



**Centre of Excellence for  
Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities  
Winnipeg Site**

**VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY:**

**Winnipeg Site Report of Key Informant Interviews  
& Community Focus Groups**

PHASE ONE, PART B

**Institute of Urban Studies  
University of Winnipeg**

**October, 2002**



**Mission of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities:**

A Prairie Centre which makes existing knowledge accessible, creates new knowledge, and uses both to influence policy and practice and to promote communities' capacity to support children and youth, with an emphasis on Aboriginal communities.

**The Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth-Centred Prairie Communities is one of five Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-being funded by Health Canada  
Le Centre d' excellence pour les collectivités Centrees sur les enfants et les jeunes des Prairies est l'un des cinq Centres d' excellence pour le bien - etre des enfants finance par Sante Canada.**

**The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of Health Canada. Les vues exprimees ici ne representent pas necessairement la position officielle de Sante Canada.**

## **About the Winnipeg Site:**

The Winnipeg Site of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities conducts research about the issues and challenges facing children and youth in Winnipeg, with the hope that, by engaging young people and their families, we can discover the ways that families, communities, service providers and governments can address these challenges.

Ultimately, we hope that our work can contribute to a "child and youth friendly Winnipeg."

**<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~ius/coe/>**

**The Winnipeg Site** is supported by a Network of individuals representing the following organizations:

1. Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg Inc.
2. Addictions Foundation of Manitoba
3. Adult Literacy - Community Learning & Youth
4. Association for Community Living MB
5. Bookmates Family Literacy Centre
6. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies
7. Career Trek
8. Centre de Sante St. Boniface
9. Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development
10. Child and Family Services
11. Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
12. Child Day Care
13. Child Development Clinic
14. Child Find Manitoba
15. Child Guidance Clinic
16. Child Protection Centre
17. ChildCare Coalition of Manitoba;

18. Children's Special Services
19. City of Winnipeg Community Services (Preschool)
20. City of Winnipeg Community Services Department
21. City of Winnipeg, Community Development
22. City of Winnipeg, Recreation Services
23. Coalition of Community-Based Youth Serving Agencies
24. Community & Youth Solutions
25. Department of Education, U of W
26. Department of Family Studies - U of M
27. Department of Sociology, U of M
28. Developmental Studies, Dept of Education, Uof W
29. Elmwood Community Resource Centre
30. Faculty of Nursing, University of Manitoba
31. Faculty of Social Work - University of Manitoba
32. Family Life and Education Centre of Winnipeg
33. Federation provinciale des comites de parents
34. Green Commuting Initiatives, Resource Conservation Manitoba
35. Healthy Start For Mom & Me
36. Institute of Urban Studies
37. KLINIC
38. Knowles Centre Inc.
39. Lighthouses - Manitoba Justice
40. Literacy Partners of Manitoba
41. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
42. Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre
43. Manitoba Association for Multi-Cultural Education
44. Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres
45. Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
46. Manitoba Association of School Trustees
47. Manitoba Centre for Health Policy & Evaluation
48. Manitoba Child Care Association
49. Manitoba Health
50. Manitoba Health - Aboriginal Health Unit
51. Manitoba Indian Education Association
52. Manitoba Teachers' Society
53. Manitoba Women's Advisory Council
54. Manitoba Women's Directorate
55. Maples Youth Activity Centre
56. MB Government and General Employees' Union
57. Mother of Red Nations
58. National Council of Women of Canada: Standing Committee for Child and Family
59. Needs Inc -Centre for War Affected Families
60. Neighbourhood Network: RiverEast,
61. Neighbourhood Network Transcona
62. Neighbourhood Network: Seven Oaks
63. New Directions for Children, Youth, Individuals and Families
64. North End Community Ministry
65. Office of the Children's Advocate
66. Powerhouse Winnipeg Inc.
67. Private Pediatric Practice, Winnipeg Clinic
68. Red Cross
69. Red River College, Dept. of
70. River East School Division
71. Rossbrook House
72. Safe Schools Manitoba
73. Salvation Army
74. Seven Oaks Neighbourhood Network
75. Seven Oaks School Division
76. Sexuality Education and Resource Centre
77. Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
78. Societe franco-manitobaine
79. South Winnipeg Family Information Centre
80. St. Boniface General Hospital
81. St. Matthew's -Maryland Community Ministry
82. Stars of Promise Inc.
83. Teachable Moments
84. Teen Touch Inc.
85. Understanding the Early Years
86. United Way of Winnipeg
87. Victorian Order of Nurses (VON)
88. Villa Rosa
89. Western Economic Diversification - Urban Aboriginal Strategy
90. Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs
91. Winnipeg Child & Family Services
92. Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
93. Winnipeg School Division #1
94. Wolseley Family Place
95. Youville Centre
96. Youville Centre - Nobody's Perfect

## **Institute of Urban Studies** *Dr. Tom Carter, Director*

The Winnipeg Site of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities is located in and supported by the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Founded by the University in 1969, IUS was created at a time when the city's "urban university" recognized a need to address the problems and concerns of the inner city. From the outset, IUS has been both an educational and an applied research centre. The Institute has remained committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan context and has never lost sight of the demands of applied research aimed at practical, often novel, solutions to urban problems. IUS has continually refocused its research objectives and broadened its mandate to incorporate issues within a prairie and national urban context, including inner city, environmental urban sustainability, Aboriginal and northern concerns, and community development issues. In addition, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, maintains a library and publications series, and serves as a resource centre for clients and the broader community.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Each day in the city of Winnipeg, communities strive to positively impact the health, development and well-being of our children and youth. The Winnipeg Site of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities has embarked on research (literature review and participatory research) designed to examine the issues or themes impacting children and youth, as well as the role of community programs and services as mediating influences in these issues. Key Informant Interviews and Community Focus Groups were held to gather accurate information, and the analysis of this research reinforces the findings captured during our earlier Literature Review (Phase One, Part A). This report is a synopsis of the issues and risk factors facing Winnipeg's children and youth; community perceptions regarding opportunities, barriers and gaps in services that are present locally; as well as a discussion of "promising practices" for the design and delivery of effective programming.

The issues facing our children and youth are complex, multifaceted and demand an examination of such core societal problems as poverty and systemic discrimination. Although programs and services are necessary measures, they primarily deal only with the visible symptoms of these root societal issues. Efforts to identify and eliminate the root causes of these problems would be preferable, but until then communities strive to respond in a comprehensive, holistic and creative way that fosters the development of skills, leadership, potential, and resiliency in children and youth. Throughout the city, agencies diligently work to improve the health, education, social, recreation, cultural and employment supports available to children, youth and families. They strive to create accepting and safe environments where children can experience new opportunities, are guided by positive role models, develop a protective support network and can be seen (to themselves and others) as valuable citizens in our community. It is recognized that children do not live in isolation and cannot be truly supported without nurturing all aspects of their development. Agencies have discovered that to be truly successful, they must be community based, fully accessible, responsive to changing needs, and able to provide services and programs that are culturally relevant and meaningful.

Issues such as poverty, inadequate housing, violence, racism and limited opportunities for growth are complex and cannot be solved by any sector of society working in isolation. In an effort to strengthen their impact and their leadership in the community, organizations work diligently to foster productive partnerships in advocating for change. The need for collaboration, innovation, responsiveness and sustainability by community and sectoral groups remains paramount. Through the gathering of accurate information and the adoption of "promising practices" for effective programming, improvements are being made in the daily lives of our children and youth. However, it is recognized that true success cannot be achieved until the basic needs of all of Winnipeg's children have been met; they are safe and well protected; receive an abundance of opportunities and learning experiences, and are embraced by the rest of their community as the most valuable component of our future. It is acknowledged that only healthy communities can create healthy children and youth.

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Key Informant Interviews– Winnipeg Site

Interview Guides for Key Informant Interviews and Community Focus Groups

## **1. Introduction and Methodology**

In support of Phase One, Part B of the research agenda for the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities, the Winnipeg Site at the Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg completed key informant interviews with 22 community agencies and 5 community focus groups, three of which were with youth participants. Two previous reports were created as this participatory research was completed. This final report, which incorporates the findings of all key informant interviews and focus groups, is seen as a compendium of

- issues/risk factors affecting children and youth in Winnipeg;
- community efforts in providing a mediating influence; and
- “promising practices” in the provision of child and youth programming.

**1.1 Questionnaire Design & Ethics Approval:** In developing an appropriate questionnaire, the Winnipeg Site’s first step was to obtain standard interview questions compiled by the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities. With input from the Winnipeg Site steering committee and staff of the Winnipeg Site, these questions were revised and supplemented where appropriate to ensure that the unique characteristics of Winnipeg would be examined. To facilitate this, questions were added to examine how the built and natural environments, as well as how the Aboriginal and Immigrant/Refugee Communities, have played a role in improving children and youth’s well-being.

