

PARKLAND INSTITUTE

25 YEARS

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD



THANK YOU FOR 25 YEARS

Ever since Parkland Institute began, it's been the people who matter most - the volunteers, researchers, supporters and employees.

Parkland wouldn't exist without the generous support of so many people like you. Donations help us do the important research that helps make people's lives better, and it's true when we say every dollar counts.

If you are already supporting Parkland, a huge and grateful thank you. If you are thinking about supporting us, now's the perfect time to sign up for a donation. Please go to <https://www.parklandinstitute.ca/donate> for more information.

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We regularly send out emails to our subscribers as a way to keep you informed about our research, events and community outreach.

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Parkland Institute is an Alberta research network that examines public policy issues. Based in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, it includes members from most of Alberta's academic institutions as well as other organizations involved in public policy research. Parkland Institute was founded in 1996 and its mandate is to:

- conduct research on economic, social, cultural, and political issues facing Albertans and Canadians.
- publish research and provide informed comment on current policy issues to the media and the public.
- sponsor conferences and public forums on issues facing Albertans.
- bring together academic and non-academic communities.

For more information, visit www.parklandinstitute.ca

contents



- 3** A Voice in the Wilderness
- 5** Taking a Risk to Tell the Truth
- 7** Top 10 Ways Parkland Has Made a Difference to the People of Alberta
- 9** A Big Win
- 11** Thanks to the Volunteers
- 12** Light Amid the Storm
- 13** Art and Activism
- 14** Space for All
- 16** New Director Up for the Challenge
- 18** The Next Generation of Leaders

Thank you

Parkland Institute thanks all the generous sponsors who have supported us over the years and throughout our 25th anniversary special events. Without these partners, Parkland Institute would not be able to study the economic, social, cultural and political issues facing Albertans and Canadians and work toward a more just, more sustainable society.

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Parkland Celebrates 25 Years of Impact in Alberta

We hope you enjoy this special magazine we have published to help celebrate Parkland Institute's 25th anniversary year.

As you will read in the many engaging articles featured within these pages, the institute has had a significant influence on the political discourse in Alberta over our 25-year history. Since we launched with the publication of our first book, *Shredding the Public Interest* by Kevin Taft, Parkland has published six books and more than 100 peer-reviewed reports that have provided in-depth progressive analysis on issues that matter deeply to Albertans. From challenging Ralph Klein's plans to privatize health care, to showing that Albertans are not getting our fair share of energy royalties, to stopping the privatization of EPCOR, the institute's research has had an important impact. The stories reflected in these articles reveal a small part of Parkland's influence on Alberta's political and economic landscape.

Throughout the years, Parkland has built an amazing community of supporters, researchers and volunteers. Through our public events and our annual November conference, in particular, the institute brings together diverse communities and serves to connect people and organizations to learn and build stronger progressive networks. The magazine also highlights how we have played a pivotal role in supporting students and young activists to learn and engage through campus groups and the Next Up program.

Parkland has had such wonderful leadership from our first directors, Gordon Laxer and Trevor Harrison, and from executive director Ricardo Acuña. We have also been fortunate to receive incredibly strong direction and support from our board of directors, both past and present. Our dedicated and dynamic past and current staff — Sharlene Oliver, Ian Hussey and Rebecca Graff-McRae — have been crucial to the ongoing success of the institute. And our graphic designer, Flavio Rojas, has been making us look good since he designed Parkland's logo 25 years ago. I want to especially thank Sarah Pratt, our outgoing communications co-ordinator, for her incredible work this past year and for researching, writing and co-ordinating this commemorative magazine that reminds us of Parkland's contributions to strengthening the public good.

While these articles and stories just scratch the surface of all that the Parkland Institute has been able to achieve, we hope they inspire you to continue to support our research (or renew your support) and help us expand our community by encouraging others to follow and get involved in our work.

Bill Kilgannon
Executive Director (Interim)



A voice in the wilderness

At a time when there was little opposition to the long-standing Conservative government, Parkland Institute came together to highlight alternative perspectives

When Parkland Institute was founded in 1996, the Progressive Conservative Party had been in power for 25 uninterrupted years, and the even more conservative Social Credit Party ruled for 36 years prior. Across the political spectrum, conservative and neo-liberal ideas went largely unopposed.

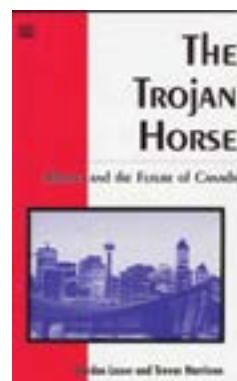
Political economist and then University of Alberta professor Gordon Laxer saw an Alberta with scattered and dispirited progressive voters and few alternative voices.

“In the 1993 election, the NDP fell from 16 to zero seats while the resurgent Liberal party called for even deeper budget cuts,” said Laxer. “There was little opposition to the Conservatives who, under Premier Ralph Klein, introduced brutal cuts to public service. We saw a need for voices with different perspectives.”

One of the Klein government’s first acts was to privatize Alberta’s liquor control board (ALCB). While its mostly unionized staff were well paid, the ALCB was a huge revenue generator for the province and provided customers with access to an array of products at affordable cost. Concerned the privatization might be copied elsewhere, Laxer and Larry Brown, vice-president of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), discussed a report to highlight the consequences of privatization. Laxer brought in two University

of Calgary academics, Dean Neu and Duncan Greene, and one of his recently graduated PhD students, Trevor Harrison, to be part of the research team.

The resultant report was only the beginning. Laxer and Harrison subsequently marshalled a group of academics and



engaged community activists to write a book on the Klein government. That book, *The Trojan Horse: Alberta and the Future of Canada*, warned the policies implemented by the Klein government were a dark harbinger of what might happen in the rest of the country. The book’s launch in spring 1995 was a huge success, so much so that many involved asked how the momentum for positive change could continue.

The idea quickly turned to founding an institute of progressive thought. CCPA President Dr. Duncan Cameron actively supported the creation of an institute that would be an Alberta chapter of the CCPA. But Gurston Dacks, then associate dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, had a different idea. The faculty had seed money to start research centres and institutes, and Dacks

suggested Laxer go that route instead of setting up an Alberta CCPA office. Laxer and his colleagues, including professors Greg Flanagan and David Cooper, union leaders including AFL president Audrey Cormack and UNA president Heather Smith, and community organizer Bill Kilgannon, debated which way to go.

