

# Rat Creek Press

Alberta Avenue • Delton • Eastwood • Elmwood Park • Parkdale-Cromdale • Spruce Avenue • Westwood



BY THE COMMUNITY - FOR THE COMMUNITY

APRIL 2022

## Welcoming others with open arms

Volunteering is a two-way street of benefits for these newcomers



Husband and wife Paul Bulamu (left) and Betty Kaahwa (right) are local volunteers. Paul Bulamu recently celebrated becoming a Canadian citizen. | Karen Mykietka

### - CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

A warm smile goes a long way in a greeting. In the case of Betty Kaahwa, her warm smile comes all the way from Uganda to Lodgepole Market and Bakery at the hall of St. Faith's Anglican Church. Every Wednesday from 12:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., Kaahwa is at the till of a convenient and cost-saving produce and bread market. The job started with volunteer work at the church some two years ago. A major perk resulted: she is now the paid Lodgepole Market and Bakery coordinator.

Kaahwa arrived in September 2019 to join her husband, Paul Bulamu, a student and community support worker at Excel Society, a local non-profit disability and mental health services provider. Shortly after their marriage in July 2015, Bulamu moved to Canada to continue his studies. In 2019, the time was finally right for Kaahwa to follow.

The couple share a deep resolve to help others. While in Uganda, Kaahwa volunteered at FOCUS Uganda, an orphanage

non-governmental organization, helping with accounting, office work, and any tasks that needed to be done. As soon as she arrived in Edmonton, she picked up on volunteering again. "I checked online for a church where I could volunteer," she says. "Church has always been an important part of our lives."

Being accepted as a volunteer took several steps. Kaahwa called St. Faith's pastor, Reverend Travis Enright, then completed forms, was interviewed, and was invited to be a volunteer.

Looking back, Enright recalls her trajectory from helping with homeless meals during COVID-19 to what will be a full-time office position (combined with Lodgepole duties) in September. "Even with all this, Betty still cleans our church, saying it's her contribution back to the church," marvels Enright. "She does all this in a dedicated, humorous, and genuinely faithful way." He is not surprised that immigrants contribute so much. "We sponsor some 30 or so immigrants every year. They all bring dedication and a desire

to be part of the community."

Another favourite place for the couple is Alberta Avenue Community League (AACL).

I met Kaahwa's husband Paul Bulamu at HUB night in the league's hall. He was hauling a plastic bin around, collecting dirty dishes from the 60 or so people enjoying a free Thursday night dinner and the chance to socialize. Like Kaahwa, Bulamu is grateful to our community for volunteer opportunities.

Although he had worked that day as a community support worker at Excel Society, Bulamu saw no reason to sit at home resting.

With a gentle smile, he says, "We volunteer to give back to our community and to make a difference. I'm getting so much from being here. I meet so many friendly people and I gain other skills." With great joy, Bulamu recently became a Canadian citizen. A party to celebrate was held with family and friends at the league's hall on March 3.

According to Ali Hammington, AACL

president, people like Kaahwa and Bulamu are crucial to the success of AACL activities. "For HUB night, we need at least 14 volunteers to make it happen. We couldn't do it without people like Betty and Paul."

"You will find it amazing to volunteer," encourages Kaahwa. "You have a reason to go out, have something to do, and make new friends. If you are lonely, you forget about your loneliness."

**April 24-30 is National Volunteer Week**  
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*Constance's writing and editing career spans more than 40 years. She lives in Parkdale-Cromdale.*



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# A budding community garden

Spruce Avenue is growing a space for food and connection

- MYA COLWELL -

This year, Spruce Avenue Community League will celebrate spring with the unveiling of their new community garden.

The garden, which has been in the works for two years, is located on the northwest corner of 115 Avenue and 103 Street, across from the league hall. It will be housed in a lot that was previously used as a construction site for neighbourhood renewal projects.

