

## Commitment to understand: Olds educators experience Poverty Simulation



Staff from Ecole Olds High School, Ecole Deer Meadow School and Holy Trinity School in Olds gathered Friday for a Poverty Simulation, sponsored by Olds FCSS and the United Way of Central Alberta

What is it like to struggle with poverty as a family in today's world?

Ecole Deer Meadow teacher, Dawanna Morgan, says that in having a taste of poverty, ***"I was put into a stressed state right away, as soon as I read my character profile. I was very anxious based on the fact that I did not know what to do or where to turn for help. I actually felt like I wanted to cry."***

Morgan and colleagues from Deer Meadow, as well from Ecole Olds High School (both Chinook's Edge Schools) and Holy Trinity School (a Red Deer Catholic School), all in Olds, felt the challenge of poverty personally on Friday, as a result of a session they attended at Holy Trinity School, called a Poverty Simulation.



### What is a Poverty Simulation?

Olds Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) sponsored the event along with the United Way of Central Alberta.

Heather Dixon, from Olds FCSS, says, ***"A Poverty Simulation is a facilitated two-hour immersive experience designed to create awareness among participants of life at the bottom rung of the economic ladder."***



She says, ***“Participants are assigned to ‘families’ who do their best to survive week-to-week over a simulated one-month period. The simulation presents participants with real-life scenarios and challenges faced by people living in poverty. The exercise is immediately followed by a group debrief that takes up to an hour, during which participants reflect on the experience and discuss insights.”***

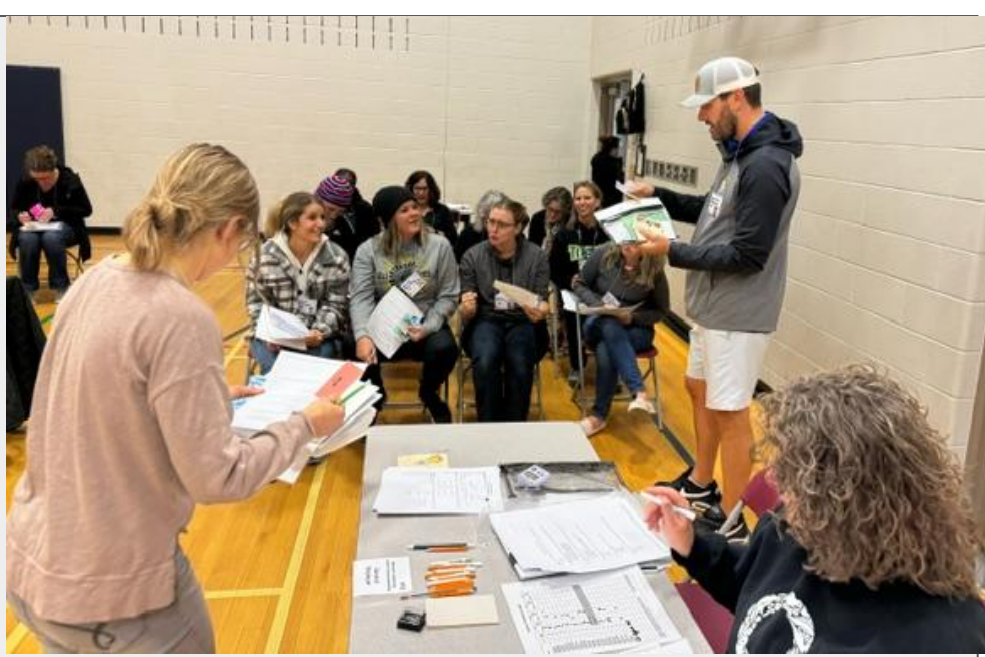
Dixon explains that the simulation offers a unique chance to experience the realities of poverty firsthand. ***“For example, people might have to make choices between purchasing food and paying for electricity. The families who face this choice regularly are brought to light, fostering empathy and understanding.”***

### **Increased understanding for students and their families, and appreciation of schools as safe places**

Dawnna Morgan says she could see how circumstances might get school pushed to the backburner. ***“People might know school is important, but do not have the means to make it a priority,”*** she says.

