



# FASTFACTS



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## Winnipeg's Inner City: Invest in Prevention, Not Detention

The public outcry and media coverage following the tragic shooting of Philippe Haiart has resulted in Winnipeg inner city issues being framed in a way that is less than useful. We should be looking at these issues quite differently.

The better lens through which to interpret Mr. Haiart's death focuses our attention on the many positive, community-based solutions that have been and are being developed in Winnipeg's inner city. If supported consistently over time, these offer the best hope for the future.

Yes, there are problems in the inner city, and they are serious—gangs, drugs and violence being the most obvious. But the inner city is not just problem-laden; it is also, and importantly, hope-filled.

For the past quarter century specially-designed tripartite investment programs—the Core Area Initiatives I and II, the Winnipeg Development Agreement, and now the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement—have, their various faults notwithstanding, led to considerable public investment in Winnipeg's inner city. This investment has funded a great deal of creativity and innovation, leading to the development of very large numbers of community-based organizations that are now highly effective, and to the emergence of a stratum of exceptionally talented inner city com-

munity development practitioners. These people, and the community based organizations they have built, are changing Winnipeg's inner city for the better.

In the Aboriginal community, for example, a highly effective and uniquely Aboriginal form of community development has emerged through the efforts of exceptionally skilled Aboriginal practitioners who have built and are working with such community based organizations as the Urban Circle Training Centre, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, and the Native Women's Transition Centre, to name just a few. Rooted in the understanding that colonization has caused enormous damage to many Aboriginal people, these organizations approach their work in a holistic way, attending simultaneously to the need to heal individuals, to create healthy communities, and to build an organizational infrastructure run by and for Aboriginal people.

In the past eight years or so inner city community development work has been stepped up a notch with the creation in a number of neighbourhoods of community development corporations (CDCs), which take a more comprehensive approach to neighbourhood revitalization and which engage inner city residents in working to build their own home-grown solutions to problems. The work of these CDCs has been significantly advanced by



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the core funding provided to them by the provincial government's Neighbourhoods Alive! program, and by some funding agencies, most notably United Way of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Foundation. The funding is not enough, but core funding has helped. The result is that housing is being renovated, community gardens are being created, youth programs are being established, and in a number of neighbourhoods— Spence and West Broadway are examples— a turnaround is under way. Large numbers of residents feel that life in these neighbourhoods is better now than it was five years ago. A new sense of hope is emerging.

In the North End a group of gang members approached the North End Housing Project saying that some of their members were being released from prison and others wanted off the streets, but nobody would hire them. 'Can you help to get us jobs', they said. The result is a small program, that has gang members working with two Aboriginal carpenters and an Aboriginal supervisor. The young men renovate dilapidated housing, while learning various life skills and being introduced to and practicing their culture. The program is working. There has been no recidivism. Person by person, house by house, hope for a better future is being built.

Many of the people who are angered by Philippe Haiart's death want immediate solutions. There are no immediate solutions. The misplaced search for the quick fix almost invariably leads to the call to hunt down the bad guys and throw them in jail.

But this solves no problems. The jails are already crammed with gang members, and the problems persist. There is no quick fix.

There *are* solutions, however. The solutions are being implemented daily by the highly skilled community practitioners and the innovative programs and organizations that have emerged in the past quarter century in our inner city. It is, in many respects, an exciting and positive place, filled with creativity and innovation and patient, hard-earned gains.

This is the better frame through which to view the inner city. It is better because it enables us to see more clearly *all* that is going on— the good as well as the bad— and to see that there is hope, if only we will choose to build on all that has been learned.

What the rest of us need to do is to support these remarkable inner city initiatives and people. The best way to do this is to *demand*— with all the fury and determination expressed by so many Winnipeggers angered this past week by a young man's tragic death— that our governments invest in those home-grown, community based solutions that have a proven track record of success.

Yes, there is despair in the inner city. Lots of it. But there is hope too. We should be building on that hope, not fuelling the despair.

- Shauna MacKinnon and Jim Silver

*Shauna MacKinnon is the Director, and Jim Silver a Board member, of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba. They are among the authors of The Promise of Community - Led Renewal, State of the Inner City Report 2005. The report will be released to the public on Monday November 14th at 10:00 A.M. at Dufferin School, 545 Alexander.*

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