This interview guide was used for the individual key informant interviews, and then revised slightly to accommodate the focus group structure (See Appendix 1 for the complete list of the interview questions). Once the interview questions were finalized, approval for the use of this research instrument was secured from the Ethics Committee of the University of Winnipeg.

An examination of the research question guide in Appendix 1 reveals that the interview guide is formatted with the questions moving from the general (definition of community and its role in supporting children and youth) to the specific (program effectiveness throughout the city, as well as child and youth involvement in their own agencies). This proved to be particularly effective when talking to key community informants about the range, success and challenges of child and youth programming in Winnipeg.

**1.2 Informant Characteristics & Research Format:** The process of selecting key informants began with the Community Research Coordinator requesting input from the members of the Winnipeg Centre of Excellence Community Network. This Network comprises approximately 140 members who are researchers, educators, parents, and individuals plus representatives of 85 child, youth and/or family-serving agencies throughout Winnipeg. These members represent a broad spectrum of community organizations, viewpoints, positions and experiences. Network members were asked to identify individuals who have a strong interest in issues surrounding children and youth

in Winnipeg, and who have experience supporting children and youth in a variety of capacities.

The more than 100 recommendations of potential interviewees included a range of individuals as diverse as the Network itself. At this point the Winnipeg Steering Committee, a subset of the Network, provided guidance in creating a more manageable list of the potential interviewees who would represent a wide range of socio-economic groups, interests, issues, lifestyles, dis/abilities, neighbourhoods, programs, and services.

Altogether, the researcher interviewed 22 key informants including community-based workers, pediatricians, community volunteers and government employees. The organizations represented included a community-level funding agency, youth drop-in centres, youth shelters, a literacy centre, family and community health and resource agencies, immigrant/refugee support agencies, the community services department, the city planning department, child care associations, a support and resource organization for people with disabilities, and provincial child and family services. Each interview was held at the respective host community agency.

Five focus groups were held: one with educators (teachers, school trustees, counsellors and community-based trainers); one with natural supports (parents, guardians, caregivers and those who support children informally in their communities) and three with youth. The youth focus groups included Aboriginals and cultural minorities, plus "mainstream" and "at-risk" youth populations from across the city. Focus group discussions were held in centralized community locations.

Interview guides of probe questions were provided for all interviews and focus group discussions. The interview guides can be found in Appendix 1. All key informant interviews and the majority of focus group discussions were recorded with an audio tape recorder with the permission of informants. A number of participants in one of the youth focus groups requested that the session not be recorded due to a lack of comfort; therefore, the content of the discussion was captured by detailed notes made by the facilitator. During the focus group discussions, the researcher facilitated and recorded discussion points.

**1.3 Data Analysis:** The first step in the qualitative data analysis process involved transcription of the verbal data from the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions, when applicable, in conjunction with review of the written notes taken during the sessions. Once transcriptions were completed, analysis of the data focused on identifying key themes, "promising practices", and community perceptions of successes and challenges. The greatest concern for qualitative analysis is the ability to provide fair, honest and balanced accounts of people's views; therefore, quotes from informant interviews and focus group discussions are utilized throughout this report to ensure a realistic portrayal of perceptions in the community.

This report is a synthesis of the findings and themes discovered during the completion of key informant interviews and focus groups. Qualitative analysis of the interview



responses allows for a comprehensive understanding of the issues and the success of community in providing mediating influences addressing these issues.

Analysis of the interview content focuses on eleven major areas:

- Definition of community and its role in supporting children and youth
- Major themes impacting children and youth in Winnipeg
- Wishes that would make Winnipeg more ‘child and youth friendly’
- Opportunities and barriers currently impacting children and youth in the city
- Aspects of effective child and youth programming – “promising practices” identified
- Gaps in child and youth programming
- Role of Winnipeg’s built & natural environments
- Role of Aboriginal communities in improving the well-being of children and youth
- Role of Immigrant/Refugee communities in improving the well-being of children and youth
- Role of children and youth in community decision making

## **2. Definition of Community & its Role in Supporting Children and Youth**

Although many of the study participants stated that community could be defined in any number of ways, 20 of the 22 informants and four of the five focus groups describe their perception of community as involving supportive relationships and a shared sense of belonging. They perceive these relationships as being based on common values, beliefs, philosophies, sense of purpose and shared experiences. Many stated that people often include boundaries in their definition, but that those boundaries may not always be accurate descriptors – a sense of community can transcend geography, ethnicity and physical proximity.

*“Community means people, not necessarily buildings, who identify a common sense of purpose and rally around causes that satisfy their needs and respond to the welfare of those around them.”*  
~ Informant #11

*“Community means a sense of belonging that can be both internally driven by the individual as well as externally defined.”*  
~ Informant #9

*"People around you who have an impact on you, whether it's your school or your neighbours. Sometimes it's not a physical thing, they don't live next door but they are involved in aspects of your life."*  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

In comparison, focus group discussions with at-risk and street involved youth revealed a view of community that is exclusive and dependent upon certain conditions such as material possessions, mainstream lifestyles and the ability to "fit in". Many of them identified that their view of community has changed dramatically in recent years since they have left home. For many of them, community is viewed as whomever is around them at the time, with no expectations of consistency or support.

When asked if there are aspects of community that are unique to living in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the Prairies, all informants agreed that there are. Responses indicated aspects such as a strong sense of family and community, the multicultural diversity in Winnipeg, the large Aboriginal population, as well as the need to be self-reliant, given the city's isolation from other major centres throughout the country. Many attributed these characteristics to rural-based development, being the center of the country and the middle of the continent, and the often-harsh climate conditions.

All informants indicated that they believe that community plays a major role in supporting children and youth. As stated in the Literature Review completed by the Winnipeg Site in July 2002, 30% of Winnipeg children live in poverty. In this situation, the informants expressed that community's role becomes critical in the provision of supports and opportunities for children and their families. Communities are involved in providing for and helping children, youth and families access such basic requirements as food and shelter. It was also highlighted that community's primary role is to ensure the creation of a safe and accepting environment that provides children, youth and their families the opportunities to grow and develop in all aspects of their lives (emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, spiritually, etc.). It was also stressed that, if the goal is to improve the lives of children and youth, then it is important to not work with children and youth in isolation, but to also include families.

*"When you are dealing with poverty, the community becomes absolutely critical to lend support. It takes more than a little family to help children grow."* ~ Informant #1

*"Community plays a major role - if we believe in a holistic approach to children and youth than communities - all aspects- have to be involved. Communities play a major role is assisting children particularly in the creation of a foundation of beliefs and values..If families do not or can not provide role models for children, or financially can not support children than the broader community certainly comes into play for the social, emotional, intellectual growth."* ~ Informant #22

*"For single parents, it's tough. Stress builds up and then at times, this leads to physical or emotional abuse. Community should provide supports but these can't be text book because people need different supports based on what they need and where they are in life."* ~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)

*"We have a role in everything – access to basic health and education but also their moral development, feeling like they are a part of the community and their safety."* ~ Informant #8

*"The biggest one should be to get rid of poverty, racism and all forms of oppression."* ~ Informant #14

Many interviewees also focused on the importance of giving children and youth the opportunity to openly express their needs and to be involved in the development of initiatives and services designed to support them within their communities.

*"Most important part for the community to understand is that children are human beings with needs and they can express their needs. Children have a voice and no one can express their needs better than them."* ~ Informant #7

*"Ask youth what they need, stop assuming that they know what's best for us."* ~ Focus Group #3 (Youth)

*"Somehow we need to teach adults about youth and how important they are and how to allow them to grow, learn new things and get involved."* ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

### **3. Major Themes or Risk Factors Impacting Children and Youth in Winnipeg**

**3.1 Poverty:** In the discussion of factors impacting children and youth in the city of Winnipeg, the most prevalent theme that emerged was poverty. Most of the informants stated that until poverty is eliminated, children and youth would continue to struggle in all aspects of their development. With so many families existing in survival mode and struggling with such issues as inadequate housing and limited access to food, the probability of children growing and thriving is unlikely unless such root societal causes as poverty are acknowledged and eliminated. Two of the youth focus groups also highlighted issues of poverty and lack of access to essential supplies for survival as the key issue placing children and youth at risk in the city.

