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**Rx**

Vape risks vex sellers and worry MDs

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MRU JOURNALISM
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CALGARY JOURNAL

PRINT MASTHEAD FALL 2019

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Halfway through his first mandate, Ward 11 councillor Jeromy Farkas has kept his word on fighting secrecy and spending.

There's nothing whatsoever that's urgent about this, except the need for some members of the council to look good to the provincial government,” said Mayor Naheed Nenshi during the first council meeting back from summer break on Sept. 9. Nenshi had been addressing a piece of “urgent business” — a late addition to the council's agenda. The motion, titled “Modernization of Municipal Expense Disclosure,” aimed to align the city’s expense reporting with recommendations made by the UCP sponsored Mackinnon report. But it failed to be added to the combined council meetings agenda after an eight to seven vote which followed an intense 20-minute debate. Nenshi never did mention the councillor who had brought up the motion by name. “I would urge the mover to be much more thoughtful about how to get what he wants, which is presumably more than just getting his name in the paper,” Nenshi added.

The mover was Ward 11 Coun. Jeromy Farkas. The motion wasn’t the rookie councillor’s first attempt at raising transparency at city hall as an issue. Nor was it the first time the rookie councillor had agitated his colleagues. Farkas has been a fierce advocate for fiscal responsibility and transparency ever since he was elected to Calgary’s city council. Though his activism has caused friction between him and his fellow politicians, it has also earned him some fans among his constituents. Farkas insists that the city needs a change of direction. But what remains to be seen is whether Farkas’ activism will brighten his political future or darken it.

“I think there is a crisis — it’s a crisis of confidence,” says Farkas, who believes a lack of transparency at city hall is threatening Calgarians’ faith in their local government. “I’ve always found it funny that despite city hall being the local level of government, Calgarians tend to know little about what’s happening. Some of that is, unfortunately, by design,” says Farkas. Farkas believes his longer-tenured colleagues use a lack of transparency to obscure past decisions which may now be negatively affecting the city. “I think the refusal to acknowledge the issues and problems happening here at city hall comes from a reluctance to examine their own record,” he says. He also claims Calgarians have one of the most secretive city halls in North America, citing it as one reason city council’s approval rating dropped 18 per cent between June of 2018 and June 2019, according to a July report by ThinkHQ Public Affairs.

While Farkas says secrecy is at the root of many of the council’s troubles, he has also taken aim at council’s pay cheques and pensions — something that has agitated his colleagues. Earlier this year, Farkas opposed what he calls council’s “golden” pensions, often highlighting in public how he has refused to cash in on the lucrative retirement plan at the end of his tenure. Last December, Farkas was unanimously ejected from council by his colleagues for refusing to apologize for an inaccurate
social media post about council’s 2019 pay raises. Describing the move to eject him as “extreme,” he’s unapologetic about the way he conducts himself. “I was sent to council to advocate certain positions particularly around transparency and spending restraint,” says Farkas. “I’m not going to back down from these things.”

Despite his issues with fellow councillors, his brashness seems to be resonating with some Calgarians. During a Ward 11 town hall at the Royal Canadian Legion on Horton Road in September, a large portion of the crowd was collectively nodding their heads as Farkas bemoaned city spending. Farkas, 31, seems to have been half the age of the average person who attended that night. But he had more than double the number of people listening to him speak than were playing bingo next door. And many of them appeared to like what he was saying. This admiration from his constituents will likely keep Farkas in his position long enough to help address what he sees as council’s biggest obstacle. “I think there’s a huge difference in vision right now, and that difference is probably the greatest now than it’s ever been,” he says.

For Farkas, his vision is a desire for a transparent government with tight fiscal restraints. “Look, if high spending and secrecy can get us the results that some people are saying it would, where are those results? I feel that the truth is that the high reliance on secrecy and having unrestrained spending has contributed to a lot of the problems the city is currently facing.”

Farkas believes what the city needs, in addition to more transparency, is a wake-up call around how the city spends its money. “Calgarians have had to change practically everything about their family life and their business life as a result of the economic downturn. They’ve had to make needed changes in order to survive. I think for Calgary to survive and remain relevant we’re going to need to hit the ground hard on reforms around spending, around red tape.” He’s concerned that if a change in direction isn’t made soon, Calgary’s competitiveness could be at stake. “In my mind, Calgary’s always been a shining light for opportunity. That light still exists but I think it’s a little bit dimmer than it’s been in the past.”

Despite his desire for a change in direction, Farkas won’t commit to trying to lead a city council to make the changes he believes are needed. “I didn’t run for council as a stepping stone for anything else,” says Farkas, who added he isn’t thinking about a mayoral run in 2021. However, the young councillor does seem to have high ambitions. “I know that in the future when I think back to my council career, I don’t want it to be the title of my book...I don’t want my time on council to be even the title of a chapter in my book. I want it to be a footnote.”

> Jeromy Farkas,
Ward 11 Councillor

“I was sent to council to advocate certain positions particularly around transparency and spending restraint — I’m not going to back down from these things”
Provincial coalition vows to stand up for vulnerable Albertans

‘Keep Alberta Strong’ has over 40 members, many of them front-line organizations working with those on low-income

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In the build-up to the United Conservative Party’s budget release on Oct. 24, many non-governmental organizations and non-profits across the province signed on to a “growing coalition” called Keep Alberta Strong. The initiative is focused on continuing to make sure the province’s most vulnerable are not affected by spending cuts.

When advertising its own budget commitments, the UCP’s campaign website referred to the former New Democratic Party government’s spending as being “out of control.” The new government promised to “balance the budget within their first mandate.”

Those who support Keep Alberta Strong commend Premier Jason Kenney and the UCP in their approach to “bring back balance” to the province’s finances, according to an open letter on the group’s website.

But the letter also states that, while finances are important, support for the province’s most vulnerable should continue, namely in six areas: a quarterly payment to low-income families with children, social services funding programs, affordable transportation, affordable and quality childcare, social assistance and affordable housing.

Keep Alberta Strong currently includes over 40 non-profits and social organizations who are “committed to ensuring all Albertans have access to the opportunities and resources they need to contribute to our province’s economic prosperity.”

While the group supporters signed on to a letter in August 2019, they intend to continue advocating over the next four years.

The Calgary Journal spoke with five of those supporters to gain some insight into why they back the initiative.

MRU INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY PROSPERITY

The Mount Royal University Institute for Community Prosperity provides programs for students to conduct in-depth explorations of various social and environmental issues, such as climate change, the opioid crisis and affordable housing. This allows them to connect with and help out their communities.

And it’s the institute’s mandate of community prosperity that fuels their support for Keep Alberta Strong.

James Stauch, from the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal said the Keep Alberta Strong coalition ensures “the most vulnerable in society don’t get left behind.”

THE MUSTARD SEED

“For us to sign that letter is to recognize that we’re part of a system,” Steve Wile, CEO of the Mustard Seed told the Calgary Journal. “And, if that system is concerned, then we should be concerned as well.”

The Mustard Seed supports those experiencing homelessness and poverty in Alberta, offering shelter, clothing, meals, mental health and addiction counselling and other support services, as well as neighbourhood centres that provide low-income housing.

The majority of their budget comes from donors. But about 25 per cent comes from the provincial and municipal governments, most of which goes towards their shelters.

While a cut to their funding would affect their shelters system, Wile felt it was unlikely to happen and said it is not the reason they support the Keep Alberta Strong initiative.

“They’ve identified six areas and many of those areas impact our clients,” he said. “They would have an adverse affect on our clients, and likely, the most significant one of those six for us is the subsidized public transportation.”

Wile said they have noticed an improvement in the quality of life of their clients from the subsidized public transportation program.
According to Wile, the Mustard Seed has also witnessed an uptick in the number of jobs that their clients not only acquire, but can continue to sustain because of the ability to get around the city. “That’s really one that has my heart.”

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES CALGARY
The local non-profit organization, Vibrant Communities Calgary, focuses on poverty reduction in the city. In January 2015, VCC signed onto the Enough for All campaign along with the City of Calgary, the United Way and their sister organization, Momentum.
While VCC doesn’t receive provincial funding, many of the organizations that they work with through campaigns like Enough for All do receive funding, which is one reason why they are involved with Keep Alberta Strong.
“We thought it was probably a good idea to bring awareness to the provincial government that it’s imperative that they maintain vital programs and services for people living on low incomes,” said Stevens.

While they don’t have a definitive plan to fight back against the UCP’s budget decisions, she added these changes have caused the social service sector to be more united than it has ever been in the past.
“We want to help each other out because, at the end of the day, it’s about the well-being of Albertans, especially Albertans living on low incomes,” said Stevens.

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES CALGARY
VCC’s sister organization, Momentum, is a community economic development organization in Calgary that works with many vulnerable groups in the city by providing them with entrepreneurial support, skills training and financial literacy.
Courtney Mo, public policy manager for Momentum, said the organization is committed to the goals of poverty reduction and that’s the main reason why they support the Keep Alberta Strong campaign.
Momentum receives funding through a variety of outlets, including all three levels of government, private and public foundations and individual donations.
Mo said her organization is supportive of the provincial government’s approach to finding efficiencies in spending, as well as working with the social services sector. However, she noted social services funding as a whole is vital in supporting the people that rely on the programs listed in the open letter.

“The low-income transit pass, for example, we found has been very important to participants,” she said. “[It enables] them to attend our programs, enabling them to attend work and education — to be able to move around the city.”

Another example, said Mo, is the Alberta Child Benefit, which provides a quarterly payment to low-income families with children under the age of 18. This program, she said, has helped to pull families and children out of poverty, enabling them to participate in programs, such as the ones offered by Momentum.

“Living in poverty is a full-time job,” said Mo. “Being able to help people better meet their basic needs enables them to participate in education and training and learn about financial literacy and to be able to get ahead.”

