experience."

Bilingual in English and Mandarin, with a background

people," says Chin, who moved from Taiwan to Edmonton while in junior high.

The value he and Nielsen place on relationships extends into the neighbourhood.

"We've done thousands of

ground-up approach.

Staff are an important consideration. "We've been really intentional in hiring and developing an awesome team that really cares about our patients as human beings, not just teeth,"

owners have invested in features "to make the whole process more soothing." Amenities include massaging dental chairs, weighted anti-anxiety blankets, fleece blankets, and Netflix with noise cancelling headphones.

They also offer payment terms such as direct billing and installment plans for eligible patients.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of their business model is its transferability. "Build relationships and invest in your team and community," urges Nielsen.

"The Alberta Avenue area is super community-focused, so getting involved with the community is key. And it's really important to deliver a great experience every single time," she says.

And because word-of-mouth is still a key part of growing a practice, their community-focused philosophy has produced results.

"We're so lucky to have developed a vibrant and diverse dental family who has helped us grow by referring friends and family to us," says Nielsen. "This is the highest compliment and we so appreciate it."

Kate took up the reporter's pad and pen while living in northern Alberta. The writing bug stuck, and the next 20 years were spent covering everything from local politics to community happenings. She lives in Eastwood.



Norwood Dental's co-owner and general manager Amanda Nielsen (left) stands with Emilie Antoine, admin staff, at the bright and welcoming patient intake area. | Kate Wilson

that includes restorative, implant, and cosmetic dentistry, Chin agrees that a dental practice can be a place of laughter, kindness, and community.

"We believe in caring for

oral health presentations at inner city schools. We're at every local festival, community league events, block parties," says Nielsen, noting their definition of success depends on a

she says. "We try to treat our team like the superstars they are, because we know when we do, they will treat our patients great in turn."

Since opening in 2018, the

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Alberta's youth mental health crisis

One family's experience with limited resources in an overwhelmed system

TEKLA LUCHENSKI

During question period in the legislature in October, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood NDP MLA Janis Irwin asked Health Minister Tyler Shandro if the UCP government planned to build the proposed children's mental health facility. The NDP initiative had been finalized right before the 2019 provincial election. Shandro replied, "There is no crisis in child mental health right now."

Since the exchange, Irwin has been overwhelmed by heart-breaking stories from teachers, parents, frontline workers, and kids. She emphasizes, "There's absolutely a youth mental health crisis that must be addressed, even if this Health Minister won't acknowledge it."

The Smith* family's story is common where children struggle with mental health issues. Maria Smith* is mother to three children. Smith says, "I am shocked and amazed that the Health Minister could say there is no health crisis for children. It's epidemic. I want to tell my story exactly because it's so common. I just can't believe he would say that."

Jane Smith* is 15. She has generalized anxiety, executive dysfunction, and sensory processing disorder. Anne* (16) has extreme anxiety and depression. Both teens take medication. Although they are intelligent and do well if they attend school, they exhibit something called school refusal, an increasingly common symptom of mental health issues.

Jane stopped attending school last November. She returned this September, but quickly stopped attending. Smith communicates regularly with the school's assistant principal to help Jane return, and to access alternative forms of education through the school board.

Although Anne used to love school, she started to resist going to junior high. By high school, her anxiety took hold. Now, every day is a struggle. She is social and wants to attend. However, during the last school year she started to miss more school. Some days, she would get to the school grounds, but panic attacks would stop her from going inside.

Many people wonder why parents can't force kids like Jane and Anne to attend school. Smith has engaged almost every resource: guidance with different

parenting approaches, involvement of the Mobile Crisis Unit, and liaising with the school's assistant principal, social worker, teaching assistant, and psychologist. She has forcibly carried one daughter into emergency at the Stollery Children's Hospital. Another time, Smith rode with the same daughter in a police cruiser that used to partner with the Mobile Crisis Unit. The Unit had a constable assigned to assist children and youth in crisis. Unfortunately, that resource was part of a pilot project that is now complete, with no plans to continue.

