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CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA OFFICE



# **Is Participation Having an Impact?**

## **Measuring Progress in Winnipeg's Inner City through the Voices of Community-Based Program Participants**

Shauna MacKinnon and Sara Stephens with  
Heather Bendell, Dave Brophy, Richard Bruyere, Michael Champagne, Tyra  
Maud, Erin Mitchell, Lorraine Nepinak, Tricia Seymour, Carey Sinclair, Sue  
Thiebaut, Nancy Thomas, Jason Wark, and  
Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT)

**January 2008**

CAW 567  
CCPA

**ISBN - 9780-0-88627-584-6**

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## Acknowledgements

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We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Winnipeg Foundation and the Province of Manitoba Neighbourhoods Alive! Initiative. This project was made possible through their generous financial support.

We are also pleased to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant # 833-2007-1001, via the Manitoba Research Alliance for Transforming Inner City and Aboriginal Communities.

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT). In particular we thank the following CLOUT representatives: Lucille Bruce, Tammy Christensen, Debra Diubaldo, Betty Edel, Josie Hill, Dilly Knoll, Sister Bernadette O'Reilly, Patty Parsons, Sonia Prevost-Derbecker, Diane Redsky, Sharon Taylor, Sister Maria Vigna. We also extend our sincere thanks to our community researchers and all of the individuals who shared their stories with us.

Shauna MacKinnon would like to acknowledge the early participation of Dave Brophy who passed away in July 2007. Dave was a kind and gentle young man and his spirit remained with the project throughout. Shauna would also like to extend a special thanks to Colin Kinsella and Heather Bendell; and to Jim Silver for his continued

encouragement, support and enthusiasm for the *State of the Inner City* report.

And finally, Shauna extends a very special thanks to Nancy Thomas. Nancy's honesty, integrity, humour and self-awareness brought a depth to this project that made it very special.



Manitoba 



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

**Cover art by Eric Flett and Amber Beardy,  
12-year- old participants in the Ndinawe Art  
Program.**

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## About the Authors

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Shauna MacKinnon is the Director of Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba and coordinator of the *State of the Inner City* project.

Sara Stephens is a community-based researcher and has participated in two *State of the Inner City* reports. She is currently Program Evaluation and Research Coordinator at Sexuality Education Resource Centre.



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# Is Participation Having an Impact?

## The report in brief

In the early stages of planning for the 2005 *State of the Inner City Report*, the State of the Inner City (SIC) steering committee expressed an interest in developing a means of measuring the difficult to measure outcomes of participation in community-based programs. In 2006, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba (CCPA-Mb) embarked on a journey with eight inner-city organizations to begin to explore the meaning of 'successful outcomes' for participants of community-based programs. Participants include individuals who use the services and programs of the community organizations studied. In some cases, they are also volunteers. This is a story of that journey, as much as it is an attempt to better understand how we might more accurately measure program outcomes for individuals struggling with multiple barriers in their daily lives.

## The Challenge of Measuring Outcomes

Funding institutions appear to be pre-occupied with measuring outcomes, and the experience of our partner Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) is that they do so in a narrow manner. (Community-based organizations are non-profit organizations providing services to residents and others within the scope of the organization's mandate.) This is frustrating for CBO representatives,

many of whom have gone through a long and painful process of decolonization. Governments and other program funders seem to be less interested in how lives are being affected *qualitatively* and how participation in community-based programs might affect the lives of not only participants, but their families, neighbourhoods and the broader community. This apparent lack of institutional interest in qualitatively understanding the outcomes of participation is in part based on the reality that such effects are difficult to measure. However, it must also be acknowledged that the underlying objectives of funding institutions may be different than the objectives of the community-based organizations participating in this project.

The CBOs that guide this project have a transformative vision. Many believe that fundamental change requires that we first address the damage of colonization and oppression. While funding institutions, in particular governments, wish to see individuals adapt to the existing social and economic structures, our community partners are interested in fundamental changes in these structures.

While change of this magnitude may seem far from reach as inner-city residents continue to struggle to overcome multiple challenges, there is a general sense for those who work on the front lines that real progress is being made by individuals and

families in the inner city. However, much of this progress is not recognized because of how ‘success’ is measured.

As we proceeded through collaboration on the 2006 State of the Inner City Report, we began to explore how we might better understand what impact participation is having on individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities. The purpose of this paper is to document and reflect on this journey and to share the findings of our interviews with 91 inner-city program participants.

### **How do we Measure Progress in Winnipeg’s Inner City?: A Participatory Approach to Understanding Outcomes**

This research topic was identified by a consortium of inner-city community organizations that work primarily with Aboriginal individuals and families. Their interest in this research is in part a response to the ongoing pressure that they are under to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs through quantifiable program outcomes.

The project used a Participatory Action Research approach that brought together several community-based organizations. (For further details see Appendix Two.)

### **Transformation Through Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been described as “systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change” (Mora and Diaz 2004). PAR is not limited to work with marginalized and oppressed communities; however this is where it finds its roots (Gatenby and Humphries 2000; Khanlou and Peter 2005). It has become a model used by many researchers and practitioners working with oppressed and marginalized groups through a transformative framework, as it is more inclusive and includes the objective of conducting research that builds

capacity and affects social change. It differs considerably from other forms of research in that it requires mutual trust among researchers, organizations, and community people and takes time to nurture such relationships. PAR differs fundamentally from traditional research because it studies problems identified by the community, and research findings are disseminated widely and in accessible forms. In full-participation PAR, the community will also determine the methodology that it believes will best suit the needs and objectives of the research project.

Consistent with the aims of PAR, we have developed a model that involves a significant community role in all aspects of the research—from planning to dissemination and utilization of findings (Mora and Diaz 2004). The project grew initially out of the mutual trust that had been developed through joint participation in earlier work, including the State of the Inner City Report, leading to the formation of a community-based research team that gathered to discuss potential research relevant to the needs of the community. The team includes the members of a coalition of eight inner-city organizations called Community-Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT) and researchers associated with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba. (Appendix One has a description of the eight CLOUT organizations.) It should be noted that the eight CLOUT representatives are all women and most are Aboriginal. Some of these women grew up and continue to live in the neighbourhoods where they now work. The organizations that they represent provide services primarily, although not exclusively, to Aboriginal residents. Some have very consciously developed their programming through an anti-oppressive theoretical framework and they integrate a strong cultural component into their programs. Teaching participants about the effects of colonization and oppression is integrated into many of the



programs offered and the impact of this model became evident in many of the interviews.

### **Colonization, Oppression and Unrealistic Expectations**

Early in the process, the research team agreed that the research framework from would need to recognize the historical context of the Aboriginal experience. Healing the damage caused by colonization and oppression is slow and painful work. Further, systemic oppression through racism, sexism and classism continues, therefore healing occurs within a context of recurring injury. Education and awareness of systemic forces is an essential first step toward individual empowerment and emancipation. This notion was reinforced during the project repeatedly, for interviewees as well as community researchers.

Oppression and racism can have long and lasting effects. In his description of the effects of oppression, Freire (2006, 63) notes: “So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitnes.” Hart, as cited in Silver (2006, 28) describes the deep damage caused by internalized colonization: “Aboriginal people start to believe that we are incapable of learning and that the colonizers’ degrading images and beliefs about Aboriginal people and our ways of being are true.”

For Aboriginal inner-city organizations, reversing the damage of colonization is a first step in the transformation process. It requires that program participants be provided with an opportunity to learn about oppression and colonization so that they can proudly reclaim their Aboriginal identity and move forward. But the journey for many is long and outcomes are not always easy to measure. Therefore it has been essential that the research project, from design through to analysis, is rooted in an understanding of the profound effects of colonization. To ensure

## **Systemic Racism? Nancy’s experience**

Nancy joined the project as a community researcher. She very recently opened up an account at a local credit union. This in itself was a new and empowering experience for her and she looked forward to being able to cash her first paycheque. However, the experience was marred by the response she received from a teller. After receiving her first paycheque for her work on the project, Nancy headed to her credit union. The teller proceeded to ask her what seemed to be inappropriate questions about the nature of the work she was doing in exchange for the cheque. There seemed to be some question, even though Nancy had appropriate identification and the cheque was clearly made out to her, whether the cheque was legitimately obtained. The excitement of cashing her first paycheque became an unpleasant experience. Nancy shared this experience with the non-Aboriginal research coordinator, who was horrified and immediately felt that the reaction of the teller was racially motivated. But Nancy’s mentor, responded to this suggestion with sad acceptance. “... we go through this almost daily.” And in response to the suggestion that a complaint be filed: “I suppose so, but if we complained each time we experience racism, we would be spending our entire lives complaining.”

that community researchers, the majority of whom were Aboriginal, had an understanding of this context, a well-respected Aboriginal teacher agreed to assist us in our training. We believe that his teachings contributed to the quality of interviews and provided knowledge to community researchers consistent with our capacity-building objectives.

### **Research Design**

In keeping with PAR, the research design required careful attention to process, instrument design, and data analysis. Our aim was to ensure that the research process remained true to the inclusive, empowering, and transformative objectives of the research team. Research processes that are designed to address exclusion of oppressed communities by actively and fully involving them in the process, can contribute to transformative objectives.

In their participatory research approach, Keys et al. (2003) consider the controlling relationships that marginalized individuals often experience. The program participants that we interviewed exemplify this experience. Many are living their lives under the watchful eye of representatives of the state, including child-welfare authorities, the criminal-justice system, and social-assistance authorities. These systems have significant power over their daily lives. This has implications for research, because establishing trust becomes more complicated. This trust is essential if participants are to feel safe to fully share their stories and be empowered through the process. This is addressed to some extent in this project by broadening involvement of the community in the research process, building egalitarian relationships with participants through ongoing collaboration, training and hiring community researchers, sharing findings in various forms, and requesting feedback from research participants.

## **A Methodology Emerges**

In keeping with PAR, community research partners must be involved in the decision of selecting a methodology that fits best with their research objectives. The role of the ‘outside researcher’ is to provide information about various methods and tools and to assist them in the process. PAR can involve quantitative and qualitative methods or a combination of both, but consideration should be given to choosing methodology and methods that will engage community residents—to be trained and hired where possible—in the data gathering process and analysis. This is important as it provides a capacity-building component that can have lasting benefit for the community (Mora and Diaz 2004).

### **Identifying the Issues**

In the process of identifying research areas that might be of interest to CBOs, several discussions took place around the use of indicators in measuring progress in the inner city. The question ‘how do we measure?’ evolved into a discussion around ‘what are we measuring’ and ‘who determines what needs to be measured?’ For inner-city organizations working with marginalized community members, the question of what we are measuring, how and why is critical. Inner-city CBOs are constantly under pressure to demonstrate to funding institutions how their programs are having an impact on participants’ lives. For the most part, funders are looking for quantitative measures that can demonstrate the number of participants who have become employed, returned to school etc. CBOs argue that these kinds of expectations are often unrealistic given the deep and damaging effects of colonization and oppression.

It is worth noting that much of the work of CBOs is required because of the damage and neglect caused by the very institutions that fund them. It is ironic that institutions continue to

expect CBOs to demonstrate their effectiveness on mainstream institutional terms. Members of the research team are also acutely aware that much of what they are able to do is in spite of public policies and programs that they view as inadequate at best and damaging at worst. While they can do their best to help individuals adapt, increase awareness, and advocate for their 'clients', the reality that housing is sorely lacking, social assistance incomes are inadequate, and access to good jobs, childcare, and training is limited, is largely out of their control. And unless public policy shifts considerably to address these issues, improvements in the economic and social well-being of the people that the CBOs serve will remain marginal.

Raising individual awareness of structural forces, so that individuals will better understand their oppression, is integral to CLOUT programs and this research project. It is a critical first step toward social transformation. As noted by Freire (2006), "critical and liberating dialogue presupposes action."

### **Defining Measures**

The research team sees value in both quantitative and qualitative measures, therefore both are integrated into the research design. However, community partners have clearly articulated that they feel it is most important to understand outcomes through individuals' stories. Consensus emerged through the early planning process to develop a means to measure progress through the voices of program participants. The research team feels very strongly that participants, through their own voices, have valuable insights to share through their stories. Their perceptions of what participation means to them, their families, their neighbourhoods and their broader communities is critical to the measurement of whether progress is being made.

This methodology is consistent with indigenous research, because it provides participants with an opportunity to have voice through stories.

As noted by Tuhiwai Smith (2006, 127), "Community action approaches [to research] assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives..." This is particularly important given the significant level of Aboriginal participation in this research.

The measurement tool has evolved within the context of a decolonization framework. Outcomes are not measured simply by individual adaptation to please funders. The process itself is part of the outcome. As noted by one inner-city development worker, "the process is the product, I think, like it's a journey not a destination" (Silver 2006, 150). This poses a challenge for institutions seeking linear, quantifiable outcomes. But by increasing awareness of the deep effects of colonization, CBOs hope that funders will learn to recognize that reversing the damage of colonization requires that mainstream institutions adapt their policies, programs, and methods of measurement to better reflect the needs of colonized peoples.

### **The Importance of Stories**

Transformative research should emphasize the value of narratives (Westwood 1991). Participants involved should be offered not only a voice, "but a speaking position through the narrative mode" (Westwood 1991, 4). PAR that limits methodology to quantitative measures will miss an important opportunity to provide a potentially empowering experience for interviewees, and the depth of knowledge that emerges through hearing the voices of the 'researched' will be lost. Story telling, or 'narrative' research gives us insight into the meaning that people give to their experiences. It can therefore be a useful methodology in community-based PAR where the knowledge of the community being researched is central to the process.

The SIC community partners agree with this perspective, and have clearly articulated that both quantitative and qualitative measures are critical to understanding the complicated context of their participants' lives. They emphasize that there

is power in the stories that need to be told. As articulated by one of the members:

...funders just want to know how many women we are providing service to and the outcomes of that service. What they don't take into consideration is the broader effects of these women's healing—the changes that result for their children, their families and the broader community.

For example, what may appear as small progress for an individual participant can have considerable impact for a new generation of Aboriginal children. As noted by one participant, getting in touch with native culture has not only changed the way that she lives, but it has changed the way that she parents her children. She feels strongly that a destructive cycle has been broken and this will have lasting benefits for her children. This is an extremely important outcome but it is very challenging to measure.

### **The Interview Instrument**

Given the desire for a mixed-method design, the research team developed a semi-structured instrument that integrates measures of social well-being with narrative, to capture the stories that are central to understanding participant perceptions of outcomes. (Appendix Two contains a sample Interview Guide.) A series of questions was integrated to better understand structural and institutional barriers for participants.

One objective of this research is to identify opportunities for policy change; therefore the measures of social well-being that we have incorporated can be helpful to identify where government intervention may be strengthened. As noted by John Helliwell, “policy interventions should be routinely accompanied by prior and subsequent measures of well-being.” He argues that “a fairly small set of questions can provide useful assessments of the level and distribution of well-being, and of the types of social capital

and institutions that support it” (Helliwell 2005, 19).

The interview guide has four parts. Part A gathers demographic information. Part B includes the indicator questions, asking respondents to rate themselves based on 14 measures of social well-being. (See Appendix Three for responses to Parts A and B.) Part C is an open-ended question to capture individual stories about the impact of participation. Part D is an open-ended question to identify gaps in services. While our initial intent was to use the 14 measures in Part B for interviews with both adults and youth, we later decided to eliminate some categories in our interviews with youth as we found that they were not responding to questions and they became much more engaged when asked to tell their story in their own words.

For this project, the research team was interested in knowing the narrators' perception of what participation in the program has meant to them and the impact on their families, the neighbourhood and the broader community. We also wanted to know if individual participation has contributed to a greater understanding of the effects of colonization and systemic oppression and whether this knowledge has had any impact on participant perceptions of self and hope for the future. There was considerable discussion with community partners as to how to best gauge participants' understanding of the roots of their oppression. In the end we agreed not to ask this question explicitly as it might be intimidating for those in the early stages of their journey. We agreed that participants' stories would provide an indication of their understanding of oppression and colonization.

### **Selection of Interviewees**

After obtaining ethics approval through the University of Winnipeg, individuals in each of the eight CBOs were interviewed. We sought to interview a mix of participants that included those engaged for various periods of time. Each

interviewee was provided with an orientation to the research project to ensure that they were fully informed of the research objectives and what the final research would be used for. Interviewees were presented with an opportunity to review findings before the research report was finalized; however, few indicated an interest in being engaged in this manner.

### **Participants**

A total of 91 individuals were interviewed (21 were male, 60 were female, and 10 were not identified by gender). Just over half (51 percent) of participants identified as Aboriginal, and 16 percent as Métis, with the remaining 33 percent distributed over many other ethnic backgrounds, including Caucasian, Russian and African. (See Appendix Four for details.) Of the 80 participants who gave their age 13 were under the age of 18. In these cases, a parent or guardian provided consent. Sixteen of those interviewed were between 18-24, 23 were between 25-35, and 28 were over 35. The average age of participants was 30.1 years. Seven of those interviewed reported having one or more children in foster care, while 12 currently have one or more children living at home. Seven participants have some children at home and some in care, and six have children living with family, partners or independently. While 17 other interviewees also had children, they did not specify where their children lived.

### **Method of Analysis**

Given the scope of the research project, 91 interviews, and limited resources, it was not feasible to analyze the data through the preferred “line by line” method (Fraser. 2004). Further, the mixed-method design required some quantitative analysis of the measures of social well-being included in the interview instrument. With the assistance of a qualitative research program, (NVivo), narrative data were analyzed by identifying key themes, and responses to social well-being measures were grouped and quantified.

We acknowledge that using this approach has limitations since breaking down the data in this manner takes away from the richness that can be found in reflecting on the full story.

Using a categorical content method of analysis, each question and response was examined in the context of whether it helped to answer the primary research question— is participation having an impact? Key themes were identified and examined for their impact on the individual participant as well as their family, their neighbourhood and the broader community, to help us to better understand implications for broader structural change.