“There was a real division of opinion,” said Laxer. “Some people thought it should be outside the university so it wouldn’t be controlled by the powers within the institution, but others thought being with the university would give it more credibility.”

In the end, the group took up Dacks and the university’s offer of \$16,000 a year for the first three years, to provide administrative assistance, a tax break and something far less tangible.

FORGING AHEAD DESPITE OPPOSITION

The early years weren’t easy. Political push-back and financial challenges were constant companions because Parkland refused corporate and government funding so it could keep an independent voice.

“There were so many powerful interests against us when we started,” said Harrison, who recently stepped down as Parkland’s director after 10 years. “But we had a lot of great people behind us and there was a widespread community effort to get Parkland off the ground. I was hopeful we could create an influential organization.”

As Parkland settled into its new offices in one of the Garneau houses east of campus, housekeeping was needed. With little money but generous supporters willing to help, Parkland put an ad in their newspaper, *The Post*, asking for donations of office supplies, including rubber stamps, an adding machine and a typewriter. The back page featured four potential Parkland logo designs. People were asked to call the office with their choice. Office manager Edith Baragar was busy on the horn in those days.

Parkland’s official launch came with Kevin Taft’s first book, *Shredding the Public Interest*, in January 1997. [That story on page 5.]

The publication, and Parkland along with it, received tremendous public support and a lot of political and media attention. It was an exhilarating beginning.

The pace quickly increased. Harrison had earlier been hired as Parkland’s first research director – in fact, its first employee. He was replaced in the fall of 1997 when Kilgannon became its first executive director. Soon, Parkland published more books and reports, and hosted public events. Among the research reports: who was benefitting from Alberta’s \$5 minimum wage, the lowest in Canada; the potential privatization of EPCOR, Edmonton’s city-owned power provider; Alberta’s corporate structure; and the long-term impact of poverty.

The top story in the first *Post* was the provincial government’s further spending cuts. When Alberta treasurer Stockwell Day tabled the 1997-98 budget update on April 21,

1997, Parkland issued a press release highlighting the health care and education cuts.

“Private-sector subsidies should be brought down to the average level of other provinces and a halt made to corporate tax cuts,” said Flanagan, then a professor of economics and political science at Mount Royal College in Calgary. “Spending could then be shifted into health care, education and social services.”

The first of more than 100 reports was “Light Among the Shadows,” a study to inform Edmontonians and city council about the debate over the privatization of EPCOR. [That story on page 9.]

The first annual conference was held in November 1997. Globalization, Corporatism & Democracy: Alberta and Canada featured keynote speaker John Ralston Saul.

The institute’s backbone over the past 25 years has been a loyal team of volunteers, donors, members and sponsors. Their dedication has proved the need and an appetite for an organization such as Parkland.

A 1997 article in the *Globe and Mail* described Parkland as an organization “bound to help galvanize political opposition in the province and offer policy alternatives to the immensely popular Klein government.”

An issue of *Impact* magazine from the same year described Parkland as a “new think tank on the block that has already had an *impact* on challenging conventional wisdom.”

“...we had a lot of great people behind us and there was a widespread community effort to get Parkland off the ground.”

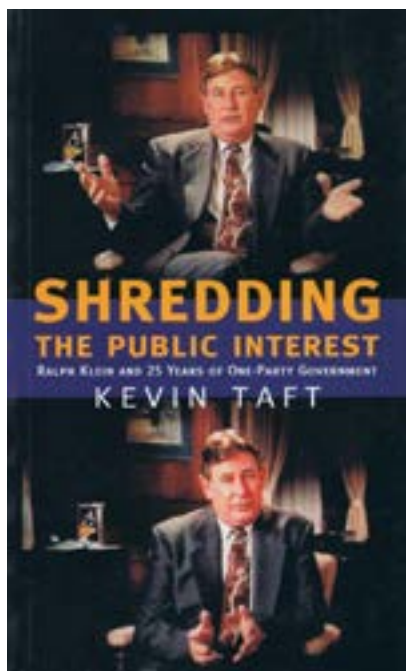
Trevor Harrison - Parkland
Institute’s first employee



Parkland Institute continues to be a one-of-a-kind organization.

“There’s nowhere else like it,” said Harrison. “Our position within the university and our board structure that’s a combination of academics and community members make us unique throughout North America. We have people of courage and integrity.”

Twenty-five years later, the partnerships between Parkland Institute, the University of Alberta and the community hold strong. ■



Kevin Taft's book, *Shredding the Public Interest*, was a huge success for everyone involved – except the government of the day.

TAKING A RISK TO TELL THE TRUTH

PARKLAND INSTITUTE'S FIRST PUBLISHING VENTURE WAS ONE FOR THE AGES

On December 10, 1992, an Alberta provincial government report examining how services to seniors could be managed over the following two decades was set for release. After a year-and-a-half of research, writing and reviews, staff had 2,000 copies printed and ready for sharing.

By February 1993, the reports were going through the shredder by an order from the newly elected Klein government.

Rewind to August 1991. Kevin Taft was hired as a research consultant for the provincial government to work on a project looking at how seniors could be better served in the province, especially as baby boomers aged and the seniors population grew.

After months of research and public consultations, Taft and his associates had a huge amount of information and began writing the report. They found that spending on seniors in many areas had been falling since the 1980s: housing by 14 per cent per senior; transportation by 15 per cent; and social services 31 per cent.

At a time when the general impression was that costs were rapidly rising, the numbers were a surprise to some people, but not everyone. Internal documents prepared by the treasury and shared within the government showed that under the Don Getty government Alberta had been tightening spending for years, and harder than any other government in Canada.

In December 1992, Ralph Klein succeeded Getty as premier of Alberta. Before the new leader even appointed a cabinet, the order to destroy the seniors report came down.

Taft recalls staff hauling unopened cartons from the store room to the mail room, where a paper shredder waited to cut each report into useless ribbons.

"After a few dozen copies [the secretary] would have enough shredded paper to fill a large, black plastic garbage

bag, and after a few days these bags piled up in layers almost to the ceiling. I thought of them as body bags," wrote Taft.

Four years later, Taft published a book he wrote about the experience called *Shredding the Public Interest*, co-published by Parkland Institute and University of Alberta Press. The book sold more than 26,000 copies and was the hottest topic around, but getting the book out to the public was work in and of itself.