CALGARY CLIMATE HUB
Approaching its one-year non-profit-status anniversary this November, the Calgary Climate Hub is an organization of volunteers focused on climate change initiatives and community engagement.
In the last ten months, the CCH has pushed for stronger climate change actions in the city, including through their involvement with its climate resilience strategy and five-year budget decisions, where climate change was a major factor.
Their support for Keep Alberta Strong stems from a concern that the provincial government’s withdrawal from provincial climate initiatives, such as programs supporting more efficient energy production and the carbon tax, will put a strain on communities, innovation and investment.
Dr. Joe Vipond, co-chair of the CCH, explained there are consequential costs in everyday activities, such as driving a car, and the carbon tax is a simple and efficient way to mitigate both the costs and greenhouse gas emissions.
He added energy efficiency, such as upgrading light bulbs or replacing old appliances, also works to lower emissions and saves money down the road.
“It’s politically savvy — who doesn’t like saving money because they’re using less energy? — and it’s also a very effective way of decreasing our emissions,” said Dr. Vipond.

According to Dr. Vipond, CCH supports policies that bolster communities and municipalities, such as energy efficiency and the carbon tax, and that can help make Alberta more desirable for investors, new businesses and citizens.
“We’re trying to build a social base where we can have a plethora of voices to fight back on this,” said Vipond. “If we’re not organized, it’s hard to push back.”
“It’s one thing to have individuals sitting in their house worried about stuff, but when they organize into a group they have a much more powerful voice, so that’s what we’ll be continuing to do.”

Joe Vipond, the co-chair for the Calgary Climate Hub, said policies that bolster communities, such as promoting energy efficiency and the carbon tax, make Alberta more attractive to investors which in turn helps the economy thrive.

PHOTO: BLAISE KEMNA
More to Alberta’s post-secondary woes than over-spending

Advocates for advanced education say budget cuts are short-sighted as there is more to Alberta’s low post-secondary participation rate than government spending

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Alberta has long been hindered by a low post-secondary participation rate – something education advocates have struggled to explain. But, while the United Conservative Party’s education agenda does include some investments for skills training, its budget cuts to universities are likely going to make the participation rate problem worse.

In May 2019, the UCP government appointed a blue-ribbon panel that was tasked with making recommendations on how the government could reduce spending to balance the budget. Its final report was released a few months later in August and drew attention to some of the struggles facing post-secondary institutions in the province.

“Since 2015, high-paying energy jobs have become scarce and unemployment has risen, yet the participation rate (for those institutions) remains at 17 per cent,” the report stated. “In most provinces, post-secondary participation rates rise with rising unemployment and fall with a booming economy – not so for Alberta.”

In an address to Albertans on Oct. 23, Premier Jason Kenney amplified that statement, commenting that the province spends roughly $10,000 more than the “large province average” per post-secondary student, yet has low post-secondary participation and completion rates.

“In other words, in program after program, Albertans pay more, but get less,” he continued.

Nor was this the first time the province’s low participation rate has been identified as an issue. It has been routinely mentioned in annual reports from post-secondary institutions across the province, as well as advanced education ministry documents.

For example, a 2008 report from that ministry, published more than 10 years ago, states Alberta’s participation rate “continues to lag behind other provinces — a position that has remained relatively constant over the last decade.”

In part, that poor participation rate may be explained by the fact Alberta attracts young workers from other provinces within the country, as well as internationally. Because the rate is calculated by dividing the number of 18- to 34-year-old students into the population base, that out-of-province population (which has likely already got whatever education they were going to get) could be keeping this number low.

However, the province’s culture may also be playing a role in keeping Albertans out of higher education. For example, Globe and Mail columnist Gary Mason recently suggested that low participation rate may be explained by the fact, “Over the past several decades, young Albertans – especially young men – could get good-paying jobs in the oil patch right out of high school.”

Indeed, Emmanuel Barker, director of government relations and advocacy for the Alberta Students’ Executive Council agrees Alberta is unique and “our economy tends to encourage young people to work rather than to be engaged in post-secondary.”

But those good-paying jobs have had costs for the Alberta economy, such as employee shortages in healthcare and other public sector fields.

On average, Alberta has some of the lowest tuition fees. However, in an effort to curb spending and balance the budget, current and future students may see a rise in tuition fees of up to seven per cent a year for the next three years.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE HAGENAARS

For example, Joel French, executive director for Public Interest Alberta, pointed out the blue-ribbon panel report highlighted the cost of nurses working overtime – something that could be mitigated by increasing the post-secondary participation rate.

“The reason that nurses have to work so much overtime is because we don’t have enough nurses in the system,” said French. And that overtime problem is only going to increase when the last of the baby boomer generation turns 65 in 2029, putting an enormous strain on ambulances, hospitals and long-term care facilities.

“If you wanted to reduce the amount of overtime they work, there’s a pretty simple solution,” said French. “It’s not one that you can solve overnight. But if you trained more nurses and got more into the system, they wouldn’t have to work those kinds of hours.”
Currently, however, many Alberta post-secondary institutions don’t have enough seats to meet the demand for potential student participation, something the Council of Post-Secondary Presidents of Alberta mentioned in a position paper released earlier this year. The paper said, in order for the province to bump its participation numbers up to national levels, “Alberta needs to create space for an additional 90,000 students by 2025.”

But the UCP seems more focused on investing in skills training for trades jobs. In a statement to the Calgary Journal, an advanced education ministry spokesperson wrote, “Today, there are young people with no jobs, and jobs that need people with the right skills,” as a result of the 3,000 people retiring from the workforce each year. In an effort to fill those trades gaps in the coming years, the Alberta government is appointing a Skills for Jobs Task Force to “report to government on how to renew apprenticeship education and expand opportunities for students to enter the skilled trades.”

The government has also recently promised $10 million over the next four years for Women Building Futures, a program offering “industry recognized training for women looking to enter the construction, maintenance, transportation and home building industries.”

As for healthcare shortages, the advanced education ministry spokesperson said the government is currently “taking action,” committing $3 million to hire up to 30 new nurse practitioners. The spokesperson also said Alberta Health Services has “recruited more than 60 new physicians in rural and remote communities across the province.”

But that action seems to be very different when it comes to the broader post-secondary education sector. The blue-ribbon panel recommended changes to the way the sector’s institutions are funded, as the current model “doesn’t link funding to the achievement of specific goals or priorities.” And it also recommended an end to the current tuition freeze. Based on these recommendations, the UCP’s budget, released on Oct. 24, saw many changes for advanced education. Overall, post-secondary institutions across the province will see a 12.5 per cent decrease in funding over the next four years, beginning in this school year.

While these institutions have yet to determine how the cuts will affect their faculty, staff and students, Jessica Revington, president of the students’ union of the University of Calgary, said it’s important university administrators protect “student services and student experience,” listening to the voices of those who sit in post-secondary classrooms.

“It is our job as student leaders to ensure that consultation is in place and that we advocate for undergraduate students not just at the University of Calgary, but across Alberta.”

In addition, the five-year tuition freeze has been lifted, meaning students could see tuition increases of up to seven per cent per year, over the next three years.

Currently, compared to other provinces in the country, Alberta’s tuition fees are quite low. But, Luc Carels, vice-president external for Mount Royal University’s students’ association, said, while it’s too soon to know exactly how it will affect students, a hike in these fees could deter potential students from enrolling, and that could negatively affect the participation rate.

“Generally speaking, the more expensive a product is, the lower the demand for that product is going to be,” he said, adding there’s little reason to think that post-secondary would be any different.

“If the price for that product, which is an education, increases, it’s likely to mean that more students will look at the price of that product and decide against purchasing it — or in this case, going to school.”

External advocacy advisor for the University of Alberta’s students’ union, Robert Nelson, adds these cutbacks will make it difficult for institutions to maintain the current quality of education offered to students.

He said that lower quality could be seen in a variety of ways, including increased class sizes or a change in modes of delivery, such as more online or blended classes.

And with the addition of increased tuition fees, along with limited seat availability across institutions, Nelson said Alberta’s participation rate is unlikely to improve.

“Avoidability of post-secondary education has been one of the factors, along with lack of space within the system, that’s contributed to a low participation rate,” he said. “Hiking costs to the degree that the government is, if anything, will have a continued negative impact.”
Albertans shrug at friends and insider appointments to higher education

Following recent public outcry, conversation surrounding post-secondary board appointments stalls

Following the UCP government’s appointment of party friends and insiders to the boards of Alberta’s post-secondary institutions, there was public outcry and controversy. There are ways to make this selection process more democratic, such as publicly electing these boards, but there doesn’t seem to be any interest from the public in discussing potential changes.

Back in August, as part of a major shakeup of the province’s agencies, boards and commissions, the UCP government made changes to the board of governors at 10 of the province’s public post-secondary schools, including replacing board chairs at eight of those institutions.

This is important because, although positions on these boards are unpaid, their members oversee critical institutional matters. This includes, but isn’t limited to, the development of policies such as admission requirements, the management of finances and hiring for positions such as faculty deans.

For example, Mount Royal University, which saw substantial changes to their board of governors, including the appointment of a new chair, describes the role of their board of governors on their website as those who oversee “the management and operation of the university’s business and affairs.”

In addition, the board is responsible for administering the “development of the overarching strategic direction and policy framework” for MRU. Through this, the board is supposed to ensure the activities the university undertakes are “consistent with its mandate, overseeing the efficient and effective use of financial and human resources to meet institutional objectives and institutional risk management.”

To accomplish these goals, which are similar amongst all of Alberta’s public post-secondary institutions, board of governors are made up of both public (or government-appointed) members and representative members which include nominated academic staff members, non-academic staff members, students, alumni and, if applicable, senate members and graduate students.

The exact number of public and representative members on boards differs depending on whether a school is classified as a university, comprehensive community college or polytechnic institution. What remains the same at all institutions is that, although government-appointed members don’t make up the entirety of these boards, they have the potential to fill up the majority of positions on each. And that gives the government a distinct, potentially more powerful voice at the table.

