

# Fiftieth Anniversary

## Historical Timeline



**BOYLEstreet**  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

1960s

Edmonton's Native Brotherhood opens the Boyle Street Information Center

**George** McDermott, a Métis leader and founder of the Native Brotherhood Society, establishes a storefront office to support the urban Indigenous population with services in Edmonton. Drawn to the city for contract work, many Indigenous people find themselves trapped on the streets when the work dries up, unable to speak English, the dominant language in the area. The Boyle Street Information Centre provides an accessible place for people to get connected to services and a hub for inner-city workers, including Boyle Street's founders, to meet.



A newspaper photo of the inside of the Native Brotherhood Boyle Street Information Centre. Photo from Edmonton Journal, December 9, 1971. Courtesy of the City of Edmonton Archives.

1971

Founding members establish the Boyle Street Co-op in the Windsor Rooms Hotel

**Community** organizations in Edmonton agree on the need for a location where all their services could be offered in one place. Boyle Street's founding members secure federal funding for a three year "Demonstration Period," which allows them to establish an inner-city co-operative. The Boyle Street Co-op runs on the bold vision that community members who are often looked down upon by society, including those experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and substance use issues, can be empowered to manage their own services. The Boyle Street Co-operative opens in October 1971 with 5 paid staff in the Windsor Rooms building, an abandoned hotel donated by the City of Edmonton.



Windsor Rooms Hotel on 96th Street. Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Journal, 1972.

**1977**

## Boyle Street moves to the O.K. Steam Bath Hotel and opens its first Drop-In space

**When** their lease expires, Boyle Street moves down the street to the O.K. Steam Bath Hotel. The Co-Op secures funding from multiple levels of government and charities, hires two more staff members and opens a Drop-In room for community members to stay warm, meet friends and drink coffee.



*Boyle Street Co-op staff including (right to left) Jonathan Murphy, Nancy Kotani, Suzanne Kristie, Maureen Irwin, Gloria Deslauriers, Linda Trottier, Richard Johnson, Mary Burlie, and Sue.*

**1986**

## Boyle Street moves to the Municipal Courthouse building and starts mental health and substance use programs

**300** community members attend the grand opening of Boyle Street's third location in the much bigger Municipal Courthouse building (9720 102 Ave). The larger space allows Boyle Street to grow and open several new programs at this location, including the Mental Health Unit and NeedleWorks, a needle exchange program which blazed the trail for harm reduction programs today.



*Community member Marilyn poses at the reception desk with an (unidentified) staff member at the Municipal Courthouse building.*

1988

## Boyle Street opens a Youth Unit and volunteer founds Tess's Place

**Boyle** Street opens a Youth Unit to give street-involved youth a safe place to go that was off the streets and offered connections to other programs, such as employment and education. Theresa (Tess) Slavic, a nun who volunteered for the Youth Outreach program, opens a boarding home to help youth get off the streets and away from abusive situations. Youth pay for room and board, while Tess uses her old age pension to keep the home running.



*Youth hang out in the safe space of the Youth Unit, surrounded by art painted on the walls by their peers.*

1990

## Boyle Street supports mental health and establishes a Mental Health Unit

**One** of the biggest problems in the Co-Op's early years is the dumping of psychiatric patients, who often lacked housing, in the inner-city. Edmontonian Jon Murphy's report, "Backwards from Back Wards," puts pressure on the government to address mental health and housing issues. Boyle Street's first mental health worker, Michael Cairns, helps to open a Drop-In room for community members experiencing mental health challenges. The program rises to meet an extremely high demand, with Cairns managing approximately 55 cases per month. Cairns initiates partnerships with Alberta Mental Health Services (AMHS) and the Royal Alexandra Hospital, which continue to serve the inner-city community today.



*The staff room in the Municipal Courthouse building became mental health clients' favorite place to hang out, since not all felt comfortable or welcome in the bustle of the main Drop-In area. Cairns created a separate Mental Health Drop-In room, forming the Mental Health Unit.*

1991

## Boyle Street celebrates their 20th anniversary at Edmonton's Klondike Days parade

**Boyle** Street's third home at the Municipal Courthouse is conveniently located along the City of Edmonton's parade route. Les Umpherville, a community member, volunteers to construct a float to celebrate Boyle Street's 20th anniversary at the Klondike Days parade. Les paints the float to look like the Courthouse building, giving many Edmontonians their first glimpse of Boyle Street as "a heart in the inner-city."



