



## **GEA Survey Response**

August 3, 2021

### **Keren Tang, City Council Candidate for Ward Karhio**

#### **Value 1: Workplace Mental Health**

We value a city that supports mental health and well being. Over the last 2 years we have approached the city to adopt the Canadian National Standard for the Psychological Safety in the Workplace as official policy. The present city council has only agreed to use it as a benchmark. Psychological health problems cost the Canadian economy \$51 billion per year - \$20 billions of which results from work-related causes.

Under the standard there is a rigorous monitoring, measurement and internal auditing process that would need to be adhered to and this is the piece that we feel is most needed as official Policy.

The present City Council has stated there will be a report presented to council concerning Workplace Mental Health in approximately 1 year ( May 2022).

**• As a candidate, what is your opinion concerning psychological safety in the workplace? When elected, would you commit to meeting and working with The Greater Edmonton Alliance to discuss Workplace Mental Health before the City Administration Report is presented and reviewed?**

Ensuring a psychologically safe workplace is an important value of mine. As a former employee at the City of Edmonton, I served as a culture ambassador and participated in multiple courses and workshops in support of workplace psychological safety. While this training was valuable to promote good mental health, I would like to see a common evaluation framework implemented to determine whether they, along with other workplace mental health initiatives, are benefitting employees at the City and how. When elected I am committed to meeting and working with the Greater Edmonton Alliance to discuss Workplace Mental Health.

**• Would you support the City of Edmonton adopting the Canadian National Standard for Psychological Safety in the Workplace as official policy? State reason for your answer.**

Supporting mental health and psychological safety in the workplace requires more than a set of standards to be implemented. There are often root causes of workplace crises that can cause psychological harm that must also be addressed. However, at a minimum I would support the City in adopting the Canadian National Standard for Psychological Safety in the Workplace to ensure accountability in actively prioritizing and promoting mental health for City employees.

A report to the City Council is vastly insufficient to take action and monitor the effectiveness of adopting and implementing the National Standard. Mental health issues are the most underreported health and safety issues in the workplace because many of these incidents do not neatly fit the definitions of harassment, bullying and/or discrimination. We know that microaggressions are often a daily occurrence in the workplace that many staff, particularly racialized employees experience from co-workers and supervisors. To build a more inclusive and psychologically safe workplace for all City staff, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism principles must be put at the forefront.

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## **Value 2: The Path to Shared Prosperity**

We value creating an equitable city that allows equal participation for people facing challenges of poverty and disability. When one of us struggles it has a negative effect for the whole community. Poverty is a condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power to have a basic level of living standards and non-living wages disproportionately impacts women, immigrants, indigenous people and people with disabilities in our communities. This is why GEA has identified Living Wages as a solution to this issue and has developed an educational course to be presented to the people and businesses of our communities. Work should lift people out of poverty and give families the ability to have a decent standard of life.

### **• When elected, will you commit to meeting and working with GEA's Living Wage/Quality Jobs Research/Action team as we reach out to our communities with our educational Program?**

If elected, I will commit to meeting and working with the GEA's Living Wage/Quality Jobs Research/Action team. The City of Edmonton has had a living wage policy in place for the last few years as part of the EndPovertyEdmonton Roadmap work. However, this living wage policy currently only covers approximately 10% of City staff (those earning under \$17/hour). Recently, as part of the discussions around Reimagine Services to restrain spending, the City is planning to outsource many jobs including the transit custodial workers. This would mean contracting these jobs out through the private sector, which might not guarantee a living wage for these employees (which they currently have at the City) or pension and benefits. Most of these workers come from racialized communities, who will likely also be apprehensive about working conditions for them and their families if services are moved to a private contractor. We need to ensure protections for all City workers to ensure that the living wage policy is equitably implemented.

**• What actions would you take to increase equity in our community and participation of the business community to make Edmonton a truly living wage city?**

To help make Edmonton a living wage city I would like to see more businesses participating in the Alberta Living Wage Network, which the GEA is a member of. Through the Social Procurement Policy at the City, I also believe we should incentivize employers to provide a living wage to their workers. Additional actions that I would support include working with existing initiatives such as EndPovertyEdmonton to accelerate their current actions in the Road Map centred around equity.

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**Value 3: Truth and Reconciliation:**

We value building and healing our relationships with Indigenous peoples by fully implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). GEA is reaching out to Local Indigenous Leaders in our communities to lead our organization to a better understanding of the “truth” of colonization, residential schools and their ongoing aftermath.

**• Once GEA has completed our internal reflections on Truth and Reconciliation and are working with our Local Indigenous Leadership, when elected, will you commit to meeting with our Truth and Reconciliation Research/Action team to discuss the calls to action and how we may partner to bring these actions to our communities?**

I am committed to meeting with the Truth and Reconciliation Research/Action team, GEA and your members on your individual and collective journey in Truth and Reconciliation. As someone who has worked extensively with Indigenous Communities across North America, I have learned a lot about my individual responsibilities to uphold and honour Truth and Reconciliation and will continue to learn how we can advance the calls to action here in Edmonton. You can read more on my reflections about Truth and Reconciliation here.