### **Analyzing the Data through an Anti-Oppressive ‘Lens’**

Because our community partners emphasize program design and delivery embedded in decolonization and anti-oppressive frameworks, our analysis takes shape through this lens. As earlier explained, the individual and community journey of healing from the damage of colonization and the reclaiming of Aboriginal identity is a long and often painful journey. This is a central challenge for CBOs that integrate decolonization methods in their practice, because this slow and not always linear process is difficult for funders to understand. Mainstream measurement tools are designed for quick and tangible results. Self-sufficiency and essentially an embracing of euro-centric, middle-class values are the mainstream ultimate goals.

While the central research question was “Is Participation in CLOUT Programs Having an Impact?” we are looking for a much deeper understanding of the impact. We also want to know if and how participation is having an impact on reversing the damage that has been caused by colonization and oppression and whether program participants, their families, neighbourhoods and the broader community, are better able to move forward as a result of their participation. As noted, the damage caused by colonization and oppression

runs deep and can have profound effects on self-esteem, sense of self-worth, self-confidence and hope. This breakdown at the individual level leads to a collective weakening of social capital. Reversing the damage is slow but essential to self-empowerment, emancipation, and community transformation.

Within this basic framework of analysis, we are interested in the various ways in which participation is having an impact on individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities with the overall objective of transformation. See Diagram 1 (next page) for the analytical framework.

### **Challenges and Design Limitations Considered**

While PAR and the use of narrative have many advantages as a means of doing research with transformative goals, there are also limitations that were considered. Because PAR has multiple purposes—systematic research that is also community-owned and empowering—it can be a more complicated process with riskier outcomes. For example, the objective to increase capacity and transfer knowledge through the process can result in the use of interviewers who are inexperienced. This created some challenges. There was ongoing need to support and mentor interviewers to ensure that they were sensitive to interviewees and were encouraging them to share information that would be useful for our analysis, while not being overly intrusive.

The interview dynamics were somewhat inconsistent. There was definite improvement in the quality of interviews as researchers became comfortable and increasingly knowledgeable of the process. There was a need to add new researchers midstream, as two individuals quit partway through and two individuals chose not to participate at all after the initial training. It should be noted that the two trainees who chose not to participate did so because of a fear that it would disrupt their receipt of social assistance. Since their involvement in this project would be very short

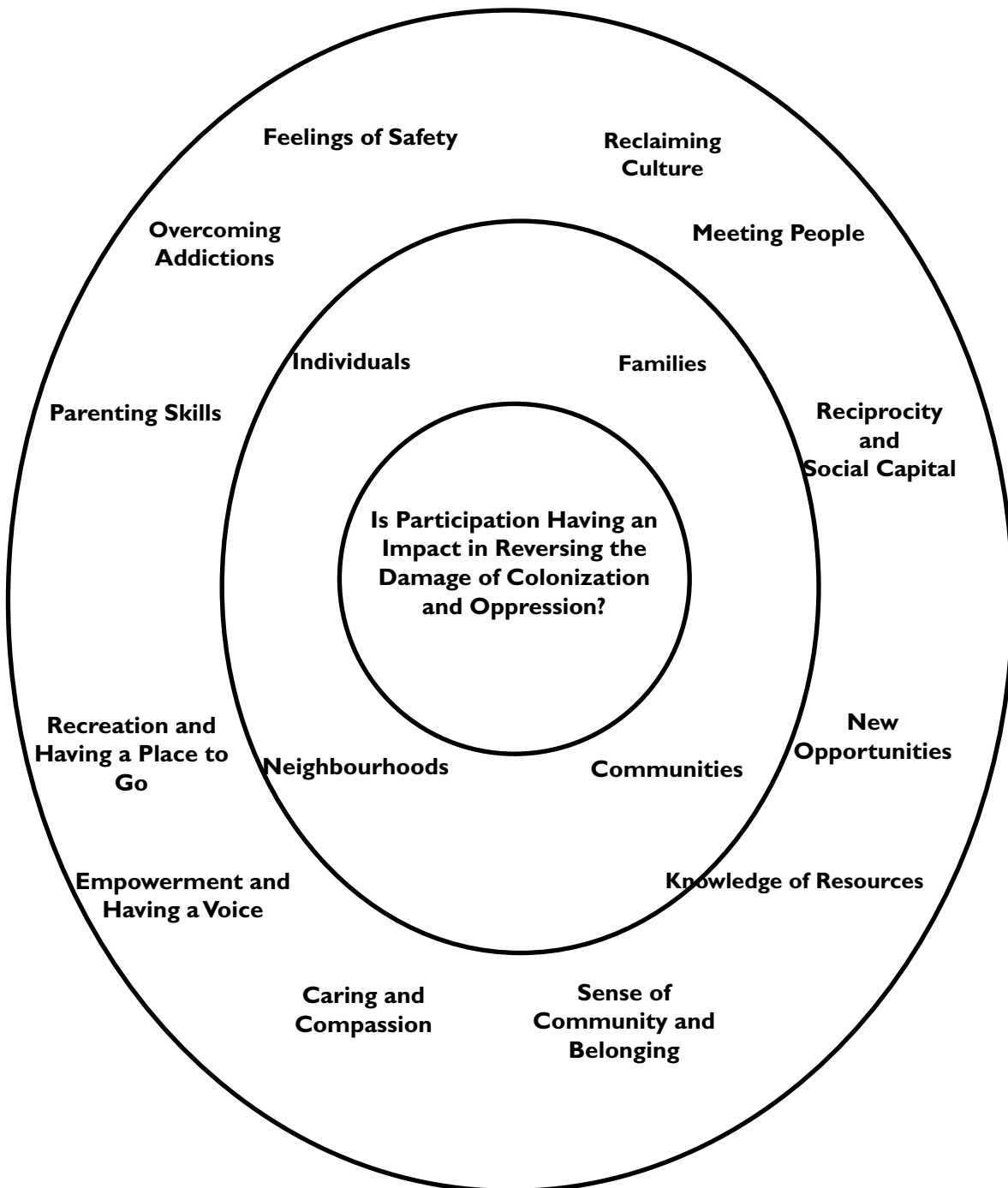
term, they felt that it was not worth risking the loss of their main source of income.

While there would have been definite advantages to having had experienced interviewers, we strongly believe that our approach was critical to the project's aims. We believe that using insider community researchers, even when inexperienced, was beneficial. Interviewees may have shared information with an insider that they would not have felt comfortable sharing with an outsider. An important capacity-building objective was met through the hiring and training of community researchers, which is elaborated on later in this report.

A final reflection is whether the research project meets the transformative objectives of community partners: is it contributing to significant social change? It can be argued that the focus of this research project is in reaction to the demands of funding institutions and its aims are narrowly directed and hardly transformative. While this is in part true, it has potential for transformation on at least three levels.

1. Demonstrating that progress can be much more broadly measured than is currently favoured, creates potential for funding institutions to understand and accept the resistance expressed by CBOs. The fact that CBOs are questioning the measurement instruments used by funding institutions and are taking steps to demonstrate their resistance by developing their own measurement models, shows that transformation is already taking place.
2. Training and hiring community researchers to conduct interviews and assist with data analysis provides an important opportunity to raise awareness and develop capacity in these communities.
3. Providing interviewees with an opportunity to 'name their world' has the potential to

**Diagram I: Analytical Framework**



be an empowering experience that can lead to further interest in PAR and/or anti-oppressive practice.

## **Research Findings: The Impacts of Participation**

The interview guide was designed to first gather specific information through a series of questions that would help to determine how participation is contributing to individual perceptions of overall health and well-being. Responses to these questions are provided in Appendix Four. The final questions gave individuals an opportunity to provide their own assessment through sharing their story as they chose to do so. Overall, this approach seemed to work well, and resulted in the collection of information with great richness and depth. There was some repetition in responses once the project reached the narrative component. However, this is not seen as problematic as it gives individuals an opportunity to emphasize areas that they feel are most important to them.

Responses to Parts C and D, the narrative questions, have been grouped according to the major themes that emerged during analysis. These themes were shared by many of the participants and illustrate the impact of the CBOs on their lives and their dreams for the future.

### **Empowerment and Having a Voice**

Interviewees provided several implicit examples of how their participation has been empowering. The participants were at different stages in their lives and in their journeys of empowerment. However, CBOs played a part at each of these stages.

Several respondents expressed an increase in their knowledge of where to go for help and an increase in their confidence to ask for help. As noted by one respondent: “I first came here for help. I didn’t have any money, I couldn’t get nothing from social services...and then they

[CBO staff] started giving me information...and I just kept coming back.”

Taking the first step of a journey by acknowledging problems is difficult and frightening. It takes courage to be willing to with personal issues. This was the experience of one woman, who gradually found the strength to cope:

I found out about [the CBO] through my friend...and she took me up there and I just listened and I was scared to go back, I didn’t want to go back because it was a place where you really heard other people’s feelings and felt your own. There’s no running away from it, you have to sit in there. I was running away from my problems, and that place made me look at my problems, because it’s okay to open your baggage and smell it for a while and move on.

She realized the impact that events in her past, including her parents’ substance abuse, still had on her, and on her own children. The CBO gave her the confidence to face her past and realize that “you know that you have a struggle and that you know it’s okay. Many other people can get over it, so can you—and they really made that clear.” This was a common experience; interactions with staff and other participants with similar experiences gave people the strength and support to face their issues.

In the program it really opened up a lot of different areas of my life...I met other women that had similar problems and it wasn’t just me, it made me realize I wasn’t just a fuck up. It wasn’t just me that had these issues and problems. Really, it helped me get stronger and to deal with the stuff I had to deal with because I didn’t know if I was coming or going...There was just so many things going on, I looked forward to going to that program twice a week...Like it was too good to be true, like a program for all



the realization that I did, like my brain was busy learning what they were teaching me but at the same time all these little light bulbs were going off going WOW, I can be okay, it's all right.

CBOs gave some participants the desire to seek help and to help themselves, which many recognized as an important step in the healing process. One participant expressed this opinion:

I did all my healing before I came here but I wanted more than what I had and to understand more of life I guess. And I thought this place had the answers for me...But I'm the only one that made that happen.

One respondent said that since participating in programs at a community-based organization, she has learned where to go for help and is no longer afraid to ask. She attributes this to Aboriginal teachings...“humility is one of the hardest sacred teachings to practice, and I have no problem practicing humility and that [includes], knowing when to ask for help.” This respondent also attributed Aboriginal teachings through the CBO with giving her strength to leave her abusive relationship. “They never said ‘leave him, leave him’ but they just said...‘are you interested in breaking those cycles?...everybody has a choice.’” Sharing and learning from other participants and CBO staff contributes significantly to participants’ journeys of personal empowerment.

The journey toward greater empowerment can be long. As one respondent said: “it was baby steps at first, that turned into running. [Now] we're getting to those marathons. We're getting up there and I'm happy.” Others described the process of change:

My self-esteem has changed. I'm more talkative. I'm more outgoing. I'm more reachable...I know where to look for things if I need help, if I don't there's always somebody here that will help me.

First year I started [the program] I was also quiet, shy and then now that I get to know people more and more, I'm starting to be confident about myself.

For one woman, this long journey finally led her to leave an abusive partner:

They have a big role on my life...showing me the different programming, and...hearing other ladies' stories, and hearing their situation, basically let me know that I'm not alone out there, you know. That other ladies are going through this. And giving me the tools and...information that I need...to put my foot down and say, “this is not right you know? Get out.” And that's what I did.

One woman came to the program as part of the care she needed after losing a loved one. The program helped her to heal and to meet others who had been through a similar experience.

I've come to realize I can do whatever I want whenever I want. I don't like it sometimes, I am doing it alone...the [program] really pulled out to make me realize that I'm not alone...I thought I was the only person that had a heart broken, I was the only person that was suffering, I was the only person that was sad, I was the only person in the whole wide world that had all these problems and then I came to the [program] and oh my God—suck it up babe because there's a lot worse out there.

Learning to take care of herself and gaining access to the tools and experiences of others helped her to move forward. Self-care was an important part of another participant's life:

First of all what I learned from this [program] is first of all, mother, to look after yourself, and gradually I look after myself. To look after physical, mental, emotional and spiri-

tual have to balance in me...now I look after myself. There's some changes—the way I look, I feel good about myself—and this way it seems that my son has changed over the past year or something here and I seem to have a better relationship with my family and they tell me I'm a good person now and I see the result...I don't feel angry anymore. I'm not hateful. I'm not mean anymore. I don't pass out, I don't swear now. I can help others, I can walk with them.

Other participants also felt that CBOs gave them the “strength and power” that enabled them to heal themselves and become a resource to others:

So I was, there just to give some strength, some avenues where to go, what to do. 'Cause I've been there. I've dealt with exes. I've dealt with abuse. You know. So, and I was like, I've walked in those shoes. So I was able to help her get out of that, and, you know, find her avenue to deal with it.

I have to have that fellowship together with other people. In order for me to grow that's what I need because I was placed in a situation where I couldn't talk, I couldn't say this, I couldn't say what I had to say in my mind... Now I'm an adult now, I can help people when I want to, I can say what I want, providing I'm very good to them, no abuse to anybody, no nothing, and I feel right now I have to start learning to trust people.

Another participant felt that “participating here would be you know, knowing that you made a difference that same day. Making a difference every day. Learning something new everyday... the most I can do is try and make it so there's more youth off the street and so they're doing something with their lives not just getting into gangs, drugs.” As another participant said “I feel

like I gotta give something back. I took a lot, so I gotta give back a lot...I could tell you there's guys that come in here, just same thing as me...They don't know what to do. And I tell them, this is what you do.”

One woman described finding her voice through the program: “I want to help people like myself that have gone through whatever I went through...If I see somebody is yelling at their wife...I fight for the child and I fight for the woman. I'm not abusive, I'm not a wrestler. I'm not like that. I'm not abusive at all, but I will tell.”

Small changes in participants' lives are difficult to measure, but still have an important impact. Some of the ways participants described these changes included becoming more outgoing, or that participating “makes me feel good.” Others said they had more self-esteem, more confidence, were happier, could “open up a little bit more” and were talking more. One participant described this change: “Before I came here I was a very weak person and like I said I realized I wasn't going to achieve anything. Now I'm doing good and I have goals set for myself.” Another participant described how the CBO made her feel:

I feel it's a home in here. I feel free, relaxed, welcome. I don't see anyone smirking at me or looking down on me.

While these changes are hard to define, they lead participants to make concrete changes in their life plans: “They don't let you slack off...They just teach you to think, actually feel motivated to do something.” Since becoming involved at a CBO, this respondent became interested in returning to school and is now considering Adult Education courses. Another joined a program at Red River College as a part of his new “academic adventure.” Other participants gained skills and experience they felt would help them in the future and encouraged them to be more involved in the community:

[My family and I] always have something to do now. If we're bored we get out of the house and come here and volunteer...I'd have to say it changed me a lot. When I first started coming here I had no experience whatsoever. I had no job. Now that I'm here there's so much things I can do now... Participating in programs like this makes a big difference because you know, it helps you gain more knowledge and somewhat find yourself...Move up you know.

One woman came because she was having trouble as a single mother with children who were becoming involved in drugs and crime. She describes the gradual process of empowerment and change that she experienced through the program, and how it affected her family:

But when I came to [the CBO], I felt I was able to relate to the stories I was hearing from the other parents and also the facilitator at the time was also a parent herself with the same situations as the other parents. I was able to relate to the stories. I was able to start sharing and open up...Anyway, I started coming back weekly and the more I came back I noticed the more I was able to cope with my children, I was able to talk with them in a way that there's no yelling. And my children could see the difference in my when I started at [the program]. So, we are able to communicate, my children, we started having good communication and they...I noticed a change in them also. They were starting to settle down. My daughter would stay home with me on weekends. My youngest daughter started seeing her older sister doing that so she started staying home with me and then next thing you know we were able to communicate and we were able to be a family again. So, I guess for me, [the CBO] was a lifesaver for my family. So, today I'm able to help other families like

me...Things are not perfect but I sure came a long way.

Another participant spoke of the struggles that face refugees coming to Winnipeg from war-torn countries and his determination to empower others as he was empowered:

When I look around me, I realize that most of refugees, in particular African refugees, they are almost lost. Most of them used to live in refugee camps and the atrocity of war and everything. They don't, they didn't even get a chance to attend school and they come here illiterate...Those people don't have skills and they are everywhere in the inner city with a bad situation and sometimes dealing drugs. So when I see that situation it makes me very unhappy...So by coming to [the program], it's a way of me to contribute in some way to the awareness and amelioration of these people because there are a lot of opportunities. We can turn that situation if we know exactly who they were overseas, what kind of situation they faced before coming here. So I have in mind to develop this concept and maybe one day I will get the opportunity to make more about that and find out, change a little bit the way of dealing with these people when they first of all come to Canada or to Winnipeg.

### **Reclaiming Culture**

The importance of Aboriginal teachings and spirituality was raised by participants throughout the interview process. Many noted that they have become increasingly informed about Aboriginal culture and spiritual teachings as a result of participating in programs in their community. Many indicated that embracing Aboriginal teachings was having a positive impact on all aspects of their health.

Many respondents talked about using alcohol and drugs to cope with stress in the past and

attributed their spirituality and Aboriginal teachings as giving them an alternative means of coping with stress. One respondent said; “My spiritual health has improved. I’m getting more in touch with the native culture.” This respondent noted that this change is also having an impact on her children: “I’ve been practicing the seven sacred teachings a lot, and learning more about the culture and learning traditional ways. And that’s how I’m bringing up my children...I’m their number one teacher right now.” She credited a CBO for her exposure to Aboriginal spirituality, through her participation in sharing circles and sweat lodges at the CBO. This gave her the ability to pass these traditions on to her children:

I’m gonna get my kids into the pow-wow group through [the CBO]. My son wants to learn the drumming and the singing. My daughter wants to learn the dancing...I’m gonna put my children on that spiritual healing path, so that they can be successful in the future.