Laurie Chandler, press secretary for the Ministry of Advanced Education, wrote in an email to the Calgary Journal that this type of control is necessary given the cooperative nature of the relationship between the government and post-secondary board of governors.

“Through their chairs, boards may provide input into the development of provincial policies,” she wrote. “Therefore, it is important for the Minister to have strong relationships with the board of each institution, and for the Government of Alberta to be confident that each board has the desired skills, knowledge and experience.”

However, this government control over the make-up of post-secondary board of governors is what led many, including the NDP’s advanced education critic and former Minister of Education David Eggen, to accuse the UCP of playing favourites when it came to who was appointed, especially when it was discovered that one-third of all the most recent ABC appointees are long-time conservative donors. Eight of the top 10 conservative contributors ended up on the governing boards of post-secondary institutions.

During their own time in office, the NDP did make changes to the board appointment process. But, as MRU
policy studies professor Duane Bratt points out, these changes were not enough to end favoritism in the selection process. “The NDP also made partisan appointments, but the NDP brought in two changes,” he said. “The first is they waited for people’s terms to expire, then they replaced them. The second is they brought in an application procedure. They ended up still choosing people that they supported but there was an application procedure.”

There are ways to reform the selection process even more than the NDP did to make it more fair and democratic. One potential solution could come from south of the border. In four American states — Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, and Colorado — they publicly-elect boards that have responsibilities similar to those of boards of governors here in Alberta.

> Duane Bratt, Mount Royal University policy studies professor

At the University of Colorado, this board is called the board of regents. According to the university’s website, this board is responsible for “the general supervision of the university and the exclusive control and direction of all funds of and appropriations to the university.”

The board is made up of nine members who serve staggered six-year terms, meaning they come up for re-election at different times. Seven of these members represent each of Colorado’s congressional districts, while two represent the state as a whole.

By electing these members, as opposed to appointing them, the regents become accountable not only to the university and the students they serve, but also to the public who helped chose them. They are then truly representative of the public that they are meant to act on behalf of on these boards.

Following Colorado’s lead and electing public post-secondary board of governors is just one possible way Alberta could reform the current selection process for these crucial positions, but it’s not the only one. Other solutions include making an application process mandatory for these positions, staggering representatives’ terms or implementing mandatory fixed term limits.

Regardless of the potential fixes, though, it seems that most people don’t even want to have the conversation. The Council of Alberta University Students and the Alberta Students’ Executive Council, who, combined, represent 18 of the province’s public post-secondary schools and their students, refused to engage on this issue when asked to by the Calgary Journal.

Via emailed statements to the Journal, the CAUS wrote that they do not “have a position on how board members are selected;” while the ASEC wrote more fully that “at this time, ASEC does not have an official stance on the board of governors selection process at public PSE (post-secondary education) institutions in Alberta, however, we believe that transparency in the process is important.”

So, why is it that even though there are potential solutions to make this process more democratic, almost no one is talking about them?

Bratt has a very simple explanation. At the end of the day, he says, “People don’t care about universities.”
Youth learning the skills to build video games

A look into a local youth gaming academy

For Calgary teens and twenty-somethings who want to be part of the $131 billion business of video games, the city offers few opportunities to learn the practical and technical skills of gaming programs. However, the Calgary Game Developers Academy for Youths (CGDAY) has been trying to change that.

Shawn Tracz, a 20-year-old student, is one of those twenty-somethings.

“Maybe bullied a lot as a kid,” he says. “Gaming was always my escape from that. The reason I want to learn how to make games is so that kids who are going through the same things that I went through as a kid can also have that escape.”

Naturally, gaming has always been at the top of his list when thinking about potential careers. Luckily, Tracz stumbled upon CGDAY through a school program. He was immediately hooked.

Created five years ago by owner and operator Marcel Burca, CGDAY specializes in teaching video game development.

Burca began the business because of his passion for video games. After moving to Vancouver to pursue a career in gaming development, he moved back to Calgary eager to share his knowledge.

“Gaming has always been a passion of mine,” says Burca. “I’ve always had an interest in teaching in some capacity and I thought that video game development was the best avenue for that.”

To help young people advance their skills, CGDAY offers four tiers of classes. The first tier includes level design and world building basics. The second tier includes audio visualization and special effects. The third tier includes user interface design and visual scripting. The final tier includes intermediate game design and world building.

Additionally, the academy also provides a variety of resources, including a gaming lounge with classic and modern consoles, a recreation area with foosball, ping pong and air hockey tables and a learning area for students equipped with 10 computers.

Although the academy is designed to inspire students, Burca says the majority of them come back because they enjoy the curriculum.

“I am constantly redeveloping my curriculum and improve it on a regular basis because technology is evolving and I feel my curriculum should as well,” he says.

According to Burca, CGDAY specializes in teaching kids how to use Autodesk 3Ds Max and the software Unreal Game Engine. He believes these skills can be applied outside gaming.

“I like to teach students how to use technical tools that will benefit them in any industry,” he says. “They don’t necessarily need to apply this knowledge to gaming — you can apply it to almost any field. For example, in engineering, it’s a requirement to understand AutoCAD or SOLIDWORKS. So, having an understanding of the tools we use in our classes will be a huge help to those kids entering that field.”

One parent excited about the education provided by CGDAY is Tracz’s mother, Elaine. She says her son finding CGDAY was a major relief.

“He always wanted to do this as a career, even when he was younger,” she says. “For us it was asking where could we find somewhere he could do this. We searched online and thankfully found Marcel because a lot of results were for places in the [United] States.”

Burca continues to see progress in Tracz’s ability and his work ethic. He’s also thrilled about the commitment his parents have demonstrated.

“Over the years he’s been persistent and working hard at it,” says Burca. “His family even went out and got a computer for him so that he could continue to develop his skills, which is so great.”

Elaine says working in a creative space with youth is so rewarding.

“Shawn amazes me with all the information that he has learned,” she says. “He surpassed me a long time ago with all the gaming knowledge. For my generation, it’s kind of scary with all the information that’s out there so to have a place I feel comfortable with sending Shawn is awesome.”

Burca says he enjoys the teaching process with all his students, including with Tracz. He says the shy kid that entered his program has really taken steps forward.

“He’s been showing so much enthusiasm,” says Burca. “He was very quiet at the start and now he’s coming out of his shell a lot.”

Elaine says she’s impressed with her son’s skill development.

“Shawn amazes me with all the information that he has learned,” she says. “He surpassed me a long time ago with all the gaming knowledge. For my generation, it’s kind of scary with all the information that’s out there so to have a place I feel comfortable with sending Shawn is awesome.”

Burca says working in a creative space with youth is gratifying.

“It’s one of the most rewarding things in my life,” he says. “To help children and teens discover a completely new path where their only limitation is their creativity is so rewarding.”
Wheelchair sports engages everyone

Wheelchair basketball teams in Calgary work to prove that this intense sport can be played by everyone

In the world of athletics, wheelchair sports often get second-billing due to the misconception that the sport isn’t as intense as able-bodied sports. However, by integrating disabled and able-bodied wheelchair players, teams in Calgary are working to prove that isn’t the case.

Kendra Ohama, one of the earliest members of the Calgary Grizzlies wheelchair basketball team and a founding member of the Calgary Rollers wheelchair basketball team, agrees that wheelchair sports are rarely thought of in the same way as other sports.

Having been paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident when she was 16, Ohama has seen this misconception in her struggle to recruit new players and in newly-injured individuals who don’t play because they are denying that they are disabled.

“Sometimes when you [have a] new injury, you don’t want to accept the fact that you are in a wheelchair,” says Ohama.

The idea of wheelchair basketball as a disabled sport was not something that Maria Blanco struggled with when deciding to join the Grizzlies, but she agrees that it is an issue.

“One hundred per cent [there is a misconception]. I never really looked at the sport before I started playing,” says Blanco.

For her own part, Ohama says she may have never tried wheelchair basketball if a member of the Grizzlies hadn’t introduced her to how fast-paced it could be – even though she played sports as a kid.

“It was so exciting because, when I came out to watch, these guys were so fast, so talented moving their chairs back and forth, turning, stopping on a dime. They’re controlling the ball with their hands, they’re pushing the wheels with their hands,” Ohama says.

Ohama remembers the players flying down the court and moving so quickly that, if one of them was fouled, they would fling out of their chair.

At one point, two players fell over each other because they hit their chairs together. Since then, straps have been required to stop players from falling out of their wheelchairs.

After watching her first game, Ohama knew she had to get on the court herself. “I fell in love with it because it was finally a sport that I could actually get involved in,” says Ohama.

Unlike Ohama, Blanco didn’t fall in love with the sport until she played it herself. She was convinced to become a member of the Grizzlies because of the technicalities and complexities of the game – something that helps her in her other role as a member of Mount Royal University’s women’s basketball team.

“I feel like they are similar sports but [have] completely different styles of play,” Blanco says. “If I had to say what’s more physical or fast or intense, I would say wheelchair basketball.”

It is these qualities that have attracted other able-bodied individuals such as Blanco to the game.

“A lot of people think that you have to have a disability to play but Canada’s one of the few countries that allows able-bodied people to play in their leagues,” says Ohama.

Having able-bodied players can be helpful to game play. Although everyone is in a chair, Ohama has trouble picking up the ball from the floor because being paralyzed from the waist down makes bending forward difficult.

As an able-bodied player, Blanco has more movement. And that’s partially why involving able-bodied people has always been important for Ohama, with both the Grizzlies and the Rollers having three such players.

Still, she doesn’t think of the team as being comprised of able-bodied and disabled players. Instead, she thinks of everyone as being equal.

“I never really thought of it [as a sport for disabled people]. I just jumped and started playing. So, if people are disabled or not is not something I’ve really considered,” Blanco says.

She believes that the wheelchair is just part of the equipment for the sport, similar to needing skates or a racket. This understanding has helped Blanco get into wheelchair basketball and become part of a unified team of all different types of people.