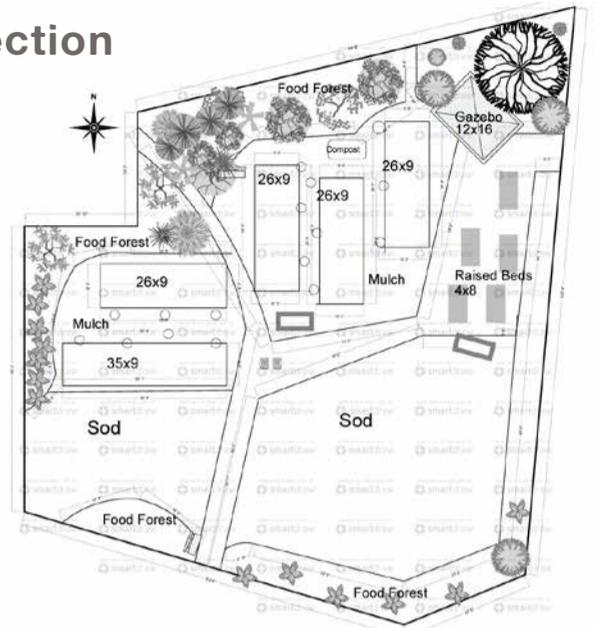
"I really love urban agriculture, and I think gardening is a great way to bring different generations of people together," says Ashley Ayume, the garden chair.

Ayume notes that limited yard space in the community was a driving factor behind the community garden. "We're getting more densification," says Ayume, "so lots of fourplexes are getting built in our neighbourhood, and we have a strip along 97 Street [that] has lots of apartment buildings. So, new residents [don't have access to] yard space."

"And also beyond that, we just wanted a space for our community to come together," continues Ayume. "Most of our gathering spaces right now are around the playground... but I also know that people that don't have little kids want space, too."

Ayume adds, "Digging in the earth and growing food, it's just a very... almost primal way of bringing people together that seems to draw [in] different generations [and] different lifestyle types. Everybody can collectively come together with that."

While the garden is primarily for residents of the Spruce Avenue community, Ayume says that anyone from neighbouring communities is welcome to apply for a spot. Spruce Avenue is currently taking open applications.



Left: The community garden is a space where Spruce Avenue residents can come together and build connections. | Pixabay  
Right: Spruce Avenue's new community garden will feature 32 in-ground beds, five above ground planters, and several trugs. | Ashley Ayume

The garden will feature 32 in-ground beds, five raised beds, and a trug, which is a V-shaped garden bed accessible to wheelchairs. They will all be available for rent.

Currently, it costs \$30 to rent a garden plot, which includes water and soil amendment costs, but Spruce Avenue is still in the process of fundraising in hopes that they can subsidize the cost of the garden beds to be \$15 a spot. There will also be several free garden plots available for those who don't have the financial means to rent a spot.

Additionally, the garden will feature

**The garden will feature a food forest, where fruit trees, shrubs, and smaller plants like strawberries will be grown. This area will be open to anyone interested in harvesting and eating the food.**

a food forest, where fruit trees, shrubs, and smaller plants like strawberries will be grown. This area will be open to anyone interested in harvesting and eating the food.

The Spruce Avenue community garden is also partnering with neighbourhood schools so they have space in the garden to grow vegetables and fruits to fit with their curriculum. Ayume notes that the schools could grow a themed garden every year, such as a pizza garden with basil, tomatoes, and peppers.

While there are no explicit guidelines about what can and cannot be grown

(although noxious weeds are not allowed) there are still a few guidelines about the growing process. The community garden allows only organic fertilizers, with no herbicides or pesticides; water conservation is encouraged.

The garden has yet to be built due to the lingering snow, but the plan is to have the garden up and running by the May long weekend.

If you're interested in renting a spot or getting more information about the garden, contact Ashley Ayume at [garden@spruceavecommunity.com](mailto:garden@spruceavecommunity.com).

*Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.*

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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.

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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.

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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.

## ONLINE AT RATCREEK.ORG

In April, we will be featuring community volunteers and volunteer opportunities. Send pictures and information to [info@ratcreek.org](mailto:info@ratcreek.org).