Both teens have been hospitalized for three to four weeks at the Royal Alexandra Hospital child psychiatry unit after waiting months for a bed. Once discharged, most children must wait again for treatment programs. The hospital unit is mainly for acute care. Its focus is on assessment and stabilization, not extensive therapy. It has a limited number of beds and a staggering waitlist.

The Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital has both in-patient and out-patient school programs.

On her Glenrose admission day, Jane refused to go. She suffered severe anxiety and threatened self-harm. There is a catch-

22 when a child refuses care. Jane and Anne are in the system under their psychiatrist's care. However, if parents or caregivers call 911 for assistance, first responders must take the child to a hospital's emergency department, not to the treatment program. According to one mental health care professional (name withheld), about nine out of 10 children with mental health issues are sent home from emergency every day due to a lack of beds. Meanwhile, the sick child will likely lose their bed at the intended facility and have to seek other (limited) treatment, or go back on the waitlist.

Jane is off of the Glenrose waitlist after three attempts over six months. Her community liaison nurse and social worker from Royal Alexandra Hospital applied on the family's behalf for Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) to open a file. That will take a month. Then, FSCD can begin to assess how, or whether, they can work with the family.

There is, in fact, a child mental health crisis in Alberta. It is buried deeply in a web of stigma and lack of political will to follow through on solutions.

We need more support of children's mental health. Write

letters, call, text, or use social media. Contact information is below.

*Names either withheld or changed by request.

Tekla is a freelance writer loving life in the Parkdale neighbourhood since 2013.

WHO TO CONTACT

Janis Irwin,
Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood MLA
780.414.0682
Edmonton.
HighlandsNorwood@assembly.ab.ca

Heather Sweet,
Edmonton-Manning MLA
Democracy & Ethics,
Mental Health & Addictions
780.414.0714
Edmonton.Manning@assembly.ab.ca

Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health
780.427.3665
Calgary.Acadia@assembly.ab.ca



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The Royal Alexandra Hospital has a child psychiatry unit, but it's meant for acute care. | Pixabay



Janis Irwin, MLA
Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood

f t JanisIrwin

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DEREK QUITTENTON

Have you ever stood on one of the four corners of the Earth? I have, on Fogo Island, which is an island off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are actually several "corners of the Earth." They are points on the planet where our gravitational force joins with the tidal pull of lunar gravity, a meeting point of the magnetosphere, a gathering point for cosmic rays, and a jump point for solar flares and where the solar winds all join in a cosmic flow of energy. Energy that can be felt, felt on the hairs on the back of your neck, energy that presses on your chest. Energy that you can feel in your heart, in your being. It is real.

There is an energy to the place. Joe Batt's Arm, the largest town on the island, is a charming coastal village. The village has charm, little shops, a harbor, and the art typical of coastal Newfoundland. The town pub is an instant home.

There is a gourmet little local restaurant, Nicole's Tea House,

where I enjoyed a fantastic meal.

For the deep pocket folks, there is the triple five star Fogo Island Inn. Now here is a place to say you have been, even if it was just to the restaurant for a

maybe the only place in Canada where you feel all these forces in play at the same place and time.

Then there's Brimstone Head, the trailhead of Brimstone Head Park. On rough coastal head-

motorcycle helmet, hang it on my bike, and take a few steps towards the trail. I feel a chill on the back of my neck. My hair stands up and life has a new twinge. But your body feels

to a shoreside cliff. You stand there overlooking an angry cold Atlantic shore and you feel the pull of ancient forces. There is a pulse here, a force of nature that you can feel. It is only after you stumble across a trail side plaque that explains not where you are but how you are: namely that you are standing on a vortex of cosmic fields, a focal point of interstellar energy that takes you to a new place in space and time.

Fogo Island is a hard place to reach, a tough place to visit, and not an easy trip. Oh you can leave the island just fine, but once there Fogo Island will never leave you. Be careful. This island will capture your soul and never let go. Trust me on that one.

Derek, a former financial planner, retired, sold his practice, bought a big honking touring motorcycle, and hit the road! Six years and 160,000 km later, all in Canada and a snippet in Alaska, he has seen this land. You want to learn about the grandeur of this land, just ask him!