Glenn Rollans from the University of Alberta Press was instrumental in helping Parkland Institute get the book published.

"Glenn was very early in his contract and he took a substantial risk publishing this book," said Taft during an online reunion with Glenn and Parkland Institute executive director Bill Kilgannon. "He was very skilled and strategic in steering it through committees and getting it peer reviewed."

For his part, Rollans said his scholarly mandate was to represent the university community, while Parkland had an activist mandate.

"It was a symbiotic relationship," said Rollans. "And there were so few people in vulnerable positions willing to speak up, so it was remarkable what Kevin did."

As the book's release date approached in January 1997, a press conference was planned at the downtown Edmonton library.

"It was a really exciting day for the launch," said Rollans. "It was the first moment someone stuck their head above the trenches in the very oppressive public atmosphere of the day."

The reporters and cameras filled the library space, and the book launched like a rocket. Then-premier Klein gave the book additional attention when he called the author a communist.

"I remember that moment," said Taft. "It was a quiet moment at our house. I made a coffee and picked up the

Edmonton Journal, turned the front page, and saw an article stating Klein calls author a communist. I nearly choked on my coffee, but in the end, it fuelled interest in the story and the book.”

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Glenn Rollans - University of Alberta Press

Taft did a speaking tour across the province, and the book sold more copies than they ever imagined.

“It was an incredibly important publication for Parkland Institute,” said Kilgannon. “It increased interest in Parkland, people were getting memberships, and we were able to build resources and hire an office manager.”

It also helped open up necessary political discourse in the province. As Taft wrote in his conclusion:

“All too often, democratic governments born from good intentions die from addiction to power The narcotic effect of command comes to glaze the eyes of leaders, sharpening their wits but dulling their souls. Nothing matters more than staying at the centre of attention, wealth, and control.” ■

PARKLAND INSTITUTE HAS
BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN
MAKING ALBERTA A FAIRER AND
MORE SUSTAINABLE PROVINCE,
WHETHER THROUGH PRODUCING
HIGH-QUALITY EVIDENCE THAT
IS ACCESSIBLE, CURRENT
AND POLICY-RELEVANT, OR
THROUGH ADVOCATING AND
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.
I HAVE SEEN PARKLAND
MATERIALS REFERENCED ON
THE LEGISLATURE FLOOR AND
HAVE PRESENTED FINDINGS IN
PUBLIC FORUMS AT CITY HALL
TO DIRECTLY IMPACT DECISIONS
LIKE THE PRIVATIZATION OF
EPCOR. PARKLAND
HAS ALWAYS
PUNCHED WELL
ABOVE ITS
WEIGHT.

—**Diana Gibson**, former Parkland
Institute research director and currently
executive director of the Community
Social Planning Council of Greater
Victoria and a principal in PolicyLink
Research Canada



TOP 10 WAYS PARKLAND HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THE PEOPLE OF ALBERTA

10



Parkland's first publication, Kevin Taft's *Shredding the Public Interest*, revealed the secrecy and manipulation behind government decisions. *Shredding* really put us on the map.

9



Parkland exposed the public costs of privatization and defended citizens against the power of unregulated markets. We helped stop the privatization of EPCOR, played a role in stopping the privatization of liquor in other provinces and exposed the cost of public-private partnerships.

8



Parkland continues to have a central role in fighting the privatization of health care and seniors care. We worked with our partners to help stop Klein's Third Way agenda, and long before the pandemic hit, Parkland was uncovering the crisis with the corporatization of seniors care.

7



We exposed Alberta's royalty give-away with our first report comparing our royalty rates to Norway and Alaska. Since then, we published many reports countering the power and influence of big oil and raised deep concerns about their impact on the environment and climate change.

4



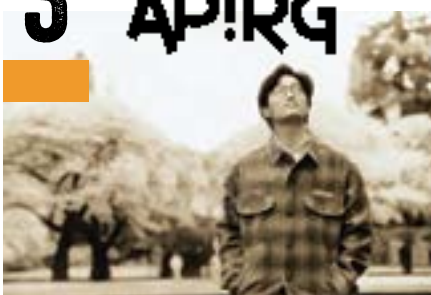
Parkland's mandate is Education for the Common Good, and we've played a key role in informing progressive Albertans on current issues and enlarged public dialogue and engagement through our blogs and symposia. And, of course, our 24 annual conferences and the many amazing speakers we've had, including John Ralston Saul, Vandana Shiva, Ralph Nader, Margaret Atwood, Naomi Klein, Seth Klein, Linda McQuaig and Tariq Ali.

6



Parkland defended the rights and opportunities of workers, the poor and the otherwise marginalized. We raised the awareness of the growing gap between rich and poor and called for better protection for workers and support for immigrants and Indigenous people.

3



We have worked with youth to support them becoming actively engaged citizens – e.g. working with graduate students, and helping establish the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG) and Lethbridge PIRG – and played a key role in the youth training program Next Up.

1

We brought and continue to bring together an amazing community of progressive activists and thinkers from diverse perspectives around Alberta, bringing hope and commitment back to Alberta's commons – **with the help of all of you out there.**

5



Parkland helped democratize the budget process to serve people over profit. We have always provided a deep analysis of the impact of the budget on people's lives and countered the spin put out by the Taxpayers Federation and the Fraser Institute.

2



Parkland has had a central role in fundamentally shifting Alberta's political culture from one dominated by neo-liberal/social-conservative ideas to one that is more progressive and democratic. Alberta is not the same place as it was in 1996, and at least in part because of Parkland.



Kevin Taft authored “Light among the Shadows,” a report that helped stop the privatization of EPCOR in 1999.

A BIG WIN

QUALITY RESEARCH HELPED A YOUNG PARKLAND INSTITUTE STOP THE PRIVATIZATION OF EPCOR AND KEEP MILLIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In 1999, Edmonton Power:

- was Canada’s largest municipally owned, fully integrated electrical utility
- owned three plants with a total capacity of 1,701 megawatts: the coal-fired Genesee Plant (820 MW) and two gas-fired plants, Clover Bar (660 MW) and Rosedale (221 MW)
- operated more than 560 km of transmission wires and 9,000 km of distribution lines
- served 230,000 residential and 27,000 commercial customers
- operated under the umbrella of the City of Edmonton’s power and water utility: EPCOR
- had a 1997 net income of \$91 million on revenues of \$823.7 million
- contributed the largest portion to EPCOR’s \$66.9-million dividend to the city

On Thursday, July 15, 1999, Edmonton’s city council prepared to vote on the future of EPCOR’s electrical assets. At the time, EPCOR was Canada’s largest municipally owned electrical utility, recording annual revenue of more than \$800 million in 1997.

