



**CCPA**  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA OFFICE

RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • SOLUTIONS

# FAST FACTS

July 8, 2009

## I just want to have a decent home: ‘Joe’s’ Story

**C**anadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-Mb) has written extensively on issues of poverty and homelessness. Unfortunately the problem appears to be getting worse rather than better as vacancy rates in Manitoba cities reach an all-time low. The rate in Brandon is currently at 0.1%, Winnipeg at 0.9% and Thompson at 0.2%.

The demand for rental housing has resulted in rising rents as many landlords renovate their units and in accordance with *The Residential Tenancy Act*, are permitted to increase rents above guidelines. Because the rent allowances provided by social assistance have not kept pace with rent increases, many individuals and families must use their food allowance to cover their rent resulting in a reliance on food banks and soup kitchens.

CCPA regularly comes into contact with people living in poverty whose situations are made worse due to a lack of housing. Some of these individuals contact us wishing to have their stories told. The following is but one story of many.

In late fall of 2008, ‘Joe’, a resident of the West Broadway neighbourhood, received notice that his rent would increase by 60% from \$330.00 to \$550. Joe suffers from bi-polar disorder. He receives a total of \$285.00 shelter allowance from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA)

plus an additional \$35.00 supplement provided to EIA recipients with disabilities. This covered the cost of his rent until the rate increase. Joe felt that the increase was far too high and he exercised his right to appeal. He lost his appeal to the Residential Tenancy Branch. The cost of rent is now far beyond what he is able to afford and he is desperately trying to find somewhere else to live. Joe’s situation is fairly common in his neighbourhood where gentrification has resulted in the displacement of many long-term low-income residents.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, The Manitoba government announced their *HOMEWorks! homeless strategy* that includes plans for “285 more mental –health housing units”. It is not clear when the new units will be built. Hopefully very soon as they are desperately needed. In the meantime, Joe continues to search for somewhere to live.

This is what he told us about living in poverty and not having a home.

*My yearly gross income is \$9,667. After expenses are paid I am left with \$2703. That’s \$225 a month to cover everything including food, bus fare, clothing, toiletries, and laundry. Everything. I have lived in my apartment for 3 years. I feel safe and comfortable there. But the rent increase is forcing me to find somewhere else to live. There is nothing available. I am told we have a 1% vacancy rate.*



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## *FAST FACTS continued ...*

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*Manitoba Housing tells me there is a one-year wait for public housing.*

*When you are poor you have no choices. I hate having no choices and having to be forced to beg on the streets. Having choices gives you self-respect, dignity, self-esteem, self-control and confidence. But this is lost when you are forced to use food banks and line up at a soup kitchen every day—to be forced to eat what is served without any choices of what you would want to eat and when and where-- in the company of strangers or the privacy of your own home. Because of my mental illness, I find eating in a room of strangers creates anxiety I do not need. It makes me anxious to be in a room of absolute strangers; surrounded by religious quotes on walls and religious hymns that I don't care to know in exchange for a meal that is not of my taste and liking. I don't think that I should be subjected to other people's beliefs because I am in want of a meal. But every cent I get from Employment and Income Assistance goes to pay my rent. There is nothing left. I have no choice.*

*I understand that people give money to food banks and soup kitchens because they want to help. But to really help would be to ensure that I have income sufficient to give me a choice of where to live and a choice of what to eat.*

*Living in poverty is to live in fear and in uncertain circumstances all your live-long days. I hate poverty.... I hate it. I hate it when I have to worry about where my next meal is going to come from and not being able to sleep because I dread the dawn of a new day---nothing changes.*

*I hate it when people stereo type me then want to change who I am and force me into a mould I cannot fit into rather than accept me and let me be.*

*I hate it when my family and friends ignore me and treat me like I don't belong in the world because I have a mental illness and am on social assistance.*

*I hate it when my dignity is undermined and my self-respect swallowed in exchange for a meal somewhere I don't want to be. I hate it when I see others suffering-- tired, worn and in pain--cheated of their basic rights to food and shelter. 'They' expect people to live were they would not live – an unsafe insecure rooming house or on the street. They expect you to spend all your energy in a transient gloom—moving from soup line to shelter and back again.*

*But it really isn't hate that I feel. I am hurt. Very deeply hurt. That people like me, people who are poor, are ill treated - verbally and physically and mentally mistreated and forced to live in such terrible conditions because people do not see us as deserving of more.*

*I just want to have a decent home. I just want to be able to buy my own food, eat what I want when I am hungry.*

Joe shared this story with Shauna MacKinnon, CCPA Manitoba. Joe has lived most of his life in Winnipeg. He currently lives in the West Broadway neighbourhood.



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