*"I think that if you are not in the mainstream culture and economy than perhaps it's not a great place to live. There's a role to play in the redistribution of economic resources to ensure that there aren't people out there who don't have enough to get along."* ~ Informant #20

*"We have a responsibility to ensure that kids have the basic needs of life - food, shelter, loving relationships, responsive healthcare, education and safety. We have generations that have been caught in the cycle of poverty, we can't expect children to be healthy when their families and communities are unhealthy and struggling to survive."* ~ Focus Group #2

*"I've worked with children in communities and have seen the poverty. Children not having enough food, enough access - access in a way that they can really think about what they could be. Poverty where they don't have access to good shoes, even if they are considered to be an athlete. ... People have this stereotype. In winter, we have to give them hats and mitts and it's not because the parents are out drinking. If the parents aren't taken care of, the children aren't taken care of. ... In Manitoba, we have 29% of children living in poverty. That means 1 in 4 living in poverty. There's no need for it in our society."* ~ Informant #6

*"With the cold weather coming on, I'm most concerned about not having good boots and not enough supplies to stay warm and safe such as sleeping bags, tents and warm jackets."* ~ Focus Group #3 (Youth)

**3.2 Safety:** Following as a close second to poverty, is the issue of safety for children, youth and communities. Discussions about safety included issues regarding gang violence and gang recruitment, as well as the need for more safe places for children and youth to go after school hours, or when their home environment is negative. Informants that live in suburban areas of the city tended to focus on issues of school violence, whereas informants living in the downtown core focused on community safety issues. All informants and focus groups indicated they felt that children and youth need to be able to feel comfortable in being themselves, meeting with others, and learning new things in a safe and accepting environment that is supported by stable, dedicated staff working to reduce feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

*"Safety remains an issue in this city. There are greater stresses in the downtown and inner city with regards to gangs, but discrimination and racism goes on in all school systems. I would suggest that new immigrants face many problems when they enter the school system...it is hard to get through these barriers of fear and racism so that you can learn something during the day. Safety is a huge issue."* ~ Informant #22

*"Safety is a big one -certainly, school related issues, everything from bullying to violence to weapons at school and playground behaviour."* ~ Informant #16

*"Kids are concerned about safety at night. I don't want to go out. In a safe city, you wouldn't see violence. You wouldn't have your cell phone ready as you ran place to place. You wouldn't have to worry about being out too late or running into the wrong people, by accident."* ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

*"We need more lighting in parks and alleys. I get scared walking there alone at night, what about little kids? We need cameras on the street and in apartment building stairways."* ~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)

### **3.3 Issues of Accessibility<sup>+</sup> to Opportunities and Programming:**

Closely tied to the themes of poverty and safety, is the need for a wide variety of accessible and culturally sensitive children and youth programs that are holistic<sup>++</sup> in nature and are able to respond to the diverse needs of the community. Programs must provide opportunities for children, youth and their families to develop and to enjoy new experiences. The need to deliver free/affordable programs and services locally (given the high costs of transportation), during flexible hours, and with skilled practitioners was also promoted.

Informants also indicated they felt that a large component in the assurance of accessibility would be to increase the awareness of families and youth regarding the

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<sup>+</sup> In this context, "accessible" refers to a) readily reached, entered or used; b) buildings that pose no barriers for entry and use; c) readily available, welcoming and culturally competent; d) based on needs of users with regards to cost, timing, location, content, pace, recruitment practices, etc.

<sup>++</sup> It should be noted that in the majority of cases, participants used this term to refer to the importance of a child or youth being seen "as a whole person" or "as a complete entity". It was felt that many services are currently piece-meal and are not looking at the whole child. This term works on the premise that all aspects of the child's life, including food, shelter, safety, family life, health, recreation, social, education, etc. must be considered and attended to in any effective programming model.

number and range of programs that currently exist. Too many children, youth and families are isolated or are unaware of existing services to be able to benefit from them. The majority of interviewees focused on the need for all children and youth to have equal access to programs and services, regardless of socio-economics, location, ability level, lifestyle decisions or ethnic background. This view was particularly evident among those living in the suburbs who often feel they have access to parks and facilities, but that the infrastructure and the coordination of supervised programs is lacking. Schools were identified as the hub of the community, yet community members can rarely access them after school hours. Childcare access and respite support for children with disabilities were also identified as areas where access is problematic.

*"You want children to have access to opportunities, activities and programs regardless of where they live or how much their family earns so that all children can survive and thrive."*  
~ Informant #15

*"I've seen children who come from wealthy families and they are left alone a lot and have certain needs that aren't being met as well. Across the board there should be programs available to all children. I think it's important for all children to have a place to go. They should feel safe and needed - especially after school programs for those kids that parents aren't around."*  
~ Informant #15

*"A big gap is not only programming of things that parents and kids can do together but accessibility to those programs. Everything from how we recruit people into the programs through to having them at the right times, at the right place with the right facilitators."*  
~ Informant #5

*"For the parents who don't have any money, they are very limited. They can't go to the zoo anymore because you have to pay, not to mention the cost of the bus fare to go there, which if you have a family of five is exorbitant."*  
~ Informant #3

*"There needs to be equal opportunity for all kids - no barriers. Programs should be more open to kids regardless of what they have or where they are from."*  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

**3.4 Racism, Discrimination & Stereotyping - Issue of Inclusion vs. Exclusion:** The vast majority of key informants and all of the focus groups remarked about the devastating impact that racism, discrimination or any form of exclusion has in the lives of children and youth. Informants identified that forms of oppression<sup>+++</sup> can be viewed on an individual and systemic level and that it has permeated every aspect of our society. Participants indicated that they have witnessed discrimination or racism within their communities, from one community aimed at another, within their dealings with public servants while trying to access services, and in the general composition of our institutions (police, city officials, etc.). Informants focused on the exclusion of children who have disabilities or multiple medical needs from community involvement due to a

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<sup>+++</sup> In this context, oppression refers to any situation/barrier that keeps a child from reaching his/her potential. Oppression includes "all the -ism's" (such as racism, classism, sexism) as well as poverty and the prevailing negative misconceptions of children and youth in our culture.

lack of appropriate program planning, infrastructure and appreciation for all children as being a part of our community. It was also emphasized that all children and youth can be subjected to biases based on negative perceptions; financial resources of their families; where they live; or expressions of their individuality.

All three of the youth focus groups identified negative stereotypes of youth as a huge issue negatively impacting them. They highlighted the role of media in establishing expectations for youth regarding what to wear and how to measure your worth, as well as establishing negative attitudes of the role of youth in the community. Such prevalence jeopardizes the development of strong, healthy children and youth who value diversity, opportunity, and inclusion, and who can access the vast array of opportunities for future success and growth. For this reason, the importance of recognizing and confronting racism, discrimination and any form of negative stereotyping remains an essential aspect of improving the futures for all children and youth in Winnipeg.

*"It can be from all over the place, from non-Aboriginals in all different sectors, it can be from within the Aboriginal community. No one has a monopoly on racism – it's infiltrated every culture, every level. It has nothing to do with education – it just becomes more refined, the more educated people become..."* ~ Informant #9

*"Themes related to exclusion and inclusion - having to do with children being bombarded with issues of racism in some communities. I like to use the word "exclusion" because when you use the term racism, people tend to think of non-white communities and I am sure that white children also suffer from racism and exclusive behaviours that come from racism. Accepting differences is very important for children because they mimic what others say and do...but people should know that children are hurt from exclusive and racist practices. All children are hurt and all children would like inclusion..."* ~ Informant #19

*"There is also a tremendous amount of discrimination regarding the poor by the corporate sector and what gets across in the media."* ~ Informant #17

*"I still cringe when I hear, rather than talk about inclusion, we talk about tolerance!"* ~ Informant #17

*"Aboriginal children with multiple medical problems- medically dependent Aboriginal children- and their families get lost in the shuffle because of the federal-provincial battle over its responsibilities. As a result, kids stay in hospital care long term because no one will take responsibility for providing services that they need in the community...there can be nothing worse for a kid than spending your life in hospital and often separated from your family."* ~ Informant #20

*"The media tells us that you have to look a certain way, act a certain way. Kids are expected to look older and that brings new expectations on them...Pressure to be older increases pressure to try drugs and have sex younger and younger...When kids do something bad it's like 'Yeah, alright they've done something wrong!' but when they do something good you never hear about it. It downplays kids."* ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

*"You are judged on how you dress. Store personnel don't hear or see me. They assume that I am a 'gang-banger'. I changed my image for a while and then I noticed that people talked to me more."*  
~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)

### **3.5 Diminishing Sense of Community/Social Responsibility for Children and Youth:**

There was an expressed concern that in recent years our sense of community responsibility has diminished with regards to children and youth. Many of the key informants and two of the focus groups discussed this theme in great length. It was felt that current societal norms and political pressures focus more on individualism; "bottom lines" and trying to minimize the areas where community should be "interfering" in the lives of others. It was unclear to the informants whether this denial of community and social responsibility is the result of a belief that we should not be held responsible for the development of others, or if the problems are so overwhelming that it is simply easier to place blame. Youth participants also recognized that aspects of the community, such as schools, and politicians are not responsive to their needs and to their development of strong leadership and decision making skills.

