



Vibrant COMMUNITIES Edmonton VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007

Feature Story

Vibrant Communities Edmonton: Looking Forward

Following several years of dedicated service to Vibrant Communities Edmonton, Karen Gingras has recently taken a new position with Alberta Agriculture. The staff, volunteers, clients, and the Leadership Council members of VCE wish Karen well in her new endeavours.

During her time as executive director, Karen helped build VCE into a robust and influential organization.

Karen used her networking capabilities to establish and broker relationships between networks of citizens, employers, the three orders of government, and the voluntary sector. Karen promoted the use of a multisectoral approach toward initiative development which had a significant impact on the Edmonton

community. This is a key strategy for all Vibrant Communities across Canada.

VCE has developed into a community resource that has, in a short time, accumulated several success stories that benefit the Edmonton community and a wide spectrum of groups, businesses, non-profit agencies, and of course individual Edmontonians.

VCE continues to pursue three main projects: *Make Tax Time Pay* (a program to help taxpayers claim maximum dollar benefits when filing tax returns), a resource binder for newcomers to Canada (and the agencies that support them), and the *Transportation Alternatives Program / Job Bus Initiative*. These projects will continue to serve those

in our community and will be adapted and updated for maximum benefit.

Following encouraging

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Looking Forward	1
Guest Columnist	2
Workforce Development	3
Taking it to the Next Level	4
Being an MTTP Site	6

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Vibrant Communities Edmonton (VCE), part of an exciting national initiative, involves a wide range of Edmonton based community partners working collaboratively to build economic success for families who are currently working but earning a low income.

VCE's Leadership Council seeks an Executive Director to provide dynamic leadership for all VCE related activities and guide the work of a small staff. The Executive Director is responsible for maintaining effective relationships with community partners, funders, businesses, voluntary sector agencies and representatives of governments.

The successful candidate will have significant previous experience at comprehensive community building and a proven ability to engage a wide range of individuals and organizations in dialogue and action. She or he will have a reputation for creative thinking, innovation and an enthusiastic commitment to a cause.

The successful candidate's communication skills will be exceptional and will be able to demonstrate an ability to balance inclusive processes with the achievement of outcomes.

Salary Range: \$55,000 to \$75,000 plus benefits

Please apply in confidence by Friday 30th November to:

Selection Committee
Vibrant Communities Edmonton
c/o United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
10020 108th St
Edmonton, AB T5J 1K6
Fax: (780) 990-0203
Email: resumes@unitedway.ab.ca

For more information about Vibrant Communities Edmonton and the position of Executive Director visit www.vibrantedmonton.ca. Thank you for your interest. Applicants considered for interviews will be contacted.

VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007

Looking Forward *con't*



"I know for sure that with the will and wisdom of this Leadership Council, true family success is possible for many of Edmonton's families"

(Continued from page 1)

recent meetings with funders – and potential funders – Vibrant Communities Edmonton has determined that it is well-positioned to move forward with confidence into its next stage of development. The Leadership Council members and interested community stakeholders are now planning to build on current strengths and hire a new executive director to take the organization to the next level – which includes exploring innovative and creative projects aimed at increasing family economic success in

Edmonton.

VCE's promising future includes a new direction that will involve marshalling community resources and ideas in support of policies and positive change. While the organization will continue to offer its current services, it will seek to grow in its role as a catalyst and community conduit for ideas and action for the benefit of families seeking to improve their financial situations. Given the many challenges created by Edmonton's buoyant economy and the issues the accompany the

current boom, VCE will increase its voice and its presence as a catalyst for action on relevant social issues facing our community today and in the future.

Working collaboratively with other community-based agencies, VCE will continue to increase its influence and impact while addressing pressing community priorities. While wishing Karen a fond farewell, the organization looks forward to strengthening itself and its community under the leadership of a new executive director.

Guest Columnist

Judy Robinson is presently Co-Chair of Vibrant Communities Edmonton's Leadership Council, representing low income citizens. She has a strong sense of community and has taken on an active leadership role to serve the greater purpose and common good of fellow citizens.

Judy has a long history as a community volunteer and has served boards of On "R" Own Home Society, Black Women's Association of Alberta, Council of Canadians of African and Caribbean Heritage, Student Bus Pass Initiative, Council of Black Organizations and the Edmonton Folk Music Festival.

Judy's credo in life is to "be the change that you wish to see in the world" (Mahatma Ghandi)..

