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CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA OFFICE

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# FAST FACTS

**February 23, 2010**

## Public funds for Youth For Christ: Have our politicians learned nothing from past mistakes?

**O**n February 17, 2010, the Mayor’s Executive Policy Committee (EPC) passed a motion to provide a grant in the amount of \$225,000 per year for 15 years in support of the Youth for Christ Centre of Excellence. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, Winnipeg City Council will vote on the motion.

As service providers working with inner-city youth, our organizations strongly agree that we need to increase recreational opportunities for inner-city youth in Winnipeg. However, we strongly oppose public funding for the Youth for Christ Centre.

It is our hope that once Council members hear our concerns, they will vote against providing public funds for this project.

First, it is important for City Council to understand that there is a strong network of organizations working in collaboration to understand the special needs of inner-city youth. We are responding to a very difficult task and we do so with culturally appropriate services and sensitivity to the diversity of beliefs and values in our community.

We take great exception to millions of dollars in public money being handed over to a Christian evangelical organization led by individuals with no connection to the many organizations

doing important work in the inner city. Unlike some other faith-based organizations that work respectfully and in collaboration with a diverse network of community organizations, Youth for Christ representatives refer to non-Christians as “deniers” and the organization is explicit in its objectives to ‘Christianize’ youth through their mission in the inner city. These objectives are clearly expressed on their website through statements such as:

“Youth for Christ, Canada exists to impact every young person in Canada with the person, work and teachings of Jesus Christ and discipling them into the Church....”

“...we will communicate to youth the life-changing message of Jesus Christ, showing concern for their whole person, and challenging them to become His disciples.”

They go on to describe a mission that includes: “the aboriginal youth community as a prime area for development....”

While we recognize that Youth for Christ has a right to work in the inner city, we very strongly believe that it is not appropriate to provide public funding to a fundamentalist Christian organization when other more culturally appropriate programs are starving for support.



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## *FAST FACTS continued ...*

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### **Lessons from history**

Given the high percentage of Aboriginal children living in the inner city, it is important for Council to understand why community-based organizations are so offended by the idea of funding an evangelical Christian organization intent on converting Aboriginal youth.

While we have a long way yet to go to correct past injustices, we can learn much from past mistakes. Those mistakes include the belief that bringing Christian values to a community will result in positive outcomes. We now know from the failed experiment of residential schools that the effects can be extremely damaging. While the Youth for Christ approach is more subtle than that used in residential schools, it is in essence based on the same model--Christianity is viewed as superior and missionaries from outside the community will teach people a better way. Existing organizations working with youth in the inner city--Aboriginal as well as many non-Aboriginal-- have been working for years to reverse the great harm caused by assimilationist policies and attempts to 'Christianize' a people with a strong culture and spirituality of their own. The fact that the Mayor's EPC is eager to take \$225,000 a year for 15 years to fund a fundamentalist Christian project, out of a budget that is supposedly so strained that it cannot support existing public recreation programs and more culturally appropriate community based initiatives, is extremely troubling for those who know first hand the damage that 'well meaning' Christians have caused.

Aboriginal youth represent the majority of youth in the neighbourhoods near the proposed Christian centre. There are several organizations that have developed significant expertise working with this population through culturally appropriate programs. These are the types of programs that should be supported if there is an extra \$225,000 available in the City of Winnipeg operating budget.

### **What process?**

Also of concern is the process by which a multi-million dollar commitment has been made. Established organizations following due process for financial support for time-tested programs are being denied support. How is it that Winnipeg City Council is suddenly able to free up \$225,000 dollars annually for 15 years when inner-city organizations have been told that the cupboards are bare?

Community-based organizations regularly consult and collaborate with one another in efforts to better serve the inner-city population. Community members and program users are regularly consulted to provide direction on programming priorities. In fact funders, including the City of Winnipeg, often require project proposals to demonstrate community support and partnerships before considering them for funding.

Where are the community partners in the Youth for Christ project? How has the Youth for Christ initiative consulted with the community? Given the high percentage of Aboriginal children living in the inner city, have Aboriginal organizations been consulted or engaged?

There are far too many questions and concerns about this project. Our City Council has a responsibility to the citizens of Winnipeg to answer these questions and to take seriously the concerns of the community-based organizations long committed to serving youth in the inner city. Council members should vote against the motion to provide public funds in support the Youth for Christ Centre of Excellence.

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