Months of tension led up to the vote, with protests, press conferences and swirling pieces of information and misinformation.

The city had been considering whether or not to sell EPCOR since 1997 because the regulations governing the electrical industry were being revamped by Ralph Klein’s provincial government, and the city faced financial constraints that led to

services being cut and increased taxes. Selling EPCOR, then the city’s largest asset, was seen as a way to ease pressure in one fell swoop.

“The provincial government forced the city’s hand to do this review,” said Michael Phair, who was a city councillor at the time.

The city hired RBC Dominion to complete a review of EPCOR’s future under deregulation. The review came with a price tag of \$500,000 and recommended the city sell posthaste because they claimed utilities had an unstable financial future.

“This was a classic inside job,” said Kevin Taft, who was a consultant and researcher at the time.

“It was a setup to strip a valuable asset from the public and sell it off at low cost to private investors. There’s no question senior executives would become very wealthy from privatization, and RBC would have collected millions of dollars in fees. It’s stunning how one-sided this deal would have been for private investors and a huge loss to the people of Edmonton.”

When Parkland Institute’s executive director Bill Kilgannon heard from then-councillor Brian Mason that the city was seriously exploring the idea of selling EPCOR, he knew what was going on.

“Ralph Klein started this process years prior, so we knew we needed to move quickly,” said Kilgannon. “We worked with Kevin [Taft] on his book *Shredding the Public Interest*, and having him on board to do this study was critical. He’s an excellent researcher and writer and we knew he could analyze the business side of the issue in the limited time we had.”

Parkland raised a small amount of research money and partnered with Myron Gordon, an acclaimed University of Toronto business professor specializing in utility finance. The resulting studies were provided to city council free of charge.

The reports “Light Among the Shadows” and “Aftershock” concluded that privatization would not reduce prices or improve reliability. There were other concerns, such as the risk of the company leaving Edmonton and reducing staff, the stability of EPCOR employees’ pensions and the economic development of

Edmonton.

“Myron decimated the information being presented to city council by RBC,” said Taft.

TIPPING THE SCALE

As the day of the vote approached, the advocacy campaign was in full swing. Rallies, press conferences and two reports garnered a lot of media attention. There was also EPCARE, a group of citizens and union activists opposed to the sale.



“The decision kept hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers’ pockets.”

Parkland held a final media conference the day before the council vote.

“We showed RBC was telling different stories to city council compared to what they were telling potential investors,” said Kilgannon. “Kevin had found quotes from RBC to potential investors that directly contradicted what they were saying to city council, so we used an image of someone talking out of both sides of their mouth to illustrate this. The media splashed that

image everywhere.”

Parkland knew the vote would be close. After meeting with councillors, Kilgannon and his team had a clear sense of who was voting for and against and who was still undecided. Larry Langley was the last undecided vote, and Kilgannon and Taft met with him soon before decision day.

“We sat in an office in city hall and went through the report,” said Taft. “Larry had straight-forward questions and kept his mind open.”

and off he went,” said Taft.

“We were cheering,” said Kilgannon. “That moment of drama was exciting.”

“The decision kept hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers’ pockets,” added Taft.

The privatization of EPCOR was off the table, for the time being. It had been a lengthy process, an important political conversation and a milestone for the young Parkland Institute.

The report, according to Phair, helped solidify some councillors’ decisions to vote no.

“The Parkland report provided credible public discourse to help inform politicians,” said Phair. “It was so important.”

“The process enhanced Parkland’s reputation,” said Kilgannon. “There weren’t a lot of people challenging the concepts of privatization or doing this kind of necessary work at the time. Ultimately, the citizens benefitted from this decision and it was proven that EPCOR was a viable and profitable company for the city to own.” ■



ALL PARKLAND REPORTS
ARE AVAILABLE
FREE OF CHARGE AT
PARKLANDINSTITUTE.CA



Parkland Institute's office administrator Sharlene Oliver has a definite soft spot for our dedicated volunteers. **"I can't say enough about the magnificent people I've met,"** she says.

Thanks to the volunteers

COUNTLESS HOURS FREELY GIVEN
MEAN EVERYTHING TO PARKLAND

The amount of time and energy Parkland Institute's volunteers have given over the years can never be measured. Just thinking about it brings a humbling gratitude to the team.

"I love our volunteers," said Sharlene Oliver, office administrator. "Parkland wouldn't have survived and been able to flourish for 25 years without the generous volunteers."

With every conference, party and project, volunteers bring their skills and enthusiasm to help Parkland Institute reach its goals. They do everything from play music and take photos to distribute flyers and serve coffee, and every action counts.

"The annual conference alone could not happen without the volunteers," said Oliver. "There are usually 50 or more volunteers over the weekend and some commit to morning coffee at 6:30 a.m. for set-up!"

Thanks in large part to the volunteers, Parkland has become a community of like-minded humanitarians.

"Parkland has incredible volunteers," said Cheri Harris, who worked as Parkland Institute's office manager. "Everybody

is always dedicated to the bigger picture of why we are doing what we're doing."

"I was introduced to the Parkland Institute by a friend in 2010, and have been a volunteer, donor and fan since then," said Mina Deol. "I have continued to support the Parkland Institute because I believe it is a unique and vital non-partisan voice weighing in on matters of public interest including economic, health and political issues in Alberta and Canada. The Parkland Institute is an indispensable organization that strengthens our democracy and provides a place for much needed public discourse and learning via its conference and research publications. Albertans are fortunate to have the Parkland Institute."

Oliver started working with Parkland in 2008, and she was a volunteer before becoming an employee.

"I'm always impressed by the type of people who are drawn to the work Parkland does, the community it provides and the future it has," said Oliver. "There are always new people who become fans and contribute in their own way." ■

PARKLAND IS A CRACK TEAM OF RESEARCHERS THAT PUNCHES WELL ABOVE ITS WEIGHT BUT NEVER BELOW THE BELT. FOR 25 YEARS PARKLAND HAS BOLDLY ENTERED THE FRAY OF ALBERTA POLITICAL DISCOURSE BY DELIVERING HARD-HITTING RESEARCH, CONFERENCES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS.