Ohama would love to better integrate able-bodied players with disabled players. She recognizes that able-bodied people often feel uncomfortable the first time they play wheelchair basketball, but knows that after getting in the chair and playing, most people get over it.

“They see how competitive it is and they see that people with disabilities are really good and they have to actually train hard and fight hard to play the sport. Then it becomes more about the sport then it becomes about the disability,” Ohama says.

This is what Ohama hopes for: that people will see wheelchair basketball as a sport equal to stand-up basketball.
How one researcher helped reduce the number of concussions in child athletes

Carolyn Emery is currently working with NFL on $12 million study

The removal of body checking in peewee by Hockey Canada, a change made in part due to a study conducted by Carolyn Emery, reduced concussions by 64 per cent. PHOTO COURTESY OF: UPSLASH.COM

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A s chair of the Sport Injury Prevention Research Centre at the University of Calgary, Carolyn Emery’s research has led to policy changes at athletic organizations, including the banning of body checking in peewee hockey across Canada. However, Emery, who is currently working on studies with both Football Canada and the NFL, believes even more changes are needed in youth sports.

“Being able to contribute to a significant reduction in concussions and injuries in ice hockey through an evidence-informed policy change has been pretty impactful and sort of a highlight of my career,” says Emery, who has been part of the University of Calgary’s kinesiology faculty since 2004.

After working for several years in pediatric sports medicine, orthopedics and neurology, a desire to reduce the number of injuries she was seeing in the clinic drove Emery to obtain her PhD in epidemiology.

Emery has partnered with Hockey Canada for several years, including on the study that led to the 2013 ban of body checking in peewee hockey. That study found the risk of injuries and concussions was more than three times greater in peewee leagues that allowed body checking compared to those that didn’t.

“I think it’s fair to say that the disallowing of body checking in games in peewee is an evidence-informed decision,” she says.

Paul Carson, vice president of hockey development for Hockey Canada agrees, saying that while there was a lot of information out there, Emery’s study was key in making the change.

“Our organization brought together all of the research that was available to us, and Carolyn’s study was certainly significant,” says Carson.

“No other child should die from repeated concussions”

> Carolyn Emery, Epidemiologist University of Calgary

She also emphasized that peewee hockey players are still taught body checking skills in practice so they are not completely unprepared when they reach more elite levels of play.

Even though she is quite happy with her work so far, Emery says more rule changes are still needed as awareness and understanding of the impact of concussions continues to grow.

“I think that it’s important to be looking at the policy related to body checking in older age groups nationally. We know the impact that will have in reducing thousands of concussions in this country, so that would be a low-hanging fruit.”

Emery says it’s also worth taking a look at tackling techniques in rugby, and the level at which tackling is introduced. And she says that while zero tolerance policies for head contact in elite levels of hockey and soccer have been shown to be effective, more work needs to be done to examine the impact of these rules and how officials handle those situations.

For her own part, Emery is now working with Football Canada to understand the impact of non-contact practices and a policy that would only allow a certain number of contact practices a season, depending on the level of play.

She is also in the early stages of leading a $12-million NFL-funded study that will, according to a UofC news release integrate “a variety of tools to detect concussion, predict recovery and inform best practice and policy in the prevention and management of concussions in youth sports.”

The study will involve researchers from universities across Canada, as well as a number of other stakeholders, looking at many different youth sports including football, hockey, basketball and soccer.

However, her work hasn’t been without opposition. “There’s always barriers to change. For example, coaches that have been coaching a certain way for a long time are sometimes resistant to change. Even if you have evidence that something works there’s still a behavioural change aspect of everything,” she says.

While social media has also allowed those that are resistant to change to share their own experiences with concussions to say they are not that harmful, Emery says those are anecdotes that do not match what the evidence is saying.

“All we can do is provide evidence to support the health of young people and keep them playing sports,” she says.

Despite these challenges, Emery says she has seen an improvement in the way parents of athletes think about concussions.

“The culture has certainly changed over the last decade. I think that people are starting to understand the impact of concussions not just acutely but also the consequences of concussions,” she says.

Rowan’s law in Ontario is evidence that the narrative is changing, Emery says. The 2016 law, which regulates concussion treatment and prevention in youth sports, was enacted following the 2013 death of high school rugby player Rowan Stringer, who suffered two concussions in the same week.

“No other child should die from repeated concussions,” says Emery.

“When the evidence was available and when [officials at Hockey Canada] were ready to have the vote to make the decision, it went forward,” Emery says.

Emery led a follow-up study which found that, after the ban was implemented, there was a 64 per cent decrease in the number of concussions and a 50 per cent decrease in total injuries. Emery acknowledges a lack of body checking experience in peewee can lead to a small increase of serious injury risk once players reach bantam age. However, the benefits of the ban far outweigh that risk.

“That increase (in serious injury risk) pales in comparison to the reduction in 11- and 12-year-olds where we’ve eliminated thousands of concussions in the earlier age group,” she says.
Powwow competitors gathered for music and dancing at the Siksika Nation annual powwow and fair at the Piiksapi Memorial Arbour from Aug. 9-11. The weekend festivities happened just east of Calgary. Tipis were set up around the central gathering place for watchers and travellers who attended the event. Amid overcast skies, campers set up around the circular map of the grounds on the valley floor. Spectators took in various styles of dance, including Grass, Fancy, Jingle and Prairie Chicken, as dancers competed for points from a panel of judges. The competition also included drum groups performing four- to five-minute sets.

1. The strings slowly swing back and forth and gentle movements make up this woman’s dance as she holds her feathers across her chest.

2. Points are awarded for each category, often with dollar prizes and giveaways.

3. The powwow events begin with grand entry where dancers from all categories fill the arena.

4. The Piiksapi Memorial Arbour where spectators watch and listen to the dancers and drummers throughout the day and evening.
STREETLIGHT
A mobile drop-in centre for youth without a home

1 THE TRAILER
The StreetLight mobile drop-in trailer includes tables with seating, a kitchen and a second story loft with a television and an Xbox.

2 THE ART
One of StreetLight's volunteers decided to put her talents to good use, bringing supplies and starting an art program for those who attend.

3 THE VIDEO GAMES
A popular section of the trailer is its second story loft, where attendees gather around to play games.

4 THE FOOD
StreetLight always feeds the youth who come to them. On tonight's menu? A full course turkey dinner complete with stuffing and pumpkin pie.

5 THE KITCHEN
StreetLight's kitchen is impressive. It's design is similar to that of a food truck. Pictured are volunteers warming up dinner.

6 THE LOCATION
The trailer is not a regular drop-in program. Instead of requiring homeless youth to come to them, they go to where they are. The trailer can often be found in Bowness or the Downtown Core.
Home sweet trailer

Providing food, connection, and hope for those without a home

Thick, white rain. That’s what one young adult is calling the forecasted precipitation to avoid using the word snow. His effort to enforce the same censorship on a few dozen youth and young adults is sparking laughter all around. The forecast is hardly surprising considering the chill in the air but here, there is a noticeable warmth and camaraderie.

It’s the kind of conversation that could happen in any youth group in Calgary. But the worry about snow is particularly significant for this one because each of its members is homeless.

Despite a decade-worth of efforts to deal with homelessness in Calgary, too many of the city’s young people still live without a permanent address. But StreetLight has been trying to provide them with a temporary one — a trailer, which operates as a mobile drop-in centre, providing food, shelter and a place where they can warmly talk about the weather.

How do we care not only for their physical state but also do this in a holistic way that encompasses all the needs that the youth might have?

> Carissa Lawton
Director, StreetLight

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Alberta’s ambitious 10-year plan to end homelessness ran out of time with the turn of the calendar to 2019. And although it was not without some success, according to Carissa Lawton, executive director of StreetLight, there are still upwards of 600 homeless youth and young adults in Calgary. This figure includes those living on the street and young people who may be couch surfing, accessing shelters or living outside of a stable home environment in any other way.

There are many factors that may lead to youth homelessness, from simple conflicts to more serious abuses. “More than not, it is the fact that there’s some semblance of family breakdown within the home,” says Lawton. 22-year-old Marcus Ophilias, whose real name isn’t being used to protect his future housing and employment opportunities, has been coming to StreetLight since last December. At the time, he had been homeless for around seven months after being asked to leave his previous residence for excessive drinking.
He began sleeping in hospitals, saying, “I’m just waiting for my mom,” when asked what he was doing there. But soon he was on the streets, unaware of the various drop-in centres where he could find shelter. When he eventually discovered a centre, Ophilias began staying there throughout the winter.

Then, in December, another homeless friend invited him to StreetLight. The non-profit organization, which has existed for over 25 years, started out in an RV before graduating to a school bus and finally the 48-foot trailer that it is today. Today’s version of StreetLight includes tables with seating, a kitchen and a second story loft with a television and an XBox. But though it has gotten bigger, Lawton says the mobile drop-in center’s mentality and purpose have stayed the same.

THE FOOD

One of StreetLight’s primary operations is feeding those who attend. Ophilias himself admits he originally came for nothing more than food as he became increasingly malnourished the longer he was homeless.

“On the streets you don’t eat well, in drop-in you don’t eat well,” he says.

This isn’t the case at StreetLight. Tonight, a full-blown turkey dinner is on the menu, thanks to a volunteer church group. As a non-profit, StreetLight relies on donations like this from various partners for the food they serve.

THE COMMUNITY

But Lawton says StreetLight provides food for more than just the obvious physical need.

“How do we care not only for their physical state but also do this in a holistic way that encompasses all the needs that the youth might have?” is the question she says the program seeks to answer.

“[Most people] see me sleeping on the transit and all that, [and] maybe I didn’t smell good some days, but they judge you and you can see it. Even though they’re not talking to you, you see it. But here they didn’t,” he says. He says this is why he started to attend more often.

Carrissa Lawton, left, is the director of StreetLight. She says that she is trying to work herself out of a job by empowering the youth she works with.