Financial Literacy = Family Economic Success

Vibrant Communities Edmonton (VCE) is a true catalyst and, with its strong networks, can do great things for families working and earning low income.

VCE Leadership Council can take a strong role in helping to push forward the policy change around financial literacy.

We must get to the root of poverty and

effectively deal with this illusion of wealth and success in Alberta. A powerful way of combating the current band-aid solution of dealing with poverty is

(Continued on page 3)

VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007

Financial Literacy *con't*

(Continued from page 2)

using the tactic of policy change. One significant topic of concern that stands out in my mind as affecting those struggling to make ends meet is financial literacy. Making sure that the right policy decisions are made surrounding financial literacy is vital to the well-being of the families in our community.

For change to take place, it is important that VCE builds an awareness and understanding of how

critical financial literacy is to family economic success and well-being. Providing young Canadians the opportunity to develop their financial literacy skills early in life is key.

VCE has tackled some important issues in the Edmonton community in the past five years with great success. Now the challenge is to promote policy change as a way of achieving family success, rather than using traditional methods which may leave us repeating

similar past outcomes.

Education plays a vital role, and since that kind of modeling may not always be in the home, then it is up to the schools to play that important role. I know for sure that with the will and wisdom of this Leadership Council, true family success is possible for many of Edmonton's families. To challenge poverty, we must to step out, speak up and be heard by policy makers.

Workforce Development

Transportation Alternatives Program

Unique transportation program helps attract and retain productive employees

Vibrant Communities Edmonton has partnered with DRIVING FORCE to give employers an edge in recruiting and retaining employees at a time when the unemployment rate is the lowest in over 30 years.

The partnership created

the Transportation Alternatives Program. It provides low income employees needing affordable transportation with a cost-shared benefits program.

"This program is an innovative way for companies to reward those employees who display a commitment to their employer," says DRIVING FORCE President and CEO Jeff Polovick. "It can also

improve or establish their credit rating in the process."

Through the program, the employee enters into a five year agreement with DRIVING FORCE for a full service lease on a subcompact automatic transmission vehicle, co-signed by the employer.

The \$600 monthly fee is evenly split and includes

(Continued on page 4)



Partnership gives employers an advantage in a competitive job market.

*For more information please contact **Cyndy** at 428-1866 or send her an email at cyndycreighton@vibrantedmonton.ca*

VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007

Transportation

(Continued from page 3)

the use of the vehicle, insurance and maintenance expenses. The employee is solely responsible for fuel, damages and insurance deductibles.

Companies enjoy the benefits of staff flexibility for shift work or overtime, increased loyalty and reduced turnover rates. Employee morale and job satisfaction are also positively effected.

“To get people interested in joining your company you have to make yourself stand out,” said Human Resources Assistant Robyn Thomas.

“Otherwise, potential employees can just go elsewhere. There are so many jobs available in Alberta right now.”

The program also

comes with optional GPS installation that allows the employer to track driving habits and location for easy withdrawal of privileges if risky driving patterns are observed.

Boundaries can be developed to restrict distant travel and help control mileage. If the vehicle goes beyond the restricted boundaries, the employer can choose to be alerted by email or have the engine disabled.

If the employee in the program leaves for maternity leave, WCB or otherwise, they can purchase the vehicle or have it reassigned to another qualified employee.

Current and prospective employees who don't own a vehicle are best suited for the program. Shift workers and staff

required to work at a site not easily accessible by public transportation are also ideal candidates.

“This is a way to set your business apart as a progressive leader in the community,” says Polovick. “Staff will tell potential employees about your company program.”

DRIVING FORCE is one of the largest independent vehicle rentals, sales and leasing businesses in Canada with ten locations in western Canada, Iqaluit and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Known for its commercial fleet management services and growth into the retail market, DRIVING FORCE has been serving Canada for 29 years.



“To get people interested in joining your company you have to make yourself stand out,” said Human Resources Assistant Robyn Thomas. “Otherwise, potential employees can just go elsewhere. There are so many jobs available in Alberta right now.”

Taking it to the next level *Insight from Karen Gingras*

This newsletter shares the news that I have resigned as Executive Director of Vibrant Communities Edmonton. While I may be leaving VCE, I will continue to use VCE's message in

my new role as Manager Labour Retention with Alberta Agriculture. In fact, the various projects that VCE introduced to Edmonton have applicability across the province and wherever

possible I will share the ideas that we brought to fruition.

