

State of the

INNER CITY

Community, Research and Social Change



CCCPA

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State of the Inner City Report 2014**

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“Its more than a collection of stories: looking back on State of the Inner City research collaboration” by Shauna MacKinnon

“It Takes a Community to Support a Family: community based supports for families and the child welfare system” by Molly McCracken and Julia Higgins

Cover art by Markus Houston, a local Aboriginal artist living in Winnipeg. Used with permission for the State of the Inner City Report. markushouston@yahoo.ca

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It's More Than a Collection of Stories

By Shauna MacKinnon

In 2005, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) – Manitoba began a journey with inner-city organizations that has evolved into a research collaboration that marks its tenth year with the release of this report. Throughout this period, several hundred individuals, from diverse backgrounds and experiences, have been involved in the *State of the Inner City (SIC) Report* project in various ways. Previous to this CCPA Manitoba had been actively engaged in community collaborative research for many years and had developed a reputation for conducting research in areas of importance to the inner city. A significant level of trust had already been established, making it possible to explore new ways of conducting research and sharing inner city stories.

But the State of the Inner City Report has always been more than a collection of stories. As outlined in our first *State of the Inner City Report* titled “*The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal*,” a central purpose has been to share the many stories of strength and perseverance that are common in Winnipeg’s inner-city neighbourhoods. But the aim has been broader than this. We’ve wanted to demonstrate what can be done when governments and other funding agencies invest in community-based develop-

ment and we’ve aimed to remind funding agencies, and in particular governments, that they have an important role not only as funders, but as policymakers.

Within the context of these broader aims, the State of the Inner City Report continues to have four interrelated objectives. One, to celebrate the community-based development work and those committed to improving the quality of life in the inner city. Two, to shift attitudes about the inner city by dispelling myths and illustrating strengths. Three, to identify service gaps and policy inadequacies, and four, to provide policy and program solutions identified by those working on the frontlines.

The SIC project uses a participatory action research framework that puts community in the driver’s seat while also emphasizing the importance of creating tools that can be used to advocate for policy change. CCPA-Mb researchers work closely with community-based organizations to identify research priorities and to develop methods of inquiry that are consistent with their values and practice models. As the past director of Winnipeg’s Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre and a key SIC community partner describes it, “We tell the researchers what the issues are and what research we think we need. They come back

to us with some ideas and together we make it happen...I feel like I'm driving it."

This sense of community ownership is a central benefit. The SIC gives voice to a community that is otherwise not heard and provides tools that can be used to advocate for improved policies and programs. The SIC makes it possible to highlight the achievements of community-based organizations (CBOs), which is important generally given that poverty is so hidden and governments are not always appreciative of, nor ideologically sympathetic to, the positive benefit that adequately financed CBOs can bring to community. While they understand the usefulness of research, CBOs do not have research capacity and are busy with the day-to-day, front-line work that they are mandated to do. The SIC can help by providing researchers while also contributing to the capacity-building goals of inner-city organizations by hiring and training community researchers. These individuals gain new skills, and as described later in this chapter, for some the experience has been transformative.

Although the State of the Inner City Report project marks its 10th year, the work that we describe and celebrate began much earlier and the initial idea of doing the SIC was in part inspired by historical challenges and the individuals committed to inner-city development long before 2005.

The inner-city communities that are the focus of this research have had a long history of struggle (Loxley 2012; Silver 2006). While poverty exists in pockets across the city, it has long been concentrated in Winnipeg's inner city. An increasing number of new immigrants, and in particular refugees, have more recently added to the diversity of the inner city, however the 'face' of the inner city continues to be disproportionately Aboriginal. Winnipeg generally has a large and fast growing Aboriginal population—the highest among census metropolitan areas in Canada. And while Aboriginal people live in all areas of the city, they are disproportionately located in the inner city. The Aboriginal popu-

lation continues to fare poorly compared with the non-Aboriginal population on several social and economic indicators (Fernandez, MacKinnon and Silver, 2010). The growing number of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg is in part due to relatively high birth rates of urban Aboriginal people, but it is also a function of Aboriginal people relocating from First Nation communities to seek education and employment opportunities. Many live in poor Winnipeg inner-city neighbourhoods, where residents in general experience lower incomes, higher rates of unemployment, a higher incidence of single parenthood, lower levels of educational attainment, housing insecurity, a higher level of crime-related violence, and greater dependency on welfare. Aboriginal people from reserve communities often gravitate to the inner city because this is where they find family and friends from their home communities, and because rent is generally lower in the inner city than elsewhere in Winnipeg. All too often they become trapped in a cycle of poverty, caught up in oppressive systems, and lose hope. But while this hopelessness and despair is clearly evident in the inner city, community-based organizations have refused to give up and there is a strong spirit of hope, reclaiming of culture, neighbourhood revitalization and community building taking place.

The Political Context: Past and Current

The initial interest in this project resulted from earlier research with community-based organizations and an awareness that much of the work in recent years has been made possible due to an advantageous political climate. If history is any indication of what the future might hold for community-based organizations, the current level of support will inevitably come to an end. Throughout the 2000s inner-city organizations have been in a more positive financial situation than was the case throughout the 1990s. This is the case because the provincial New Democratic Party

(NDP) government has been committed to supporting inner-city work. Documenting the good work being done will help organizations make their case in the future with governments that might be less amenable to investing in the inner city. This is important because history tells us that investment in Winnipeg's inner city has always very much depended upon the political landscape.

Support for Inner City Development in the 1970s and 1980s

Urban revitalization through comprehensive, geographic focused strategies began to replace more narrowly focused sectoral approaches in the mid 1970s (Layne 2000). This shift in philosophy had a particularly strong impact in Winnipeg in the 1980s with the introduction of programs such as the Core Area Initiative, a multi-year tripartite agreement signed between Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg. The initial Core Area Initiative was signed by a federal Liberal government, a provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) government and a municipal government led by Mayor William Norrie. The 5-year, \$96 million agreement (1981 – 1986) was geographically focused on the inner city and downtown and emphasized both poverty reduction and physical revitalization. A subsequent agreement, Core Area Initiative II (CAI-II) was signed in 1986 between a Conservative federal government (Brian Mulroney), a provincial NDP government (Howard Pawley), and Mayor Norrie. The Core Area Initiatives provided the funding necessary for creative community-based development projects including community-based education and training initiatives, infill housing, and inner city neighbourhood renewal projects (Layne, 2000).

Midway through the CAI II, Manitoba elected a Conservative government led by Premier Garry Filmon. The CAI II ended in 1992 and it was three years before another tripartite agreement was signed. The new agreement, signed by a federal Liberal government (Jean Chretien),

a provincial Conservative government (Garry Filmon) and Mayor Glen Murray, moved away from the previous geographic, poverty reduction focus. While the inner city and downtown were not excluded, fewer resources were available as government priorities changed. The focus of the Winnipeg Development Agreement (1995-2001) was more generic, with new objectives focused broadly on creating safe and productive environments, creating skills, work experience and education (labour market focus) and job creation (private sector focus).

The focus on inner-city development returned in a new tripartite agreement signed in 2004 under the leadership of a federal Liberal government (Paul Martin), Provincial NDP (Gary Doer) and Winnipeg Mayor Glen Murray. The 5-year, \$75 million tripartite agreement known as the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement expired in 2009 and the federal Conservative government under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has shown no interest in continuing the tradition of entering into cost-shared urban development tripartite agreements with the Province and City of Winnipeg. It should also be noted that the Provincial government had a key role in shaping the parameters of the previous Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, bringing the focus back to inner-city development, a focus that was lost when the Provincial Conservative government was in power in the 1990s. This shift in focus from a narrow to broad geographic focus is not surprising given the historical and very clear ideological/ geographical divide in Winnipeg.

Political power in Manitoba has historically moved from the right leaning Conservative party to the left leaning NDP. Members of the NDP have consistently been elected in the inner city and therefore these neighbourhoods have been best off when the NDP is in power. After eight years out of office throughout the 1990s, the NDP was elected in 1999. One of the first initiatives the NDP government introduced, after a decade of cuts under a Conservative government, was

an inner-city initiative called *Neighbourhoods Alive!* (NA!). NA! and the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement gave a much-needed injection of support for inner-city community development. *Neighbourhoods Alive!* was initially limited to project funds for community projects, but in part as a response to the advocacy efforts of the community, it soon expanded to include multi-year core funding for Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations in targeted neighbourhoods. After a long stretch of deep cuts to social spending in the 1990s, the federal Liberal government began to again contribute to inner-city development through various project funding later in the 1990s and through the WPA. However, much of this funding was eliminated when the federal Conservatives came into power. While the funding environment remains far from perfect, the current provincial government has been instrumental to the boost of energy, enthusiasm and creativity we have seen in the inner city over the past 15 years.

In part, the State of the Inner City research project has evolved from the belief that documenting inner-city stories to demonstrate the positive impact of investment over the past 15 years will be useful to organizations. It can arm CBOs with evidence that shows they are making a difference in the lives of inner-city residents while also serving to have a positive social and economic impact for all of Manitoba. The hope is that this evidence will ensure that the experience of the 1990s will not be repeated and that governments of all stripes will see the benefit of investing in the inner-city development work that has evolved since that time.

Inner-City Development in the 1990s

There is a long history of community-based response to inner-city challenges in Winnipeg. Some of the organizations that participate in the State of the Inner City Report project were actively engaged in inner city community devel-

opment long before the year 2000. For example, The Community Education Development Association (CEDA) was formed in 1979 by inner-city parents who wanted a stronger voice in issues concerning the education of their children. The Native Women's Transition Centre, also established in 1979, continues to provide safe transitional housing for vulnerable Aboriginal women and children. The North End Women's Centre has provided services to women and families in the North End since 1984.

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. was formed through grass roots efforts in 1984 by a group of mostly female Aboriginal leaders in Winnipeg's inner city. Their aim was "to reclaim Aboriginal people's inherent role and responsibility as the caregivers for Aboriginal children and families in Winnipeg" (Ma Mawi Wi chi Itata, n.d.). A few years later Ma Maw Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. took a leading role in establishing a safe home for Aboriginal youth. Ndinwemaa-ganag Endaawaad was established in 1994 and has since grown to provide a range of services for Aboriginal youth. Andrews Street Family Centre was formed in 1995 with a mandate "to be a family resource centre that builds on its community's strengths and encourages its individuals, children, elders, families and youth to reach their full potential through support, friendship and positive experiences."

These organizations survived and thrived in spite of severe government cutbacks in the 1990s. Others did not.

The early 1990s were difficult times for many Canadians and in particular for those living on the edge—surviving from pay cheque to pay cheque. By 1992, Canada was deep into a recession. Like in many cities, Winnipeg's unemployment rate had risen to levels not seen in several years. In 1992 the unemployment rate in Winnipeg was 11.3 percent compared with 7.9 percent in 1990 (Statistics Canada 1996).

In keeping with the general shift to neoliberalism that began to take shape under the lead-

FIGURE 1 Cartoon



SOURCE: Retrieved from CHOICES archives, University of Winnipeg, November 2014

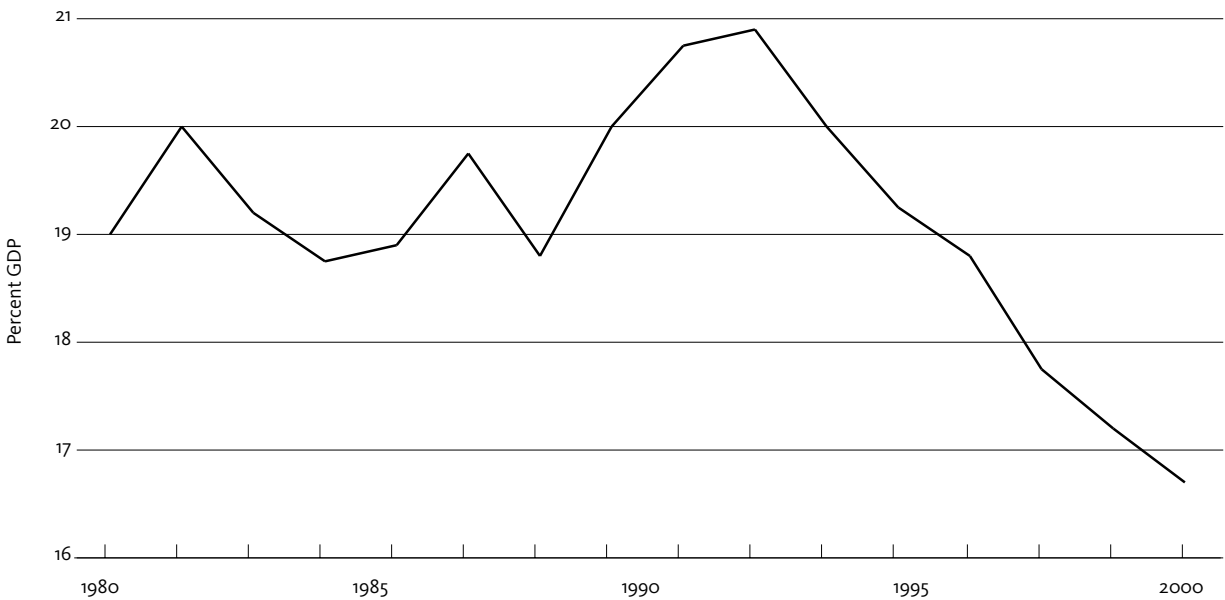
ership of the federal Conservative government in the 1980s, the governments of Canada and Manitoba were focused on retrenchment, deregulation and privatization of public services.

Governments at all levels made severe cuts to health and social services in the name of deficit reduction. This focus on deficit reduction continued with a federal Liberal government, elected with a majority in 1993. Finance Minister Paul Martin, as depicted in the above political cartoon featured in the Winnipeg Free Press is 1995, continues to be known for 1995 “deficit busting budget” that led to major cuts to transfers and programs. Government debts and deficits were indeed rising in the 1990s although ar-

guably a problem of the government of Canada’s own making through restrictive monetary policy and contradictory fiscal policy (Stanford 1999). The neoliberal solution was to cut spending, and Manitoba’s Conservative government followed suite by drastically reducing program spending between 1992 and 2000 (Figure 2).

Provincial cuts and sweeping federal policy changes made life difficult for many in the 1990s, but in particularly for individuals and families living in poverty. The inner city was hit particularly hard. Many community-led initiatives became easy targets and much of the progress made prior to this time was setback as a result. For example, in 1992 a provincial Conservative

FIGURE 2 Program Spending as percent GDP Manitoba



SOURCE: Investing in People: The 1999/2000 Budget of CHO!CE. CHO!CES Coalition for Social Justice and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

government eliminated funding to several community-based organizations in Winnipeg’s inner city. The social justice coalition, CHO!CES, highlighted these and other cuts to non-government organizations in the publication titled *The Real Deficit* (1993) while also featuring stories of inner-city residents who were negatively affected. Similar to the current actions taken by the federal Harper government, the Filmon government cut funding to organizations advocating for the most marginalized, including the Manitoba Anti-Poverty Organization, Aboriginal and Métis Friendships Centres across Manitoba, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. The Manitoba government also cut important social services and supports. For example, childcare subsidies for low-income families were reduced, financial supports to assist low-income, multi-barriered individuals return to school were eliminated, and social assistance benefits were reduced. As described by one inner city resident, who felt she had no choice but to pull her four children from childcare as a result of program cuts, “ I know

daycare was a safe place for them.... [now] I just don’t have the money.” Another individual spoke of the effect program cuts had on her attempts to return to school: “I grew up on the streets. I stole for food. I know how my children’s lives will turn out if we don’t get an education and jobs.... they have to open their eyes and see what they’re doing is wrong.” (CHO!CES 1993).

Many community-based organizations continued to survive throughout the 1990s but their ability to do creative and innovative work was greatly reduced as program funding disappeared. As described by one long-time inner city CBO Executive Director, “we were in maintenance mode... just barely surviving and doing what we could to help inner-city residents with very limited resources.” (personal communication, November 2014)

Community-based organizations persevered and residents began to mobilize in an effort to stem the deterioration they were seeing in their neighbourhoods. They looked to neighbourhood revitalization strategies in other jurisdictions and new organizations began to emerge.

Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations – A New Era for Community Development Practice

As noted, disinvestment in the 1990s led to serious inner-city decline in the 1990s. Winnipeg's North End became known across Canada as the Arson Capital of Canada (CBC, 1999). Winnipeg's reputation for violent crimes grew, neighbourhoods began to deteriorate and public and private housing stock was left to decline. Community residents began to mobilize in response. The West Broadway Development Corporation (now West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO)) was established in 1997 with the aim to revitalize a struggling neighbourhood. The Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) was established in 1997 by volunteers seeking to improve conditions in that neighbourhood. In response to troubling trends and inspired by community development corporations in other jurisdictions, The North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC) was established in 1998 to promote social, economic and cultural renewal in the North End.

But these organizations struggled to survive in their early years, with few resources. Soon after being elected in 1999, the provincial NDP government set its sights on supporting community renewal efforts. In 2000 the Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!) Initiative was introduced. Initially NA! was limited to a project fund that community organizations could apply for to assist them with their community development work. While grateful to have this dedicated source of funds, NRCs called upon the government to do more. They proposed that NA! be expanded to emulate a similar program established in Saskatchewan which provided neighbourhood-based organizations in Regina and Saskatoon with multi-year core support to fulfill their neighbourhood renewal mandates. To its credit, Manitoba responded accordingly, establishing the Neighbourhood Development Assistance (NDA) Fund, a multi-year funding stream for Neighbourhood Renewal

Corporations (NRCs) in designated neighbourhoods and communities across Manitoba. The NDA initially supported the West Broadway Development Corporation, Spence Neighbourhood Association and the North End Renewal Corporation in Winnipeg as well as the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation and the Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation. It has since expanded to include the Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation, The Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation, and Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation in Winnipeg as well as Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations in Portage la Prairie, Flin Flon, Dauphin, The Pas and Selkirk. In addition to the NDA, NA! provides project funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Community Initiatives Fund, and in more recent years has expanded support for smaller localities outside of the inner city, through the Localized Improvement Fund for Tomorrow (LIFT).

Although far from perfect, NA! and government investment in general has made a significant difference in Winnipeg's inner city. By the mid-2000s we were beginning to see these benefits and felt that documenting this progress, while also identifying continued gaps, was essential to the development process taking place. With this in mind, the State of the Inner City Report project began.

The State of the Inner City Report:

Research and Action Toward Social Justice

From the onset, the State of the Inner City Report has been a project driven by the same values that guide community development work in Winnipeg's inner city, aiming to contribute to the capacity building efforts that our community-based partners are engaged in. For this reason, *how* we do our research is as critical as what we do. It is our view that documenting the inner-city journey is best told through the voices of

those who live and work in the neighbourhoods, and that policy prescriptions should be rooted in their experiences.

Although our research is directed by our community partners, the process that we follow is no less rigorous than other research. We obtain ethics approval for our research through the University of Winnipeg Senate Ethics Committee, and various drafts are reviewed and modified prior to publication. A common theme through all State of the Inner City Reports is that they identify community strengths while acknowledging continued challenges and proposing ways in which public policies and programs might better respond.

Through an annual process that can involve a series of meetings, participants define a topic or theme that will shape the direction of research for that year. The sense of ownership is established at this stage of the process because community rather than researchers determine the focus.

Beyond specific research objectives, the SIC has always been viewed as a capacity building project. University students and community residents are often involved as research assistants supervised by experienced university and community researchers. Inner-city residents are often trained and employed to conduct interviews, and assist with transcription. Some community partners take a more active role in developing research tools and participating in research design and implementation while others choose to take a less active role. Community partners are viewed as “the experts” in that they are working on the frontlines and know the issues and obstacles best. We encourage them to identify ways that governments and other funders can better respond to their needs and objectives. All partners are given the opportunity to review draft reports and provide input into final publications.

As further described in the following pages, some of the most important outcomes of the project have been the intangible contributions to the lives of participants and to the advocacy

efforts community-based organizations (CBOs) undertake upon completion of the SIC report. The more tangible ‘deliverables’ (as our funders like to call them) have been the publications and tools produced. To date we have produced ten annual State of the Inner City Reports, two videos and several supplementary and summary documents designed to be accessible to community residents and program participants.

Our reports have been broadly disseminated to policy makers, CBOs and the broader community. Our various reports have been downloaded from the CCPA website over 100,000 times. Our videos are available on YouTube, and we regularly use them as education tools in the classroom, at academic conferences, invited lectures, and government professional development events. As noted, an important aspect is that we include in each and every report, public policy recommendations that we believe respond to the social and economic challenges that we explore. This is a central component of our research because it responds to our community partners’ interest in research that will make a difference in the lives of inner-city residents.

The research materials we produce are also used by organizations as education and advocacy tools and as we have found, they sometimes make their way to unexpected places. For example, in the 2006 *State of the Inner City Report* titled “*Inner City Refugee Women*” *Lessons for Public Policy*, we explored the challenges of refugee women, primarily from African countries, struggling to adapt to life in Winnipeg’s inner city. Women shared with us the tension they felt—on one hand grateful for the refuge Canada provides, but on the other hand learning to accept that their new home is not the paradise they dreamed it would be. As described by the women we interviewed, they continue to face many obstacles. When we completed this project the Somali women who guided our project and worked as research assistants, asked us if we could translate the summary document (which

we call ‘research for communities’) into Arabic. We did so, assuming it was for other refugees in our community for whom Arabic was a first language. However, when we presented the translated document to the women, we learned that they had other motives. The women told us that they would send the research summaries to their families in Somalia. They said that this was important to them for two reasons. First, because they were proud of the work they had done and they wanted their families to see it. More surprising to us was the second reason. The women had shared with us how overwhelming was the pressure they felt to send money back home to help support their families remaining in Somalia. They explained to us that their families back home had an impression that life in Canada came with wealth and stability. They tend not to understand that in relative terms, refugees in Canada often struggle financially and are unable to help families they left behind as much as they would like. The guilt that the women felt weighed heavily, and they believed that sharing their research might help their families in Somalia to understand that life in Canada, while better in many ways, is complicated and at times very difficult. They hoped that if their families better understood this, it might relieve some of the pressure and guilt. For researchers involved in this project, this was a pivotal lesson in the value of fully engaging communities in the research process. We would not have thought that what was for us a fairly simple gesture (translating a short document) could have such an important impact for our community partners.

What We’ve Learned

The past 10 years have been extremely gratifying for those involved in this project. We have learned a lot, and have developed a particular kind of ‘expertise’ in conducting community-driven research with what we describe as a “critical edge”. But it has also been challenging.

This is largely due to our commitment to a participatory community-based model that sometimes results in the participation of local residents with complicated lives. While some of our community researchers move smoothly through projects, embracing newfound skills and developing confidence along the way, others involved have needed more support and encouragement, and this can be time consuming. In some cases, unforeseen circumstances have led community researchers to “drop out” and we have found ourselves at times scrambling midway through projects to fill in the gaps. While we acknowledge our model is by no means perfect, we feel that the challenges and tradeoffs that are inevitable in projects such as this are overshadowed by the benefits to individuals, organizations and communities. Our partners do too. After completing the fifth *State of the Inner City Report* we suggested ending the project. Our community partners insisted that we continue. Many have told us that it is the first time that they have felt research to be of direct value to them, and they continue to believe the exercise is worth doing.

Having now completed ten *State of the Inner City Reports*, we find it useful to reflect back on how the project began; why it is widely embraced in our community; some of the impact it has had; and why we believe that the project is important to keep alive.

Building Capacity Through the State of the Inner City Report: The “How” and the “Who”

The success of the *State of the Inner City Report* project can be attributed to the community-based participatory framework that we use. This model is particularly appealing as it is both consistent with the CCPA Manitoba’s social justice mandate, and the transformative community development principles that guide our community-based partners. Fundamental to our model is that we study issues identified by the community. While there are many examples of partici-

patory research that is community “based,” our model is better described as community “driven.” Our aim is less about producing research for academic publication, although we do this too, than it is about producing research that can be widely disseminated and in accessible forms that the community can use. While the level of participation in the research process may vary from project to project, we aim as much as possible to have a high level of community participation throughout the research process.

The project was developed in the spirit of a full participation community-led and community-based research paradigm and it is highly dependent upon the well-established trusting relationships that have been nurtured over a long period. It is notable that the majority of participants have been women, and Aboriginal women in particular have played a leadership role.

The Aboriginal context

Given the high concentration of Aboriginal residents in the inner city, the organizations that they represent provide services primarily, although not exclusively, to this population. Some have built their programming around 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 fundamental to their transformative goals.

The demographics of Winnipeg’s inner city led us to agree very early in the research process that a framework from which to proceed would need to recognize the historical context of the Aboriginal experience. Many of our community partners know all too well that healing from the damage caused by colonization and oppression is slow and painful work. Further, oppression through racism, sexism and classism continues to be systemic, therefore healing occurs within a context of recurring injury. As a result, our research is grounded in an understanding

of systemic forces. As described by Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhawai Smith, governments and social agencies have failed to relate indigenous problems with historical experience, and therefore decolonizing research is essential to the reframing of issues to acknowledge historical contexts (2006, 153).

The impact of colonization in Manitoba has been considerable. Indigenous Manitoba researcher Michael Hart, as cited in Silver (2002, 27) 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.” Reversing the damage of colonization is a critical step toward transformation and it is central to program models of many inner-city CBOs. It is from this philosophical basis that this project has developed and we are careful to ensure that each of our research projects is designed with this in mind. Careful attention is given to all aspects of the research process including identification of projects, research design and data analysis.

Our aim is that the research process remains true to the inclusive, empowering, anti-oppressive and transformative objectives of our partner CBOs. But this is no small feat. Engaging inner-city residents in the research process requires that we understand the controlling relationships imposed by various “systems” that marginalized individuals often experience. Many of our community researchers and those that we interview 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 welfare authorities. These systems have significant power over their daily lives. This has implications for research because establishing trust becomes more complicated, yet essential, if participants are to feel safe enough to fully share their stories and be empowered through the process. We believe that

our community researchers have been extremely important in this regard as they bring shared experience and sensitivity to the interview process.

It has been our experience that conducting research guided by a paradigm that acknowledges the importance of cultural identity and an understanding of the role that colonization and oppression has played in shaping lives, can contribute to consciousness raising, empowerment, renewed cultural identity, individual emancipation and ultimately, transformative change. 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, are important elements of our research design.

Our community-led process is consistent with the anti-oppressive orientation guiding our CBO partners, and in keeping with transformative and participatory research models and decolonizing methodologies. We learned of this importance early on. For example, in our first *State of the Inner City Report* we looked at housing issues in the inner city because the community told us that the lack of affordable and decent housing was a critical issue for families and individuals. And we know that without safe, reliable housing it is near impossible for individuals to move forward. This housing theme has continued to be present in subsequent years and our research is being used by community groups advocating for policy change and has been effective in steering the province toward a renewed investment in social housing. In fact, the provincial government's investment in social housing, especially since 2009, has been exemplary.

Beginning in our second year, our community partners expressed an interest in examining the difficult to measure outcomes for individuals and families participating in community-based programs. This theme emerged as a result of their frustration with the reporting demands of their

fundors. In our third year we worked with our partners to develop a research model to gather information about the experiences of inner-city residents participating in various community-based programs. Their insight was critical to the design that evolved, and the project provided significant insight into the benefits of participation for individuals, their families and the broader community. In our seventh *SIC Report* our community partners took our research to a deeper level, choosing to focus on the ideological model that has resulted in a scaling back of public support and growth in poverty and inequality that deeply affects their communities. The report—*Neoliberalism, What a Difference a Theory Makes*—reflects the politicization of participants as they began to consider the limitations of community development work in the absence of strong state support, in particular the absence of strong federal government support.

