



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

August 7, 2013

Thoughtful, committed citizens make change: Right to Housing

Affordability of housing has been an important issue in Winnipeg for the last decade or so, with vacancy rates well below three percent and rents rising every year. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in discussion of housing, and a broader awareness that something needs to change to improve this situation. This is due in no small measure to a group of loud and persistent advocates for social and affordable housing in Manitoba: the individuals and organizations that form Right to Housing.

Right to Housing is a non-partisan Winnipeg-based coalition of individuals, community organizations and businesses that advocate for housing for low-income people in Manitoba. It got its start eight years ago, when a small group from some churches in River Heights got together in Winnipeg to talk about the then-empty housing on the Kapyong Barracks. Heating the vacant houses through the winter seemed preposterous when there were thousands of families needing good quality shelter in the city. The group decided it wanted to do something and set out to talk to government officials and service agencies about the issue.

As the group began to build connections and networks with others who shared similar concerns, they also began to educate themselves about the housing crisis that many Winnipeggers face. They began to make connections to other poverty-related issues, and realized that the real issue was not the housing at Kapyong, but the lack of affordable and social housing in general.

On January 6, 2006, the group held a well-attended public meeting, and out of that interest Right to Housing was formed. Its first action was to draft a letter to the prime minister and the leaders of all parties in Ottawa. The letter not only asked for action on the empty houses on Kapyong, but also for the federal government to become a more active partner in funding the creation of social housing.

Soon after, Right to Housing established working groups to press the municipal, provincial and federal governments to address the housing needs of low-income households. Each working group developed specific requests, and Right to Housing worked with its partners to build support around these requests and advocate to the governments to implement them. Working with community organizations, Right to Housing was able to access resources such as meeting space, funding for occasional events, and background research to complement its advocacy.

Over the years, Right to Housing's successes have been significant. It has succeeded in getting housing on the political agenda and in the media, which has created a space for discussion of housing issues. It has also raised awareness and concern among Winnipeggers and elected officials about housing issues. Right to Housing is now recognized as a stakeholder in housing

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog

www.policyfix.ca

twitter

@ccpamb

CAW TCA
CANADA
Local 967

continued..

discussions in the community and by the provincial and municipal governments, which means that Right to Housing is able to advocate on behalf of many of its members for stronger housing policies to support low-income households.

In addition to this, and more concretely, in 2009 Right to Housing secured a commitment from the provincial government that it would build 300 rent-geared-to-income units, and 300 affordable units of housing each year for the following five years. This came as a result of three years of lobbying on a clear and focused platform. The commitment happened at a provincial NDP leadership debate, when Right to Housing saw an opportunity to pressure the future party leaders to support the request for 300 units of social housing per year. Both candidates agreed that, if elected, they would add this to their budget.

In this year's budget, the Province again committed to building 500 units of social housing, and 500 units of affordable housing. Although not directly a result of a Right to Housing request, civil servants said that pressure from Right to Housing and Make Poverty History Manitoba (among others) was a strong factor in this year's budget decisions.

These successes have re-energized the work of the coalition. However, Right to Housing also continues to face challenges in its work. Its successes, though important, were preceded by years of lobbying, strategizing, research, relationship-building, and hard work. It is easy to become frustrated and discouraged, especially when there is so much more work to be done. This has been particularly true in strategizing about how to approach the federal government and City of Winnipeg, which have not been especially receptive to discussions about social housing.

Despite these ongoing challenges, Right to Housing continues with its work. It continues to press the Province to build more social housing, and to work with non-profit organizations, other levels of

government, and businesses to develop affordable housing. It also advocates to Winnipeg City Council, pushing for a higher priority for housing in City affairs, and is working to raise awareness of the federal expiry of social housing operating agreements.

Although Right to Housing remains committed to its work, and cautiously optimistic about the future, it is unlikely that the housing challenges facing low-income households will disappear anytime soon. It is inspiring, however, to see the pay-off of the last few years of work, and to recognize that relationship-building, persistent reiteration of housing as a priority, and on-going advocacy can have—however slowly—an impact on housing policy and reality in Manitoba.

For more information on Right to Housing visit www.righttohousing.ca

Sarah Cooper is the Researcher, Housing and Community Development, at CCPA Manitoba

CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog

www.policyfix.ca

twitter

@ccpamb



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.