

**May Day! May Day! A Share Fair and Symposium on Human Services,
Social Needs and Working Together in Camrose
May 1 and May 2, 2008: Camrose Regional Exhibition
Final Report: September 2008**

Background

In February 2008, members of the City of Camrose Social Planning Advisory Committee began organizing a *Share Fair and Symposium on Human Services, Social Needs and Working Together in Camrose* to provide a forum for networking and discussion among representatives of human services agencies and other leaders in the community.

It had been three years since the last Human Services Share Fair, and six years since the last Social Needs Assessment. Recent efforts to secure funds to update the Social Needs Assessment were unsuccessful, and SPAC members believed that a Share Fair and Symposium would generate useful information in the absence of a more formal assessment. A Social Issues Survey would also be distributed during the two-day event, which would be held at the Camrose Regional Exhibition on May 1 and May 2, 2008.

The Social Planning Advisory Committee is a standing committee of the City mandated to work with other groups and individuals to explore social issues, and provide such information to City Council and City Administration. The East Central Community Partnership Enhancement Fund (CPEF), a group which includes Child and Family Services Authority representation, helped fund and organize the event.

Activities

Thirty-seven displays were set-up for the May 1 Share Fair. Visitor numbers were not tracked, but it is estimated that at least seventy people dropped by. Acting as Deputy Mayor, Councillor Wayne Thronson presented the "State of the City Address" that evening. During the afternoon, brief presentations were given by the following agencies:

1. AADAC – Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
2. Augustana Faculty, University of Alberta, Place-Based Learning
3. The Bethany Group
4. Camrose Association for Community Living
5. East Central Child and Family Services Authority
6. East Central Health, Mental Health: Men at Risk Program
7. Healthy Living Coalition
8. Service Options For Seniors

Sixty-six participants attended the Symposium on May 2. Three morning presentations gave participants current and historical information on social issues and actions within the city of Camrose, the immediate rural service area surrounding the city, and the wider regional area served by East Central Child and Family Services Authority. They included:

1. Social Planning Advisory Committee: An overview of needs and actions from the 2002 Social Needs Assessment to May 2008 (Denis Beesley and Ina Nielsen)
2. Camrose and District Support Services: Preliminary Results from a January 2008 Rural Communities Social Needs Survey (Clarence Hastings)
3. East Central Child and Family Services Authority: Community Mapping: What is it? Examples of some East Central CFSA Alberta Maps (Robert Andrews)

Following lunch, Karin Naslund and Brian Nelson of Naslund Consulting Group facilitated a workshop that was primarily based on the questions contained in the May Day! Survey.

Ninety Social Issues Surveys were completed. Twenty-two issues were identified. Because the questions were open-ended, articulation varied among the respondents. This required some interpretation with respect to issue categorization. There was significant consistency between Survey and Symposium results.

General Outcomes

Comments received during the Share Fair revealed much appreciation on the part of agency representatives for the opportunity to gather together, network, and update each other on their respective programs and services. Participants also offered constructive feedback regarding the Share Fair layout and location.

An evaluation completed at the end of the Symposium confirmed the above comments and reinforced the overall success of the two-day event. Almost all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the information they received from the morning presentations was helpful, as was their participation in the afternoon workshop. A common conclusion: talking and getting together is great – please let the city officials know what we said – but now is the time for some action!

In addition to the specific social needs identified and explored during the two-day event (see below), participants offered several other observations worthy of note:

1. State of the City Address: The State of the City Address provided a bird's eye view of Camrose development – a comprehensive “big picture” that citizens on the whole do not have while going about their daily routines. Based on the discussion that followed, the address was appreciated as informative. At the same time, however, some people were disappointed that it focused almost entirely on housing and economic development (with some mention of recreation and sport). Acknowledging that these addresses were originally produced at the request of the business community, SPAC also notes that, from the perspective of at least some May Day participants, an even more comprehensive picture including social/human services would be appreciated in future reports.
2. Publication of Camrose Council Agendas: Some attendees questioned the publication times of City Council Agendas. The concern arose from the perception that agenda items are often not made public until the Friday afternoon preceding the Monday Council Meeting – which affords the public little time to submit a request to address Council or plan to attend Council based on the publicized agenda. City Council is encouraged to ensure that information regarding the process by which citizens can arrange to address Council is clearly presented and easily accessible, and that the Agenda is published in as timely a fashion as possible.
3. Social Planning Position (within City Administration): Sixteen survey respondents encouraged the City of Camrose to create a Social Planning Position within City Administration. They felt this would enable the City to better identify and incorporate social needs into its long-term strategic plan. Symposium participants echoed this view. During the small group discussions, five out of eight tables identified Social Planning as a priority need: a Social Planner would “*balance social needs with economic growth*”. At the end of the day, all participants adopted the call to “*Support a Social Planning Advisory Position within City Administration*”, and encourage the City to update the 2002 Social Needs Assessment.
4. Social Planning Advisory Committee/Camrose and District Support Services: Fifteen survey respondents identified the work of SPAC (including Task Forces) and/or CDSS (including Interagency) as essential vehicles for assisting the community and community leaders in identifying and exploring social needs. (It must be noted that the respondents said nothing to suggest a view that SPAC and/or CDSS could function as a viable alternative to having a Social Planner within City Administration.)