PHOTO: BLAISE KEMNA

THE HOME

Lawton says the final piece of the program is building hope for the future and providing a place where youth can work towards their own goals.

“We’re basically trying to work ourselves out of a job,” she says.

Through relationships built in mentorship, staff can recognize the specific needs of those they work with. The mentorship program also helps youth with practical skills, such as finding work, budgeting and finding affordable housing. StreetLight can then refer youth to other organizations that can help.

Ophilias is a good example of the success of this model. When he started to attend more consistently, he began to desire more from life.

“I just missed having a bed. I missed having my life. And I didn’t want to be homeless anymore. I didn’t want to do drugs. I didn’t want to screw my life up because I know I’m young and I can do a lot better for myself.”

What followed this realization, however, was what he calls a very slow progression. His goals were overwhelming until his mentor helped break them down step by step. Then in August, after being homeless for just over a year, Ophilias found a place to live.

“If I didn’t have some guidance, or if I didn’t have some direction in life, I know I would still be on the streets right now.”

It’s in this way that Ophilias says StreetLight has had a huge impact on his life. From the first time he came for food, he has felt at home in the trailer. Now, when the “thick, white rain” threatens this year, he won’t need to sleep in hospitals or shelters. He’ll sleep in his own home.

Food is just a gateway to meet other needs — mental and emotional. StreetLight is currently developing a mentorship program which seeks to foster a place of healthy community, safety and belonging for homeless youth.

Ophilias, who received his own personal mentor when he began to attend, says he immediately noticed this sort of community.

> Marcus Ophilias, StreetLight client

> "If I didn’t have some guidance, or if I didn’t have some direction in life, I know I would still be on the streets right now"
Where there’s smoke there’s fire
Sellers and doctors debate vaping dangers

Twenty-two-year-old Colten Stankowski dabbled in cigarette smoking before he tried vaping. Once he discovered vapes — and his favourite mint and dessert flavours — he switched for good.

“I liked the idea of it cause I always liked the action of smoking and I was like, ‘This isn’t as gross as a cigarette, it’s tasty,’” he says.

But just three months ago, Stankowski quit vaping because of reports about serious health issues linked to the habit. Those issues have been raised by healthcare professionals, who have asked pointed questions regarding the ethics of the industry’s marketing strategies. But at least one member of Calgary’s vaping community maintains that these issues and questions are a result of tainted products, misinformation and a basic misunderstanding of the vape industry.

A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

What is now being called a public health emergency began with reports from the United States of an acute respiratory syndrome linked to vaping.

“People have a dry cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, they even have a little bit of vomiting and abdominal discomfort,” explains Dr. Richard Stanwich, the chief medical health officer for Vancouver Island and a leader in the fight against cigarette smoking.

In extreme cases, individuals even require assistance breathing, he says.

As of Oct. 8, 1,299 cases of lung injury and 26 confirmed deaths have been reported and are being investigated in the United States by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

In mid-September, Canada reported its first case of vaping-related illness and, as a result, Dr. Stanwick says health officials across the country are treating the issue very seriously. Ottawa’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Vera Etches has called for increased regulations on all vaping products.

But Sean Rankin of Haze Vape Co. in Calgary insists these health issues are the result of tainted vape juice, not vaping itself. Because cannabis is mostly illegal in the United States, there is a black market for THC concentrates that are vapable. Unfortunately, Rankin says, these concentrates are often diluted with oil so dealers can sell more.

“Talk to any juice maker worth his salt [and] he will tell you, you do not use any oils. It’s dangerous. Bad. Don’t use it,” says Rankin.

According to the CDC, 77 per cent of individuals reporting lung injury said they have used products that contain THC.

HEAVY METALS

Regardless of whether or not the current health emergency is a result of vaping diluted oil THC, vaping itself is still not harmless, according to Dr. Stanwick.

He says that during the heating process involved in vaping, “there’s basically ultrafine particles, heavy metals — volatile hydrocarbons particularly — being created,” which users then inhale when they smoke.

Rankin doesn’t dispute this, but says this must also be put into perspective.

“You go downtown, you’re inhaling metals, you’re inhaling dirt, dust, ultrafine particles, all sorts of crap.”

Individuals inhale particles every day, he says. So although Rankin acknowledges particles are created while vaping, he contends they are often not even measurable according to most health standards.
But Dr. Stanwick emphasizes the fact that new unknown molecules are created in the process. “I can’t tell you what chemicals you’re going to generate when you superheat [vape juices] and what sort of interactions are occurring,” he says.

What both Dr. Stanwick and Rankin can agree on, however, is that the harms associated with vaping don’t come close to the harm of cigarettes.

**WILD CHERRY AND BUBBLE GUM**

Nonetheless Dr. Stanwick, who is also a pediatrician, is concerned by the way the vape industry employs marketing strategies specifically targeted to adolescents who have likely never smoked before. This has led to an increase in youth vaping which normalizes nicotine consumption, he says.

“More than half of the consumers of this product are under age 35 and most of those people probably didn’t take it up to quit smoking,” says Dr. Stanwick.

According to a Health Canada survey, 23 per cent of students in grades seven to 12 have tried vaping.

He says a vape’s sleek appearance and electronic features increase its appeal, which “pairs well with the iPhone.” He also says the variety of vape juice flavours entice youth and he questions whether a suave, sophisticated 40-year-old in an Audi R8 would vape bubble gum or wild cherry flavour.

But Rankin says this actually happens.

“People pull up in their Mercedes, fur coats, gold Gucci glasses, the whole nine yards and [ask], ‘What do you have for a strawberry mint?’”

He also notes that flavours actually play a large role in helping adult customers quit smoking.

“I still eat cereal. I love Cinnamon Toast Crunch. If I could vape it to quit smoking — hallelujah, that’s a God send!” he says.

As for the rising numbers of young people vaping, Rankin blames that on large vape companies as opposed to smaller “grassroots” shops like his own. Grassroots shops existed when vaping was a grey market product. In May 2018, Bill S-5 was passed, excluding minors from such stores. So, Rankin says all of his customers are adults.

But, because vapes are no longer a grey market product, this same legislation has also opened the market to big businesses.

These corporations began aggressively advertising and promoting products with high nicotine levels, using lifestyle marketing that appealed to youth. They also approached convenience stores, making their products more easily accessible to minors. This marked a shift away from vaping as a smoking cessation tool.

“We don’t sell those brands, we won’t. The day I have to sell one of those brands is the day that I get out of this,” says Rankin.

He believes calls for a vaping ban can be attributed to the public’s lack of distinction between vape corporations and grassroots shops that help people quit smoking by educating customers about how to wean themselves off nicotine.

Rankin himself used vaping to quit smoking after a 27-year addiction and believes passionately in his product.

**TO VAPE OR NOT TO VAPE**

So are the negative headlines prompting individuals to quit vaping? Stankowski did. But it’s also clear that he has no real passion for it. In fact, he admits he only started because he observed other people doing it. He says it was trend.

And though casual users like Stankowski may be swayed, it appears dedicated members of Calgary’s grassroots vaping community, such as Rankin, aren’t. They say despite vaping’s ability to help smokers quit, the news has unfairly lumped all vaping into one category: dangerous.

Meanwhile, Dr. Stanwick and other medical professionals caution that this is merely a new mass marketing of nicotine, creating a new generation dependent on the psycho-active substance.

“It’s really the cigarette 2.0 for the 21st century,” he says.
That’s a wrap: How to reduce holiday waste
A greener guide to celebrating the holiday season with sustainability

According to Statistics Canada, Alberta produces the most waste per person than anywhere else in the country, at almost 1,000 kg per year. But, during and after the holidays, there is a 50 to 75 per cent increase in the amount of materials received at Calgary’s waste and recycling facilities. So, here are some simple ways to give less to the landfill during the season of giving.

ECO-FRIENDLY HOLIDAY GIFT SWAPS
“I know it sounds super cheesy, but hear me out,” says Lea Luciano from Plastic Free YYC. “Some people value quality time more than the act of gift-giving. I personally prefer spending quality time or doing something together, rather than buying a gift for someone that they may or may not use. For your mom, you can do a cooking class together. For dad, you can go hiking. For your significant other, do an activity of his/her choice that you wouldn’t normally do.”

GET CREATIVE AND MAKE SOME DIY SELF-CARE PRODUCTS
For those who still enjoy giving physical gifts, making homemade self-care products is the way to go. “If you happen to be creative, this is a perfect project for you to do. There are a lot of things you can make such as candles, soaps and even bath bombs,” says Luciano. “With the amazing technology we have nowadays, you can easily Google how-tos and tutorials on how to make candles. Check out your local bulk stores or refillery for materials.”

PREPARE BAKED GOODS
If spending time in the kitchen is your jam, use your skills to find some fun, festive recipes and prepare a batch of holiday goodies to gift. “Why not give your best friend who has a sweet tooth a tray of cookies?” says Luciano. And don’t be afraid to get creative with cheap and sustainable wrapping options. “The thrift store also has [a] great selection of plates, trays and mason jars so you can package your treats nicely,” says Luciano.

GIVE SECOND-HAND A CHANCE
While you’re thrifting for some greener wrapping options, be sure to scope out some holiday decorations too. “I know some people are iffy about buying other secondhand items,” says Luciano. But, she adds, “Holiday decor is expensive and most of the time, they are made out of plastic. Some people get rid of their decorations after one use and they often end up in thrift stores” where they could become a potential gift.

IT’S A WRAP!
Luciano suggests trying furoshiki to wrap your presents and skip the plastic bows and paper wrapping. She explains, “[Furoshiki is] the Japanese art of using fabric or cloth to wrap gifts. You can use old pillowcases or an old shirt to wrap up your presents.” If you still want to use traditional wrapping, be sure it’s reused instead of newly purchased. “Save all your gifted tissue paper and bags from previous gifts and celebrations to re-gift this season,” says Luciano.