The above example is indicative of the transformative potential of programming built from a foundation of decolonization. For this individual, participation has not only helped her, but it has exposed her children to experiences that will shape their identities as Aboriginal people.

Several respondents clearly articulated that they feel very strongly the programs that they participate in are very important to them and they have contributed greatly to their spiritual and mental well-being. From an anti-oppressive/ decolonization perspective, it is important that respondents articulated the important role that the CBOs have had in their journey of discovering their cultural and spiritual roots. Many are just beginning to take great pride in their Aboriginal identity.

CBOs gave many Aboriginal participants the opportunity to connect with Aboriginal culture, spirituality and language that had been taken away

from them or that they had never been exposed to. This is an important step in the decolonization process. Aboriginal participants expressed the importance of their traditional culture in helping them to regain pride, confidence and balance in their lives.

The meeting rooms are just full. When they have going for sweats...Tradition’s becoming more part of our life than anything. Then we’ll get this back. It’s something that shouldn’t have been taken away in the first place.

One participant explained his perception of the impacts of colonization and the meaning of the decolonization process.

[Decolonization has] got to start at home actually. People got to become more aware of it. People in the area they don’t even know what the work means. I took workshops, I know what it’s about. A lot of people don’t even know the residential school example. That’s why we have so many problems with kids and the violence. Lack of respect, not proper upbringing up home. No idea of their own culture. Something that’s got to be worked on more. They have to take the first step themselves, say they want to learn more about things. We’re just stuck in the violence and broken homes, foster kids, kids running amuck. People need to be more aware...[kids] need to be made aware of who they are and where they come from. The parents should be given more supports. As a kid I wasn’t aware of who I was or where I came from. It wasn’t until 1994, that’s when I started becoming aware of who I was, my background and culture.

Some participants used what they learned in CBOs to pass these teachings on to their own children; an important component that was missing from their own childhoods.

Like [the CBO] gave me the code of honour, and they gave me these individual pieces of paper, and there's seven things, and I pin them on my wall. And every morning after we smudge, we go over those seven teachings, those seven code of honours. We go over the seven sacred teachings, me and my kids. I teach them about the animals, what does the animals bring to the culture. I teach them about Mother Earth, respecting Mother Earth, you know. Even saying hello to the tree, saying hello to the grass, touching it, you know...and just teaching them love.

[The CBO] put everything into perspective for me to see that I really enjoyed—we did a collage...different questions were asked and we expressed them in our collage. I would have never asked myself what kind of animal I'd be. Because I wasn't raised with that teaching... I thought for sure I'd be an eagle, sitting on my nest, looking up above.

[The CBO] was good because they respected your culture and they were into their culture and you learned about the native people because I never knew anything about it and I loved it. I love it—and what I want to do is go back to [the CBO] and listen to people and be a volunteer and help people.

If I had those things when I was small I would have been participating to learn more about tradition. We didn't have those things when I was a kid. Now it's brought out more, within the last 20 years...[it's part of] the healing process, yeah. Giving back their tradition instead of taking it away from them. They should have gave it back long ago. Why would they take something that wasn't theirs to take in the first place?

CBOs that offer Aboriginal cultural activities can be an important part of the decolonization process for the community. As one woman said: "I keep going back to [the CBO] because they have so many good things there, like the pipe ceremony on Monday mornings, the smudging every morning, their traditional day on Thursdays. And being here there's a lot of programs and if you can apply yourself to them, it works, and it makes it a big difference if you follow it."

Once they had been introduced to Aboriginal traditions, many participants continued along the spiritual path on their own. "I like the spirituality and that's just bringing me back, taking that step towards that, because I was never a traditional, like into the tradition. I never used to do that, I used to think that I could not do that on my own but now that I got that little spirit involved in my head I know that I can move on."

There was a correlation between the length of time that participants had been practicing traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality and their emotional and spiritual health. Participants who were just learning about their culture and tradition were more likely to rate their emotional and spiritual health as poor or average. The more they became involved, the better they felt about their spiritual health.

Yes, I'm learning a lot. A lot more about our culture in general and which I'm very, very proud of and I do strongly believe that if, if our community didn't start, like we're going on our fourth year and if we didn't have what we have now, I strongly believe I wouldn't have any spiritual and things like that because it's the ladies in my community that are really healthy, we do go to sweats, we smudge, my children are benefiting from it, my husband is very supportive of it. I'm seeing for the first time in my life, so 40 years I've been stripped of something that was rightfully yours from the beginning. I'm

just learning now, it's like a baby being born again. So that is very exciting...our community is, was sleeping at one point is the way I like to describe it and we're waking up and we're waking up the strength. Everyday it's more strength...Now that we have all these committees going on we are so empowered and we're growing and it's nice to see, it's healthy and people are taking more pride and, myself to, and it just makes me feel so good to be part of this community.

I've become more spiritually aware of myself and my background. I'm involved in ceremonies and stuff. I'm at a point where, say I was five years ago, I'm a long ways from that point until now. I've talked to different elders and I've talked to different spiritual advisors and been involved in ceremonies.

My spiritual health has improved. I'm getting more in touch with the native culture. I went to a sweat a few months ago.

For one participant, becoming more connected to Aboriginal teachings gave her newfound knowledge and strength to combat the racism she faced as a Métis woman. She told us her story: "The only thing I think about nowadays is tradition. Going to ceremonies and doing things. I'm not full-blooded native but I still have native in me so why not? I still get looked down on. I still get racial comments." She described an incident when five non-Aboriginal men surrounded her and called out racial slurs at her. She told us her response:

And I said...I'm Métis and you should be ashamed of how you're talking to me, I said it was our people that saved your ass. I said if it wasn't for us you wouldn't even have a city to live in and I said we fought for you guys and my father fought for you people

so you should be very upset about how your attitude is.' And [they] didn't think I was going to say nothing, they thought I was just going to be like a little shy, scared person, intimidating me. And I spoke up!...Don't talk down to me. I stood up. I'm not scared.

### **Meeting People**

Many people began attending a CBO or program because they knew someone who went there, or they wanted to meet others. By meeting others they gradually become more interested and involved in the community. One participant describes this process:

It has changed because it did start off with that flyer that went out and it was a simple phone call. An invitation to come down and listen—and going back on that evening, putting a pot of coffee on, sitting on our deck that we just had built and enjoying a really nice evening, having a coffee and discussing what we had heard that evening. When the next meeting was set up we decided, yeah, let's go, let's go and see what we hear. And we never stopped going and we met a lot of community, which we both desired.

Another participant had a similar experience:

When I first started going it was more support for [my cousin]. I would go with her because she always wanted me to go with her. And then, just got to know all the other girls and all the rest of the girls and all these activities, even games and stuff. It's fun getting to know them and having to do all these little things together and then her, she stopped going and I though...I just kept going.

When asked what it was that kept them coming back, some of the responses included:

- Friendly people.

- Who I'm going to meet. That's what I look forward to is meeting new people.
- Again the biggest thing I find is it's given the opportunity to meet people. It's been wonderful.
- Have fun and make new friends...it just changes when you wake up in the morning you feel better.
- Interacting, just being around people.
- Mostly the community brings me back here.
- People that I know come here and it's like a meeting place.
- I really don't like being alone and there's always somebody around. I can always talk to someone or just go sit with them and have a smoke, I'm never alone.

From these responses, it is clear that meeting others helps to break the isolation that people face when they do not know their neighbors or anyone else in the community. They saw community organizations as a meeting place, somewhere that they felt safe to be around others, interact and socialize in a comfortable setting. Meeting people made them feel good, relaxed, sociable, active and less stressed. This can be the first step in creating a sense of community and belonging that connects people to others.

After meeting people and creating ties and relationships, many participants developed the incentive they needed to continue participating in a CBO.

Well what got me coming to [the CBO] was when I first moved here my cousin took me there and it was really fun so I kept going back and since then I've made a lot of my friends and it's really fun.

You get to go on outings. My sister's the one who first brought me here...It's a fun place to go I guess.

One woman heard about the CBO through a friend, and then stayed "because I like the people and I like meeting new people." Another noted that: "It's hard to find a community that's really there for you and your family, and I've picked up some trustful friends."

For some participants, the people they met made a major difference in their lives and decision-making. As they met people who had a positive influence on them, these relationships prevented them from becoming involved in gangs, crime or other activities that would have a negative impact on their lives.

I just like coming here, I like the people... if I wasn't coming here I'd probably be, I probably wouldn't have my kids or I'd probably end up giving them up or something. 'Cause there's someone, people, people are here to talk to."

Well it's good to see people...Just to talk to each other I guess...just to be around people, just to share, share the laughter, instead of being out there going on crime sprees, makes me not want to do that.

I felt so welcome when I came there and I got to know everyone right away and it kept me away from getting into trouble and like, I don't know, I really enjoyed going to [the CBO] and I experienced a lot of things over there and it made my life, better I guess, because I seen a lot of my friends that didn't hang out [at the CBO] and I see how their lives are and I guess I just chose to not, take that path and to follow my friends at [the CBO].

Positive influence from friends made at CBOs led to positive life changes for many participants. One young person got involved due to his friends,

and met people who were connected to the drama and acting community. This introduced him to people with the same interests as him.

I think it's something that I was definitely interested in and for someone who's ambitious enough and they want to get involved and want contacts, it's the perfect place to go, like I wouldn't have met a lot of the people I've met in the past year and I wouldn't have been involved with the drama community.

Some participants felt that the people they met introduced them to new ways of thinking and living. One woman began going to an CBO to do laundry, but ended up participating in many of the programs and meeting others.

[P]articipating here has made a difference it's really broadened my horizons a lot being here and seeing different lifestyles and meeting different ethnic groups all that's always been very interesting to me and... it's just a godsend that the place exists especially when you have like little or no family support...

Another participant had a similar experience meeting new groups of people:

I try and respect people as much as I can you know, because I would like them to respect me in the same way...It taught me to, how to like a different kind of person. They have different flavor, have a different way of being respected. It opens my horizons a little bit more.

For one youth, making new friends made her feel more connected with the community as a whole. Participating and getting to know people gave her a different perspective on the community:

I think I have a better outlook on our community. Before I didn't know anybody so my

view of youth in our community was actually not very good. But now that I've got to know some of the youth, I understand you know, like it's more than I see. It's all layers and stuff. They have issues that they're dealing with. They don't know how to deal with them, so they act out in this way that makes them look bad but they're not really bad, they're just trying to deal with their problems right?

Although many people said they initially came to the CBOs to meet people, it is clear that many became more involved in CBOs through these ties and connections. New friends and staff encouraged them to try programs or take chances that they had not attempted before. For some, positive influences helped keep them away from crime and drug involvement. Some began to feel better about themselves and more connected as a result of the relationships they made. In some cases, participants extended these connections outside the CBOs.

### **New Opportunities**

For many participants, becoming involved in a CBO opened new doors to them and created opportunities that they had not previously been exposed to. Participants were given the opportunity to try activities and experiences they were unfamiliar with, and provided volunteer services that gave them new skills. This gave many the chance to give back to the CBO by taking on such tasks as cooking and working at drop-ins. Some participants mentioned the direct job experience that CBOs gave them. For others, opportunities arose in many facets of their lives:

Ever since I've been involved with this organization, it's opened doors for relationships, employment, offers...It's been wonderful.

[I]t helps you gain more knowledge and somewhat find yourself, or maybe I should



work here, some people will come here and they'll apply for a job they like it so much. I figure once I get enough schooling I can be a volunteer coordinator or something you know.

Got me out of the gutter, got me a job, got me moving instead of sleeping...Right now I've kind of changed. I wasn't stealing since 16.

[The CBO has] given me a lot...It gave me confidence, it gave me opportunities, like now I talk to you so that's pretty good. Opportunities to learn something, to do something. To share.

It's going to give me opportunities—open doors...I was volunteering there doing a little everything. Helped me get my hands on for when I go for my Child Support Youth Worker...Gave me a lot of opportunities—got my volunteer opportunity. Helped with a couple of my addictions.

One person was involved in a program that enabled her to save money and matched her contributions on a three-to-one basis. With the money she saved, she was able to buy furniture for her children. "So at the end of six months, I got a thousand dollars to spend on my home, and all I invested in six months, is like, 42 dollars a month, and in the end, I got a thousand bucks, you know. Buy a bedroom suite. Buy my son a, a nice little car bed, 'cause that's what he wants."

One participant who had been involved with a CBO since youth reflected on the doors that had opened to her: "I actually learned a lot growing up there. I've learned responsibilities and I've learned how to be a leader and a role model. I really learned a lot growing up there actually and I think that's why I'm a better person today just from growing up at [the CBO]."

Some CBOs gave youth a concrete opportunity to become involved in arts and drama. The youth shared the benefits they received from these programs:

So I got a little bit of exposure and recognition and...I know, it can connect me with a lot that I need if I have nowhere else to go... yeah, so I really appreciate the fact that it's there and I really hope that more people like me can go and be inspired and meet new people and just get involved with what they want to do.

I went to [the CBO] because my brother told me that the radio heard him and offered him a record deal and he actually has produced the album at [the CBO]...I felt there was so much opportunity, why not use these resources to better myself...It's helped me refocus on my dream...I hope that everything gets better and I hope that I can offer my services and give as much as I can back.

I was in the group and then we moved on and did other programs and it was all group togetherness. We made a movie later all of us. Wrote the script for it and made our own characters to go in the story and it was great...for the most part it was just like sitting around and being creative and talking and sharing our ideas about what we wanted to express through our art.

The opportunities created by community organizations gave participants the chance to set and achieve goals that they would not be able to reach otherwise. Meeting these goals gave them confidence and pride, and motivated many to have dreams and plans for the future.

### **Knowledge of Resources**

As participants built their knowledge of their communities and became more involved in

CBOs, they learned about the resources that were available to them. This is important for many of them to improve their quality of life, to know what kind of help they can get and to be able to access it.

I walk down the street now and I'm proud because of the fact that I noticed that hole in the ground is getting fixed because of me and [a CBO staff member]. We both worked together on that and got something done, and I know that got done this quick because I'm employed by this and I'm part of this community that's getting stronger, and same...I met a lot of people that do have connections with who are the right people to go to and everything like that.

CBOs are able to connect the participants with resources they need and other organizations or individuals who can help them. This keeps people connected in the community and ensures that they are getting the assistance they need to live healthier lives. The help offered by CBOs was crucial for many participants:

Like certain people let me know where to go, like go to [CBO] they'll help you, to ask for help. It made a difference; I'd probably be out the same place I was before.

I'm looking at, like I keep asking the girls and they've been giving me, telling me there are places, but I've never actually gone.

There's a lot of resources like for housing and jobs, clothing department if you need clothing. Sometimes they have meals set out or snacks if you're hungry...Just supports here. Look for apartments. Relax, watch T.V. Put my baby in childcare.

Me and my family started coming to [the CBO] when my wife became pregnant. We needed support with clothing, internet and family activities and stuff like that. Through the [CBO] we got what we were looking for most definitely.

I'll come back here because the computers, I used the computers sometimes and...a year later I started volunteering in the store...ever since then I've been getting more and more involved.

I heard it was a friendly place to come to and they had resources...there's a computer if you need access to the computer, there's free clothing, there's a little store that is cheaper than any other corner store.

One participant felt that as a single father, there was a lot for him to learn, and he needed parenting resources. As he said "[there is] a lot to know when you have kids, so you have to learn methods you gotta learn how you gonna get by. You know I learned a lot over here; where to go you know, it helps out even just being here today if it's a wash, to talk to people, it helped me out knowing...where to go."

Knowing where resources are located provided emotional support and peace of mind to many participants. As well, participants who had good experiences with CBOs felt more prepared to seek out and use other community resources. Their experiences gave them confidence, which is a key factor in being ready to ask for help.

It made a huge difference. After that I searched for more programming and more self help groups, supports, community supports, volunteering, it was just a ripple effect for me, everything just kept going.

When I first came here I didn't know too much...about the programs here or who the people were and over the years, who runs what program. What programs that I might need to use. I've also developed some kind of, I have more self esteem. It's helped me in the long run.

One participant went to a CBO because he was facing abuse from his partner and did not know how to deal with the situation. The CBO was able to provide him with the resources, information, and support to deal with the many challenges of leaving an abusive partner, gaining custody of children, and healing from emotional and physical abuse. He shared his experience:

So I came here...I didn't know how to deal with it...I didn't know what avenues, or who to see or anybody. And when I started, I started coming here and then they started giving me information, how to, who to contact and how to do it...when I started talking, telling them what was going on, then they told me, well you could do this, you could do this, you could do this...I was just upset, and you know, and they gave me some support. Like every time I feel overwhelmed, I know I have somebody here...When I knew I was gonna be in trouble, and I couldn't turn to anybody else, I came here... 'Cause I knew that somebody here would help.

Through the CBO, he gained access to all the resources he needed, from emergency supplies of food and diapers, to advocacy with CFS and police. This approach helped him to get out of his abusive situation.

### **Parenting Skills**

Many participants were parents, and many spoke of wanting support and resources from CBOs to become better parents and caregivers. As one participant said, "I did it for my children but mostly for me, just to be able to learn an extra

couple things." For those who had experienced violence and neglect in their own childhoods, CBOs could provide them with healthy methods of parenting that they had not received from their own caregivers. One participant, a grandmother who was caring for her own grandchildren, spoke from her own experience:

I wish they would have had [a parenting program] when I was raising my kids you know, we had no role models. It was so different back then...I had no means of teaching [my kids] so I became a very bad mom because I wasn't sending my kids to church so I'd yell, scream and beat them, but if there would have been something like that...there was nothing...I've become stronger.