*"There is political pressure to deny community responsibility and our beliefs of social responsibility. You often hear that children are the responsibility of the parent and I'm not going to pay taxes to take care of these kids. So even though we, around the table, agree that children and youth are our shared responsibility, I think that there are pressures in society to deny this. How do we rebuild this sense of community responsibility?"*  
~ Focus Group #2

*"A sense of community means to be responsible for the next person, the next child and so on. I find that the broader community has an individualistic emphasis - see young people as individuals and if we keep pushing only the individual aspect, which is important, without the respect for community and the broader community, it will not work."*  
~ Informant #19

*"Attitudes - I'm amazed at the 'they are not my kids, therefore why should I be concerned, why should I support this cause'. That's very bad. We can look to the heavens and say that children are our greatest resource but then we say 'not with my tax dollars'. There are gaps between what is believed about children."*  
~ Informant #18

*"I see really different philosophical stances. You seem to have people who are in business who are looking at the bottom line and lowering taxes and getting the government out of any kind of social issue and then you have people who believe that they need to be more involved and there is more to our community than bottom lines and dollar figures. It seems that those two are always challenging each other."*  
~ Informant #17

### **3.6 Other Themes:**

- The effects of family breakdown on children and youth
- Issues of substance use, gang involvement, violence and lack of hope
- Need for positive role models for children, youth and parents

- Need for affordable and accessible social housing; daycare; education opportunities; etc.
- Need for increased focus on healthy early child development
- The need for communities and families to focus on being healthy
- Communities need to support the educational system
- Need to focus more on prevention programs - be proactive instead of reactive
- True inclusion in society for children and youth with disabilities or alternative lifestyles

#### **4. Top Wishes for the Creation of a More Child and Youth Friendly Winnipeg**

- All children and youth to have their basic needs met, including food, shelter (including access to tents and legalized squatting areas for street involved youth), safety, health care, adequate clothing and education.
- Increased number and diversity of accessible opportunities – education and training, employment, recreation, leadership development, safe drop-in centres, housing, cultural expression, etc. This access would be affordable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and offered in accepting environments by skilled practitioners. Youth focus groups also promoted increasing the number of opportunities for youth to get involved with community development and decision making.
- Increased awareness and acceptance of all children and youth – their gifts, their issues, their culture, their contributions – by all sectors of our community, including government. For the community to realize that children and youth are our future and, therefore, deserve our investment. Reduced negative stereotyping of children and youth and raised awareness by adults about the importance of giving youth an opportunity to grow and develop.
- Increased opportunity for children and youth to contribute to the identification of their needs and the development of appropriate programs and services.
- Improved utilization of existing facilities and structures, especially schools and community centres. This would also include improved promotion of existing programs and services.

#### **5. Opportunities and Barriers in Winnipeg for an Improved Future**

The opportunities most frequently mentioned throughout the key informant interviews and the focus groups included:

- An increasing focus on forming community partnerships to improve service delivery, as well as program/event planning. This partnership building would be instrumental in decreasing a sense of isolation, increasing hope, and improving community capacity building. Respondents also indicated a need for all levels of government and



the private sector to improve communication, collaboration and commitment for the benefit of children and youth.

*"What I would like to see more of is more communication between the levels of government. Health Canada does its thing, HRDC does its thing, the province and the city does its thing. You have all these different programs and bureaucrats working on children and youth issues yet they so rarely talk to each other."*  
~ Informant #12

*"I think more and more there are partnerships that are being formed around the issues of children in Winnipeg...hope within the group...we have all learned from each other."*  
~ Informant #1

*"Strong networking circles are communicating and coordinating efforts... women's networks are collaborating together, sharing information and skills, time and funding and supporting each others' initiatives and solution-seeking."*  
~ Informant #17

*"There has been an increase in involvement not just with the general community but also from corporations as well but it's often for tax write-offs so more can be done."*  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

- Adoption of a community development approach to providing programs and services, as well as a community economic development movement which focuses on utilizing and developing the social capital available at the community level. Partnership building is seen to be an essential component of each of these approaches, which also allows increased control for - and feedback from - the local community about what initiatives will work for them and how they will be a part of shaping their own future.

*"We are now in a position to use this [community development] approach more now than we ever have before and that includes partnerships with other agencies as one important piece as well as a willingness to give over some of the control and power [regarding program development and decision making] that we one time held over to communities, neighbourhoods and to youth."*  
~ Informant #22

*"I think one of the biggest [opportunities] is that Winnipeg is moving ahead in a big way in terms of community and economic development ...neighbourhoods and children will reap the benefits of this."*  
~ Informant #16

- Increased awareness of the importance of supporting children and youth and of providing effective and responsive programming.
- A strengthening of the Aboriginal community in its leadership, positive role modeling for children, celebrations of their culture and identity, as well as a transfer of authority regarding child welfare and education issues. There is a recognition that a lot can be learned by looking at the experiences of the Aboriginal community, its grassroots approach, its focus on self-determination and its growing leadership capacity.

*"We have in front of us a fabulous opportunity to capitalize on the assets and the contributions that urban Aboriginal people are making - whether we will be smart*

*enough, sensitive enough and understanding enough to do that will be anyone's guess but I see it as a huge untapped resource."*  
~ Informant #16

*"Our community has benefited from focussing on being more self-determined. This does not just include independence, it means that the community defines its needs, creates solutions, implements those solutions and feels empowered through the process."*  
~ Focus Group #2

- An increased focus on healthy child development requirements and initiatives. These are having a positive impact on the development of children, especially in terms of preparing them for a successful transition to the school system, as well as ensuring healthy nutrition and parenting practices.

*"There is more of an awareness and interest over the last 5 years of early childhood development. We have the Healthy Child Manitoba Initiative. Awareness that children are not just our future but also our present."*  
~ Informant #18

*"Ensuring that there is healthy child development is the way to go. Some strides have been made at working with Fetal Alcohol and alcohol related issues. There are some huge nutritional problems related to children, especially in the core areas...efforts to improve child health and development are essential."*  
~ Informant #20

- Increasing opportunity for children and youth to contribute and have a voice in needs identification and program planning.

*"...people appreciate the importance of young people being at the table from the very beginning."*  
~ Informant #11

The most frequently listed **barriers** included:

- Poverty

*"We have a high rate of poverty here and it hampers our ability to make lasting improvements in the lives of children and youth. So many people are struggling to survive and we wonder why they can not succeed according to the outcomes set by our funders."*  
~ Focus Group #1

- Ineffective Program Funding Models: A large number of the informants and both of the adult focus groups mentioned the difficulties that community based agencies experience as they try to be responsive to the ever-changing needs of their clients yet their funding remains short term, inflexible, project based and conditional upon outcomes of "success", as defined by the funder. Agencies struggle with trying to provide innovative and ongoing programming delivered by stable and well-trained staff yet they can not always be guaranteed of income to offset operational costs. The funding situation is further complicated with the increasing amount of competition amongst agencies/programs for available dollars.

*"Agencies need long term funding, not just project based funding which forces agencies to look at reinventing the wheel just to be able to say to funders that they are doing*

*something new. Innovation is great when existing programs and staffing have proven to be ineffective. We need sustainable funding for those programs that are working and that encompass the many ever-changing needs of our specific communities. Funding needs to be flexible and agencies need to be able to access core funding so that they can continue to operate and foster positive and lasting relationships in the community."*

*~ Focus Group #2*

*"Funders outcomes are often unrealistic given the many complicated issues that our clients are working with, there needs to be a different definition of success."*

*~ Informant #16*

*"There are too many people at the trough ...when it comes to competing for funding."*

*~ Informant #18*

- Racism, Discrimination and Exclusion Stereotyping:

*"There are issues of racism and sexism and ageism. I see it as the nature of our product - it's how we see it, it's the product of our history and our many cultures. So we need to deal with that and it means that we need to invest more and bring some more equitable levels because there are so many gaps. There's ageism - there are a lot of senior citizens, according to Stats Canada and we have a lot of young people but it only seems that we hear most about them when they are in trouble, the negative things that appear threatening to people. People are marginalized by this, particularly youth."*

*~ Informant #17*

- Lack of equal access to opportunities - education and training; employment; recreation; cultural programs; leadership development; food and housing - regardless of where you are from, your ability level or your family's socio-economic status.

- A Decline in Sense of Community/Social Responsibility:

*"Our society is so concerned with the individualistic view of the world. What needs to happen is to find an inclusive way of getting the problems of the children to be the problems of the whole community or children's access to be access of the whole community and how do we do that? It's really integrating the whole community."*

*~ Informant #19*

- Lack of recognition of the needs and culture of children and youth and a continued sense of segregation that appears evident within the school system.