***“What stood out to me is how difficult it was to access support in the simulation, and often a struggle to receive the benefits or help that you knew were available,”*** says Allan Whitehead, Principal, Ecole Deer Meadow School.

He says, ***“Even though there were many supports, it was hard to know where to go and what was needed to access them, on top of complicating factors like health, transportation, or just having the time to get to the places of support.”***







Whitehead says, ***“I think this mirrors real life, and it underlines the importance of keeping empathy at the heart of our work with students, their families and colleagues as well.”***

Taylor Grenier, a teacher at Ecole Olds High School, agrees. Grenier says the simulation ***“was a more in depth look at other barriers outside of our school walls in relation to resources.”***

Tammy Chrusch, a teacher at Holy Trinity School, says, ***“The poverty simulation was an important reminder that although services exist, it is very challenging to access them. It was so stressful! I was also reminded that schools keep our kids safe, and take a load off of the parents who are struggling. I’m grateful that I can be a safe space and a support for families and children in need.”***

***“I was put in a position that is completely outside of my personal experiences,”*** says Wendy Vockeroth, teacher, Ecole Deer Meadow School. ***“I realized there are many desperate situations, and that people are pushed to do whatever it takes to get by.”***

Katie Feeney, a teacher from Holy Trinity School, says ***“This was my second time experiencing the Poverty Simulation, and it was just as powerful.***

***“It creates awareness, understanding, and compassion for the many barriers faced by those in our community who only want what is best for their families,”*** says Feeney.

***“What stood out for me was how in a room full of people, everyone was focused on how best to meet the needs for their own family with huge financial and time constraints. This simulation was a reminder that when families are dealing with financial hardship, schools are a safe place where kids can just be kids,”*** says Kindra Burke, teacher, Ecole Deer Meadow School.

***“I walked away with a much better understanding of what poverty in our town looks like, where the barriers are, and what context some of our families and students deal with every day,”*** said Meaghan Reist, Principal, Ecole Olds High School.

Heather Dixon thanked the staff from the three schools for participating. ***“Taking time to understand the challenges of people who experience poverty in our community shows commitment and caring. We were glad to partner with these schools to make our community stronger,”*** says Dixon.





# Chinook's Edge staff celebrated at annual event

The annual Celebrations event on October 24, honoured dozens of staff who were receiving long service award, as well as 37 retiring staff members, special award recipients and 34 new teachers, who are inductees to the Alberta Teachers Association, gathered in Bowden for the event.

"This is a particularly special event for us," said Kurt Sacher to the gathering Thursday evening. "Celebrations is a proud tradition in Chinook's Edge. It unites us as a staff." Sacher added, "Thank you to each of you for what you do for students and our school division."



ATA Inductees



Roy E. Cope Award Recipients

Left to right: Kurt Sacher - Superintendent, Kirk Wassmer - retired DHS band teacher, Ray Hoppins - retired Associate Superintendent, Holly Bilton - Board Chair. Wassmer and Hoppins both received the Roy E. Cope Award for contributions to students in Chinook's Edge



Edwin Parr Award recipient

Holly Bilton (left) - Board Chair, presents congratulations to Emily Wilson, a teacher at Carstairs Elementary School, and recipient of the Edwin Parr Award for exceptional first year teachers.







10 years of service



15 years of service



20 years of service



25 years of service



30 years of service



35 years of service







Retiring staff members

## Chinook’s Edge students invited to play in Alberta Symphony

Eight Chinook’s Edge students were given a significant opportunity and honour last week. They were invited to participate in the Alberta Wind Symphony in Edmonton between October 23 and 26, 2024.

The symphony is the honour band for Alberta, and is for high school musicians from across the province. Students had to complete an audition in order to participate. Of the 85+ musicians in the symphony, eight are from Chinook’s Edge, and specifically from Didsbury High School, Cremona School, and Sundre High School.

***“The Alberta Symphony is an exciting opportunity for band students,” says Alex Hutcheon, band teacher at Cremona School. “It gives them a challenge, and exposure to different music and a different conductor so it broadens their horizons. Also, students have the opportunity to represent their school and our school division, and connect with students from all over the province who also share a love for music. I am really proud of all of our students who were able to participate.”***