Some participants attended CBOs as a family, with both parents and children, which gave them the opportunity to have positive interactions with their children and with other parents. As one participant said; "We're getting the help we needed and getting a better understanding of how to be a better family." Other shared their families' experiences:

Family activities, we come to family swim at least once a week...We would have never done that if it wasn't for this place either, me and my wife we wouldn't of...That helped us in that retrospect and it also helped [my partner] get more confident with herself too after having a baby...going swimming with other families, it was really good support.

Even my boys like going there. I tell them we're going to go the [CBO], we're going to go to mom's program and they get all excited...Things for us to do with our kids. To better relationships and bonds and stuff like that.

Another participant was brought to a CBO by a friend because he was partying all the time and was not taking care of his kids.

[I came to the CBO] Just to try out the parenting program out there. Then I actually liked it and so I started going...Helps me understand more about my kids and how to deal with them more, than just yelling all the time...[my kids are] the ones that keep on wanting to go back, they like it there... Their attitudes changed...it's not so bad. My son's not fighting so much.

A year after he first came, he was voluntarily involved with the program and improving his parenting skills.

Some participants directly credited CBOs with enabling them to keep custody of their children, due to their participation in parenting programs.

I had to come here because they apprehended my baby at first...so I came here to get my baby back and so that I could get visits with my kids with, like supervision I guess, so that they can see that I am a good parent and that I'm not what they think I am. And, I don't know what keeps me coming back. I just stay here because I know that if I leave then I might as well say goodbye to my kids.

I do have my youngest living with me now because of me being in this program and there is a lot I learned in the programs. I got a lot out of them, I can say...my participation in the program has made a big difference in my life to focus more on myself and the things I need for my daughter to keep her living with me and that I'll always be welcome back here when I need help.

## **Reciprocity and Social Capital**

After receiving care and support from a CBO, many participants had started on the path to healing, and began to feel a strong desire to give back to the CBOs and to their communities. Many participants volunteer—formally and informally—in their neighbourhoods. They felt strongly that they have benefited significantly from the community-based programs but they are also giving back. As noted by one respondent “What I get out of them—free service—I give back free service—to give back to other people that can use it too.”

Another participant emphasized the power of this reciprocity “...I always have something to give, and I also have something to receive, because I'm sitting in a group, I get to listen to other stories, other situations, so that we know that, I'm not alone in this world. I'm not the only one going through these situations, and it's very spiritually moving for me...” For this participant, the experience is intrinsically linked to her Aboriginal identity; “In the native culture, everything happens in a circle...that's how we are. So, if I can give to someone, and receive at the same time, from their experiences, their stories, then we're just traveling in a circle.”

Participants talked about the experience of getting help and they also take great pride in the fact that they are now able to give back.

...it makes me feel good. I like helping other people, that's about it.

They're all part of this, because if they didn't do what they did...I necessarily wouldn't have this...I don't think how many lives they realized they really did reach and enrich and everything like that, so if they need to hear it I'm going to tell them it.

“I understand that [parents] have a lot of fear...They don't have a voice in the com-

munity, so I'm able to help other community family members. Especially single mothers. You know, I understand what they're going through and I'm able to...able to share my stories. My own struggles."

I have a couple friends that, I've helped out a lot, and they have to return the favour to me, so it's, whatever situation I'm in, or who I'm talking to, who I'm dealing with, I'll give.

Often participants spoke of helping in ways that would give back to the CBOs they had received help from. They shared with us some of the ways they were able to contribute their skills and abilities to these CBOs:

I've met a lot of people here. Sometimes I listen to their problems. I'm a good listener. I keep coming back because the people around here are good people and some of them need help and I help them out whenever I can...And if any of the staff here ask me to do something, I'll help them out with that.

Like the times I was there by myself, there was nothing do to so I'd help around there, help out in the kitchen. I think I was in there for two hours washing dishes! She was so grateful that I helped her.

I wanted to support parents. Support that parents who are in the same situation, like what I go through...I was a single parent and I would like to help them better educate their children. Those young mothers who come here, and help them and also to be aware of the effects of violence on kids—teenagers.

One participant was especially interested in becoming a mentor for youth in his community.

He described the feeling that this reciprocity gave him:

[The program] gave people the opportunity from the area to get some work experience working with kids and it just gives you a sense of being needed. Kids, that's the future. To show these kids that it's possible for them to do anything they put their mind to. A lot of the kids, they show respect, they tell me they like me. It's a nice feeling.

### **Caring and Compassion**

One of the important benefits that community organizations offer is the care and compassion of staff. For many participants who did not have family and friends in their communities, CBO staff provided them with essential support:

I feel like I made the right decision coming to [the CBO]. Also I feel another good decision going to [another CBO]. What keeps me coming back to these two places is the compassion and care.

They're trusting. They're really, really caring and they understand. They don't judge anybody. They don't judge you.

Like I said, it kept me off the streets and it gave me a place to come and talk with someone if I had a problem. And people here understand me and that and I like all the staff and that and everyone here.

I feel support here, because I can ask for bedding—they'll give me. If I need something extras like juices or something like that. They'll help me.

It feels good, nice to have a backbone. Something you can always fall back on.

[The CBO staff person], been available for me, and I've sat and stayed longer and she's talked to me and I've walked away encouraged because she's just like, you know, just encouraged me: 'Yeah, school's tough, but you're going to be okay. Don't be so hard on yourself.'

One participant described the impact that the caring of the staff had on her life:

This is twice now that I like I gave up on this place because of shame and started doing drugs and then my ex took my little girl from me and it was because of [this CBO] that they helped me get her back...So no matter what, this place makes me feel like even if I slip here and there then I'm still human and that I'm still okay and that I'm not that bad of a person...they're slowly trying to teach me that they'll always be there for me and just knowing that it gives me the power to come and talk to them and to admit to them when I do fail...I always know that they're going to smile and that they're going to make me feel okay when I leave. So I would like say that you know thank God for this place 'cause if it wasn't, I don't know if I would have my daughter today.

CBO staff contributed their energy and support to many participants. As one woman noted; "I still have the feeling of [a staff person] in here. She just cared so much about women, you could really feel it...And she gave her all, so yeah, it was terrific." Feeling unconditional support was important to many participants: "they want to see you live a good life and what I liked about [the CBO] is that they had childcare and they just opened arms and they didn't care who you were."

Another participant described the gradual process of building a trusting relationship between staff and community members. As she said: "Reaching out, just coming for that cup of

coffee. Maybe a selfish motive in the beginning but eventually they'll find themselves and they'll start giving back and that's what [a staff person] brings to this program and the ladies here, you see them, talking laughing."

### **Overcoming Addictions**

CBOs inspired some participants to take the first step or the next step toward overcoming addictions. Participants were able to combat the shame and stigma associated with addictions, and to meet others who were also struggling.

[The CBO provides] healing, and support, and...[I get to] hear other stories. They have guest speakers that come and teach us about the culture, or they come and tell their story, of...[their] drug and alcohol abuse in the past and what made them change their lives around, what made them realize that this is not the life they want to, to have.

CBOs had a direct impact on participants by preventing them from developing addictions, or from going back to old addictions. As one participant said: "If it wasn't for this place, I'd be on drugs and that and it's actually got me away from that, my family sees that, that it got me away from drugs and that, and ultimately that affects them."

It has changed for me. It's helped me to see [how] to live my life away from drugs and alcohol and to focus more on myself.

I'm not out causing trouble. Sober. Doing better. Better for my kids, not choosing drugs and alcohol over my kids anymore. I wish I would have turned back time with my son, but all is done. People grow out of things. Some do anyways.

I've gotten older and there's nothing to do and I started coming here more often and,

it just keeps me away from the drugs and all that.

I'm just grateful for the program itself. I'm glad I came to [the CBO] because if it wasn't for [the CBO] for all I know I'd be still out there. Maybe gone back to my old lifestyle, my old addictions. Because I see a lot of that happening to parents and they can't find the support they need, because they get so frustrated they give up and they go back to their own addictions, so I'm just grateful for [the CBO].

Some participants came to the CBO while they were heavily involved with their addictions. For some the process of getting help is very gradual.

...when I found out about the program I was just so happy, it just seemed like everything fit for what I needed, and the first time I took it was in the North End...I was racing, I was coming off of drugs, I was a big needle dope user, pretty messed up relationships, a lot of criminal activity, people I was associating with, my lifestyle it was just a mess. I had lost my kids to CFS.

When I first came here I was very involved in my addiction. Drinking, drugging. I came here because I tried to make up for lost time and be with my grandson and I found out that they had places for kids here.

One participant went back to a CBO to complete a program that she had been unable to complete the first time she attended.

And being here there's a lot of programs and if you can apply yourself to them, it works, and it makes it a big difference if you follow it, because I've been following it and the counselors, you know if I'm having a bad day, they say, 'Well, look at the way

you were when you came in and look at you now. You've changed. You've done a lot of progress', and I get a lot of good feedback...[The CBO] has bettered my life.

### **Feelings of Safety**

Many participants felt that having resources and CBOs in their communities made those communities safer. As well, getting involved and knowing people in the community made individuals feel safe. One woman told the story of how CBOs have had an impact, especially on youth in her community.

They picked the exact right time to come in to our community...I think by them coming in they've saved and helped, like, save our community, getting more involvement...we have a lot of gang activity...now you get all these projects coming in and taking on these youngsters. It's really nice to see because these children are getting saved and it all has to do with that flyer. Because if it didn't come, they'd probably be up in Headingley, Stony, Juvie...So, it's done so much for our community. It worked in our community. It could work in anybody's community

Other participants felt that CBOs were a "safe place" to come, somewhere where there was "always a place for me". For some youth who had no fixed living situation, CBOs provided the safest place to stay.

Like when I used to go to [the CBO] I was around 14 and I knew they were open to me because I used to run away and that's the place I went and felt safe.

I really like coming here. I feel safe here. Outside the property you still can't say anything to the person like...you got to watch yourself. They're fighting right outside over

drugs...It's supposed to be a safe place for everybody.

I love meeting people in my community. I like to know everybody in my community. I think that's better because then you get to know everybody and I think you feel safer when you know everyone in your community.

### **Recreation and Having a Place to Go**

Often CBOs provide people with recreational activities or simply a place to go. This can be the first step for people to become involved in an CBO, and more opportunities often arise for them after they first drop in. While some participants did not elaborate on the impact of having a place to go, it affected their quality of life. This was reflected most often with youth participants.

If I wasn't here I'd be on the street. I would have no place to go, so it's been an improvement on my life that I can come to this place, that I can go to other places that I know that I'm welcome. That I feel welcome and that I know I'm needed. If I wasn't needed I wouldn't have nothing to do. I need to feel needed everyday. I need to do something for myself every day otherwise...it's just one stressful headache after another, worrying about where I'm going to go, who I'm going to talk to, who I'm going to meet.

I heard they had a drum set here... Drums, all the music stuff upstairs, pool, watch TV... [the staff are] Pretty awesome... I have a place to go.

Well, when I was little, I was bored so I came for the crafts and the games and the T.V. and I come for the support and help now these days and for the food store, it's pretty cheap. It helps me budget with my

cheques I get from assistance, food buy club, something.

I went there because my friends all went there, it was something to do. Get away from my family.

I first heard about this place when I moved into the shelter on Flora and every Tuesday we have to come here and make supper so I started coming here and my friends started to come here...because it's fun and the staff are cool and I can talk to them. I like the computers and play pool and watch some T.V... my behaviour is better than before...I used to be, be really bad and now I come here I'm not, I'm not other places where I shouldn't be.

I was playing this game on computer and I heard that this place had it, had computers so I started coming here playing with other kids on it, got them into it, been here ever since and then this program started up and I'm still here...I come here every day.

### **Sense of Community and Belonging**

Through continued participation in CBOs, participants began to form a sense of community, of belonging to a group. As one participant noted: "...if you don't believe in your community then you're not going to have any dreams, you're not going to have any future, anything like that. You're just going to be wandering... We're happy. I really like it here. I don't *like* it here—I *love* it here and that to be honest, not to be cheesy sounding or you know, phony, I really do. I believe in this... We made it our home. We made our community part of our home, so we're happy and pleased and excited."



Other participants shared the ways in which their participation in CBOs made them feel like a community:

Well, because a lot of my friends were involved in these programs and then I began to make more friends with the youth that were there and I found that they were all like really funky and neat and a lot of fun to be with right? So, I really want to be involved in my community because I just like to know people, it's fun to pass by people when I'm with friends who know lots of people and they say "Hey" to every person who walks by and I think "I wish that was me."

Just going out and meeting people and being part of the community that's what brings me up. It's a sense of belonging, it's just a sense of knowing that people are out there. As it stands right now I'm just basically around the area. People know who I am and what I'm capable of doing volunteer wise. So it's improved a lot over the last two years.

CBOs create a sense of community in the people who go there, and also become a part of the community themselves. As one participant said; "If this place ever disappeared, this community would go to shit. I'm saying that straight out...Because without, without [CBOs]...our community would be lost."

Another participant shared the story of how her community and the CBO had grown together; "[My sister was] the one that first came here with me. She goes 'Come on,' I'm going to show you this really great place that's going to be great for the community." And it is. That was eight years ago. This place had nothing when we first came here. There was nothing here. There was only one little office...A lot has changed. And she was one of the first volunteers here."

The sense of community and belonging in CBOs made many participants feel that they were

as comfortable there as though it was their own home or family. Participants made statements such as:

- This is like home.
- A sense of belonging, like a little family, like all those women just seemed to connect.
- It is my second home.
- I feel it's a home in here. I feel free, relaxed, welcome...they know me.
- I don't have no family, but to me it feels like family here and without this place I don't think I would have made it.
- I just feel right in here, I guess. Like a second home.

One participant summed up what belonging to a community can contribute to life:

...we can't live outside of the human community and I have to be part of the community. I have to give my contribution and...I can do it by being a part of a community and to be partnered with people who are dealing with how to change and how to ameliorate a neighbourhood and how to make people more self-supporting and by doing that, I am, I will be creating safe neighbourhoods where I can live myself safely. I don't have enough money to choose maybe a place outside of downtown, I am still going to live there, but if the situation doesn't change I will be part of victims. So by involving the program I would like to make the environment around me more agreeable, more attractive. More friendly instead, instead of scared.

## Research Findings: Gaps in Services in the Community

In the final question in our interview guide, we asked the participants to identify any gaps

in service that they saw in their communities. While 13 participants did not feel there were gaps in services in their communities, the majority of participants identified gaps and offered recommendations for how these gaps could be addressed. Their responses have been grouped according to themes that emerged.

### **Youth Resources**

There was a great concern among participants for the well-being of youth in their communities, and many participants expressed that there was a gap in services for youth. Some saw a need for youth-focused CBOs with longer hours, to “keep them off the streets”, getting involved in gangs and crime. The dangers of gangs and crime were of concern to many participants, especially for youth. Participants described what youth face if the resources they need are not available.

- They’ve stopped the young kids and I know that they’re gang kids and they’ve stopped them from coming inside the community centre...our community’s afraid of them. And what’s there for them?...if they’re being shut out now what did and they’re probably being shut out at home, they need a place they need something, some activities that will interest them...more people need to come together and realize that these are really just kids and they need somebody to care about them...I wish that more people would do that for the teenagers around here. Treat them as you know, you know people too, not just scared of them.
- And what I see gaps is that what I don’t like is the danger out there threat for the kids... because of the gang relationship, they go after the young kids...we just can’t be there blind, we got to do something.
- I think there should be more things for the children...I see young kids leave in the evening and they’re just being terrible kids because they don’t have any place to go...so I think it would be nice if they had

something for young people from seven to twelve when it’s dark outside.

Some participants saw a lack of resources in their communities and made recommendations for how these could be filled.

- Like if we had a building where we could have different resources in it for example, like a safe house for children... and like make it a 24 hour—an ongoing thing, never closed kind of thing. Have a parenting group. There are a lot of young moms. If they can have a break and relieve that stress off them so they know they’re not alone. You can have, like a swapping day or whatever, or if you watch my kids for an hour I’ll watch yours for an hour. A safe house for kids at any given time that they could come.
- Sport teams. They need sport teams because they have none. A girl’s sport team. Where everybody, every community centre has a girl team and we all play against each other.
- Like they have more hockey? They should have girl’s sports. Let kids do more stuff. They just gotta be getting out more.

One participant suggested that if parents would volunteer at a CBO with their children, they could offer their particular skills to the CBO to help expand its services.

- Whether it be a stay-at-home mom, stay-at-home dad...they get involved with their community or whatever, go and volunteer for even two or three hours a day, right there that opens up a new program a child could be involved in...And, I just think there needs to be more volunteers out there, so the programs could be met at their fullest...I think there should be more resources for kids and children.”
- [CBOs should have] either group or one-on-one counseling, you know, once a week

or something for kids who can talk about their problems...And if they don't have anyone that they can talk to, you know, to help learn how to make these things better for themselves, then I think it's just going to accumulate. I think it's just going to go with them throughout their lives and they're not going to be able to grow and become, what's the word—functioning members of the community.

- You know what I really wished? I wish there was some support for our kids out there. There's support now for parents, but I wish they could form a support for teenagers that would meet every week and just share their struggles at home with their own parents, you know with the, peer pressure...I would say that there's a lot of kids out there that have a lot of anger and they don't know how to release it and the only way they know how is by getting themselves involved in crime, drugs and sometimes, I see the youth, turn against their parents because they have no way, or no place to release that anger. So that is one of the things I'd like to see is for, to have a support program for the youth. That's my wish for the community.

Others saw gaps in existing resources, and a need for changes to services to better serve youth and address their issues.

- Yes, there could be more training [for staff] because right now they're just picking up kids that have no experience with kids and they need to do something about that.
- I feel that they should be a more positive role model...They offer a lot of programs and outings and stuff like that but they also need to show, show a safe environment to and where you could actually go and say 'Mommy I have these friends.'
- [Kids] kind of just drop in and that's

about it. They don't really kind of forward themselves in any way...I think maybe they can bring more speakers and instructors just to kind of broaden and introduce kids to more. I think they could bring in some more, like with anyone that wants contact in the fields that they're interested in, like they can bring in more contacts so they can find something more appropriate for them.