## UPCOMING ONLINE ARTICLES

### The upside of COVID's pruning

Life, just like plants, sometimes needs to be pruned  
April 7

### The perplexity of Easter weekend

What the holiday means to this non-religious individual  
April 14

### Lessons learned from being fired

What I've discovered from my work experience  
April 21

### Live for less and relax more

Buying stuff doesn't pave the road to happiness  
April 28

## DON'T MISS THESE ARTICLES PUBLISHED MARCH 1ST

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### Making yoga available to everyone

### Alberta Ave's district policing

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# Shopping outside grocery stores

Local alternatives to fill your fridge every month

**- TALEA MEDYNSKI -**

Grocery shopping no longer takes place strictly inside a store. In the RCP area, there are three alternatives to round out your groceries: The GÜD Box, Lodgepole Market and Bakery, and WECAN Food Basket.

**The GÜD Box**

The GÜD Box is a for-profit organization, but contributes to savings in a fundraising model.

Cindy Sherrard, business development specialist, says, "It's a box that we built to increase food security and a fundraiser." Organizations who use The GÜD Box as a fundraiser keep \$5 or 17 per cent of proceeds from the orders. "It's 35 per cent cheaper than the grocery store," says Sherrard. The produce is seasonal, fresh, and a little over 30 per cent organic and local.

The GÜD Box started up in June of 2021. Customers pick up their \$30 box of produce at a depot within a time range. The GÜD Box sells produce twice a month, with no obli-

to help bridge that gap for us and offer healthy food to our (and our neighbouring) residents at a reasonable cost."

Merryn Edwards, a Sprucewood resident, signed on to buy produce from The GÜD Box.

"I wanted to support the league's community garden initiative," says Edwards. "You get a good selection for \$30. My husband estimates it would be about \$45 at the grocery store (organic prices), so about \$15 savings. Plus knowing \$5 goes to fundraising for our community garden."

Edwards says The GÜD Box supplements grocery shopping. "Good initiative, good produce, good fundraising."

**Lodgepole Market and Bakery**

Lodgepole Market and Bakery is a non-profit organization based out of St. Faith's Anglican Church, and is another grocery shopping supplement.

Steve Smith, the PrayerWorks coordinator, says, "We've been running since the beginning of September. Safeway had just shut down and there

They're open from 12:30 to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays at St. Faith's hall.

Constance Brissenden recently visited Lodgepole Market and Bakery. She shares, "I was given a plastic bin and it filled up quickly. Cauliflower, green pepper, bananas, oranges, apples, ginger, limes, avocados came home with me. There were plenty more choices for next time. I was welcomed with enthusiastic smiles that made my day."

**WECAN Food Basket Society**

The WECAN Food Basket Society is another alternative. The charity began in 1993, and was created to help people access healthy, affordable food near the end of the month when money might be tight. WECAN has more than 20 depots in Edmonton and serves more than 500 families.

While WECAN serves many people living in poverty, "anyone and any family can become a WECAN member," says the WECAN communication committee.

Membership is \$5 per year, and

The communication committee adds, "Given the community locations of our depots, members are able to pick up their groceries from WECAN."

Brissenden is also a WECAN member. She says, "I'm all for supporting the community, which drew me to WECAN. My curiosity kicked in. When I picked up my first order, veggies and meat, the produce was fresh and really went a long way. Buyers get feedback on what it would have cost and I saved at least 15 or 20 dollars. I like that. Plus it's convenient to pick everything up at Alberta Avenue Community League. Just bring a nice big box. You get a lot of food and will need one."

WECAN has depots at Alberta Avenue Community League, Bethel Gospel Chapel, and McCauley Apartments. For more information, visit [wecanfood.com](http://wecanfood.com) and select the general location from the location menu or call 780.413.4525.



Left: A typical order from The GÜD Box. | Supplied Middle: WECAN Food Basket Society has been around since 1993. They buy their food from The Grocery People. | Supplied Right: Constance Brissenden's purchase from Lodgepole Market and Bakery. | Constance Brissenden

gation to commit to subscription. However, they're working on a subscription model for those interested.