The magnificent Fogo Island Inn. | Derek Quittenton

coffee. The hotel looks like a fish shack on stilts out over the rocks and sea. What a view!

Fogo Island is such a place,

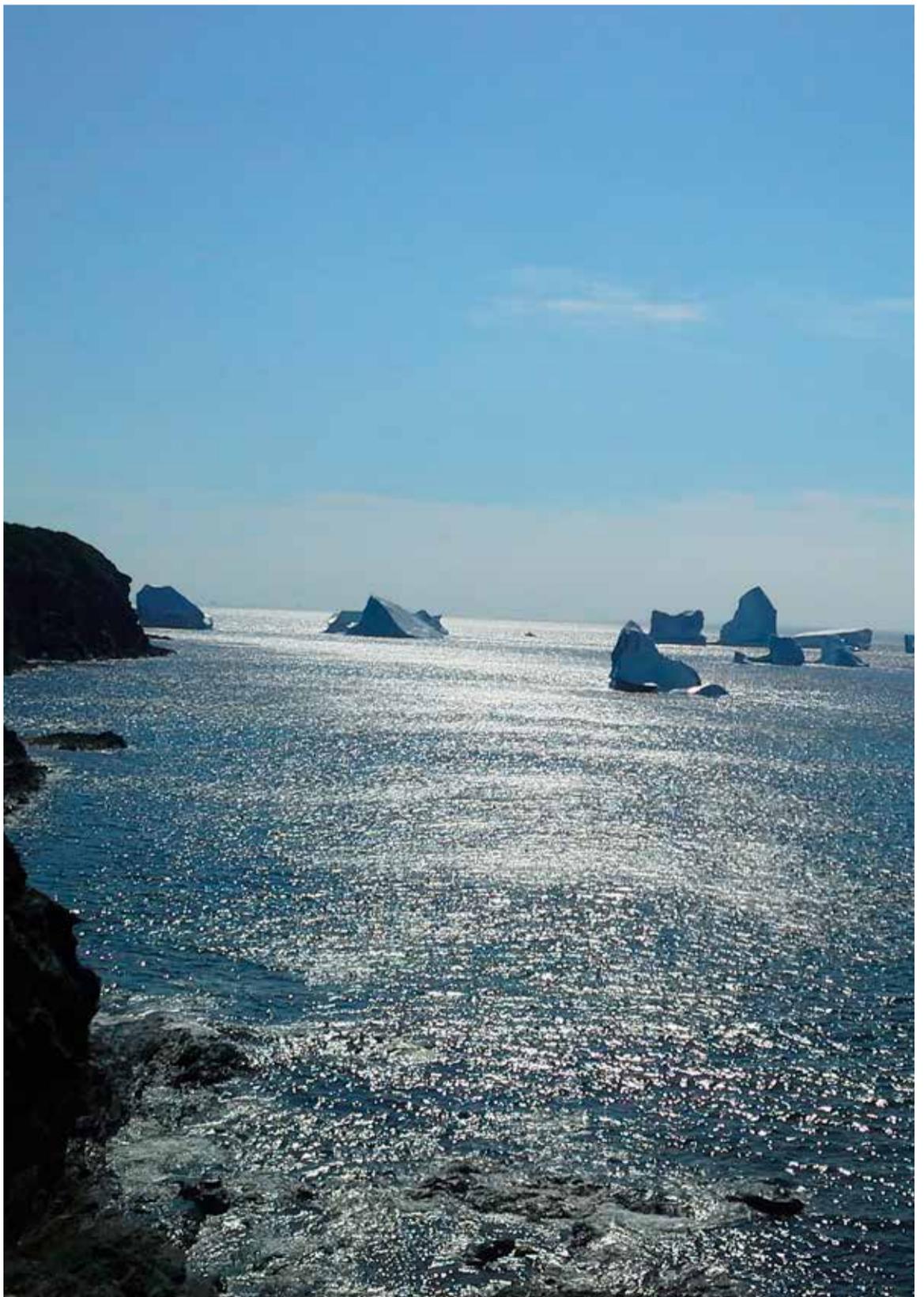
lands, this is a rugged place that is home to cosmic forces. You can feel the energy just as soon as you arrive. I take off my

more alive and more at risk at the same time. You know something is amiss in this place.

