



CITY OF  
*Lethbridge*

# *Road Map for a Brighter Future:*

## *Community Social Assets & Needs Assessment*

*April 2005*



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*Lethbridge*

# *Road Map for a Brighter Future:*

## *Final Report*

*April 2005*

# **ROAD MAP FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE:**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**Completed for the City of Lethbridge, Community and Social Development<sup>1</sup>**

**Completed by Wells & Schissel Analytics Consulting Group Ltd<sup>2</sup>**

**March 2005**

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WS Analytics was contracted by the City of Lethbridge to conduct a research and consultation process to identify the needs and priority issues for the community. The intention of the project was to inform and guide the work of the City over the coming years, in particular the work of Community and Social Development.

Lethbridge is a dynamic and inviting city with community members who are proud of their city – their safe and clean streets, friendly neighbourhoods, and welcoming nature. It is a community that is working hard to build strong civic leadership, an engaged business community and innovative social service, health and education sectors. The presence of an overarching community commitment to collaborate demonstrates the City's commitment to creating a healthy, productive and inclusive population.

Despite the fact that Lethbridge is a strong and caring community, there are still members of the community whose quality of life is not as equitable, profitable or desirable as their neighbours. Social issues prevail in all centres in the nation and Lethbridge is no exception. Understanding these social issues is a key component to identifying areas that can be targeted for change.

The Community Consultation and Mapping Process was made up of three separate but interconnected phases.

### **Phase 1**

In phase one of the project relevant and available research and information concerning social needs and issues for Lethbridge was collected and reviewed. The result was the development of a preliminary report to City Council entitled *Road Map for a Brighter Future: A Preliminary Report*. The report was submitted to City Council in September of 2004. The report identified four main demographic groups facing a number of significant challenges: Families; Children & Youth; Aboriginal peoples; and Seniors. Within each of these areas a number of key issues of concern were highlighted.

### **Phase 2**

Phase two of the process emerged from the recommendation that the Community and Social Development Committee engage in a community consultation process involving a wide range of community stakeholders to collect further information to support the development of decision-making criteria for future funding.

### **Phase 3**

Based on the information collected in phases one and two, a third and final phase was developed. This phase involved holding a series of focus groups with citizens of Lethbridge. The information collected in the first two phases was based on data gathered from social service professionals, representatives from government, health, education and front line staff working directly and/or indirectly with members from the five demographic groups. It was clearly important that the process include consultations with individuals who represent demographic

groups – the people who face the challenges and issues in their daily lives. Thus focus groups were developed and conducted with citizens identified as: Families with children; Youth; Seniors; Aboriginal people; New Canadians and Persons with Disabilities.

Participants in the overall study were drawn from a variety of stakeholder groups including more than 125 agency and/or professional staff and 95 citizens.

## PROJECT FINDINGS

### Families with Children

Families in Lethbridge were identified as facing a number of issues, in particular challenges related to poverty, such as low wages and long work hours and the struggles to make ends meet for single parent families. Other concerns identified included access to high quality and affordable childcare; access to safe and affordable housing; family violence; transportation; and recreational opportunities.

#### Community Assets

In terms of community assets, there are a number of initiatives identified that work to support and build the capacity of the community to care for children and families. The multitude of organizations that work with this population have a long history of working well together. Collaborations and partnerships were reported as the usual way of doing business and as a result many at-risk families are able to access vital services.

There have been a number of successful community initiatives and innovative responses, especially around family poverty, homelessness and affordable housing. Along with these collaborations, there are a number of community programs that are working with this population in an effective manner.

The leadership role played by the Mayor and City Council was also identified as an important asset for the community. Municipal leadership is key in advocating for better provincial supports and needed changes to public policy that impact families.

#### Priority Areas

Based on the research and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for families with children in Lethbridge:

- More Affordable and Child-friendly Housing – there is a need to ensure that community subsidized housing is safe for families with young children.



- Support to Cover Rising Utility Costs – families are often forced into community subsidized housing because their monthly expenses, especially utilities, continue to rise without a corresponding increase in real incomes.
- Increased Access to Affordable or Free Recreational Opportunities – low income families require the same access to recreational activities, and not just at certain times and locations. By limiting the time and location for free access, these families are further marginalized by their low-income situation.
- Basic Needs - the services that support families to obtain food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education and personal safety need to be user-friendly and accessible, particularly for low income and single parent households.
- Education – in particular parent education services, including prevention and early intervention services, and parent and life skills development programs. Also, public education campaigns aimed at addressing issues such as addictions, family violence, prenatal care and parenting skills.
- Coordinated Services – the need to explore viable partnerships and collaborative service delivery opportunities. There is an acknowledgement that the professional community can always be better engaged and coordinated in the provision of services for families and children.
- Policy Changes – there are a number of social policies that further marginalize children and families. The community needs to work together to identify these policies and lobby the provincial government to change policies that negatively impact families. Supports for Independence and the restrictions put on families in terms of accessing other incomes and supports for educational opportunities is an example of a social policy that needs to be reviewed and modified in order to support families in their quest to move toward economic independence.

## Youth

The number of youth between the ages of 12 and 19 years residing in Lethbridge is approximately 7,100 representing almost 10% of the total population. Service providers in the community have pointed out that this number was collected in the spring of 2001, when the majority of college and University students were not in the city, making the total number of youth in the community significantly higher during the school year.

Based on available research and supported by our focus group findings, there are currently a number of issues facing youth in Lethbridge. These include overall health and well being as affected by poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, lack of recreational opportunities and exposure to family violence and bullying.

## Community Assets

In terms of assets, the leadership from the Mayor and City Council were again identified as key to addressing issues faced by youth in the community. There was also recognition that the wider community is beginning to respond to youth needs and there is an increase in people giving their time and money in an attempt to address some of these challenges.

Another frequently mentioned strength was the amount of interagency work and collaboration that was occurring and that in many ways the community of Lethbridge could be seen as a model for other communities.

## Priority Areas

Based on the information gathered the following were identified as priority areas for Youth:

- Youth Spaces – there is a need to focus attention and resources on ensuring that youth in the community have access to social and recreational opportunities and spaces. A youth centre should be a priority for the community.
- Addictions – the issue of youth addictions must be addressed and this will probably mean the development of a local treatment centre for youth.
- Self-Esteem – there is a need to increase the self-esteem of youth, especially ‘at-risk’ youth, as a way to reduce social isolation and overall alienation – key factors that often produce engagement in most high-risk behaviours and activities. Opportunities for recreation may be key to addressing this issue.
- Building Capacity – the need to further build the capacity of organizations to effectively deal with the many and complex issues being faced by youth. This will partly be done by further supporting creative community solutions, and engaging the business community and schools to work with community organizations in a variety of collaborations and partnerships.

## Aboriginal Peoples

Research has shown that Aboriginal peoples across Canada face a multitude of challenges and issues - poverty, violence and isolation are more severe amongst First Nation, Metis and Inuit peoples. This holds true in Lethbridge where Aboriginal people in Lethbridge find it difficult to access to safe and affordable housing, and experience high levels of family violence, unemployment and under-employment.

The ability to earn a living is intimately linked to factors such as education, employment and discrimination. While there have been significant increases to Aboriginal student enrollment in post-secondary institutions, the average income of Aboriginal people continues to be

substantially lower than that non-Aboriginal people. Estimates indicate that their earning potential is only 62% of the rest of the population. In real numbers this means that if the average income were \$40,000, an Aboriginal person would earn only \$24,800. Unemployment rates are also higher, which can be linked directly to lower educational levels and indirectly to covert discriminatory hiring practices.

## **Community Assets**

In terms of assets, there was recognition that the community of Lethbridge, especially under the leadership of the Mayor and Community and Social Development, is committed to enhancing relations with the Aboriginal community. The City of Lethbridge is seen as being a strong advocate for Aboriginal people and their concerns.

In recognition of this work, Lethbridge has been named a pilot site for the federal government Urban Aboriginal Strategy. The goal of the program is to develop innovative solutions to close the gaps that separate Aboriginal people from other Canadians. With the support of the Lethbridge Aboriginal Opportunities Initiative, the Aboriginal Interagency Committee will take the lead in completing the community assessment required by the pilot project.

Another asset noted was the role of the Chinook Health Region and its' commitment to working closely with the Aboriginal community to deliver more appropriate and accessible services. The Population Health Department has a unique multi-disciplinary Aboriginal Health Program. Lethbridge also has a variety of Aboriginal-run and/or Aboriginal focused programs that play an important role in the community, both in terms of service delivery and increased community awareness.

## **Priority Areas**

Based on the findings of the research and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for Aboriginal people living in and around Lethbridge:

- Communication - communication with the broader community needs to be made a priority. This will require the leadership of the City to ensure that communication between the City and the Aboriginal community continues to develop.
- Education – the need to increase the awareness of different cultures both in schools and in the community. The school curriculum needs to be formally developed to increase knowledge about Aboriginal people and their culture.
- Recognition and Acceptance – recognition and acceptance of the Aboriginal community is also seen as being important. Aboriginal people have the right to ‘a quality of life as equitable and open as that afforded to all other Lethbridge citizens’ (Focus Group Participant)
- Increased access to safe and affordable housing – including more and better Treaty 7 Housing and community subsidized housing

- Intergovernmental relationships - continue to build relationship with local First Nations government to address issues of services
- Support for Aboriginal Youth - ensure that Aboriginal youth have the supports to be successful in school, the community and as they transition to adulthood.

## Seniors

Lethbridge is an appealing retirement community with a high percentage of seniors living within the city limits. The senior population (55 years and over) is close to 25 %, which is more than 5% higher than the provincial average. The growing number of aging baby boomers reaching the age of seniority means the demand for senior's services and programs will continue to grow.

Seniors identified transportation, affordable housing, accessibility of services and deteriorating health as their primary concerns.