Locally, The GÜD Box is at Delton School, Spruce Avenue Community League, and Westwood Community League.

Spruce Avenue Community League is offering The GÜD Box to those wanting to support fundraising for its community garden.

Ashley Ayume, vice president of the league, says, "Our community is in a bit of a food desert; this is a way

was a bit of a drought for produce. We partnered with Fatima's Market for wholesale produce. It's low in cost but still good quality."

They offer fresh fruit and vegetables from Fatima's, along with sourdough, bannock, and chapati (flatbread) baked fresh on Wednesday. Smith says the bread has been very popular.

"We want to offer lower prices than Freshco to help out the community." Due to fluctuating grocery prices, there's not a specific price decrease in comparison to Freshco.

members can choose a produce order with three fruits and vegetables for \$15, and/or a meat order with two or three cuts of meat for \$20. "Due to the pandemic, we have seen a decrease in member purchases due to depot closures and an increase in our prices to keep pace with rising food costs," says the communication committee. "We do expect these to bounce back as our members adjust to the new pricing and, hopefully, the reopening of depots closed during the pandemic with the lifting of restrictions."

**SHOPPING ALTERNATIVES**  
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[wecanfood.com](http://wecanfood.com)

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

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# A sweat lodge benefits everyone

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society begins construction in April

- CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

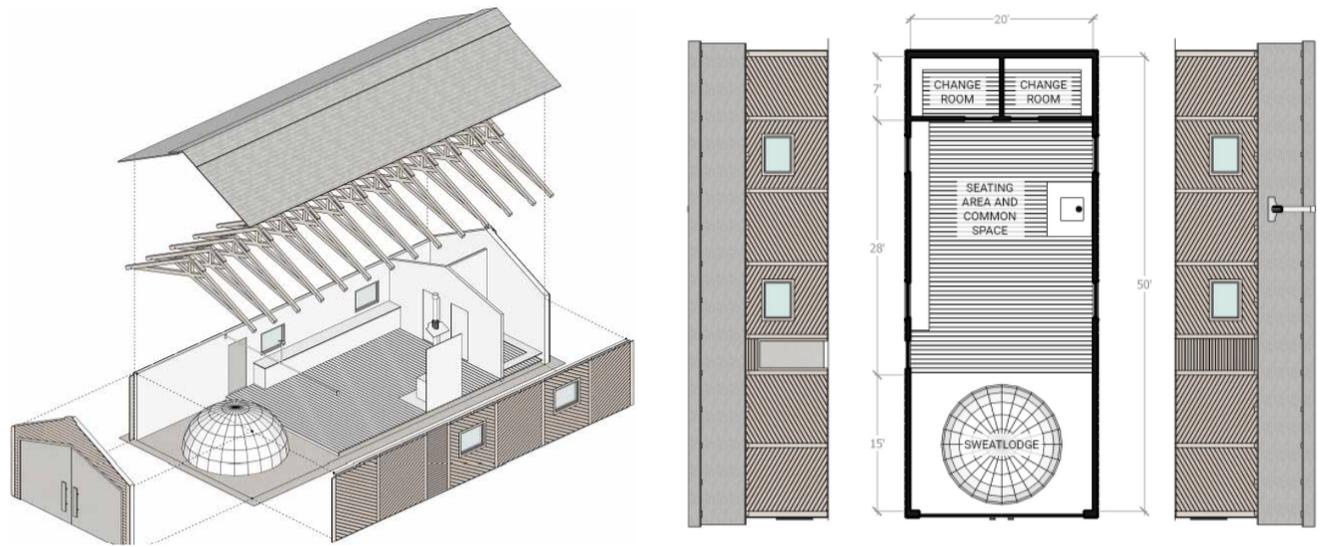
A sweat lodge is going up at Parkdale School, the home of Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. Construction for the enclosed, permanent structure starts in April.

For the staff, it's been a six-year journey from concept to realization, beset by COVID-19 delays and fundraising challenges. With funding now securely in place, and pandemic health restrictions eased, the dream will soon be a reality.