The coastal trail draws you

These icebergs, called growlers or bergy bits, are off the shore of Fogo Island. | Derek Quittenton

Brimstone Head Park is considered one of the four corners of the Earth. | Derek Quittenton



Six easy tips to being a conscious consumer

These small steps can make a big difference to the environment

SARAH DOTIMAS

The concept of being a conscious consumer may seem pretty straightforward, but it can be confusing. There are many ways to do it. I'm that kind of conscious consumer who tries her darndest to be mindful of environmental impacts when purchasing products and services.

This practice includes doing some research before I make a purchase. Impulse shopping rarely happens because I already know what I need to buy. It may sound like too much work, but it gets easier over time.

For decades we have been encouraged to practice the 3Rs: Reuse, reduce, and recycle. With the amount of items we

purchase on a global scale, recycling is not the best strategy to combat waste. Instead, I say let's focus more on reducing our waste and reusing what we already have.

Let's talk about straws for a moment, shall we? Straws make drinking beverages more fun, right? Well, in North America we use over 500 million straws daily. That's a lot of plastic straws.

I have made a conscious choice not to buy or use plastic straws. Paper ones are better, but I'd rather use ones made of steel, glass, or bamboo because straws made of those materials will last longer and be more sustainable. Sometimes it's tricky, though, like when your diligent server brings your guava margarita with a small plastic straw

already in it. Rats! Next time I'll be more proactive and ask what kind of straws they use. How do you drink a margarita without a straw? Are there even small eco-friendly straws for margaritas? Hmmm. I can Ecosia it.

For those unfamiliar with Ecosia, it's the search engine I use. They use their ad revenue from people's searches to plant trees where they are needed the most. You need to make about 45 searches to plant a tree.

This past September I was a guest on the podcast show Running with the Krinelles and they asked me what a potential listener could do to make practical changes to support the environment. I gave them a short and simple list. Here it is:

1. Invest in a water bottle. If you have access to clean water,

don't buy bottled water.

2. Use reusable bags when shopping.

3. Invest in a traveler's mug. I bought mine from The Carrot Coffeehouse.

4. Avoid over-packaging when shopping. Buy bulk when you can and bring your own containers.

5. Buy and support reuse. You can do this by buying or swapping used items or even by getting books from free libraries. If your community doesn't have one, start one. Or, borrow books from the Edmonton Public Library. If you prefer to buy books, the Bissell Thrift Shop on Alberta Avenue has some pretty cool finds.

6. Support local small businesses. Edmonton has so many. I'm sure we all have our favou-

rites. Let me know which are yours.

How does my list sound to you? Simple, eh? If you cannot commit to everything on this list, that's okay. The important thing to remember is that small and simple steps can make a difference even though it may not feel like it at times. Let me know how you practice being a conscious consumer!

Sarah D volunteers at the Parkdale Cromdale Community League. She is passionate about many things, including environmental issues and community wellness. Reach Sarah through Instagram @sarahdtheconsciousconsumer.



Use cloth bags for grocery shopping. | Pixabay



Buy a water bottle instead of buying bottled water. | Pixabay

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December 15th starting at 1:00 pm

\$15 each

\$25 per family with 2 children

(1 gingerbread house per child)

RSVP is required to participate

Tickets can be purchased deltoncommunity.com or at the door

Questions?

Contact programs@deltoncommunityleague.com



Food & folk music make a toasty combination

Listen to curated folk music in a friendly and informal venue

TALEA MEDYNSKI

Thursday afternoons just got a whole lot better with The Carrot Coffeehouse's newest musical offering: Toast and Jam.

Yes, toast is referring to toasted bread, which participants can happily eat while listening to the "jam": local folk music played around a table, reminiscent of a kitchen party.

Bill Werthmann is the folk

musician who conjured up this punny title and proposition.

Christy Morin, executive director of The Carrot Coffeehouse, explains: "Bill is an established folk musician in Edmonton. He's really rich in the knowledge of folk and acoustic music."

