



HehrLines

I have two friends who are as different as night and day.

One is quiet, soft spoken and prefers to talk about the Calgary Flames or the Toronto Blue Jays. The other is loud, boisterous and has strong opinions on politics, religion and anything else you might bring up.

Both suffer from mental illness. Both receive support from **Elements Calgary Health Centre** (formerly the Calgary Association of Self Help). Elements is located at 1019 7 Ave SW in the heart of

Downtown West's vertical village.

Last year over 1200 Calgarians suffering from depression, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, and other forms of mental illness were assisted at Elements. The lines from the theme song of the TV sitcom Cheers apply to many who drop in to Elements; "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came." Social acceptance, understanding, and support are in abundant supply at Elements at all times... along with a good cup of coffee.

On January 8th I had a most pleasant and informative chat with Elements' Executive Director **Anneisa Lauchlan** who generously shared information while giving me a tour.

She told me Elements opened in 1973, and at that time was located near the Colonel Belcher Hospital. Anneisa started at Elements in 1991 and served in numerous positions before taking the helm as Executive Director. She said Elements' clients range in age from 18 to over 70, with the average age being 47. When she stressed the fact that 1 in 4 Albertans will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some time, the thought passed through my mind that "there but for the grace of God, or the luck of the draw, go you or I". She also emphasized that no matter what the degree or severity of the illness, its impact is felt not only by the victims but also their families, friends and society as a whole.

Anneisa mentioned that Elements' clients almost inevitably have limited incomes. Her budget of \$2.2 million is essentially funded by the Alberta government - obviously an excellent example of our taxes at work.



ELEMENTS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANNEISA LAUHLAN, AND YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT



ELEMENTS ARTWORKS ON DISPLAY AT THE 7TH AVE ENTRANCE

Elements provides over ten programs and three support groups ranging from life skills, decluttering, smoking cessation and others to mention just a few. It is a busy place!

In wrapping up our chat, Anneisa pointed out that **visitors are always invited to drop by** and see firsthand how Elements is working to benefit our community!

After thanking Anneisa, I exited out onto 7th Ave and started my block and a half walk back to the Marquis. I couldn't help but think that in the lottery of life I had won the jackpot... and that the majority of my Downtown West friends and neighbours had also drawn winning tickets.

But then I thought back to the two friends that I mentioned at the beginning of this article. I was then reminded that life can be hard. Life isn't fair. Life can beat you up. Life can wear you down.

Mahatma Gandhi said; "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

Elements is a real example of our society's efforts in this regard. In my lifetime we have come a long way in erasing the stigma of mental illness. Unfortunately we still have a long way to go.

Next month I hope to write about another Downtown West gem - Mewata Armouries. Until then, as my dad used to say, "Don't take any wooden nickels."

Richard Hehr - Director, DWCA



**HE HAS
A
RIGHT
TO
CRITICIZE,
WHO
HAS A
HEART
TO
HELP.**

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN**