

# RAT CREEK PRESS

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## Local league completes two long-term projects

Parkdale Cromdale Community League installed solar panels and a mural



The mural that now beautifies the chain-link fence consists of 27,000 pieces. | Supplied

### TALEA MEDYNSKI

One could say Parkdale Cromdale Community League is partly focused on beauty and equally concerned with practicality. After all, they recently completed two long-term projects: a chain-link fence mural and a major solar panel installation.

Kevin Wong, the league's current civics director, designed the mural that took over two years to assemble and contained 27,000 pieces.

Wong explains the mural all started with the fence. "[Mural volunteers] felt like the chain-link fence surrounding the league grounds wasn't the most welcoming. I was looking for ideas to add colour to the chain-link fence."

After Wong stumbled on the mural idea, the league board applied for revitalization funding.

After that, the league held

workshops so community members could create patterns that best represented the diversity of the community. Some questions posed at the workshops were: What does diversity mean or community mean? What does happiness look like to you?

"Our league has a tradition of creating mural projects. When we held the workshops, we had a good response."

When the patterns were created, Wong digitized them in Adobe Illustrator to form the cohesive mural. He then wrote a computer program to pixelate the mural into 27,000 plastic tiles that could be installed in 2.5 by 2.5 feet pieces.

Wong says community members started installing the mural last year and completed it in September. "People thought they'd paint. They didn't expect to play with puzzle pieces."

"Volunteers this year were mostly board members due to COVID-19." He adds, "It was

one of those examples of a community getting together and making things happen."

While the mural could expand further, Avenue Initiative Revitalization funding may not continue, so the mural will likely remain as is.

The league's solar panel installation also took three years to complete, from concept to installation. In 2017, the league board started looking into solar energy for the building and decided to go with Evergreen & Gold Renewable Energy, located in Cromdale.

"We applied for funding from all levels of government," says Wong, explaining that the project is completely funded (a little over \$45,000).

The whole south-facing roof is now installed with solar panels. This means the league should generate enough solar power to run everything at the league building. "Our whole league will actually be net-zero,"

Wong explains. "We were able to sell off energy in the summer and buy it back in the winter. If we've done it right, we'll actually make money."

In a funny sense of timing, the solar panel installation was completed one week before the mural was finished, bringing both three-year projects to a close.

Don't expect this busy league to stay still for long. They're currently holding a logo contest to update the old logo. The winning logo will be printed on merchandise and the winner will receive an assortment of the new merchandise. Read the league programming article for more details on the contest or visit [parkdalecromdale.org/logo](http://parkdalecromdale.org/logo) for more information.

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

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# Norwood fire station is here for the community

Fire truck sirens mean someone is being helped

## CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Have there been more calls for Edmonton Fire Rescue Services in our area since COVID-19? Hearing the frequent sirens made me think so.

But I was in for a surprise. Norwood fire station #5, although the second busiest in the city, has not seen a rise. Total calls are “fairly consistent,” says Scott Macdonald, deputy chief of operations. This year’s numbers are similar to the past two years, totalling 3,445 to the end of September.

Fire-related calls come from the consolidated 911 dispatch service for police, fire, and ambulance. Calls related to medical events arrive from Emergency Medical Services of Alberta Health Services.

Given the reality of COVID-

19, the number of medical events is steady at 58 per cent of calls. A typical year at Norwood station is just under 2,500 medical events. The number to the end of September was 2,013 medical events.

October is traditionally a month of open houses for 28 of Edmonton’s 30 fire stations. This year, of course, visitors are not allowed.

Mark Harvey, station captain, speaks for the staff of eight when he says, “Remember that all stations are there for the communities they serve when needed. In Norwood, we are still active in the community and able to be approached when we are out in our district. So, wave and say hi!”

“Morale in the whole of society is affected, not just life in a fire station,” says Macdonald.

“But while we have certainly changed our interactions, our firefighters are still out in the community.”

All firefighters at Norwood are trained as medical first responders. Coupled with the necessity of wearing full PPE while on medical calls, the barriers between firefighters and the community have increased.

Adds Harvey, “As a station we are constantly out in the district we serve. Whether it’s responding to events, training, attending community functions, or getting groceries for the shift, it’s important that we make contact and build trust with the citizens we aim to help. We hope to provide a positive experience to all. From the young to the elderly in our community, we do our best to build relationships to grow the confidence our community has

in us.”

Firefighters often arrive at a medical event before an ambulance. They bring equipment such as oxygen, automatic external defibrillators, and Naloxone among other supplies. “We always work hand-in-hand with ambulance personnel,” says Macdonald. “Arriving in the golden hour [the period of time after an injury where medical attention may prevent death], sometimes before an ambulance, we can save a life.”

When you hear fire truck sirens, says Harvey, “You need to realize that those who need help are getting the help they require.”

Respect protocol: if you are driving and see a fire truck coming, pull over to the side of the road and stop as it passes. If someone needs medical atten-

tion in a large group, stand back. This allows firefighters to help as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Fire safety starts with simple tasks such as installing smoke detectors and changing batteries in the spring and fall. Ensuring household members know how to respond to fire and medical emergencies is also an important practice that helps in stressful situations.

After speaking with firefighters, community members can watch out for one another and help those in need. If help is required, Norwood fire station is ready when called.

*Constance’s writing and editing career spans more than 40 years. She lives in Parkdale-Cromdale.*



The pump crew outside Norwood fire station #5. | Photo courtesy of Edmonton Fire Rescue Services

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### ABOUT US

We are a non-profit community newspaper serving Alberta Avenue, Delton, Eastwood, Elmwood Park, Parkdale-Cromdale, Spruce Avenue, and Westwood. Published on Treaty 6 Territory. The opinions expressed in the paper are those of the people named as authors of the articles and do not necessarily reflect those of the board or staff.

### GOALS

Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joe Wong, Mariam Masud, Steven Townsend, Sarah Dotimas, George Crawford and Sean MacQueen. The board may be contacted at [board@ratcreek.org](mailto:board@ratcreek.org).

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### CONTRIBUTORS

Our writers vary from trained journalists to community residents with varying backgrounds. We strive to be a place where individuals can learn new skills and acquire experience—whether in writing, editing, photography, or illustration. We welcome letters, unsolicited submissions, and story ideas.

### COPYRIGHT

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### CIRCULATION

Serving 12,500 community members.

