

Toward a Poverty-Free Community

Bissell Centre Strategic Framework
JUNE 2017



Bissell Centre

DEFINITIONS

In order to ensure a common understanding of Bissell Centre's strategic framework, we have provided a short list of definitions for the following key terms:

“Community(ies)” refers to the social and geographic “eco-systems” where Bissell Centre engages in its work. It is both the neighbourhoods as well as the relationships with people and groups where we share the common unity of the equality of all people and the elimination of poverty.

“Empower” is both the respectful acknowledgement of people's capacity and agency to determine the direction of their lives, and our collaboration with them in removing barriers and supporting the realization of their aspirations.

In my first week of contact with Bissell I had more support than at anywhere else.

- BISSELL CENTRE
STARTING POINT PARTICIPANT

“People” first and foremost means “all of us” (Cree: KIYANAW). That includes individuals, families and communities. We acknowledge that people, while a generic term, also refers to the peoples in our community. This includes Indigenous Peoples who are disproportionately represented in the numbers of those affected by poverty and the many other people groups who also experience the vulnerability that poverty brings such as newcomers, women and children, and the LGBTQ+ community.

“Poverty” is defined as, “when people lack, or are denied, economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community.” (EndPoverty Edmonton Task Force definition, 2014).

“Prosperity” is the inverse of poverty; a reality where individuals, families, and communities are thriving economically, socially, and culturally, such that they are able to participate fully and meaningfully in the world around them.

FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENTS

Everything Bissell Centre does is grounded in its vision of eliminating poverty. Together, our vision and mission articulate this commitment, and outline how we work to make that vision a reality.


Our Vision

The elimination of poverty in our community

Our Mission

Working with communities, we empower people to move from poverty to cultural, social and economic prosperity.



A woman with dark curly hair tied in a bun, wearing an orange zip-up hoodie with 'Aéropostale 87' printed on it, is holding a young child. The child has curly hair and is wearing a green t-shirt with a blue and white patterned Nike swoosh. They are outdoors in front of blue wooden stairs.

It's great that these
services are available
to us and staff is
knowledgeable
and friendly.

- BISSELL CENTRE FAMILY SERVICES
PARTICIPANT

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS



For more than 100 years, Bissell Centre has played a key role in reducing poverty in Edmonton. In 2010, we endorsed the bold vision to eliminate poverty in our community.

This vision has changed how we approach our work. It allows us to stay focused on simply doing what is necessary to end poverty, as we continue to explore innovative ways to help vulnerable families and individuals. The impact of this bold approach can already be seen, for example, through our role as a partner in the work of the EndPoverty Edmonton initiative.

This Strategic Plan is meant to serve a few purposes. Approved by the Board and backed

up by annually renewed business plans, we can measure our progress towards the outcomes it articulates. It is a guide for Bissell as we continue our journey toward a city without poverty. It provides clear outcomes for us to pursue, ensuring we are focused in our work. It helps ensure we remain a transparent organization. It helps tell our story and provide inspiration to our staff, partners, and funders.

Toward a Poverty-Free Community is our commitment to make a real impact in the lives of vulnerable Edmontonians.

Our Board has representation from diverse areas of our community, from business leaders, lawyers, accountants and doctors to social workers and thought leaders. One thing we share is our common belief in the work of the Bissell Centre. Together we are united in our vision to eliminate poverty in Edmonton and to make a difference for the people we serve.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



At its core, this strategic plan is about families, individuals, and—more broadly—our community. In order to end poverty, we must be engaged at all of these levels, and each outcome

contained herein is focused on providing the supports needed by those struggling with poverty in our community.

The six key strategies in this document show an intentional focus on exploring new and different ways to help eliminate poverty in our community. As such, the strategies outlined here have been informed by the voices of people with lived experiences, from community members to our participants and staff.

Our vision of ending poverty is underscored by a commitment to continually improve. We are improving our effectiveness and efficiency by developing new insights through data analysis and program evaluation. One thing we already know through our data is that relationships are central to our organization and the work of ending poverty. For example, there is a significant correlation between homelessness and the strength of a person's support networks.

While there is still much work to do, I am confident that the strategies articulated in this plan, when combined with the dedication of our staff and partners, will truly make a difference in ending poverty.

"I think camp brought our family
closer together. We came home
from camp feeling rejuvenated.
We all experienced something new.

