



# Vibrant COMMUNITIES Edmonton VCE News

February 2007

## IT TAKES A LITTLE TO GET A LOT!

The LINC and ESL students from **NorQuest College Westmount Campus** are energetically participating in the **2007 Make Tax Time Campaign**. These 22 students, from all over the world, are eager to give up their free time to be involved in this initiative that contributes

towards making our community stronger and more connected!

This opportunity is a great learning experience for everyone. For Vibrant Communities Edmonton (VCE), it is one more example that collaboration is crucial in order to build a better

society. For the teachers it demonstrates the significant role that they are playing in each of the students' lives. For the students it's a way to affirm that they are capable of achieving their dreams. For the Edmonton community it's just another example of

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## United Way of the Alberta Capital Region and the Edmonton Community Foundation Support Purchases for VCE's MTTP Campaign

We recently participated in collaborative funding for VCE's Make Tax Time Pay (MTTP) campaign. With the

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region we obtained funds from the Edmonton Community Foundation

to purchase lap top computers and other items for the campaign.

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## Partnering to Understand More about the Lives of People Who Work and Live in Low Income Households

VCE and the Edmonton Social Planning Council are partnering with the United Way of the

Alberta Capital Region to research and write a report that will help us gain an understanding

of the characteristics of people who are working and living in low income

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If you are supporting a family and earning less than \$20 per hour, call Karen at 428 1866 or email us at [karengingras@vibrantedmonton.ca](mailto:karengingras@vibrantedmonton.ca). Tell her the ways that you make ends meet. We'll share the tips that you provide in our next newsletter and on our website. When we all share knowledge, we all benefit.

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*“a special thanks goes out to the teachers who encouraged their students to participate in this initiative and of course, to the 22 student volunteers that will be preparing and filling out tax returns for their fellow students”*

## Takes a Little *con't*

how the power of collaboration can surpass any cultural or language barriers.

VCE would like to acknowledge the support from all NorQuest College staff in helping to get this Tax Preparation site

operational in the coming months of March and April. As well, a special thanks goes out to the teachers who encouraged their students to participate in this initiative and of course, to the 22 student volunteers that

will be preparing and filling out tax returns for their fellow students.

## United Way *con't*

We are thrilled that the United Way was willing to partner with us in this funding. We would like to

commend the Edmonton Community Foundation for considering this innovative approach to

partnering, and for the \$35,000. Your support is greatly appreciated!

## Partnering to Understand *con't*

households. The United Way is generously sponsoring both ESPC and VCE. Alberta Employment

Immigration and Industry has commissioned a similar report for the province and we have offered to gladly share

our data with them.

## VCE Announces New Council Members

VCE would like to welcome as new council members the following individuals: Dr. Lauri Gilchrist, Mohammed Maie, Susan Morrissey, Judy Robinson, Pedro Rodriguez, Dennis Horrigan, and Tracy Tuesday. We would like to thank these new

members for contributing their valuable time and energy as members of Vibrant Communities Edmonton Leadership Council.

In our next newsletter, we look forward to including some

comments from each of these council members.



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## *Family Economic Supports*

### **Another First!**

West Edmonton Mall has become the first business in Edmonton to partner with VCE to deliver a free tax preparation site for their employees. The Launch was February 5 at West Edmonton Mall and was a highly

successful, dynamic introduction of MTTP to their employees. We see this launch as a significant benchmark event in our work with employers.

### **AND THERE'S MORE....**

Another first is the support from Eastwood

School. They invited us to their parent night and posted our MTTP announcement in their school newsletter. We thank them for their support of VCE and look forward to our continuing relationship.

*One of the MTTP volunteers was hanging posters and handing out info about the sites when one lady in a mini mart grabbed the flyer as did a clerk in the store and both said "this is what I need". Let's get the word out in all those mini marts around Edmonton. Pass it on.*

## *Workforce Development*

As a follow up to the article in our August newsletter, we have started discussions with 2 employers in Edmonton to implement a job bus for each of their sites.

Various employers have voiced concerns about the lack of public transportation in their area. They have found that people who could

work for them screen themselves out as job candidates when they learn that public transportation to the job site is inadequate. One employer noted that one day he saw an employee heading home, walking in the rain and just knew that the person was thinking, "I have to find another job."

The job bus will help people obtain and keep jobs that pay well and have benefits. It will also help employers recruit and retain employees. We thank Opportunities Niagara for taking the time to mentor us as we proceed with our job bus initiative in Edmonton



*"One of the Eastwood parents mentioned that he was looking for a truck driving job. We gave him a couple names of human resource people in the transportation industry and one of those companies emailed us to say thanks for the referral – they just hired him. YEAH!*

## *Community Investment*



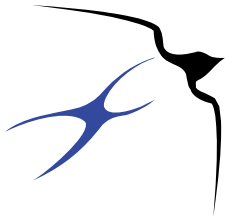
Again, as follow up to our August

newsletter, we are in discussions with a financial institution to introduce at least one alternative product and we hope to make a formal

announcement later this year. Stay tuned!

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*First Nations people can benefit from completing a tax return even if they do not have to pay tax because they can still be eligible for benefits and tax credits such as the Child Tax Benefit and the GST Credit.*

## Did You Know That Getting Your Taxes Done Can Mean More Money In Your Pocket?

Make Tax Time Pay is all about stretching your budget by getting your taxes done for free and at the same time, applying for benefits such as the Alberta Child Health Benefit.