*"Thirty two percent of students are Aboriginal yet very little of their culture and history has been incorporated into the curriculum as an intrinsic component of their education. We continue to have lots of students who struggle with English as a second language yet funding for this intervention has been drastically reduced."*

*~ Focus Group #2*

*"There is an increasing sense of anger and alienation for those living in poverty as the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" gets larger - we see this everyday in the schools. This gap seems more apparent in today's society given the expectations created by popular media - it's not okay not to be wearing brand name clothing. This is particularly evident in the increasing violence in the schools."*

*~ Focus Group #2*

- Gaps in programs and services for youth over the age of 18 - not enough programming for transition years.

*"Once you turn 18, they turn their back on you. It's as if you never existed."*

*~ Focus Group #3 (Youth)*

*"There is a poor social net for youth. There are a very few limited selection of places to go and get help. When you are no longer receiving parental supports there are not many options to help readjust."*

*~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)*

- Minimum wage is too low, poverty continues.
- Multicultural education needs to be taught in the community
- Facilities are underutilized and poor promotion of existing programs and services.
- Not enough collaboration between agencies, levels of government and communities.
- Lack of information and awareness campaigns regarding the range of programs and services that are in existence.
- Exclusion of children and youth in decision making processes throughout institutions and agencies.

## **6. "Promising Practices" for Successful Child and Youth Programming**

Upon examining programs and services that are working particularly well in Winnipeg, the key informants and the focus groups, both adult and youth, identified many programs as successfully serving children and youth. Table 1 provides an overview of the “promising practices” for child and youth programming. The characteristics of these programs/services can be summarized as:

- Long term, community based, grassroots programs that are strength-based, rather than deficit-based. These are accessible and provide a variety of age-appropriate opportunities for children and youth to grow, develop and learn. These programs employ a holistic and integrated approach in their service delivery that depends on community partnerships and community ownership and, therefore, remain responsive to the diverse and changing needs of the community. Youth input into the program planning and development is seen as an essential component for success. Acceptance and safety remain paramount themes in the delivery of age and culturally appropriate activities. These programs and services are delivered by a skilled and non-judgmental staff team that has a strong knowledge of, and connection to, the community, their clients and the issues.

*“We have a holistic philosophy in that when people come to us with whatever the [issue], we consider their strength as something positive...We look for what their strengths are and we help them to build on those strengths. The programs that we run for the kids are things that have positive role models, that provide kids with the opportunity to learn to be good citizens, they’re fun things that make kids want to come back again because the people in this community feel accepted. They know that this is their place.”*

*~ Informant #3*

*"I think that places work best when they work together and don't try to work in isolation. We see a continuum and work towards the goal...work together with all the other caregivers to provide a much more integrated, wrap-a-round kind of service."*

*~ Informant #14*

*"Those grassroots, volunteer driven programs at the heart of the community, coupled with motions that are quick to respond to local needs...they have a reputation for stable funding. Being community driven, governance is by, and stakeholders are in, the local community."*

*~ Informant #18*

*"Some are successful because they are well funded, have a well developed infrastructure, are user-friendly and are clear on what their mandate is and their mission is and they have the expertise to follow through. They have the ability to create resources that people can use and they have the right people and the right resources to make it happen."*

*~ Informant #18*

*"Programs need to look at all issues involved in development, for all age groups. They must be ongoing, comprehensive and provide assistance for all aspects of the child."*

*~ Focus Group #2*

*"Programs that take too narrow a view don't work well for youth. If we are providing a program for recreation, it is hard just to deal with recreation and not look at the other issues that youth bring to the program. I always find it interesting that in schools where children are sitting in a classroom where they have resource people and teachers and they also have a counsellor where they can go to talk to someone if they are having a problem, but now that they are in their community and they are playing, those supports aren't there. If it's a recreation program, it's not just recreation because they bring the same issues with them, it's just that they don't have the supports in their neighbourhoods or the services are not available after hours. Those supports may be out there, it's just a matter of bringing them in - don't just have a recreation program; also have maybe a social worker or an outreach worker there or someone with an employment background so that they can take a much broader perspective on how the program can be run. If you narrow your view too much I think the kids will get bored really quickly and go elsewhere - we need to be able to meet all their needs."*

*~ Informant #22*

*"A group of teachers and a board of trustees saw that there were problems in the community so they held a youth focus group or forum one night and started talking about what they wanted to do. Then they took this information and turned it into programs. What kids wanted was a place to go to where lots of things are offered - sports, crafts, field trips."*

*~ Focus Group # 5 (Youth)*

Rosbrook House, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Aboriginal Centre for Health and Wellness, Boys and Girls Club of Winnipeg, Lighthouse Programs, Mother Goose Program, New Directions, as well as MacDonald Youth Services were mentioned numerous times as examples of agencies that are successfully delivering child and youth programming and forming partnerships in the community. Head Start, Healthy Child Manitoba, and the Parks and Recreation (now known as City of Winnipeg's Recreation Services) programs were mentioned numerous times during these interviews for their

successful design and delivery, as well as their ability to incorporate the needs of the local community.

Many participants expressed that the very definition of "success" may be seen as a barrier to effective programming since often what front line workers recognize as improvements and positive movements does not correlate with funder's expectations. An examination by research participants of programs and practices that are not working well in communities, revealed the following characteristics:

- non-responsive to the needs and input of the community;
- unstable and inflexible funding;
- little or no involvement of youth, families and community members in development, evaluation and decision making processes;
- lack a holistic and integrated approach, but instead they try to deal only with isolated aspects of the child's life (i.e. no family involvement and no recognition of the interrelationships of issues and concerns);
- inaccessible due to the cost, limited locations, restrictive hours of operation or have conditions attached to participation; and,
- insensitive to cultural diversities: are discriminatory.

Research participants also raised that when examining unsuccessful practices, we need to look beyond individual programs and services and look at larger systems (such as political maneuvers and systemic racism) to determine how responsive, transparent and accountable they are to the community.

**Table 1: “Promising Practices” for Child and Youth Programming**

<b>Community Perceptions of Successful Child &amp; Youth Programming</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Program Design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integrated Approach - ability to tie service/program to existing and complementary supports in the community (wrap-a-round approach)</li> <li>▪ Holistic – recognize the importance of looking at all aspects of development</li> <li>▪ Accurate Needs Determination Process performed by community, children and youth</li> <li>▪ Creativity and variety re: programming options</li> <li>▪ Stable and flexible funding available</li> <li>▪ Interagency/Multidiscipline collaboration and partnerships needed for success and sustainability</li> <li>▪ Long term involvement and interventions required to improve future of children, youth and community</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Guiding Principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community Based – offered in local environment, preferably by locally hired staff</li> <li>▪ Community Ownership – involved in development, delivery and evaluation/feedback</li> <li>▪ Strength-based programs, premised on values, rather than just rules</li> <li>▪ Focus on building local capacity and sense of "community"</li> <li>▪ Responsive to changing needs of community – always look to make improvements</li> <li>▪ Provision of culturally sensitive programming</li> <li>▪ Accessibility – free services, flexibility in hours of operation, free of conditions</li> <li>▪ Youth involvement and input is an essential component</li> <li>▪ Provision of service must be coupled with advocacy for the elimination of root societal causes of risk factors (i.e. poverty, discrimination, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Program Delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Delivered by skilled, non-judgmental practitioners</li> <li>▪ Acceptance – provide a safe place, free of all forms of oppression</li> <li>▪ Family and community involvement is the goal</li> <li>▪ Create opportunities for children and youth to experience new things, to learn and develop</li> <li>▪ Incorporate positive role models and work towards developing lasting relationships</li> <li>▪ Assist clients in making connections in the community and creating support networks</li> <li>▪ Be open to examining program changes and adaptations to respond to changing needs</li> </ul>

## 7. Gaps in Programming for Children and Youth in Winnipeg

Although much is being done by communities to improve the lives of children and youth, informants could easily identify gaps in service. The following is a list of programs and services that are needed in Winnipeg where currently none, or not enough, exist.

- The need to better utilize the assets, facilities and infrastructure that currently exist in the community. This would include community access to schools during after school hours, to churches and community centres; to develop programs that would better utilize the green space and wonderful waterway system that we have here in the city and to have supervised programming in local parks.

*"We have to utilize the assets in our communities better than we have in the past. We have schools in our community that are sitting empty in the evenings that we certainly could be utilizing. We have community centres all over the place that aren't utilized to capacity - generally these are sports centres so we need to be providing services that match the broad range of interests that children have." ~ Informant #22*

- Communication and Promotional Issues: A large number of informants and four focus groups mentioned the need to have a user-friendly way of finding out what programs and services are available in the community. Identifying opportunities and accessing them proves to be quite daunting for agencies trying to meet the many needs of their clients and for youth trying to identify programs and services that may be of interest to them. Methods of sharing information on available programs and services would ensure better use of agency staff time as well as improved service to community members seeking assistance. Youth participants also discussed the importance of using youth-friendly communication and promotional strategies, preferably created by youth, in order to ensure that the program or service is received positively and accessed.

*"We need to find ways to get information regarding available resources for all clients especially those that are isolated in our communities, especially seniors and new moms." ~ Focus Group #1*

*"There's a lack of communication. There's a community centre but people don't know about it. They try to organize things without talking to people about it so people don't go." ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)*

*"Get youth involvement to plan programs and then advertise it. Youth need to be a part of this or else it's too cheesy. Create some hard core flyers that will make the thing look interesting." ~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)*

*"There needs to be one-stop shopping so that services are better integrated, better coordination so that their issues and problems can be dealt with more efficiently." ~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)*

- Need for Increased Number and Variety of Opportunities, Programs and Services: the need to increase and improve the programs and services for children, youth and



families was reiterated numerous times by both adult and youth participants. Youth focused on the need to increase the number of opportunities available to them to improve their education, explore their interests, develop new skills, explore different cultures, receive specialized assistance for counselling and tutoring and be exposed to new things. A lot of agency staff focused on the need to increase services to families, especially families who are struggling with (1) poverty; (2) the transition of moving to a new city or a new country as well as (3) providing for children with special needs. The need to provide multicultural education in the community and to improve the coordination and availability of respite services were also of interest for these informants.

*"Need to allow them opportunities to grow, to teach them so that they can expand and become whatever they want to be. Encourage them and help them out, let them be creative, don't stifle them. That doesn't mean that the opportunities will be the same for everyone - different kids will need different things. It's great when they have lots of options for kids."*  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

*"Do you know how many kids we have here who never get to go to camp, never get out of the city? They don't know what it is to go to the beach. They are playing on cement, they are playing between parked cars on the street."*  
~ Informant #9

*"Drug and alcohol use/abuse as well as high teen pregnancy rates are all areas where education is lacking. Lifestyle in terms of recreation and exercise are other areas that need improvement within the Aboriginal community."*  
~ Informant #9

*"I think that a big thing is to continue providing programs and services that support families - that help functional families stay functional and help families in crisis survive that."*  
~ Informant #16

*"One program for FAS but there should be more services for the caregivers of these children. They are so overwhelmed that they end up putting their children into care and then professional foster parents can access lots of respite. Why can't we have respite for parents of children with FAS or other disabilities? There are an awful lot of kids in Manitoba with ADHD and others who are so explosive at an early age so that parents are exhausted. Also parents of kids with disabilities, these parents need and deserve a lot of support."*  
~ Informant #17

- A number of informants, adult and youth, stated that there was a growing need for safe houses, shelters and drop-in centres here in the city. Many of the at-risk and street-involved youth interviewed during this research felt that such programs would also be more effective if conditions were not attached to the provision of assistance. For example, many of them stated that in order to access food and shelter from some organizations, they first have to attend a religious service or provide their name and case history. It is felt that children, youth and their families need to have more accessible options available to them when they require a safe place to stay in times of stress or violence or access to the basics for survival.

*"I feel embarrassed already that I have to go to some places to get food or have a place to sleep and even then it's often not safe, I don't want to have to pray or give my entire life story just to get food."*  
~ Focus Group #3 (Youth)

*"I think safe houses - there's a real need so that if a child is in a bad situation that they need or want to get away from then they should have safe houses where they can go."*  
~ Informant #22

*"Another thing that's missing are shelters - there's MacDonald Youth Shelter but there's a lot of homelessness. I'd like to see more openness and a doorway to more resources for those who want to move on and get out of the cycle that there are places where they can go to get assistance."*  
~ Informant #17

- Current lack of child, youth and community input during the development, promotion, delivery and evaluation of programs and services, as well as decision making at the community and government levels.

*"Needs must be identified by those using the service, and community feedback is essential to ensure that the program remains responsive to changing needs. We always need more children's programming but children's programming that is designed according to what children and the community say that they want to do."* ~ Informant #3

*"Programs that are defined by those using the service...To enhance the programs that are already there we need feedback from communities."* ~ Informant #6

*"There are a lot of older people who ask for opinions and then don't listen, not to mention act on the suggestions given."* ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

#### Other Gaps Identified:

- Lack of youth employment initiatives that truly prepare youth with practical job skills and experience that would open up opportunities for an improved future.
- Improved mental health services for youth, including youth counselling services off campus and a dual diagnosis clinic.
- Lack of effective transition programming for youth leaving the child welfare system and entering the adult system.
- Lack of focus in the community and media coverage regarding the positive activities of youth.
- Need to increase the funding options and parameters for agencies and programs.
- Need to increase the amount and flexibility of daycare and respite options available - make these services non-judgemental and responsive to needs.
- Need to incorporate funding for childcare, nutrition and transportation costs into every child and youth program.
- Need to determine ways to educate youth regarding the rights, roles and responsibilities of their citizenship. This would ensure that social responsibility and accountability is maintained in the future.
- More emphasis needed on prevention programs and strategies that assist youth in developing positive coping strategies and alternative choices.

- Increased advocacy work needed regarding the issues that are impacting children, youth, families and communities.
- Need to get the private sector involved as a partner or stakeholder in community programs and services.
- Need for children's assessments and follow-up action planning, especially at the preschool level.

## 8. Winnipeg's Built and Natural Environments

Most of the informants proclaimed that overall Winnipeg is blessed with plenty of green space, beautiful waterways, parks and good air quality, all of which provide great opportunities for children and youth. It was apparent, however, that green space is not as available to children, youth and families living in the downtown core of the city. Most also agreed that greenspaces could be used more often and more effectively to further enhance the positive role that they may play in the lives of children and youth.

Many informants pointed out that Winnipeg's built environments are not very child and youth friendly. The reasons given for this viewpoint ranged from inaccessibility of buildings and structures, especially for children and youth with disabilities; not enough play areas or day care areas in shopping and commercial centres; vacant, run-down and unsafe buildings in the inner city, as well as the high cost and inconvenience of city transportation systems. Many expressed that in Winnipeg there is an obvious discrepancy between the promotion of the value of investing in children and youth, and the insignificant amount of input elicited from children and youth during the development stages of new facilities. As a prime example of this discrepancy, a number of informants raised the issue of a lack of safe skateboard parks for the 6000+ skateboarding youth in the city.

*"We have quite a few parks in Winnipeg - lots of natural and green spaces. Not quite enough in the centre though. We have the beautiful Assiniboine Park but you need to take the bus to get there and lots of families just don't have the money. One adult fare back and forth is worth a 4 litre of milk so you chose milk and bread over going to the park. I'm just really sad to see our fares going up every year."* ~ Informant #17

*"Are natural and built environments truly family friendly? I think it depends on where you live in the city and how healthy your community is. In many places, kids aren't made to feel welcome, people assume that they are there to cause trouble and often it's not safe for kids, thanks to the broken glass and the badly maintained equipment."* ~ Focus Group #1

Interview participants also focused on the fact that the built and natural environments could be better utilized to enhance the lives of children and youth. This could be accomplished by:

- eliminating (or at least reducing) user and admission fees to facilities and events;
- ensuring that community centres meet the needs of their local community (needs of inner city communities are different than suburbs);

- improving housing options – affordable and accessible
- providing creative recreational spaces that are specifically designed for youth
- ensuring accessibility to all venues, especially for children and youth with disabilities;
- ensuring that playgrounds and public areas are updated and maintained;
- removing broken glass and graffiti on a regular basis;
- offering organized and structured programs to children by qualified and supportive staff; and,
- improving the usage of underutilized spaces throughout the community, for example schools, libraries and shopping malls.

## **9. Role of the Aboriginal Community**

As referenced in the Literature Review completed by the Winnipeg Site of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities in July 2002, Winnipeg is home to 27% of Manitoba's Status Indians and 52% of the Province's Metis. Given the rising number of Aboriginal children and youth in the city, it is important to examine the role that the Aboriginal Community is playing in supporting children and youth.

Overall, both adult and youth respondents expressed that the Aboriginal community has made great gains in improving their community and in responding to the needs and issues affecting children, youth and families. They have successfully developed and enhanced many community-based services and programs designed to improve the educational, medical, cultural, economic and social opportunities for their people. Many informants praised the Aboriginal community for its emphasis on inter-agency collaboration and its innovative and client-centered approach to service. The Aboriginal community's service delivery is viewed as respectful, value-based and holistic in its philosophy and this is seen as a positive influence on social service agencies throughout the city of Winnipeg.

Informants praised Aboriginal people for being courageous in raising issues of systemic discrimination and for lobbying for authority to deliver child welfare programs and federally-governed services in a way that is more appropriate for their communities. Their efforts have resulted in such successes as the establishment of their own schools and agencies, such as the Children of the Earth School, Thunderbird House, and the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, where the Aboriginal culture is celebrated and respected. Many informants remarked that they have witnessed a strengthening in the Aboriginal people and their culture as they begin to take ownership of their lives and provide a leadership role in the development and decision making processes within the city.

