

## **One year later, the economic meltdown still impacts Calgarians' lives, says new report**

**FOR SEPTEMBER 15, 2009 RELEASE**

CALGARY, AB, August 31, 2009—The recession has impacted Calgarians much more deeply than is portrayed by the media and government leaders, according to a new report released by a group of Calgary organizations.

*Dashed Dreams, New Realities: Calgarians Talk Frankly about the Impact of the Economic Downturn* draws on the findings from ten focus groups organized by the Alberta Global Forum, Calgary Counselling Centre, The Calgary Foundation, Canada West Foundation and the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

Over a hundred people representing a cross section of ages, incomes, occupations and ethnicity contributed observations on how the recession has impacted Calgarians.

“What was most striking about the focus groups,” says Kelly Ernst, Senior Program Director with the Sheldon Chumir Foundation, “was that no one seems to have escaped the impact of the economic meltdown.”

Five key themes emerged from the focus groups and are reflected in the report:

- (1) Reduced employment and/or reduced income is a major concern for many Calgarians, especially middle and low income earners:
  - The downturn has created an older cohort of people in a double bind that includes loss of investments and potential income security prior to retirement-age.
- (2) The safety net designed for times of need was shredded before the downturn and has left many Calgarians with few resources available to them and little idea of how to navigate a patchwork of fragmented social services provided by governments and non-profit agencies.
  - The disconnection between public demand for low taxes and a higher standard of services may prove especially problematic if budget cuts lead to corresponding service cuts.
- (3) The lack of affordable housing in Calgary is a serious concern, even to those not personally at risk of losing their housing. An increase in homelessness has

- resulted from the sustained economic downturn.
- (4) The economic meltdown has had some upsides, including a better labour market for social service agencies to attract and retain staff, a rise in entrepreneurship amongst Calgarians looking for ways to make ends meet, and more gratitude for what people already have in their lives.
- (5) Participants noted several shifts in societal values:
- Two views of Calgary emerged: those least affected by the downturn view their city as a generous place; by contrast, those most affected by the downturn see Calgary as an uncaring, harsh place to live.
  - The slide from boom to bust has given Calgarians a chance to reflect on what is really important to them. Participants expressed a desire for more community, more connection with their neighbours and more kindness.

Based on the impact of the economic meltdown, many focus group participants suggested that public policy consultations are required to look for long-term solutions focused on: greater community development, reconnecting taxation policies to service need, and developing realistic plans for well-paced economic development that supports a large and prosperous middle class. A series of public forums to address these issues will take place in Fall 2009/Winter 2010.

**The report is EMBARGOED until 12:01 AM, September 15, 2009.**

Download a copy of *Dashed Dreams, New Realities: Calgarians Talk Frankly about the Impact of the Economic Downturn* [here](#), or cut and paste the following link into your browser: <http://www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca/download/> and then log on:

Username: chumir

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**Press Conference:**

Kelly Ernst, PhD, Senior Program Director with the Sheldon Chumir Foundation, will address the media at the report release press conference:

WHEN: 11:15 AM, September 15, 2009

WHERE: Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Peter Bawden Room  
100 - 6 Avenue SW, Calgary

For more information:

Kelly Ernst

403-244-6666

[kernst@chumirethicsfoundation.ca](mailto:kernst@chumirethicsfoundation.ca)