Survey/Symposium Report

The May Day! Survey contained four “open-ended” questions:

1. In your opinion, what are the top three social issues/needs facing Camrose today?
2. Why do you think these are the top three issues?
3. What is Camrose doing right now to address each issue – either at the city level, at the agency level, or at the community/collaboration level?
4. What else could be done – and by what agency or group – to address your top three issues?

The report that follows presents the issues in order of priority. Because the questions were open-ended, and because respondents were restricted to three issues only, some of the assigned percentages are likely low and may not fully reflect the level of interest an issue might otherwise generate among local citizenry.

1. Affordable Housing: identified by 90% of survey respondents and 6 out of 8 Symposium groups

Included under the affordable housing umbrella: rental housing; home ownership; diverse housing (apartments; townhouses; detached single family homes, etc.); assisted housing (for seniors, persons with disabilities, mental illness, etc.); and transitional shelter.

- a. Evidence: Survey respondents and symposium participants all seemed to agree that the need for affordable housing is self-evident. They noted a lack of rental housing and expressed this in terms suggesting unacceptable and systematic neglect with respect to encouraging rental development. Some also noted a lack of “adequate, clean, healthy and safe housing”, especially with respect to some rental accommodation. Others cited homelessness: “Not everyone has a home.”

Many respondents referred to the increasing disparity between local income levels and rising housing costs. This trend, they noted, is affecting more and more middle-income earners and young families along with low income people. Reference to income versus cost-of-living within the affordable housing conversation indicates a strong link between this area and the “local economy issue”.

Some respondents provided additional evidence drawn from their own experiences – both as service providers and as community citizens:

- *The affordable housing issue is affecting my own family.*
- *I receive many calls from people looking for affordable housing.*
- *Housing comes up over and over again from people on social assistance as well as working individuals.*
- *Young families speak of how much it costs to buy their first home and how they don't have a quality of life.*
- *I know of people who commute to Camrose to work because they can't find affordable housing.*
- *There is a huge demand for eviction assistance (gov't program) due to the cost of housing.*

- b. Current Response: Collectively, survey respondents and symposium participants were well aware of the recent and current housing initiatives. They welcomed the Wild Rose Arena Affordable Housing project, crediting the City for freeing the space and securing the funding to make that happen. (A few stressed the need to go ahead with the project, expressing worry following the City's decision not to go ahead with the public transportation project).

For the most part, however, respondents did not feel that enough was being done at the City level (“*The City needs to do its housing plan*”), and thought most housing assistance came from “other-than-the-City”. They identified the following agencies/services/groups as doing the bulk of the work to develop affordable housing:

- The Bethany Group
- Habitat for Humanity
- Rose City Residential Society
- Social Planning Advisory Committee and Affordable Housing Task Force
- Camrose and District Support Services and Interagency – for being a voice
- Provincial programs: landlord subsidies; rent subsidies; eviction assistance, etc.
- Private developers (few) who are building rental properties

- c. Future Response: Respondents were encouraged by increased attention to affordable housing in recent years, and expressed an interest in seeing this level of attention at least maintained if not expanded. Some of their thoughts and suggestions:

- *Address housing needs with business as well as part of long-term planning. The City should approach private developers – maybe with government funding dollars.*
- *The City needs to enforce a minimum level of availability of affordable housing. Developers should have to contribute a certain percentage of low or lower-income housing options.*
- *Lobby government; need more government funding for housing development.*
- *Increase subsidized rental programs.*
- *The City needs to set aside land for affordable housing development in the long term. The City needs to make sites available. The City should be reasonable around what costs are for land.*
- *We need diverse housing; we need smaller homes and manufactured homes as part of the mix.*

2. Public Transportation: identified by 68% of survey respondents and 6/8 Symposium groups

Each person who identified public transportation as a priority need clearly specified a desire to see a bus service in Camrose. Some expressed their disappointment in City Council's decision to postpone public transit development and decline the CAMRIF grant awarded to Camrose in January. Others called for increased support for the Handivan and/or subsidized taxi fees as an alternative to the preferred but unavailable bus service option.