Informants also pointed out that Aboriginal people have also succeeded in pressuring mainstream systems and structures to begin providing truly culturally competent and inclusive service to the Aboriginal Community. They have successfully integrated community feedback and cultural traditions in developing and implementing programs and services that meet the diverse needs of their members in a holistic and respectful manner. They have developed strong leadership skills and have forged meaningful and

productive partnerships with other stakeholders in their community to ensure that their issues and strategies have been upheld. Although there is still much work to be done in erasing the impacts of negative historical events and relationships, progress is being made and the Aboriginal community is viewed as a leader in the move to improve child, youth and family services throughout the city.

*"They have been successful because the leadership is being provided by the Aboriginal community. It's successful because the skill sets have been improved, the program planning has improved, and the consultations that they have with the community in building programs has helped tremendously. Being more open to partnerships with places like the city and other nonprofit agencies has helped and have been successful...There's still work to be done since there's still some fear regarding some partnerships."*  
~ Informant #22

*"The Aboriginal communities have strengthened themselves, they are able to provide a community for children and youth that is healthy with mentors... They put energy into looking at having more community based services that will begin to address some of the issues that have come from years of racism and the residential school experience."*  
~ Informant #14

*"Metis and First Nations communities have really fought to get their own HRDC money and child welfare transferred so they can deliver services that are most appropriate for their communities... So I think that we have made huge gains in the community to try to enhance the well-being of children and youth – from political levels to the grass roots level."*  
~ Informant #8

*"I would think that the biggest piece by far is that community groups and organizations are grassroots where Aboriginals have themselves identified the issues, identified possible solutions and are working on the community economic development which children and youth will benefit from, as well as addressing the needs of children and youth in their communities. I think that it's huge that more Aboriginals are becoming involved in the solution of difficult issues."*  
~ Informant #16

*"They've done a good job at teaching about where Canada came from, teaching the true culture and history of Canada. This is important to all children. In my school, there was a class that you had to take about that in order to graduate."* ~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)

It was also identified that, although gains and improvements have been made, there is still a lot to be done – it is a process that will take time and involve “growing pains”. Continuing to work on developing stronger and more effective partnerships with other agencies that are striving to provide better services to children and youth was indeed identified as important. The point was also raised by a number of informants that Aboriginal leadership will continue to be a difficult process given the amount and intensity of discrimination still residing in our society and its systems.

## **10. Role of the Immigrant and Refugee Community**

Although a smaller number of respondents felt comfortable responding to this question, informants who did respond felt that the immigrant/refugee communities are very supportive within their communities in terms of assisting newcomers to access services, maintain and share their culture, and effectively integrate into mainstream society. They were recognized for creating opportunities to share their culture and traditions, beyond the annual Folkarama festivities. Immigrant/refugee communities have engaged in creating meeting places for children and youth that are culturally sensitive, they work well with families, and they continue to work towards improving the services available.

The International Centre was praised on a number of occasions for its support in settling newcomers in areas and communities where people from the same culture are already residing. This encourages the development of strong support networks. It was also mentioned that as immigrant/refugee communities get larger, they are better able to maintain their culture and strong sense of tradition, they also appear to be better equipped to advocate for new programs and services that are responsive to their unique needs. The success of the Filipino community in Winnipeg was raised as a prime example. It was also highlighted that the refugee and immigrant community has played a part in opening the minds of Canadians to increase our focus on humanitarianism, global issues and examination of the many social issues impacting all Canadians.

Through the interviews it was also revealed that there are many issues that impact the integration of newcomers into our city that go beyond the provision of basic services such as shelter, safety, language training and accessing employment opportunities. Other important aspects in overcoming the cultural gaps include immigrants, refugees and their families feeling comfortable with their different identities; their involvement in Canadian culture and their traditional culture; the added pressure on families when these different identities and expectations clash; and, the provision of opportunities that match the comfort level of newcomers. Informants expressed that although many good resources are available to assist new immigrants and refugees, that much more is needed, and that often the greatest problem is trying to increase the public's awareness of the resources that are available. The importance of providing multicultural education in the community and the challenge of getting young people engaged in community development were deemed to be essential components in ensuring that all community members feel included, safe and valued in this multicultural city of ours.

Most informants felt that this community needs more services and programs and that stable funding sources and increased partnership building efforts with other community stakeholders would strongly enhance the work being done. Although there has been an increasing awareness of the issues and needs of refugees coming from war torn countries, much work and research is needed to improve the development and delivery of services that will allow children, youth and families to truly heal from the traumas that they have witnessed. The number and variety of programs and services to address this were stated to be limited at the present time.

*"That kind of cultural gap, not just generation gap - we need to know how to bridge that cultural gap...When I do my teaching on multicultural education, we talk about different identities and how our identities change, people's loyalties even. You are not just one individual or one culture, we live in a multicultural community and we come from many cultures and we have to teach this to children...Multicultural education needs to take place in the broader community and it can be taught in a variety of ways."*

*~ Informant #19*

*"As the immigrant community becomes larger they have gathered strength from each other and because of that, they have been able to maintain their ethnic traditions such as folk dances, singing and foods. They have made efforts to share these with the rest of the community...I think this is important because the more you know about something, the less likely you are to show prejudice."*

*~ Informant #13*

*"Refugees and immigrants coming into the community with needs, I am of the view, that they have opened up the minds and the views of the indigenous Canadians who have children with problems to be more open. Let's look at poverty - when I came to Canada, what Canadian would talk about the fact that they were poor, but because other cultures came here with needs, the needs of the indigenous communities have been met and looked at too. There is research that this has opened up a more broader view of the discrepancies or needs of the community for children or poor people. They have also brought some values that have rubbed off on other individuals and groups. It makes us more humanitarian, more sympathetic to the plight of others. "*

*~ Informant #19*

*"Once they feel integrated and find their places in the community as full partners, they feel empowered. Then they may choose to help promote their respective cultures and participate in the mutual enrichment of our community...we need to invest in them to ensure that they feel included and invested into transitioning. There's lots of resources that need to go into education, language development and work placement. Again, this particular sector, whether they are immigrant or refugee, would appreciate having bilingual childcare services in their communities. This is for the most part done by community organizations that don't have stable funding."*

*~ Informant #17*

*"...we are working more on the development of relationships with the whole family (as the) best way of working through the healing process for youth and children. I think that part of what we are talking about is a huge number of people who are professionally trained to work with children, but not with trauma therapy."*

*~ Informant #7*

As with the Aboriginal communities, discrimination and systemic racism will continue to provide challenges for the immigrant and refugee communities. Canada's poor treatment of foreign-trained professionals was stated as an example of this discrimination. Mediating this societal factor will be difficult, but it was expressed that if the immigrant/refugee communities can work together to promote the acceptance of diversity in organizational/societal structures, and if communities begin involving new immigrants/refugees in the development of culturally competent services, then future success would be inevitable.

*"So when we know that we are accepting refugees from a particular area, what kind of community development do those programs need to help them take on and manage their community's issues in the way that we are finally seeing the Aboriginal communities do."*

*It's taken them (Aboriginal communities) generations to get there...let's learn from that and not let it take 5 and 6 generations of terrible things going on before people get the supports and the resources that they need."*

*~ Informant #12*

*"I know that in our community we have attempted to reach out to them [immigrants and refugees]...sometimes our good intentions are a barrier because we try to do the right thing but we haven't asked them what the right thing is and we are starting to do that."*

*~ Informant #3*

## **11. Youth Involvement in Community Decision Making Processes**

Based on findings of this research, the most meaningful way to involve young people is through a community development approach that engages them in a process of identifying issues and needs and working towards solutions. This process can be a powerful experience in building capacity for change and leadership. Many research participants expressed that the opportunities for youth to be involved in community decision making are increasing, through both informal (program evaluations, focus groups and participation statistics) and formal (Youth Advisory Committees) processes but that much more work and attention is needed in this area. This was also an important point raised many times by youth participants. Youth informants stated that youth input in program planning, promotion, delivery and evaluation, as well as community decision making is an essential component in increased probability of successful programming. They reported that, although they are receiving more opportunities to contribute, they did not feel that their views are not being taken seriously or being acted upon.

It was mentioned by a number of the informants and two of the focus groups that school councils played a huge role in assisting youth to become involved in the democratic process and to better understand their roles and responsibilities related to being a Canadian citizen. Many informants stated that there needs to be more community-based, youth focused forums and conferences to ensure the participation and inclusion of their ideas and concerns.