This participant felt that more specific programs might help to keep youth interested and engaged at CBOs. CBOs could find out what youth are interested in and then attempt to meet their needs and interests.

Some of the youth participants also saw gaps in the services that were available to them. One youth suggested, that it would help him if CBOs closed at 11 instead of 9 at night.

- [The CBO] could give jobs to younger people, like, the staff here are like, twenty-plus or whatever, they could start giving jobs to 16-year-olds and they can be with the kids and they see that they're trying to do something bad they can go be a snitch or whatever, rat on them or tell them don't do that, be positive.

Another participant suggested more recreational resources, such as a swimming pool and sports equipment to start a sports team.

### **Family and Parenting**

For participants who are parenting, it can be difficult to get daily activities done. One participant saw a gap in short-term child-minding services for parents.

- I think that there I mean there's always room for improvement. You know like, I'm just thinking with me I have a four year old, a two year old and an eight month old and to do anything is hard you know like to go get a prescription filled is hard, to get a haircut is hard and all that kind of thing. So, any steps that can be taken to make that

easier are awesome.

- I think that there should be that offer where you can get, like I did apply for that offer for somebody to come to my house to watch my kids...I don't have that resource offered and I'd like that...Even just for like two hours just so you could go and study at the university... I think it would be really good.
- If someone had an appointment, they could leave their child there for an hour.

Some participants wanted to see more programs for families, rather than a separation between parent services and youth services. They felt the gap between programs for adults and youth should be bridged.

- More involved in families...get involved with the families, get them out, go visit them at their home, they may resist, but it's still the support they'll see that's out there and people were to go to their homes and see that there is support a lot of people will step up.
- Now—look what's going on around here and I don't really see much of anything like that especially for women and children. So it's not only for kids but for women and children. Mixed classes or whatever.
- Well, they just need to do more things for the parents and their kids. We're always separated and that's something I always thought, like it's a parenting program.
- I know there are programs for whole families, but there's such a limited space. There's a huge waiting list to work with families, you know, the whole family, but it's a long waiting list. The families just give up. I wish they had more resources to work with the whole family.

In some areas, participants felt that there were more resources for children than there were for

parents. Without helping parents, families will not be healthy, even if their children are participating in programs. These participants saw a need for parenting programs to help parents learn how to deal with and care for their children.

- Around this area here they really need...a centre for more parents...down here it's mostly for children and when I walk around I usually see how like the adults, they're the ones that need help around here...I don't really know where to go hang out or like go sit with other parents.
- I see parents are struggling too, like to get around, can't come to the community because they have small kids. They tell me about it. It's hard to get around with my kids and it's hard to get a babysitter.
- So the parenting...the main thing is the parenting...Doing different things instead of the same things over all the time. They need different things for the parenting program.
- Send in people to teach us things with our kids. Like communication things and stuff like that...If you're going to get them, just leave the room and see how we are together. You let us be the judges.

Some participants recognized the special challenges that young parents in their communities face. When youth have children, they may need services that are specific to their situations and needs.

- ...my emotional level as a young adult was like a child, so...I wasn't at a mature enough level to be a mom to him. I didn't have the tools. I didn't even have the example. So my heart goes out to women that are single moms and are struggling.
- Now kids are having kids. You got 13, 14 year old girls having kids. There needs to be some parenting resources for these kids, just for the simple fact that they know how to raise a child you know and that's half the

reason why a lot of kids are in CFS. They can't take care of a child; they can't even take care of themselves. There should be more resources for adolescent parents.

The participant had heard of one program geared towards young parents, and felt there should be more like it.

- If you have a baby you can go and get your GED and they have a daycare program out of the school. You submit your child there half the day and do school work and you get your GED within two years.

### **Resources for Marginalized Groups**

Participants recognized that there were people and groups in their communities who were falling through the cracks. These groups are marginalized for many reasons; poverty, gender, race, abuse, addictions and violence. Participants made recommendations for programs aimed at closing the gaps in their communities to reach out to these marginalized groups. This can be difficult, as people who are living in crisis or traumatic situations may not be ready to access help, and may face discrimination when they do go for help. There is a need for sensitive and understanding services in the community.

### **Addictions**

- Places to get real help. Help for people who are on the street. Homelessness, everybody. People that really need the help, there's no places to go.
- The thing in this area that they need is more rehab centers. Rehabs. And drug treatments, addictions. Not only for AA anymore, anything is for fucking crack addicts you know. There's a lot of them on the street that nobody knows about. They hide it in downstairs, they sit in little shacks that are open. They'll smoke anywhere they can find... "I don't care if you take me to jail, I'll still get out and smoke some more you know? There's nobody there to help

stop me. There's nobody to help me get off this so why should I stop?" you know?

- Don't turn them away because they're an addict...how else do you cope when you've been sexually abused by your parents, your family, thrown out on the streets when you're 10 years old.
- The drugs and the alcoholism, like there's people that they're drunk on my street... and there's dealers all over the place and I just really, it's hard to like just to look at that all the time...I'm just tired of it, but I think that that would be, if there was a better like drug program.
- Most definitely Alcoholics and Cocaine Anonymous meetings... That's basically the key, when a person becomes in touch with themselves because of their addictions then they can move forward. But if they're not dealing with these addictions, then how can they possibly be okay for the community? This is where you are going to get violence. This is where you are going to get all these bad things that happen to people.

### **Violence/Abuse**

- A woman has such a beautiful station, calling, to give birth to children, love of her husband, cook for her family, the woman is the most beautiful, that's the one that get more abused by men. We need somebody that will talk to these people without calling them down without saying anything bad about their family. Just to open up. Come on hey—open up. The more you hold it in your heart the worse it gets... Help these women. Don't hide anymore... I want to be that person to help these women.
- A circle for men. I think men need it just as much as women. If not more so. Men, up to this day and age, are considered the strong ones and that and I think a lot of themselves don't know themselves for it and I think if we had this... where we

could offer so many different things in one building and maybe they can volunteer and stuff like that. That's how you start reaching them first and who knows where they can go from there and that's one thing I would like to see in our community, is something big like that. Somewhere safe, where it is safe for all and nobody's ever turned away.

- Where, to help men, in that situation, because there's nobody. CFS don't give a flying crap...you wanna do something, get a shelter for men with children...And I've told that to CFS too. All of them. And I wrote letters. I said we need shelters for men with children... 'Cause there are men out there that are in this situation.

### **Government Systems**

Experiences with the justice system, social assistance and Child and Family Services were very negative for many participants. They felt there were gaps in understanding and experience between the people working in these systems and people in the community. Poor treatment and neglect from the systems led many participants to report poor emotional health, stress and demoralization.

#### **Police**

- Okay, recently I've talked to a lot of people and the police aren't helping us. They're letting criminals go with out putting them in jail, and we need help, because a whole bunch of my friends and myself have been victimized by the system...the cops are not arresting the people they should be arresting. They're leaving them out in the community and endangering lives. So I think we need some sort of support group where we can come forward and say, look, this is happening to us and we should open our mouths in the community because this is wrong, that the police aren't putting these people away that should be away.

- Zero tolerance was designed for women. Because, I'm sorry, when that woman picks up that phone, and phones, you may not have done nothing, but they walk in, and they have to...It is [a] biased law...I heard a cop say that yesterday. When it's domestic, it's a race to the phone, whoever gets to the phone first, wins...and that's just the way it's gonna be until our lawmakers fix that. And that they start trying to put things in place for men.

#### **Child and Family Services**

Participants who were involved with CFS reported bad experiences and a great deal of stress on their mental and emotional health. Most felt that the focus of CFS was punitive and marginalizing, rather than helping them to keep their children. Many participants wanted to keep their children or get their children out of care, but did not have support from CFS to keep their families together.

- I'm currently involved in CFS so I'm going through a lot of changes I guess you could say... I just some days my meetings are good with them, some days my meetings are bad...so they're up and down.
- Well, I actually started taking antidepressants about six months ago and I've been going through a lot you know, dealing with CFS...I'm expecting again, so I've been dealing with CFS and stuff like that so my moods were really, like, I was really depressed.
- The gap in my community support would be with CFS. I feel a lot of what I say is used against me instead of helping me and my family. I feel it's more of a pointing fingers and making you feel ashamed of yourself and the things you've done. Instead of helping you get over what you've done.
- Seems like CFS and stuff like that they just ignore you. They just say what they know you want to hear and they don't follow

through. They don't call you back and then when you do get hold of them then they try and say YOU misunderstood me. And they lie. There's not honesty, there's no trust.

#### **Government Funding**

- Government. Government should put more money into them...They should put more money into CBOs that are out there trying to help people better themselves.
- I think it's more or less the government cuts programs and then people have to pay for that.

#### **Social Assistance**

Participants on social assistance reported that it was difficult to get out of the system and into a job, noting that social assistance workers made them feel unproductive and parasitic. Sometimes, participants faced barriers from more than one system at a time, which compounded their problems and made them feel trapped.

- Well with the welfare they should be giving more on rent, because the places that they have today for that rent they're giving isn't good enough for us, and when CFS gets involved with it, saying that the home isn't fit for us and right away the children are taken from our care, and I just feel CFS should be, I feel that they should be investigated in how they're doing their work.

#### **Staffing Conflicts**

Sometimes, participants felt that CBO staff did not deal appropriately or quickly to their concerns. They voiced their concerns with these gaps in communication and service, and offered suggestions on how staff could be more sensitive to the needs of the community.

- Loopholes of communication between staff in general. Staffing problems, staff burnout.
- The way the look she gave me, it was like, are you contradicting me? I'm like okay.

She cornered me. Now I got to sort of kiss her ass. She made me feel like I said something wrong. And at that time we had [another staff member]. I was able to talk to her a bit about it.

- I think the people, itself, I don't know if they get bored with their job and take it out on the older youth; try to piss them off once in a while...they don't show any interest in their jobs as much as they should I guess.
- The only thing I could think is teach some of the staff how to deal with kids. Like some of them just don't know how to get kids to listen to them. Teenage kids don't listen...They just shut the kids out; instead of doing that they should just talk to them. Find all the details and then instead of just having a bunch of kids yelling and causing havoc they could have peace and quiet.
- I think the program would have been run better if it was a girl and a guy, not two guys...it felt awkward talking to some strange guy, like, he was rude and stuff.
- I'd have to say some of the staff. Some of the staff, they get food brought in here and you'd swear they were taking it home, all the good stuff.
- There's a lady here that makes me feel very uncomfortable and I don't like the way I see others respond to her either. Like she made me feel like I'm just a scab off the earth...she found out that I don't have children, she told me I couldn't do laundry here. That's fine, I can go...but the way she told me made me feel very uncomfortable, like, as if, like I don't want you doing clothes here. That's the way I took it and I felt, and I've been here for this year. I'm not taking it personal but I just feel that if that was someone weaker than me, who knows where they could have went. I always think of the next person. I always think,

is it because I'm native? Is it because I'm addicted? What if the next person didn't have enough self-confidence to say man, "that lady's having a bad day." But I think that people that work in these places should be very careful because this could mean life and death to a person.

Many of these problems seem to stem from gaps in available resources for community organizations. Due to a lack of funding and support, CBOs are often understaffed, which leads to pressure, stress and burnout for staff members. Increasing resources for adequate staffing and staff training might help CBOs provide services to all community members.

### **Aboriginal Culture and Language**

As discussed earlier, many Aboriginal participants experienced gaps in their knowledge of and ability to practice their Aboriginal traditions, including spiritual and cultural activities and Aboriginal languages. Many wanted to reconnect with their traditions and needed resources to help them they connect with elders and others who were reclaiming their Aboriginal identities.

- I was in foster homes in the city for two years before I got shipped out to the States. I lost my language. When I was a young boy, six, seven years old, I was speaking my language but when I was in the States I wasn't allowed to talk that. I'd get in trouble if I talk or if I try to teach the other siblings ...I got in touch with my family, a lot with my aunties and that but I never got to learn my language. That's one thing I'd like to do is learn my language...Right, they should have something like that here.
- Children are lost because of the culture. Like for the Aboriginal. Like the teachings. Especially the seven teachings. For the seniors, when have you ever seen them go in the bush? Never...to do their stuff in the bush, to pick cedar or sage or

whatever. They sit in their apartments and do nothing. Like for them to just go sit in the bush. Give thanks to the creator. To put their tobacco down...We could still get [traditional teachings] back by using our seniors. By getting our seniors to teach us, we could always get something back by using our seniors, that's where our knowledge is, is in our seniors, in our language.

- I'd like to see the kids get their language back...It's just sad the way our children are growing up. It just breaks my heart. Even with my grandkids. I always tell my children don't ever, ever, lose our language to our children, to our grandkids, because our children speak the language. I always speak to them in our native tongue. "Don't lose it," I said...[Elders] could teach these children all the stuff if they're interacting together. Take them to the bush and tell stories around a big bonfire. It's sad. Like these children could learn a lot from the...elders, they have a lot of stories to tell. That's why I always sit outside with the seniors and elders. It's just amazing. Sometimes it's heart wrenching.
- I believe that the Aboriginal community, we need a female elder and some female programs to support the women...for the females that are dealing with children, learning about their bodies and stuff and the stresses of motherhood and the environment it has on us, that a female—an all woman sweat, so that women can release that tension around being around a man—being phony. They can just be themselves and have that belly laugh that women always have when it's all women around. That's what I think, some sort of programs here where, access to an elder or access to sweats, access to the counselor or someone on site that can give that information at



least...Give these women some prime joy and help their spirituality.

- Right now I don't have anywhere to go because sometimes I feel like talking to somebody...like an elder, or like the other day I overheard somebody say a sharing circle. They don't have that here anymore. I don't know if they had it before or, but sharing circles or smudges. Spiritual things have to happen here also. Maybe there is other places but I feel comfortable coming here.
- The Circle of Life Thunderbird House is for the community and by them fighting and bickering and going to court is not helping out the community and the elders even say that. And to me they're not doing what is best and I'm not happy with what is happening there and I think that would be a gap in the community because they don't have as much access as they would if they, if things went the way the elders said that they should.

### **Program Criteria—Exclusion**

Although many participants were aware of resources in their communities, it was difficult for them to access them. The criteria of some programs and CBOs excluded people from being involved. In other cases, the number of programs did not match the levels of need for the service, creating wait times that discouraged community members.

- People that really need the help, there's no places to go. And they say there's always a place open to the public, sure there's places open to the public, do they get their needs met? No. I don't. I can go to ten different addictions foundations and I'll still be sitting there waiting to get into one.
- Child and Family says, "you gotta do this, in order to keep your kids, or get your kids out of care"...a lot of people do go because they're forced, and they feel resentful.

They feel angry, they're not participating... they're not giving it their all because they don't wanna be there. They're there because they're forced. And I on the other hand...I want to be there, and I want to get the most out of it. When I was in the parenting program...I was on the waiting list for three classes, and it's, because it's in such high demand for Child and Family because I wasn't in high demand, I kept getting bumped...bumped, bumped, bumped... I had to wait 12 weeks, and then wait for the next one.

- It's always like there's like this limit of, either you're not cracked out enough to get into this program...Yeah—you're not black and blue enough, you're not poor enough, you're not selling, pawning your shit enough. You have to be really down and out before you can actually utilize some of these projects...It's like who you know. You have to know someone or not know someone. It should be not judgmental.
- [Food distribution is] a big gap in the community. Lots of people don't think it's fair that some people get food and some don't, well a lot don't. Mostly seniors and families. Single people have to wait and whatever's left over they'll give it out to them. Sometimes, a lot of times people don't get what other people get...So there's a lot of things that people get that single people don't get.
- I see a big gap there, is the counseling part in the [CBO]. We need to have more counselors. There's so much need, for our community women that need counseling and they have to be put on waiting lists and then again, that is when they go back to their own addiction. While they're being held on waiting lists they just give up... What they need is someone that they could talk to one-on-one, not over the phone.

That is what they need, for someone to sit there with them and see that person is really listening to them.

Criteria in CBOs can exclude the people who do not qualify, which limits their ability to participate in the community and access services that are essential to their quality of life. In order to prevent people from falling through the cracks, going back to addictions, or giving up on participation, more programs and resources are needed so the criteria can be more broad and inclusive.

### **Outreach and Communication**

Some participants felt that although the resources existed in their communities, it was difficult to find out about them or get the word out to others about the services available to them. They recommended greater input into communication and outreach to get community members who need the services involved. The outreach strategies used need to be appropriate to the community.

- **Communication.** There is a lack of it. People aren't aware of what's out there. If there are more people advocating on their behalf the people would be more aware that there is certain things in place that you can turn to...More advertising to let people know what's out there... I think the biggest gap is participation in the community itself. There's got to be more community involvement.
- **More outreach for the youth.** I see a lot of the kids running around and that and nobody is really paying attention to them or giving them the time of day to ask them what's wrong or why their clothes are dirty or anything like that. That's where I see a gap because that ultimately leads to them being self destructive in the future... [Outreach could be improved by] having the older crowd of people that have been

there and that, going out to the community and telling them, 'Hey, this is a place where you can come'...I feel it would make enough room in the community.

- **More advertising from [CBO]** that it's free, that it's there, would be really good. I haven't really seen any, I've heard about it through my friend but I didn't really know what [the CBO] was, so more like posters and signs in the community.
- **More advertisement on the programs** that are offered through agencies in this area. A lot of women don't know where they are or how to utilize them...And to just advertise or to get the programs out there, it's on internet and that, not too many people have internet around here...Holding workshops or come on out—have a free bannock burger or something, come on out but you have to come and listen to what we have to offer kind of thing.

