
3.4 United Way

“We firmly believe that the solution is much deeper than managing the situation. It is not just making the homeless more comfortable in their current situation - we need to alter their situation. This is our opportunity to end homelessness.”

The United Way discussions involved supporters of the organization including leaders from business, government and the community. Their message was one of pragmatic optimism, hope and a belief that homelessness could be solved.

“We respect that the committee’s mandate is to end homelessness in ten years. Why can’t it be done in five years? If we have a proven concept, and the backing of the community, we just need to roll up our sleeves and get it done!”

● A moral and civic obligation

Many felt a moral and civic obligation to end homelessness. Participants could not reconcile pride in their city as long as homelessness was allowed to exist.

“Our society is measured by how we look after the disadvantaged. I see much misery where it didn’t exist before.”

“As a city, we are judged by many things. The tourism and conference industries make decisions based on perceived safety, street friendliness. We all lose with homelessness.”

“Building healthy and sustainable buildings is my job. I think it is unconscionable that in our wealthy society not everyone can have a safe home.”

● Ideas for success

There were very clear ideas on what would make the concept of Housing First successful in Edmonton. A social marketing campaign that combined education, awareness and changing perceptions was seen as critical. Champions need to be created in the business community that could help influence government as well as share best practices. Government ‘stepping up to the plate’ is essential.

“The provincial government made a lot of this mess in the ‘80’s. They need to acknowledge their role in creating the problem. We change ministers of the crown, leaders and MLA’s. We need to have a plan that the business leaders feel is there to stay. It has to show staying power, that it won’t be out of vogue when the next government comes in.”

● Involvement

Participants also wanted to become involved and were willing to work hard to end homelessness.

“Let’s challenge our community and do the right thing. The concepts are good. We need to be bold and not be apologetic for what we are doing.”