- a. Evidence: The simple absence of a bus system was evidence enough for some respondents. Others cited the local economy (low wages) as another obvious indicator – echoing many of the observations given to support the need for affordable housing. Some respondents pointed to development spread as indicative of a need for transportation in general, and a bus system in particular. Houses are being built further from workplaces; retail development is concentrated on the city edges. People without cars and people who would prefer not to use a car for economic and/or environmental reasons (thought to be a growing segment of our local population) would obviously benefit from a bus system. Not everyone addressed the “ridership issue” specifically; however, some did state that seniors, students and low income workers would likely welcome a bus system.
 - *Camrose is not a walking friendly city – city growth accentuates this.*
 - *We rely too much on cars; public transportation serves to address environmental concerns.*
 - *Employment is inaccessible without a vehicle and; not everyone can afford a vehicle.*
 - *Twenty-five percent of Camrose citizens are seniors. If we are a senior friendly city, we need public transportation. This is both an affordability issue and an accessibility issue for many seniors.*
 - *I hear families say they walk through harsh weather conditions for 30 to 45 minutes for family programming.*
 - *I know clients who walk children to Day Care...walk to work....walk everywhere.*
- b. Current Response: A significant number of survey respondents had not yet heard of the City Council decision to delay public transit development. They observed that “*City buses are coming soon!*” or “*I have read in the paper that the City is talking about a bus system for our area.*” Others who knew challenged the City's decision: “*I am very disappointed with Council's decision not to go ahead with the transportation initiative – I think many people are quite frustrated.*” Several people indicated that the Handivan is still providing some service, and people continue to “*rely on the goodness of others*”.
- c. Future Response: People want a bus system for Camrose! Some participants called for a plebiscite to challenge the City's decision to delay public transit development. Others encouraged the City and SPAC to keep this issue in the forefront in order to avoid a lengthy postponement period, seeking “*a firm commitment on the part of City Council to develop the public transit system*”. Although developing a bus system was clearly the preference for most May Day! participants, some also highlighted other key areas for future action:
 - *Have a shuttle service between the doctors' offices and the lab.*
 - *Clean up taxi service and taxi cabs; increase assistance to organizations that subsidize taxi costs for their clients.*
 - *Expand the Handivan service – develop partnerships with Centra Cam, Camrose Association for Community Living, the City and the Province.*

3. Local Economy/Poverty: Identified by 30% of survey respondents and 3/8 Symposium groups

This category includes observations specifically identifying poverty/low income in general (especially with respect to people living on fixed pensions or other types of income assistance) with observations regarding decreased employment income versus increased cost of living.

It is interesting and important to note that the local economy may, in fact, be the most pressing social issue insofar as it was often connected with the other identified social needs. Economic concerns, for example, were mentioned by most of the 90% of respondents who chose affordable housing as a top need, and by most of the 68% of respondents who named public transportation as a top social need.

- a. Evidence: According to participants working in the human or social services field, economic challenges related to low wages and fixed incomes have become the norm. Camrose is not a

wealthy community; in fact, Camrose has one of the lowest per capita income levels in the entire province. Participants repeatedly pointed out that local residents are unable to keep up with the cost-of-living, an experience shared by middle and low-income earners. Many blamed the Alberta boom for the rising cost-of-living, noting that the Alberta Advantage seems to have bypassed our community altogether. For most, this is another “self-evident” issue.