### **Safety**

Feeling safe in the community is important for people to be able to participate in events and programs. Some participants felt that the safety of their neighborhoods had to be addressed before community members would feel secure and comfortable going to CBOs.

- **Also I feel that there should be more foot patrolling around here...**It's about time somebody steps up and we need more respect in this area, even if it's the downtown area, central, whatever, people need to feel safe...we need to go to the door and let them feel welcome in the neighborhood too and not think that they have to hide all the time.
- **Better surroundings so you can feel more safe around the street.** More recreation, maybe it needs to be open in the evening—like three times a week. Something for the youth.
- **And another thing too would be self**

defense classes. Something similar to that—especially now. Right now I don't even let my daughter walk down the street by herself. Even half a block to the store. I'll go with her.

### **More CBOs and Resources**

Participants had suggestions for the creation of new CBOs and resources in their communities that would help to fill the gaps in service that they saw around them.

- Well, if they had a 24-hour drop-in that would help a lot of people that needs it.”
- I think there could be more places like this available there's but what needs are currently not being met. There seem to be a lot of people that need food, emergency food or you know food and I think that's maybe an issue that should maybe be dealt with a little more... There are supports out there but I just see people looking through the garbage bins for food and stuff like that.
- I don't really know about my needs but I know about another kids needs. Like the resource centre down the street, it's only open from 7-10 during the summer and it should be open during the days. At least 11-9, and they're complaining these kids are being in trouble and stuff, like I've been there, I've done it. They need to open more resource centers around here or do something.
- The only problem I think is with funding... 'Cause I think it's tough. Like there's a lot of things we'd like to help, but we just can't help because we don't have it.
- I know they're always looking for funding at [CBO]—it's really tough to keep those programs going if you don't have any money to run them. I don't know what else can be done there. They're always trying to get what they can to help these kids.

Some participants stressed the importance of having free programs, because if there was a fee, they would not be able to participate.

- I believe in the women's centre, I believe in the programs that they offer us. I'm so glad they're free... I'm really appreciative of all the things that I can come to that are free because it's fits in my budget... And it's not free everywhere, and so, yeah, very lucky. The [CBO] has to keep going for another 100 years. It's the core of the North End, North End women.

### **Other Gaps**

Other gaps recognized by participants included the need to take greater care of the environment, hold community clean-ups, combat racism in the community and in systems, better housing, more commitment and consistency from program participants, not wasting food in CBOs, having better food, having CBO staff sharing their life experiences with participants, providing people with transportation costs or food vouchers when they come to a CBO, encouraging people to volunteer and contribute to the CBO if they use its services, and more spiritually-based groups.

One participant recognized the importance of measuring the changes that have occurred in the daily lives of the people who come to community organizations. He agreed that funders should not measure just concrete facts such as employment.

Oh look at his soul now. He's not a number, he's looked at his person, he went from this to this... We've done our job... Now look, he's, what we gave him, he's giving back... Giving back to some other people that can use it too.

## **Conclusions: Is Participation Having an Impact?**

### **The Broad Benefits of Participation**

Participants very clearly articulated how participating in various community-based programs has contributed to their individual well-being. But the broader benefit of participation also becomes apparent through the majority of interviews. Many of those interviewed moved from 'client' to 'volunteer' and take great pride in the fact that they are now able to help others in their community. Others spoke of the benefits to their children, as they become better parents. Many spoke of the importance of interacting with people who share similar circumstances and the relief that comes from feeling like they are not alone in their troubles.

Many of the participants indicated that government systems—primarily welfare and child welfare—create significant stress in their lives. This would suggest that structural change remains a challenge. However, there seems to be a growing awareness among many program participants that the failure of systems to adequately respond to their needs does not mean that they as individuals are failures but rather that these systems are failing them. This awareness, and the willingness of participants to speak about systemic issues, is encouraging.

Many of those interviewed articulated that they continue to struggle with inflexible and insensitive government systems and that their participation in programs has helped them to better understand systemic problems and get help in maneuvering through various government agencies. Nonetheless, there is little indication that attitudes are changing on a broader community level and/or that structural change is near. For most, the journey is currently focused on individual healing and building relationships. For many of the Aboriginal participants, reclaiming their identities and understanding their culture

is where they are most focused. For youth, staying safe and building positive relationships is important. These are all critical first steps toward broader social change.

### **How Do We Measure Success?**

The primary purpose of this research is to better understand how we might better measure the outcomes of participation to more accurately reflect individual, family, neighbourhood and broader community benefits. Using a PAR framework—engaging CBOs and program participants in design and implementation—we aimed to develop a better understanding by interviewing program participants.

As discussed in the previous pages, individuals participating in community-based programs articulate positive experiences that contribute to their lives and the lives of their families and communities, in many powerful ways. Their stories offer important lessons for the way that we measure effectiveness. They also provide important lessons for CBOs as they examine and refine the programming that they provide.

### **Indicators Emerging From the Research**

Our research reveals that one of the most important outcomes of participation in CBOs is the development of social capital. Social capital is the development of relationships and networks between people. As noted by Onyx and Bullen (1999), where high levels of social capital exist, people are more likely to feel they are part of the community; feel useful and able to make a real contribution to the community; participate in local community networks and CBOs; come together in time of crisis; and welcome strangers and participate as a group. This is also consistent with Freire's notion of dialogue and communication as a first step toward empowerment and transformation.

The experiences articulated by program participants interviewed provide insight into the impact that community-based programs have

on the development of social capital in the inner city. This is critical for marginalized individuals and communities with high levels of poverty and transience. Measuring social capital can provide important information about individual growth and community change. Participants' reports of 'volunteering and giving back,' 'feeling connected,' 'making friends,' and 'becoming actively involved in the community,' are measures of social capital and provide evidence of an increase in social capital for individuals who have previously felt isolated and alone.

In most cases, individual participants clearly articulated their reason for participating in programs. Many initially participated for material reasons such as having access to food, clothing and a welcoming and safe place to 'hang out.' However many of these individuals later found emotional and spiritual supports to have a great deal of impact on their lives. Including indicators that will measure the incremental benefits of participation can provide useful learning for policy and program design.

Analysis of the interviews showed that participation in culturally based programming was an extremely powerful indicator of increased sense of self and hope for the future. Individuals who felt a strong connection to their culture reported feeling that their lives had improved significantly as a result of 'reclaiming their culture', were better people, better parents, and had much to contribute to the community. This is an important first step in the process of decolonization and the impact of culturally based programming can provide useful insight for further program development.

Most of the participants interviewed do not work for wages. However many talked a great deal about their 'work'—raising children and volunteering both formally and informally. Many reported having moved forward from 'users' of services to acting as mentors to new participants. Our research shows that many program participants see their involvement as part of a longer journey

toward greater community involvement and independence. Moving from 'client' to 'helper' is an important step and demonstrates progress for individuals and communities.

The impact of structural barriers for people living in poverty cannot be minimized. Interviewees almost always identified 'government systems' as one of the top three causes of stress. Many individuals attributed the CBOs with helping them to learn how to more effectively deal with these systems to get what they need. Such learning is critical and should be included as an indicator of success.

The majority of respondents very clearly articulated at least one important dream for the future. In most cases these dreams were very practical. For example, at least 14 respondents had children in foster care and their dreams for the future centered on reunification with their children. (See Appendix Four for details.) For those whose children are not permanent wards, they reported working very hard to do whatever necessary to get their children back in their care. For them, being reunited with their children is the ultimate indicator of their successful participation in community programs.

Many of the youth interviewed indicated that a major reason for participating in projects is to keep them safe from gangs and keep them out of trouble. If program participation does nothing more than keep children safe and out of the justice system, then an important service is being provided to individuals and the broader community.

Addiction was raised as a concern for many respondents. Some reported that their participation in programs was helping to keep them off of drugs and alcohol. Others openly reported their ongoing struggle with their addictions and were thankful for the non-judgmental support and encouragement they received from program staff. Overcoming addictions can be a long process and setbacks are not uncommon. The role of

community-based organizations in providing a safe and supportive healing environment for individuals struggling with addictions is an important community service.

Many of the individuals interviewed had few family supports and therefore relied on the workers at community-based programs, as well as government agencies, to take on this role. As noted by one respondent:

...I've had a lot of support at [the CBO]. My parents deceased when I was eight so I...ran around. My workers helped me out a lot. I'm very like, bad, so they straightened me out. I like the supports, I like the workers sometimes I don't want to lose them. They get me into programs because my two daughters are in CFS so I want to get them back, so I just went through all these programs, I didn't like at first, and the more I learned things from it, and now I'm doing all this support stuff. But I think back to my old ways, I kind of miss it and I don't know why. Like I'm still young and I feel like I'm forty and I'm doing all these things for people and homecare. I've come a long way with where I was before. I used to be an F student and now I'm an A student. Just finished getting my grade 12. See a bunch of my old friends. No, I don't like that. I go to church sometimes and... it scares me. I do it for my kids mostly. I've done a lot for myself but I do it for my kids mostly. The workers have helped me get through everything, so, I like the support. I never used to get it because I was too, f'd up... and, [the CBO worker] would [not give up on her] "No, I'm not going to give up on her. I'm not going to give up on [her]" A lot of workers did [support her] and the same workers that I have still aren't even supposed to be helping me out but they are, because they were my workers before I was eighteen. I get a lot of support. I enjoy it.

We must not underestimate the need for unconditional support and guidance of family and for those who do not have this, CBOs and agency social workers can be an important proxy.

It is also important to understand the different roles of different organizations. Many of those interviewed reported participating in two or more programs. This should not be seen as an overlap in services. Individuals often 'ladder' from one program to another as they progress through their individual journeys. Many have multiple issues and require services from more than one CBO to help them cope. The network of CBOs provides complementary services and all make an important contribution to the very complicated lives of their 'clients'.

## **Building Community Capacity through PAR - the Importance of Community Researchers**

The *State of the Inner City Report* is committed to training and hiring community researchers. Eight community researchers were hired and trained to conduct interviews for this study. Once interviews were completed we decided to interview a sample of the researchers to hear their perspectives on the project. We were interested in understanding whether they felt they benefited from participating as a community researcher and what their thoughts were on the project in general. A sample of three of the eight interviewees was selected. While this component was added late in the project and time did not allow for us to interview all eight researchers, we learned that hiring and training community researchers is critical to our community capacity-building aims.

### **Nancy**

Nancy is a 39-year-old Aboriginal woman. Nancy told us that she quit drinking on September 4th, 1996, when she was told that if she did

not do so, she would die. Adopted by a non-Aboriginal American family during the 1960s large-scale adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal families (often referred to as the Sixties Scoop), Nancy was sent back in 1985 when she was 17 years old and was placed in the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre. Nancy had four children, all of whom were raised by foster parents. Her daughter committed suicide one year ago and since then Nancy has focused on her own healing.

During an interview that took place at the Aboriginal Visioning Centre on Selkirk Ave., Nancy was asked whether she felt that her participation as a community researcher benefited her at all. Nancy lowered her eyes and reflected for several minutes before responding. She then looked into the interviewers' eyes and said: "Participating in this project gave me my voice back". When asked to elaborate she went on to say that she was initially very anxious about participating and almost dropped out. But she was encouraged by her mentor at Native Women's Transition Centre and CCPA researchers and so she continued on. Nancy told us that she had very low self-esteem and did not have the confidence that she could do this work or any work. Although Nancy had been engaged in volunteer activities in her community, she had never been 'employed' for wages. Nancy bravely continued through the project in spite of her initial hesitation. She told us that she became stronger and more confident with each interview. We witnessed her improvement through each interview we listened to.

Nancy expressed being thankful for the support and encouragement she received and she said that she now feels that she has the confidence to try other things. Nancy has since begun work—paid work—as a support worker at the Native Women's Transition Centre.

### **Carey**

Carey became involved in the project through the Native Women's Transition Centre, where she

is a participant in the Centre's mentoring program. Carey conducted interviews at Wolseley Family Place, where she has also participated in programs. Carey has participated in other community-based research projects and she told us that she feels she learns a lot from doing so. "I really enjoy doing these kind of research projects because it gave me a chance to hear other peoples' stories and also their opinions because I guess a lot of people don't get that opportunity very often...to voice their opinions or be able to have it actually used for something."

When asked if there was something in particular that stood out for her, she said that it was the emphasis on need for greater supports for youth. Carey also noted that there was a desire for more "Aboriginal places they could go for cultural stuff." A further issue she observed was the fearfulness of repercussions from Employment and Income Assistance. Even after reading through the consent form and learning that interviews would be confidential, one of the women she interviewed was hesitant to share too much information "...because she was on social assistance, she was afraid to...I don't think I got as much as I could have out of her because she was hesitant to share."

Another stand out for Carey was an interview with a refugee woman. "...Her story was...scary I guess...Yeah, where she came from and what she had to go through...that was the first time [I had talked to a refugee]...you hear about it on the news but when you're actually talking to a person telling their story, it's different".

In terms of hopes for the project and her participation, Carey would like to be able to use the experience as a reference for future employment, and she hopes that the information will be used. "...The information is important and instead of looking at numbers all the time...I think people's stories have a bigger impact on...it should have a bigger impact on...how policies and stuff are made."

## **Lorraine**

Lorraine is a long time inner-city resident and has volunteered at Rossbrook House for several years. She told us that she was honoured when Sister Maria asked her to participate as a community researcher for the project. Lorraine told us that she had already believed that Rossbrook was providing a valuable service but hearing what the kids had to say about Rossbrook was sometimes quite surprising. Lorraine felt that she developed some important skills. It was sometimes challenging to get the children to open up and elaborate on their answers, but when they did, they had some very important things to say. Lorraine told us that she appreciated getting to know the children she interviewed better. She now has a better understanding of the extensive challenges that they have. "A lot of them don't have any place to go. I talked to one that was staying at his grandma's but there is no room for him so he hangs out at Rossbrook basically 24/7 when he can...and a lot of them because of the home life, they...I remember going to work and having kids sitting at the door because they've been outside since early morning, parents are doing drugs, they haven't ate since the day before. All they want...'can I have a piece of bread?'... and it's sad."

Lorraine plans to continue to participate as a volunteer at Rossbrook House and elsewhere in her community. Lorraine is interested in continuing to be involved in this and future community-based research projects.

## **Final Thoughts**

A critical lesson for governments and funding agencies is that 'success' has many meanings. Those of us who had the opportunity to participate in this project learned much about the very subjective nature of measuring outcomes. The size, scope and design of this project presented many challenges. While the hiring and training of community researchers added an additional

layer of complexity, it was critical to the project's capacity-building objectives. The benefits far outweighed the costs.

In respect for the many program participants and community researchers that contributed their time and shared their stories with us, we conclude with a quote from one of our community researchers, which we believe captures the essence of what this project has been all about.

When asked to provide a pseudonym to ensure her anonymity in the final report, Nancy, a community researcher and program participant, responded as follows. We feel that Nancy's words very powerfully articulate why our PAR model is critical to conducting research in the inner city.

I really don't mind if you put my real name on the final report. Our people have been silent for way too long...without a name or a face, which is known as an identity.

I'm starting to know my culture and my identity, so without a name or a face, I am not complete or whole. I feel our government and/or other agencies could and will know the real facts. I feel too, we as a people need to speak up, and let our voices be heard. I am speaking up for people who don't have a voice or they're afraid to speak up. I am giving you permission, to put my real name on the final report. I want to thank you for giving me the chance to speak up; I have learned so much about human beings, including myself.



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## **Appendix One: Member Organizations of CLOUT**

### **Andrews Street Family Centre**

Provides a focal point in the community where families work to meet their own needs. United Way supports three programs at ASFC. (1) The Pritchard Place Drop-in Centre, which offers a safe and positive alternative to street life for vulnerable children and youth in the inner city. (2) Parents Helping Parents program provides outreach and practical support to families and their children. (3) Volunteer Program strengthens and utilizes the skills of community residents.

### **Community Education Development Association**

Supports efforts to increase the capacity of residents in the North End of Winnipeg to develop, strengthen and sustain their communities. CEDA serves as a resource to organize and facilitate action; to promote the development of skills and resources necessary to help neighbourhoods and communities realize their potential. CEDA also runs the Youth Opportunity Program at two North End high schools.

### **Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre**

Is designed as a bridge between the community and the “systems” that interact with it. Ma Mawi works to create preventative, supportive services and resources for Aboriginal families living in Winnipeg: of, by and for Aboriginal people. Ma Mawi’s work is based on a recognition and understanding of the importance of extended family systems. Using a community-based approach, Ma Mawi puts emphasis on working with the strengths and capacities of people they serve, creating opportunities for leadership and strong community involvement. United Way supports capacity-building opportunities for members of the community in the Volunteer Program, Youth Program and Community Training and Learning.

### **Native Women’s Transition Centre**

Offers a safe home as it addresses the needs of Aboriginal women and children who have been victimized and need assistance to make healthy lifestyle changes. All services are delivered within the context of Aboriginal culture and traditions. United Way supports programs that address family violence and related issues, build supportive networks and develop healthy coping skills. United Way also provides time-limited support for Completing the Circle, a mentorship program that supports women as they leave the Transition Centre and move back into the community.

### **Ndiniwemaaganag Endaawad**

Provides 24-hour shelter and basic necessities for Aboriginal children/youth who are runaways or are presently living on the street. Offers culturally-appropriate services, including residential support and outreach for children/youth at risk of exploitation and abuse. United Way supports an initiative that builds the organizational capacity of the agency to fulfill its expanding community role. United Way also supports a volunteer program in the Youth Resource Centre, which seeks to give both adults and local youth employment-related experience and a way of giving to the community.

### **North End Women’s Resource Centre**

Assists women to gain control over their lives, break the cycle of poverty, and achieve more independence. The Centre offers individual and group counselling, learning and volunteer opportunities, skill development to local women, along with crisis counselling, and referrals. The Centre also has a drop-in area for women and their children, runs a second-hand clothing shop, and operates an employment preparation program.