### 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.

RATCREEK.ORG

I ❤️ my RCP

# Why I joined the Rat Creek Press board

How and why to join the board of this local community paper

**GEORGE CRAWFORD**

I saw my place on the RCP board at our last Annual General Meeting (AGM). I didn't intend on joining, but as I listened to the previous community director talk about her work in having the recognition of Treaty 6 territory put in the paper, I was inspired. I was concerned about how much of a responsibility it would be and I was scared of trying something new. Yet once I started thinking about the act of recognizing the territory and how that made me feel to see a part of my Métis heritage represented, I saw the power of the *Rat Creek Press* to

represent the diversity of our communities. When I became a director, I did it to have the *Rat Creek Press* better represent our diverse communities by cultivating space for the voices of diverse people.

This last year, I have come to realize we have an amazing team of writers, photographers, and illustrators supported by our editor and publisher. We have brilliant, vibrant, and active communities to write for and about. These communities support us, too. They volunteer, share their spaces, and advertise with us.

However, we currently have only half the board members needed, with vacancies in vital

roles. This has made it difficult for us to support our publisher, editor, the rest of our team, and the communities we serve to the degree they deserve. Likewise, our lack of board members means we are not representative of all the communities and people we are trying to serve. We simply don't have the perspectives and voices present in our meetings.

Luckily, our AGM is on Nov. 25 and we have several positions open, including vice-chair, volunteer coordinator, secretary, and several director positions. Despite all the talk of titles, it really comes down to one meeting a month and any time, knowledge, perspectives,

or skills you are willing or able to share. To join the board, all you need is to live in one of the seven communities we serve and complete the brief questionnaire through [timecounts.org](https://timecounts.org) or the link on the Board & Staff page at [ratcreek.org](https://ratcreek.org).

My story about finding my place on the board is not unique. Most of us take part in an AGM and are inspired to join, or we see a specific task that matches our skills. But even if you don't see that or experience the feeling that I did, the AGM is an opportunity to learn about the paper and our challenges, goals, plans, and the people and communities that make it possible.

Please join us on Nov. 25 for our AGM, and if you are inclined to help support the growth of strong, vibrant, well-connected communities, consider joining the board.

*George is the youth culture and community director at the Rat Creek Press. They live in Cromdale and are an active member of the Parkdale Cromdale Community League.*

**RCP AGM**  
**Nov. 25**  
**7-8 pm, online**  
**Info, registration, and meeting link: [bit.ly/Nov25agm](https://bit.ly/Nov25agm)**



RCP board members from last year's AGM from left to right: Joe Wong, Virginia Potkins, Steven Townsend, George Crawford, Sarah Dotimas, and Mariam Masud. | Rebecca Lippiatt

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**“ WE MUST ADAPT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. ”**

*Karen Mykietka*  
 RCP Publisher

# Rona Fraser is leading local arts organization

Nina Centre for the Arts will thrive under her leadership

## STEPHEN STRAND

People need to participate in activities that bring them joy, even during times of uncertainty like we are experiencing now. And that is exactly what the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts has been doing, and will continue to do under the leadership of Rona Fraser, the new CEO.

Born in Edmonton, Fraser attended a business program at NAIT that focused on marketing and also earned an Arts and Cultural Management diploma from MacEwan University. After graduating, Fraser worked in event management and promotion, which led to her and her husband starting their

own event company in 2001. Interestingly, one of her first contracts was to produce and promote the grand opening of the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts when it opened in 2003.

"I absolutely fell in love with the centre and the amazing work that Wendy Hollo [co-founder and former CEO] and Paul Freeman, the artistic director, were doing," says Fraser. She continued to take on contracts with the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts until 2015. It was then that she accepted the position as director of development at the Nina. "My main role was fund development. I loved this position and found it challenging and rewarding."

Fraser explains she wanted

to be a part of the organization because it's inspiring and impacts and changes lives.

"With over 230 artists with developmental disabilities in our collective, we have the opportunity to witness the growth of our artists as they work with many different mediums," says Fraser. A team of professional artists work with the collective and the community programs the organization offers, such as the free Family Art Night and Community Art Night classes.

Fraser was the director of development for five years when Wendy Hollo, who was then the CEO, approached her. She wanted Fraser to take on the CEO role when Hollo retired. "I was very hesitant as Wendy had big shoes to fill. She

had led and grown the centre to become what it is today," says Fraser. But, with a bit of encouragement, Fraser accepted the position and took over the role as of July.

The art organization's vision has been focused on making arts accessible to everyone, no matter their physical, mental, social, or financial barriers. They also focus on sharing their artists' artwork with the community, with the intention of helping to change the perceptions about what someone with a developmental disability is capable of doing.

This has been their focus since day one and will continue to be, even during the pandemic.

"COVID has drastically

affected the way the Nina operates and impacted our fundraising capabilities. We once could accommodate up to 50 artists at a time in our studios and now, with safe social distancing, we are around 20 artists at a time," Fraser says. They extended their hours and broke up their days up into two blocks to accommodate everyone. "This has been a big change, but we are so happy to still have our artists safely creating."

"Everyday I am inspired by what happens here and feel so fortunate to be a part of it."

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



Rona Fraser has been the CEO of the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts since July. | Stephen Strand

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# Stay connected with league programming

Fall & winter programming includes indoor & outdoor activities

TALEA MEDYNSKI

Local leagues are continuing to provide safe and fun programming despite the coming winter and the continuing pandemic.

Ali Hammington, president of Alberta Avenue Community League, says, “[We’re] planning to host Thursday Community Nights on a weekly basis. The hall will be open from 5-8 pm for socially-distanced coffee and snacks, and the Fresh Routes mobile low-cost fruit and veggie market will be on site. We will offer access to a free book exchange and emergency food pantry.”

Bent Arrow will be providing Indigenous Teachings on Nov. 5, 19, Dec. 3, and 17.

Other programming includes resume preparation, an English conversation circle, a knitting circle, and Naloxone training.

“In addition, we’ll be bringing in teachers and knowledge-keepers to share their gifts. Anyone with something to teach or share should contact [programs@albertaave.org](mailto:programs@albertaave.org). Keep your eye on social media for details on upcoming Community Night events,” Hammington says.

Resident Alyssa Becker-Burns started up monthly Accordion Avenue Jams. Email her at [accordionavenuejam@gmail.com](mailto:accordionavenuejam@gmail.com) for more information. Plus, watercolour Paint Nights are back. Register for the Nov. 7, Nov. 28, and Dec. 12 events through [timecounts.org/alberta-avenue](http://timecounts.org/alberta-avenue). Classes start at 1 pm at the community centre and cost \$15. COVID health guidelines are in effect.

Eastwood Community League has started up its Meditation Mondays class, held

at the league at 6:30 pm. An Eastwood Community League membership is required to participate.