In keeping with Smith's decolonizing research framework, which stresses that "intervention is directed at changing institutions which deal with indigenous peoples and not at changing indigenous peoples to fit the structures" (Smith 2006:147), the SIC project aims to be interventionist at the structural level. We are not interested in blaming individuals living in the inner city for their poverty-related problems, but rather in examining the context within which they live, how community development activities contribute to their lives, how state policies have failed them, and where those policies might be changed to address the issues that emerge through the research that we conduct together.

Research Methods Emerge Through Participation

In keeping with community-based participatory research, we believe that our community research partners must be involved in the decision to select the methods that fit best with their research objectives. The role of the 'outside researcher' is

to provide information about various methods and tools and to assist community members in the research process. While we use both quantitative and qualitative methods, consideration is always given to choosing methods that allow us to tell the story that needs to be told while also engaging the community in the data gathering process and analysis. We consider this to be important because it provides a capacity building component that can have lasting benefit for the community. While we have found quantitative data to be useful, it is insufficient for this project. As noted by Aboriginal research partners in one SIC research project, it is the stories that have the most meaning (MacKinnon & Stephens, 2007). Quantitative data do not capture the richness of the stories, or the experiences and perceptions of those most affected by policy. Quantitative data also do not capture the impact of structural forces that are at the root of poverty and social exclusion.

It is notable that while government and other funding agencies continue to emphasize the collection of quantitative data demonstrating measurable outcomes, they too know the value of hearing individual stories. In fact it is often the stories rather than the measurable outcomes that are used in funding agency promotional materials and fundraising campaigns.

Moving Beyond the ‘Story’ for Broader Social Impact

Sally Westwood (1991) emphasizes the value of narratives to research that is transformative. She notes that research that is transformative requires that those involved are not simply offered a voice “but a speaking position through the narrative mode” (p.4). Just as research that focuses solely on quantitative methods will miss an important opportunity to provide a potentially empowering experience for interviewees, and the depth of knowledge that transpires through hearing the voices of the ‘researched,’ the potential impact

of the individual ‘story’ will be lost if not told in the context of historical, social, economic and political injustice.

The idea of giving voice to the oppressed as a necessary stage of emancipation and transformation was central to Paulo Freire in his classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 2006). Freire noted that “if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming their world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way in which they achieve significance as human beings” (2006, 88). From an anti-oppressive/decolonization perspective, dialogue is an essential precursor of action and reflection, or “praxis.” Narrative research can provide an opportunity for meaningful dialogue that leads to praxis, especially in the context of community-based participatory research that is aimed at building capacity and moving from research to action. Stories must be situated within the context of broader conditions (poverty, colonization) to draw a connection to structural problems. If we are to move individuals from self-awareness to empowerment, researchers must “redefine informants to be those *with* whom they study, and redefine their own activities far beyond the production of a document describing events experienced, recorded, and analyzed” (Le Compte, 1993, 14). When conducted through a critical framework, such as we do, narrative research can be an appropriate methodology to complement quantitative measures, to ensure that in our efforts to quantify through numbers and statistics, we don’t lose sight of the uniqueness of the individual experiences behind the numbers, and to ensure also that we don’t lose sight of the historical, social and political factors that have contributed to each individual’s experience.

The Benefits: Individual, Community and Policy Outcomes

As outlined earlier, the overarching benefits of the State of the Inner City Report project are

quite broad. A central purpose is to document the journey taking place in Winnipeg's inner city at a time when there is relatively significant political support (provincially) for community-based initiatives. Community-based organizations currently receiving state support are vulnerable, and this has become increasingly apparent with serious federal cuts in recent years. Research that demonstrates the effectiveness of community development work will provide organizations with important evidence to justify continued state commitment to their work. This will become increasingly important should a Conservative government be elected in Manitoba, as the current NDP government, in addition to their own continued commitment, has filled many of the funding gaps left by the federal Conservatives. For example, in the absence of federal and municipal interest in renewed inner-city focused tripartite agreement, the Provincial NDP has taken the lead in a scaled down partnership in the form of the Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy (WRS). The WRS is a provincial strategy in response to the lack of a tripartite agreement. Although the federal and municipal government have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and have come to the table with some in-kind contributions, poverty related projects funded through the WRS are almost entirely provincially funded with the exception of some municipal contributions through Tax Increment Financing (TIF) toward affordable housing units downtown.

State of the Inner City research is also beneficial to community organizations that become consumed by their own mandates, and as a result drift away from collective efforts. This project brings them together to share their experiences, successes and challenges. For example, dialogue with community organizations led to a housing focus in several *State of the Inner City Reports*, including the 2008 *Putting our Housing in Order*. This research continues to be used by community groups advocating for policy change and renewed investment in social housing. Partici-

pants are beginning to see a shift in policy focus as demonstrated in recent provincial government investment in repair of existing social housing after several years of neglect. The province has also responded, for the first time in more than twenty years, to calls for the development of new social housing units.

