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SUMMER 2025



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How Zita Cobb revitalized  
Fogo Island



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ANNA GRODZKA SERVED AS POLAND'S FIRST OPENLY TRANS MP. SHE CONTINUES TO INSPIRE POLAND'S LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY TO FOLLOW THEIR "TRUE PATHS".



PHOTO: JOANNE PEARCE



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# Message from the CEO

## Impact for Generations

**SUMMER IS AN EXCITING TIME** at Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) as we complete our annual financial audit and share with our community the remarkable work we accomplished together in 2024.

Last year was an exceptional one for ECF — demonstrating what's possible when individuals, families, organizations, businesses and partners unite to strengthen our community.

I'm pleased to report that ECF's assets under management grew to \$899 million, allowing us to distribute \$35.5 million to 850 charitable organizations and 551 students across Edmonton and beyond. We established 115 new funds, bringing our total to 1,751 — each representing the trust placed in us by donors who share a vision of long-term, sustainable impact. Through prudent stewardship, our return on investments was 14.89 per cent compared to 7.02 per cent in 2023, ensuring your generosity continues to benefit future generations.

While we are thrilled by our financial results, what really matters are the actions we take and the impact we have because of the funds that have been entrusted to us.

This summer marks the one-year anniversary of the Jasper wildfires. ECF quickly activated the Northern Alberta Resiliency Fund, raising \$260,000 for long-term recovery. By matching \$100,000 in contributions, ECF significantly boosted donor support to aid those affected.

We are also proud to share that over 45 organizations are receiving approximately \$2.3 million in community grants already this year for a variety of initiatives.

For example, a \$34,500 grant is helping Latitude 53 renovate its gallery to create a more functional and inspiring home for Edmonton's contemporary art community. This revitalized space will better serve artists, audiences and staff, while securing a long-term future for one of our city's most dynamic creative hubs.



Photo: Aaron Pedersen

At ABC Head Start Society, \$80,000 will help retrofit its Northgate Centre Classroom Space. This transformation will create an inclusive, welcoming environment for children and families who benefit from early learning opportunities and wraparound support.

Our collective efforts over the past year demonstrate the power of collaboration and the profound impact we can achieve together. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to making Edmonton a place where everyone can thrive.

**Tina Thomas**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Together, we plan for tomorrow



Megan Dart and  
Murray Utas from  
Fringe Theatre  
Adventures

**All charitable organizations need long-term financial support to continue delivering on their mission. This goal can feel out of reach — but it doesn't have to be.**

Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) Endowment Sustainability Program helps staff and board members develop their organization's endowment and giving plan. Put more tools in your creative toolbox and expand your fund development possibilities.

**THROUGH TRAINING AND COACHING, YOU WILL:**

- Develop donor relationships
- Increase funding opportunities
- Learn about tax strategies and types of giving
- Level up their donor communications
- Ensure their organization is supported for generations

**Fringe Theatre Adventures is one of many beloved organizations planning for the long-term with ECF's help.**



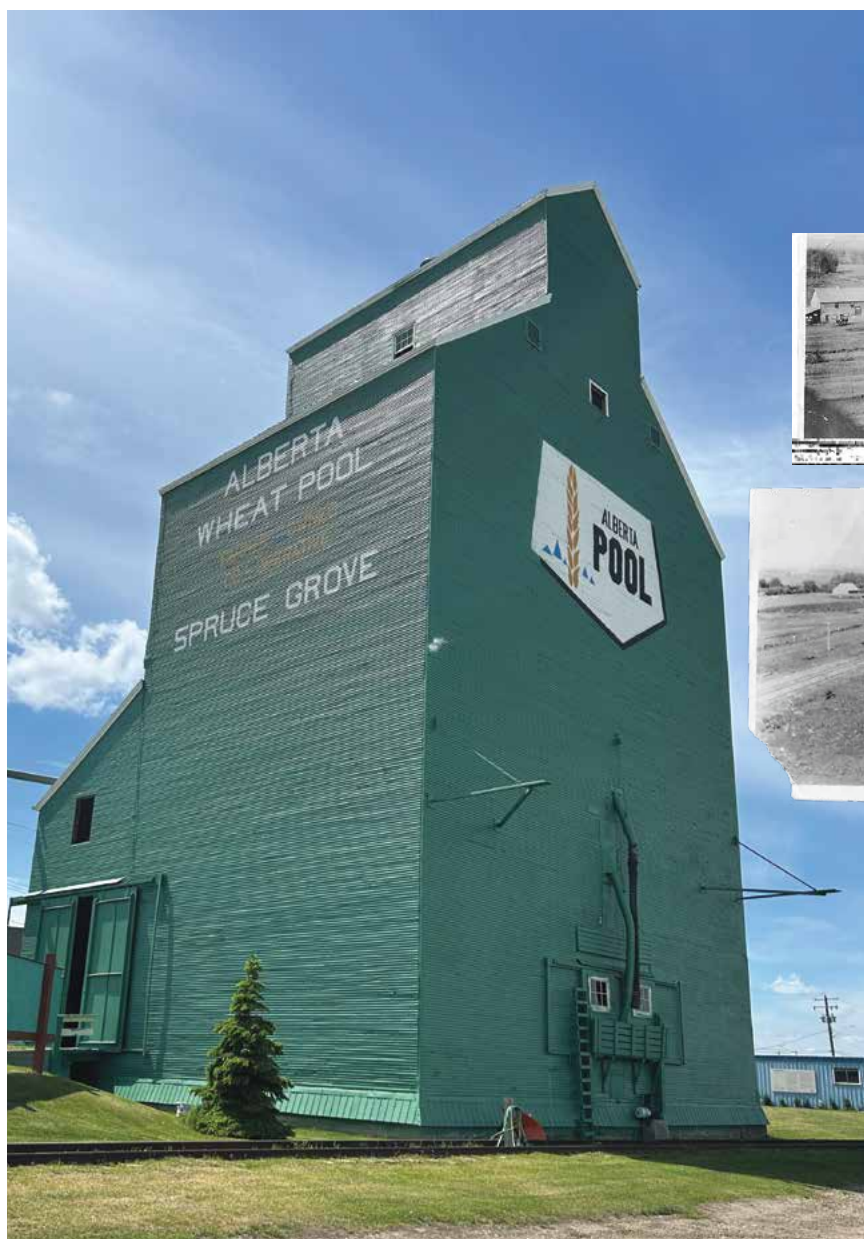
Learn more about  
**ECF's Endowment  
Sustainability Program.**



# Elevating Alberta's prairie past

Spruce Grove and District Agricultural Society celebrates and protects the region's history

By LISA OSTROWSKI



THE  
ALBERTA  
WHEAT  
POOL

**A PROUD REMINDER** of the region's agricultural heritage, the Spruce Grove Grain Elevator has stood tall over the prairie community since 1958. It was once an important centre of commerce for the region, bustling with activity during the harvest season and spurring development of businesses and transportation lines in the area.