### **Rossbrook House**

Provides a 24-hour, safe alternative to the streets 365 days a year. At Rossbrook, young people can meet their needs for socialization, recreation,

personal development and crisis intervention. Programs empower youth and build self-esteem through a variety of educational, cultural and pre-employment activities. An innovative music program, now in its fourth year, is nurturing the artistic capacities of many youth.

### **Wolseley Family Place**

Is a community-based family resource centre that focuses on building supportive relationships. Services and programs include parent/child education, child care and development education, health and safety issues, as well as food and nutrition sessions. With time-limited support from United Way, Wolseley Family Place operates the Food Connection project. Participants are also provided with supported, on-site employment that involves preparation, service and sale of food.

## Appendix Two: Interview Guide



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
CENTRE CANADIEN  
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

### CLOUT Interview Guide March 2007

#### Is Participation Having an Impact Study

##### **Purpose:**

To better understand how participation in community based programs contributes to the lives of individual participants, families and communities.

**(note that this tool is designed to be administered through an interview process that would be recorded on audio tape. Duration of interview approximately 60 minutes. The objective is to get enough information from respondents to better understand how participation in community based organizations helps them in their lives)**

##### **Part A. General Questions**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
4. What ethnic background do you identify with?  
( interviewer to provide examples -Aboriginal, non aboriginal, African etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
5. If the interviewee is an adult  
# of children (at home? In care? Ages?) \_\_\_\_\_
6. How long have you been a participant in this program? (Name the program and organization. Note that we are not interviewing staff of programs. Interviewees must be participants of programs 'ie. Clients'.
7. Are you involved in other programs in the community? If yes, can you name them? (give examples)

**Part B.**

The following questions are designed to gather information specific to the indicators that CLOUT members identified.(we will need to decide if we ask the same questions of children or do we go straight to the Part C)

Indicators	Suggested questions
<p>1. Health</p> <p>(Research has shown that one of the most reliable indicators of a persons health status is their own assessment)</p>	<p><b>1.1 How would you rate your own health? (ask for each of Physical, mental, spiritual)</b></p> <p><b>1.1.1 Physical</b></p> <p>1.Poor_____</p> <p>2.Average_____</p> <p>3.Very Good_____</p> <p>4.Excellent_____</p> <p><b>1.1.2 emotional</b></p> <p>1.Poor_____</p> <p>2.Average_____</p> <p>3.Very Good_____</p> <p>4.Excellent_____</p> <p><b>1.1.3 Spiritual</b></p> <p>1.Poor_____</p> <p>2.Average_____</p> <p>3.Very Good_____</p> <p>4.Excellent_____</p> <p><b>1.2 How would you best describe your health during the last 12 months:</b></p> <p>1.2.1 My <u>physical</u> health has improved _____ declined (is worse) _____ remained the same _____</p> <p>1.2.2 My <i>emotional</i> health has improved _____ declined (is worse) _____ remained the same _____</p> <p>1.2.3 My <i>spiritual</i> health has improved _____ declined (is worse) _____ remained the same _____</p>

	<p><i>for each of the above, the interviewer should ask the respondent to elaborate where appropriate</i></p>
<p>2. Access to resources (child care, housing,)  (stability, isolation,)</p>	<p><b>2.1 Do you have access to child care that meets your needs ?</b> Yes _____ No _____</p> <p><b>2.2 How long have you lived in your current residence</b> 0 - 6 months _____ 6- 12 months _____ 12 months – 2 years _____ more than 2 years _____</p> <p><b>2.3 How would you describe your housing?</b> Satisfactory _____ Unsatisfactory _____ <i>If unsatisfactory, why?</i></p> <p><b>2.4 Are you currently looking for better housing?</b> Yes _____ No _____ <i>If yes, ask respond to elaborate – why?</i></p> <p><b>2.5 Do your children (or ‘you’ if interviewee is a child) participate in sports?</b> Yes _____ No _____ <i>If no, why not?</i></p> <p><b>2.6 Do your children (or ‘you’ in interviewee is a child) participate in other recreation/ organized activities?</b> Yes _____ No _____ <i>If no, why not?</i></p>
<p>3. Sense of self value Self-Confidence Motivation Empowerment</p>	<p><b>3.1 To what extent would you agree with the following statement?</b></p> <p><b>3.1.1 I feel that I have many strengths to share with others in my community.</b></p> <p>Agree very much _____ Agree somewhat _____</p>

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

*If agree very much, are they being used?  
If no, why not?*

**3.1.2 12 months ago I felt that I had many strengths to share with others in my community.**

Agree very much \_\_\_\_\_

Agree somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

**3.2 To what extent do you agree with the following statement:**

**3.2.1 If I am in need of services or supports from government or other services, I know where to go and I will ask for what I need.**

Agree strongly \_\_\_\_\_

Agree somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

**3.2.2 Over the past 12 months, my knowledge of services has:**

Improved \_\_\_\_\_

Not improved \_\_\_\_\_

Remains the same \_\_\_\_\_

**3.3 Over the past 12 months, the likelihood that I will ask for what I need has**

improved \_\_\_\_\_

not improved \_\_\_\_\_

remains the same \_\_\_\_\_

*If it has improved, why do you think this is so?*

**3.4.1 I feel that I can make decisions and take action**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

**3.4.2 Over the past 12 months, I feel that my ability**

	<p><b>to make decisions and take action has</b>  Improved _____  Declined (worse) _____  Remained the same _____</p> <p><i>Why do you think this is?</i></p>
<p>4. Social networks – social cohesion- social supports</p>	<p><b>4.1 How would you most accurately respond to the following statement?</b></p> <p><b>4.1.1 I have safe places to go to when I need help:</b></p> <p>Very much _____  Somewhat _____  Not at all _____</p> <p><b>4.1.2. Over the past 12 months my access to safe places has:</b></p> <p>Increased _____  Decreased _____  Remained the same _____</p> <p><b>4.2 If you were ill at home, is there someone who would look after you?</b></p> <p>Yes _____  No _____</p> <p><b>4.3 If I am feeling overwhelmed or in need of a break, I can get help to take care of my children to give me a break.</b></p> <p>Yes _____  No _____</p> <p><b>4.4 Would you say that you know (pick one)</b></p> <p>Most of the people in your neighbourhood _____  Many of the people in your neighbourhood _____  A few of the people in your neighbourhood _____  Nobody else in your neighbourhood _____</p> <p><b>4.5 What number of groups or organizations are you involved in?(give respondent examples of what we mean by ‘involvement’)</b></p> <p>One _____</p>



	<p>Two or more _____</p> <p><b>4.6 Over the last 12 months, would you say that your social supports have</b></p> <p>Increased _____</p> <p>Decreased _____</p> <p>Remained the same _____</p>
5. Reciprocity	<p><b>5.1 Do you volunteer in the community (formal volunteer)?</b> <i>(explain to participant what we mean by 'formal' volunteer)</i></p> <p>Not at all _____</p> <p>Less than 5 hours per month _____</p> <p>More than 5 hours per month _____</p> <p><i>If yes, where and what do you do?</i></p> <p><i>If no, why not?</i></p> <p><b>5.2 Do you participate in the community to help others (informal volunteer - explain)?</b></p> <p>Yes _____</p> <p>No _____</p> <p><i>If yes, elaborate? If no, why not?</i></p>
6. Greater sense of safety and stability	<p><b>6.1.1 Do you feel like you have control over your life?</b></p> <p>Often _____</p> <p>Sometimes _____</p> <p>Rarely _____</p> <p><i>If rarely or sometime, explain why</i></p> <p><b>6.1.2 Over the past 12 months have your feelings of control over your life.....</b></p> <p>Improved _____</p> <p>Not improved _____</p> <p>Remained the same _____</p> <p><i>explain</i></p>
7. Safety	<p><b>7.1 Do you feel safe walking in your community?</b></p> <p>Very much _____</p> <p>Somewhat _____</p> <p>Not at all _____</p> <p><i>If somewhat or not at all, explain?</i></p> <p><b>7.1 Have your feelings of safety in the past 12</b></p>

	<p><b>months....</b></p> <p>Improved _____</p> <p>Declined _____</p> <p>Remained the same _____</p>
8. Financial Security	<p><b>8.1 Which of the following statements best describes your family financial situation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have enough money to purchase most things that we want _____</li> <li>• We have enough money to purchase what we feel we need _____</li> <li>• We have enough money to take care of only the basic needs _____</li> <li>• We do not have enough money to take care of basic needs for our family _____</li> </ul> <p><i>If you do not have enough money, how do you make ends meet?</i></p> <p><b>8.2. If you were in financial trouble, do you know someone that could assist you?</b></p> <p>Yes _____</p> <p>No _____</p> <p><i>If yes, who?</i></p> <p><b>8.3 Over the past 12 months, has your financial situation.....</b></p> <p>Improved _____</p> <p>Declined _____</p> <p>Remained the same _____</p> <p><b>8.4 Do you currently have paid employment that you feel adequately meets your needs</b></p> <p>yes _____</p> <p>no _____</p> <p><b>If no, which of the following best describes your situation</b></p> <p>I am currently seeking paid employment _____</p>

	<p>I am not currently seeking paid employment _____</p> <p><i>If interviewee is not seeking paid employment, ask them to explain – for example busy working at home, child care issues, other</i></p> <p><b>8.5 Do you feel that there are adequate opportunities and supports to help you find a good job (jobs available and agencies to help)</b>  Yes _____  No _____  <i>(if no, ask them to explain what they think is lacking)</i></p>
9. Stress	<p><b>9.1. 1 How stressful is your life?</b>  Not stressful _____  Moderately stressful _____  Extremely stressful _____</p> <p><b>9.1.2 Compared with 12 months ago, would you say that your life is</b>  Less stressful _____  More stressful _____  Same _____</p> <p><b>9.2. What would you say causes the most stress in your life (Pick the top three 1 being that which causes most stress)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money _____</li> <li>• Relationships _____</li> <li>• Lack of support _____</li> <li>• Children _____</li> <li>• Addictions _____</li> <li>• Family violence _____</li> <li>• Violence in my community _____</li> <li>• Government systems (eg. Welfare, CFS, _____</li> <li>• Other (please name) _____</li> </ul> <p><i>Ask interviewee to elaborate on their choices if they wish</i></p> <p><b>9.3 What do you do to relieve stress?</b>  <b>Example--exercise, talk with friends, drugs/alcohol, spiritual activities, other</b></p>
10. Trust	<b>10.1 How would you most accurately respond to the following statement?</b>

	<p><b>I have people that I can trust</b></p> <p>Yes _____</p> <p>No _____</p>
11. Belonging	<p><b>11.1 Where do you feel most ‘connected’ (explain to interviewee what is meant by connected if they do not immediately respond. Eg. Neighbourhood, community, reserve, community based organization etc.)</b></p> <p><b>11.2 Has this changed over the past 12 months?</b></p> <p>Yes _____</p> <p>No _____</p> <p><b>11.3 Have your feelings of belonging....</b>  Increased over the past 12 months _____  Decreased _____  Remained the same _____  <i>If decreased, why?</i></p>
12. Participation	<p><b>12.1 How often do you participate in activities in your community? (church activities, community centre, bingo, other)</b></p> <p>Several times a week _____</p> <p>Several times a month _____</p> <p>Once a month _____</p> <p>Less than once a month _____</p>
13. Sense of Purpose	<p><b>13.1.1 How would you best respond to the following statement.</b></p> <p><b>I participate in daily activities that give my life meaning and purpose.</b></p> <p><b>Very much so</b> _____</p> <p><b>Somewhat</b> _____</p> <p><b>Not at all</b> _____</p> <p><b>13.1.2 If yes, what activities give you the greatest sense of purpose. (choose 3 – rank 1-3. 1 being that which gives the greatest sense of purpose)</b></p> <p><b>Parenting/caregiving (unpaid work)</b> _____</p> <p><b>Employment (paid work)</b> _____</p> <p><b>Volunteering in my community (unpaid work)</b> _____</p>

	<p>Other _____</p> <p><b>13.1.3 Has your sense of purpose over the last 12 months.....</b></p> <p>Increased _____</p> <p>Decreased _____</p> <p>Remained the same _____</p> <p><i>Why do you think this is?</i></p>
14. Hope for the future	<p><b>14.1 How would you best respond to the following statement?</b></p> <p><b>I look forward to good things happening for me in the future</b></p> <p>Very much _____</p> <p>Somewhat _____</p> <p>Not at all _____</p> <p><i>Explain why</i></p> <p><b>14.2 Name and describe one of your dreams for the future</b> _____</p> <p><b>14.3 Overall how would you best describe your life today</b> _____</p> <p><b>14.4 Overall how would you best describe your hope for the future</b></p> <p>Excellent _____</p> <p>Very good _____</p> <p>Good _____</p> <p>Poor _____</p> <p><b>14.5 Would you say that your hope for the future over the past 12 months has</b></p> <p>Improved _____</p> <p>Declined _____</p> <p>Remains the same _____</p>

**Part C. – Your story in your words**

In this question we would like to get a sense from you, in any way that you should choose to tell us, what participation in this program and other community programs means to you. For example, what made you decide to come to (insert name of program)? What keeps you coming back? What has changed for you (and your family) since you have been involved? Do you feel that participation in the program has made a difference in your life?

**Part D. Where do you see gaps in program supports in your community – what needs are currently not being met in your view?**

## Appendix Three: Responses to CLOUT Questionnaire

The following statistics were gathered from interviews with 91 participants. Responses were coded using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program, and compiled according to the question number.

Not all participants were asked or responded to each question; therefore numbers and percentages are given only for those who responded. The number of respondents for each question is given in brackets () beside each question.

### Part A: General Questions

#### 1. Age (80 responses)

Respondents under 18	13 (16.2%)
Respondents between 18-24	16 (20%)
Respondents between 25-35	23 (28.8%)
Respondents over 35	28 (35%)

The youngest participant was 15 years old, and the oldest was 60 years old. The average age of participants was 30.1 years.

#### 2. Gender (81 responses)

Male	21 (26%)
Female	60 (74%)

#### 3. What ethnic background do you identify with?

Responses and terminology based on self-identification (79 responses)

Aboriginal	41 (52%)
Métis:	13 (16.4)
First Nations	3 (3.8%)
Cree	2 (2.5%)
Ojibway	2 (2.5)
Caucasian	5 (6.4%)
African	2 (2.5%)
French Canadian	2 (2.5%)

English	2 (2.5%)
Other (Inuit, Italian/French Canadian, Latin/South American, French, Russian, Métis/Aboriginal Métis/East Indian)	7 (8.9%)

#### 4. Number of Children? (64 responses)

Living Situation	Number of Respondents
One child at home	3 (4.7%)
One child other	1 (1.6%)
Multiple children all at home	9 (14%)
Multiple children all in care	7 (10.9%)
Multiple children other	2 (3.1%)
Multiple children with some at home and some in care	7 (10.9%)
Children living independently	3 (4.7%)
One child, living situation not specified	5 (7.8%)
Multiple children, living situation not specified	12 (18.8%)
No children	15 (23.5%)

#### 5. How long have you been a participant of this program?

Responses ranged from 1 month to 16 years. Most people had attended for between one to five years.

#### 6. Are you involved with other programs in the community? (82 responses)

Yes	46 (56%)
No	36 (44%)

Responses ranged from those who served on committees or volunteered in their community to those who received services from multiple organizations.

## Part B: Indicator Questions

### 1. Health

#### 1.1. How would you rate your own health?

##### 1.1.1. Physical (85 responses)

Poor	11 (13%)
Average	42 (50%)
Very Good	23 (27%)
Excellent	9 (10%)

Participants gave the following reasons for a poor health rating; surgery, disability, violence, diabetes, chronic illness, and post traumatic stress disorder. One person rated themselves as being between poor and average.

##### 1.1.2. Emotional (85 responses)

Poor	14 (16.5%)
Average	41 (48.2%)
Very Good	21 (24.7%)
Excellent	7 (8.2%)
Unspecified	2 (2.4%)

Participants gave the following reasons for ratings:

Average – CFS challenges, demanding partners, anxiety.

Poor – sexual assault as teenager, currently in court, negative living situation, depression and anxiety, death of loved one, trouble expressing feelings.

Very Good – focus more on feelings and self, in touch with emotions, think positively, know where resources are and can access help from organizations.

##### 1.1.3. Spiritual (84 responses)

Poor	12 (14.3%)
Average	23 (27.3%)
Very Good	32 (38.1%)
Excellent	12 (14.3%)
Unspecified	5 (6%)

There was a correlation between how in touch Aboriginal people were with their traditional cultural and spiritual ways, and how they rated their spiritual health. Those who were unfamiliar with or just beginning to practice Aboriginal culture rated themselves as poor or average. Those who had great exposure to Aboriginal culture rated themselves as very good or excellent.

#### 1.2. How would you best describe your health during the last 12 months:

##### 1.2.1. My physical health has (85)

Improved	31 (36.5%)
Declined	19 (22.4%)
Remains the same	29 (34.1%)
Unspecified	6 (7%)

Participants gave the following reasons for their responses:

Improved – feeling healthier, better access to health care, avoiding drugs, recent weight loss, taking better care of self.

Declined – life problems, stress, recent surgery or illness.

##### 1.2.2 My emotional health has (84 responses)

Improved	33 (39.3%)
Declined	9 (10.7%)
Remains the same	36 (42.9%)
Unspecified	6 (7.1%)

Participants gave the following reasons for their responses:

Improved – attending sweats, being treated for addictions, more supports for coping, feeling like part of the community and meeting people, left abusive partner, now able to talk about feelings and problems, taking care of self, friends are loving and caring, and they felt programs were helpful.

Declined – stress from school, crying due to going through healing process.



It is important to note that most participants who said their health improved directly attributed this to the programs they were attending.

