



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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Don't Cut Neighbourhoods Alive!

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The provincial government has halted funding for Neighbourhoods Alive! This is a serious mistake.

Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA) is a provincial government program that funds community development initiatives in thirteen low-income urban areas in Manitoba, including six in Winnipeg's inner city. In 2015/16 the program invested \$4.8 million in 182 projects in urban areas with high rates of complex poverty. NA has been instrumental in bringing about much-needed positive change in these neighbourhoods.

A good example is Lord Selkirk Park. LSP is Winnipeg's largest public housing complex. It is located in the heart of the North End. In the 1990s it was half-empty. Units were boarded-up. Those who lived and worked there at the time routinely referred to it as a "war zone." It was not safe, and was widely seen as a place to avoid.

In 2005 the North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC) secured a federal government grant to work in LSP to reduce crime and violence. NECRC is a "neighbourhood renewal corporation." It works in 11 North End neighbourhoods and receives core funding from Neighbourhoods Alive!

The NECRC team, led by Director of Community Development Janice Goodman, began its work in LSP by meeting with residents, developing relationships, earning peoples' trust and learning about the hopes and fears of those who lived there. This is classic community organizing.

People told us they wanted a safe space

to meet, where they could talk with neighbours and break down the social isolation they experienced. We responded by creating a Resource Centre in an empty unit. Neighbourhoods Alive! contributed significantly to its funding.

Residents told us they wanted to earn their grade 12. Many were single parents with, on average, grade 7, 8 or 9. They were stuck on social assistance, and hated it. They wanted to change their lives. We negotiated with the provincial government to locate an Adult Learning Centre in LSP, and to create a literacy program, and because parents and especially single parents needed childcare to take advantage of educational opportunities, we negotiated again with the provincial government to locate a 47-space childcare centre in LSP.

It is just over a decade since we started. Throughout that decade Neighbourhoods Alive! has provided consistent and substantial financial support to both NECRC and the Lord Selkirk Park Resource Centre.

Today, LSP is a different place. It is fully occupied. There is a wait list of people wanting to live there — evidence of the many improvements. There are some 60 newcomer families living in LSP; they have become a seamless part of the largely Indigenous community. Approximately 80 adults have graduated with their mature grade 12 diploma

there is an alternative.

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from Kaakiyow, the Adult Learning Centre. Few would otherwise have been able to earn their grade 12. The literacy program is full to capacity and has a wait list — residents want to take advantage of opportunities to change their lives. The childcare centre is piloting the Abecedarian model, and is proving to be hugely beneficial to children, especially in terms of language acquisition. A recent evaluation of the Resource Centre reported that it is “highly successful” and is having a “profound impact in the lives of neighbourhood residents.”

This is a dramatic success story. What was one of Winnipeg’s most difficult neighbourhoods has been significantly transformed. It has taken only a decade. If this can happen in a neighbourhood as challenged as Lord Selkirk Park was, it can happen anywhere.

The process was driven by the North End Community Renewal Corporation. NECRC gets core funding from Neighbourhoods Alive!, as does the Lord Selkirk Park Resource Centre, which has also played a key role in LSP.

There is much more still to be done, in LSP and elsewhere. On the day the provincial government announced that NA’s funding was frozen, NECRC released a new five-year vision for the North End. The plan for economic and social renewal was developed in collaboration with North End residents. It prioritizes opportunities for youth to break inter-generational cycles of poverty, which is especially important since the North End has the highest child apprehension rates, and shamefully, more than 10,000 children — 90 percent of them Indigenous — are in the care of CFS.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry have called for solutions that get at the roots of this problem. The NECRC plan is intended to do that. That’s what has happened in LSP. But this work needs resources, and so NA funding is essential.

Other neighbourhood renewal corporations get core funding from NA. Those inner-city neighbourhoods are also making gains — for example, a

recent study found that the decades-long inner-city population decline not only has stopped, but has been reversed, and that education and employment indicators are turning around. But these hard-earned gains are fragile and require consistent, long-term investment in order fully to take root. Neighbourhoods Alive! has played a key role in the gains being made, and its continued funding is essential if this is to continue.

Terminating Neighbourhoods Alive! would be a dreadful mistake. It would be a betrayal of the poorest among us. It would be a repudiation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the recommendations of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry. That would be morally wrong. And it would be economically counter-productive.

Neighbourhoods Alive! is a clear case of intelligent public investment producing far better results than thoughtless cutting for the sake of cutting.

Don’t cut Neighbourhoods Alive!

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