"Spruce Grove was really started because of the elevator," explains Sharon Acheson, a volunteer with the Spruce Grove and District Agricultural Society. "People started to come there to deliver their grain, and then businesses built up around there, and that's really how Spruce Grove started was all the business that started to collect from grain elevators."

But like many historic grain elevators in the province, the elevator is no longer used for its original purpose. In 1995, it ceased operations as a traditional grain elevator, and was slated to be demolished. That's when the Spruce Grove and District Agricultural Society stepped in to purchase the building for one dollar from the Alberta Wheat Pool. A few years later, they purchased the land surrounding the building from CN for \$35,000. "The organization thought at the time that it would be a good place to preserve local agricultural history," says Acheson.

In 2020, the Government of Alberta designated the site as a provincial historic resource, in recognition of its role in Alberta's past. "Over the years the Ag Society has maintained it, repainting about every five years just to preserve the wooden siding," Acheson says, adding that repairs to the elevator were primarily done by volunteers.

Over time however, the effects of weather on the building began to be more noticeable and the Ag Society requested an assessment by Alberta Historic Resources in 2023.

That assessment found they needed to replace some of the siding, the roof needed fixing and the windows needed extensive repairs. Those repairs would require them to replicate the original windows using the same glass and putty to preserve the historic integrity of the elevator. But this wasn't the biggest issue.

"When we actually got into examining the elevator really closely, we found out that the foundation of the building — the concrete foundation — was crumbling. So it ended up being a very big project."

With costs for the project estimated to run over \$150,000, the volunteer-run society faced a difficult reality. The elevator, which had stood watch over Spruce Grove for more than half a century, was at risk.

But volunteers like Acheson were determined to protect the historic building.

"Grain elevators were all over the prairies at one time, and they're falling down, they're burning, there just aren't that many left," she says, adding that she estimates there are around 100 remaining across the province. ➤



Three grain elevators in Spruce Grove, 1965



Gillespie grain elevator







Brackman & Kerr (left), and Gillespie elevators (right)



Gillespie grain elevator with agent Scotty Robertson



"I really feel like we need to protect the ones that are left. It represents our agricultural history here."

Thanks in part to a \$50,000 Community Grant from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), along with a provincial grant for aging facilities, the Ag Society raised the necessary funds to repair the building's foundation, paint the wooden structure and begin repairs to the windows.

"We believe that a community's health and identity are deeply rooted in its connection to the past," says Melisa Zapisocky, ECF's Grants Associate. "Projects like the preservation of the Spruce Grove Grain Elevator don't just protect historic structures — they safeguard the stories, values and experiences that shape who we are."

Today, the bold green elevator continues to stand proud as the heart of the Spruce Grove and District Historic Agricultural Grounds, and is open to the public during the society's office hours. Tours of the elevator, which is still in its original working condition, are provided from April to October.

"It's in very good, original shape inside, and it's beautiful," says Acheson.

Looking back over the restoration project, as well as the fundraising process, Acheson can hardly believe what the society has been able to accomplish within just a short few years.

"At first, the thought of managing all that work was overwhelming, but once we started to see some grants and funding coming in, we realized we could actually do it," she says.

"It's quite wonderful to think that when you work together and get other people involved that you can accomplish things like that." *ecf*



Imagesupplied

Josiah Maxfield, vocalist

# BRIDGING THE GAP

## Making choral music accessible

By **RENATO PAGNANI**



Britney Huynh, conductor

**IN THE WORLD** of choral music, the leap from academic training to a professional career can feel like crossing a vast canyon without a bridge — unless you're in Edmonton. Here, Pro Coro Canada has constructed a pathway that helps transform promising young talents into polished professionals through its emerging artists program. While aspiring choral musicians can often find themselves in a post-graduation limbo, Edmonton's only professional choir offers a unique — and rare — opportunity to gain invaluable hands-on experience to help artists fulfill their potential, thanks to grant funding from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF).

Founded in 1980 by conductor Michel Marc Gervais after studying with legendary choral conductor Eric Ericson in Stockholm, Pro Coro Canada was created to establish a professional ensemble in Edmonton based on Swedish choral culture. Since its inception, the choir has performed on stages including the Toronto International Choral Festival, toured the country numerous times and commissioned close to 100 new works, the majority by Canadian composers. For the last decade, the choir has been led by conductor Michael Zaugg, in his own words, a "passionate pedagogue", who loves working not only with choirs but also up-and-coming choral artists.

Composer Jason Noble, now a professor of instrumental and electroacoustic composition at the Université de Moncton, describes his time in the program as "extremely empowering and one of the most satisfying artistic experiences" of his career. His experimental and thought-provoking piece *Furiouser & Spuriouser*, written during the choir's residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2018, has become his most-performed work.

"The program ... gave me the luxury of immersing myself in composing without distractions," Noble explains. "Working directly with singers during the composition process allowed me to be both adventurous and practical in my work. It's rare to find a professional choir that supports emerging composers and encourages exploration of new music the way Pro Coro Canada does." >



What sets the emerging artists program apart is its comprehensive approach. Participants receive one-on-one mentorship from professional musicians and have their performances recorded, helping them build portfolios for future opportunities. Vocalist Josiah Maxfield, another one of Pro Coro Canada's emerging artists, remarked that being treated as a professional while still learning creates an environment where emerging artists can rise to challenges with proper support.

For conductor Britney Huynh, the program provided invaluable mentorship — after singing with Pro Coro Canada a few times, Zaugg encouraged Huynh to apply to the emerging artists program, which she took part in last year. She was invited to conduct with the Grande Prairie Boys Choir and Pro Coro Canada in February of 2024. The comprehensive experience included private lessons with Zaugg, coaching on conducting techniques and post-concert debriefing sessions that helped refine her skills.

The program also addresses a critical gap in the artistic ecosystem. “Between post-secondary education and professional careers, there's often nothing,” explains Zaugg. “Our program provides that stepping stone, giving young artists the experience and feedback they need to succeed professionally.”

Beyond individual development, the program also contributes to Edmonton's reputation as an arts hub. “People say, ‘Oh, look what they do in Edmonton!’” Zaugg exclaims with enthusiasm.

