



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

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## Teenaged photojournalists document the inner city

Sixteen youth from North and West End Winnipeg were given an important assignment: tell the stories of their neighbourhoods to the rest of Winnipeg. The results are insightful and compelling; the inner city is as beautiful as it is ugly, a place of play and a place of fear and most importantly, a place where young people feel they belong and are proud to call home.

For this year's State of the Inner City Report, CCPA Manitoba worked with two youth-serving organizations on a photovoice research project. Photovoice is a research approach whereby the subjects of the research become the researchers. The youth received photography training and wrote accompanying narratives to the images. Over seven weekly meetings, the youth engaged in discussions about what makes their neighbourhoods good places and what they want to change. We discussed ethics in photography and learned about research and why it is important. Their honest findings add urgency to the long-standing injustice of poverty in our city and province.

Poverty in Winnipeg disproportionately impacts children and youth: children aged 15 and under had the highest rate of poverty of all age groups in 2010, 22 percent, while youth ages 15 to 24 had the second highest rate of poverty in a major urban centre in Canada, according to the 2011 National Household Survey. Approximately 9,400 children aged 0 - 19 live below the poverty line in Inner City Winnipeg. Manitoba has had the unfortunate moniker of the child

poverty capital of Canada on more than one occasion, in 2012 we moved to the second-highest, after BC. The situation is worse for Aboriginal Manitoba youth: 56 percent or one in two live in poverty. Many of them live in Winnipeg's Inner City, where 21 per cent of the population is made of Aboriginal people.

Growing up in this situation can have devastating impacts on young people, and perpetuate this cycle over generations. It is only by investing in community-based supports and improving the economic situation of low-income families that the cycle of poverty can be broken. The State of the Inner City Report documents the literature on the impacts of poverty on youth in terms of education, housing and safety. The following is a summary of what we found and what needs to be done.

Poverty has a cascading impact on young people's lives; children who grow up poor are less likely to be ready for school, do well in school and graduate. In Winnipeg, according to the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, the lower-income neighbourhoods have significantly lower graduation rates – the inner-city neighbourhood with the lowest income had a graduation rate of 55.4 percent, in comparison with the highest rate of 98.5 per cent, found outside the Inner City. Research shows that family and community supports

there is an alternative.

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across the child and youth lifespan address this, through early childhood education and working with families and children to mentor and support young people to complete high school and continue on to post-secondary education. This also pays off in terms of decreased social welfare costs, as well as criminal justice and health care costs.

The Community Education Development Association (CEDA) Pathways to Education program, one of the partners in the photovoice project, works with over 400 youth and their parents to support young people to complete high school in North End Winnipeg. This program has been tailored to local needs, incorporating indigenous teachings to develop strong identity and empowerment among youth.

Education is a proven path out of poverty. However in order to go to school, basic needs must be met: most notably adequate, safe and affordable housing. The housing crisis for low-income families is a result of stagnant income for families on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), skyrocketing cost of rent a vacancy rate of below two percent. Affordable housing is not being created fast enough – the Right to Housing Coalition estimates that 3,000 units need to be built per year to meet demand; the Manitoba government has committed to 500 units per year. With the federal government virtually absent on the affordable housing scene and the City of Winnipeg choosing to be a small player, families and children continue to suffer due to core housing need. The youth researchers found this to be the case – their photos of boarded up or derelict homes and vacant lots come with a straight-forward recommendation: build more housing.

Safety is the strongest theme that emerged from the youth research. The youth are concerned about their personal safety and shared steps they take to be safe. They like their neighbourhoods but feel vulnerable because of criminal activities. Despite stereotypes of inner city youth gang

involvement, the youth involved in this research project referenced gangs only in terms of something to be avoided; this could be attributed to their involvement in local community-based organizations. Research shows that adolescent youth require alternative places for self-expression and the development of healthy relationships in order to build a sense belonging and growth. The Spence Neighbourhood Association is just one example of CBOs who do this, by building relationships with each child and youth, so that youth feel respected and included.

This research project was guided by the CBOs working on the front lines against poverty; they wisely advised that a youth lens is needed to shed new light on poverty and reinvigorate anti-poverty efforts. The camera lenses highlight the youths' feelings of vulnerability, giving us a glimpse of how profoundly affected they are by the challenges faced by low-income communities.

May these photos inspire everyone who sees them to look deeper, challenge assumptions, build connections, invest more resources and be proactive so that we may eliminate poverty in Winnipeg.

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