-Guy Smith, president, AUPE



Light amid the storm

REFLECTIONS OF A LONG-TIME
VOLUNTEER AND SUPPORTER

by **VERNA MILLIGAN**

When Parkland began, I was involved with the Seniors Action Liaison Team (SALT). They relayed a message that Parkland Institute was looking for a volunteer typist. Thus it was my distinct privilege to have typed the press release for Kevin Taft's new book, *Shredding the Public Interest*. I remember the information about the PCs having spent enough money over the years to build a house – at Calgary prices – for every family in Alberta. Wow! Of course, my lips were sealed for about five days before the book was released. What a bombshell! Of course, Premier Klein calling Kevin a communist was the best publicity ever – shooting it to an immediate bestseller!

THE FRIDAY GROUP

A few years later, Phyllis Matousek, chair of SALT, asked me to go with her to take a *New York Times* newspaper article to Liberal health critic Howard Sapers.

It was the front-page story of Columbia/HCA, a huge hospital chain in the U.S.A., convicted by the U.S. Grand Jury, resulting in the corporation settling for \$1 billion US. I asked Howard about a company wanting a Canmore Hospital. He said: "It is Health Care of Australia (HCoA). He's a nice man. I had dinner with him. I paid for my own meal. They will come in and build a hospital, run a hospital for you if you want."

For two years they courted the newly established Canmore RHA, seeking a 20-year contract to run their hospital if Canmore would pay them \$2 million per year to do so. None of this made sense to me, so I stopped in to the University of Alberta business library and quickly discovered HCoA was owned by Mayne Nickless, a trucking firm and parent of Loomis. I printed some articles stating HCoA was "not transparent," "cherry picking patients" etc. and took them to someone I had heard about: Prof. Richard Plain.

When I went back the next week with some more equally damning articles, Richard said that during the week, a representative of Canmore had come to him asking about the issue. He told the representative: "Do you know where your town will be in 20 years? How can you sign a contract for 20 years? He gave her my highlighted articles — and she "went out with all guns blazing." HCoA was turned down by a split vote.

Richard told me that day: "We're losing our health care if the Health Resource Group in Calgary gets approval from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPSA) for a private surgical clinic in two weeks." I went home and made a list of groups/agencies that would be concerned: seniors groups, consumers' association, Parkland Institute, some churches, etc., for a meeting exactly one week before the college's meeting. It was held at the United Nurses Union and their president, Heather Smith, contacted all the major unions and asked them to be there. It was at that first Friday Group meeting that Parkland offered to do research and to host a conference featuring

Ralph Nader and a debate between Richard Plain and the health economist from the Fraser Institute about the privatization of health care.

Fortunately, the day of the CPSA meeting, the college was swamped with media and representatives of the groups, and the pressure resulted in the HCoA request being turned down. Although HRG fought the college for months on this, it did result in the issue having to go through the Alberta Legislature.

We were able to have the first two attempts to privatize health care by Premier Klein 'die' at the closure of the legislature. But in 2000, his final attempt, Bill 11, led to rallies in front of the legislature and major rallies in Calgary on a Friday night and in Edmonton on the Saturday night. Parkland Institute and Friends of Medicare were very involved in helping to organize these rallies featuring speakers Shirley Douglas, her son, Kiefer Sutherland, and a doctor in Calgary, Dr. Wally Temple. His powerful talk, where every sentence resulted in a Standing O, can be found at <http://sites.utoronto.ca/hpme/dhr/commentaries/Temple.pdf>

Parkland has been a light amid the storm through the Klein years and into today. The institute has always been ahead of the curve in selecting topics for your conferences. It has been a privilege and joy working and volunteering with you over the years, and thank you for being so active in the Friday Group, and your willingness to host a Medicare conference with Ralph Nader. ■



Art AND ACTIVISM

PARKLAND'S GRAPHIC DESIGNER CREATES A LIFE WITH PURPOSE

Flavio Rojas picks up every abandoned pencil he sees in school hallways. He's not a janitor, a hoarder or a compulsive cleaner.

As a graphic designer for the Edmonton Public School Board, Flavio walks miles of hallways, always tucking discarded pencils into a bag that's part of a collection destined for greater things than hallway sweepings.

To understand why Flavio collects these most basic and useful mark makers, you have to go from the vinyl corridors of M.E. LaZerte High School to Rancagua in rural Chile, more than 10,000 kilometres south. When Flavio's mother, Uberlinda, was growing up there, the only way she could draw was to sweep an area of dirt and carve into it with a stick. There was no paper. No pencils. No money. But Uberlinda found a way to express her imaginings.

These days, if a student slides Flavio a curious look as he picks up a pencil, he tells them his mother's story.

"I say to them, 'Do you know the value of this? The power this has? This is a commodity.'"

He carried those bags of pencils to Cuba for children who had no access to drawing supplies.

"They were so grateful. Here in Canada, pencils, jackets, even electronics get thrown all over the place," said Flavio.

Flavio's inherent connection to the past shapes his creativity and, ultimately, many of his life decisions. His father, Miguel, was a political activist in 1970s Chile. Flavio recalls attending rallies as a child and feeling hope rather than fear.

"I remember those times in a positive light," he said. "It was a complicated time and people struggled, but I felt hopeful because I saw it through my parents' eyes."

Before the 1973 coup d'état, Flavio enjoyed the freedom to play, grow and explore. When he was in Grade 4, Uberlinda encouraged him to enter a Chilean Independence Day drawing contest. She knew her son loved to draw, especially superheroes.

Together they planned a scene where people danced the *cueca*, a traditional courtship dance done with

handkerchiefs that simulates a rooster and a hen. The dancers were surrounded by flags, spectators and a wandering dog, possibly wondering why the humans were acting like poultry.

Flavio won the contest, and his love of drawing and the arts took hold.

After the coup, he says, "life in Chile changed to a different colour." The arrests, torture and deaths of leftist citizens turned this into a dark, violent time in Chilean history. Flavio's family moved to the safety of Canada when he was 12. They became part of a growing Chilean community in Edmonton. Miguel wrote for a local Latino publication, *Unidad*, while a teenaged Flavio drew illustrations and cartoons.

"I think in a way it was my getting into the idea that you can use a skill for a cause," he said.