As a non-Indigenous person who shared in several sweat lodge ceremonies with my partner, Cree author Larry Loyie (who died in 2016), I have learned that the importance of the sweat lodge can't be understated. It is a place for all people to share, to learn, to heal, and to enjoy our common humanity.

The new sweat lodge, 15 metres long and six metres wide, will be housed in a dedicated building with protection from the weather. In addition to the sweat lodge area, a seating area, as well as men's and women's changing rooms, will be included.

The hope is that all will be completed by June 17 for Bent Arrow's five day Kiskinohamakewin culture camp, a Cree word that means teach



The covered sweat lodge's interior views. | Supplied

and learn by doing.

For many in the community, the new sweat lodge, one of only a handful in the city, will be an opportunity to share this important Indigenous tradition.

"The lodge will support our Indigenous community or anyone wanting to experience a sweat lodge ceremony," says Murray

Knutson, the society's acting deputy executive director.

Respected Elders, Tom Snow and Rose Wabasca, will aid with the protocol involved in sweat lodge activities.

"People want to connect to their spirituality and to each other," says Lloyd Yellowbird, a senior manager with Bent Arrow. "We were away from our gatherings for two years. Now it's time to recharge and get going again."

The Elders will ensure that special care is taken to keep everyone safe.

Inside the blanket-covered, dome-shaped lodge, a small number of people sit around a pit containing searing hot river rocks, or in some cases, heated lava rocks. All participants are dressed lightly for the intense heat, and some may bring in a towel to sit on. A wet cloth for relief from the heat is not unusual.

Once everyone is seated, the door flap is closed, leaving the sweat lodge in complete darkness. It is a time for reflection and guidance shared by an Elder. If a participant feels any adverse reaction, he or she can ask to leave the lodge. The flap is immediately opened for their exit without any negative feedback.

Due to COVID-19 supply issues,

the cost to build the sweat lodge jumped by more than \$50,000.

Cheryl Whiskeyjack, Bent Arrow's executive director, recalls the struggle to find funding, with gratitude that everything is now in place. "COVID-19 interrupted us, but the funds are now completely raised."

Funding came from many sources, both individual and corporate, such as the CN Stronger Communities Fund, TD Bank, Sherritt Mines, Dexterra Group, and Boys & Girls Club Big Brothers Big Sisters. Leading Edge Physiotherapy matched the first \$5,000 donated, a warmly welcomed and encouraging pledge.

Says Whiskeyjack, "The Indigenous community will no longer have to travel outside the city to access this ceremony. They can feel proud that their traditions are being celebrated here. For the non-Indigenous community, we will be providing convenient access to experience and learn about an Indigenous ceremony."

In the process of reconciliation, the sweat lodge is a win in every way.

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

**People want to connect to their spirituality and to each other. We were away from our gatherings for two years. Now it's time to recharge and get going again.**

**Lloyd Yellowbird, senior manager at Bent Arrow**



Leading Edge Physiotherapy presented \$5,000 towards the sweat lodge. From left to right: Murray Knutson, deputy executive director of Bent Arrow; Heidi Fedoruk, owner of Leading Edge Physiotherapy; Vernon Boldick, promotions and communications coordinator of Bent Arrow; Keleigh Larson, senior manager at Bent Arrow.



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# League reveals renovated lounge

Successful pub night kicks off a new era of community involvement



MLA Janis Irwin dropped by to check out the new PCCL lounge. | Steven Townsend

**- TEKLA LUCHENSKI -**

On March 19, Parkdale-Cromdale Community League (PCCL) celebrated a beautifully renovated lounge with the first of what will be a series of pub nights on every third Saturday of the month. It was a well-attended family event, with snacks, beverages, and later, enthusiastic karaoke. The consensus is that the evening was a whopping success.

Kevin Wong, league president, redesigned the lounge to be a welcoming multifunctional space. The PCCL board has intended to renovate it for a long time. Wong says, “[We were] shut down for a long time because of COVID. It was a perfect time to do renovations. We managed to get funding so everything just kind of lined up.”