- *Low salaries in the retail/service sector dominate the local economy. (We are) not keeping up with the cost of living.*
- *This issue is related to staff retention, which is a big issue for Camrose. Funding for front-line staff in human services is not on par with other wages/sectors.*
- *We need more full-time/permanent jobs that enable people to work and live in Camrose – on a competitive wage. My husband has been commuting to Edmonton for eleven years because he is unable to make the same wage here as a tradesman.*
- *More people need to access food bank and assistance with rental subsidies, leisure services subsidies, help with utility costs, etc.*
- *Seniors on fixed pensions are not keeping up with the cost of living.*
- *Families experiencing income fragmentation (several part-time jobs; shift work) struggle to make ends meet.*

- b. Current Response: Are Camrose leaders doing much to address economic concerns? Many participants either left this question unanswered or stated that little or nothing is being done. Some were specifically concerned that economic development focusing on retail and mega-stores has possibly hurt the local economy. Others cited non-government agencies like The Open Door and Lokken Career Training as at least providing some employment support, even if they are not able to create or guarantee jobs that pay adequate wages. In fairness, some respondents did acknowledge that economic issues cannot be solved by City initiatives alone.
- c. Future Response: The need to create a Social Planner position within City Administration was mentioned by some as an important first step in creating a more comprehensive picture of local economic issues and integrating these insights into a more comprehensive urban plan for Camrose. Others suggested that we need to look beyond Camrose: “(we) need to get the MLA involved”, and “(to) continue advocating/lobbying” in this area. One respondent likely echoed the views of most when he/she said “provincial surpluses should be focused on social issues”.

4. **Safe, affordable child care: Identified by 20% of survey respondents and 3/8 Symposium groups**

Included under the child care umbrella: traditional day care; family day home care; out-of-school care; summer care, and flexible “24-7” care to accommodate the changing work day and week. Safety is stressed partly because much child care is still privately arranged and therefore “unmonitored”.

- a. Evidence: Wait lists for available programs confirm the fact that there are not enough child care spaces. Increased demand is compounded by the complexity of needs: a labour market increasingly dominated by the retail/service sector means more shift and evening work for parents within a 7-day work week. The demand for both parents to work longer days has put more stress on after school programs as well as traditional child care.

Respondents also noted that child care costs are not affordable for some families who earn too much to qualify for subsidies although they are not earning huge salaries. Finally, several people noted that child care professionals are not paid an adequate salary, which exacerbates limited availability because of inadequate staffing due to recruitment challenges.

- b. Current Response: Though not officially announced at the time, Gardner College’s new child care development plan was welcomed by several participants. Others indicated that child care is on the provincial government horizon. (Since then, a comprehensive program has been announced. It will help relieve local pressures, especially in terms of out-of-school care.) Several participants reported discussions among local business to create child care, though no concrete plans were identified.
- c. Future Response: Despite the movement noted above, participants stressed the need to develop flexible child care – the “24-7” approach. Some wanted a community-run day care. (Presumably, the Camrose Children’s Centre can’t meet growing demand.) One person suggested the city hire summer students to operate a “summer in the park” program to help fill summer care needs. (Again

suggestive that programs now offered through the Boys and Girls Club and the City's Community Services Department are insufficient.)

Finally, we need to look at how child care is delivered: "*Child care should not be a business. Staff do need to be paid well and there needs to be enough staff, but volunteers are good, too... Since we expect child care workers to be professionals they should be paid as such – this would add to the stability of child welfare.*"

5. Youth Programs: Identified by 17.5% of survey respondents and 1/8 Symposium groups

Included under this umbrella: general programming; youth shelter (shelters entail a variety of in-house services); youth apathy; youth obesity/poor health; youth substance abuse; and youth violence/crime. (Interestingly, the much publicized December 2007 home invasion/cat killing incident was mentioned by only two of ninety survey respondents and was not recorded as mentioned at the Symposium.)

- a. Evidence: Respondents confirmed the need for a youth shelter by referring to the fact that there are only two regular beds available through The Open Door; since they experience many more youth without a permanent home, this is clearly not enough.

At the Symposium, professionals who work with high risk youth spoke of a significant population of high risk youth in Camrose (though no concrete numbers were given). Substance abuse, sexual exploitation, and violent, criminal or anti-social behaviour are more of a norm or risk for this population. Several survey respondents observed that children and youth will get into trouble if they have nothing to do, there are not enough youth programs, and that therefore children and youth are either getting into trouble or at risk of getting into trouble. According to them, in some families, children and youth are "raising themselves".

A somewhat different approach came from several people who spoke not so much of "problem" youth, but of our collective responsibility to engage youth as active community citizens. For them, youth apathy is not just a youth issue. Whether high or low risk, youth often don't feel they have a voice or are genuinely welcome to participate in community building. Again, concrete evidence was not provided to support this claim which respondents may have felt simply "stood to reason".