As Flavio grew up, his heroes turned from Zorro and Superman to Latin American activist artists.

He was inspired by protest art, especially the Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP), a Latin American artistic collective. The group was founded in 1968 and named after Ramona Parra, a 19-year-old woman shot dead by the police during a protest in

Santiago in 1946. Members of the BRP painted street murals to brighten public spaces while inspiring social change.

"It's such a strong, rich art style and it really triggered my interest," said Flavio.

Flavio went on to complete the communications program at Grant MacEwan. When he wasn't studying, he and a group of friends from the Latino community created a magazine called *AQUÍ*. The purpose was to give people from the Latino community a space to write about all sorts of issues, from poetry and humour to health, politics and the arts.

"The magazine became a means of allowing ourselves to feel comfortable and at peace with the fact that our lives continued and flourished aquí (here) in Canada," said Flavio.

Soon after college, Flavio began his design career with the public school board. Working in schools has taught him yet another way of thinking and creating.

"Beautifying a school – there's a purpose to it," he said. "There are messages for wellness and awareness. When we arrived in Canada after the political turmoil in Chile, my sense of purpose was strengthened. We asked

ourselves, ‘What are we going to do here to make a difference?’ That feeling has never left me.”

In 1997, Flavio began graphic design work for his friend from the Parkland Institute, Bill Kilgannon. Flavio helped design the Parkland logo and worked on the Parkland Post, hand-drawing many illustrations. Flavio continues to design Parkland’s reports and posters. It’s personally and professionally satisfying work.

“The Parkland work, again it’s about contributing to something that has a purpose,” he said. “I stay informed about what’s happening and at the same time I get the challenge of designing reports that can be abstract, in terms of imaging. I work to find a design that is cohesive with the Parkland message. The issues are fundamental to the design.”

When you see a graphic design with the Parkland logo on it, you know the inspiration is a culmination of different lives, different countries and one shared desire to live with purpose.

And while the few pencils Flavio now collects in this age of laptops and tablets are used for his own meandering doodles – something he doesn’t usually realize he’s doing while in a meeting or thinking through an idea – his belief that art has the power to inspire change never wavers.

“In the end, I want to be hopeful and believe things are going to get better. There’s light at the end of this if we act accordingly.” ■



Space for All

Parkland’s people-first philosophy stands strong

Ricardo Acuña believes one of Parkland Institute’s biggest strengths is the community of people who support the organization. “When we get together it’s like a big family reunion,” he says.

Ricardo Acuña will tell you people are the heart of Parkland Institute. That’s not meant as a glib comment or a cliché that elicits sighs and groans. Everything Parkland does is motivated by the inherent humanitarianism of its people.

When Acuña was hired as Parkland’s executive director in 2002, he had been supporting the institute since its inception in 1996. He was considering returning to school to complete a master’s degree when the job posting came across his desk.

“I was sent that posting enough times from friends that I decided to apply,” said Acuña, who’s on a two-year leave from Parkland to work as the president of the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta (AASUA). “I wasn’t sure if I had the qualifications, but they were looking for someone who understood policy and politics on the ground rather than from an academic perspective. I had years of working with non-government organizations and unions and I could connect with the larger community. I had also been active in provincial politics, running unsuccessfully in Edmonton Mill Woods in 1997.”

Often it goes beyond being a community. When Parkland supporters come together, it’s like a family reunion, according to Acuña. He recalls children playing together at Picnic in the Parkland and friends reuniting during conferences and special events.

At one of Parkland's early conferences, The Raging Grannies and The Radical Cheerleaders performed songs and cheers together. It was a bridging of the generation gap that Acuña believes speaks to the power of Parkland Institute.

"It really highlighted Parkland's role in the community beyond politics and research," he said. "It personified bringing together a generation of powerful activist women who are at core of so many progressive movements with this group of young folks who were focusing on anti-globalization movements and bringing different ideas of activism."

The opportunity to share experiences, debate ideas and discuss policy, whether it's at Parkland events or in classrooms, workplaces or coffee shops, is something to celebrate, he said.

Bringing together activists and thought leaders of all ages and backgrounds is essential to Parkland's success. The institute's motto, "Research and education for the common good," captures why Parkland exists.

"The public interest is what we should be focused on as a society," said Acuña. "It's what brings such a variety of people to Parkland Institute – that focus on defending and promoting the common good rather than private interests and wealth."

LOOKING BOTH WAYS

"It's been a ride," says Acuña, when asked about his 19 years with Parkland.

A report on the privatization of Alberta's liquor stores made one of the biggest splashes, he recalls. "Sobering Result, The Alberta Liquor Retailing Industry Ten Years After Privatization" by economist Greg Flanagan stirred up a lot of attention.

"Back in those days it was fun because Premier Ralph Klein was so easily triggered," said Acuña. "The liquor store report was everywhere and as Klein was walking into a caucus meeting after the release, a member of the media asked him what he thought about Parkland and the report. He said he thought the people at Parkland were spending a little too much time in the liquor store doing research."

“It personified bringing together a generation of powerful activist women who are at core of so many progressive movements with this group of young folks who were focusing on anti-globalization movements and bringing different ideas of activism.”

His reactions generated even more interest in Parkland, said Acuña.

"To this day, 18 years later, the office still receives calls about the report any time another province considers privatization."

When Acuña turns his thoughts to Parkland's future, he sees an opportunity to connect the older cohort of activists with upcoming campaigners. Again, it's about people.

"I think Parkland is well positioned to build intergenerational links," he said. "It's an organization with a broad public interest focus that doesn't shy away from intersectionality and embraces diversity and inclusion. The ability to create a space for people – that's one of the best contributions Parkland has made." ■

YOU'VE HAD SOME INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT CHALLENGES THAT YOU'VE FACED SO ADMIRABLY. YOU HAVE DONE REMARKABLE WORK FOR THE PEOPLE OF ALBERTA. IF YOU WEREN'T THERE, THE POLITICAL DYNAMIC OF ALBERTA WOULD BE MUCH WORSE.

-Larry Brown, president, National Union of Public and General Employees

PARKLAND INSTITUTE MEANS LIGHT. IT HAS BROUGHT LIGHT TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE. IT HAS BROUGHT FORWARD FACTS VERSUS POLITICAL RHETORIC. PARKLAND HAS EDUCATED AND INFORMED ALBERTANS AND IS AN ESSENTIAL VOICE IN ALBERTA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE.

