



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

December 7, 2012

Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges

The 2012 *State of the Inner City Report* is titled *Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges*. We called it this because we believe it captures the essence of the two distinct projects included this year. The first chapter, *Who's Accountable to the Community?*, speaks to concerns raised by our community partners that the current approach taken by governments and other funders often disregards what is most important—whether or not those in receipt of services feel that they are getting the supports that they need.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a forum for the Executive Directors of community-based organizations (CBOs) who believe that governments and other funding agencies should be more accountable to the community being served just as CBOs must be accountable to funders. This 'two way street' is not always easy to achieve, but is necessary if we are to move forward in a manner that best benefits those we aim to serve.

Breaking barriers and building bridges is also the dominant theme in our second chapter, *Fixing our Divided City*. Like most cities, Winnipeg is divided in many different ways. The racialized, spatialized poverty that is a growing reality in Winnipeg's inner-city has led to a divide that is particularly worrisome.

In one form or other CCPA Manitoba has examined the social and economic divide in our city through eight annual *State of the Inner City Reports*. We have learned much about the damaging effects of colonization, racism, concentrated poverty, low educational attainment, street gang involvement and the causes and complexity of the glaring and persistent concentrated disadvantage in our city. These problems won't be easily solved, and less so as long as we are divided and blaming individuals for their troubles.

We also know that the divide is not always intentional. It is sometimes simply the result of our not knowing and understanding each other very well. This is something that we can change through dialogue across neighbourhoods and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

It also occurs to us that more can be done to increase dialogue across generations. There are a growing number of young people showing concern about social and economic injustice and in many ways we have neglected to fully tap into their optimism and hope. We also have a breadth and depth of knowledge and wisdom available to us through our Elders. We believe there is

there is an alternative.

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much to be gained from bringing these groups together, so we developed a plan, which we then put into action and report on in this year's *State of the Inner City Report*.

In a series of workshops and interviews we spoke to Aboriginal youth from the CEDA Pathways to Education program, Collège Béliveau and Grant Park High School. We talked with them about their perceptions of the inner city, poverty and racism in our city. We talked about their hopes for the future and how to make the world a better place. We also filmed interviews with five Aboriginal Elders who shared their experiences growing up as Aboriginal youth and the lessons they wished to share with young people.

We then brought these thirty youth, their teachers and mentors, and four Elders together to give them an opportunity to learn more about each other. We spent a Saturday together at Circle of Life Thunderbird House. The Elders shared teachings with the youth and the group was invited to share their thoughts and ideas with each other in a traditional sharing circle format. It was a powerful day. One Elder later described the event as "very much needed for us to learn about each other...I can't believe we didn't think to do this before".

One non-Aboriginal youth expressed concern with "the amount of racism, the oppression, the discrimination that Aboriginals and other people of different cultures deal with in our society."

One non-Aboriginal youth said the day was important because "if we don't share our stories we won't be able to

learn from others mistakes or our own mistakes." Another youth said "it was an amazing experience".

One Elder said "the youth have a voice and they're using it positively... they are being very proactive in their approach against racism." Another said that she was very impressed with the youth participants and "I go home hopeful".

It was indeed a hopeful day and we believe it should be the first of many to follow. Circle of Life Thunderbird House is a perfect venue to bring Elders, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together from across the city to dispel some of the myths about the inner city and to learn about Aboriginal culture and history. This can help us begin a much-needed process of healing in our divided city.

This eighth *State of the Inner City Report* adds to the mounting knowledge we now have about what works in the inner city and what doesn't. This year's report also reminds us that we have a lot more to learn from each other, and more work to do as a community to break down the barriers that remain and build bridges that lead to a better city for everyone. Our city may be divided, but it doesn't have to be.

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