Werthmann is friends with Peter Nolan, who is a retired teacher as well as a blues musician and longtime volunteer at The Carrot Coffeehouse.

Werthmann had been looking for the right venue to explore his idea, and he contacted Nolan to ask if he could talk to Morin.

"His concept was that he wanted a relaxed venue to jam around the table," Morin explains. "And he asked if we serve toast. He said he always wanted to call his idea Toast and Jam."

As it happens, The Carrot Coffeehouse does indeed serve toast. So now with a relaxed

venue and his choice of snack, people can come and eat and enjoy the performances. Although, of course, they don't have to order toast if they'd rather have something else.

Unlike The Carrot's Open Mic Night where anyone can participate, Morin explains that Werthmann is curating the music.

"I think it's going to start attracting more folk musicians to The Carrot," says Morin. All

people need to do is come and listen. "[Werthmann] just wants to see how and where it goes."

Toast and Jam is held every Thursday from 11 am to 1 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse (9351 118 Ave).

Talea is the Rat Creek Press editor. She loves sharing the stories of our diverse neighbourhoods.



Folk music artists entertained guests with holiday music in late November. | Talea Medynski

FREE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

ESL & LANGUAGE

PRACTICE ENGLISH
Conversation circle, Mondays, 7-8 pm at Sprucewood Library.

GLOBAL VOICES CHOIR
An informal way to practice English. Song books and light lunch provided. Thursdays, noon-1 pm at Mennonite Centre (no classes in August). More: Suzanne 780.423.9682.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS TO CANADA (LINC)
More: Edmonton Mennonite Centre 780.424.7709 or info@emcn.ab.ca.

FOOD & SUPPORT

EDMONTON URBAN NATIVE MINISTRY
Drop-in Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 10:30 am and 3 pm for social, spiritual, and practical support, including computer access. Lunch Tuesdays and Fridays, noon-1:30 pm. Small food hamper every second Thursday. Meal provided after 4 pm Sunday service.

BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY
Various programs and services, including a soup & bannock lunch once a month. 11648 85 Street. 780.481.3451. www.bentarrow.ca.

PRAYERWORKS COMMUNITY
Hot meals & warm friendship at PrayerWorks Common in St. Faith's & St. Stephens Anglican Church, 11725 93 St. Thursday lunch: served 11 am - 1 pm with doors open 10 am - 1 pm. Friday dinner served 5 - 6 pm, with doors open 3:30 - 7 pm. Saturday breakfast served 8:30 - 9:30 am, with doors open 8 - 10 am. Meals will be in recess for Dec. 26-28 and April 9-11, 2020. More: 780.477.5931

COLLECTIVE KITCHENS
Cook with friends, try new recipes, help your food budget. St. Faith/St. Stephen: 2nd Tuesday, 1-3:30 pm. Call ahead. Trish: 780.464.5444. Parent Link: Second Wednesday, 11:30-2:30 pm. Call ahead: 780.474.2400. Parkdale hall: Last Sunday of the month, 1-4 pm. Check parkdalecromdale.org for details.

PARENTS & PRE-SCHOOLERS

BABES IN ARMS
A wonderful casual parent meetup. Fridays, 10 am-noon at The Carrot Coffeehouse.

SING, SIGN, LAUGH & LEARN
Saturdays & Tuesdays, 10:30-11:15 am at Sprucewood Library. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:15 am at Highlands Library. More: 780.496.7099.

NORWOOD CHILD & FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE
Parent & family education, early childhood education, community events. 9516 114 Avenue. 780.471.3737. www.norwoodcentre.com.

PARENT LINK CENTRE
Information, support and a variety of free programs. 11666 95 St. 780.474.2400. Mon to Fri, 9 am-7 pm.

CHILDREN

LEGO AT THE LIBRARY
Design and build a lego creation. Ages 6-12. Saturdays, 3-4 pm at Highlands Library.

GIRL GUIDES
Meetings on Mondays from September to June at St. Andrew's. More: 39thedmontonguiding@gmail.com or 1.800.565.8111 (answered locally).

TEEN LOUNGE JR.
Play video games, make a DIY project, meet friends. Thursdays, 3:30-4:30 pm at Highlands Library.