Kate Wilson, the league’s facility coordinator, says, “We are tentatively planning on opening the outdoor rink for skate season, and we’ll be following current guidelines for COVID-19. As of late October, we’re still waiting for guidance from Alberta Health Services. We may have a family fun skate, but this is tentative. It was a great success last year. Watch for details on our website.”

They’re also offering the free snow removal program for seniors and those with disabilities again this year, set to start in late November or early December.

For youth, the Sarah McLachlan School of Music is offering music lessons at Eastwood community hall. To learn more, visit [sarahschoolofmusic.com/](http://sarahschoolofmusic.com/) or email [nathan@sarahschoolofmusic.com](mailto:nathan@sarahschoolofmusic.com).

Parkdale Cromdale Community League has a lineup of programming, plus its logo contest.

Sarah DeLano, the league’s program director, says anyone entering the logo contest will need to communicate three messages in the design: heritage and history, Parkdale and Cromdale representation, and neighbourhood diversity. Submit the design and a paragraph explaining the concept to [development@parkdalecromdale.org](mailto:development@parkdalecromdale.org) before 11:59 pm on Oct. 31. Visit [parkdalecromdale.org/logo](http://parkdalecromdale.org/logo) for more info.

And check out the Short Story Book Club, held every second Thursday.

“This will be hosted in person (potential to change) at the league where we will chat about

the recent read. All stories will be sent out prior to the meet-up and they will be accessible online. This is an adult book club, as mature content may be covered.” When weather permits they may meet outdoors around a fire; otherwise, they will meet physically distanced in the hall. “Bring your layers, a mask, a comfy chair, a cozy drink, and your thoughts!” says DeLano.

Stay active with the Wednesday Coffee Stroll, a physically-distanced, mask-required walking group. “This group is senior-focused, but all are welcome as distance will not exceed 5 km and can be easily accomplished by all levels,” says DeLano. The walks start at 8:30 am at Sheriff Robertson Park.

Or, join the Grass Routes Running Group at the league on Wednesdays at 6 pm and Sundays at 9 am. The run, which incorporates physical distancing, takes about 45 minutes.

Yoga, normally Tuesdays at 7 pm, barre classes, normally Wednesdays at 6 pm, and Creat music lessons, typically Saturdays at 10 am, will all soon be moving indoors.

Sabino Spagnuolo, communications director of Spruce Avenue Community League, says, “We are working to see how our skating rink can remain open, but all programming in general is essentially on hold still pending their viability.”

Check other league websites or Facebook pages for programming information.

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



Accordion Avenue Jams is starting up again at Alberta Avenue Community League. | Supplied

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## OPINION

# When a pandemic throws a curveball on life

Losing and finding work amidst the upheaval of COVID-19

STEPHEN STRAND

Sometimes no matter how hard-working, successful, safe, or how closely you followed the steps to success spouted by self-help gurus and entrepreneurs, life throws you a curveball. This happened to me on March 12, 2020.

After going to college and working relentlessly for over a decade to carve away a career in the entertainment and broadcasting industries, I lost all of my work in the span of an afternoon. And that goes for many people in many industries.

Unlike other industries, people in the entertainment industry could not work from home. There was no live entertainment and no sports to broadcast. Even corporate work in the audio visual world disappeared. With a limit on gatherings and many people working from home, there were no meetings or conferences that needed technical support. Everyone in the entertainment and broadcasting world had one of their worst fears realized.

Obviously, the entertainment industry isn't the only one suf-

fering. With an unemployment rate of 11.7 per cent, many Albertans are struggling. Many are worse off than my wife and me. Finding a job isn't easy right now with so many people applying for work. Being from a specialized industry, my skills are either overlooked or are non-transferable. It's demoralizing not receiving a call back.

Thankfully, a friend helped by giving me some work livestreaming weddings. He paid me a fraction of what I previously made, but it was certainly better than nothing. He was not exploiting me. I was simply taking over a few of his contracts while he was lucky enough to get inside the NHL bubble.

The livestreaming isn't the only work I have gotten since March. I have helped other friends with projects. These friends who don't have much work themselves, but understand the importance of helping others. And you better bet I will return the favour once I am able.

So, reach out to your network and see what happens. It's often who you know when it comes to getting work.

Explore working in another industry that may be more stable than your own.

Caiti Farquharson, a former member of the marketing team at the EXPO Centre, was temporarily laid off on April 20. Luckily, she was able to get another full-time marketing job. "It was tough looking for work during COVID," says Farquharson. She originally held off searching for another job, but in July she began to seriously look.

"I applied for around 15 jobs before I was hired," she says. "I'm grateful that this is a field that remains less affected by the pandemic than other fields of work," Farquharson adds. If there weren't many opportunities in her field, she would have expanded her job search.

There were a mix of remote and in-person jobs. "I would say employers were being more clear about offering work-from-home arrangements than they were pre-pandemic," she explains. Her new job as the marketing and communications manager with the Alberta College of Massage Therapy is in-person. "We have a small team, so we are comfortable

being in the office together at this time."

She looked for a new job because the events industry would likely be the slowest to recover.

"I didn't think that it was likely that I would be recalled to work anytime soon, and even if I did, I knew there was a possibility of being temporarily laid off again if lockdown measures were reinstated. It was time for me to move to a more stable industry!"

This is something everyone must think about, especially as the days tick by and the money trickles out of our accounts.

But, to what field? It's hard to know what's a safe bet anymore.

A friend, who asked to remain nameless, left the entertainment industry to go back to school for nursing and says COVID simply delayed the job cuts. "I feel a little anxious about going into the workforce, just because we've consistently been told by this government that healthcare is going to get axed."

Indeed, in early October the UCP announced they will cut 11,000 support position jobs from AHS. The UCP claims they won't cut nurses and other

frontline positions, but a leaked budget draft from July states differently.

The idea of having my entire income tied to one job terrifies me. If it weren't for my network, I would've been completely without work.

Perhaps we're better off working for ourselves. Learn multiple skills and trades that give us maneuverability so that if one job dries up, we can move on to the next.

Taking in free education is also a good idea. Numerous educational institutions offer free or cheap online courses and bootcamps. Even Stanford University offered a free online coding course. YouTube is always a great resource.

It's hard to know what to do next. Navigating is a bumpy process, but one thing I've learned is that you don't always need the piece of paper to get the work. My career has taken me far beyond my educational background. The best bet is to be flexible and open to change.