The program's commitment to contemporary themes keeps choral music relevant in today's world. *Furiouser & Spuriouser*, which will be performed at Pro Coro Canada's June 7 concert at the Westbury Theatre, addresses modern concerns about social media and the internet. The piece — the title of which is a nod to the famous line in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, “Curiouser and curiouser!” — views the internet as Wonderland, full of both wonders and horrors, found at the bottom of the rabbit hole. This engagement with current issues reflects Pro Coro Canada's philosophy that art must respond to contemporary challenges.



Britney Huynh in concert with tenors and basses from Pro Coro Canada featuring the Grande Prairie Boys Choir and Edmonton Swiss Men's Choir

As Pro Coro Canada continues to nurture the next generation of choral music talent, the program works to ensure the vitality of choral music for the future. By providing access to professional training, mentorship and performance opportunities, the emerging artists program creates a sustainable pathway for artistic development in Edmonton and beyond, thanks in part to ECF's continued support.

“Pro Coro Canada has put in a lot of work to create and grow their own endowment funds at ECF that will support their work for years to come,” Matt Mandrusiak, ECF's Manager, Philanthropy says. “They have been able to engage donors and patrons to get behind their long-term success and sustainability and have also had other ECF fund holders supporting their work with additional grants.”

Zaugg emphasizes how this funding helps the organization offer the program for free to participants, removing the financial barrier often associated with programs like this and making world-class instruction more accessible.

“I don't know of many other professional choirs in North America, if any, that offer a program like this for free. It's the support of ECF that makes this all possible.”

For aspiring participants, Noble and Huynh enthusiastically recommend the emerging artists program. “It's such a great opportunity to make connections, learn from people like Michael Zaugg and work with professional vocalists,” says Huynh. “Whatever you learn from this experience, you'll take to the rest of your career.” *ecf*



# EMPOWERING TECHNOLOGY



Elizabeth Kaleta

## Keeping people with disabilities connected through digital literacy

By **CAITLIN HART**  
Photos **ERIC BELIVEAU**



**TODAY, MANY OF US** take our ability to navigate technology for granted. From banking and shopping to talking to friends and family, many of us are using technology for these everyday activities. Without digital skills, individuals can become isolated and disempowered.

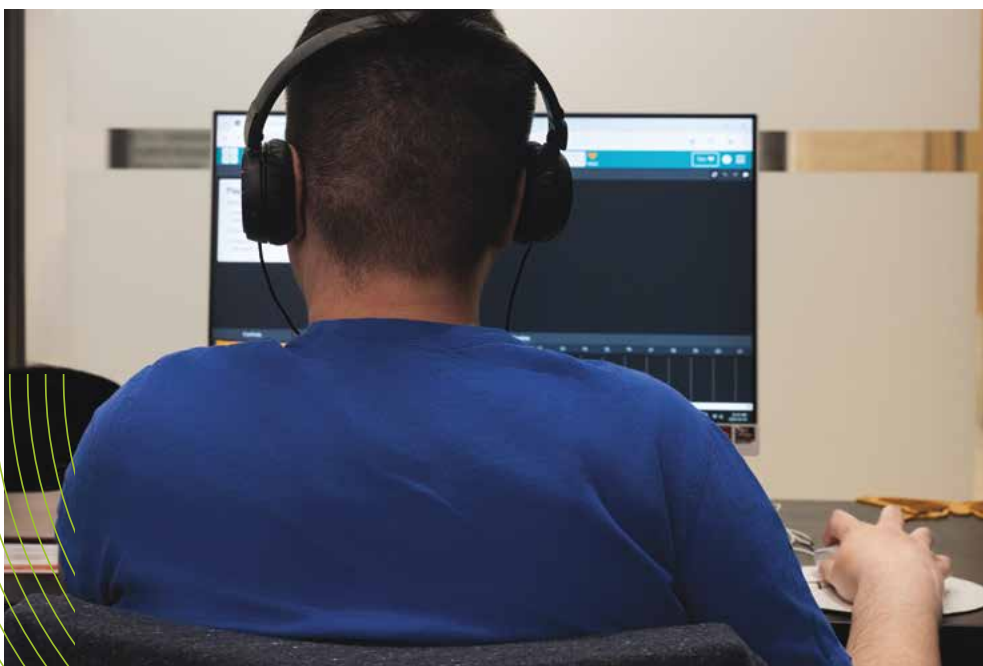
“As people who don’t live with any kind of physical or mental disabilities, we don’t realize how often disability can lead to isolation,” says Elizabeth Kaleta, Director of Social Inclusion and Support Services at Cerebral Palsy (CP) Alberta.

In 2010, after realizing the rapidly changing technologies were leaving people behind, CP Alberta started offering the ComputAbilities program to help people with disabilities feel connected in an increasingly digital world.

Held weekly over three months, the course is offered four times a year — and many people currently enrolled in ComputAbilities have been taking the classes for years, including Greg Liknes and Chris Cli.

Over the last 15 years, the program has evolved, although most of the basics have remained the same: teaching seniors and people with disabilities to do everything from typing to coding, and using programs like Microsoft Word and Google Maps. As social media became more popular, they added instruction on using these platforms.

As the program has grown, so too has the focus on digital safety. Seniors in particular can be vulnerable to online scams. Every component of what ComputAbilities teaches — from applying for jobs to online banking to ►



social media — includes education about potential scams and risks in using this technology.

More recently, they've introduced a tablet course, making technology even more accessible. Many assistive tools for people with disabilities rely on tablets.

But all the hardware required to teach these classes can become obsolete quickly and upgrading is expensive. That's where Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) comes in. By providing CP Alberta with a \$20,000 grant, ECF helped the organization upgrade their computers and tablets.

"The effectiveness of programs like ComputAbilities depends entirely on being able to provide learning on up-to-date technology," says Cassandra Lundell, ECF's Manager, Grants. "This grant is ensuring that CP Alberta's clients are staying at the head of the curve in a time when technology is changing so fast. We're proud to support initiatives that remove barriers and create more opportunities for inclusion through digital literacy."

While the program is run by CP Alberta,

ComputAbilities serves people with all kinds of disabilities who might need help using technology. Seniors who may not live with a disability but still struggle with technology enrol in the class, too. The goal is to foster independence, connection and confidence with digital skills.

"I enjoy it, and the volunteers are nice," says Liknes. "I get to choose what I'm learning about."

For Liknes, the class gives him something to do and a reason to get out of the house. Cli says the class has taught him helpful tricks like keyboard shortcuts and has connected him with friendly, helpful volunteers like Kryssy Black, who has volunteered with CP Alberta for eight years. She sits with different participants in the program and lends a hand navigating to different websites and programs, or troubleshooting and offering a soothing word when something goes wrong.

Because ultimately, while the participants come in every Friday to gain computer skills, the program builds community.