YOUTH

EVIL GENIUS CLUB
Robot battles, Arduino hacks, DIY music, art, Minecraft, photography, 3-D design & printing are just the beginning. Fridays, 4-5 pm at Highlands Library. Thursdays, 3:30-4:30 pm at Sprucewood Library

TEEN LOUNGE
Play video games, make a DIY project, or just hang out. Thursdays, 6:30-8:30 pm at Sprucewood Library.

GLOBAL GIRLS
Build new relationships, develop self-confidence, and identify pathways to achieve goals. Every other Thursday, 3:15-5:30 pm at the Mennonite Centre for ages 16-22. Drop-in. More: 780.423.9691.

TEEN LOUNGE JR.
Play video games, make a DIY project, meet friends. Thursdays, 3:30-4:30 pm at Highlands Library.

AIR CADET SQUADRON
Youth program for ages 12-18. Aviation, drill, department, music, marksmanship, survival, physical fitness. Thursdays, 6:30-9:15 pm Sept to June. www.570squadron.com.

ADULTS

COFFEE WITH COPS
Join a roundtable conversation with EPS. First Wednesday of month from 10-11:00 am at The Carrot Coffeehouse.

AVENUE BOOK CLUB
Meets the first Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse. More: Lorraine 780.934.3209.

AVENUE WORD ADVENTURING
Join other writers in a positive environment to write, share, and discuss writing habits and goals. Drop-in on the third Thursday afternoon of the month, 1:30-3:30 pm, The Carrot Coffeehouse. More: Rusti @ lit@ratcreek.org.

SEATED MEDITATION
Restfulness for the body and mind. Led by Kate Wilson, 12 years exp of Zen-based meditation. Bring a cushion and mat or simply show up. Mondays, 6:30 pm, Eastwood hall. Membership required.

GUIDED MEDITATION SITS
Perfect for beginners. Saturdays, 5 pm. All welcome, no charge. Land of Compassion Buddha Temple. 9352 106A Ave. 780.297.7392.

COFFEE FRIENDSHIP CLUB
Have coffee with individuals who are single, divorced, or widowed and looking to meet new people in the area. Wednesdays, 1-4 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse. This is a drop in club only, and if people cannot attend, then they do not meet any other time.

COMMUNITY ART NIGHT
Free art workshop for adults. Tuesdays, 6:30-8:30 pm at the Nina. Register/info: 780.474.7611.

TOAST & JAM
Thursdays, 11 am - 1 pm, The Carrot Coffeehouse (9351 118 Ave). Musicians bring their instruments and gather around a table for a "kitchen party" featuring whole grain toast and jam.

WELLBRIETY SUPPORT GROUP
Mondays, 7-9 pm at Canadian Native Friendship Centre, upstairs room #200.

SENIORS

CENTRAL LIONS SENIORS ASSOCIATION
Programs, clubs, drop-in activities, fitness centre. 11113 113 St. 780.496.7369. www.centallions.org.

NORWOOD LEGION SENIORS GROUP
Cribbage, Wednesdays at 1 pm at NorwoodLegion.ca.

SENIORS BREAKFAST & SOCIAL (55+)
Join us for breakfast, visit, or play cards or billiards. Wednesdays, 11:30 am-12:45 pm (10:30-11:45 am during the summer) at Crystal Kids.

FAMILIES

HIP HOP SHOWCASE
Listen to sick beats and step up on our open stage for hip hop artists, rappers, spoken word, and poets. Rated PG. Third Wednesday of month, 7-9 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse.

TABLE TOP GAMES NIGHT
Choose from our selection of games or BYOG. Tables are free! Last Wednesday of the month, 6-11:30 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse. Hosted by Tim of GOBfest.

FAMILY ART NIGHT
A variety of free art activities for school age children accompanied by adults. Thursdays, 6:30-8:30 pm.

MUSIC LESSONS BY CREART
Free group music lessons Saturdays at Parkdale-Cromdale hall from 10 am-noon. More: createdmonton@gmail.com or 587.336.5480.