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



The entertainment industry has suffered since the pandemic, although some work like livestreaming weddings has been an unexpected source of work. | Stephen Strand

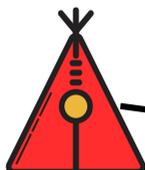
Alberta Avenue  
Community League

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# Residents on AISH worried about changes

The government is discussing changing eligibility criteria

## VICTORIA STEVENS

Potential changes to who qualifies for AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) in order to save money in the 2021 budget is on the table. Currently, AISH recipients receive \$1,685 a month.

Charles Philips has been on AISH since 2002 or 2003.

“The process for me was a bit easier [than for most] as I have kidney failure and am on dialysis, which is something that automatically qualifies for AISH,” Philips explains. His doctor still completed a three-page document affirming his condition and that it is terminal without dialysis.

Philips receives \$1,798 a month from AISH. The extra money is a dietary stipend meant to help offset the cost of the specialized diet he needs to survive. His medication is also covered by AISH. He considers himself lucky, as he lives with his brother as a roommate and spends half of his AISH income on rent. His other expenses are

food, a phone, and a bus pass. Even with a quite modest lifestyle, he says he still feels the pinch at the end of the month.

“My biggest concern, however, is that the UCP will get rid of or change the automatic qualifications and force me to reapply. That would cost me my apartment as I do not have enough money to pay rent without AISH.”

Although AISH will backdate payments to the date someone qualifies, this can still mean losing a home or extra charges for late fees, an expense Philips can’t afford. The recent change to payments arriving on the first of the month instead of a few days before has also been stressful. Although he hasn’t had a payment come late yet this year, he has in the past, which required at least three or four days to fix.

Philips says the recent talk about AISH eligibility has taken an emotional toll.

“Much like I felt when the pandemic started,” Philips says. “People were going on about how only the elderly and those with pre-existing medical con-

ditions were at risk. It’s not nice to know that your life is an acceptable casualty.”

He’d like to see AISH indexed to inflation again; that way AISH recipients don’t have to wait for the government to decide on increases. Instead, the increase automatically comes with cost of living increases.

Sam (last name withheld) has been on AISH for just over five years.

“The application process was brutal. I had to get multiple doctors to fill out multiple papers. It seemed they all said the same thing. I felt like it was assumed I was lying or trying to be lazy,” she says.

Unlike Philips, Sam doesn’t automatically qualify for AISH as her disability isn’t terminal. Sam receives AISH due to mental health. She is diagnosed with severe PTSD, depression, and anxiety and experiences panic attacks often. She also has ADHD.

Sam used to be precariously housed, but since qualifying for AISH she has secured stable housing with a roommate. She says she’d prefer her own place,

but it’s much better than where she was before.

“AISH has made it so I can function, at least a bit like a ‘normal’ person,” Sam says with air quotes. “My medication is covered and most days it has made it so I can be productive, at least a little,” she laughs.

When the date of AISH payments was changed to the first of the month, Sam said it threw her into a panic. She relies on AISH cheques to come in the mail as she doesn’t trust electronic banking. Some cheques have arrived late in the past, but they usually show up three to four days prior to her rent payment. She doesn’t know what will happen if one comes late now. She suspects she’ll be on the hook for late fees.

“Things are really tight as it is. I can’t afford an extra \$50 to \$100 in late fees. That’s my food budget!”

Sam says she is worried about no longer qualifying for AISH, as the rhetoric around people abusing the program seems to be pointed at people who are on AISH due to mental health struggles. If she loses the fund-

ing, she doesn’t know what she will do. She isn’t in a place where she can work a regular job—although she hopes to get to that place some day—nor does she have family or friends nearby to help support her.

“I’ll end up back on the streets. I’ll lose the medication and therapy I have been receiving. The fact that I am even able to talk to you today is because of that therapy and medication.”

Sam says she wishes the government, regardless of its political stripe, would see people on AISH and all disabled people differently.

“We are f\*\*\*\*ing people! Just people like everyone else and we deserve to live our lives with safety, health, and happiness. Why can’t they see us that way?”

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



Possible eligibility changes to AISH may impact many recipients. | Image by Olya Adamovich from Pixabay



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Priyah Naicker, Priyah Fashions

# Distance learning has its ups and downs

Local parents find different ways to cope with kids learning at home

## CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Ajayi Aluko has a heavy distance learning load. He's studying language arts, math, social studies, science, and physical education. Luckily, the Grade 1 student has help. Both of his parents work with his teacher to ensure Ajayi is getting a good education and enjoying it as much as possible.

Mom Sharee Aluko is a full-time college instructor working from home. Dad Emmanuel Aluko also works from home. This year, due to COVID-19, Ajayi's parents decided to enroll him in a private school and employ distance learning. With a curriculum set out by the province, distance learning has its advantages and disadvantages, says Sharee.

"We meet with his teacher online twice a week," Sharee says. "It's rewarding to see what my son is learning and see his

progress. I love that aspect."

On the other hand, she says, "It's demanding on my time. I'm doing a full-time job from home, and we have a younger child as well. In class, the teacher has more responsibility. With distance learning, we do activities with my son that his teacher would be doing if he was in a classroom."

Last year, Ajayi attended Kindergarten in person. "He knows the difference and misses his friends," Sharee says. Students do meet virtually in some classes on Zoom, she notes.

He also misses having an in-person teacher. "It's different when your teacher is in class with you. The teacher would be with Ajayi all the time and get to know him well. Now she needs to reach out more, and it's not as close."

She adds: "If you are capable and have time, it's very worthwhile to engage in your child's

education." On the other hand, is it realistic to continue distance learning into the far future? "Maybe not. It's a lot of work and sacrifice."

Nadine Riopel found herself laid off from her university job just two days after the pandemic restrictions hit in mid-March. This worked in favour of distance learning, she says: "I would probably have quit but since I was laid off, I didn't have to make that choice."

Although her son is only in Grade 2, complex computer skills are required. "For Sam's schoolwork, he needs to know all the Google classroom systems, such as having meetings, taking photos, inserting into slide texts, and printing assignments. Is this what a Grade 2 student should know how to do?"

At the start of this school year, Sam was so frustrated with technology issues that he wanted to go back to the class-

room. Things got sorted out, but Riopel spends an "inordinate amount of time" working with Sam and two other children using technology. Teachers, too, she notes, have had to step up. "As well as teaching the students, they have to be computer experts."

One solution helps ease the stress. Riopel, her husband, and two other couples share distance learning duties for a total of three children. As a result, the couple puts in two days a week instead of five.

"It looks like we're in it for the year," Riopel adds, "but I really hope Grade 3 next year is back in the classroom in a safe manner."

Distance learning does have its advantages. Maggie Glasgow's daughter, Seren, is in Grade 2 and enjoys everything. Her son, in Grade 5, is doing better in reading and writing. "Isaac doesn't have as many distractions as when he was in the

classroom," Glasgow says.