*Boyle Street's 20th anniversary float showcases programs such as StreetWorks and Street Outreach in Edmonton's annual Klondike Days parade.*

1995

## Boyle Street loses its building and enters "the year the Co-Op was homeless"

**Boyle** Street moves to make way for the construction of Edmonton's new concert hall, the Winspear Centre. The Co-Op struggles to find a new location because of stigma around the homeless population and moves into a small office above the Family Market Drug Store (97 Street and 101A Avenue). This year is known as "the year the homeless centre was homeless." Despite the challenges of the year, Boyle Street opens a Charter School to meet the needs of street-involved youth and joins StreetWorks, a harm reduction program for community members involved in substance use and sex work.



*Staff and community members held a candlelight march to say goodbye to the Courthouse building, not sure when Boyle Street will find its next home.*

1992

## Boyle Street hosts the first inner-city Memorial Round Dance in urban Canada to honor community members who died on the streets

**Boyle** Street hosts its first Memorial Round Dance in response to a particularly difficult few months during which 27 community members died. The staff were attending so many funerals, and wanted to find a way to celebrate the deceased. Around 500 people attend the Round Dance at Norwood School, including Mayor Jan Reimer. Indigenous community members work together to put up a teepee for the occasion. This Round Dance and Feast is the first event of its kind in urban Canada and became a Boyle Street tradition.



*Blackfoot, Stoney and Cree community members debate on how to put up the teepee for the Memorial Round Dance on the grounds of Norwood School.*

1995

## Boyle Street opens Charter School to meet demand for alternative education model for street-involved youth

**When** Joe Pillay, a refugee from South Africa, joined the Co-Op in the early 90s, he met a number of youth who lacked meaningful activities to keep them off the streets in the daytime. He set up a "classroom" in the Courthouse and attendance quickly grew from two to fifteen students who attended every day. In response to this demand, Boyle Street establishes a Charter School in 1995 with a leading-edge alternative education model to support street-involved youth whose needs were not being met by the mainstream school system. Getting a charter means Boyle Street receives provincial funding to help run the school and provide education and employment opportunities for its students.



*A community member beams with joy as she receives a plaque from Boyle Street staff for completing her high school diploma.*

1996

## Boyle Street moves to the Reaney Block building

**Boyle** Street finds its fifth and current home in the Reaney Block building. A former banana ripening warehouse, this building reunites Boyle Street's programs under one roof, ending "the year the Co-op was homeless." Boyle Street forges a loyal partnership with the landlord, Leston Holdings, who agrees to rent the building to us in a period where no others would. This building is now recognizable as the big blue building behind Roger's Place.

### Inspirational "Black Angel of Boyle Street" Mary Burlie passes away

**Mary** Burlie, also known as "The Black Angel of Boyle Street," provided 26 years of service to the Boyle Street community. Burlie moved to Edmonton in 1969 and volunteered at the Co-Op until we could afford to hire her full-time. An inspiration to all who work here, Burlie was known for 17 cases open at a time, while other staff had only six. Burlie fought against racism and advocated for women, children, and families in her personal life and as the President of Alberta Black Women's Association and Change for Children. She was awarded an honorary Social Work diploma from Grant MacEwan. Mary is remembered by her children for her authenticity, non-judgmental attitude, and, most of all, her humility.



*Mary Burlie smiles with colleague at Boyle Street's annual Christmas dinner.*



*A mural on the outside of the Reaney Block building brings color and meaning to our community members, signaling to passersby that Boyle Street is a welcoming place to those in need.*

**2001**

## Boyle Street celebrates our 30th anniversary with a huge mural

**Boyle** Street establishes "winter warming" protocol to support community members during Edmonton's high-risk winter months. As part of Edmonton's Winter Emergency Response (WER), the community center extends its hours of operation to 8am-8pm to provide people a safe, warm place to stay and access services. Boyle Street hires seasonal "winter warming" workers to help manage our busiest season and accept and hand out donations. Two years later, Boyle Street runs a winter warming bus, which delivers warm clothing and food and transports community members in remote areas to the shelters clustered in the city's core.



*The Metamorphosis mural weighs 440 pounds and spans two floors of our Community Centre building.*

**2004**

## Boyle Street establishes Winter Warming protocol

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*The winter warming bus transports people from across the city to shelter during Edmonton's coldest months.*

**2007**

## Boyle Street's Group Living Program grows to support youth at all stages of development

**Boyle** Street's Group Living Program began with the goal of reuniting children with Child Welfare status with their families. The program's first location, "Stepping Stones," was a home for 20 children under the age of 13 that provided holistic care to children and a supportive environment for their parents to get involved and establish a healthy family routine. Boyle Street then expanded the program to include "Transitions," group homes for youth ages 12-19 who have "aged out" of the services offered to children. In 2007, Group Living rounded out its scope of care by opening a third stream, "Transitional Support to Independent Living," which supports youth ages 16-24 in gaining their independence. Group Living's ability to support children and youth throughout their development helps to build strong support systems and disrupt the cycle of trauma which leads many to the streets.