*"Fear and negative perceptions seem to be the biggest factors that keep adults from determining what kids really think regarding their needs and beliefs. Instead, adults blame them and expect the worst of them. We need to go to kids and ask, don't expect them to come to us. They've learned that adults don't usually listen to them."*

*~ Focus Group #1*

*"...it's just so powerful to hear what they say about it and what it means to them and so they always give us direction. And you know that they vote with their feet – if they don't like a program, they tell you or they just don't come back."*

*~ Informant #1*

*"Give youth more of an opportunity to get involved. Creating more committees like this one so that people can actually make a difference and we can be taken seriously. Sometimes you get involved and no one takes notice. Now adults make all the decisions but as we get older and take over those roles, we would be better trained to do this."*

*~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)*



*"Student councils in schools are great. A group that had some impact on decision making would be great so that you didn't feel like you were speaking to the wall."  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)*

*"On a larger level of politics and program planning, we don't have a lot of say. We really need a Mayor and city council who really want to work with youth and that's their main goal."  
~ Focus Group #5 (Youth)*

*"Decision makers need to come to where kids are and start talking to them in their language. Get to know us."  
~ Focus Group #3 (Youth)*

*"Our input...it is imperative that this happens. It happens now to a limited degree through focus groups but it has to be an ongoing process instead of snapshots."  
~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)*

*"Youth Parliament is needed on the municipal or community level... Ideas of children are asked for but not taken into consideration during decision making."  
~ Focus Group #4 (Youth)*

## **12. Conclusion**

It should be apparent from this report that the problems facing many of Winnipeg's young people and families are complex, interrelated and, in many cases, systemic. While some of these issues certainly require a stronger investment in terms of the provision of programs and services, most are simply not resolvable within the context of service provision. Instead, they are rooted in culture – or rather, multiple cultures.

Foremost is the culture of the dominant, “mainstream” society, where the issues facing children, youth and their families originate in part from the greater political economy. Governments at all levels are now increasingly driven by the needs of the “global economy”, which, in its emphasis on strictly-defined economic productivity and growth at the expense of most other considerations, is leading in many instances to a “race to the bottom” where government-funded social welfare provisions are concerned.

The result is that the state and the community at large are adapting to a culture wherein there is little room for an ethic of care. The availability of employment, housing, childcare and social assistance is based on the premise that it is the *individual* who is primarily responsible for their own welfare, as well as their children's'. To be without a job is to be considered shiftless and irresponsible; to be homeless is to be essentially without an identity; and, in spite of the progress made in securing rights for women, childcare is still primarily left to women, all of whom, it is assumed, should be married to wage earners. The final assumption ignores the need that young people have for caregivers beside their own parents, including the need for a variety of role models.

Given these broader cultural assumptions, families have responded accordingly by adopting a culture of their own. Families – in particular, mothers – have accepted that families are their sole responsibility; many men, of course, have denied this role entirely. In combination with the political economy of housing (which holds that families are

expected to secure – and ideally own -- their own housing independent of others), this emphasis on the individual family has resulted for many in social isolation. Children, youth and their families in both low and high income brackets are left to build and maintain their own supports – a task made almost impossible for the poor, who for a variety of reasons are often forced to move many times per year.

In the middle of these forces are children and youth. Left in many cases to grow up without loving families, healthy homes or community support systems, they often resort instead to an outlaw culture – that of the streets and gang association. This rogue culture, with its own morality structure, rituals and value system, valorizes particular (and heavily advertised) material possessions and peer approval, but, as we have seen, holds no illusions about the consistency or reliability of its extremely unstable “community”.

Faced with these crises, communities and community-based organizations have responded as best as they can. However, they are subject to the funding sources that are themselves concerned with the same economic pressures as the greater political economy; as a result, these service providers must spend a great deal of time and energy chasing funds and then producing reports to document their own success. In securing such funding to offer piecemeal services and programs to face ever-growing needs, some providers are left to wonder if they are actually doing any good, or if they are simply a part of the industry of poverty.

The remarks above, while based in part the commentary produced in this report and therefore to a degree representative of the Winnipeg context, are not intended to describe an exclusively Winnipeg condition. Rather, it should be understood that although Winnipeg faces some challenges particular to prairie cities, some issues won't be solvable solely within city limits. There are broader and deeply entrenched cultural values operating at multiple levels of society that will resist simple solutions.

It is hoped, however, that the Winnipeg Site will document effective models of intervention that will enable prairie communities to work together to challenge old assumptions, transform cultures, and create a new ethic of care for children, youth and their families.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDES**

**Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities -  
Winnipeg Site**

## **WINNIPEG SITE KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

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### **GENERAL QUESTIONS: COMMUNITY**

1. What does 'community' mean to you? What would you consider to be your community?
2. Are there aspects of "community", in your view, that are unique to Winnipeg/ Manitoba/ the Prairies?
3. What roles/ responsibilities should 'communities' play in supporting children and youth?
4. What do you see as the important themes or issues related to children and youth in your community?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN & YOUTH PROGRAMS IN WINNIPEG**

5. What three wishes do you have that would make Winnipeg more child/youth friendly?
6. What opportunities do you see in Winnipeg for an improved future for children and youth?
7. What barriers do you see in Winnipeg for an improved future for children and youth?
8. What programs/services are working particularly well for children and youth in Winnipeg and/or your community, and what makes them work so well?
9. What programs/services are not working well for children and youth in Winnipeg and/or your community, and what makes them not work well?
10. What programs/services are needed in Winnipeg where apparently none exist?
11. How are the built and natural environments used to support the well being of children and youth in Winnipeg?
12. How have Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg been working to enhance the well-being of children and youth?
13. Have these efforts been successful? Why or why not?
14. How have refugee/immigrant communities in Winnipeg played a role in improving children and youth's well-being?
15. Have these efforts been successful? Why or why not?

### **QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO ORGANIZATIONS**

16. What are the needs of children and youth served by your agency and what programs and services have you developed to meet these needs?
17. Are the interests of children and youth represented in your agency's decision-making processes? If so, in what capacity/form?

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION: ADULTS**  
**CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILD AND YOUTH CENTRED PRAIRIE**  
**COMMUNITIES: WINNIPEG SITE**

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**GENERAL QUESTIONS: COMMUNITY**

1. What does "community" mean to you?
2. What roles/ responsibilities should 'communities' play in supporting children and youth?
3. What do you see as the important themes or issues related to children and youth in your community?

**QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN & YOUTH PROGRAMS IN WINNIPEG**

4. What three wishes do you have that would make Winnipeg more child/youth friendly?
5. What opportunities do you see in Winnipeg for an improved future for children and youth?
6. What barriers do you see in Winnipeg for an improved future for children and youth?
7. What programs/services are working particularly well for children and youth in Winnipeg and/or your community, and what makes them work so well?
8. What programs/services are not working well for children and youth in Winnipeg/your community, and what makes them not work well?
9. What programs/services are needed in Winnipeg where apparently none exist?
10. How do Winnipeg's natural and built environments –streets, parks, buildings, public places– contribute to child and youth well-being? How could they be improved to make them more "child and youth friendly"?
11. How have Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg been working to enhance the well-being of children and youth?
12. How have refugee/immigrant communities in Winnipeg played a role in improving children and youth's well-being?
13. Have you ever felt that there is racism/discrimination in your community/Winnipeg?

**QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING:**

14. Do you feel that the ideas and opinions of children and youth are obtained and used when programs and services are planned and developed? If yes, how? If no, would you like to see this happen in the future? How would you like to see this happen?

**FOCUS GROUPS: YOUTH  
WINNIPEG SITE  
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILD AND YOUTH CENTRED  
PRAIRIE COMMUNITIES**

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**GENERAL QUESTIONS: COMMUNITY**

1. What does 'community' mean to you? What would you consider to be your community?
2. What should 'communities' do to support children and youth?
3. Do you feel that children and youth are an important part of your community? Why or why not?
4. What do you think are the issues that affect children and youth the most these days?

**QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN & YOUTH PROGRAMS IN WINNIPEG**

5. What three wishes do you have that would make your community/Winnipeg more child/youth friendly?
6. What opportunities do you see in Winnipeg for a better future?
7. What barriers do you see in Winnipeg for a better future?
8. What programs or services have you used in the past, or are using now?
9. Were these programs helpful and/or fun to participate in? Why or why not?
10. What other programs/services for children and youth do you know about? Have you heard if those programs are working well? What makes these successful or unsuccessful?
11. What other programs, services or activities are needed for children and youth in Winnipeg?
12. How do Winnipeg's natural and built environments –streets, parks, buildings, public places– contribute to child and youth well-being? How could they be improved to make them more "child and youth friendly?"
13. What have Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg done to improve the lives of children and youth?
14. What have refugee/immigrant communities in Winnipeg done to improve the lives of children and youth?
15. Have you ever felt that you do not belong in your community/Winnipeg?
16. Have you ever felt that there is racism/discrimination in your community/Winnipeg?
17. Do you feel that the ideas of children and youth are asked for and used when programs and services are planned and developed? If yes, how? If no, would you like to see this happen?
18. What role do you play or would you like to play in making Winnipeg a better city?