**IMAGINE** less stress knowing that your child's prescriptions, dental bills and eye care are covered through the Alberta Child Health Benefit.

**IMAGINE** how happy your children will be,

knowing they can use the arenas and pools in the City of Edmonton because you have the Leisure Access Card and that means you don't have to pay to get in.

**IMAGINE** the relief knowing that you don't have to come up with money to pay the Alberta Health Care Premiums because you have the Alberta Health Care Premiums Subsidy.

**IMAGINE** the excitement when you get the retroactive Alberta Health Care Premium Subsidy which **PAYS YOU BACK** for the premiums that you paid.

**MAKE THAT CALL TO 211** to find out the free **MAKE TAX TIME PAY** tax preparation site nearest you.



## Mathilde's Story

We would like to announce that Mathilde Balu, our former co-chair, has moved to Ottawa.

Mathilde arrived in Edmonton a few years ago, after living in Montreal for several years. She is originally from Congo. Mathilde attended one of our focus groups when we were in the exploration stages for Vibrant Communities. We were asking the focus group that she participated in to help us understand the kind of

language and messaging to use.

Mathilde was instrumental in helping us to understand the importance of recognizing the assets that people do have, assets that aren't necessarily monetary. Mathilde joined the Leadership Council and became a Co-Chair. At that time she was taking ESL at Metro Community College and then at Norquest College.

She was able to join the Council meetings

because her ESL instructor thought that would be a great way for her to apply her language training.

While participating in VCE, Mathilde broadened her networks, gained confidence and over time obtained employment in consecutively more challenging positions that helped her gain experience to build on the education and skills she was gaining as a co-chair. Eventually, she decided to return to

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Ontario to be closer to her children and pursue a career with the Federal Government.

Mathilde's parting message to the members of the Leadership Council:

"I want to thank you for this opportunity to learn. I especially want to thank

Karen for her support. She told me I could do it. When I felt like everything was going bad she gave me hope. She helped me believe that I was a somebody and that my input was important. I won't forget the experience, it will stay with me. Sometimes we move because it is our path - sometimes we need change. I will be an

ambassador for Vibrant Communities. Even in my job interview I spoke of Vibrant Communities. I wish I had the chance to say goodbye to everyone individually. But it is only a bye bye not adieu."

We are so proud of Mathilde – it takes a lot of strength and courage to do what she has done.

## Fast Paced Economic Growth and Family Economic Success: A Case of Diminishing Returns?

We are hearing more about the effects of fast paced economic growth on people in our province. For many families, the promise that this economic growth holds is not being realized and there is a need for access to rapid and real assistance before the situation deteriorates into one of 'diminishing returns.'

'Diminishing returns' means that the lack of enough money to pay all the necessary bills at the end of each month is pushing many families further and further into a downward spiral, posing greater and greater

challenges and barriers to family economic success.

This can happen when the income earned is generally too low to support everyone in the family unit. In Canada, we have an assessment figure known as the "low income cut off" that defines what is considered low income for different family sizes. There are 172,000 economic families in Alberta who are working and living below the current Low Income Cut Off figure.

In Alberta, the number of jobs available has increased and

employers are paying more. The availability of jobs has created an increase in population as workers migrate here. This in turn is creating a higher demand for housing, especially lower cost housing. As rents and property values go up due to the increased demand, members of low-income households are adjusting by moving to properties of lesser cost in an attempt to manage their expenses. Families are finding that they have to move from neighbourhoods where they felt safe and secure to places where crime rates are increasing,

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**DIMINISHING** *(con't)*  
homes are run down and their children are now more fearful than ever.

The move to lower cost housing is part of the diminishing returns cycle, where the family now becomes exposed to higher risks in their living situations: crime, distance from work, rundown apartments, the stress of

living in cramped quarters. They may have to do without telephone and other necessary utilities. They may have to deal with landlords who don't maintain their properties. Their bus ride to work may now take 1 ½ to 2 hours because they had to move to a neighbourhood that they could afford to live in although it meant

moving farther away from their job. As they try to stretch their budget as rent, clothing and other necessities continue to increase in price, they find that they are buying fewer groceries. Lunches for work and school are not as filling. These are all indicators the household has entered a 'diminishing returns' cycle.



*VCE's core activity is getting people with diverse experiences, opinions, responsibilities and politics to find ways to build on the existing assets of this great city so that families can build economic success*

Isn't it time for uncommon solutions?

Vibrant Communities Edmonton (VCE) has a goal to bring people together to collaborate on finding solutions to assist people who are working and live in low income households to build family economic success and to deal with and avoid 'diminishing returns' life changes.

At a recent strategic planning session, a member of the VCE Leadership Council, Judy Robinson, challenged the Council to consider ideas that go beyond our common experience and to seek solutions that are

uncommon, particularly around housing and home ownership.

VCE's core activity is getting people with diverse experiences, opinions, responsibilities and politics to find ways to build on the existing assets of this great city so that families can build economic success. Karen Gingras, Executive Director of Vibrant Communities Edmonton, summarizes VCE's collaborative approach. She says, "I would like to challenge all of us to build collaborations within our business systems, within

our operations, within the very fabric of how we work. Let's make sure that there are diverse people who are involved. These collaborations may not be easy to manage but they are the most rewarding because it is the differences not the commonalities that people bring to the table that result in the most innovative ideas. As Judy suggested, it's time to create the uncommon solutions."