She and her husband, Darren Pleavin, share responsibilities with parents of a Grade 3 student. Glasgow's involvement is two to three days a week. On those days, the full-time working mom gets up at 5:30 am and works until 11 am. "I definitely am a night person," she says with a laugh. "Waking up at that early is killing me!"

The couple alleviates stress with Family Art Night classes at Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, movie nights at home, and special "loud nights" like she had with her own parents. "We all choose music and turn it up loud and we dance. It's a lot of fun."

*Constance's writing and editing career spans more than 40 years. She lives in Parkdale-Cromdale.*



Sharee Aluko with son Ajayi (right) and daughter Ebunike (left). | Emmanuel Aluko.

# Sending kids to school during COVID-19

Parents must choose how they want their children educated

## SHAREE ALUKO

Families were faced with the difficult decision of what school would look like for their children during the pandemic, and many parents sent their children back to school.

Rachael Robertson, who lives in Alberta Ave, says, “It has been a little nerve-wracking sending my kids to school during COVID-19, mainly because of the logistics surrounding it. There are extra things for me to remember, like having to constantly be washing their masks, packing separate snacks, and when I ask my children about how school went, I really need to try hard to be positive about the changes.”

Robertson says her children are finding it challenging as well. “One day early on in the year, my son came home in tears saying school was so lonely.” Her children attend John A McDougall School, which requires students to wear masks

all day long. “He never sees the smile of anyone in his class, as the only time [masks] can come off is when they are eating. Eating also presents another challenge. Sometimes my kids need help opening their lunch kits or some food items, but their lunch supervisors are not allowed to help. On a whole, we are happy to have the children getting some interaction daily, but are a little sad by the measures we have to follow.”

Robertson and her husband sent their children to school because online schooling didn’t work last term and neither of them work remotely.

“My son in Grade 2 has high anxiety and he would not participate virtually. It was a daily struggle getting him to be on the computer. I do not feel confident in being responsible for my children’s education.”

Their routine has changed only slightly from before. “We are following the same routine, however hand washing masks after school is getting tiresome!

Occasionally the boys would go to friends’ houses after school, but that is not happening anymore.”

Robertson is confident they made the best choice and their children will attend school the next quarter as well. “Even though they are isolated within a social setting, my children’s behaviour in school versus the last term out of school is like night and day. Their mental health obviously needs the social aspect in their lives.”

Kirsten Scott also decided to opt for in-class instruction for her two children.

“It has been a different challenge than I expected,” Scott explains. Her youngest child is doing well so far because of the small class size. “So far we have only experienced two times since September that she was sent home.” The first time was due to a rash on her hands that was caused by the hand sanitizer. The second time was due to a sore throat from running during recess with her mask on.

“The symptom cleared up within minutes of her drinking water and resting, but the school insisted on a COVID test. I felt it was totally inappropriate and a drain on resources. However, the school was adamant and her father with whom I share custody also requested that the test be done, so she took the test and it was negative.”

Her eldest daughter is unable to attend in-person math and science classes, but she is hopeful that problem will be solved next semester.

Scott chose in-class learning because her eldest daughter insisted and she felt her daughter would be able to physically distance, wear a mask, and sanitize well enough to be safe.

“With my youngest it was different. Her father and I had seen how well she was doing with distance learning [during the last school year] and had discussed her staying home. He changed his mind in August and yet I felt we should keep her home until the first semester

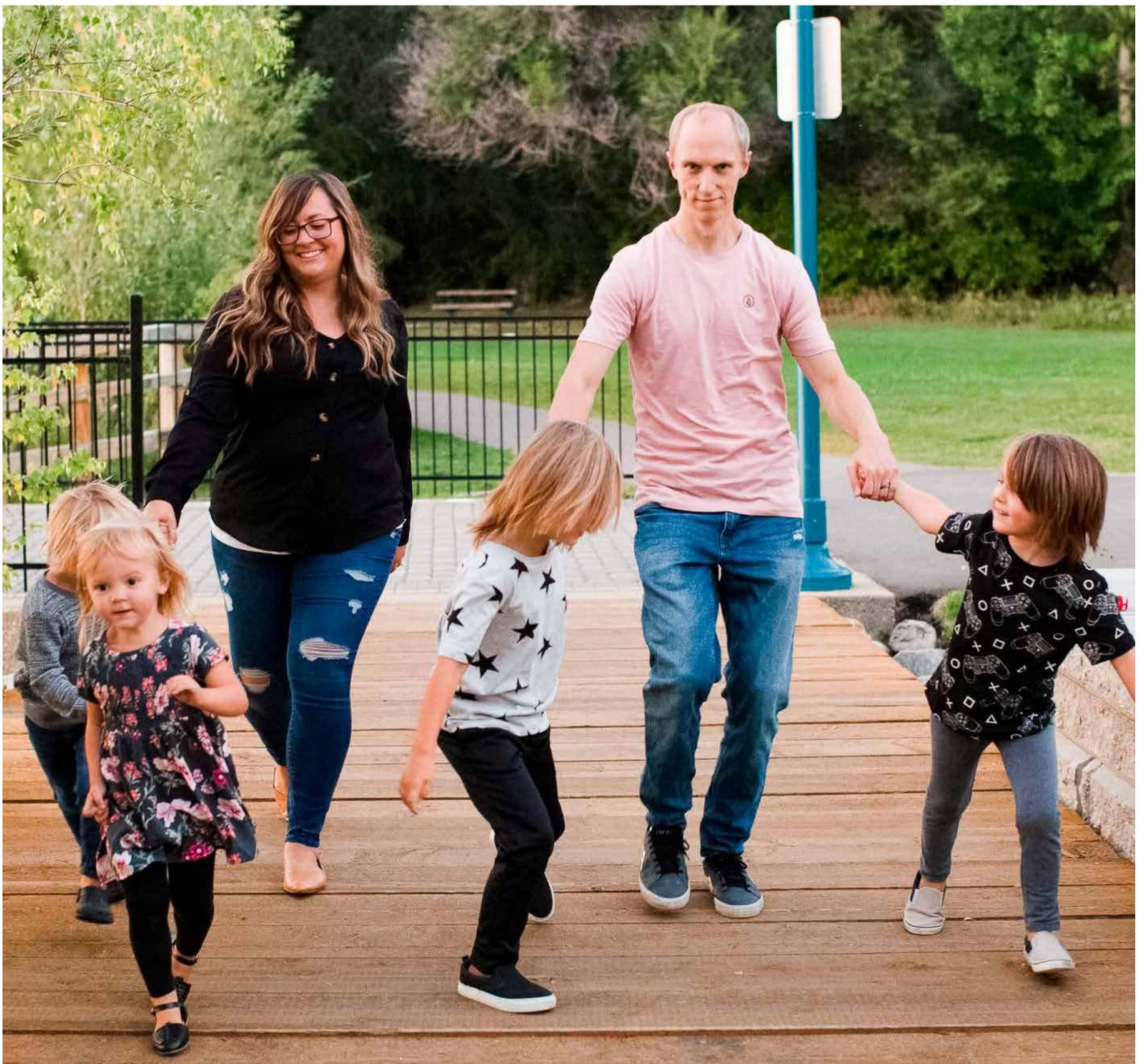
was over to see how the schools were managing outbreaks and such.” They couldn’t come to an agreement and the school defaulted to in-person attendance.