The space features a nook of modern-style chairs, three bar-style tables, and a large table surrounded by com-

fortable chairs. There is full access to the kitchen, which also serves as a bar on pub nights.

Framed art adorns the walls. Wong is proud that the symbolism in each piece represents the Parkdale and Cromdale communities. Some of his favourites include the enlarged prints of the PCCL playing card decks, which artist Jason Lin illustrated. Wong designed the concept and tuck box. The space is simple but warm, comfortable, and inviting.

Wong and the league board imagined the lounge as a space for creative

activity. They encourage feedback from community league members. Wong says, “Our dream is that people will

**It will be a place to feature hidden gems in Parkdale/Cromdale. It will bring people out to try new food and meet new neighbours. People should come and see the lounge to see what they can do.**

**Kevin Wong  
PCCL league president**

know of a space to find new and cool things. We talked about having an incubator space, say for a small neighbourhood startup restaurant, to try [their idea] out.” Some ideas include a book or podcast club. “Parents can watch their kids play outside,” Wong points out, because the ample windows overlook the playground.

Although the board has ideas about how to use the lounge, they also want to hear PCCL members’ ideas. Wong says, “We don’t know the details yet. A team

is still working on it as an incubator space. It will be a place to feature hidden gems in Parkdale/Cromdale. It will bring people out to try new food and meet new neighbours.”

“People should come and see the lounge to see what they can do,” says Wong. There is some flexibility in how members can organize the space. The league encourages feedback, fresh ideas, and consultation. “If people see a need not being met, let us know.”

If you are interested in contributing your ideas for the lounge space, or to simply come and enjoy its ambiance, contact the PCCL at [info@parkdalecromdale.org](mailto:info@parkdalecromdale.org). You can also visit [parkdalecromdale.org](http://parkdalecromdale.org) to learn more about becoming a member and to see what events and programs they offer.

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

# Funk like an April Fool



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## OPINION

# Assessing the risk of another wave

Now may not be the right time to ease restrictions

- STEPHEN STRAND -

My youth was filled with reckless abandon, not caring about the consequences of my actions or my future. If it didn't affect the present me, it wasn't worth my time. I was more interested in having fun. I loved taking unnecessary risks, coming of age with the *Jackass* movies. I went into everything at full speed and with no planning. However, that left me with three broken arms, a broken shoulder, a dislocated shoulder, three concussions, a torn meniscus that still needs surgery, minor fractures in my spine, scars, burns, and scrapes. Once, my friend and I used an old bathtub as a toboggan, realizing too late that it didn't have brakes. The ride ended with us piled up at the base of a tree. Thankfully, the bathtub took the worst of it. I ended up with a sprained ankle and my friend was just banged up a little, while the tub cracked where we hit the tree.

While there were many laughs along with those injuries, the injuries took longer to heal and became more painful with age. At some point, I realized there were consequences to my actions. Each injury caused unnecessary stress on my mother, causing her to fret whenever I left the house. When I met my wife, I realized even more that I shouldn't be so reckless. I didn't want my actions to negatively affect her. It dawned on me that with every injury, I tied up hospital rooms, the medical staff's time, and pain killers or other prescriptions that could've been used for people truly needing those resources. Not only that, it also caused my family to waste their time

waiting for me while I got treated. Slowly, I learned to think before I acted.

I removed as much unnecessary risk as possible. Being pain free won over the joys of recklessness, which led me to become very cautious. At almost every moment, I ponder if there is a safer, better option. Because of this, I have been accused of being scared. Possibly. But, why add any unnecessary risk? Would you stand on a chair sitting on top of a table? Or would you find a ladder to use?

That is how I feel about the removal of the COVID-19 restrictions. I am aware that they must go away at some point. But is now the right time?

On March 1, the Alberta government moved into Step 2 of easing the

measures. According to the Alberta government website, this includes removing school restrictions, screening for youth activities for entertainment and sports, capacity limits for venues, and restrictions for bars and food-serving businesses. There are no longer limits on social gatherings, the mandatory work from home requirement is gone, and people no longer need to wear masks, except for on transit for people over 13, at AHS facilities, and at all continuing care settings.