-BISSELL CENTRE FAMILY CAMP PARTICIPANT



OUR STRATEGY: OUR APPROACH

Toward a Poverty-Free Community contains six strategies that provide a clear path for Bissell Centre to enhance and expand our poverty elimination efforts.

The first three strategies address our programs, services and advocacy efforts, or “what we do,” and ensure that everything we do directly supports our mission and vision.

1. Bissell Centre will empower families and individuals to move out of poverty by:
 - Increased involvement in, and advocacy for, appropriate and accessible housing options and supports
 - A continued commitment to providing supports that address system gaps and barriers
 - Enhanced alignment and collaboration with partners to increase effectiveness of supports
2. Bissell Centre will engage in impactful community and economic development initiatives by:
 - Collaborative engagement with local neighbourhoods and stakeholders
 - Development of social enterprises and other community based initiatives
3. Bissell Centre will influence systemic and societal change by:
 - Ensuring the voices of people with lived experiences are heard in a meaningful, empowering manner
 - Building an organizational culture of learning and reflection, and a commitment to evidence based practice
 - Educating and raising awareness about the issues and complexities of poverty and inviting the community to actively engage in the elimination of poverty
 - Engaging with government and other institutions to influence policy and practices to best enable families and individuals to move out of poverty

OUR STRATEGY: OUR METHOD

The following three strategies refer to how we do what we do, and are focused on ensuring Bissell Centre achieves the highest standards of operational excellence.

Although we are working towards a day where Bissell Centre is no longer required, the elimination of poverty in our community will be realized more quickly if our efforts are coordinated by a robust organization.

4. Bissell Centre will engage in resource development to ensure its sustainability and to support the growth required to meet its vision and mission:
 - Raising funds to benefit the people we serve
 - Raising awareness about Bissell Centre and the impact of its work in the community
 - Ensuring that donors have positive experiences investing in our work
 - Ensuring equal opportunity for all employees
 - Ensuring all employees understand their role and their relevance to advancing our mission and vision
 - Providing meaningful opportunities for professional development
 - Ensuring a balance of support and accountability
 - Providing competitive compensation for Bissell Centre staff
5. Bissell Centre will establish itself as an employer of choice in Edmonton through:
 - Embedding a culture of employee engagement, celebration and empowerment
 - Establishing clear and consistent internal communications systems
6. Bissell Centre will develop a strategy for sustained growth through:
 - Long-term planning for effective risk management, infrastructure and administrative capacity required to achieve our mission strategies
 - Continued commitment to governance excellence

RIVERBANKS

- All initiatives and efforts will **align with Bissell Centre's foundational statements.**
- Bissell Centre will only engage in service delivery or community development initiatives that can reasonably be demonstrated to **move families or individuals out of poverty.**
- Bissell Centre will **always engage in partnership or coordination with others** when considering new service delivery and community development activities.
- Bissell Centre will not duplicate services except where capacity is lacking and **need is demonstrated.**
- Bissell Centre will only engage in social enterprise initiatives that are, or will become, self-sustaining and **generate social and/or economic benefit to the community.**
- In order to remain **focused on providing high quality housing supports**, Bissell Centre will not own residential apartment buildings.¹
- Bissell Centre will explore opportunities to support the implementation of the **spirit, intent and content of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's** findings.
- Bissell Centre will **align its work with the efforts of EndPoverty Edmonton**

¹Ownership of private residences establishes a conflict of interest as Bissell Centre would then function as both the landlord and advocate. Further to this, aging housing stock becomes increasingly expensive to maintain, forcing a shift in focus and resources from operational supports to capital upgrades.

Neither foundational statements nor outcomes, this list of “Riverbanks” provides a set of ground rules that will guide the work of Bissell Centre as we position the organization for the future. However, riverbanks are not immovable, and are changed by the flow of the water over time. We see our ‘riverbanks’ shifting as they are influenced by the work we do.

Like the banks of a river that guide and direct the flowing water, these statements set clear boundaries for Bissell to operate within and are necessary to ensure our programming and services are streamlined, focused, and intentional.

A COMMUNITY WITHOUT POVERTY

How will we know when we have succeeded in eliminating poverty? What exactly does a poverty free community look like?