### **Community Assets**

In terms of community assets, Lethbridge has two well-run and effective seniors organizations - the Lethbridge Senior Citizen's Organization (LSCO) and Nord-Bridge Senior Citizens Association - that are doing good work ensuring that seniors have a place to meet and activities to keep them engaged in the community. There are also other community programs that provide vital services to seniors such as the Lethbridge Society for Meals on Wheels and Home Care.

Another important asset in the community is the commitment of many seniors to supporting others to ensure that they are able to get out and participate. The spirit of volunteerism is found within the senior's community provides tremendous support to the many programs and organizations that work with this population.

### **Priorities Areas**

Based on the research and information gathered from seniors the following were identified as the priority issues:

- Research – there is a need to conduct research on seniors to ensure that there is accurate information in terms of who they are and what their needs are.
- Transportation – seniors need to be able to access affordable modes of transportation if they are going to be capable of staying connected to the community.
- Housing – there is a need for more affordable housing, the type that falls between community subsidized housing and higher end private housing. Also, seniors require support to stay in their own homes, both physical and financial support – especially to cover increases in land taxes and utilities.

- **Municipal Leadership** – the City of Lethbridge must commit to ensuring that the community is as senior-friendly as possible. First, by ensuring that city facilities, roads and sidewalks, are assessable for seniors and persons with disabilities. Part of making a community truly senior friendly is ensuring that seniors can get out and participate in the community - street signage, lighting, etc. are important aspects of this requirement.
- **Sustainable Funding** – more dollars will be needed to support seniors and senior services as the population continues to grow.
- **Senior’s Community Forum** –there is a need to ensure that there is participation in the Senior’s Community Forum. The Senior’s Community Forum has the potential to play a key role in the community and to act as an advocacy body for senior’s issues.

## New Canadians

There continues to be an increase in the number of New Canadians that arrive in the community each year. On average Lethbridge receives between 150 and 160 New Canadians each year. There are two types of new Canadians arriving in Lethbridge – refugees and those commonly referred to as independent immigrants.

For all new Canadians, making a living can be a struggle. In fact, the study, *Immigrants in Canada's Urban Centres*, conducted in 2001 revealed that “male immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1995 and 1999 had earnings that were less than 60% of those of comparable Canadian-born workers. In most urban centres, recent immigrants were at least twice as likely as Canadian-born workers to earn less than \$20,000 a year”.

Most new Canadians face issues of marginalization and barriers to integration. In general, there are five key challenges to integration: language/cultural barriers; job opportunities and skills training; education; settlement/housing; and poverty. The main issues related to these challenges that were identified by the research and participants in this study are: support for inclusion; employment opportunities; and educational opportunities.

Despite the fact that Lethbridge does not receive high levels of immigration in comparison to other larger Canadian centres, the number of new Canadians arriving is increasing, particularly the number of refugees. Although this increase is a relatively new phenomenon, the community of Lethbridge has begun to respond in an effective manner. Settlement services in the community are effective and have been able to respond to the increased need and diversity of clients.

### **Priorities Areas**

- **Improved understanding of the needs of new Canadians** – there is a need to understand what is being provided and what else needs to be made available for these families and

individuals. Groups need to work together to better understand the needs and to respond in the most effective manner.

- Employment support - on-going employment training and supports for adults to access and retain employment
- Educational support – for both children and youth in the school system, as well as young adults that want to further their education
- Funding – funding is an on-going issue for these services, and with the growth in need, comes the requirement for further funding.
- Rural Service Provision – there is a need to get services into rural areas - especially basic settlement services such as ESL.

### Persons with Disabilities, Mental and/or Physical Health Challenges

In 2001, findings from the *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey* (PALS) indicated that 3.6 million Canadians reported a physical, mental condition or health problem that reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do. This number represents 12.4% of Canadians living with a disability. The percentage for Alberta was 12.5%, just slightly higher than the national average.

Within this context, the main issues identified through this research for persons with disabilities were economic supports; housing; transportation and accessibility of services.

#### Community Assets

Lethbridge has a history of being committed to ensuring that all citizens are equally able to participate in community life. For persons with disabilities this often means ensuring there are the requisite physical supports to ensure participation. According to members from this community, the City has had a strong commitment in the past to ensuring that streets, buildings and public transportation have been accessible. Today this commitment needs to be renewed and strengthened in order to ensure that the community is truly accessible.

#### Priorities Areas

- Improved Financial Supports – many persons with disabilities are living well below the poverty line, government supports must be increased (especially AISH), to afford a measure of economic stability.
- Transportation – affordable and accessible transportation for persons with mobility challenges. Handi Bus services need to be reviewed and alternative specialized transportation services considered.

- Safe, Accessible and Affordable Housing – especially supported housing for persons who are under 65 and have severe mental and physical health challenges.
- Community Accessibility and Dignity – continue to ensure that all City facilities are accessible and that people with disabilities can participate in the community as equal members with dignity and autonomy.

WS Analytics was contracted by the City of Lethbridge to conduct a research and consultation process to identify the needs and priority issues for the community. The intention of the project was to inform and guide the work of the City over the coming years, in particular the work of Community and Social Development.

### 1.1 The Community of Lethbridge

*Lethbridge is one of the warmest & sunniest cities in Canada with a population of 77,202. The community is proud of its parks & recreation facilities not to mention the friendliness & community spirit.*  
(City of Lethbridge Community Website)

Lethbridge is a dynamic and inviting city with community members who are proud of their city – their safe and clean streets, friendly neighbourhoods, and welcoming nature. It is a community that is working hard to build strong civic leadership, an engaged business community and innovative social service, health and education sectors. The presence of an overarching community commitment to collaborate demonstrates the City's commitment to creating a healthy, productive and inclusive population.

Lethbridge has a vibrant economy with a number of small and medium size companies operating within the city. It is the major commercial centre for a large agricultural area and supports an extensive cattle and grain industry. Despite the impact of the BSE crisis in the region, the local economy continues to flourish.

A 2002 study of the more than 100 cities, across nine developed nations, rated Lethbridge number one for the lowest cost of doing business. Another 2002 study also ranked Lethbridge number one for lowest cost of living. In 2003 a Bank of Montreal study of smaller Canadian urban centres, Lethbridge ranked seventh for growth in small business payroll enterprises. Its location supports a retail trading area of approximately 275,000 people that encompasses parts of southern Alberta, British Columbia and the United States. At the same time that the tax supported debt of only \$11.00 per capita is projected to be eliminated by 2007. (Lethbridge Profile, 2003-2004).

The University of Lethbridge boasts a \$22 million performing arts centre and is a leader in advanced education with approximately 14,000 students enrolled in programs at Lethbridge Community College and the University of Lethbridge. The University generates an estimated \$89 million in direct expenditures, \$134 million in local annual income and 1,700 jobs. (Dr. Rey D. Pagtakhan, 2004).

Lethbridge is a strong and caring community, yet there are still members of the community whose quality of life is not as equitable, profitable or desirable as their neighbours. Social issues



prevail in all centres and Lethbridge is no exception. Understanding these social issues is a key component to identifying areas that can be targeted for change.

## 1.2 Community Consultation and Mapping Process

The Community Consultation and Mapping Process was made up of three separate but interconnected phases.

### Phase 1

In phase one of the project relevant and available research and information concerning social needs and issues for Lethbridge was collected and reviewed. The result was the development of a preliminary report to City Council entitled *Road Map for a Brighter Future: A Preliminary Report*. The report was submitted to City Council in September of 2004. The report identified four main demographic groups facing a number of significant challenges: Families; Children & Youth; Aboriginal peoples; and Seniors. Within each of these areas a number of key issues or concerns were highlighted.

### Phase 2

Phase two of the process emerged from the recommendation that the Community and Social Development Committee engage in a community consultation process involving a wide range of community stakeholders to collect further information to support the development of decision-making criteria for future funding.

To this end a community consultation process was developed. Over 200 stakeholders were invited to participate in a forum that took place on November 19, 2004 at the Lethbridge Lodge. The participating stakeholders represented five key demographic groups: Families and Children; Youth; Aboriginal peoples; Seniors; and New Canadians. Participants came from the provincial and federal governments, the Regional Health Authority, Mental Health, faith groups, both School Boards and the not-for-profit sector, including anti-poverty groups, social service agencies, and community organizations.

Participants self selected into one of the five demographic groups and participated in a focus group discussion to explore issues facing the selected group. Based on the information collected from each focus group, a second report was prepared that further elaborated on the challenges faced by these groups. The report also set out existing community responses, strengths and opportunities to address the challenges. (See: *Road Map for a Brighter Future: Community Consultation Report*, January 2005)

### Phase 3

Based on the information collected in phases one and two, a third and final phase was developed. This phase involved holding a series of focus groups with citizens of Lethbridge. The information collected in the first two phases was based on data gathered from social service professionals, representatives from government, health, education and front line staff working

directly and/or indirectly with members from the five demographic groups. It was clearly important that the process include consultations with individuals who live as part of these demographic groups, those people who face the challenges and issues in their daily lives. Thus focus groups were developed and conducted with citizens identified as: Families with children; Youth; Seniors; Aboriginal people; New Canadians and Persons with Disabilities<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.3 Community Consultation and Mapping Participants

Participants in the overall study were drawn from a variety of stakeholder groups including more than 125 agency and/or professional staff and 95 citizens.

Professional staff engaged in the process represented:

1. Provincial and Federal Governments
2. Regional Health Authority
3. Mental Health
4. Faith Groups
5. School Boards (Catholic and Public)
6. Not-for-Profit Sector (including anti-poverty groups, social service agencies, and community organizations).

