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FAST FACTS

December 8, 2009

It Takes All Day To Be Poor - The State of the Inner City Report 2009

I wonder if it might have been different if we weren't as poor as we were. (Angelica)

For the past five years, CCPA Manitoba has conducted inner-city research in collaboration with community-based organizations. The purpose of our research has been to chronicle the progress being made and to identify where problems continue to exist and how they might be addressed. As was the case in past years, our community partners identified the focus of this year's research. Poverty, they tell us, continues to be the root of all inner-city challenges.

The release of *It Takes All Day to be Poor* comes at a critical time. The provincial government has recently announced that they will begin consultation with individuals and organizations across the province for feedback on *All Aboard: Manitoba's poverty reduction plan*.

We hope that government officials will begin their process by reading "It Takes All Day to be Poor".

To illustrate the complexity of poverty, we asked seven individuals to document their experiences getting through their days, weeks and months, on a low-income budget. The diaries of Angelica, Uzochi, Allan, Taryn, Janette and Claudette form the centre piece of this year's *State*

of the Inner City Report. Hannah, an advocate for youth living in poverty, provides a perspective of those who work daily assisting impoverished youth maneuver through systems that are not always helpful.

While these eight individuals don't specifically speak to government policy, much is inferred. There are no one-size-fits-all explanations or solutions for how we become poor or how we escape being poor. For some, becoming poor is a matter of bad luck. With a bit of good luck, it might be temporary. For others, poverty is deeply rooted and near impossible to escape. When everyone you know is poor, it is hard to imagine how life can be different.

While the individual stories our diarists tell are unique in many ways, they are also all too familiar. People who are poor face challenges that often leave them feeling trapped and disillusioned.

But there are signs of improvement. While poverty statistics mean very little for those who continue to be poor, they can be useful to track progress so that we know whether or not gains are being made. On this front, we have both good and bad news.

We examined census data from 1996 – 2006, to get a better picture of poverty over the past ten years. We appear to be moving in the right direction.



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Census data tell us that the percentage of households living in poverty--using the LICO before tax--has decreased in the inner city and in Winnipeg as a whole. In Winnipeg, the rate has decreased from 24.25 percent in 1996 to 20.20 percent in 2006. (Neighbourhood data for after-tax LICO was not available for census years 1996 and 2001 therefore before-tax rates were used. Nonetheless, the trend, what we are most interested in capturing, remains the same). In the inner city, household poverty dropped from 48.25 percent in 1996 to 39.60 percent in 2006. Comparing the inner city rate (39.60 percent) with the non-inner city rate (20.20) tells us that poverty continues to be spatialized in the inner city.

There is also a very clear distinction in income when comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in the inner city and in Winnipeg generally. The percentage of Aboriginal people living in poverty compared with non-Aboriginal people has not changed between 1996 and 2006: Aboriginal poverty in Winnipeg is 2.27 times greater than non-Aboriginal poverty. Aboriginal people living in the inner-city are more likely to be poor than their non-Aboriginal neighbours.

There are other data that show a story of spatialized poverty in Winnipeg's inner city. For example, the average income in Winnipeg is 50 percent higher than in the inner city. And when specific inner-city neighbourhoods are examined, the gap is even greater. For example, 56 percent of Point Douglas economic families had incomes below the LICO. Point Douglas is also home to a large Aboriginal population – 36 percent of Point Douglas residents are Aboriginal compared with 20 percent in the inner city generally and 7.5 percent in non-inner city neighbourhoods. Almost half of Point Douglas families are sole-parent-headed compared with less than 20% in all of Winnipeg.

Homeownership is often used as an indicator of stability. Fully 72.2 percent of non inner-city

households own their homes compared with 39.1 percent of inner-city households.

Lord Selkirk Park is one such neighbourhood where the majority of residents do not own their own homes. A good majority of these residents reside in the Lord Selkirk Park public housing development. We wrote about the challenges of Lord Selkirk Park in our first State of the Inner City Report in 2005. At that time, those we interviewed held little hope for the 'Development'. By 2007, signs of improvement were apparent. Lord Selkirk Park is transforming into a community of hope thanks to the collaborative hard work of community organizations, the provincial government, schools, and individuals living in the neighbourhood.

As this year's report shows, the inner city story is complicated. Our 5 years of research has taught us a lot about these complexities. But most important we have learned that the inner is much more than a community with problems. It is a vibrant place full of culture and diversity. While it is true that the people who live and work in the inner city are faced with many challenges, they live up to those challenges in creative ways. This year's report provides signs of hope and shows how creativity helps residents cope with the day-to-day grind of being poor.

But we are reminded by Angelica, Uzochi, Allan, Taryn, Janette, Claudette, and Hannah, that poverty remains a problem to be solved.

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