While the case numbers dropped over February, they have seemed to stagnate since the beginning of March. According to a *CBC* article published on March 16, "The province reported 593 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday,

but that number only includes cases confirmed by a PCR test." A *CBC* article published on March 17 even includes an editor's note that explains daily case counts "are a deeply flawed metric. Throughout the pandemic, the case counts have been based on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing done by provincial bodies like Alberta Health Services, but those testing protocols have shifted to prioritize high-priority groups and people in higher risk settings, like health-care workers. So there are likely to be thousands of cases going untested, or tested but not reported, since there is no system for cataloguing at-home rapid antigen tests."

With the new "stealth Omicron" variant cases doubling every day in China, is now the time to loosen restrictions?

It's no fun to delay satisfaction in reaching something like our pre-COVID life. But, as someone who has had a surgery delayed for close to two years due to the pandemic, let's get to a point where the healthcare system isn't overwhelmed and regular surgeries can happen again.

I believe we should eliminate COVID-19 as best as we can before we remove restrictions. Do firefighters put out a house fire completely before they leave? Or do they get it to an acceptable level of fire and then leave the rest for the occupants to deal with?

While there are lives at stake, shouldn't the acceptable level of risk be none?

*Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.*

**Why add any unnecessary risk? Would you stand on a chair sitting on top of a table? Or would you find a ladder to use? That is how I feel about the removal of the COVID-19 restrictions. I am aware that they must go away at some point. But is now the right time?**



Everyone wants life to go back to normal, but looking at the risk involved is crucial. | Pixabay

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2 p.m. Meeting

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albertaave.org

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- President
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# Providing an extra line of support

## Safety Network Coordinator brings sustainability to victim supports

**- MARILYN GRAY -  
REACH EDMONTON**

A newly-funded position is making an impact in the lives of vulnerable women trying to escape human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The Safety Network Coordinator is working for the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE), and the position was created after the pandemic highlighted the extent of specific gaps in services for people in these dangerous situations.

“In March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, just as everything was closing down, two separate women walked into EPS police headquarters on separate occasions and asked for help while a third woman was referred by a police officer from another city,” says Kate Quinn, executive director at CEASE.

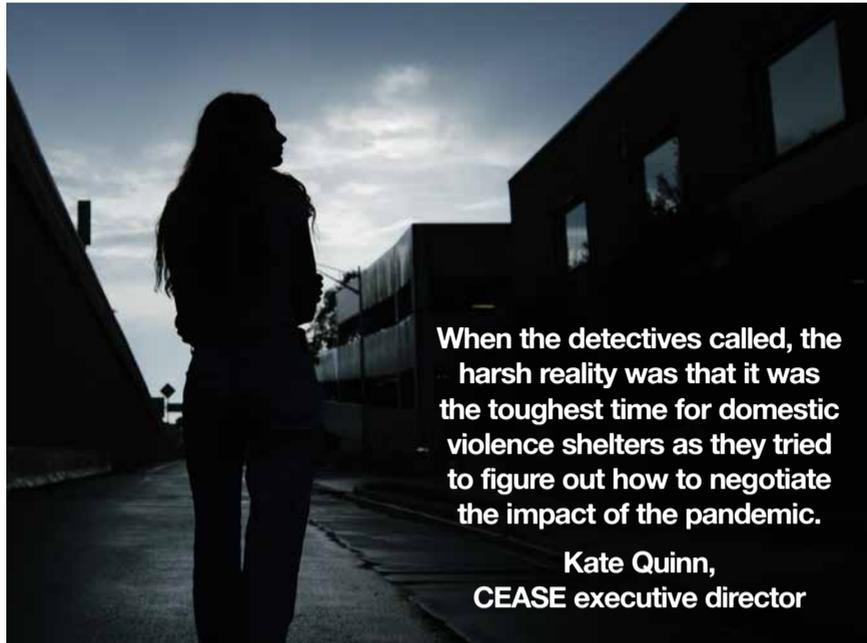
“This is highly unusual, that women would walk into the police station asking for help because they’re being trafficked,” Quinn says. “Traditionally, detectives would call me or CEASE Project STAR victim advocates, knowing that we would mobilize quickly to find safety for women in those circumstances. When the detectives called, the harsh reality was that it was the toughest time for domestic violence shelters as they tried to figure out how to negotiate the impact of the pandemic. There was one bed left in one shelter for the woman at highest risk of danger.”