Leaving an organization that I helped develop and nurture is a difficult process. It's more than

(Continued on page 5)

VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007

Taking it to the next level *con't*

(Continued from page 4)

simply telling someone that I am resigning – it's also preparing for the transition.

The process includes drafting a transition plan and with the assistance of staff, committee members and the Leadership Council, evolving the organization.

While transitions are difficult, I am confident that VCE's will be smoother than most. We have extremely skilled staff who have always been self directed and understand our strategies and the vision of VCE. Our Project Support Team, which is our operations support committee, is one of our longest standing committees and they also understand our strategies and vision. In addition, we are fortunate to have access to leadership coaching through Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement and the lead organization in the national Vibrant Communities network. This team will provide any coaching that the VCE staff may require.

Our Make Tax Time Pay evaluation report, due this fall, will help us operate an even more successful campaign for the 2007 tax year. Churches, libraries and schools have expressed interest in hosting these free tax preparation sites in 2008. Proposed workshops that focus strictly on completing the applications for benefits and subsidies in public libraries has considerable promise.

We understand that the lack of access to suitable transportation prohibits many people from getting and keeping a job that pays a family sustaining wage. Most of these jobs are on the periphery of the city and there simply isn't adequate transportation to those areas. VCE's first Job Bus should begin in early fall – congratulations to Maple Leaf Foods for taking such a lead in the community. We have also partnered with Driving Force to create the Transportation Alternative Program. Employers will be able to "TAP" into workforce

pools that that might otherwise have not been available with this unique car ownership program. This company benefit will provide transportation that substantially improves the lives of many Edmontonians.

Finally, let's not forget the newcomer welcome resource that VCE has developed. With feedback on the content and design from recent immigrants, this resource will include several "how to's" such as:

- How to get a bank account
- How to get a drivers license
- How to find a Doctor who is taking new patients

VCE has some great initiatives underway. With solid action plans, excellent staff and a host of volunteers, Vibrant Communities Edmonton will continue to fulfill it's mandate.



"VCE has great initiatives underway. With solid action plans, excellent staff and a host of volunteers, Vibrant Communities Edmonton will continue to fulfill its mandate"
Karen Gingras

VCE News

External Newsletter

November 2007



Worship centres make excellent MTTP sites



For more information on hosting a MTTP site, please contact Emily at 428-1866 or emilyrudd@vibrantedmonton.ca

Being a MTTP Site:

The Experience at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish

by Jose Gonzales

When we were invited by Vibrant Communities – Edmonton (VCE) to participate as hosts of a Make Tax Time Pay (MTTP) site, we did not know what was involved or how we could do it. But the very first challenge was to convince our priest of the significance of participating and the possible impact of the MTTP initiative on families and individuals with low income in the community.

As a small ethnic community in Edmonton, we were challenged in getting enough volunteers to participate because the commitment was for almost three months of work. But certainly, the overwhelming response from the members of the parish was just great because we had formed a 15 member team of volunteers in a few weeks ready for the challenge. Through a step-by-step training program, we were able to learn the nuts-and-bolts aspects of this initiative, which includes not only tax preparation but also other

city and provincial benefits sometimes

unknown to community members. In addition to learning the MTTP basics, a relationship and friendship with VCE members was developed during these first steps. When we opened the MTTP site for the first time in March, we were not only very excited but also had concerns about how we would perform and how people would respond to our efforts. These concerns were quickly erased as “clients” began showing up at the church doors, and familiar and not very familiar faces were seen.

In a very typical Hispanic scene, the site rapidly became a place for having a coffee or cold drink and some goodies while chatting. These clients were very understanding and trusting of our first attempts at offering this tax service. The clients were also patient while the volunteers worked through the initial challenges. In the end, we were able to serve more than 70 people, most of them seniors or new immigrants with little English language abilities and/or knowledge of the tax preparation process.

Some thoughts of this past experience have yielded feelings of accomplishment because we were able to offer a highly needed free service for members in our community, from both an economic perspective and offering it fully bilingual Spanish-English. In addition, through the MTTP work, we were able to identify other needs in the community, and as a result we have already developed other initiatives such a support group for new immigrants. VCE is also helping us in this new effort.

I would like to thank the long list of volunteers who “sacrificed” several Saturdays working with enthusiasm and dedication serving those who came for tax preparation help. Thank you VCE’s members Karen, Cyndy and Karina for the opportunity and support you gave us to develop the MTTP site in our community. We are now ready at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish for the next-year MTTP season with new commitments and challenges.



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