

Calgary Chamber of Volunteer Organizations AGM
June 25, 2012, Calgary, Alberta
Honourable Dave Hancock

Thank you for the introduction

And thank you so much for the invitation to speak with you this afternoon.

It is an honour to be in the same room with so many people who have dedicated their lives to helping others.

Volunteers are the heartbeat of Alberta's communities.

Your work is an incredible example of the positive difference we can make in the lives of others, when we come together to achieve a common purpose.

I commend the Calgary Chamber of Volunteer Organizations for your dedication and partnership in building strong, healthy communities...

...and for your outstanding leadership in promoting and strengthening the non-profit and voluntary sector.

It's often said, the measure of a society is how we treat our most vulnerable.

Our government is pleased to walk beside you, and with you in service to our fellow citizens.

I truly believe that we share a vision for our province where every child grows up in a nurturing home and vibrant community...where every individual has the opportunity to participate fully in Alberta's economy, communities and cultural life.

And it starts with our children.

And with children as our priority, it is important for us to focus on the collaborative opportunities that we have to help achieve better outcomes for Albertans.

GOA PRIORITIES

Albertans want to look outward and build bridges to one another, amongst our communities and with neighbours.

And the Premier has outlined the government's priorities to achieve the results Albertans expect.

These include:

- Investing in Families and Communities,
- Securing Alberta's Economic Future and
- Advancing World-leading Resource Stewardship.

PREMIER COMMITMENT

The first thing Premier Redford asked me to do when she took office, was to begin working with other Ministers and community partners to develop a social policy framework for Alberta.

When we help our most vulnerable citizens, we build stronger communities and a stronger Alberta.

And when Albertans are successful, they can give back to the community and provide for their families.

And like every province, Alberta faces some complex social challenges...

... in areas like health and unemployment, addictions, education, housing and child care.

To successfully address these challenges, we need to take a collaborative approach...

...both within and outside government.

That is where important community relationships can play an important role.

COLLABORATION

Two outstanding examples of collaboration and community solutions are

Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness and the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

The homelessness plan illustrates clearly how local partnerships with communities – and a focus on wraparound services – produces positive outcomes for Albertans.

Bold in its vision and pragmatic in its approach –the plan is based on a Housing First model that is proving successful in major North American cities.

The approach is straightforward.

First, help homeless people find a permanent and stable place to call home.

Second, once housed, provide the supports that people need to address the underlying causes of their homelessness.

This is a radical shift from managing homelessness through shelters and other temporary means, to creating a way for people to end their homelessness. So far, almost 6,000 formerly homeless people have a permanent place to live and 80 per cent have maintained housing.

As their quality of life improves, our communities are strengthened.

Another example is the Alberta Mentoring Partnership which was formed 4 years ago.

The partnership brings together youth, community mentoring agencies and government to increase mentoring opportunities for children and youth.

The partnership's vision is that every child or youth who needs a mentor has access to one.

When young people have supportive adults in their lives, they are less likely to become involved with drugs or crime and more likely to have success in school, which helps to create safer and stronger communities.

Mentoring agencies and partners are doing exceptional work in communities throughout the province.

Over the Alberta Mentoring Partnership's first three years, we saw a 21% increase in the number of children being mentored through Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies across the province, with similar success stories across the province.

There are now 91 partnering organizations in the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

These include non-profit organizations involved directly in mentoring, as well as organizations that are supporting mentoring in their communities.

HUMAN SERVICES

Successful initiatives like the plan to end homelessness and the mentoring partnership inspired the creation of the Human Services ministry – in October 2011.

Under Human Services, we've brought together the many programs and supports that ensure children and their families are supported to be resilient and strong...

... services help people to find safe, healthy and fair jobs...

...and supports for persons with disabilities to help them participate fully in their community and reach their potential.

As a government, we recognize the deep and complex connections between social challenges that affect Albertans.

...we acknowledge that we are 'better together' in providing support to vulnerable Albertans...

and...we embrace the challenge to better align and co-ordinate our services...

... to make it easier for Albertans to access all the help they need in one stop.

Ultimately, Human Services is dedicated to creating a healthier Alberta where everyone has the opportunity to live in dignity and contribute to our society.

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

And this brings us full circle back to the Social Policy Framework for Alberta.

A couple of weeks ago, we launched the public engagement for the social policy framework - *Speak. Share. Thrive.*

The intent is to guide the alignment and potential redesign of social policy and programs to achieve better outcomes for children, families, individuals and communities.

This framework needs to reflect our shared values as Albertans, and guide collective efforts to support all Albertans to attain a high quality of life –

This means all Albertans have access to the programs and services they need, when they need them.

The framework will focus on the social system that serves disadvantaged Albertans while considering how the whole system works to serve its citizens.

But the fact is that ALL Albertans share the benefits when people can participate as full members of our society.

We are building a foundation for governments, communities, non-profit organizations and individuals to make decisions about the relevance and effectiveness of social policies and programs for Albertans.

It will lay the foundation for an accessible system that produces results – both for the Albertans who use it and for those who share in the benefits of a stronger society.

This policy work is currently in progress and we expect to begin turning it into action this year.

We have engaged with many in your sector and community leaders in some early discussions and now are expanding the discussion to all Albertans to seek their input.

And I emphasize – all Albertans - including the business community, social agencies, service groups, church groups, municipalities and town councils – and youth.

I do caution you this is not to be another government report and this is not the government's social policy framework – this has to be driven by the community, its need and its capacity.

It is not about doing more or downloading, it is about doing better for Albertans.

The success of this work depends on your participation - your thoughts, ideas and local conversations.

You can learn more at www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca

To have your say:

- Take the online survey
- Read and edit the Wiki
- Blog
- Download the discussion kit and host your own community conversation
- Attend a local session hosted in community.

The social policy framework is also the foundation for the Premier's commitment to eliminate child poverty and to adopt a poverty reduction strategy.

Research and common sense tell us that people who live in poverty experience a greater degree of health and life challenges.

The reality is—if we want to improve the overall health of Albertans, we must ensure a good level of support to our most disadvantaged citizens.

This means giving people the support and resources they need to make profound life changes.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the Human Services ministry is a signal that we want to work differently and better align services and supports for Albertans.

We will continue to bring programs and services together to contribute positively to the well-being of Albertans.

We can set a new direction for improved access to the economy, better health for disadvantaged people, and provide a building block for stronger families and safer communities.

I believe that if we can help improve the life of an individual, then our families become stronger.

In the throne speech, we stated our intention clearly—we are investing in families and communities, because our future rests in their hands.

Through the social policy engagement, our government is taking a fresh approach to find better solutions.

We look forward to your participation - your communities' contributions – to make a difference.

Please, take the time to learn, visit the website, get engaged and be inspired by new approaches and ways to improve the lives of Albertans and our communities.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak with all of you today...

...and for your continued commitment to helping others.

Your helping hands lift people up, build trust and inspire hope.

We will continue to join with you as partners – to help create positive change in Alberta, and shape an even brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you.