The family has a relatively normal morning routine.

“We do a check-in first thing about how we feel and if there is anything new or changed about our throats, noses, and lungs, then we mask up and head to school and work! Once home, there is more attention to hand washing before anything else occurs, but then it’s chores and play time,” says Scott, who plans to continue sending her daughters to school.

There is no perfect situation and ultimately the choice of sending children to school is a personal one.

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



Rachael (left), her husband (right), decided to send their children to attend school in person this year. | Supplied

# The motivation behind hate crimes & incidents

Online session provides resources for education and reporting

**RUSTI L LEHAY**

Understanding why hate can motivate people to commit crimes or incidents is a complex issue.

The Resiliency Project, a collaboration between the City of Edmonton, Edmonton Police Service, and the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, hosted a free online “Understanding and Reporting Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents” awareness session on Sept. 29. Community leaders struggling with occurrences that may be motivated by hate are strongly advised to attend future sessions.

Renée Vaugeois, executive director of Alberta Hate Crimes Committee (AHCC), says, “Indigenous people tend not to report when hate happens to them.” The AHCC claims only

1 in 10 crimes motivated by hate are reported.

There were 119 validated reports to the online self-documenting tool StophateAB.ca between February 2017 and March 2019. These included derogatory slurs, hateful material, vandalism, graffiti, threats, and other incidents. The most common motive is race or ethnicity. Reporting crime or acts of hate will help support the outreach and education initiatives of the AHCC.

Incidents or crimes motivated by hate occur because of someone’s hate, prejudice, or bias against race, national or ethnic origin, language, skin colour, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor.

To help end this injustice, ensure your kids’ schools tap into the “Hate Hurts” diversity and anti-hate/bias educa-

tion program designed for junior and senior high school students. The program provides tools to support an environment that addresses hate, bias, and discrimination and fosters safe spaces.

Communities can access a resource toolkit called Beyond Hate. It helps identify hate, illustrates existing laws to address hate, and aid community response through action, education, prevention, and partnership.

When a hate crime happens, both the victim and the community are impacted. AHCC literature states, “Hate crimes are more than just an individual crime, they are message crimes.” This means the perpetrators are sending a message like, “you don’t belong.” Victims experience shock, disbelief, PTSD, and more. Families often feel powerless.

In the community, it creates unrest and fear. Incidents can escalate and lead to retaliation. If there is no justice and the offender drives the victim to retaliate, then the victim becomes the criminal/offender. When this occurs, the tragedy is that the original victim, driven to retaliate, is now criminalized.

Ignoring incidents can lead to normalization and under-reporting. Vaugeois says, “We worked with the Peacemakers Program to create spaces to have the hard conversations to find remedies using dialogue to shift things.” There are many more impacts. Visit the AHCC website to gain a broader understanding. AHCC also offers restorative justice circles with individuals or communities impacted by hate.

Want to become more informed or need help? Follow @ABHateCrime on Twitter

or FB: ABHateCrime or self-report to StopHateAB.ca. Or, call toll-free 1.888.476.8082, email ahcc@albertahatecrime.org, or visit AlbertahateCrimes.org.

Restorative justice circles and information sessions are important. Albertans must understand there is a significant need to document crimes and incidents spurred by hate. Without accurate records of how often it happens, there is reduced action to prevent it, and victims think, “Why bother?”

Protect your neighbourhood by reporting, witnessing, and becoming informed.

*A professional writer, Rusti has been writing professionally since 1999. Her favourite word activities are coaching writers and offering online writing stay-treats.*



Hate crimes and incidents hurts both the victim and the community. | Image by Wokandapix from Pixabay



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November 5th, 19th  
December 3rd, 17th

WHERE

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Community League  
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QR CODE

# Use art as a therapeutic tool and to bring joy

Art is for everyone to enjoy as a fun and beneficial activity

## TALEA MEDYNSKI

Creating art can be therapeutic, and you can use it in therapy and as a destresser. Better yet, there's no need to be an artist.

Tracy Suter, an Eastwood mental health counsellor who uses art therapy in her practice, explains the difference between art therapy and artistic expression.

"Art therapy combines the creative process and psychology (therapy), providing an opportunity for self-exploration and awareness, emotional resilience and healing. Art therapy is a great process for those who find the idea of talking to a therapist for an hour somewhat daunting. It is a noted therapeutic modality and can release complicated thoughts and emotions."

Suter says art therapy focuses on the process as the goal, not necessarily the art itself. It

"encourages introspection and supports the individual." It may help treat anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, and even the stress and grief surrounding a medical diagnosis or illness.

Some simple activities include making a collage or vision board or working with clay or craft materials.

"Using imagery, colour, words and phrases and arranging them on poster board under a simple directive such as 'how do you envision your future self?' can provide insight. This gives an individual time to utilize their instinctive and feeling processes and not intellectualize. Moving paint around paper and mark making can also be very cathartic even though the end result isn't a recognizable image. Clay, textiles, and craft supplies can also be used for emotional expression."

When stressed or anxious, the brain goes into survival mode. Art therapy is nurturing

and helps with self-expression through a process that feels like play. "The physical act of using our hands in a tactile effort alone can be very cathartic," says Suter.

And while working with an art therapist can help connect the dots, the act of creating art is therapeutic on its own.

"Pure expression through art materials (and also writing/journaling or music and dance) can be used by anyone to alleviate anxiety, practice mindfulness, and are a wonderful form of self-care and relaxation," says Suter.

Lorraine Shulba, a local artist, designer, and illustrator, teaches Family and Community Art Night classes at the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts.

"If anything, COVID has shown me art is so important," says Shulba. "It's a therapeutic process. It doesn't have to be a masterpiece."