SHOP LOCAL
“If you are planning to buy gifts, we encourage you to shop local. It uses less energy because they don’t have to transport items so far and you are supporting local vendors/artists,” says Luciano. The Bridgeland Farmers’ Market, Calgary Farmers’ Market, the Spruce Meadows International Christmas Market and Calgary Night Markets are some local shopping options to choose from. You can even support local artists from the Alberta University of the Arts at one of their infamous pie and plate sales!

GIVE THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING (BACK TO THE EARTH)
Give gifts that will help others become more environmentally conscious. Shop for items like beeswax wraps for leftovers, reusable straws or steel razors. “If you have a friend or family member who is interested in being waste-free, give them items that would encourage them to use less plastic such as a reusable mug/bottle, bamboo cutlery set they can bring for their packed lunch, reusable straws, etc.,” says Luciano. This way, they can continue their eco-friendly ways all year long!
Two moms prove ‘This Girl Can’

Inspired by their daughters, two moms created This Girl Can Expo as a one-stop shop for childrens’ programs and resources

This year, dozens of young women gathered at the This Girl Can Expo in Calgary to become young entrepreneurs, selling everything from homemade headbands to robots. Out of all of them, the expo’s co-founder Robyn Miskic remembers one girl the most due to the negative responses she’s had pursuing her art.

“The girl’s mother said, ‘Everybody keeps telling my daughter that that’s great you want to pursue art but you’re going to be a starving artist,’” says Miskic. “This show gives her a platform and an opportunity to create something that she could sell.”

Many girls face similar pushback when it comes to following their passions. That can make it difficult for girls to become confident in themselves and their abilities. But Miskic believes this happens more now than it has ever before. Co-founder Hockenhull was inspired by her daughters to change that by creating the This Girl Can Expo.

One of the reasons young girls have trouble developing positive self-esteem is that they compare themselves to others. Miskic believes this happens more now than it has ever before. Co-founder Hockenhull blames social media and the abundance of accessible technology.

“There’s just more pressure and more expectation because a lot of what you see is the best of people and so it’s like, ‘Well, how do I get to be the best? How do I get there?’” Hockenhull says.

Tasha Belix, a registered psychologist who participated in this year’s event, is a mother of three teen girls herself and agrees those expectations are becoming an increasing problem.

“The pressure to feel like you fit in is really evident. And fit in in a way that you’re not only managing your life, your family, your siblings, your friends and your school community but you’re also trying to manage your online profile,” says Belix.

This need to fit in and compare themselves to others can stop kids from exploring new things, says Miskic. She believes a girl’s self-confidence directly impacts the activities she participates in. When girls don’t think they can do something, they never try it and thus are limited in their experiences.

It was through talking about these challenges that Miskic and Hockenhull became interested in taking action themselves. Both had kids entering their teens and wanted to be prepared for challenges, such as low self-esteem, that their children might experience.

However, they were at a loss and frustrated by how difficult it was to find programs designed to help parents.

“Programs and resources — those are the two things that parents want to know about and how do you find those, where are they, how to access them?” Miskic says.

Fueled by these questions, the co-founders gathered contacts within multiple organizations so that parents, including themselves, could find those programs and resources more quickly. This is how they came up with the This Girl Can Expo.

“After researching to see if something like [This Girl Can] was out there and there wasn’t — that’s when I thought, ‘Let’s just do it,’” says Miskic.

The expo brought representatives of the programs and resources they had identified together in a casual environment where parents and children could more easily talk to them.

“[Having] a place that is safe and comfortable for people to approach a program or resource that they might not just reach out to on their own [is the point of the expo],” Miskic says.

Hockenhull has found this to be true with her own daughter, who has started trying new things and exploring her interests since participating in the expo.

“We formed [This Girl Can] essentially for our daughters,” says Hockenhull.

One of the first steps of creating the This Girl Can Expo was launching a website. Hockenhull took on this challenge even though, in her words, she could barely log in to her email.

“When I published [the website] my daughter was there, and I said, ‘If I can make a web page, you can literally do anything,’” says Hockenhull.

After creating the website, the hard work did not stop. Planning for the event gave Hockenhull and Miskic the chance to show their kids what they do and all the behind-the-scenes work needed to make the expo happen.

“They see the super fun times like today and they see us working all the time to make this happen. So, they realize that work does go beyond having a good day,” Hockenhull said on the day of the expo.

Watching their mothers every step of the way, both Hockenhull and Miskic’s children became involved with the event. They were especially involved in the expo’s kids’ market, which Hockenhull’s daughter helped oversee and facilitate.

Miskic’s three girls also participated in the kids’ market by selling handmade scrunchies made from recycled fabric. They were fully accountable for their booth, planning it out themselves with little to no help from their parents.

“They made a schedule and followed it and they’ve worked so hard to make this happen,” Miskic says.

Seeing the benefits of their work helped the children feel good about themselves and their abilities. This teaches the girls that, through hard work and perseverance, they can reach their goals.

Hockenhull and Miskic hope to not only help kids, but parents too so that they can help their own children. With booths on everything from therapists to dance classes, kids can explore and find programs they are interested in that will help them tackle challenges.

With all the resources that are available, the message Hockenhull and Miskic hope participants take away is one of possibilities and empowerment.

“You can literally do anything you want. And it sounds so cliché to say that, but you literally can. We are in a phase of life that you can absolutely do anything you want,” says Hockenhull.
Gaining homes, losing languages

Immigrant families are losing their mother tongues and Calgarians are lacking the resources, such as bilingual school programs, to preserve them.

Like many children of immigrants, growing up without her heritage language was normal for Katarina Daignault. When her Indo-Carribean mother and grandmother immigrated to Canada, they made a decision that many do when they immigrate: to let go of the Hindi language and learn English.

Now, at 23 years old, Daignault finally understands the important things she lost along with her mother tongue: a connection to her culture, a sense of belonging and even the confidence to identify as an ethnic woman.

“There’s a big isolation piece. What is being Indo-Carribean? What is being Trinidadian? … I don’t know,” says Daignault. “I feel very isolated from that cultural group.”

However, Daignault isn’t alone. As a second-generation immigrant who doesn’t speak her heritage language, her story is similar to many others who are born to immigrant families across Canada.

Preserving heritage languages through resources like bilingual school programs can be critical for maintaining immigrants’ ethnic identities. However, the process for approving those programs in Calgary is complicated and one that requires substantial community support — something many groups might have a hard time garnering.

According to Statistics Canada’s most recent census data, Calgary was home to 404,700 immigrants in 2016, making up approximately 30 per cent of the city’s population. Since 1981, this population has increased by almost 600 per cent.

While this increasing immigrant population means an increase in the number of heritage languages brought into the city, the general trend is that these languages are often lost by the third generation. This causes an incessant cycle of gaining and losing languages.

Evangelia Daskalaki, an assistant linguistics professor at the University of Alberta, says immigrant families are losing their heritage languages faster simply due to limited opportunities to speak those languages.

“If we think about it, immigrant children use the majority language in a variety of contexts, with a variety of speakers, for a variety of purposes,” says Daskalaki. “The use of the heritage language, on the other hand, is more limited both in quantitative and qualitative terms: it is typically used at home with few speakers on topics concerning the everyday routine.”

This can be detrimental — not only to family ties, but to children’s overall wellbeing.

“Imagine the relationship between a grandparent with limited proficiency in the majority language and his grandchildren, who might have limited or no proficiency in the heritage language,” says Daskalaki. “In what language will they communicate with each other? In what language will they tell stories, play, argue and express emotions?”

Daignault, who is taking a minor in child psychology and often works with ethnic immigrant children, sees the negative effects of losing heritage languages on a regular basis.

“[My students] will always tell me, ‘Oh, I’m not really this, but my family is from here.’ They discredit that this is their heritage, this is their whole foundation, and the more we learn about children, the more we learn about how important family and cultural identity is,” says Daignault.

Furthermore, Daskalaki stresses that on top of limited opportunities to speak the language, immigrant children don’t always have resources for formal instruction in their
heritage language, like bilingual or immersion programs.

When asked to list activities best suited to promote heritage language usage, attendance of heritage language schools was first on her list. She also listed, “interaction with friends in the heritage language, reading, Skype with relatives in the home country and extra-curricular activities in the heritage language.”

BILINGUAL PROGRAMS FOR LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

University of Alberta alum June Cheung focused on this growing issue for her thesis titled, “The Impact of a Bilingual School Program on Generational Heritage Language Loss,” published earlier this year. She worked with 31 Chinese-Canadian immigrants from both second and third generations to learn how bilingual schools impact heritage language abilities.

Her thesis shows that participants who didn’t attend bilingual schools obtained lower scores than those who did attend, sometimes being unable to use the heritage language altogether. According to her research, speaking the language regularly at home and attending a bilingual school is the most effective way to strengthen children’s heritage languages and slow the rate of language loss.

Cheung herself is proof of this. As a child, she attended a Mandarin bilingual school in Edmonton and now, as an adult, is able to speak to her family in the language they’re most comfortable speaking.

“It gives you a sense of, okay, this is where I came from. This is part of who I am,” says Cheung.

However, many of Calgary’s immigrant families aren’t so lucky.

Despite having almost double the immigrant population, Calgary is falling behind Edmonton’s bilingual school programs, only offering three languages within the Calgary Board of Education: Mandarin, German and Spanish.

Edmonton’s Public School Board, on the other hand, offers six: American Sign Language, Arabic, Mandarin, German, Hebrew and Spanish.

This is done through the Edmonton school board’s Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education — the first institute of its kind in North America that supports the development of second language education for students. Despite its name, it also supports heritage, international, official, signed and indigenous languages.

Janice Aubry, director of curriculum and resource support at the Edmonton school board, says that although the institute’s bilingual programs are designed for all students, they allow newly arriving immigrant families to successfully develop their heritage language skills and maintain ties to their heritage while also learning English.