### 1.2.3 My spiritual health has (81 responses)

Improved	33 (40.7%)
Declined	5 (6.2%)
Remains the same	41 (50.6%)
Unspecified	2 (2.5%)

Participants gave the following reasons for their responses:

Improved – learning more about Aboriginal culture, learning about self through programs, participating in programs, meeting people

## 2. Access to Resources (child care, housing)

### 2.1 Do you have access to child care that meets your needs? (60 responses)

Yes	31 (51.7%)
No	10 (16.7%)
N/A	19 (31.6%)

Of those who responded “yes”, they were receiving childcare from the community organizations they were attending, or from family members.

Those who felt they did not have access to childcare said that daycare was too expensive, hard to get into, or did not accept children with special needs/ADHD. Those who responded N/A either did not have children or their children were old enough that they did not require care.

### 2.2 How long have you lived in your current residence? (88 responses)

0-6 months	28 (31.8%)
6-12 months	21 (23.9%)
12 months-2 years	8 (9.1%)
More than 2 years	31 (35.2%)

### 2.3 How would you describe your housing? (88 responses)

Satisfactory	48 (54.5%)
Unsatisfactory	39 (44.3%)
In-between	1 (1.2%)

#### If Unsatisfactory, why?

Responses include; slum landlords (can't contact or contact but nothing happens), unhygienic conditions (mold, spiders, mice, ants, dirty), old or run-down property, temperature fluctuations (too hot or too cold), too many people living there, too small, drugs and violence in the building.

### 2.4 Are you currently looking for better housing? (87 responses)

Yes	50 (57.5%)
No	34 (39.1%)
Unsure	3 (3.4%)

#### If yes, why?

Responses include; more space for kids, too dirty, to live with family instead of neighbors, for safety (gangs, violence, drugs), for health reasons, to have own place or independence, problems with bugs, on a waitlist for Manitoba housing.

### 2.5 Do your children (or 'you' if interviewee is a child) participate in sports? (57 responses)

Yes	21 (36.8%)
No	25 (43.9%)
N/A	11 (19.3%)

#### If no, why not?

Responses include: Cannot afford it, children are not old enough, nowhere for them to go, nothing in the community, children are in care, youth working full-time, not interested, shy.

**2.6 Do your children (or 'you' in interviewee is a child) participate in other recreation/ organized activities? (51 responses)**

Yes	32 (62.7%)
No	16 (31.4%)
N/A	3 (5.9%)

**If no, why not?**

Responses include; Not enough time with the kids, children too young, nothing in the community, on a waitlist for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, no time, ill, and saving up money.

**3. Sense of Self Value/Self-Confidence, Motivation, Empowerment**

3.1 To what extent would you agree with the following statement?

**3.1.1. I feel that I have many strengths to share with others in my community. (88 responses)**

Agree very much	Agree somewhat	Disagree	Unsure
52 (59%)	25 (28.4%)	7 (8%)	4 (4.6%)

**If agree very much, are they being used?**

**Yes 15**

It is worth noting that the majority of participants were not asked this question. Some of the strengths and skills mentioned included spiritual knowledge, advice and support, areas of personal experience and expertise, reliability, love for people, positive attitude, training in arts, crafts, singing and dancing, and working with youth.

**No - 5**

**If no, why not?**

Responses include; No opportunities, nothing special to share, too shy, don't know what to do, credentials were not recognized.

**3.1.2. 12 months ago I felt that I had many strengths to share with others in my community. (84 responses)**

Agree very much	Agree somewhat	Disagree	Unsure
22 (26.3%)	37 (44%)	16 (19%)	9 (10.7%)

These results show that many participants have experienced positive changes in the strengths they have to share with their communities. Some gave reasons for these changes; they gained employment in the community, learned more skills, were looking after themselves better, came out of their shell, and gained confidence. As one person said "you have to go through a lot before you become strong."

3.2 To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

**3.2.1. If I am in need of services or supports from government or other services, I know where to go and I will ask for what I need. (87 responses)**

Agree very much	Agree somewhat	Disagree	Unsure
36 (41.4%)	34 (39.1%)	11 (12.6%)	6 (6.9%)

**3.2.2. Over the past 12 months, my knowledge of services has: (87 responses)**

Agree very much	Agree somewhat	Disagree	Unsure
46 (52.9%)	3 (3.4%)	36 (41.4%)	2 (2.3%)

**3.3. Over the past 12 months, the likelihood that I will ask for what I need has (84 responses)**

Improved	Not improved	Stayed the same	Unsure
44 (52.4%)	6 (7.1%)	32 (38.1%)	2 (2.4%)

**If it has improved, why do you think this is so?**

Due to the programs, having somewhere to go for help, feeling more comfortable and secure asking someone for help, feel stronger, staff are nice and friendly, staff will find answers to any question or make referrals, reconnected with people and the community, saw that people could actually provide help.

**3.4.1. I feel that I can make decisions and take action (87 responses)**

Yes	No	Somewhat	Unsure
63 (72.4%)	4 (4.6%)	19 (21.8%)	1 (1.2%)

**3.4.2. Over the past 12 months, I feel that my ability to make decisions and take action has: (86 responses)**

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
54 (62.8%)	1 (1.2%)	28 (32.5%)	3 (3.5%)

**Why do you think this is?**

Stayed the same – dealing with CFS and welfare make people feel as if they can't make any progress

Improved – become more straightforward, aware of decisions, program taught her there was more to life than her addiction, more responsible, found strength in a program, received counseling, organization was welcoming, made positive changes in life, more independent, can ask for help now, make better decisions, more knowledgeable of resources, aware of rights, feel positive, connected with agencies, gained confidence, have supportive friends, can now refuse drugs, no longer hold feelings inside.

**4. Social Networks, Social Cohesion, Social Supports**

4.1 How would you most accurately respond to the following statement?

**4.1.1. I have safe places to go to when I need help: (88 responses)**

Very Much	Somewhat	Not at all	Unsure
58 (65.9%)	23 (26.1%)	7 (8%)	0

**4.1.2. Over the past 12 months my access to safe places**

**has: (88 responses)**

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
27 (30.7%)	11 (12.5%)	48 (54.5%)	2 (2.3%)

For those who reported that their access to safe places had declined, most cited family and friends turning to drugs as being the reason for their decline.

4.2 If you were ill at home, is there someone who would look after you? (88 responses)

Yes	Unsure	No
54 (61.4%)	3 (3.4%)	31 (35.2%)

4.3 If I am feeling overwhelmed or in need of a break, I can get help to take care of my children to give me a break. (64 responses)

Yes	Unsure	No
39 (60.9%)	15 (23.5%)	10 (15.6%)

4.4 Would you say that you know (neighbours) (88 responses)

Most of the people in your neighbourhood	22, (25%)
Many of the people in your neighbourhood	20 (22.7%)
A few of the people in your neighbourhood	42 (47.7%)
Nobody in your neighbourhood	3 (3.5%)
Unsure	1 (1.1%)

4.5 What number of groups or organizations are you involved in? (85 responses)

One	Two or more	Unsure
25 (29.4%)	59 (69.4%)	1 (1.2%)

4.6 Over the last 12 months, would you say that your social supports have: (84 responses)

Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	Unsure
37 (44.1%)	8 (9.5%)	38 (45.2%)	1 (1.2%)

## 5. Reciprocity

5.1 Do you volunteer in the community (formal volunteer)? (85 responses)

Not at all	29 (34.1%)
Less than 5 hours per month	14 (16.5%)
More than 5 hours per month	32 (37.6%)
Yes (unspecified hours)	5 (5.9%)
Unsure	5 (5.9%)

### If yes, where and what do you do?

At the organization, at foodbank, watching kids at organization, at community events, community cleanup, cooking, doing crafts with kids, on parent council

### If no, why not?

Common reasons for not volunteering were that no one asked them, they didn't have time, they needed money, or there was nothing to volunteer for.

5.2 Do you participate in the community to help others (informal volunteer - explain)? (83 responses)

Yes	61 (73.5%)
No	22 (26.5%)

If yes, elaborate

Helping at feasts, at organizations, with neighbours and family members, doing outreach, helping with babies and kids, visiting patients in the hospital.

## 6. Greater sense of safety and stability

6.1.1. Do you feel like you have control over your life? (86 responses)

Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Yes (unspecified)
38 (44.2%)	30 (34.9%)	12 (13.9%)	6 (7%)

### If rarely or sometimes, explain why

Partner has all the control, CFS has control of children, involvement with courts, poor health,

came to Canada as a refugee, struggling with addictions, have no financial resources.

6.1.2. Over the past 12 months have your feelings of control over your life? (84 responses)

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
40 (47.6%)	15 (17.9%)	29 (34.5%)	1 (1.2%)

### Please explain

Improved – participants said that people helped them to take control, they got advocacy services with CFS, were involved in programs, became sober, received children from care, older, learned to speak up and act, put their foot down, took counseling, or learned to handle situations.

Not improved – participants said they made poor choices.

## 7. Safety

7.1 Do you feel safe walking in your community? (86 responses)

Very Much	35 (40.7%)
Somewhat	35 (40.7%)
Not at all	9 (10.5%)
Yes (but not at night)	7 (8.1%)

### If somewhat or not at all, explain?

Participants who reported feeling safe in their communities said it was because they knew everyone in the community, were familiar with the youth, or they were very involved in the community.

Those who did not feel safe in their communities had experienced violence such as being jumped or mugged, or had witnessed crimes, drug deals, gang activity and violence in their communities. Some were refugees who had experienced war and had flashbacks. People often said they did not feel safe at night, when they didn't know people, when they were on certain streets or in areas with gangs, fights, robberies, drug deals and murders. Some participants felt home-bound at night.

7.1.2 Have your feelings of safety in the past 12 months: (85 responses)

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
19 (22.4%)	16 (18.8%)	49 (57.6%)	1 (1.2%)

## 8. Financial Security

8.1 Which of the following statements best describes your family financial situation: (83 responses)

We have enough money to purchase most things that we want	6 (7.3%)
We have enough money to purchase what we feel we need	26 (31.3%)
We have enough money to take care of only the basic needs	29 (34.9%)
We do not have enough money to take care of basic needs for our family	18 (21.7%)
Unsure	4 (4.8%)

**If you do not have enough money, how do you make ends meet?**

Most participants responded that they use foodbanks. Other strategies included; going to organizations, borrowing from friends and family, doing odd jobs such as babysitting or housecleaning, skipping meals, walking instead of taking the bus, going to pawn shops, consolidating bills, bargain shopping, and student loans.

8.2. If you were in financial trouble, do you know someone that could assist you? (84 responses)

Yes	50 (59.5%)
No	33 (39.3%)
Unsure	1 (1.2%)

**If yes, who?**

Family -	31
Friends -	5
Organizations -	12

8.3 Over the past 12 months, has your financial situation: (83 responses)

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
14 (16.9%)	24 (28.9%)	43 (51.8%)	2 (2.4%)

**8.4.1. Do you currently have paid employment that you feel adequately meets your needs? (80 responses)**

Yes	23 (28.8%)
No	52 (65%)
Unsure	5 (6.2%)

**8.4.2. If no, which of the following best describes your situation? (52 responses)**

I am currently seeking paid employment	20 (38.5%)
I am not currently seeking paid employment	32 (61.5%)

Participants who were not currently seeking employment cited disabilities, full-time childcare, attending school full-time, addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder as their reasons.

8.5 Do you feel that there are adequate opportunities and supports to help you find a good job (jobs available and agencies to help) (81 responses)

Yes	61 (75.3%)
No	16 (19.7%)
Unsure	4 (5%)

**If no, what is lacking?**

Participants felt there were no organizations in their neighbourhoods, no advertising, no childcare for single parents who want to return to work, no good or stable jobs, and no proper preparation for the workforce. Some had also experienced racism, poor treatment, bad pay and misleading information about what a job entailed.

## 9. Stress

### 9.1.1. How stressful is your life? (84 responses)

Not stressful	Moderately	Extremely	Unsure
13 (15.5%)	45 (53.6%)	23 (27.4%)	3 (3.5%)

### 9.1.2. Compared with 12 months ago, would you say that your life is:

Less stressful	More stressful	Same	Unsure
27 (32.5%)	28 (33.7%)	25 (30.1%)	3 (3.7%)

### 9.2. What would you say causes the most stress in your life (Pick the top three 1 being that which causes most stress) (83 responses)

Money	52 (62.7%)
Government Systems	36 (43.4%)
Relationships	32 (38.5%)
Violence in the Community	24 (28.9%)
Children	20 (24.1%)
Lack of support	18 (21.7%)
Addictions	17 (20.5%)
Family violence	13 (15.7%)

Respondents cited other causes of stress, including; health, health of family members, death of a family member, loneliness, school, job situation, violence, and gossip in the community.

### 9.3 What do you do to relieve stress?

Respondents cited many strategies including:

- Physical – exercise, jog, bike ride, play basketball, boxing, sports, walking;
- Outdoors – go fishing, get out of the city;
- Social – talk to friends, family and partners, play with kids, get childcare and go out, go to an organization, call a helpline;
- Solitary activities – write in a journal, cry, cook, bake, read, play music, crafts, sleep, eat, play on the computer, use drugs or alcohol, smoke;
- Spiritual – attend church, go to sweats, smudge.

## 10. Trust

### 10.1 How would you most accurately respond to the following statement? (I have people that I can trust) (86 responses)

Yes	64 (74.4%)
No	18 (20.9%)
Unsure	4 (4.7%)

## 11. Belonging

### 11.1 Where do you feel most 'connected'? (87 responses)

In community-based organizations	34 (39.1%)
In the neighbourhood	14 (16.1%)
In the community	9 (10.3%)
At home	7 (8%)
With friends	5 (5.7%)
With family	4 (4.7%)
On the reserve	4 (4.7%)
Other (spiritual group, school, work, gym)	6 (6.9%)
Unsure	3 (3.4%)
Nowhere	1 (1.1%)

### 11.2 Has this changed over the past 12 months? (87 responses)

Yes	No	Unsure
30 (34.5%)	53 (60.9%)	4 (4.6%)

### 11.3 Have your feelings of belonging: (87 responses)

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
38 (43.7%)	6 (6.9%)	39 (44.8%)	4 (4.6%)

## 12. Participation

12.1 How often do you participate in activities in your community? (87 responses)

Several times a week	27 (31%)
Several times a month	27 (31%)
Once a month	12 (13.8%)
Less than once a month	13 (14.9%)
Never	3 (3.5%)
Unsure	5 (5.8%)

### 13.1. Sense of Purpose

13.1.1. How would you best respond to the following statement? (I participate in daily activities that give my life meaning and purpose) (87 responses)

Very Much	Somewhat	Not at all	Unsure
36 (41.4%)	41 (47.1%)	4 (4.6%)	2 (2.3%)

Another four respondents (4.6%) said they agreed with the statement, but did not indicate the level to which they agreed.

13.1.2. If yes, what activities give you the greatest sense of purpose? (82 responses)

Parenting/Caregiving	41 (50%)
Volunteering in the Community	17 (20.7%)
Paid Employment	10 (12.2%)
Other (sports, family, music, programs, friends, AA, school, finding yourself, fishing, art, riding bike, skateboarding)	8 (9.8%)
Unsure	6 (7.3%)

13.1.3. Has your sense of purpose over the last 12 months: (81 responses)

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
38 (46.9%)	5 (6.2%)	35 (43.2%)	3 (3.7%)

### Why?

Improved – Participants reported having a sense of direction, being more open, having positive connections, more resources, becoming sober, having kids, going back to school, becoming more involved, gaining confidence and becoming a better person.

Stayed the same – Participants felt that nothing in their lives had changed for the better or worse.

Declined – Participants cited poor health, no job opportunities and having no childcare.

## 14. Hope for the Future

14.1 How would you best respond to the following statement? (I look forward to good things happening for me in the future) (84 responses)

Very Much	Somewhat	Not at all	Unsure
71 (84.5%)	9 (10.7%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.6%)

### Why?

Very Much – Respondents said they wanted to get their kids back, become better parents, were going back to school, made goals, had a good outlook, were following their heart, want to get a job, have become sober, have had doors open and have started participating in programs.

Somewhat – Respondents were afraid to look forward to something and be disappointed, or were suffering from poor health.

Not at all – The respondent felt there was nothing look forward to.

14.2 Name and describe one of your dreams for the future (84 responses)

Respondents shared with us their dreams for the future. Many of these reflect common

themes. Some were centred around family and home, such as the desire for strong relationships, a healthy family, getting custody of children, getting children out of care, having kids, getting married or meeting a partner. Others reflected a strong desire to give back to the community, such as becoming a social worker, lawyer, corrections officer, a nurse, working with youth, inspiring others, building a strong community.

Other respondents were working toward personal achievements such as better jobs, overcoming addiction, graduation, going back to school, achieving financial security, getting out of debt, getting a vehicle and a driver's license, going on vacation or moving out of the city. Some had dreams of becoming famous, winning the lottery, being on TV, or becoming artists. Some were focused on health and healing. Only two people said they had no dreams for the future.

**14.3 Overall how would you best describe your life today (81 responses)**

Very good	19 (23.5%)
Good	19 (23.5%)
Improving/getting better	11 (13.6%)
Okay/Average	9 (11.1%)
Not good/sad/lonely	6 (7.4%)
Rollercoaster/up and down	5 (6.1%)
Boring	2 (2.5%)
Hard	2 (2.5%)
Other (hectic, in transition)	4 (4.9%)
Unsure	4 (4.9%)

**14.4 Overall how would you best describe your hope for the future (83 responses)**

Excellent	27 (32.5%)
Very Good	34 (41%)
Between Very Good and Good	2 (2.4%)
Good	17 (20.5%)
Poor	2 (2.4%)
Unsure	1 (1.2%)

**14.5 Would you say that your hope for the future over the past 12 months has (83 responses)**

Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Unsure
44 (53%)	3 (3.6%)	32 (38.6%)	4 (4.8%)