Early on in the pandemic,

she taught the classes online. Because accessing supplies could be challenging, she planned projects using supplies people already had at home.

"Online, I'd have a group of 20 people making a creature of paper made from scraps found around the home."

She's back teaching in person at the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, although people must register. And although she has access to supplies for her students, she still uses free supplies.

"Last week in the family class, we observed the leaves and talked about what shapes we could make out of leaves. I made a face of the grasses with a leaf for the hat."

You can often find supplies in your kitchen. "Just look at what we have at home that we can get crafty with."

Check out Dollarama or browse your local thrift store for affordable supplies or visit one of the many art stores for

higher quality supplies.

Other ideas include mixing food colouring with shaving cream to create a painting. Or, roll marbles or small styrofoam balls around in paint.

Shulba says people who create art gain confidence, energy, and benefit from what she calls "well-filling" or therapeutic benefits.

If you have a tough inner critic, follow the advice of writer, editor, and teacher Rusti Leahy and put your work away for five days after creating it.

Visit [recreatecounselling.com/](http://recreatecounselling.com/) to find out more about Tracy Suter and [thenina.ca](http://thenina.ca) for more information on art nights.

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



Art can be used as part of therapy or just as a relaxing activity on its own. | Image by bodobe from Pixabay

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# Secure your property against theft

## How to avoid becoming a victim of property crime

### TEKLA LUCHENSKI

A long-time resident in Alberta Ave, Brendan Van Alstine is speaking up about the incidence of yard invasions.

“It’s been a very active summer,” says Van Alstine. He acknowledges that this is not new. “I think it really is everywhere; it’s just whether you’re aware of it or not.”

He noticed an increase over this summer. “I’m sure [the fact] that people are in dire straits because of COVID-19 isn’t helping. The closure of the EXPO Centre in early summer didn’t help.”

As the former president of Alberta Ave Community League, Van Alstine’s commitment to address socio-economic issues in the community

informs his empathy. However, his concern overlaps with personal and community safety.

A trespasser tried to steal a new bicycle from Van Alstine’s backyard shed. When Van Alstine confronted him, the thief threw the bike over a six foot fence and tried to get away. Van Alstine fought the intruder and managed to retrieve the bike.

Strangers cut through his yard, which is mid-block (i.e. not a corner location, where this tends to be more common). As an empathetic resident, Van Alstine says, “They said they were just cutting through. Who knows if they were telling the truth or not.”

He installed cameras on his property. Later, he secured and locked fences. The yard is now fully enclosed, and there are

fewer incidents.

Const. Kenny McKinnon would likely applaud Van Alstine’s efforts. McKinnon, of community engagement for Edmonton Police Service (EPS), informs people about how to prevent property crime.

“Crime increase is very area-dependent,” he says. “It changes from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and even from street to street.”

He says that because of the pandemic, “A lot of people are laid off and stuck at home.” “People are seeing more things because they are home to see it. The prevalence of being aware of property crime has increased. The seasons definitely have an impact on the type and prevalence of property crime.”

Regardless, McKinnon advises, “Define your property line

as best you can and keep things secured. A fence with a locked gate is good. People committing property crimes tend to look for open back yards. Also, a lot of crime happens from the alley. You need a locked gate in the back, and a locked vehicle. People are looking for a crime of opportunity.”

McKinnon also stresses, “You have to think, ‘what’s valuable to someone who has almost nothing?’ People will break into a car for sunglasses, clothes, and garage fobs.”

McKinnon and the EPS have a wealth of information for how to protect property on [www.edmontonpolice.ca](http://www.edmontonpolice.ca).

McKinnon adds, “A key strategy is to be neighbourly. The more people get to know each other, the more you break down boundaries and help each

other.” Also, “Online information sharing is good, but it’s not good to eliminate face-to-face contact. Social media connects and separates.”

“Property-related crimes are the most preventable,” says McKinnon. Be aware, informed, connected.

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

### CRIME PREVENTION TIPS

[edmontonpolice.ca](http://edmontonpolice.ca)



Van Alstine and his partner have installed cameras to surveille their yard. | Tekla Luchenski

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# Caring for isolated seniors during the winter

Stay connected with loved ones during the pandemic

**NAZREENA ANWAR-TRAVAS**

As temperatures plummet, seniors may soon be facing an extended period of social isolation. Winter often brings isolation anyway, but the pandemic has made it worse. Seniors in long-term care facilities have had limited in-person visiting hours and were already living in social isolation.

According to the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council's 2019 survey of adults 55 years old and older, 21 per cent of respondents scored as "lonely". Almost one quarter of respondents seldom or don't have someone to talk to or rely on for help. Their social networks have gotten smaller because of retirement, children and grandchildren moving away, friends dying, and so on. Plus, many of the one-person households are seniors living on their own following the death of a spouse. This is particularly true for older women.

Loneliness has a devastating impact on health for people of all ages. Socially isolated seniors already dealing with mental and physical challenges are more exposed to risks such as cognitive decline, dementia, depression, anxiety, falls, and hospitalization.

But not all hope is lost!

Although working remotely, staff of seniors' centres strive to respond to essential needs by regularly monitoring emails and voicemails. Many organizations have turned to digital technology to keep its older patrons engaged.

based information sessions, educational programs, games, and conversation. Seniors can still also connect with Sage's online Life Enrichment Programming. Some seniors' centres also have in-person classes for a limited number of attendees using

ry compiled by The Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

Technology plays an important role in not only staying connected but also in reaching out for essentials. However, since some seniors are not confident about using digital tech-

to FaceTime and video calls, applications such as WhatsApp offer free calling, voice and video messaging. Many retail giants offer online shopping options. Prescription refills can also be done online. For example, through the Instacart app, customers can order groceries from participating retailers with the shopping being done by a personal shopper.

Loved ones can still visit seniors living in senior housing or long-term care facilities in the winter, provided they follow AHS public health guidelines, such as wearing a mask, maintaining a safe distance, sanitizing, and staying home if feeling unwell.

Because not everyone has access to the Internet, it is essential that we regularly stay connected with our senior family members, friends, and neighbours to know if they need any essentials. Even just calling to ask about their well-being can go a long way, especially with the onset of winter and influenza season.

Socially isolated seniors may not feel valued or have a strong sense of belonging or fulfillment. A lack of social contact can cause mental health challenges. By regularly reaching out to seniors, we can ensure they do not feel neglected or unsupported at the most vulnerable stage of their lives.