- b. Current Response: Some people stated that nothing or not enough is being done. Others identified at least one or two services. Given the list of identified programs, perhaps those who reported "nothing" are unaware of what does exist. Current programs would then be advised to market themselves a little more effectively. On the other hand, these respondents may be aware of at least some current programming, but still view it as insufficient. Identified programs include:
- The Open Door
 - PACE Outreach School
 - Programs at the Community Centre (perhaps referring to PACE, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Family Resource Centre – A Parent Link Centre, Skate Park)
 - Programs at the Chuck McLean Arts Centre
 - Programs at the Camrose Public Library
 - AADAC in-school services
 - Battle River Drug Task Force Neighbour Aid Shine Outreach Program
 - Augustana Faculty (University of Alberta) – Community Services Learning Program (which places students with community groups at least partly to nurture community engagement)
 - Subsidized youth programming (for example, through the City's Community Services department)
- c. Future Response: Many respondents would like "more of the above" since the above is not able to keep up with increasing demand. Others wanted to see The Open Door Youth Shelter development come to fruition with community support. A Youth Center (drop-in centre?) was identified as a need, although this need is partly being filled via The Open Door, PACE, the Boys and Girls Club and potentially Neighbour Aid. Finally, the City was encouraged to finish the Arts Centre project (since not all youth are interested in sport).

6. Managing growth: Identified by 17% of survey respondents and 5/8 Symposium groups

Participants stressed the downside of growth. Is Camrose growing too much and too quickly? Is there a City-led plan, or is growth pretty much market driven? At the Symposium, growth was discussed in terms of “urban sprawl”. Participants were concerned that that more people are working longer hours, are experiencing increased stress, and have less time for family and community involvement. Managing growth, they thought, will help us better address a multitude of related social problems.

Along with the connection between growth management and risk reduction (re: social issues), there is also a connection between this issue and the local economy – the third priority issue noted earlier.

- a. Evidence: Again, people thought that “urban sprawl” – or, at least the risk of “urban sprawl” if the growth patterns continue – is self-evident. Many people were frustrated that evidence for the downside of growth was based on more on observation and speculation rather than concrete research and analysis afforded by an updated Social Needs Assessment. Several comments worth noting:
 - *Citizens are not turning out to activities. There are barriers that are at least partly due to stressors related to fast growth, income pressures, and even the nature and local of local development over the past few years.*
 - *Community is deteriorating (Symposium.)*
 - *Continuing expansion of west-end retail development will not enhance formation of community (survey respondent).*
 - *Existing community services are threatened and the exponential growth can seem great in the moment but translate into long-term loss.*
- b. Current Response: People were hopeful that the City’s Strategic Plan (under development at the time) would address this issue. Other participants applauded the ongoing efforts of SPAC (including the May Day! May Day! event) and the collective and individual work being done within the human/social services field. However, there are limits: *“Human services agencies persevere.... (but) are already working at capacity serving clients. They are stretched to fill the social planning/social needs assessment gap sufficiently at the level that is required for the city.”*
- c. Future Response: Updating the 2002 Social Needs Assessment and creating a Social Planner position within City Administration was a favoured response to this issue. Participants want action! They also want to ensure a sustainable human/social services field, as well as *“a more sympathetic ear at the municipal and provincial levels”*. Several people suggested a media campaign.

7. Substance abuse: Identified by 10% of survey respondents and 3/8 Symposium groups

Alcohol and drug abuse among both adults and youth were related to other issues, including crime. Some participants noted an increase in use by younger youth, along with a perceived increase in the number of young children living in homes with parents abusing drugs. The criminal connection is especially important to law enforcement, while “drug endangered children” is of special concern to child protection services. Some people also spoke of “complex issues” that included mental illness.

- a. Evidence: For those who identified substance abuse as a top issue, evidence was most often grounded in their own experience as service providers. These respondents noted all of the points made in the previous paragraph. Several people also expressed concern that substance abuse is becoming more acceptable – a personal choice rather than a public issue (despite the public cost in terms of addictions, anti-social and criminal behaviour, etc.)
- b. Current Response: Participants think city and community leaders are better aware of the full spectrum of abuse, including the social impact. Some noted certain actions that have had a positive effect – citing the decrease in the use of crystal meth as one example. The school-based DARE program was identified as another current response. Others suggested that youth programming and adequate child care are also effective responses – we just need more of both.
- c. Future Response: Future initiatives should build on current programs to tackle substance abuse more effectively. Along with intervention and treatment, programs that address risk factors (such as isolation or youth inactivity) were suggested as useful, though no specifics were given.