Our commitment is to end poverty in our community. Impossible? Can't be done? That is the same things that were said to Edison and the Wright brothers. Where would we be today if they believed those things could not be accomplished? When we believe something is impossible, we act as if that is true and as a result we make it true – it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, if we believe something is possible, we begin to take actions that align with that belief, and that's when interesting things begin to happen – just ask the 6,000 people that have found homes in Edmonton through the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

We believe that the elimination of poverty cannot be accomplished by a single individual or group; it will take a commitment from the entire community. Toward a Poverty-Free Community is not simply confirmation of what we hope to accomplish, but also an invitation to join us in our work to eliminate poverty in our community.

The five criteria that Bissell Centre believes define a community without poverty are as follows:

1. Families and individuals have sustainable livelihoods, secure housing, and can meet their basic daily needs.
2. Families and individuals are fully engaged in their community because of strong support networks, a sense of safety, and improved physical and mental health.
3. Families and individuals have hope for the future.
4. Individuals have access to the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential and participate equally within in the community.
5. Diversity is celebrated in a spirit of mutual respect and dignity.



OUR STORIES

For thousands of years people have been drawn together along the shores of the North Saskatchewan River. Amiskwaciy Waskahikan—a Cree term used to describe the area now known as Edmonton—was **originally an important meeting place for Indigenous people who travelled here** to live, hunt, and trade. Eventually, the river paved the way for Canada's fur trade, and the founding of Fort Edmonton brought a new wave of settlers to the area. By 1871, the growing settlement of Edmonton was incorporated as a village.

Lured by the prospect of fertile farmlands and abundant resources, more and more people flocked to our burgeoning town. To help meet the needs of these newcomers, **Methodist Reverend William and Florence Pike began Bissell Centre**, starting a mission out of a small storefront in downtown Edmonton. Originally, the mission offered Sunday school, social groups and church services to newly arrived Ukrainian Canadians.

In the more than 100 years since then, Bissell Centre has become a leading social value organization in Edmonton. We now have more than 20 different programs aimed at helping families and individuals move from poverty to cultural, economic and social prosperity.

While these services have changed over time, one constant has remained—**serving the less fortunate of Edmonton's inner city**. Today, our programs are about more than just addressing symptoms of poverty. At Bissell Centre, our vision is to permanently end poverty in Edmonton.

We know that poverty as experienced by diverse Edmontonians—from First Nations to newcomers—is complex. So when we look at ending poverty, we think in terms of how the person's whole life will change—personally, not just societally. We think about how we are changing the stories of our participants' lives.

It is these stories—of struggle, hope, transformation and success, that are at the center of all our work.

Making sure the story of poverty in Edmonton has an ending will require more than just programming and services. Like most social change, it **can only happen when the whole community cares enough to be a meaningful part of the change.**

This understanding drives our emphasis on working collaboratively, not just with other social services agencies, but also as part of community wide initiatives like EndPoverty Edmonton.

There is a word
in Cree, *kîyânaw*,
which means
“for all of us”.

Our work is also grounded in the idea of reconciliation with indigenous Edmontonians. The story of our city is rooted in Aboriginal history, but the legacy of colonialism and the impact of residential schools mean that a disproportionate number of indigenous Edmontonians are affected by poverty. **Building a city where all can enjoy prosperity, equity and opportunity** requires a particular emphasis on reconciling the past injustices faced by our Aboriginal citizens.

Interwoven through Bissell Centre's story is this: **we believe real change is possible**. This belief is affirmed by our story, because we have seen time and time again the bold and visionary goals laid out by our forbearers that have become reality. When Ukrainian immigrants needed support, Bissell Centre helped; when the amendments to the Indian Act were identified as necessary, Bissell Centre facilitated; when Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness was created as a response, in part, to the 2008 tent city outside of Bissell Centre's back door, Bissell Centre participated; and **day after day, we see poverty eliminated in the lives of the people that we support**.

That is why this document isn't only an outline of how we intend to go about our work, it is more importantly a call to action, an invitation to join together and to be remembered as the generation that made the impossible, possible.

OUR VALUES

Our values are reflected in all aspects of our work and within the culture of Bissell Centre. They are our commitment to ensuring our participants and our employees are involved with an organization that puts people first.

Respect

To recognize the value and dignity of all people including their values, rights, beliefs and property.

Compassion

To genuinely care about the wellbeing of others in a non-judgmental manner that is motivated by a desire to help.