*Writing has always been Nazreena's biggest passion besides crocheting and breeding birds. Having changed nine schools as a child in different countries, cultural tolerance and flexibility to adapt to diverse environments come naturally to her.*



Reach out regularly to seniors so that they don't feel neglected. | Nazreena Anwar-Travas

For example, the Sage Seniors Association hosts several different activities through Seniors' Centre Without Walls, which offers free, interactive telephone-

safety protocols. In addition, many program options are available via computer or telephone. A complete list can be found in the recreation directo-

nology, that's where volunteers, friends, and seniors' centres play an important role in helping seniors understand and use technology. As an alternative

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PRESENTS

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# Healing trauma with creative interventions

Workshop offered practical solutions for a misunderstood condition

## TEKLA LUCHENSKI

On Sept. 26, Qi Creative presented an online workshop called *My Name is Trauma: creating resilience through play*.

Jon Jon Rivero and his partner Paula Rivero are the founders of Qi Creative. Jon Jon is a trained occupational therapist, an internationally-known professional speaker, and a certified trauma specialist. Also, this guy can dance! He incorporates his moves into his practice, encouraging clients to dance as a way of accessing and coping with trauma.

Jon Jon wrote *My Name is Trauma*, a picture book that helps traumatized children understand they are trauma survivors. Its goal is to validate their

experience so they can begin to learn ways of recognizing and responding to trauma stored and expressed in the body.

Traumatized children act out in ways others may not understand. When triggered, traumatized children may become angry or anti-social. They may completely shut down and retreat from stimulation and engagement. He teaches that those behaviours are signals of something going on underneath the surface. He uses an iceberg metaphor, where we only see the tip of the iceberg while the bulk of it is hidden from view.

In order to heal, children need to externalize trauma. We don't need to understand the source of trauma for healing. "Trauma resides in the body, an implicit memory," says Jon

Jon. The child might have experienced trauma directly, or have been a witness to an upsetting event.

In order to externalize trauma, he represents it as a tiger that lives inside the child. Most of the time, the tiger is sleeping. When it awakens, it can be scary and aggressive. The book teaches children that their tiger protects them. Their problematic behaviours were necessary for survival in the face of trauma, like a fierce tiger fending off danger.

"It is hard to be our best selves," says Paula of trauma. "[Trauma] is not only confusing for others, it is confusing for us." Paula adds, "A child may not be a 'bad kid'. It may be that they are a hurting individual who comes to [us, at school,

for example], to be loved."

The staff at Qi Creative teach children to recognize that tiger. They may notice their heartbeat increasing, for example. Once they can recognize the physical signs of trauma, they can begin to tame the tiger, and to heal.

The best way to access and heal trauma is through the senses.

To heal, a child needs a sense of safety and security. The staff at Qi Creative teach the children to find their safe place. One way can be through smell, the only sense directly connected to implicit memory. A smell that brings the child to a happy memory can become part of a healing toolkit. Staff encourage the child to carry an object that smells like their happy place. It is unique to each person, like

cookies baking, or lavender. In a safe place, the child can validate their feelings and become more mindful.

Once the child feels safe, staff focus on rerouting neural pathways in the brain through patterned motions and specific stretches that release trauma. This is where dance comes in. Jon Jon also recommends singing or art therapy.

*My Name is Trauma* is a powerful resource for helping traumatized children.

*Tekla is a freelance writer who has lived in the Parkdale neighbourhood since 2013.*



Paula Rivero (pictured), who recently co-presented an online workshop, helps bring imagination and fun through Qi Creative. | Supplied

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# Finding your way back to fitness again

Do exercise you enjoy and incorporate it into your daily life

**RUSTI L LEHAY**

The old adage “if you don’t use it, you lose it” definitely applies to fitness. I have been out of shape many times, but I also become fit once again. You do not have to lose it forever. My theory is once you have enjoyed a level of fitness that allows you to participate in desired activities, you may lose it temporarily when life happens but you can find your way back. If you are like me, it may be cyclical.

While going through some personal challenges, I found comfort in keeping to a consistent fitness routine. Four days at home stretching, followed by cardio and three days at the gym working upper body and squatting my weight to work my leg muscles. This routine made mountain hiking with a 40-pound pack easy, canoeing against headwinds possible, and much more. My adult nieces would complain, “Slow down.”

After separating from my partner, I lived with my sister. I lost my exercise habits, patterns, routines, and gym access. Moving into my own house, I again dedicated a room to exercise. Wearing my grungiest workout clothes, I refused to shower or change clothes until I completed my yoga, stretching, and cardio routine. This tricked

me into a consistent habit. Cardio then was my exercise bike or my mini-trampoline.

Years later in a one-bedroom apartment, exercise gear is part of my decor. My busy schedule

step goal. My two-pound hula hoop allows easy access for quick shimmies during a romantic comedy.

On prolonged desk-time days, I move my Bosu ball to my path

minutes of sitting, whereas after just 20 minutes of walking our brain looks like fireworks.

The ball also maintains my ability to balance. I recall in one of my lost fitness phases,

tion to exercise.

Our large leg muscles stabilize us when we lose our balance. Squats are a great way to work those large leg muscles. Start easy, start slow. Integrate daily squats by grasping your kitchen sink with both hands, then sit back on an invisible chair. Day one, do one. If your quadriceps and hamstrings are pain-free the next day, try two squats. After grasping the sink counter edge becomes easy, try wall squats first imagining a bar stool, working your way down the wall if your legs feel strong enough to sit lower.

This summer, I hiked to Mount Carlyle. The guide chose the route with the best views and the steepest altitude gain. Forced to admit my deteriorated fitness level failed to match this trip and group, I will not give away costly hiking equipment just because Mac, whom my friend called donkey legs, helped. He would jog ahead, drop his pack, and jog back to take my gear up the steep inclines. If, like me, you are missing a former enjoyable activity, do not rush to give it up. Make a plan with a health and fitness coach to restore those muscles. Check out bio-hacking research. I AM hiking Mount Robson next year.

Take it slow, be safe, and find exercise routines that appeal to you, and that work in your environment. Make the time AND make it stare you in the face when you tiptoe to the fridge. It works for me.

*A professional writer, Rusti has been writing professionally since 1999. Her favourite word activities are coaching writers and offering online writing stay-treats.*



Rusti Leahy shows how she fits her exercise equipment in her home. | Rusti Leahy

demands I multi-task. I bounce on my trampoline swinging kettlebells. A tense movie makes me bounce faster or phone calls help me reach my daily 10,000

to the kitchen. Bouncing on and off wakes up my brain to realize I just needed movement, not food. Our brains dull like a city-wide power outage after 30

becoming aware my stride stepping on and off sidewalks was jerky, requiring a pause and even wavering to catch myself. That loss renewed my dedica-

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