



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • SOLUTIONS

FAST FACTS

April 3, 2012

You Know You're Not Alone: Community Development in Public Housing

In Winnipeg, three out of five households living in poverty live outside the inner city. This suggests that although the problems faced by low income households in the inner city are particularly serious, there are many households outside the inner city who experience the same challenges of dealing with poverty on a daily basis. Family resource centres address some of these challenges for families living in public housing, and in little ways – that add up to make big changes – the resource centres make people's lives better.

The Family Centre of Winnipeg runs six family resource centres in Manitoba Housing complexes in Winnipeg. CCPA-MB recently completed a report examining the impact these centres have had on individuals, families and communities.

Over the last 10 years, these six family resource centres have become integral parts of the communities in which they are located. The centres offer supports and programming for parents and families, and a gathering space for the community. They offer residents a chance to get out of the house to socialize, meet new people and contribute to their community. They also provide learning opportunities, and a space for addressing conflict and accessing supports when crises arise.

Perhaps most importantly, the resource centres meet very basic needs for the tenants who come

in: food, essentials like phones, faxes or computers, and social interaction with friends and neighbours. They offer a place for parents and children to learn new skills and to spend some time together outside the home, and tenants are always welcome to stop by and say hello, to have a cup of coffee and a snack.

People need to meet basic survival needs before they can consider other needs or wants. Manitoba Housing meets tenants' shelter needs but for many of these tenants, low income levels mean that other basic needs remain unmet. For many households, there are often times in the month when money is tight. Food security is a big concern for many families. Access to food banks, the cooking programs, the community store and to snacks or small meals on a regular or occasional basis through the resource centres fill the gap.

When asked what they liked about the centres, one respondent said:

When I first got here I didn't have a washing machine, I have one now, but you know the simple things like that, a place to come and do my laundry, a place for me and my kids to come hang out that's a safe place, there's many positives.

Another said that:

With the resource centre, my kids know if we are short on something or having to do something, we do have



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.

FAST FACTS continued ...

the resource centre here now, that would help us with, either we're short on bread or something we can always come ask, and not be scared to ask.

Having the opportunity to meet their neighbours, and for their children to play with other children at the resource centres, has helped individuals and families build self-esteem, overcome shyness and get to know their neighbours as a result of attending programs at the resource centre. Many feel safer and more comfortable now that they can say hi to others in the complex. One tenant said:

It's really opened me up to being more comfortable with my neighbours. I've lived in places in the past where I haven't even really talked to any of my neighbours.

Another mentioned:

Oh my son's a lot more confident, the eight year old, for sure. And [my younger son] loves it, like every Thursday there's a program, like he reminds me... so obviously he's really enjoying that. And my daughter loved Kids in the Kitchen, and she's just waiting until it comes around again. So yeah, we're happier, we're very very much happier now.

Having a space for parents where they can come for a little break, where their children are welcome and there are other parents there to chat with helps to take the pressure off. This helps people be better parents, which makes the whole family happier. Overall, people also talked about having more connections with other tenants, better relationships with neighbours, more supports for each other, and increased trust and pride in the community.

Despite all these successes, the resource centres still face a number of challenges. These include insufficient funding, pressures on staff and safety concerns. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for the Government of Manitoba, The Family Centre of Winnipeg, and the six family resource centres. These recommendations include:

- Recognising the integral role that the resource centres play in improving the

quality of life of the tenants in the Manitoba Housing complexes;

- Ensuring that the resource centres have access to core funding to cover basic costs such as space and core staffing.
- Ensuring that tenants in all Manitoba Housing complexes have access to resource centres.
- Strengthening the decision-making processes in the resource centres.
- Finding ways to increase the hours and programming available through the resource centres.

From changes in people's self-esteem and level of comfort in their community, to better communication and stronger relationships among family members, to networking and mutual support among tenants, interviewees had a lot to say about the impact the resource centres have had on their lives and on their communities. The comments from tenants and staff show that the family resource centres help to build stronger communities and reduce costs for Manitoba Housing as the complexes become more stable. In addition, all of these changes point to a better quality of life overall for tenants in the Manitoba Housing complexes. These family resource centres offer an excellent model for community development that could benefit other communities as well.

Sarah Cooper researches housing issues for the CCPA-MB office.



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.