FREE COMMUNITY REC ACCESS
At Commonwealth Stadium on Saturdays from 5-7 pm: Alberta Ave, Eastwood, Westwood. Sundays 1-3 pm: Alberta Ave, Parkdale-Cromdale, Spruce Avenue

OPEN MIC NIGHT
Open to performers of all stages and ages! Sip a latte and enjoy original music, poetry, comedy, and more at The Carrot's uniquely warm and personal open mic night. Saturdays, 6-10 pm at The Carrot Coffeehouse.

NOTICES

Jingle Jammin Christmas Carolling, Dec. 13, 6-9 pm, The Carrot Coffeehouse (9351 118 Ave) & Eastwood Community League (11803 86 St). Get into the holiday spirit and join us at The Carrot for chili at 6 pm and carolling at 7 pm. Our partners at Eastwood Community League will have Christmas activities from 6-8 pm and carolling at 8 pm. Dress for the weather and bring your own flashlight.

The Carrot Gallery call for submissions: We want to showcase and sell your art from our gallery walls! We welcome exhibition proposals from local visual artists and arts collectives. We are currently accepting submissions to The Carrot Gallery for our 2020 programming. Visit thecarrot.ca/art for more info.

LOCATIONS

Bent Arrow
11648 85 St
Bethel Gospel
11461 95 St
Cnd Native Friendship
11728 95 St
Community Leagues - see page 12

Crystal Kids
8715 118 Ave
Highlands Library
6710 118 Ave
Mennonite Centre
11713 82 St
Norwood Family Centre
9516 114 Ave
Norwood Legion
11150 82 St

Sprucewood Library
11555 95 St
St. Faith/St. Stephen Church
1725 93 St
St. Andrew's Church
8745 118 Ave
The Carrot Coffeehouse
9351 118 Ave
The Nina
9225 118 Ave





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ANGLICAN PARISHES
 ST. FAITH AND ST. STEPHEN
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 11725 93 Street
 St. Stephen | 780.422.3240
 Sunday Worship:
 8:30 am - Low Mass
 9:00 am - Morning Prayer
 9:30 am - High Mass
 7:00 pm - Evensong
 St. Faith | 780.477.5931
 Sunday Worship:
 9:00 am Friday Prayer
 11:00 am Sunday Worship
 1st Sunday Common
 2nd Sunday Trad. Anglican
 3rd Sunday Aboriginal Form
 4th Sunday Trad. Anglican

AVENUE CHURCH
 A community to belong in...
 a community to serve with.
 11335 85 Street
 (Parkdale Hall)
 avenuechurch.ca
 Sundays
 9:30am coffee fellowship
 10:00 am Service

NORWOOD WESLEYAN CHURCH
 Meeting needs with love and compassion
 11306 91 St
 10:00 am Sunday School
 11:00 am Sunday Service
 ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN
 A caring and loving church in your community where everyone is welcome.
 8715 118 Avenue
 780-477-8677
 Sundays at 11 am

BETHEL GOSPEL CHAPEL
 A Bible-based, multi-ethnic fellowship.
 11461 95 Street
 780.477.3341
 Sunday Meetings:
 9:30 am - Lord's Supper
 11:00 am - Family Bible Hour

AVENUE VINEYARD CHURCH
 A friendly, informal, non-judgmental and safe place to grow spiritually. Traditional Christian values in a non-traditional way.
 8718 118 Avenue
 (Crystal Kids Building)
 avenuevineyard.com
 Sundays at 10:30 am

THE SALVATION ARMY CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH
 A Place for Worship and Service
 11661 95 Street
 salvationarmy.ca/alberta
 780.474.4324
 3:00 pm Sunday Worship

CHURCH SERVICES
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Jingle Jammin'

Christmas Carolling Evening

Friday December 13th at 6 pm

The Carrot Community Arts Coffeehouse
 (9351 – 118 Avenue) 6 pm – 8 pm
 Chilli dinner at 6 pm, followed by carolling
Dress for the weather and bring a flashlight!

Eastwood Community League
 (11803 – 86 Street) 6 pm – 9 pm
 Chilli and festivities 6 to 8 pm
 Carolling 8 to 9 pm



visit thecarrot.ca or call (780) 471-1580 for more details