

## Learning from Ponoka

By **MAX MAUDIE**, EDMONTON SUN

The head of a home for the poor in Ponoka wants to bring his mix of social housing and retail space to Edmonton.

"I think the concept itself is worthy of looking into," said the Champion's Centre executive director, Klaas Klooster, a former youth minister.

"Plus we're not a burden on society, because we're fiscally responsible."

The Ponoka Champion's Centre, which has been open since 2002, houses - for \$600 each - 16 men who struggle with mental and physical disabilities.

Built in to the Ponoka centre is a cafe and antique/collectables store. The shops serve three purposes: potential employment for residents, revenue for the centre and a place to help reintegrate residents into the mainstream.

Yesterday, members of the mental health, housing, and religious community gathered at St. Alphonsus Catholic parish, 11828 85 St., for Klooster's pitch.

Klooster was asked here by former Antarctic explorer Austin Mardon, who has had schizophrenia for 13 years and holds a PhD in geography.

The small number of residents in Ponoka's centre, he said, minimizes "cliques and social problems."

He was also impressed by their business model.

"It's a very efficient use of space and money. Some of the derelict buildings around here (118 Avenue) would be optimum."

For \$600 a month, residents - most of whom are on some sort of financial support - get their own room; one hot meal a day, and the makings for other meals; full laundry and cleaning support; access to a recreation and cleaning room; and a sense of belonging.

Mardon said a few people voiced interest after the meeting, but none had signed up to strike a committee, the next step in an Edmonton Champion's centre.

Pastor Pedro Schultz, a 58-year-old street pastor, had to be out of his Jasper Avenue apartment by noon yesterday.

He's spent decades ministering to Edmonton's less fortunate and got a brief reprieve from his landlord.

He'll move into a downtown bachelor's suite on Friday.