The Citizen focus groups were conducted with the following:

1. Persons with Disabilities, Mental and Physical Health Challenges
2. Aboriginal Women
3. High School Youth
4. Homeless and/or Near Homeless Youth
5. Aboriginal Youth
6. Aboriginal Elders
7. Seniors
8. Recent Immigrants
9. Low Income Families

A total of 95 people were involved in these citizen focus groups. Of the participants, 25 were from the Aboriginal community, 24 were youth (under the age of 24), and 18 were families with children under the age of 12<sup>4</sup>. The ages of the focus group participants ranged from 14 years of age to 82 years. Although this sampling is not entirely representative of the community of Lethbridge, it does provide a reliable overview of issues being faced by these groups.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the findings in phases 1 and 2 additional stakeholder groups were included in the study for a total of 6 demographic groupings.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that these numbers add up to more than 95 because some participants could be included in more than one group.

The following sections of this report provide an analysis of the research and consultation process through a review of the project findings by sub-group, an exploration of Lethbridge community assets and a summary of the priorities.

WS Analytics would like to acknowledge the time each participant gave to collecting this information, especially considering the numerous challenges that many participants face. We would also like to acknowledge the honesty and good will that was displayed in each session. People participated in an open and honest manner, bringing forward many concerns and issues. It is our intention in producing this report to represent these individuals and the discussions as accurately as possible.

## 2.0 COMMUNITY ASSETS: A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT LETHBRIDGE

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The focus of this study was two-fold: to collect information on the social needs in the community, and also to look at the assets that are already in place and working to make the community of Lethbridge a better place to live. Looking at community assets, and understanding the role they play in addressing social issues is an important way to understand the work of any community. The traditional deficit way of looking at community issues is slowly being tempered by also recognizing that communities have a number of strengths or assets and that these factors play a role in ensuring that communities grow and flourish.

Part of mapping assets is done by physically mapping the resources of a community – the roads, schools, social service agencies, parks etc.<sup>5</sup> This is a useful tool to understanding how resources are distributed across a community and how accessible they are for the people who require them.

Mapping assets is also about mapping those more intangible factors in a community, those things that influence how a community operates, how people engage with each other and how they come together to help each other.

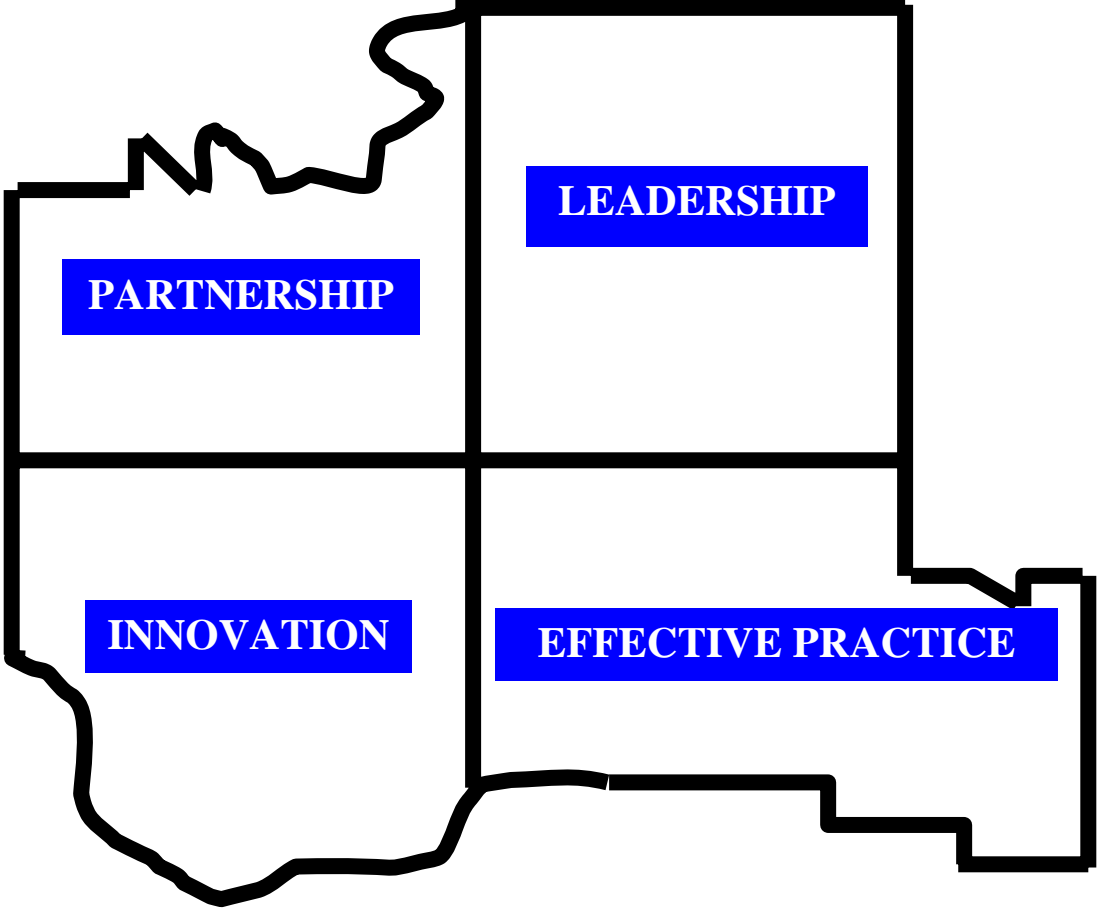
In terms of the City of Lethbridge, part of our discussions with community members included talking about these intangible things that help support the community. Throughout all the discussions four main assets were recognized. These assets were identified as the following:

- Partnerships – the willingness of community groups, organizations and systems to work together to address issues and respond to community needs
- Leadership – the tremendous leadership demonstrated by the Mayor and City Council in terms of addressing community concerns
- Innovation – the willingness and readiness of community organizations and the City to try new ways of working
- Effective Practice – the recognition that services must be effective and meet the needs of the community

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<sup>5</sup> To view this larger map, please contact Diane Randell, Community and Social Development, City of Lethbridge

This map outline of Lethbridge is a visual description of the community assets most often mentioned by stakeholders.



## 3.0 PROJECT FINDINGS

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### 3.1 Families with Children

Families in Lethbridge were identified as facing a number of issues, in particular challenges related to poverty, such as low wages and long work hours and the struggles to make ends meet, especially for single parent families. Other concerns identified included access to high quality and affordable childcare; access to safe and affordable housing; family violence; transportation; and recreational opportunities.

#### **Poverty, Unemployment and Underemployment**

In 2001, there were 18,500 families living in Lethbridge. Of these, 2,805 or 15% were lone parent households. Lone parent median incomes were \$26,624.00, which is less than half that of families where there are two parents in the home. Alberta continues to have one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada at \$5.90/hour. An individual working 40 hour per week will gross \$12,272.00 per annum placing them well below the \$16,407.00 allotted for 2002 Low Income Cut-off (LICO)<sup>6</sup> levels. Women's average earnings are only 63% percent the earnings of men thus making them further disadvantaged financially and leaving women at higher risk of living in poverty.

LICO for a family of two parents and two children would be \$28,869, well above what two parents working full time for minimum wage can earn.<sup>7</sup> The Market Basket Measure<sup>8</sup> threshold for a two-parent family with two children in an Alberta city with a population of between 30,000 and 99,000 would be somewhat lower, at \$23,677.<sup>9</sup>

Compared to other Alberta cities, Lethbridge has the second highest percentage of its population living below Low-Income Cutoffs before tax. In 2001 those living below the low-income cutoff in Lethbridge were:

- 16.4% of the total population (10,825)
- 19.1% of children under 15
- 49.3% of lone-parent families
- 50.3% of the total Aboriginal population

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<sup>6</sup> Measures of low income known as low-income cut-offs (LICOs) were first introduced in Canada in 1968 based on 1961 Census income data and 1959 family expenditure patterns. At that time, expenditure patterns indicated that Canadian families spent about 50% of their total income on food, shelter and clothing. It was arbitrarily estimated that families spending 70% or more of their income (20 percentage points more than the average) on these basic necessities would be in "straitened" circumstances. With this assumption, low-income cut-off points were set for five different sizes of families.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Jackie Seippert, Understanding Poverty, Centre for Social Work Research and Development, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is a new tool to assess low income that estimates how much it costs to buy a specific basket of goods and services in different communities across Canada. Basket items include food, shelter, transportation, clothing & footwear, as well as, personal care, household needs, basic telephone and school supplies.

<sup>9</sup> Community and Social Development, Fact Sheet: Low-Income in the City of Lethbridge, 2005.

These families struggle to provide the essentials for their families. Once they have covered the basics – food, shelter, and clothing – there is little left to pay for household expenses, childcare, health care, transportation, education, recreations, etc. Participants explained that there is a shortage of well paying employment opportunities in the community, with most requiring post secondary education and extensive work experience. Jobs that are available in the community are often low paying, with few or no benefits, making it next to impossible to raise a family on a minimum or low wage job in Lethbridge.

## Child Care

Affordable and accessible childcare is a central concern for low-income and single parent families. Subsidies are dependant upon the facility and the age of the children. Current subsidy rates are a maximum of \$475 monthly per child between the ages of 0 – 18 months and a maximum of \$380 monthly per child +19 months as long as the child is registered in a daycare centre. Families unable to secure a daycare placement and who rely on registered family day homes are only able to receive a maximum subsidy of \$300 regardless of the child’s age. Currently there is no subsidy available for private babysitting. There is however, good news on the horizon, as the Federal Government’s commitment to the long awaited National Daycare Program seems to be renewed.

## Housing

Community subsidized housing was another important issue identified by families with children. In Lethbridge there are two sources of community subsidized housing, Treaty 7 Housing Authority for members of the Kiania Nation that live in Lethbridge, and Lethbridge Social Housing Authority. Treaty 7 Housing owns 115 units and in January 2005 there were 59 applicants waiting for housing and another 271 applicants being processed. The Lethbridge Housing Authority has a portfolio of 696 publicly owned units and some 233 privately owned units that are intended for senior citizens, low-income families, and persons with disabilities. In January 2005, 335 individuals or families were waiting for housing assistance:

- 295 units are prioritized for families, with a waiting list of 193
- 398 units are for Seniors’ Housing, with a waiting list of 73
- 227 households receive rental supplements, with another 89 on the waiting list

*“Alberta and in particular Lethbridge are not cheap places to live, there are many hidden costs. Lethbridge needs to stop putting itself out there as a cheap place to live and raise children”.*

Focus Group Participant

Non-subsidized rents in Lethbridge range from approximately \$550.00 for a single bedroom to \$875.00 for a 3-bedroom place before damage deposit and utilities. The limited supply of subsidized housing and the high cost of rentals vis-à-vis actual incomes create a significant issue for many families living in the Lethbridge area. In addition, much of the available housing is inappropriate for families, particularly with small children.

Rising utility costs were also cited as contributing to the economic challenges facing low income and fixed income families. Utility costs have been consistently increasing over the past years

without a corresponding increase in most people's real wages making it difficult for many families to meet their housing expenses and increasing demands for subsidized housing.

## Family Violence

Family violence and alcohol and drug use are additional factors of stress for families. According to AADAC, in 1997, 58% of all cases of family violence involved alcohol or drug abuse by one or both partners. In 2003, 464 calls were made to Lethbridge Police Services related to domestic violence resulting in 390 charges being laid. With limited numbers of spaces in shelters, more women and children are placed at risk. While 896 women and children were sheltered at the YWCA Harbour House in 2004, 1013 women and children were turned away from June to December 2005, due to lack of space.<sup>10</sup>

## Transportation

Participants stated that the transit changes made this past year, although intended to increase efficiencies, have resulted in making public transit less accessible and efficient. They suggested that the City return to the previous routes and look at other ways to increase access and efficiency, such as adding new routes.

*"Thanks to the changes in transit, they have turned a 20 minute wait into a 40 minute wait".*  
Focus Group Participant

## Families and Recreational Opportunities

Recent child developmental research has begun to draw the correlation between positive leisure and recreational opportunities and positive outcomes for children and youth. However, participants explained that recreational opportunities are often expensive and for those with little or nothing left over at the end of the month, recreation is a luxury, rather than a key developmental component for their children. Although there are low and no-cost recreational opportunities, they are limited in terms of hours, locations and availability. Participants claimed that it needs to be recognized that many families have little time and flexibility and that one or two hours of free recreation a week may not be feasible for them. Increased times and availability of recreational and community programs would enable more poor and low-income families to participate.

### 3.1.1 Community Assets - Building on What Works

In terms of assets, there are a number of community initiatives that work to support and build the capacity of the community to care for children and families. The multitude of organizations that work with this population have a long history of working well together. Collaborations and partnerships were reported as the usual way of doing business and as a result many at-risk families are able to access vital services.

There have been a number of successful community initiatives and innovative responses, especially around family poverty, homelessness and affordable housing. Along with these

<sup>10</sup> Community and Social Development, Fact Sheet: Low-Income in the City of Lethbridge, 2005.



collaborations, there are a number of community programs that are working with this population in an effective manner.

The leadership role played by the Mayor and City Council is an important asset for the community, municipal leadership is key in advocating for better provincial supports and needed changes to public policy. Along with this advocacy is the support of the Social Housing in Action Committee (SHIA), which has provided much needed action in the area of affordable housing and addressing homelessness. Thanks to SHIA, Lethbridge families have more affordable housing and services.

### 3.1.2 Priority Areas

Based on the research and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for families with children in Lethbridge:

- More Affordable and Child-Friendly Housing – there is a need to ensure that community subsidized housing is safe for families with young children.
- Support to Cover Rising Utility Costs – families are often forced into community subsidized housing because their monthly expenses, especially utilities, continue to rise without a corresponding increase in real incomes.
- Increased Access to Affordable or Free Recreational Opportunities – low income families require the same access to recreational activities, and not just at certain times and locations. By limiting the time and location for free access, these families are further marginalized by their low-income situation.
- Basic Needs - the services that support families to obtain food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education and personal safety need to be user-friendly and accessible, particularly for low income and single parent households.
- Education – in particular parent education services, including prevention and early intervention services, and parent and life skills development programs. Also, public education campaigns aimed to address issues such as addictions, family violence, prenatal care and parenting skills.
- Coordinated Services – the need to explore viable partnerships and collaborative service delivery opportunities. There is an acknowledgement that the professional community can always be better engaged and coordinated in the provision of services for families and children.
- Policy Changes – there are a number of social policies that further marginalize children and families. The community needs to work together to identify these policies and lobby the provincial government to change policies that negatively impact families. The example of Supports for Independence and the limitations put on families in terms of accessing other incomes and support for educational opportunities.

## 3.2 Youth

The number of youth between the ages of 12 and 19 years residing in Lethbridge is approximately 7100<sup>11</sup> representing almost 10% of the total population. Service providers in the community have pointed out that this number was collected in the spring of 2001, when the majority of college and University students were not in the city, making the total number of youth in the community higher during the school year.

Based on available research and supported by our focus group findings, there are currently a number of issues facing youth in Lethbridge. These include overall health and well-being as affected by poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, lack of recreational opportunities and exposure to family violence and bullying.

### Substance Abuse and Addictions

Increasing levels of drug use and drug addictions among friends was a major concern for many youth participating in the focus groups. Youth from the High Schools in the community report that the increase in drug use has become a serious problem for students, and the pressures to engage with drugs, combined with the high levels of boredom have created situations where many youth are experimenting with drugs, especially crack cocaine, which youth report to be the most commonly used hard drug in the community.

These concerns were supported by service providers who reported that the two most common presenting problems for youth accessing services are addictions and mental health issues. The influx of 'hard drugs' into the community is becoming more serious. There are estimates from some service providers that addiction rates may be as high as 50% of the youth population. An example of the seriousness of these issues was provided by the Emergency Youth Shelter, where according to their agency statistics - out of the 119 youth they have seen, 54% had mental health issues and 29% indicated some form of addiction (drug & alcohol) issues. Compounding factors include the increase in criminal activity among these youth with 41% disclosing current or past involvement. Aboriginal youth make up 27% of all youth, which is disproportionately representative to the population of Lethbridge as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

Lethbridge Police Services estimate that 50% of youth experimenting with drugs are becoming addicted. *The Alberta Youth Experience Survey* commissioned by AADAC in 2002 discovered that 56.3% of youth grades 7-12 experimented with alcohol and rates of drug experimentation ranged from .5%-15%. Experimentation increased significantly at the senior high level.

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<sup>11</sup> 2001 Census statistics taking N in age category 5-14 / 10=Nx2+6.9% + age category 15-19+6.9% = 7123.

<sup>12</sup> These numbers were provided by the Youth Shelter staff

ADDAC also reported that over the past three years the numbers of youth who have received service for their drug and/or alcohol issues has risen from 246 in 2002/03 to 271 in 2004/05.<sup>13</sup> Of this group, in 2004/05 the overwhelming majority of services utilized were for alcohol use (223) and marijuana or hashish (227).<sup>14</sup>

A youth addictions centre located in the community was described as a priority because many believe that drug-addicted youth should not be forced to leave their community to access treatment. Currently most youth who require treatment go to centres located in Calgary, where they often have no friends or support systems. This lack of support while in treatment compounds the challenges making it even harder for youth to successfully “kick the habit”.

According to the youth interviewed, tackling the rising drug problem requires a two-pronged approach – treatment and prevention. The treatment response is the establishment of a local addictions centre for youth. The approach to prevention requires the establishment of community opportunities and programs for youth, which will lead to less experimentation with drugs. However, focus group participants noted that these community opportunities need to capture the imagination of youth, because most at risk youth are not interested in the structured programming that is currently offered. They claimed that youth will require some type of centre where they can come together with their friends, something modelled along the lines of the CAVE Youth Centre in Calgary.<sup>15</sup>

*“We have nothing to do, people don’t want us any where, the police hassle us, why not use drugs, everyone else is doing it and we’re bored.”* Youth Focus Group Participant

### **Lack of Social and Recreational Opportunities**

Youth reported that one of their major concerns is the lack of opportunities for engagement in community recreational and social opportunities. All youth groups reported that there were not enough activities for them in the community and there was no place for them to go where they could just hang out and be with their friends. There are organized (and often costly) opportunities, such as clubs and team sports available for youth and although these opportunities are important for healthy engagement, there are many youth who are looking for less formal or structured activities.

*“There is no place to hang out if you are not 18 years old.”* Youth Focus Group Participant

Youth noted that there were a few places (such as the local pool hall) where they could go, but with the new smoking by-law and other changes, these places have become “adult only” establishments. This lack of public places for youth compounds the feeling amongst some youth that the community is not interested in them and that the focus for the community is on other ‘higher priority’ groups, such as seniors. As one participant noted “all the talk is about seniors, we are always building seniors housing, but what about young people, there is nothing for us in

<sup>13</sup> The numbers provided relate to the youth seen in the Lethbridge office and are not specific to the City of Lethbridge, but also include surrounding communities.

<sup>14</sup> These numbers also reflect self-reported concerns with the use of addictive substances and are not necessarily indicative of an actual addiction.

<sup>15</sup> The CAVE provides Calgary's teenagers with a safe, alcohol and drug-free environment, where everyone ages 13 to 17 is welcome to hang out and if needed receive peer support and guidance.

the community”. Although this may not be a completely accurate reflection of events in the community, it does highlight a certain level of discontent felt by youth in the community. Service providers supported these views, expressing concern with the lack of daytime and evening programming and safe places for youth to congregate.

## Violence

Youth also reported that violence is a concern for many in the community. Many of the young women reported that they do not feel safe on the streets after dark, especially in certain “rougher” parts of the city, including the downtown core. Part of this feeling at risk is connected to the existence of gangs, both formal and informal, in the city. This is especially true for youth that come from Aboriginal or visible minority backgrounds. These youth reported that gang activity often is directed toward groups of youth from different backgrounds, especially Aboriginal youth.