-Heather Smith, president, United Nurses of Alberta

New Director Up for the Challenge

Jason Foster goes from long-time supporter to director



Jason Foster is earnestly aware he's a middle-aged white male with a beard. As the new director of Parkland Institute, he's also aware he's succeeding two other middle-aged white males who sported facial hair. Foster steps into his new role with sensitivity and a genuine belief that different voices with varying perspectives need space, and he's committed to ensuring Parkland makes plenty of room. As he settles into the director's chair, Foster brings self-awareness, collectivism and an unwavering focus on being part of solutions.

Sarah Pratt talked to Foster about his motivation, expectations and vision for Parkland's future.

SARAH PRATT: Congratulations on your new position as Parkland's director. Why did you choose to take on the role?

JASON FOSTER: I've been involved with Parkland in various capacities since its inception. I've been a speaker, a researcher, a supporter, an attendee and I've long valued the work Parkland does. When this opportunity came, it felt like the right moment to say, 'I can contribute even more to Parkland.' It was time to step up.

SP: What are your expectations of yourself as director? How do you feel as you start this journey?

JF: I'm really aware that I'm the third director in Parkland history. Gord [Laxer] and Trevor [Harrison], those are big shoes to fill. I come into the job

aware of what they built and I very much feel the obligation to rise to the occasion and make sure I continue Parkland on a positive trajectory. I feel the weight of that. I also know my deepest area of expertise is important but relatively narrow. I come into the job knowing I am going to need to bring in others who have breadth of knowledge to ensure Parkland can speak to a wide range of issues.

SP: It's a curious exercise to look back on the impact Parkland has had over the years and think, what would Alberta look like if Parkland never existed? It's unnerving, and that speaks to the importance of the institute.

JF: That's an interesting thought. We would be living in a much more impoverished democracy in Alberta. Public discourse would be greatly

diminished. Parkland's ability to bring uncomfortable facts to the powers-that-be...I don't think we can understate how much this has transformed Alberta. One example is oil royalties. If Parkland wasn't doing research around oil royalties, that never would have hit the public and they would never realize how much government's selling us out.

SP: Someone trustworthy and credible needs to get this information to the public.

JF: Yes, and Parkland brings in research and facts. We make the information accessible to people. Our provincial debates would be much weaker without Parkland. The privatization of health care, just transition...there are important organizations in Alberta advocating for public interest, but what makes Parkland unique is that

If Parkland wasn't doing research around oil royalties, that never would have hit the public and they would never realize how much government's selling us out.

it provides the foundation that lends credibility to those voices. It gives resources to those voices so they can be more effective.

SP: And the idea of speaking out against certain government policies for the good of many, a voice that says, 'Hey, stop, that's not right,' it has to come from people who aren't the official government opposition, right?

JF: It's different from the opposition. It's a different voice with a different purpose. Parkland has the ability to focus on issues that benefit others. By having that being our singular focus, we articulate perspectives without an agenda push. The other problem political parties have is they're limited in what they can say and do by electoral boundaries and what's popular, but Parkland is free to articulate 'This is what Alberta needs.' We can help move public opinion.

SP: There's a lot going on in Alberta right now and a lot of difficult issues demanding attention. What weighs on your mind?

JF: It's not any specific issue. I worry that I'm not doing enough. I'm over 50 and I feel like I'm running out of time. It's the urgency of what is facing us, and that's one of the reasons I took this job – it's another way I can say I am being part of the solution. It's beyond being "not part of the problem" – you can also not be part of the solution. I need to take action.

SP: Today's issues sure look a lot like issues from previous decades. Will Alberta ever get out of this revolving door of the same problems?

JF: We've been saying the same things since the 1980s. When I think about issues, I get overwhelmed. I don't think I can pretend I know the answer. The only thing I can think of is that we all do our

bit. We need to keep putting out there what is possible. But some things have changed and we are a different province than 10 or 20 years ago. Even seven or eight years ago, the phasing out of coal was seen as one of the most outrageous, irresponsible policies you could have. Now it's almost done and we're going to end coal before 2030. Let's not lose sight of how much change has occurred. We need hope and we need to inject things that are new possibilities but not impossibilities.

SP: What do you see for Parkland when you look forward?

JF: When you turn 25, often you reevaluate your life. We've accomplished a lot and need to honour that. Thinking about what to do over the next 25 years – I think that is a conversation within Parkland and its supporters. I'm turning my attention to how we make the organization more sustainable and with an expanded scope that includes more young activists and academics and the kinds of voices that we need to hear more from, such as rural Albertans and racialized and other marginalized groups.

SP: What are some of the most pressing issues in your mind?

JF: Transitioning off fossil fuel, reimagining Alberta's economy, rethinking our traditional dynamics around Indigenous Peoples, rethinking who do we privilege, and then how can Parkland put itself at the centre of these global discussions.

SP: These are big issues...impressive challenges.

JF: I'm excited because I think academics have an obligation to engage in public discourse and bring debate into politics to help make communities better. This is what Parkland is built to do. ■

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SO GLAD THAT
YOU ARE SO
BRAVE.
WE NEED MORE
PARKLAND.



-Naomi Klein, professor of
climate justice, UBC Geography



"It isn't just about the neo-liberal capitalist idea of put your head down and work – it's about having relationships and a community that sustain the activist movement."

–Laura Collison

PARKLAND INSTITUTE
EMPOWERS YOUTH TO
CREATE SOCIAL CHANGE

The Next Generation of Leaders

In 2006, University of Alberta student Laura Collison attended a Parkland Institute conference as part of a class assignment. It was an experience that helped direct the course of her life.

After hearing keynote speaker John Ralston Saul and learning more about Parkland Institute's work, Collison used the team's research on the privatization of liquor stores and surgical facilities and the deregulation of electricity in her coursework and signed up to volunteer at future conferences.

"Being involved with Parkland lets you know you're not alone," said Collison, who now works as director of operations with the Aspen Foundation for Labour Education. "It isn't just about the neo-liberal capitalist idea of put your head down and work – it's about having relationships and a community that sustain the activist movement."

Collison's connection to Parkland turned into a job as the institute's administrative co-ordinator and then the co-ordinator of Next Up, a youth leadership program for people ages 18-32 who are committed to social, economic and environmental justice. Next Up's goal was to build and support a network of people doing justice work in Canada and working to bring about systemic change.