"I like seeing you every week," Black tells Cli, who nods. "Yeah, me too." *ecf*

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**"As people who don't live with any kind of physical or mental disabilities, we don't realize how often disability can lead to isolation."**

— Elizabeth Kaleta





# Setting the Stage for Tomorrow





Erin Voaklander

**With support from ECF's Endowment Sustainability Program, Fringe Theatre is ensuring the show will go on for generations**

By **AREEHA MAHAL**  
Photos **JANICE SAXON**

**LIKE MANY ARTS** organizations, Fringe Theatre runs on “dreams and duct tape” in the words of Erin Voaklander, the theatre’s Director of Development. But the long-term sustainability of an organization requires a little more than duct tape — it needs a robust fundraising plan. That’s where Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) comes in.

ECF’s Endowment Sustainability Program (ESP) serves as a creative toolkit for long-term financial stability for non-profits. With sessions spanning over five months, participants dive into everything from structuring endowment funds to understanding donor motivations in order to strengthen meaningful engagement and relationships. They also roll up their sleeves for hands-on exercises, like drafting personalized donor strategies and uncovering new fundraising opportunities.

“ESP is really about meeting organizations where they are and guiding them toward a practical, achievable path to long-term funding,” says Sydney Stuart, Philanthropy Advisor at ECF. “It also helps open the door to a different kind of donor — people who want to make a lasting impact, often through gifts in their wills or other legacy plans. That kind of support can be transformational.”

Voaklander agrees.

Since joining ESP in 2022, Fringe Theatre has actively shaped its fundraising strategies and deepened its knowledge of how endowment funds can sustain unconventional, out of the ordinary theatre for everyone, by everyone, for generations. >



"It's a really well-structured program. You feel like you're going on a journey and that you're being very well taken care of because they've thought it through from beginning to end," Voaklander says.

ESP provides a unique space for participating organizations to gain a practical understanding of endowments and legacy giving. "You're in a room with a bunch of your peers, and you have a chance to ask silly questions — but the questions aren't silly because they're part of learning, and the ECF staff is so willing to share their knowledge."

While most Edmontonians will know of the Fringe *Festival*, which occurs for 11 days in August, the Fringe *Theatre* runs year-round, providing a home for local theatre artists and hosting 500 artistic events at the Fringe Theatre Arts Barns annually.

With the funding received from endowments, Fringe Theatre supports their artist awards programs. Voaklander considers this a practical way to connect endowment gifts directly with the art created in Edmonton. One such initiative is the Mowat Diversity Award, which breaks down barriers for artists from underrepresented communities — including Indigenous, Black, People of Colour and 2SLGBTQIA+ artists.

"The award recipient receives a spot in the Fringe Festival without having to pay (the) festival fee, plus a cash award, and creative mentorship," Voaklander says. "Our artist this year is a young filmmaker who will be staging a theatre production for the first time."

**"We work on shoestring budgets, and we work on really tight timelines, and we do a lot with a little."**

— Erin Voaklander



Christine Lesiak, a past recipient of the Westbury Family Fringe Theatre Award, says "As an artist, one's always a little bit precarious," Lesiak says. "But things like the Westbury Award really allow people to think bigger and have bigger visions." With this support, Lesiak was able to hire a larger team of technical professionals, which elevated the scope and quality of her theatrical production.

For many arts organizations, financial planning often proves difficult due to the immediate demands of production. "We work on shoestring budgets, and we work on really tight timelines, and we do a lot with a little," Voaklander says.

But ESP has been a vital reminder that thinking about the future is just as important as handling the present.

"The program is a friendly reminder that you should be cultivating your sustainability through things like endowment giving and legacy giving," Voaklander explains. "As you're practically moving through serving the mission of your charity, building for the future has to be a part of that equation. Your service is a valuable part of the community now and it needs to continue."

Through ongoing participation in the program, Fringe Theatre is solidifying its endowment strategy to ensure the Edmonton Fringe Festival will continue to amplify artists' voices and illuminate stages for decades to come.

"I hope that every charity and not-for-profit organization in Edmonton can have the chance to workshop their skills through ESP," Voaklander says. "And if they don't have an endowment yet, I hope they can work with ECF and their supporters to establish one. Endowments are just like trees, the best time to plant a tree, or establish an endowment fund, was fifty years ago, but the next best time is today." *ecf*



An illustration featuring two hands reaching towards each other. The hand on the left is a realistic, light-skinned hand with fingers slightly curled. The hand on the right is covered in a blue, floral-patterned material, resembling a tattoo or a bandage. The wrist of the right hand is wrapped in a grey bandage with a white spiral pattern. Several translucent, colored circles (blue, yellow, green) are scattered in the background.

# SECOND SKIN

**enCompass' free tattoo removal program is giving individuals a blank slate and a fresh start**

By **TOMNDEKEZI**

Illustration by Nick Ross

**IT'S THE MORNING** of your job interview, and you're in go-mode. You wake up early, so early in fact that you don't need the four alarms it usually takes to get you out of bed. A day-old haircut greets you in the bathroom mirror where you repeat a few affirmations and maybe even hit a power pose. Over breakfast (which is another first), you recite the company biography that you memorized the night before, making sure you know every face and name from the head office down to the satellite offices. And after double-checking your teeth for any rogue spinach omelette bits, you put on the brand-new outfit that you bought just for today. Sure, it cost a bit more than you'd like, but hey, that's what the interview is for, right?

Most of us have been in a similar situation at some point, and whether it's a new haircut, a new outfit, or even a new vocabulary ("I would love to circle back on that!"), we have probably engaged in a little self-editing ahead of a big interview. But what does one do when the things they might want to cover up are in plain sight, laced with stigma and seemingly permanent?

That's the dilemma faced by many of those who are served by the Tattoo Removal and Cover-Up Program at enCompass

Community Safety Agency. And while the name of the program is pretty self-explanatory, its impact on program participants is difficult to quantify. Launched this past fall, the program provides tattoo removal and cover-up services for individuals with gang tattoos, racist or hate-based tattoos, or markings from self-harm, abuse or human trafficking. It's quickly become a popular service in enCompass' larger reintegration program, particularly for clients who are just trying to get their foot in the door.

"Sometimes the placement of tattoos can have some anti-social associations," says enCompass Team Lead Kezia Wright, discussing the barriers often faced by clients with tattoos on their face, neck, hands and other highly visible areas. "There's just a lot of assumptions that can be made that don't really give that individual the opportunity to truly show what they're capable of and the skills they might have, or to learn the skills they might need to be in that job. It can be an immediate judgment that takes away that opportunity." >

Wright has seen firsthand the impact visual markings can have on individuals reintegrating into day-to-day life after a period of incarceration or abuse. From interviews with employers to landlords to service providers, the process can be a radical change for folks accustomed to being perceived negatively. There are also the self-limiting behaviours often tied to tattoos and scars, even when they aren't visible to anyone else.