“Students in our bilingual programs achieve high levels of language proficiency overall — even students who enter our programs with little or no previous exposure to the language. Students in our bilingual programs also generally achieve well academically.”

Though the institute has shown great success in Edmonton, Calgary does not appear to have made similar steps towards heritage language development.

The Calgary Journal reached out to Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education for Alberta’s government, for comment.

“Our government recognizes the value of offering language programs in schools to enhance learning opportunities for students,” says Colin Alitchinson, Minister LaGrange’s press secretary. “School authorities make decisions regarding offering second language programming based on teacher capacity, resources, as well as community and student choice.”

However, according to the Calgary school board’s media relations, “This is beyond our mandate to deliver the Alberta Program of Studies. We offer three bilingual programs — Spanish, German and Mandarin.”

CBE’S COMPLICATED PROCESS

The Calgary school board’s website shows that members of the public can propose alternative programs, including additional bilingual programs, but the process is complicated. It follows a procedure outlined in a provincial government manual that was last updated in 2010.

According to a school board report titled, “Framework for Alternative Programs,” alternative program proposals go through six stages:

- Stage one: proposing a new alternative program
- Stage two: implementing approved programs
- Stage three: sustaining an existing alternative program
- Stage four: expanding an existing alternative program
- Stage five: closing an existing alternative program (if an entire school is being closed, provincial regulations apply)
- Stage six: student registration and transfer

However, within a 60-day timeframe, the proposal must go through seven different authorities and departments for review before parents are able to express interest. By the end of the 60 days, a final decision must be made by the chief superintendent of schools, Christopher Usih.

Proposing new alternative programs to the Calgary school board and demonstrating a sufficient demand for the program through enrolments is critical to the implementation of new bilingual school programs. Without it, nothing will change.

Because of this, substantial community support is crucial. However, according to Daignault, this community support may be lacking in Calgary. Drawing upon her experience with immigrant families, she says this could be due to the shame immigrants may feel because they do not speak perfect English. For many newly-arrived immigrants, this shame often causes them to focus more on learning English than maintaining their mother tongue.

“I tutored English for years for high school students and they were willing to give up their heritage language to speak English well,” says Daignault.

This is often the reality, even for her own family — her grandmother was the last generation to speak Hindi fluently as a result of going to missionary school to learn English to immigrate successfully.

“My grandmother was told not to speak Hindi ever, so why would she teach her grandkids? Why would she teach her own children? ‘English is the best language. It is where you’re going to get places in life.’”

Cheung says that this is where strong communities can come in to combat the problem.

“Communities are where language and culture and diversity are able to grow and to be shared,” says Cheung. “I think if you have those factors then people are more curious about other languages, people are more likely to share their own language or to be more proud of their own language and to have those chances to keep the language alive.”

My grandmother was told not to speak Hindi ever, so why would she teach her grandkids?

> Katarina Daignault, University of Calgary student

Not only will this allow immigrants to be proud of where they came from, but it can give further generations opportunities to speak their heritage languages more regularly.

Confidence and pride in speaking heritage languages is crucial to maintaining them past three generations of immigration to Canada. Cheung says that to do so, it’s important for new immigrants to speak their mother tongues at home without worrying about their child learning English.

“The research shows that you should speak to your child in the language you feel most comfortable in because that way you can give them really rich language exposure, especially if your English isn’t great,” says Cheung. “If you try to speak to your child just in English, they won’t get that same richness of language they would get if you were speaking to them in a language you’re more fluent in.”

Many immigrants must learn their heritage language on their own.

PHOTO: KARINA ZAPATA
People often expect their family gatherings will be cordial and blissful during the holidays, hoping to get through dinner drama-free and revel in feelings of love and safety.

However, differing views, toxic behaviours and strained relationships can fuel conflict between relatives.

Perhaps it is unrealistic to think the holidays will be picture perfect, but there are ways you can navigate some of the stress, reduce conflict and start to build stronger relationships.

Jennifer Watts, counsellor and owner of Living Well, a counselling practice in Calgary, says it’s understandable that people have an unrealistic expectation of how their families will behave during the festive season — especially because family members are “supposed to be the safe place that we can share and love freely.”

However, this isn’t always the reality.

The truth is that not all of us get along with our families. Our relationships with them can be tense and toxic, making conversations at family dinners difficult to have. Some of us might have a parent with an unhealthy ratio of rum to eggnog, who will polish off the bottle before appetizers are served.

Or maybe the dinner table feels more like a firing squad, with an uncle’s loaded questions about our sexualities, gender identities or marital status (laced with homophobic undertones).

Carolyn Claire, a registered psychologist who runs her own practice, says arguments around the dinner table have become a growing issue for families in recent years.

“I think it’s way more common that families are having really heated, angry, maybe even hateful conversations that are pretty distressing to lots of people.”

While this may be the reality for many families, both Watts and Claire say it doesn’t have to be.

The Calgary Journal spoke to the counsellor and psychologist about how to reduce conflict and build stronger relationships with our families over the holidays.

REALITY, LISTS AND BOUNDARIES

To set yourself up for success, Watts explains we need to clarify our expectations by reflecting on what we really want from our family, while being realistic.

“We want unconditional love but maybe their love is really conditional. So going in with reasonable expectations of what they can provide is important.”

If conversations are still consistently taking a heated turn, one option is to avoid taboo topics altogether.

Watts suggests making a list of safe topics and questions ahead of time so that you don’t get stressed and freeze if things go sour. She explains, “At least it’s keeping us off of things that we really strongly disagree on and it allows us to bond and just have a conversation.”
But sometimes these kinds of lists don’t work. When the conversation takes a wrong turn and we don’t want to be silent or fuel another hour-long debate, we should create a boundary that is still consistent with our values and ethics.

Claire says, “I might just say something like, ‘You know, that really isn’t my experience and I don’t agree with what you’re saying.’ And then kind of using that as a broken record.”

By repeating your statement but also not arguing further, this will allow you to stay true to your beliefs and vocalize that you don’t agree with something being said.

**HAVE OPEN CONVERSATIONS**

The other alternative, Claire says, would be to offer to talk about the issue later.

She suggests saying something like, “I would be really open to talking to you further about this some time. Maybe we could go for coffee — but I’m not comfortable doing that tonight. You know, ‘Mom is really upset with all the conflict,’ or, ‘There’s too much alcohol involved; let’s meet for coffee, discuss this and see if we can understand each other’s viewpoint.’”

While you’re not obligated to have these conversations, it could be an opportunity for a relative to understand your perspective.

If you shut down their curiosity, this could be the first and last chance to expand their ideas and thinking.

“Ultimately, there’s so much dissension in our world and the only way we’re going to move forward is by having dialogue,” says Claire.

And while it may be difficult, encouraging learning through open conversations is important.

**ENCOURAGE LEARNING**

However, for many vulnerable people, such as individuals in the LGBTQ community or racial minorities, having these conversations may not be safe.

“Sometimes just surviving, just surviving the get-together, is maybe all you can do — especially if you’re part of a vulnerable community,” says Claire. “I don’t think that it should fall on your shoulders to be the one who’s challenging everything.”

Therefore, it’s important for others to help push the barriers of thinking, standing up to bigotry and creating a safe space for those vulnerable people.

This opens up the opportunity to learn and hear each other out in a productive way.

“It’s just usually so much more contained and respectful,” says Claire.

By not engaging in futile conflict, but also encouraging informative conversation in an appropriate manner, we can begin to hear each other’s experiences and viewpoints and, ultimately, build stronger relationships.

**GROW WITH EACH OTHER AND CHANGE**

At the end of the day, one of the only things we can control is how we grow and change.

“Whatever change you would want to see from people, try to be that change first,” explains Watts.

Watts describes relationships as a system. When we start to shift directions through our attitudes and behaviours, the whole system starts to change and adapt because it can no longer function the way that it once did.

So one shift in your behaviour might be a catalyst to better interactions, relationships and holidays this season.

Overall, progress is progress.

> Carolyn Claire, psychologist

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**Reporting on the People, Issues, and Events that Shape our City. The Calgary Journal, awarding winning journalism.**

[Link to website]
Local feminist arts and music festival Femme Wave has been pushing back against a music scene that consistently prioritizes white, male rock musicians – helping lift up the voices of women and nonbinary musicians in Calgary. Beyond that, its organizers have been inviting others into a space where they too can come to grow and learn. But there’s still more work to be done, with the festival’s policies and latest lineup still leading the way.

Since it was launched in 2015, Femme Wave has featured musicians, artists and filmmakers from around the globe. The dreamy Vancouver surf-pop outfit Peach Kelli Pop graced the Dickens stage in 2016 and was followed by Philadelphia rap legend Sammus in 2017. Last year Femme Wave highlighted the Toronto/Calgary duo Too Attached and Cartel Madras, with the latter now signed to Sub Pop Records.

But just as important as Femme Wave’s female-first programming has been its policies. For example, during festival events, safer spaces team members are deployed to “take action to address violation of consent, violations of Femme Wave’s Safer Spaces guidelines and other harmful incidents.” The purpose, according to those guidelines, is to ensure “the safety of individuals regularly made to feel unsafe due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, age and/or size.”

The festival’s visual arts curator Alicia McKenzie says making sure festival-goers have someone to talk to – especially if something goes wrong – can create a difference in the overall atmosphere of the festival. And such policies can also play an important part in starting the conversation about what Calgary’s music scene can do to uplift underrepresented voices.

And that seems to be working. Since the first Femme Wave festival, safer spaces policies have started to become the norm at shows rather than an anomaly. It’s become rare to walk into a venue without such a policy being proudly displayed. McKenzie says the festival has also set a precedent for the sort of diverse programming that can happen. Festival bookers in the city have now made major strides in prioritizing gender parity.

At the same time, however, some other festivals are still struggling to create equitable line-ups. And Femme Wave’s visual arts curator Alicia McKenzie says many arts spaces in Calgary still don’t have diversity mandates in place, making the work of Femme Wave more relevant than ever before.