"Next Up was an opportunity to get young people involved in issues and organizations," said Collison.

The program ran in Alberta from 2007-2019 and helped build leadership skills in youth committed to social and environmental change.

"The Next Up students were able to learn from senior labour leaders and activists about their past struggles and ways of organizing while at the same time providing the elders

with a better sense of current ideas around intersectionality and non-hierarchical, anti-oppressive and anti-racist ways of organizing,” said Ricardo Acuña, who was Parkland Institute’s executive director throughout the Next Up years.

Acuña points out the importance of cross-pollinating the generation of people who grew up in the peace movement of the 1960s and were the foundation of the labour movement in Alberta with the younger people who are looking to organize and activate against injustices they see today.

“We don’t want the older activists’ knowledge to get lost,” he said.

Julia Dalman is a Next Up alumna who says the program changed her life by teaching leadership and organizing skills and introducing her to lifelong friends.

“It’s critical to think about the importance of welcoming young people into the activist community, forming relationships and upholding their organizing capacity,” said Dalman, now a community organizer working alongside a principal in Edmonton Public Schools to centre student voice in policy decisions. “It was a small cohort but the impacts are far-reaching.”

Dalman also founded an internationally recognized social justice program in EPSB called the Global Cafe and co-founded the RAD Educators Network with another Next Up alumni, Dan Scratch, to help train educators to create a more equitable education system.

Shima Robinson has always been committed to engaging young activists. Robinson is the working group and program co-ordinator with the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG), a student-run and student-funded non-profit group at the University of Alberta dedicated to social justice, grassroots organizing and anti-oppression. Through grants, workshops and programming, APIRG empowers students and members of the community to be active citizens who create positive social change and was a core sponsor and designer of the Next Up program from its beginning.

Robinson is also an active member of the Parkland community through her work at APIRG and as a spoken word poet at events. She is also an important voice on Parkland’s programming committee.

“Parkland helps young people connect to community members and University of Alberta alumni and students so we can further our work to create the social change we’re looking for,” said Robinson.

Although Next Up is no longer active in Alberta, the program’s legacy continues, as does a focus on young activists.

“The investment Parkland made in Next Up has not gone to waste,” said Dalman.

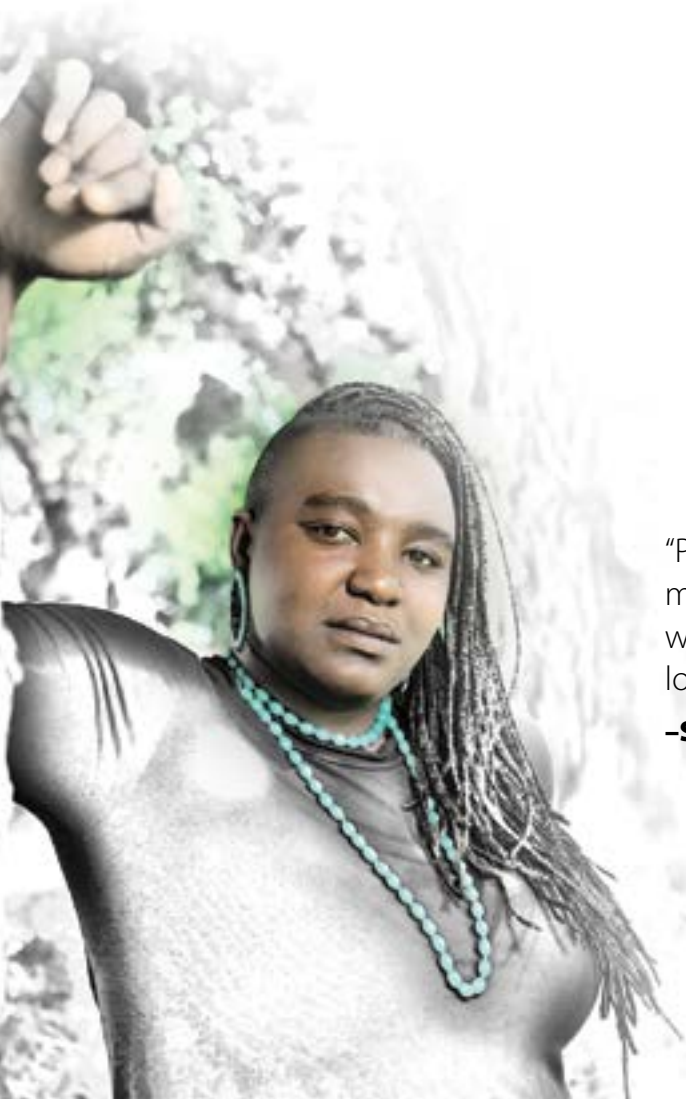
“People who came through the program have gone on to such important positions and do important work,” said Acuña. “It helped create space for young people to grow into positions of leadership, and Parkland continues to do so.”

Parkland’s commitment to help educate and support youth to be directly engaged in all forms of political action is an integral part of its history and current mandate. From helping to get public interest research groups (PIRGs) set up at the universities of Alberta and Lethbridge to playing a lead role in the Next Up program, Parkland has helped build a community of amazing people.

There are many inspiring and active young people who are leading in areas of social and environmental justice efforts. Parkland plans to be there to support the next generation in their education and organizing efforts for the next 25 years.■

“Parkland helps young people connect to community members and University of Alberta alumni and students so we can further our work to create the social change we’re looking for.”

—**Shima Robinson**



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Alexa is an assistant professor in Women's and Gender Studies at Athabasca University.



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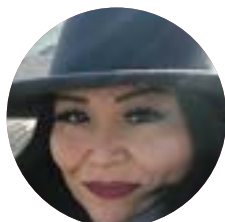
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Paul is a professor in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies at Athabasca University.



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University of Alberta

Marie teaches Canadian, Indigenous and Québécois literatures in the Department of English & Film Studies at the University of Alberta and is associate dean (Research) in the Faculty of Arts.



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Phil is executive staff officer and associate co-ordinator, research with the Alberta Teachers' Association, and adjunct professor within the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.



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Mike is a vice-president for the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.



Suzanne Lenon
University of Lethbridge

Suzanne (she/her) is associate professor in the department of Women & Gender Studies at the University of Lethbridge.

96
21



CELEBRATING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