"Having a gang tattoo in particular is symbolic of a specific type of lifestyle that is very traumatic," Wright says. "It really impacts people's self-esteem and ability to move forward because every day you're confronted with this reminder of things that you're trying to possibly move away from."

The ability to remove tattoos is just one of a few features that makes the enCompass program unique. The program also allows participants to work with a tattoo artist to design cover-up tattoos, which may be a better option for those looking to cover markings from abuse, trafficking, self-harm or other traumas.

While cover-ups are facilitated by a handful of tattoo artists that have partnered with enCompass, as of now, the removal process occurs entirely through Legacy Tattoo Removal. The business — which is actually located inside of a tattoo studio — has been offering its own pro bono tattoo removals since it opened in 2023. The program's history goes back even further, though; Legacy co-owner Madi Rawson got her start working under the guidance of Ben Alway at Second Skin Tattoo Removal, who also offered free laser removal for individuals with antisocial tattoos, as well as track marks and radiation spots. And although Alway passed away in 2023, his mission has been carried on at Legacy and now expanded with the help of enCompass.

"People are just so grateful that they don't have signs of hate on their body that they don't associate with anymore," Rawson says. "It's really empowering to be able to even see a client who comes in with ashamed body language — sometimes they don't even want to show me the tattoos — and then, over a series of months or years, to see them really come into their own where they're feeling like themselves again."

Rawson often gets to build relationships with individuals over the several sessions that might be required to fully remove a tattoo. It's a process that can take anywhere from several months to a few years — laser removal works by breaking up the tattoo ink into smaller pieces that are slowly digested by the body — and cost thousands of dollars. But thanks to the support of Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), enCompass and Legacy expect to serve dozens of participants over the lifetime of the \$15,000 grant.



"This program is a powerful example of how modest support can have a deep, long-term impact," says Sherilyn Trompetter, ECF's Manager, Equity Advancement. "By reducing barriers like visible tattoos tied to past experiences, we're helping people reclaim their identities and build confidence as they move forward — and that's exactly the kind of change we want to support."

Wright and Rawson are also thinking big, with their eyes set on offering mobile tattoo removal services for individuals who are still incarcerated. It's the kind of head start that can accelerate the reintegration process, and it only hurts about as much as a hot elastic against the skin.

"This program is not just about the tattoo cover-ups or the removal process. It's about the life skills aspect too," Wright says. "We're trying to get you to a place where you're able to get that job that you want. Or you're able to go back to school and feel confident in the classroom. Or you're able to approach that landlord and not feel that they're going to discriminate against you and deny you housing."

"We want people to be well, and we want people to have the tools and resources available that they need to get where they want to go in life." *ecf*



(Left) *Pride vs. Prejudice* began its eight-city screening tour at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The building was a “gift” from Stalin. At the time, male homosexuality was punishable by up to five years of hard labour in prison.



(Above) Andrew Paul, Doug Stollery, Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells and Darrin Hagen on the steps of the Palace of Culture and Science for the European premiere of *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story*.



# Pride Across Borders

By  
**DARRIN HAGEN**

An Edmonton documentary travels to Poland, sparking global dialogue on 2SLGBTQ+ rights

I'm pretty sure my response was “you know I've never directed a documentary before, right?”

Three years ago, I got an email from Andrew Paul, Marketing and Communications Advisor with Edmonton Community Foundation, asking if I was interested in doing just that. Did I want to direct a documentary about *Vriend v. Alberta* — Canada's first successful Supreme Court ruling on gay rights? This truly Edmonton story about a man fired for being gay, and his battle with the province of Alberta to have his equality recognized and protected, marked a profound change in Canadian society.

After being screened at film festivals across North America, our award-winning documentary *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story* was about to cross the Atlantic for its European premiere at the 16th Poland LGBT+ Queer Film Festival, at the invitation of the Canadian Embassy. This screening was a unique opportunity for diplomatic outreach, and so our team of producers and creators headed to Warsaw to connect with activists, politicians and ambassadors to explore the challenges facing generations of Queer lives. ▶





## THE CANADIAN EMBASSY

A sign at the front gate of the Canadian Embassy says “No Cameras.” It’s spring in Warsaw, and the green is new and bright. Inside, it’s basic — meeting rooms and beige wood panelling. I grab a coffee (no fancy espresso machine here — just a simple drip, in respect of taxpayers no doubt!) and wait with the team for Catherine Godin, the Canadian Ambassador to Poland. Our delegation includes Executive Producer Doug Stollery; Director, Stollery Charitable Foundation, Scott Graham; Canadian Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells; Executive Director of Dignity Network Canada, Doug Kerr; Andrew Paul and me.

Ambassador Godin sweeps in with friendly energy and sets the stage for our visit. The film was invited to Poland, thanks in part to the Dignity Network, for an eight-city screening tour as part of Canada’s work as the current chair of the Diplomats for Equality initiative, founded in 2019 in Vienna by diplomats from 35 countries. We are briefed in detail on the state of equal rights in Poland — specifically about LGBTQ+ equality and the pivotal moment the community faces as part of a contested presidential election.

## THE NEXT GENERATION

We move to another room, one that feels much more like I had imagined a room at the embassy would look — large windows, sun streaming in through the green space outside, and two long tables with place markers. We are meeting with a group of Polish activists — community group leaders, filmmakers and drag performers. All of them are passionate about the world they can imagine — the world they can see emerging in other places. Poland still doesn’t recognize marriage equality. But Canada and Poland share many common concerns, like the rise of extreme-right politics, and its accompanying baggage of anti-trans discrimination. Canada is just about to elect a progressive government which bucks the current drift to the right in many other places; Poland’s Presidential election is imminent, and there is a lot riding on it.



*The Pride vs. Prejudice* delegation meets with Polish LGBTQ+ advocates in the Canadian Embassy.



*The Pride vs. Prejudice* delegation met with embassy officials and members of the Polish Ministry of Equality to discuss the advancement of equality rights for Poland’s LGBTQ+ communities

From L to R: Marie-Hélène Côté, Counsellor, Embassy of Canada to Poland; Doug Kerr, Executive Director, Dignity Network Canada; Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells; Katarzyna Kotula, Minister of Equality; Doug Stollery, Magdalena Dropek, Advisor in the Polish Ministry of Equality.

The flags of both nations hang on the wall ... both red and white. Blood and snow.

We are excited to share our own nation’s strategies and wins, even as we acknowledge there are still challenges. *Pride vs. Prejudice* shows that even seemingly insurmountable odds can be beaten. The message resonates, and we recognize that their battle takes place in a different world.