*“Teachers and administrators need to focus more on drugs and these issues, and stop labelling kids as good and bad.”* Youth Focus Group Participant

It was reported that because there are few places for youth to ‘hang out’; they often attend large private parties with older people. These venues present a series of threats including widespread access to alcohol and drugs and often considerable violence. These types of setting put youth at risk; both young boys and girls can be the targets of the resulting violence that breaks out at these large parties.

According to service providers who work directly with youth, bullying and violence are on the increase in Lethbridge, and there are limited supports to deal with this increase. Interestingly youth did not focus much attention on the issue of in-school bullying. They all acknowledged that it does happen, but that it is often over reported and that parents and teacher focus too much attention on this. According to students in the focus group, often students are labelled as bullies whether they are or not.

### 3.2.1 Community Assets - Building on What Works

In terms of assets, the leadership from the Mayor and City Council were again identified as key to addressing issues faced by youth in the community. There was also recognition that the wider community is beginning to respond to youth needs and there is an increase in people giving their time and money in an attempt to address some of these challenges.

Another frequently mentioned strength was the amount of interagency work and collaboration that was occurring and that in many ways the community of Lethbridge could be seen as a model for other communities. Through the coordinated work on homelessness, the SHIA Committee, and the leadership of Woods Homes, Lethbridge has established a shelter for youth. The shelter provides a safe place for homeless youth, as well as day programs for homeless and at-risk youth. Today, youth in the community that are forced from their homes because of violence or some other crisis, have a safe place to go where they will be connected to the supports they need.

There is strong commitment among community agencies that work with this population. They have historically worked well together to ensure that youth have access to the programs and supports they require. This commitment to collaboration has served the population well and will be an essential element of actions taken to improve the situation.

Also there is a recognition of the importance of addressing youth addiction and drug issues, as witnessed by the Community Forum on crystal methamphetamine and other drugs, sponsored by AADAC and the City of Lethbridge, Community & Social Development.

### 3.2.2 Priority Areas

Based on the information gathered the following were identified as priority areas for Youth:

- Youth Spaces – there is a need to focus attention and resources on ensuring that youth in the community have access to social and recreational opportunities and spaces. A youth centre should be a priority for the community.
- Addictions – the issue of youth addictions must be addressed and this will probably mean the development of a local treatment centre for youth.
- Self-Esteem – there is a need to increase the self-esteem of youth, especially ‘at-risk’ youth, as a way to reduce social isolation and overall alienation – key factors that often produce engagement in most high-risk behaviours and activities. Opportunities for recreation may be key to addressing this issue.
- Building Capacity – the need to further build the capacity of organizations to effectively deal with the many and complex issues being faced by youth. This will partly be done by further supporting creative community solutions, and engaging the business community and schools to work with community organizations in a variety of collaborations and partnerships.

### 3.3 Aboriginal People

The City of Lethbridge is located in the heart of the traditional territory of the Blackfoot people and consists of three distinct Blackfoot nations, who share historical and cultural backgrounds but have separate leadership: the Siksika (which means Blackfoot), the Kainai (or Bloods), the Pikanii (Piegan). The Blackfoot territory ranged from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta to Yellowstone River of Montana, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Cypress Hills on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The Kainai First Nation, which is the largest reserve in Canada, is located minutes from the City of Lethbridge.

The members of these First Nations have close ties with Lethbridge, and people often travel to Lethbridge to access public and community services. Also, certain First Nations members have re-located from surrounding reserves to the City, either on a permanent or temporary basis.

The Aboriginal population in Lethbridge was approximately 2,290 as of the 2001 census; however, due to number of post-secondary institutions in the community, the Aboriginal Inter-Agency group in Lethbridge estimates these numbers to be closer to 8,000-10,000 during the academic school year. This coupled with the findings of the *Projections for the First Nation Population* study, which determined a growth rate three times that of current estimates, supports the belief among most service providers that the Aboriginal community is larger than the numbers indicate.

Aboriginal familial information is also important to consider as it differs significantly from that of the general population. For example, Statistics Canada 2001 found that children under the age of 15 accounted for 35% of the Aboriginal population compared to only 20% of non-Aboriginals. Over representation of Aboriginal youth in the justice and child welfare system is particularly evident in the western provinces. On the other end of the age spectrum, Aboriginal elders represent only 4% of the population, compared to 12% of non-Aboriginal people. Also, Aboriginal children are twice as likely to live in lone-parent families (32%) than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Research has shown that Aboriginal peoples across Canada face a multitude of challenges and issues - poverty, violence and isolation are more severe amongst First Nation, Metis and Inuit peoples. This holds true in Lethbridge where Aboriginal people in Lethbridge find it difficult to access to safe and affordable housing, experience family violence, unemployment and under-employment.

The ability to earn a living is intimately linked to factors such as education, employment and discrimination. While there have been significant increases to Aboriginal student enrollment in post-secondary institutions the average income of Aboriginal people continues to be substantially lower than that non-Aboriginal people. Estimates indicate that their earning potential is only 62% of the rest of the population. In real numbers this means that if the average income were \$40,000, an Aboriginal person would earn only \$24,800. Unemployment rates are also higher, which can be linked directly to lower educational levels and indirectly to covert discriminatory hiring practices.

### **Cultural, Social and Economic Discrimination**

It is impossible to discuss these issues and others that affect the Aboriginal community without first addressing the discrimination and racism faced by Aboriginal people across the country. Members of the Aboriginal community site the lack of recognition and acceptance of Aboriginal people as full-fledged community members as the largest barrier they face. Aboriginal people continue to be seen as outside the mainstream of Lethbridge community life. This lack of cultural understanding and awareness leads to widespread misconceptions and discrimination against Aboriginal people, this is especially the case when attempting to access employment, housing and support services. Ultimately it impacts upon the delivery and effectiveness of social and community services for the Aboriginal community.

The main issues that emerged from the research and discussions were: Access to affordable housing; on/off Reserve issues; Aboriginal youth; and Aboriginal elders.

## Accessing Affordable Housing and Discrimination

Like many other groups in the city of Lethbridge, Aboriginal people report the need for safe and affordable housing as a major concern. People provided a number of examples of community members living in sub-standard housing with what amounts to slum landlords. This situation is compounded for Aboriginal people because of the additional challenges of finding housing in a system that is often exclusionary and racist. Many young Aboriginal mothers reported being denied housing because as one participant reported, “when I arrived and he saw I was Native, all of the sudden it was unavailable”. As often happens in this type of situation, a few landlords will corner the market on rental properties, particularly for Aboriginal families, and with little or no regulation, rent out sub-standard suites. As one participant noted, “we live in a dump, there are pipes showing, water leaking everywhere, the shower is simply a pipe in the wall, but if we complain, we end up out on the street with nowhere else to go”.

All of this combines to create a housing crisis for Aboriginal people. Whether they are trying to leave the reserve, or moving to Lethbridge from other communities, Aboriginal people are faced with limited housing options. At any given time, up to half the women residing in the Native Women’s Transition House, are there because they cannot access independent housing. This is also the case at the other shelters throughout the city.

## On-Reserve, Off-Reserve Issues

Many members of the Aboriginal community reported the challenges for them living off reserve. There is an assumption that if they return to the reserve they will be eligible for support and services, and as such, do not require supports from the city. However, many families move to the city in order to access supports, and although they may be band members, they do not receive support once they are off reserve. Many people end up caught between the two worlds, with little or no support from either side. The needs of Aboriginal people end up being debated in terms of jurisdictional responsibilities, while families and individuals continue to have few options, either on or off reserve.

*“When you cross the bingo bridge you’re on your own”* Aboriginal Focus Group Participant

## Aboriginal Youth: Exclusion and Racism

Aboriginal youth reported high levels of racism in the city and surrounding communities. They reported a number of instances where they had been threatened and/or attacked by groups of non-Aboriginal youth who were driving around at night. One youth reported being chased home by a car full of non-Aboriginal youth who had threatened to beat him up. When questioned about the police, the youth reported that often the police would either arrive too late to help, or would say that there is not much they can do in terms of following up with the threats.

*“I use to live in Edmonton and now that I am in Lethbridge I face more racism”* Aboriginal Youth Focus Group Participant

As a result Aboriginal youth have developed informal supports systems and ways of coping in what is often a hostile environment. They watch out for each other and make sure that the smaller and younger kids are protected. They also reported that there are some Aboriginal youth that are fighting back and that this perpetuates the stereotypes of Aboriginal gangs and gang violence.

Many youth also reported instances of systemic racism, especially in terms of treatment in the education and health systems. Youth described instances where they had been mistreated simply because they were Aboriginal. There were reports of problems with teachers, being singled out for discipline when other kids were left alone and even examples of racial slurs being ignored in school classrooms.

Aboriginal youth reported feeling that they live in a community where they are not treated with respect. The mainstream community sees them as outsiders, not true community members. Ironically, many of these focus group participants came from families where the parents had chosen to move to the city in order to provide more opportunities for their children. Despite this desire by their parents, the youth felt excluded and alienated by the community at large.

*“Native people have gone a long way to living together with non-Native people. It is time for non-Native people to move towards living with Native people. It can’t all be one way. We have done a lot – it is their turn”*  
Aboriginal Youth Focus  
Groups Participant

### **Support for Aboriginal Elders**

Elders, like many members in the seniors’ community, reported two areas of concern; transportation and affordable housing. Elders report that they have difficulty in accessing public transportation and as such often become quite socially isolated. These difficulties are compounded in winter, when it is too cold or icy to make it to the bus stop. Very few elders have access to cars or drive and this makes their reliance of public transportation even more important. When they are unable physically to use public transportation they are left without viable options, as handi-bus is reported by many seniors to be impossible to book.