In fact, Femme Wave’s resource director Stephanie Perrin, who has been with the organization since 2016, has noticed, “something has clicked. Now people are appreciating the work and wanting to be a part of it.”

“There’s always been a need for Femme Wave in Calgary, but now people are more open to trying new things,” she adds.

Among the things Femme Wave is doing this year is highlighting under-represented and emerging artists with its film programming. That includes bringing in filmmakers from as far away as Taiwan, as well as continuing to showcase work from artists across the Prairies.

“Sometimes it can feel discouraging to only see men getting attention,” says the festival’s film co-curator Paige Lansky. As a result of the attention Femme Wave is providing to female filmmakers, Lansky hopes they will be provided with more opportunities. After all, having a festival on their resume will make it easier for them to apply for grants in

Femme Wave’s safer spaces policy outlines unacceptable behaviours. PHOTO: JARRETT EDMUND
the future. And, above all, she wants the festival to be able to remind these artists that “their art is worth making, and worth paying for.”

For her own part, McKenzie hopes the festival’s visual arts program will help start difficult conversations and highlight new ways of thinking about that medium. That program includes a zine discussing bodily autonomy (presented as an ‘abortion cookbook’). McKenzie and her colleagues are also facilitating a mentorship program to pair emerging artists with more established creators, as well as bringing in artwork from across Canada.

Meanwhile, the music line-up for Femme Wave continues to highlight strong, unique voices in Canadian music with performances from the winner of this year’s Polaris Prize, Haviah Mighty; Canadian rock ‘n’ roll mainstays, The Pack A.D.; and rising experimental rap star, Kimmortal. Bringing these voices to Calgary not only proves that artists like these can sell out venues, but shows that there is already an audience ready and excited to hear them.

McKenzie says it’s especially exciting to bring diverse communities together. She hopes those who attend the festival walk away with a better understanding of someone else’s perspective and are challenged by the work they see. Hopefully, the art helps open their minds up to different ways of thinking.

“If you want to come [to the festival], you need to be open-minded and we’ll be happy to have you,” Perrin says with a laugh. And for those who continue to be closed-minded? “Well, we’re not going anywhere.”

“There’s always been a need for Femme Wave in Calgary, but now people are more open to trying new things”

> Stephanie Perrin, Femme Wave resource director

Guidelines for conduct at Femme Wave hanging in the Royal Canadian #1 Legion

PHOTO: JARRETT EDMUND

Gender neutral washroom signage.

PHOTO: JARRETT EDMUND
Six podcasters share their unique stories

Starting up and keeping their podcasts alive

CASSANDRA JAMIESON
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There are now more than 700,000 podcasts around the world, making it feel like a flooded market. However, some Calgary-based productions have still managed to gain popularity with their unique topics, ranging from sports and culture, to storytelling and business. In this edition, the Calgary Journal takes a look at six of them.

ANTICULTURE — ARTS, FOOD AND CULTURE
Josiah Sinanan is a born and raised Calgarian who didn’t have a strong sense of culture growing up. As he got older, he realized Calgary was full of people with all kinds of different backgrounds and experiences. This made him wonder, “What makes someone’s cultural identity?”

That’s a question Sinanan explores on his podcast, Anticulture, where he interviews people with different cultural backgrounds from across Alberta — such as Tehilah Chiwete, a member of the only family of African descent in the northern town of Lac La Biche, and Anila Umar Lee Yuen, the chief executive officer of the Centre for Newcomers in Calgary.

Through these interviews, Sinanan came to realize that people are not defined by their background alone. Instead, “it’s about the culture they have created around themselves and the only way we figure that out is by asking questions and hearing people’s stories.”

The title Anticulture does not come from an adversity to culture. With this title, Sinanan is trying to get others to challenge their perceptions of how they look at people and different cultures in western society.

The amount of listens the podcast receives depends on the subject matter and the interviewee. Anticulture has an average of 200 downloads per episode. There is no specific category his podcast fits into but Sinanan says he enjoys that because it allows the messages and ideas of his interviewees to spread even further.

COMMON GROUND — SOCIAL ISSUES
One of the newest podcasts to emerge in Calgary is Common Ground, produced by the Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation. So far, the show only has a handful of episodes but that hasn’t stopped it from getting its message across.

As anti-racism advocates, Iman Bukhari and Irfan Chaudhry felt the popular medium of podcasting would help them share their knowledge about hate in Alberta and have conversations about it. They do that on Common Ground by interviewing immigrants, settlers, indigenous people and even hate groups to create a balanced dialogue.

There’s an emphasis on bringing the community together and working together to resolve hate issues. They hope that people will come to understand others perspectives, even if they don’t like them.

“I think, at the end of it, in order to find common ground, we have to be willing to be able to listen to each other — even if that means getting uncomfortable,” says Bukhari.

CREATIVE BLOCK MEDIA LAB YYC — BUSINESS AND MARKETING
When Kyle Marshall was a kid, the thing he wanted to do more than anything was be a late-night talk show host. As he grew up, he started producing YouTube videos until one day, a friend of his got him to listen to a podcast. Since then, he’s been making his own podcasts.

His show is called the Creative Block for two reasons: first, it’s a “block” of time where he gets to talk to anyone he finds creative; and second, it refers to the fact that he often interviews artists and business owners about the “blocks” they sometimes hit and how they overcame them.

Creative Block is a local podcast with Marshall talking exclusively to people in Calgary. He wanted to be able to tell people in the city about all these amazing businesses that they might not see or know about without him having to write reviews, a blog or articles.

“I think we get this idea into our heads that there’s nothing cool that goes on in Calgary but there’s all this stuff that’s under the seams.”

Depending on the topic, there will be anywhere from 70 to 200 downloads per episode from people all over the world. Marshall also talks to his guests about how they can grow their ideas, as well as create their own podcasts and videos.

GIRL TRIES LIFE — SELF-HELP
Victoria Smith is a stress-reduction coach who started writing a blog that included advice from strong females. Unfortunately, she found that no one was reading her work so she ended up using a different medium to share her work with the world.

Her podcast, Girl Tries Life, dives into tangible tools and topics that women can apply to their everyday lives. It was inspired by the belief that we never know what life will throw at us but the most important thing we can do is give everything a solid try.

Every other week, there is an interview, typically with a woman who has persevered in her field. Smith has spoken to entrepreneurs, employees of large corporations, shop owners and moms.

Kyle Marshall brings his portable recording device to interview people in various locations around the city.

PHOTO: CASSANDRA JAMIESON

The amount of listens the podcast receives depends on the subject matter and the interviewee. Anticulture has an average of 200 downloads per episode.
“I want to show profiles of women doing incredible stuff and sort of break down how they got there and their story,” said Smith.

On alternating weeks, she dedicates time on her podcast to microlife coaching. She hopes that women will finish her podcast feeling inspired, like they’ve gained useful information and like they are part of a network of individuals looking for the same things.

Girl Tries Life has over 120 episodes, with an average of 175 downloads per episode. Most of Smith’s listeners come from the Calgary area, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Smith would like to continue reaching out to more people and share the stories of incredible women — whether they live in or outside Alberta. She hopes that maybe one day Girl Tries Life could become big enough for live podcast events.

**MAKESHIFT STORIES — STORYTELLING**

Makeshift Stories started 11 years ago as an extension of Vern Hume telling stories to his son before bed. Hume has always been a fan of radio dramas and listening to audiobooks, so this podcast was a way for him to explore both mediums.

The original idea for the podcast was to have the audience create the story’s script and determine how the characters develop. However, there was no audience at the time. So, the first two episodes were improvised by Hume and this is where the name Makeshift Stories comes from.

Hume is not a writer but he really enjoys creating stories and producing episodes. He says, “I feel a strong commitment to that audience to continue to provide content for them.”

That audience includes both younger and older generations and has grown to attract an average of 1,800 downloads per episode. Most come from the United States. Yet there was a time where an English teacher in Japan recommended Hume’s podcast to their students.

Currently Hume publishes two episodes a month: one short story and one long story, which has bumped his episode count up to more than 170. Hume is joined on the podcast by Mitchell Tew, one of his son’s childhood friends, who is now the show’s primary narrator.

“I would love to do a non-fiction podcast but at this point I have no time. I would like to improve the writing, the narration and to maintain the audience wherever possible and to grow it,” says Hume.

**THE RED MILE — SPORTS**

Started by lifelong Calgary Flames fans Nathan and Cameron Woolridge, the Red Mile hockey podcast began as a way for the brothers to bond over their favorite team even though they live in different cities. Nathan records from his spare bedroom in Calgary, while Cameron does so from his university dorm room in Edmonton.

“I wanted something to do with hockey because I wasn’t playing anymore. So I thought with what Nathan is doing, I could use him a little bit to create our own platform,” said Cameron, referring to his brother’s pursuit of a journalism degree at Mount Royal University (which publishes the Calgary Journal).

While choosing a name for their podcast, Nathan asked Cameron what stuck out about the Flames from their childhood. For Cameron, the most memorable thing was when the team competed for the Stanley Cup in 2004. During those playoffs, Calgarians travelled down 17th Avenue and partied. That’s when the street became known as the Red Mile, which the podcast takes its nostalgic name from.

According to the brothers, the Red Mile now hits 150,000 to 200,000 downloads each month. Earlier episodes ranged from 20 to 30 minutes long. But a Red Mile episode today is roughly 45 to 60 minutes, as the conversations got deeper and fans requested longer episodes.

Currently, their listeners hail from all over the world. Along with their loyal Calgary audience, the Red Mile has been downloaded on the Canadian East Coast, northern Washington state and even as far away as Ireland.

That growth has led to new opportunities, including a recent partnership with Kids Up Front Calgary, an organization that helps young people have enriching experiences by providing tickets to various events around the city. The Red Mile is helping bring awareness to the Kids Up Front Calgary organization by asking its listeners to donate tickets to these events.