In Canada, activists utilized the judiciary to gain equality. In Poland, the Supreme Court was tainted by autocratic regimes, forcing activists to consider other means to change their world.

## LAMBDA WARSAW

Our visit to the humble third-floor LAMBDA Warsaw office and community gathering space reveals the headquarters of the oldest LGBTQ+ organization in Poland — with nearly three decades of positive outreach to its credit. We are welcomed by Miłosz Przepiorkowski, who has been the head of LAMBDA Warsaw for much of its existence.

Similar to our own Pride resources in Edmonton, LAMBDA began as a phone-help line, gradually expanding to offer an emergency intervention hostel, and legal and psychological counselling. The meeting space we are in hosts a myriad of Queer organizations in the city including a students’ group, a seniors’ group and a group called Faith and Rainbow for LGBTQ Christians.

The work is essential, positive and worthy... and then Miłosz brings us back to reality. “Warsaw is our little rainbow bubble ... In Warsaw I see young, same-sex couples walking hand in hand in the streets. Very colourful people, open people.”

But the reality is that much of the rest of Poland, while evolving in the right direction, is still struggling with the slow progress towards Queer equality.

We are introduced to the first trans MP ever elected in Poland, Anna Grodzka. She was the only current openly trans MP in the world when she was elected in 2011. An icon of the Queer community, she shared the story of her political battle, and her insights about the polarized politicization of trans rights. Grodzka became

an activist in 2011, when the left-leaning Movement Party asked her to enter the political fray.

“Our mission back then was to tell people that transgender people exist in the world; that they deserve exactly the same treatment and respect as other people,” she says.

What resulted was a history-making electoral victory, and four years as an MP — the first two with the Movement Party, and when Grodzka felt like she couldn’t speak independently, ran a second time as an independent candidate and won again.

The job came with risks. “Now, nobody was protecting me,” she says. “The press in Poland led a coordinated attack on me.”

In reflection, she feels she accomplished her mission to create an environment where trans people could safely follow their true paths.

“And I think that although there is some oppression, they are happy.”

Grodzka has now left politics behind. “It changed my way of life,” she reflects. “But some jobs are done when they’re done.”



Senator Wells listens to the challenges facing LAMBDA Warsaw. Recent funding cuts have forced some staff to redirect their salaries to keep services open.

## QUEERMUZEUM

We headed down Marszałkowska Street and entered a small storefront — one of the world’s only Queer history museums. The black and white portraits on the walls look into the camera, into our eyes, revealing the presence of our borderless, shared Queer nation across centuries. Guides lead us through hundreds of years of Queer history in two languages. The English-speaking guide is introduced as Młosz’s husband, even though the word can’t legally be applied to their partnership under the current laws.

Once punishable by burning at the stake, Poland’s laws regarding homosexuality shifted to imprisonment when the Orthodox Church was pushed aside as three conquering nations annexed all of its territory. The Poland that re-emerged post-annexation kept these laws in place, but the tone towards Queer life was cautiously tolerant.



Curators show a photo of Delwin Vriend that was donated to QueerMuzeum by a Torontonian. The *Pride vs. Prejudice* team thought they were bringing Delwin’s story to Poland, but he had beaten them there.

Despite being a fairly progressive culture in the early 1900s (age of consent laws didn’t discriminate against same-sex unions, for example) and the influence of German LGBTQ+ advocate Magnus Hirschfeld, Poland’s early promise was shattered during Nazi Occupation. The ghost of the Holocaust looms with memories of lives lost, when millions of Jewish people and scores of others, including homosexuals, were deemed as “subhuman,” and murdered in concentration camps.

In *Pride vs. Prejudice*, there is a memorable clip of Lyle Kanee in 1997 when he was speaking to the Supreme Court of Canada on behalf of the Jewish Congress of Canada, who acted as one of many intervenors in the case.

*“... it is uncomfortable for the Jewish community to be distinguished by being granted protection from discrimination while others who have shared experiences of victimization are not. Many doors previously closed to Jews have been opened with the passage of human rights statutes, but can Jews in good conscience enter through those doors when other minorities who have suffered with them are required to remain behind?”*

Liberation from the horrors of war was only for some. The oppression of sexual and gender minorities continued post-war, as Soviet rule harshly kept Queer life in the shadows. When Soviet occupation finally faded in 1991 and Poland held its first parliamentary elections since the 1920s, the Catholic Church re-established its oppressive hold on Poland’s morality. ▶



Doug Stollery and Doug Kerr listen to the history of how the Holocaust impacted Europe’s LGBTQ+ community during a tour of QueerMuzeum.





Senator Wells and Doug Stollery fielded questions from students at the University of Warsaw about Canada's fight for equality.

## WARSAW UNIVERSITY

The next afternoon was a special screening of our film for students at Warsaw University, introduced by Doug Stollery, Doug Kerr and Senator Wells.

Casa, a student at the French Studies Institute, asks the first question after the film — poignantly outlining the situation for so many young adults.

"I would just like to ask, how do you find the power, the strength and the energy to keep fighting those fights, to finally be able to be considered just as a human being? ... I feel like I'm a very passionate advocate for the community. And sometimes I just feel so sick that my existence is just a political conversation over dinner," she says. "How do you keep fighting?"

Doug Kerr reaches into his own experience for his reply.

"This morning we were in the Canadian embassy and we met some young Polish activists who work on LGBTQ rights in schools here in Poland. And they were dynamic and they were determined, and they reminded me of me when I was 20 ... you keep doing this work. And that's what gets me inspired. I work with people all around the world ... every place I go, I meet young people who are doing this work. And that's what gives me hope ... it is you that will give me hope."

## OPENING CEREMONIES

On opening night of the Poland LGBTQ+ Film Festival, I was prepared for a restrained event, knowing that Poland remains near the bottom of the list of EU nations when it comes to Queer equality.



Doug Stollery with Catherine Godin, Ambassador of Canada to the Republic of Poland.



Many of Poland's finest drag performers travelled to Warsaw for the opening ceremony of the 16th Poland LGBTQ+ Film Festival.

Instead, our team was treated to a glittering evening of Warsaw's activist, drag and Queer communities, bejewelled in a manner to rival the most glamorous drag balls from home. I stopped worrying about Poland's Queer population for a moment. In spite of the oppression and repression of their culture and rights, the vibrancy of a community, thriving in defiance and solidarity, was tangible, and sparkled in the glitter of the fiercely creative queens strutting on the red carpet, reminding me of how I found my own footing in 1980s Alberta.