In 2009 our report was titled *It Takes All Day to Be Poor*, a term coined by a community partner to describe the complexity of life for people living in poverty. In this project we used a variety of methodologies to illustrate the complex lives that many people living in poverty endure. In 2010 our report titled *We're in it for the Long Haul* included the story of Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT), describing the collaborative model the eight member organizations use to serve youth and families. As noted, in 2011 our community partners asked us to examine the political and economic context within which they are providing services. They observed that in spite of all of their efforts, poverty seems to be getting worse. They wanted to know why.

We returned to our focus on program evaluation in the paper titled "*Who's Accountable to the Community*", featured in the eighth *State of the Inner City Report* published in 2012. This project evolved through discussions with several community organization's Executive Directors who described their frustrations with the expectations of government and other funding agencies, and the unacknowledged power imbalance that results in the absence of reciprocal accountability. We have currently taken this research further, working with community organizations to develop guiding principles for evaluation that community organizations can use collectively and independently to ensure that government and funding agencies evaluation expectations align with community priorities.

The above provides some examples of how community organizations are using this research project to help them in their work. There is also

evidence of how the SIC has benefited many individuals who participate as community researchers as well as those who share their stories with us as participants in interviews, focus groups, sharing circles, and other projects. Our commitment to hire and train community members as research associates has proved beneficial for individuals. For example, one community researcher, a refugee from Somali, later enrolled in the University of Manitoba Bachelor of Social Work program and has since graduated. Another was hired as a community helper at an inner-city agency after having completed her work with us, which was also her first paid work experience. University students who have worked with us have gone on to further their education as Masters and PhD students, and others have gone on to work in CBOs. While we provide community researchers guidance, we also allow them freedom to be creative. For example, Jil Brody, a social work student and the principal researcher in the 2009 Report titled *It Takes All Day to Be Poor*, was given freedom to take a general idea discussed at a community meeting (to explore journaling as a method to capture the day-to-day experiences of people living in poverty) and developed an innovative project that provides valuable insight into the complexity of poverty.

Others have benefitted in ways far more profound than we would have imagined. For example, in the report titled *“Is Participation Having an Impact?”* an inner-city resident who we hired and trained as a research assistant said this about her experience: “Participating in this project gave me my voice back.”

As noted, community-based organizations benefit from the project in several ways. In sum, it provides an opportunity to come together to identify issues of shared concern, investigate the issues, identify policy solutions, and use the tools that are produced to advocate for improved policies and programs.

Broadening involvement of the community in the research process, building egalitarian re-

lationships with participants through ongoing collaboration, training and hiring community researchers, sharing findings in various forms, and requesting feedback from research participants, have made this project an important part of the development process that continues to evolve in Winnipeg’s inner city. CBOs are on the frontline and they know best what the issues are.

Year Ten and Still Going Strong

In 2012 we completed our eighth report called *Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges*. Our partners identified two priorities. As described earlier, they wanted to talk about the current process of accountability between CBOs and funding agencies, especially governments. Their aim is to improve current practice in such a way that governments are accountable back to communities in addition to CBOs being accountable to governments. The second focus they asked for was to look at ways to build relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and inner city and non-inner city youth. This they believe is the hope for our future. We moved forward with this idea by bringing thirty youth from various backgrounds together with Aboriginal elders, to learn about each other and dispel some lingering myths as a first step to healing our city which remains very much divided racially and geographically. As requested by our community partners, we produced a film in addition to a report. The film is currently being used to advocate for the development of an ongoing project emulating the 2012 experience with youth and elders. In 2013, the *State of the Inner City Report* again picked up on the theme of engaging youth, integrating a photo-voice project.

In addition to this chapter reflecting on the history and purpose of the SIC, community partners identified child welfare as a priority for the 2014 report, which is the focus of the paper titled *It Takes a Community to Support a Family*.

The SIC – A Celebration of Inner-City Work
The final and equally important purpose of the SIC has been to celebrate the work of inner-city CBOs. Since our project began in 2005, we have held an annual celebration at the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, a sacred Aboriginal meeting place in the centre of the city. We profile our work and tell our stories; we share food, hugs, laughter and tears. And we leave knowing that in a few months we will get together again to begin the process for the next year. But while the release of the report is the impetus for our

gathering each December, it is the shared love of our community, our pride in the work that we do and our appreciation for the tireless, dedicated people who do it that is what we are gathered to celebrate. For those of us who are primarily researchers, great satisfaction comes from knowing that our research is useful to the community. In the words of a long-time, community leader who previously dismissed research because, she said “we have been researched to death,” the State of the Inner City Report project is important because it produces “research that belongs to us.”

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