The pandemic made visible all the gaps and strains in our safety systems for women.

“I wanted to make it sustainable. There has to be a better way to do this,” says Quinn. “What if I was sick? Or on holiday? And these urgent calls came in? We needed a more systemic response that would allow us to integrate and coordinate more quickly.”

CEASE has been responding to these needs for years, so the organization was building on a foundation of knowledge and experience.

“When I saw a call for proposals [for the position funding] from the federal ministry of Public Safety, I called Jan Fox



**When the detectives called, the harsh reality was that it was the toughest time for domestic violence shelters as they tried to figure out how to negotiate the impact of the pandemic.**

**Kate Quinn,  
CEASE executive director**

A new position is making an impact for vulnerable women. | Unsplash

from REACH Edmonton and Pat Vargas, from Catholic Social Services, who sit on the Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force,” says Quinn.

Quinn knows REACH well in regards to community safety, as well as the executive director of A Safe Place women’s shelter. She also contacted EPS detectives and asked if they’d like to be involved and they collaborated with the ALERT team.

ALERT is a specialized police team, made up of Edmonton Police Service and RCMP members, that conducts criminal investigations specific to human trafficking. While ALERT’s dedicated investigations have proven successful in targeting perpetrators, the Safety Network Coordinator provides a compassionate and fulsome response to survivor supports.

A key aspect of the funding proposal was the integration with law enforcement and community to improve responses to victims/survivors of sex trafficking. When the funding from the Public Safety ministry was secured, the position of Safety Network Coordinator was created.

“We know we have domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters that are almost always full and don’t have the specialized support these women need,” says Quinn. “That’s why we created the Safety Network Coordinator position.”

The individual who has been filling that position has seen first hand the impact it has on preventing vulnerable women from slipping through the cracks. It’s not an outreach position, but a doorway to wider supports and a bridge to law enforcement. This individual is remaining anonymous in this publication for safety reasons.

“I’ve been in this position since April of 2021,” she says. “I’m not a member of law enforcement so if someone tells me something, anything that’s shared, we can have a discussion about where the survivor wants the info to go.”

The Safety Network Coordinator can connect the survivor to either law enforcement, social services or both, giving them a stronger sense of agency and control when coming out of an exploitative situation.

“I provide support throughout any investigation, but in addition, there’s no requirement that someone has an investigation or is connected to ALERT to work with me,” she says. “And that’s where the CEASE side of things comes in.”

If someone is self-referred, she can offer support and systematic navigation to them as well as talking to law enforcement or ALERT if they’d like to report their experience. But they’re not pressured or required to do so.

“We’re just trying to connect them to other organizations and appropriate services,” she says. “No one organization is able to do it all by themselves.”

Her position is essentially a connector role between social services and law enforcement.

“What we’re doing is enhancing the safety network around these vulnerable clients,” says Quinn.

The new position can fill gaps by connecting services from law enforcement and social agencies to the people who need them, across different cities, regions, and provinces.

“We want to be more sustainable, integrated, comprehensive, and coordinated,” says Quinn.

This is the work CEASE has been doing for many years that is now more appropriately resourced.

“She is only one person and her job, primarily, is to be that first responder,” says Quinn. “The position is co-located with CEASE so she doesn’t have to do everything alone; there’s a community of expertise around her.”

The position in Edmonton is funded until March 2024 and is part of the Safer Way Out project, which is guided by lived experience and Indigenous wisdom.

*The REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities was established in 2010. Its ambition is to, in one generation (25 years), significantly increase community safety in our region; increase Edmontonians’ perception of safety and inclusion; and engage the people of Edmonton and the region in developing a culture of safety and crime prevention.*

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