*I was transported back in time: sitting with my husband and my first roommate on the concrete steps, massive columns framing the excitement. We smoke and laugh, marveling at the epic drag creations, and the hundreds of joyous Queers of every possible persuasion. The air is warm, and a welcome escape from the humid and throbbing intensity of the party indoors.*

I've been here before. It's the 2025 Polish doppelgänger to the notorious Flashback loading dock: Queers and queens and cigarette smoke. The joy collected in one place is moving and inspiring.

Queer joy refuses to be legislated out of existence. It erupts in the most difficult circumstances, in the most challenging of locales, making even austere Communist concrete fabulous.

## EUROPEAN PREMIERE

Finally, our screening: the European premiere of *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story*. A packed theatre, and my first time seeing the film with Polish subtitles. Our Edmonton skyline, our Edmonton story is on screens in Europe. I can feel the film hitting the audience in all the right ways at all the right moments. The sounds of shock at the disrespect shown by one of the judges, the laughs and the tears. This story of courage, persistence and resistance transcends languages and cultures.





Doug Stollery and Scott Graham on the red carpet at the 16th Poland LGBT+ Film Festival. Scott has been an integral part in the work behind 2SLGBTQ+ equality in Canada through his roles as a director of Stollery Charitable Foundation, Chair of ARC Foundation and past Director of Grants at ECF.

The moderator's first question is about the quote at the beginning of the documentary. "Our rights are not handed to us. We have to fight for them." She wants to know what its significance is and why I lead into the story with such a statement of finality.

I struggled to recall my reasoning at the time: the three years since we began the long process of capturing this story is a blur, with giant steps backward in society as we move forward in time. I recall being frustrated by the complacency I was seeing in the next generation of the community, and our collective lack of insight into the struggles and battles that created decades of relative ease for urban white North American Queers, and how essential it was that they become aware of the invisible heroes among us, because our story is still mostly untold.

I think of the dozens of articles and plays about Queer history that I've written in the last decade, and how almost every one of them ended with a call to vigilantly protect and defend the simple freedoms we had gained ... as if I was already sensing how easily they could be eroded.

That quote speaks clearly to my deepest fear, my darkest concern — that it could all vanish in a heartbeat, in a flash of rising anger, in a contradiction of language, where freedom suddenly means racism and homophobia; where rights suddenly become the prize for the enemies we needed protection from; where social media becomes a rusted sword, pulled from history's scrap heap with blood of the past staining its dull edges and wielded with imprecision and a careless sneer.

*Our rights are not handed to us. We have to fight for them.*

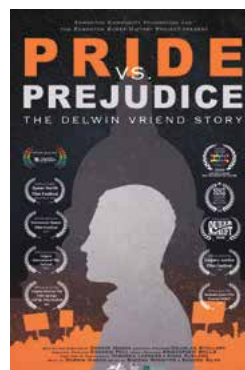
Being in Poland reminds me of that fight. And it shows me how much work there is to do. Parades and rainbows can't obscure the fact that the battle for equality is composed of many different battles. And we need every weapon — social, political and artistic. Our stories are what unite us and give us hope.

Milosz approaches me, tears staining his face. He tells me that the documentary made him relive his own struggle; he and his husband have been locked in conflict with the Polish government, trying to have their partnership legally recognized.

And I know that even after we leave Warsaw, eight other cities around Poland will be showing our story on their screens. Our Queer Canadian Edmonton story.

We — the Queer people of the world — need to act as each others' inspirations. We exist in every culture and every nation. We need to be aware of the struggles we all share.

With this documentary, we witness firsthand the power of the human story, and the power of art that can deliver a narrative of hope and possibility to the individuals who need to experience it the most. *ecf*



This June, *Pride vs. Prejudice* will screen across Canada through a national initiative led by Edmonton Community Foundation, in partnership with the Edmonton Queer History Project and local community foundations.

The goal is to spark local conversations about 2SLGBTQI+ rights, celebrate resilience and honour the legacy of a case that helped shape Canada's human rights landscape.

**Find a screening near you at**  
**[pridevsprejudice.ca](http://pridevsprejudice.ca)**

# Fogo Island Framework

**Zita Cobb returned to her home island to help build its economy and protect its culture. She ended up spreading its success far beyond its shores**

By **CORY SCHACHTEL**

**A**s a former CFO who helped turn JDS Uniphase, an international communications technology company, into one of the most successful high-tech innovators of all time, Zita Cobb knows the language of money. But for the earliest part of her life, she barely spoke it at all.

“We traded fish for the things we couldn’t otherwise secure — it was almost as if I grew up in a pre-money time,” Cobb says of her childhood in 1960s Fogo Island, off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. There, she grew up the youngest (and only girl) of seven children, among just under 6,000 people “who knew how to make a living on the North Atlantic, which is not the easiest thing in the world.”

Things got harder when Cobb, an eighth-generation Fogo Islander, was eight years old. After 400 years, the island’s inshore-fishing industry collapsed due to an unprecedented threat: “the arrival of these monster factory ships from everywhere on Earth.” In the span of 10 years, modern industry displaced centuries of culture, constraining locals’ tiny cod fishing boats — which had never ventured farther than five miles off the coast — even closer to shore.

At first, the older generations couldn’t understand who in their right minds would fish until there’s nothing left to catch, until one day her father figured it out: They must be turning the fish into money. “So when I was 10 years old, he came to me and said, ‘When you grow up, you’re going to have to go away and you’re going to have to figure out how this money thing works. Because if you don’t, it’s going to eat everything we love.’”

Cobb went away to figure out money at Carleton University in Ottawa, but she had big city things to figure out first, “not the least of which was electricity.

I remember seeing my first escalator — that was a big thing — and I didn’t know how to use a bus. To this day, Fogo Island still has two stop signs, and no traffic light.”

With a career that would be the envy of any businessperson, it’s safe to say Cobb figured this money thing out. But along the way she found a modern world of “placelessness” in which people simply exist to work, disconnected from their immediate environments beyond how those surroundings can serve them. “And when that fundamental relationship to the world is broken, I don’t think humans are at our best.”

It wasn’t Cobb’s plan all along to come home after her career. But after seeing the widespread effects of the corporate world taking local places for granted (“On a good day, corporations are place agnostic — on a bad day, they’re downright hostile”), she felt compelled to protect her hometown. So in 2004, with her father’s words in mind and working with two of her brothers, Cobb returned home with a plan “to put *place* in the economy.”





Fogo Island Inn, Fogo Island, Newfoundland

In 2004 the Cobb siblings started Shorefast, a charity named after the tether that connects a cod trap to shore. Its philosophy is based in part on the work of economist Raghuram Rajan, who explains how the three pillars of human societies — governments, markets and place-based communities — need to work together with philanthropy to create kinder, more effective local economies. But Cobb says these pillars have been too siloed since at least the early '70s, when the world started following Milton Friedman's economic logic of making "increase shareholder value" the singular goal of corporations, which Cobb calls "a terrible marker on the road to the idea that place doesn't matter."