Collaboration

To commit to working with others to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

Integrity

To base all actions on the principles of honesty and trustworthiness.

Diversity

To accept and respect everyone, recognizing and celebrating our individual differences and understanding that each person is unique.

Inclusion

To create an environment where all feel welcome.

Accountability

To be good stewards and accept responsibility for our actions and decisions as individuals and as an organization.

Empowerment

To respect people's capacity and ability to determine the direction of their lives and to help them remove barriers and reach toward their goals.

The staff at Bissell treat me like family. They're gentle and discreet. They've saved my life over and over again. I feel safe here.

- BISSELL CENTRE DROP-IN PARTICIPANT



It's about the whole community
participating together
to end poverty.

- BISSELL CENTRE STAFF



KEY PRACTICE PHILOSOPHIES

The work of Bissell Centre is underscored by the following key philosophies. These represent not only the leading practices of the human services sector, but are a commitment to ensuring our participants are served by accessible, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate programs. Our key practice philosophies are:

- 1. Cultural Competence and Representation**—Bissell Centre will seek to be knowledgeable about and representative of the communities and cultures within which it serves.
- 2. Trauma Informed Practice**—Bissell Centre acknowledges that trauma is pervasive among its participants. Trauma includes a variety of experiences that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. It can be the result of a single incident or repetitive events and may be developmental, intergenerational and historical. Bissell Centre will provide services in a manner that is consistent with the principles of trauma-informed practice including safety, trust, choice and control, and compassion.¹
- 3. Harm Reduction**—Harm reduction aims to keep people safe and minimize death, disease, and injury from high risk behaviour, especially psychoactive substance use. Harm reduction recognizes that high risk behavior may continue despite individual knowledge about risks.²

A harm reduction approach involves a range of support services and strategies to enhance the knowledge, skills, resources, and supports for individuals, families and communities to be safer and healthier. Bissell Centre will practice harm reduction in a manner that is consistent with the diverse demographic it serves.
- 4. Anti-Oppressive Practice**—Families and individuals are often trapped in poverty due to systemic and social structures that place them at a disadvantage. Bissell Centre will be sensitive to the social and systemic imbalances experienced by its participants and will promote equality in our interactions.
- 5. Client Centred Services**—Bissell Centre will always strive to put the family or individual at the centre of all that it does. This means the people we support will determine the appropriate path forward for themselves and as we support them to achieve their goals, we will consider their needs and strengths holistically.
- 6. Strength Based Approach**—All communities, families, and individuals have strengths and assets from which they can draw to move out of poverty. In addition to removing barriers to prosperity and equality, Bissell Centre will seek to affirm and apply people's strengths and assets through their supports.
- 7. Restorative Justice**—In many ways, our justice system has been built on the principles of punitive consequences—one must “pay their debt to society.” This approach can ignore the victim and the larger affected community as the sole focus is on the one who caused harm. Restorative justice strives to consider the wellbeing of the victim, and the larger community, repairing harm and ideally restoring relationships and wellbeing for all parties. Bissell Centre will support the families and individuals it serves in a manner consistent with the values of restorative justice.
- 8. Evidence based practice**—Decisions about how to support people in poverty are often based on people's beliefs, values and best guesses. Evidence based practice acknowledges the deficiencies this can create in providing effective supports for families and individuals. Rather, it carefully considers a range of information based on robust research and analysis, participant feedback, and demonstrated outcomes.
- 9. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Informed Practice**—Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a disorder that develops when alcohol passes into a fetus' blood stream in utero. FASD affects 1% of the population and each person affected presents differently. Bissell Centre will be informed as to the nature of FASD and will try to help individuals with an FASD successfully integrate into the community.

¹ http://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf, accessed February 16, 2017

² <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/substance-use-harm-reduction>, accessed January 25, 2017

FINAL NOTES

Toward a Poverty-Free Community is a strategic framework that will guide Bissell Centre's efforts to address the inequities present in our society and ensure that every Edmontonian has an equal opportunity to thrive, prosper and contribute to their community.

It is underscored by clear strategies that support our vision of a city without poverty, and is grounded in the experiences and stories of the people we serve.

We invite you to join us in our mission to empower people to move from poverty to cultural, social and economic prosperity.





ORIGINAL ARTWORK BY
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