*“The buses don’t go to part of the city we need – many of us that live in Treaty 7 housing live way out on the outskirts of the city.”* Aboriginal  
Elder Focus Group  
Participant

Like other members of the Aboriginal community, many Elders reported living in sub-standard housing with few or no options to access better accommodations. Limited affordable housing stock in the city coupled with their lack of resources makes the housing situation for Aboriginal Elders a serious concern. Home care was also reported as an issue with many Elders describing problems such as the support not showing up when scheduled and/or deciding that the Elder did not require their assistance. Some Elders also report that homecare workers do not treat them well, often treating them like children.



## **Treaty 7 Housing**

A large number of Aboriginal Elders interviewed lived with their families in Treaty 7 housing. Although they acknowledge the important role that Treaty 7 housing plays in supporting the Aboriginal community, they had some serious concerns about the quality of housing made available and the quality of tenant treatment. Treaty 7 Housing provides subsidized housing for urban Treaty 7 members, as well as tenant counsellors who work directly with tenants in the areas of homecare, budgeting and nutrition. However, some tenants report that the housing is substandard, located in isolated parts of the city and there is little or no support provided to struggling families.

### **3.3.1 Community Assets – Building on What Works**

In terms of assets, there was recognition that the community of Lethbridge, especially under the leadership of the Mayor and Community and Social Development, is truly committed to enhancing relations with the Aboriginal community. The City of Lethbridge is seen as being a strong advocate for Aboriginal people and their concerns.

In recognition of this work, Lethbridge has been named a pilot site for the federal government Urban Aboriginal Strategy. The goal of the program is to develop innovative solutions to close the gaps that separate Aboriginal people from other Canadians. With the support of the Lethbridge Aboriginal Opportunities Initiative, the Lethbridge Aboriginal Council will take the lead in completing the community assessment required by the pilot project. This will result in a community action plan and new ways to approach the social, economic and employment needs of the more than 3,200 Aboriginal people who live in Lethbridge.

Another asset noted was the role of the Chinook Health Region and its' commitment to working closely with the Aboriginal community to deliver more appropriate and accessible services. The Population Health Department has a unique multi-disciplinary Aboriginal Health Program. This program includes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff providing services for the community in health promotion, mental health, transportation for health care services, diabetes/heart health and nutrition education, community kitchens, and in conjunction with wellness services providing immunizations, post and pre-natal care and sexual health. As well, there are several inter-agencies, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal within the city of Lethbridge that collaborate to assist Aboriginal people and their families.

Lethbridge also has a variety of Aboriginal-run or focused programs that play an important role in the community, both in terms of service delivery and increased community awareness. Programs include the Native Women's Transition House provides much needed housing supports to women and children; the Sik-Ooh-Kotoki Friendship Society provides a variety of programs for the Aboriginal community with the goal of improving the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in an community and encouraging equal access to, and participation in, Canadian Society; and the Aboriginal Elders/Lethbridge Seniors partnership program that works to provide opportunities for Aboriginal Elders to engage with local senior programs and activities.

### 3.3.2 Priority Areas

Based on the findings of the research and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for Aboriginal people living in and around Lethbridge:

- Communication - communication with the broader community needs to be made a priority. This will require the leadership of the City to ensure that communication between the City and the Aboriginal community continues to develop.
- Education – the need to increase the awareness of different cultures both in schools and in the community. The school curriculum needs to be formally developed to increase knowledge about Aboriginal people and their culture.
- Recognition and Acceptance – recognition and acceptance of the Aboriginal community is also seen as being important. Aboriginal people have the right to ‘a quality of life as equitable and open as that afforded to all other Lethbridge citizens’ (Focus Group Participant)
- Increased access to safe and affordable housing – including more and better Treaty 7 Housing and community subsidized housing
- Intergovernmental relationships - continue to build relationship with local First Nations governments to address issues of services
- Support for Aboriginal Youth - ensure that Aboriginal youth have the supports to be successful in school, the community and as they transition to adulthood.

### 3.4 Seniors

Lethbridge is an appealing retirement community with a high percentage of seniors living within the city limits. The senior population (55 years and over) is close to 25 %, which is more than 5% higher than the provincial average. The growing number of aging baby boomers reaching the age of seniority means the demand for senior’s services and programs will continue to grow.

In terms of vulnerability, elderly women are often most at risk as they face additional obstacles at the age of retirement than their male counterparts. Women represent a higher proportion of the senior’s population (57%). In 2000, 70% of all persons aged 85+, and 60% of those aged 75-84, were women. This is due in part to longer life expectancy of women. Elderly women are more likely to live in poverty because women’s incomes are generally 60% of men’s and they make low or no contributions to pension schemes. They are less likely to live with and be supported by family members, and they are more likely to be victims of abuse.

Seniors identified transportation, affordable housing, accessibility of services and deteriorating health care as their primary concerns.

## Transportation

Transportation was reported as the major issue for seniors in the community. Social isolation is a major risk factor for seniors and transportation is a key service that can support seniors to be engaged with their community. Seniors are often reliant on public and specialized transportation; if they are unable to access these services they are unable to get out much to access other services and the community. In terms of public transportation, the major concern for seniors is related to the new bus route introduced by the city, and the perception that the system is less efficient now than previously.

The Handi-Bus system is another area of significant concern, particularly the requirements of a doctor's referral or to be over 80 to use the service. Handi-Bus is almost impossible to get unless it is booked well in advance. It was reported that many seniors require more flexible and accessible transportation services, something that can take them to the mall or the store, to recreational activities, out of visit with their friends, etc. Both senior centres have vans and buses, and this is seen as an important part of providing transportation services for seniors.

## Housing and the Rising Cost of Utilities and Other Expenses

In terms of seniors housing, there is little available between the very low-income housing provided by the Lethbridge Housing Authority and the high-end housing being built by private developers. Most seniors live on a fixed income and they require some support to stay in their homes, particularly with the rising cost of utilities and other services.

Seniors who qualify can access subsidized seniors housing through LHA and this is an important service in the community. But many participants reported the need for support to stay in their own homes. Without support these people are forced to sell their homes and move into rental accommodations which puts added pressure on the available low cost housing stock. Seniors want to stay in their own homes and live independently. Participants stated that they are not looking for a hand out, they simply require some support to continue to be independent, supports such as tax breaks and lower utilities. As one participant noted "seniors do not go out and ask for help, they are not great self advocates, but they are fiercely independent and want to make it on their own".

Senior housing is being built in the outlying areas of the city, this further perpetuates the isolation suffered by many. These areas are not conducive for seniors, with little or no public transportation, few restaurants and shopping facilities.

*"With the rising cost of energy – seniors with fixed incomes can't cope, even though they own their own homes, it becomes impossible for them to stay in their own homes."* Focus Group Participant

*"The City needs to get the Low Rental Housing Project in the Downtown core back up and going. This project meets two important needs – that of making more affordable housing available and also to help revitalize the downtown core of the city."* Focus Group Participant

## Accessibility of Services and Infrastructure – Making Lethbridge More Senior Friendly

The seniors engaged in this study noted a number of concerns that, if addressed, would make Lethbridge a more senior friendly city and facilitate their on-going independence and community engagement. Participants noted that the street signs are too small for many seniors to see, and often hidden behind branches. The signs need to have larger printing and be clearly placed in open areas. There are some streets that do not have signs on both sides, the signage for streets needs to be consistent, and so that when seniors are driving they will know where to look for the address.

The street lights need to be brighter, it is too hard for most seniors to drive at night, and this limits their ability to go out in the evening, especially in the darker winter months. In fact most seniors stated that the two biggest barriers to them driving safely and confidently around the city are signage and street lighting.

A number of seniors also mentioned that the current length of stoplights is not long enough for seniors and people with disabilities to cross safely. The city has made some walk lights longer; they need to do this in other areas, not just around senior centres and homes, but all over the city.

Parking was another issue that was mentioned, especially parking downtown. There is not enough parking around the YWCA, Police, City Hall, and Public Library, etc. Seniors would come downtown more often and use the available services and facilities if they could find parking in the area – they cannot be expected to walk from surrounding blocks, again especially in the winter months.

*“Everything downtown is so nice and close, but there is no parking”*  
Focus Group Participant

The city also needs to address issues such as making more curbs accessible, as one participant stated it is “not good enough just around Henderson park”. City run and/or funded facilities such as swimming facilities need to be more accessible, making sure the washrooms, curbs and entrances are accessible.

### 3.4.1 Community Assets – Building on What Works

In terms of community assets, Lethbridge has two well-run and effective seniors organizations - the Lethbridge Senior Citizen’s Organization (LSCO) and Nord-Bridge Senior Citizens Association - that are doing good work ensuring that seniors have a place to meet and activities to keep them engaged in the community. LSCO provides support services, outreach, support for independent living, advocacy and education related to health and lifestyle issues for seniors in the community. Nord-Bridge offers educational, recreational, social, and support services and programs to Senior Citizens throughout the City, with a particular focus on fostering independence, self worth, and a sense of community pride.

There are also other community programs that provide vital services to seniors such as the Lethbridge Society for Meals on Wheels, which provides hot noonday meals five days a week, to

any person within the City of Lethbridge who, through illness, handicap or age, cannot provide such for themselves. The organization assists and fosters independent living and self-esteem, and acts as a liaison with relatives, friends and other human service agencies. The Chinook Health Region's Senior Health Program also provides a variety of community and acute care programs and links to ensure that seniors living in the community of Lethbridge and surrounding areas have access to the information and services they require.

Another important asset in the community is the commitment of many seniors to supporting others to ensure that they are able to get out and participate. The spirit of volunteerism found within the senior's community provides tremendous support to the many programs and organizations that work with this population.