At home, the road back started with adding another industry to complement the fishery, which survived on Fogo Island thanks to the creation of a locally owned cooperative — which still runs to this day. The cooperative initially processed cod and, over the years, has adapted to add other species including shrimp, snow crab and turbot as well. ▶

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"We traded fish for the things we couldn't otherwise secure — it was almost as if I grew up in a pre-money time."

— Zita Cobb





Zita Cobb. Photograph by Virginia Macdonald

But while the fishery is essential to the island's economy, Cobb says "it's not sufficient to life, and cultural continuity on Fogo Island, which we need so we don't fall out of our own story."

So Shorefast centred Fogo Island's story around art, "because art is about cultural knowledge," and hospitality, because while Fogo Islanders are as hospitable as they come, "we just didn't have a fine inn to practice it." The artist-in-residence program brings in artists from around the world to live and work in the community. And in addition to building the now locally owned Fogo Island Inn, Shorefast restored and saved several important heritage structures as well.

With a furniture business, ice cream shop and a hand-line cod business (in conjunction with the fishery cooperative), Cobb says the sum of Shorefast's work adds about \$50 million annually to the local economy, and employs about a third of the households on the island.

The dream is to get Fogo Island's population back up over 6,000 after a COVID-caused exodus brought it down to about 2,500 people. But in the meantime, visitors from across Canada and around the world are visiting the island (which is three-and-a-half times bigger than Manhattan), seeing its success and looking at their local worlds differently when they return. By looking inward and focusing on what Fogo Island offers, Cobb says Shorefast "put another leg on the economy" through its asset-based community development, a process that helps people anywhere recognize the real value of their communities.

"We're often blind to what our true assets are," Cobb says. "Money is not an asset — it's a resource. People, nature and culture are assets, and we need to deploy the resources, like money, to support and properly develop them. I believe that an economy needs to underpin the places that people live in, and underpin people's lives. Otherwise, what's an economy for?"



Squish Studio, Fogo Island, Newfoundland

Shorefast has already spread its vision for economic resilience beyond Fogo Island's shores, through its Institute for Place-Based Economies. During COVID lockdowns, it implemented place-based economy pilot projects in four differently sized communities around the country (Victoria, B.C., Hamilton, Prince Edward County and London, Ont).

Cobb found that despite differences in size, the work needed to support and connect the pillars in each community was largely the same. And she sees some of this work already being done in Edmonton through Edmonton Community Foundation's Social Enterprise Fund, which provides debt financing to people looking to improve their communities, but struggle to access traditional financing sources.

For Cobb's liking, too many businesspeople think they'll turn their minds to doing good only after the market makes them rich, and not enough philanthropic foundations extend their work to addressing the upstream interventions that

can strengthen local economies. "But for a community foundation to say, 'hang on a second, how can we participate in the whole system in a way that goes more upstream?' That thinking is very ahead of many other foundations."

The Social Enterprise Fund may never help start some giant company, Cobb says, but that's beside the point. "These are market failures — a market is not going to support the small, the unusual, the much needed, in this way. But this can be solved. It just takes a little miracle, and miracles happen every minute — a miracle is nothing more than a slight shift in how you see something, and when you start to see the power of *place* and that it holds all the answers, then we'll all change our systems." *ecf*

On June 24, ECF and the Edmonton Public Library will present Zita Cobb in conversation with Mary W. Rowe. **Visit [epl.ca](http://epl.ca) for details.**

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# Diversifying Endowments

## *Halal* (permissible) investment portfolio

By **ECF STAFF**

**ENDOWMENTS ARE ONE** of the most effective tools for donors to provide long-term support to causes that are important to them. However, for some donors, traditional investment practices don't align with their values. This means that some cultural groups have been left out of fully participating in this impactful way to give.

In 2022, Edmonton Community Foundation's (ECF) CFO, Chris Quinn, partnered with Riad Assaf of TD Wealth to develop a Shariah Compliant Investment Portfolio for Muslim donors. This was the first of its kind in Canada and last year, the pair was recognized for this work by the Al Rashid Education Foundation.

We spoke with Quinn and Assaf about this new, inclusive way for donors to support the charitable sector and what makes a Shariah Compliant Investment Portfolio unique.



Chris Quinn



Riad Assaf

**ECF:** What is an endowment fund, and how does it work at ECF?

**CHRIS QUINN:** An endowment fund is a permanent fund established by donors to support causes they care about. At ECF, these funds are invested, and a portion of the value of the fund is granted to charities every year. The rest of the earnings are reinvested to ensure the fund continues to grow and support the community for generations.

**ECF:** What is ECF's Shariah Compliant Investment Portfolio?

**RIAD ASSAF:** A Shariah Compliant Investment Portfolio is an investment approach that aligns with Islamic principles. For Muslim donors who want their charitable giving to reflect their values, ECF offers a dedicated portfolio that invests according to these guidelines. >



**ECF:** How is the Shariah portfolio different from other ECF endowments?

**CQ:** The only difference is in how the funds are invested. The granting process and long-term goals of supporting communities are exactly the same.

**ECF:** What makes an investment Shariah compliant?

**RA:** Shariah investing follows two main types of screenings. The first is sector-based screens. These exclude investments in industries such as alcohol, tobacco, pork, conventional banking, weapons, gambling and certain forms of entertainment. Companies earning more than 5 per cent of their income from these sectors are excluded.

**CQ:** The second is accounting-based screens. These limit investments in companies with high levels of debt or interest income. Specifically, a company must meet strict financial ratio requirements, with thresholds no higher than 33 per cent in three key areas: total debt to market capitalization, cash and interest-bearing securities to market capitalization, and accounts receivables to market capitalization.

**ECF:** How does ECF ensure its Shariah Investment Portfolio meets these criteria?

**RA:** ECF has created a separate investment policy for Shariah compliance and follows standards used by globally recognized index providers. This ensures the investments meet both sector and financial screening guidelines.



Chris Quinn and Riad Assaf were recognized by the AI Rashid Education Foundation for their work creating Canada's first Shariah Compliant Investment Portfolio at the Edmonton Community Foundation.

**ECF:** Why did ECF create this option?

**CQ:** As part of our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, ECF introduced the Shariah Endowment Fund to provide more inclusive giving opportunities. This allows Muslim donors to participate in endowment giving in a way that aligns with their beliefs, helping build stronger and more inclusive communities. *ecf*

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Strategic Workforce  
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