*A family poses with some artwork at a Boyle Street trip to Camp Meywasin.*

# 2010

## Boyle Street starts Downtown Proud to provide employment opportunities to community members

**Boyle** Street employs community members who are experiencing poverty and homelessness through Downtown Proud, a team which works for three hours a day, five days a week, to clean up some of Edmonton's busiest streets in the downtown core. As Boyle Street's first social enterprise, Downtown Proud pays a living wage, improves our city, and generates profit which funds our services. It provides life-changing opportunities for community members who face multiple barriers to employment. Most importantly, Downtown Proud gives our community members a sense of purpose in their lives and a feeling of pride, rather than marginalization, in our city.



*Denise from Downtown Proud smiles on the corner of Jasper Avenue and 101 Street during her morning rounds*

# 2011

## Boyle Street's Street Outreach team gains funding

**Boyle** Street gains funding for a Street Outreach team in 2011, which formalized the outreach operations which have always been fundamental to our relationships with community members. Reaching out to community members on the streets allows us to build trust, check up on each other, and connect more people to our services.



*Street Outreach worker, Aidan Inglis, visits encampments in Edmonton's river valley to check on community members' wellbeing, build relationships, and offer support.  
Photo from Edmonton Journal, October 31, 2016.*

**2013**

## Boyle Street buys the Reaney Block building

**Amidst** the buzz of downtown revitalization and the construction of Rogers Place, Boyle Street makes the daring move to buy our building. As "the year the Co-Op was homeless" taught us in the 90s, the stigma around homelessness makes it difficult to find an area where Boyle Street is welcomed. Buying our building cemented our place within the inner-city so that we can continue to be a "home" for those experiencing homelessness, poverty, and discrimination.



*Community members enjoy a summer block party at Boyle Street.*

**2015**

## Boyle Street joins innovative partnership at C5 North East Hub

**The** C5 North East Hub opens, a groundbreaking approach to collaboration between non-profits in an area which was previously a "dead zone" for community services. This innovative partnership that unites Boyle Street Community Services, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Terra Centre for Teen Parents, Norwood Child and Parent Link Centre, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, and SAGE Seniors Association in one location. The C5 provides employment, family, and housing services, building on the strengths of each partner organization.



*Children play in a communal space at the C5 Hub. Photo from Terra Centre.*

**2016**

## Boyle Street partners with ATB Financial to open Four Directions Financial Bank

**Boyle** Street partners with ATB Financial to start Four Directions Financial, a first-of-its-kind bank that makes financial services accessible to everyone. Biometric technology allows the many community members who lack ID to access their accounts and keep their money in a safe place. The bank provides a welcoming space that empowers our community members, helping them to manage their money, build a history with a mainstream financial institution, and avoid predatory payday loans.



*Located right next to our Community Centre, Four Directions Financial, in partnership with ATB, provides full banking services to our community members.*

**2020**

## Boyle Street coordinates innovative response to COVID-19 pandemic

**In tough** times, we come together. Boyle Street collaborated with many inner-city agencies in a series of groundbreaking partnerships to respond to the pandemic. We opened temporary pandemic response locations to provide all of our services under one roof: COVID-19 screening, contact tracing, shelter, mental health, overdose prevention, Indigenous cultural supports, housing, youth services, storage, security, and meals. Our current location at the Edmonton Convention Centre, known as Tipinawâw (tee-pin-a-wah), a Cree word meaning "sheltered from the elements, cold, and wind," provides shelter and services to approximately 300 people during our city's coldest months.



*Christmas Day celebrations at Tipinawâw included a physically distanced holiday meal which fed more than 600 people accessing services that day.  
Photo by Greg Southam in the Edmonton Journal.*

**2021**

## Boyle Street celebrates its 50th anniversary

**Boyle** Street kicks off our 50th Anniversary celebrations with a congratulatory message to our staff. Our staff are our services, and we wouldn't have been able to provide 50 years of exemplary service in our city without the relationships our staff build with community members. Our staff make a difference every day, through big and small actions.



**"Our staff have driven so many innovations that I can't wait to see what happens in the next fifty years."**

*—Gloria Chalmers, one of our Board Members*