### 3.4.3 Priorities Areas

Based on the research and information gathered from seniors the following were identified as the priority issues:

- Research – there is a need to conduct research on seniors to ensure that there is accurate information in terms of who they are and what their needs are.
- Transportation – seniors need to be able to access affordable modes of transportation if they are going to be capable of staying connected to the community.
- Housing – there is a need for more affordable housing, the type that falls between community subsidized housing and higher end private housing. Also, seniors require support to stay in their own homes, both physical and financial support – especially to cover increases in land taxes and utilities.
- Municipal Leadership – the City of Lethbridge must commit to ensuring that the community is as senior-friendly as possible. First, by ensuring that city facilities, roads and sidewalks are assessable for seniors and persons with disabilities. Part of making a community truly senior friendly is ensuring that seniors can get out and participate in the community - street signage, lighting, etc., are important aspects of this requirement.
- Sustainable Funding – more dollars will be needed to support seniors and senior services as this population continues to grow.
- Senior's Community Forum –there is a need to ensure that there is participation in the Senior's Community Forum. The Senior's Community Forum has the potential to play a key role in the community and to act as an advocacy body for senior's issues.

### 3.5 New Canadians

There continues to be an increase in the number of New Canadians that arrive in the community each year. On average Lethbridge receives between 150 and 160 New Canadians each year.

There are two types of new Canadians arriving in Lethbridge – refugees and those commonly referred to as independent immigrants. Independent immigrants are people who qualify to enter Canada on a permanent basis because they meet a set of criteria, including educational achievement, business background, financial independence or other family members already in Canada. Most independent immigrants come from the Pacific Rim countries, and tend to be well educated. According to Lethbridge Family Services Settlement Program, a number of well-trained engineers from China and Afghanistan have arrived in recent years. However, there tends to be little work for them in the city and they are often forced to relocate to other cities in order to try and find better work opportunities.

Of the new arrivals in Lethbridge, approximately 70% enter as refugees. They are mainly from the Sudan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan and a number of single mothers from Afghanistan have come through the “Women at Risk” program. Refugees are persons who are forced to flee their home countries and are granted status in Canada based on the Geneva Convention as it relates to refugees. Canada uses the following definition of refugee:

*A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*

The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

Refugees require more intensive settlement supports than independent immigrants, who often tend to have access to other resources and supports, including family members. Refugees are most often coming from situations where they have been forced to flee their homes, leaving everything behind and relocated to refugee camps where they surviving on next to nothing. By the time these people enter Canada, they are in dire need of language, social, economic and psychological supports.

For all new Canadians, making a living can be a struggle. In fact, the study, *Immigrants in Canada's Urban Centres*, conducted in 2001 revealed that “male immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1995 and 1999 had earnings that were less than 60% of those of comparable Canadian-born workers. In most urban centres, recent immigrants were at least twice as likely as Canadian-born workers to earn less than \$20,000 a year”.

*“Things are so different here, we need to adapt to a new society and culture and we need help to do this. It is often both the big things and the little things – the buses are always on time here – this is very different for us.”* Focus Group Participant

Most new Canadians face issues of marginalization and barriers to integration. In general, there are five key challenges to integration: language/cultural barriers; job opportunities and skills training; education; settlement/housing; and poverty. The main issues related to these challenges that were identified by the research and participants in this study are: support for inclusion; employment opportunities; and educational opportunities.

## On-going Supports for Inclusion

The majority of new arrivals in Lethbridge require supports to adapt to their new city, culture and community. Participants spoke highly of the supports they receive from available settlement programs, but stressed that they often require support for longer periods of time than is currently available. The process of settlement is complex, and some people are able to adapt more quickly than others, there needs to be a recognition that peoples' needs will be unique and that supports will often need to be customized to the individual.

## Employment Opportunities

A major area of concern for most new arrivals is in the area of employment. Focus group members made numerous references to the challenges they face in terms of employment. Successful settlement is inextricably linked to the ability of individuals to provide for themselves and their families. A number of newcomers talked about the difficulties they face in terms of not only accessing jobs, but also keeping them. They noted that language and cultural challenges make them less desirable for employers, and that they are often fired when misunderstandings arise between employer expectations and employee understanding.

For many new Canadians there is also the challenge of having their educational and professional credentials recognized in the Canadian work context. Many independent immigrants are eligible to come to Canada partly because of their educational and professional background. Yet once they arrive, they find they cannot work in their chosen field because their training is not recognized. Some participants were shocked by the disconnect between what they understood before they arrived and what the actual reality is for many new Canadians. And as a result, many well trained medical professionals, engineers and technicians are grossly under-employed and struggling to support their families.

*“I don't know why I was let go at my last job – there were many things I did not understand, but I was on time and worked hard”.* Focus Group Participant

## Educational Opportunities

The other area of significant concern for new Canadians, especially for youth and young adults, is accessing appropriate educational opportunities. Many immigrant children and youth struggle in the education system, especially where language is an issue. For children and youth who require ESL supports, it is limited in schools and they must take time away from other subjects to get language training. Inevitably students end up behind in their other subjects and never really catch up to their peers. For others who have had limited educational opportunities, they face language challenges as well as the challenges of being placed in grades that are far more advanced scholastically. This is partly due to the practice in the public education system of placing new arrivals in grades with other students their own age. Although this practice does

*“I am ready and need to work – but I want to go to school, to learn to read and write properly, I would like to get some education”*  
Focus Group Participant

prevent students from being further marginalized by being in classes with children much younger, it does not help them meet their educational needs.

Young adults reported that they want to continue their studies, recognizing that this is the only way to access a well-paying job. Yet many are faced with the day-to-day reality of needing to provide for themselves and their families. This is particularly difficult for young people who have limited language skills, as they report the ability to communicate orally, but struggle with reading and writing in English. Most ESL support is sufficient to enable immigrants to communicate at a basic level. But without the ability to read and write employment opportunities, even as a labourer, are limited.

### **3.5.1 Community Assets – Building on What Works**

In comparison to other larger centres, Lethbridge does not receive high levels of immigration. However, the number of new Canadians arriving is increasing, particularly the number of refugees. Although this increase is a relatively new phenomenon, the community of Lethbridge has begun to respond in an effective manner. Settlement services in the community are effective and have been able to respond to the increased need and diversity of clients.

The cultural sensitivity work that has taken place through Police Services has also been important in ensuring that people are supported in their new community. Things are being done in this new area, and groups seem to be willing to work together to make sure that the needs of new Canadians are addressed in an effective and timely manner.

### **3.5.2 Priorities Areas**

- Improved understanding of the needs of new Canadians – there is a need to understand what is being provided and what else needs to be made available for these families and individuals. Groups need to work together to better understand the needs and to respond in the most effective manner.
- Employment support - on-going employment training and supports for adults to access and retain employment
- Educational support – for both children and youth in the school system, as well as young adults that want to further their education
- Funding – funding is an on-going issue for these services, and with the growth in need, comes the requirement for further funding.
- Rural Service Provision – there is a need to get services into rural areas - especially basic settlement services such as ESL.

## **3.6 Persons with Disabilities, Mental and/or Physical Health Challenges**

In 2001, findings from the *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey* (PALS) indicated that 3.6 million Canadians reported a physical, mental condition or health problem that reduced the



kind or amount of activities they could do. This number represents 12.4% of Canadians living with a disability. The percentage for Alberta was 12.5%, just slightly higher than the national average.

The presence of disabilities increases gradually with age. For example the rate for children aged 0 to 14 is 3.3% compared to 10% for those aged 15-64. Seniors rates continue to escalate with 40% of individuals 65 years and over reporting a disability, which climbs significantly to 53.3% beyond the age of 75.

In terms of the total population aged 15 and over, 5.0% of Canadians had a mild disability, 3.6% reported living with a moderate disability and 3.9% had a severe disability. What is considered a compounding issue is the fact that the majority of those reporting in fact are living with multiple disabilities. Only 18.2% reported having only one disability, whereas 29% reported three, 27.7 had four or five and just under 8% of persons with disabilities had six or more.

According to Alberta Human Resources, there are 2,157 AISH recipients in the region and it is estimated that for the City of Lethbridge there are around 1,600 people receiving the benefit. This is just an estimate for the city, as the exact numbers are not possible to access.

Within this context, the main issues identified through this research for persons with disabilities were economic supports; housing; transportation; and accessibility of services.

### **Economic Supports – AISH and other Disability Supports**

The participants explained that accessing economic support is a difficult and complex task. They described a system of contradictory rules, where information is not easily shared, and the regulations and eligibility criteria seem to change depending on whom you talk to. Participants who receive AISH – Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program report that they struggle not only to make ends meet but also to understand what it is they are exactly entitled to through this program.

*“Congratulations Alberta – you paid off the debt on the backs of the poor”.* Focus Group Participant

In Alberta there are approximately 32,000 adults receiving *Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped* (AISH). The following represents the breakdown of claims: about 32% of due to mental illness, 23% are developmental disabilities, and 45% have various physical disabilities. The maximum financial benefit is \$850 per month and is based on income and asset levels.

Simply accessing AISH can be confusing. Applicants require a doctor to fill out the paper work, often for a fee, which is difficult for some people to cover. Once the paperwork is submitted, the government often denies the request and it is difficult to understand the reasons for denial. As one participant stated, “If you have a physician verifying the application, then why does AISH turn it down?”

Participants explained that in order to be eligible for AISH applicants cannot have any other assets; they must have exhausted every other avenue of support. One participant reported that an AISH worker told her that she would have to sell her wedding ring as it was considered an asset.

Another participant stated that “they strip you away, your dignity, your self esteem – they take everything away for you.” There is a need for the AISH program and workers to understand that this is a program of last resort and that they are dealing with the most vulnerable people in the community. As another participant with serious health challenges stated, “we fight to stay alive – then we start to ask ourselves why did I fight so hard to say alive? Everything becomes such a struggle and we have little support or understanding.”