I am also committed to continuing to connect with the GEA and with multicultural and racialized communities as I have done through past roles and currently engage in as a candidate. This is a critical responsibility of an elected official, and when elected I aim to be a connector and facilitator who brings people together and co-creates solutions that can lift up all Edmontonians.

**Values 4: A Just Transition for Workers**

We value a healthy environment that can sustain us into the future but with Climate Change and the Transition to Green Energy or a Greener Future, workers always seem to be forgotten in this process. As the economy changes workers need to be re-trained, this seems to fall on the shoulders of the worker and the family most times.

**• As a candidate, what role do you see the City of Edmonton taking to lessen the impact of this transition period for workers and their families?**

While worker retraining currently falls under the Ministry of Labour, the City of Edmonton can play an active role in connecting workers to and implementing these vital retraining programs. When I last ran during the 2017 election, I spoke to many Edmontonians newly laid off from the oilfields in the economic downturn at that time. Job skill retraining should have been a major priority area then to create a buffer against some of the renewed economic challenges we are seeing today. As we move forward, the City should remove barriers for retraining to support workers as we transition to a Greener Future. For example, with infrastructure projects ongoing throughout the City, we should ensure that all City-funded projects meet sustainability standards such as through green building certifications, such as LEED for new buildings or BOMA BEST for operations and maintenance, and retrain our workers to support this shift in infrastructure building.

I also see the City being a key player in the transition to clean technology. We are experiencing this shift currently in the province, with more clean technology companies setting up their businesses in Edmonton and the surrounding areas. As a City, we need to seize this opportunity and ensure we are advocating and partnering with the private sector and provincial government through incentives to support the transition of oil and gas sector workers towards our future in green energy.

**• Once elected will you commit to meeting and working with the Greater Edmonton Alliance to explore the possibilities to keep quality jobs in the hands of Edmonton Workers.**

Yes, once elected I am committed to meeting and working with the GEA on this issue. I have been actively involved in the technological innovation space where many jobs are being created, into which many workers are transitioning. One primary focus of mine is to keep local capital funding circulating locally to benefit our employees and businesses and keep quality jobs in Edmonton.

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**Value 5: Community Mental Health**

We value healthy communities within our city and this is why GEA has identified Community Mental Health initiatives as a solution to the increasing mental health concerns particularly due to the effects of the pandemic. By creating community mental health resources to build resiliency, by fostering peer support networks, an under-utilized resource, whole communities can improve the mental health of those in need. We know these networks can reduce the stigmatization about mental health, improve crisis response, and support early intervention.

**• As a candidate, what role do you see the City of Edmonton taking to support building**

## **community mental health initiatives?**

Community wellbeing and community mental health are two sides of the same coin, and as a public health professional I have been actively involved in promoting and building capacity for wellbeing in the community. Specifically, I was the project manager for the Recover urban wellbeing initiative with the City of Edmonton, and later served as a member of the Catalyst Group, a diverse collective of community leaders working to grow Recover initiatives for greater impact. After years of co-designing with Edmontonians, conducting on the ground ethnographic research, and learning and testing, a promising idea emerged called the Soloss prototype which connected everyday people with each other in a peer support network to overcome disenfranchised grief and trauma. This prototype lays the foundation for what community care can look and feel like in Edmonton, complementing the mental health supports found in professional care settings (i.e., psychology, counselling etc.).

At the June 30, 2021 Community and Public Services Committee, I spoke about the importance of social infrastructures like the Soloss prototype for promoting community wellbeing because it is building a different kind of relationship for community care between Edmontonians. Moving forward, the City can play an important role in funding and supporting peer-based, neighbour-to-neighbour networks for relationship-building and community care to help advance community mental health.

### **• When elected, would you commit to meeting with GEA's Mental Health Research/Action team and support the ongoing efforts of GEA to partner with certain departments within the City of Edmonton and Edmonton Public Libraries to create community mental health Initiatives?**

Yes, if elected I am committed to meeting with the GEA's Mental Health Research/Action Team to support the efforts and partnerships to create community mental health initiatives. However, community mental health or community wellbeing must go beyond institutional structures in order to manifest more tangibly in people's relationships with each other in the community. Through a people-centred approach working directly with communities and Edmontonians, we can address the mental health issues impacting them by listening to those most affected and co-implementing approaches based on what we learn.

Read more of my thoughts on community wellbeing here:

<https://www.kerentang.ca/blog/prioritizing-community-safety-and-wellbeing>

<https://www.urbanwellnessedmonton.com/stories/our-north-star-wellbeing>