8. Social isolation/dysfunction: Identified by 9% of survey respondents and 2/8 Symposium groups

Participants spoke of individual and family dysfunction (not really defined) along with marginalization and social isolation. According to some, this area is often linked with mental health issues; for others, it is connected to a “pressurized lifestyle” adopted by many families that is at least partly an offshoot of the booming economy.

- a. Evidence: Once again, evidence was based in experience and opinion rather than research per se. People reported continuing stigmas against the poor and/or individuals living with mental illness. Others suggested that societal value for self-sufficiency can lead to intolerance, which contributes to social isolation. Some people noted a growing sense of despair and apathy – among all population groups but especially among youth. Family dysfunction was felt to be rising, partly because work and money are seem to be driving parental priorities at the expense of children.
- b. Current Response: Participants seemed “cautiously optimistic” regarding current response. As one person observed: “*Community members are beginning to realize that marginalization and related issues exist in our own backyard and are not just something that occurs in larger cities. Because of awareness, steps are now being taken to address the issues*”. Others identified specifics:
 - Jaywalkers Jamboree and Festival of Trees – community-wide events that addresses isolation
 - Camrose Kodiaks – support of the team brings community together (for hockey fans at least!)
 - Camrose Senior Centre (though it is not as fully functioning as it has been)
 - Education programs like those offered AADAC, CHAMP (new mental health initiative for children), Learning Together and the Open Door help with youth isolation and apathy
 - SPAC and SPAC Task Forces

One respondent also noted a “response link” between isolation/dysfunction and the economy: “*Nothing will happen to relieve family stress without economic changes*”.

- c. Future Response: No specific new ideas were offered. People seemed to perceive social isolation and dysfunction as larger societal issues that we are working on as a community and as individual agencies. Again, we need to continue this work, and to build on what we are currently doing. Some thought having a Social Planner to assist with this would be helpful.

9. Health care: Identified by 9% of survey respondents and 2/8 Symposium groups

This area covered the need for more health care professionals (doctors, nurses) and services (specialized and general care) as well as enhanced personal and community attention to nutrition, exercise, lifestyle and other preventive behaviours/programs.

(It is interesting and important to note that May Day! preceded recent events within Alberta Health: the resignation of several top provincial officials, the dismantling of regional health authorities to construct one “provincial super board” by spring 2009, and the re-rumouring of some privatization. Perhaps more people would have identified this as one of their “top three issues” if the timing had been reversed.)

- a. Evidence: Respondents pointed to longer wait times for doctors’ appointments or surgery, shorter hospital stays (affecting recovery) and general staff shortages. Seniors services were thought to be quite limited. One person noted that “*there is no dialysis in Camrose*”, suggesting it is needed. Others stated that “*poor health choices are leading to increased demand on the health care system*” implying that services must address prevention needs as well as treatment needs.
- b. Current Response: Local and provincial recruitment and marketing initiatives – both government and non-government – are underway. The Healthy Coalition program at the Edgeworth Centre (involving the city, East Central Health and Augustana Faculty/University of Alberta) was identified as a recent and valued initiative; it combines both prevention and intervention services.
- c. Future Response: Participants want the actions noted above to continue, with more concerted lobbying for a strong health care system. Locally, someone suggested that a shuttle bus between the clinics and the lab would help. One person suggested a need for more research – specifically the mapping of health care vulnerabilities by and within East Central Health region – with adequate planning to follow.

The remaining thirteen issues were identified by fewer than 5% of the survey respondents (3 or 4 people at most) and were either not recorded as raised at the Symposium, or were recorded as raised at only one or two tables at best.

10. Mental health supports

Mental illness and the need for enhanced mental health services were noted by some in conjunction with other identified social issues. Several people, however, specifically identified this area as a priority issue. Increased supports for people living with mental illness include assisted living accommodation, more “mentoring” or outreach services, and increased tolerance and inclusion at the community level.

11. Integrating newcomers/immigrants

People working within the human/social services field have begun to notice more newcomers to Camrose – from other parts of the world as well as other parts of Canada and Alberta. They welcome this “diversification” of Camrose, but also recognize the challenges it places on existing services. Social isolation is an obvious risk for newcomers who have unique linguistic and cultural needs. Camrose and area needs to know more about these needs in order to assist newcomers in meeting them.