Many focus group participants shared stories of mistreatment by AISH workers and of receiving contradictory information. Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and this vulnerability makes them especially susceptible to mistreatment. As such, these incidents of poor treatment far out numbered experiences of being treated with dignity and respect.

*“The system is punitive.”* Focus Group Participant

## Housing

There are currently few housing options for people who are under 65 and have medical problems, especially if they have few resources or family supports. They often lose their jobs, and end up on either CPP Disability or AISH. Participants explained that they need a safe place to live and enough resources to access in-home supports and appropriate diet and medication. Currently none of this is available to participants and many end up living in community subsidized housing, accessing the food bank and struggling to survive.

*“And what about the people who cannot afford LHA – there should be something for them beside the street”*  
Focus Group Participant

As more affordable housing is being built, it will be important not to forget the importance of making some of this supported living. Currently people who require supported living have few options in the city. In fact many people with mental and physical health issues are currently living in low cost housing through Lethbridge Housing Authority. And although it is important that they can access this affordable housing, they often require supports to stay successfully housed, and this is something that LHA does not provide. Some participants explained that there is a situation where very vulnerable seniors and persons with mental health and health challenges are living in inappropriate accommodations with people who potentially abuse and prey on them. Supported housing would help residents with mental and physical health challenges to monitor medication, make sure they are getting the appropriate help and that there is continuity in terms of their other supports and treatments.

*“Building more independent living, need more supported living”* Focus Group Participant

## Transportation

There were many issues raised concerning Lethbridge Handi Bus. These included the cost of the service, especially given the limited resources of many persons with disabilities, as well as the limited hours of operation and the fact that the service is operating at beyond capacity. Currently there is no alternative to Handi Bus, (other than a few accessible city buses) for people with mobility challenges.

*“My life does not stop at 5pm”* Focus Group Participant

There were also issues raised about the treatment of people who use

Handi Bus, both by the drivers and the people who work on dispatch. As one participant noted, “sometimes they treat us like cargo, not human beings.” Although participants felt that is was a vital service, they also believed that the City needs to continue to work with Handi Bus to ensure that the services are accessible and safe for the disabled community.

In terms of Lethbridge Public Transportation, there are currently only a few accessible buses, and it is impossible to know when they will be on what lines. Participants claimed that this is not a workable system, the entire system should be accessible or not at all. Participants stated that they did not want to take the chance that an accessible bus may be along when they need it and they cannot be expected to phone ahead and find out where it will be at a certain time. As one participant stated, “what happens if you are on an accessible bus and need to transfer – what are the chances it will be accessible to?” City transit cannot guarantee accessible buses on specific routes – which makes it an ineffective service for those who require it. Also, if you do not have an attendant with you to strap your chair in – you cannot ride city transit – bus drivers are not allowed to strap in wheel chairs. This further limits who can access the bus system. In fact the community questioned whether given all these constraints, is it realistic and effective to attempt to make the bus system accessible. Maybe more resources should go into making Handi Bus or another service more accessible and convenient?

### **Accessibility of Services and Infrastructure**

According to focus group participants, the City of Lethbridge has historically been a leader in terms of accessibility for persons with physical disabilities. They felt that this commitment appears to have waned somewhat over the last few years and they hope to see a renewed commitment and leadership from the City around issues of accessibility.

Accessibility of buildings is one thing, but other issues must also be addressed, such as sidewalks, crosswalks and other issues related to trying to get around the city when you have mobility challenges. Again participants stated that some sidewalks and crosswalks are accessible and some are not, again making getting around a challenge. There was previously a program that made new accessible lips on existing sidewalks, but the focus group participants stated that the program appears to be no longer in operation. In addition, even if the sidewalks are accessible, when snow is ploughed from the roads or shovelled from walkways, it is piled up and people in wheel chairs cannot get around. The City has ensured that the bike paths are accessible, but this does not help when you are trying to get around the city and to specific addresses.

Participants felt that many of these issues have been around for 25 years and disability advocates have been trying to make change, often to no avail. Members of the disability community realize that the city cannot do everything, but they feel the City must recognize that participation by persons with disabilities in the community is important and advocating for the necessary changes is essential. Participants felt that there needs to be a shift in thinking as a community, to realize that it is not as simple as making one accessible entrance in the back of a building or some accessible buses and sidewalks. Accessibility needs to be understood more broadly. One concrete way to do this would be to

*“It has been twenty five years and we are still saying the same things, this is frustrating for those of us who have to live with these things every day.”* Focus Group Participant

engage with the community, find out what is best for people, and draw from those with the knowledge and experience. As one participant stated “we could have told the city to save their money – a few accessible buses on select routes means nothing to making transportation accessible for us.”

### **3.6.1 Community Assets – Building on What Works**

Lethbridge has a history of being committed to ensuring that all citizens are equally able to participate in community life. For persons with disabilities this often means ensuring there are the requisite physical supports to ensure participation. According to members from this community, the City has had a strong commitment in the past to ensuring that streets, building and public transportation have been accessible. Today this commitment needs to be renewed and strengthened in order to ensure that the community is truly accessible.

### **3.6.2 Priorities Areas**

- Improved Financial Supports – many persons with disabilities are living well below the poverty line, government supports (especially AISH) must be increased to afford a measure of economic stability. Along with an increase in AISH payments, there is a need for the City to take leadership in advocating for more dignified treatment of AISH recipients. The system is currently under review, and as such it is a good time to push for reforms.
- Transportation – affordable and accessible transportation for persons with mobility challenges. Handi Bus services need to be reviewed and alternative specialized transportation services considered.
- Safe, Accessible and Affordable Housing – especially supported housing for persons who are under 65 and have severe mental and physical health challenges.
- Community Accessibility and Dignity – continue to ensure that all City facilities are accessible and that people with disabilities can participate in the community as equal members with dignity and autonomy.

## 4.0 CITY OF LETHBRIDGE RESPONSE – NEXT STEPS

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The following information is based on the information collected during the research and consultation process. What follows are suggestions for future action within six key areas: Housing, Transportation, Supports for Youth, Accessibility Issues, and Gaps in Services, and Voluntary Sector Support.

### 4.1 Housing

Based on the research, discussions with stakeholders and information collected from the citizen focus groups, the number one issue in the community of Lethbridge is housing and in particular affordable housing. There is agreement that the City of Lethbridge must continue to provide leadership in the further development of affordable housing.

The community believes that the City of Lethbridge should continue to support the Social Housing in Action Committee and continue to take a leadership role in the creation of new affordable housing stock for single people, couples and families. Especially in the area of housing for low-income families, supported housing for seniors and persons with disabilities and health challenges, and the Aboriginal community.

### 4.2 Transportation

After housing, the second most important issue for people in the community of Lethbridge is transportation. The transportation challenges that face persons with mobility issues and seniors are great in the community, and this must be a priority for the City. Without access to safe and timely transportation, a large percentage of the community is unable to fully participate as citizens and community members.

The community believes that the City of Lethbridge should review the transit system, to ensure that it has the widest coverage possible and is most accessible to those who rely on the system, especially seniors, persons with disabilities and youth.

The community also believes that the City of Lethbridge should review alternative transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities, to ensure that those that require specialized transportation services are able to access them.

### 4.3 Supports for Youth

Throughout this study, it became evident that youth in the community of Lethbridge feel isolated and disenfranchised. Upon further investigation it was made clear that much of these feelings emerge from the realization that there is not a lot of community programming for youth, especially those youth that are not drawn to organized sports and clubs. Youth feel neglected

and bored and as a result are participating in high-risk behaviours such as drug use. The youth interviewed for this study were very clear - they want more opportunities to engage with their friends and hang out without being made to feel like they are bothering someone or loitering.

The City needs to engage with youth to address these and other issues being faced by young people in the community. Especially the areas of youth addictions, and youth recreational and social opportunities.

#### **4.4 Gaps In Services**

Through out the study it became apparent that although there are many effective services available in the community, there continue to be areas where there are gaps in services, and without these services, the community is not able to access a full array of supports. This is particularly the case in terms of emerging issues and priorities, such as the continued growth in the number of new Canadians coming into the community.

The City of Lethbridge Community and Social Development in partnership with community organizations need to identify service gaps and develop community plans to address them. This is particularly important for settlement services, youth programs, and supports for the Aboriginal community.

#### **4.5 Building the Capacity of the Voluntary Sector**

The voluntary sector is faced with increasingly complex issues and as a result it is important to ensure that these organizations have the capacity to respond to social issues effectively.

The City of Lethbridge Community and Social Development should continue to play a leadership role in building the capacity of the voluntary sector. This includes support in the areas of best practices and outcomes and providing support for professional development. This may include setting aside a portion of FCSS funding for capacity building initiatives such as board development, strategic and program planning, program evaluation and the development of best practices.

#### **4.6 Accessibility of Services and Infrastructure and Coordination of Services**

Current research and the information gathered through the consultations and focus groups, reveals that the most vulnerable people in our community are the elderly, those with disabilities - especially people with severe physical and developmental disabilities - and the poor. These populations suffer from severe isolation and neglect and are often completely reliant on outside service providers and organizations to meet their basic needs. Historically these populations have not been strong self-advocates, and as such their concerns are often absent from public discourse. It is the role of any vibrant community to ensure that these marginalized community members are well cared for and have opportunities to participate in their communities.

The City of Lethbridge should renew its commitment to making Lethbridge a truly accessible community, including infrastructure, buildings and ensure that the transportation system meets the highest standards of accessibility.

The City of Lethbridge Community and Social Development should also continue to build the capacity of Community Links to ensure that services are coordinated and accessible for those people who require support, this is especially true for youth, the Aboriginal community, seniors and low-income families

And finally, the City of Lethbridge should investigate the feasibility of making City-run/funded recreational opportunities free for low-income individuals and families. This could best be achieved with some form of pass that families could qualify for and use at a variety of facilities, at a variety of times.

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