12. Programs for young families

This area has grown so much it was a surprise to see it receive priority billing from anyone. Perhaps the respondents who identified it as a need are not aware of the full range of services currently available for young families. Perhaps the services are not sufficient in number and type to serve everyone. Or, some respondents may know of families who still find services unaffordable (though many are subsidized). Further examination is needed to determine if current services for young families are, in fact, adequate.

13. Literacy

Family and adult literacy programs were identified as a joint priority area by several respondents who also referred to what they see as a disturbingly low high school graduation rate in Alberta. The Camrose Adult Learning Council, Family Literacy Program and Adult Read and Write Program work together to address literacy needs, and can provide more information about this particular issue.

14. Fundraising pressures for non-profits

Though only a few respondents identified this as one of their top three social issues, the challenge of fundraising is well-known within the non-government human/social service field. Individual services continue to compete for limited local donations in order to meet the matching requirements of government and non-government funders.

15. Family violence and bullying, including elder abuse

People working in this field noted that Alberta has the highest rate of family violence in Canada. Family violence is exacerbated (though not caused by) substance abuse and economic pressures – too much wealth or too little income. Several local programs are working to address family violence and bullying through prevention and early intervention services.

16. Sexual freedom of younger & younger youth

This issue is probably linked with youth programming in general (see priority five), substance abuse (see priority seven) and social isolation/family dysfunction (see priority eight). Several respondents also opted to identify it as a specific priority issue. People working in child protection and youth outreach are certainly aware of sexual exploitation of youth in Camrose and area. Others believe that more younger youth are “freely” choosing to engage in sexual activity.

17. Stress/depression in farming sector (especially livestock/cattle)

One survey respondent listed this as a top priority issue. The issue probably affects many more residents of Camrose and area, particularly farm families. There was no information offered regarding how best to respond to the needs of farm families – the human services field would certainly benefit from fuller understanding of this area.

18. Well-being of the homeless

Though related to affordable housing, placing this issue in that category risked having it hidden by the affordable housing discussion. The respondent who prioritized this issue clearly wished the fact of local homeless to be acknowledged and the needs of homeless people to be recognized and met.

19. Intergenerational connections

One respondent gave intergenerational connections top billing – perhaps in an attempt to combine seniors' issues with youth/children's programming. Connecting generations certainly makes sense when building community. More research will reveal what is happening in this area at present, as well as further areas to be explored.

20. Entertainment shortage

One respondent noted a shortage of “non-sports” entertainment in Camrose. Filling this need is not within the mandate of human/social services, although limited fulfillment for people interested in the arts could have some impact on their overall well-being which, in turn, could increase their vulnerability with respect to unhealthy or risk-taking activities.

21. Personal security/safety

The respondent who identified this as a priority issue did not fully explain what he/she meant or indicate how this need could be addressed. It may be related to a general perception that crime is increasing and safety at greater risk today than it has been in the past. More study is required.

22. Affordable, healthy local food

With more attention being paid to the environmental issues like transporting food, this “singular” issue may be of interest to other Camrose and area residents who would appreciate the opportunity to purchase more locally grown/produced food in order to reduce “carbon footprints”. This is an issue that could perhaps be referred to the “Green Committee” that City Council will establish in the fall of 2008.

Concluding Observations

According to all of the May Day! May Day! participants, Camrose and area could be working harder to address a variety of social issues and needs. A more effective way of dealing with social issues would clearly improve community life for more citizens. Addressing social needs, moreover, also means examining the local economy, perhaps with a view to reviewing and revising our current economic development path.

It is also clear that effective social development necessarily extends beyond City borders. If, as suggested by the State of the City Address on May 1 and confirmed in the morning presentations on May 2, Camrose is positioning itself as a regional centre for sport, recreation and retail activities, then it must also look to the entire region when assessing social needs and developing social services. And, it must do so with partnership and collaboration in mind.

As a community event, the Share Fair and Symposium was an important first step in what is hoped will be a full process of social service development. That event and this report are by no means sufficient to provide the City with the information it needs to make fully informed decisions with respect to social needs. Perhaps the next step will be deciding to conduct a comprehensive Social Needs Assessment to further explore the observations made at May Day! May Day! – perhaps under the guidance of a new Social Planner within City Administration, as suggested by the participants.

Whatever happens as a result of May Day, it seems fitting to conclude by repeating an observation shared earlier in this report: *“talking and getting together is great ... now is the time for some action!”*