

*State of the*

# INNER CITY

**Community, Research  
and Social Change**



**CCCPA**

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA

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**Community, Research and Social Change:  
State of the Inner City Report 2014**

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“Its more than a collection of stories: looking back on State of the Inner City research collaboration” by Shauna MacKinnon

“It Takes a Community to Support a Family: community based supports for families and the child welfare system” by Molly McCracken and Julia Higgins

Cover art by Markus Houston, a local Aboriginal artist living in Winnipeg. Used with permission for the State of the Inner City Report. [markushouston@yahoo.ca](mailto:markushouston@yahoo.ca)

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**TABLE 1 State of the Inner City Reports 2005 – 2013**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reports</b>	<b>Topics</b>
2005	<i>The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Considerations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describing inner city</li> <li>- Statistical overview</li> <li>- Housing, employment development and education</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A view from the neighbourhoods:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comparative analysis of Spence, Centennial and Lord Selkirk Park</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2006	<i>Inner City Voices: Community-Based Solutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A portrait of West Broadway and North Point Douglas</li> <li>• Inner City Refugee Women: Lessons for Public Policy</li> <li>• Bridging the Community-Police Divide: Safety and Security in Winnipeg's Inner City</li> </ul>
2007	<i>Step by Step: Stories of Change in Winnipeg's Inner City</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a Community of Opportunity and Hope: Lord Selkirk Park Housing Developments</li> <li>• Costing an Ounce of Prevention: The Fiscal Benefits of Investing in Inner City Preventive Strategies (cost to themselves and society of young women entering the street sex trade)</li> <li>• Is Participation Having an Impact? (how do we measure progress in Winnipeg's Inner City? A participatory approach to understanding outcomes)</li> </ul>
2008	<i>Putting Our Housing in Order</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy, people and Winnipeg's inner city</li> <li>• Voicing housing experiences in inner city Winnipeg</li> <li>• From revitalization to revaluation in the Spence neighbourhood</li> <li>• Homeownership for low-income households: outcomes for families and communities</li> </ul>
2009	<i>It Takes All Day to be Poor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven individuals document their experiences living on a low income budget</li> <li>• Tracking poverty in Winnipeg's inner city 1996 – 2006 (analysis of census data)</li> <li>• Lord Selkirk Park: Rebuilding from Within (how community and government can work together to make change for the better)</li> </ul>
2010	<i>We're in it for the Long Haul</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Together we have CLOUT: model of service delivery and analysis of "the Just City"</li> <li>• Early Childhood Education and Care in the Inner City and Beyond: Addressing the Inequalities Facing Winnipeg's Aboriginal children</li> <li>• Squeezed Out: The impact of rising rents and condo conversions on inner city neighbourhoods</li> </ul>
2011	<i>Neo-Liberalism: What a Difference a Theory Makes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Program: Exploring the Policy Impacts on Winnipeg's inner city</li> <li>• Housing for People, Not Markets: Neoliberalism and housing in Winnipeg's inner city</li> <li>• Policy and the Unique Needs of Aboriginal Second-Chance Learners</li> </ul>
2012	<i>Breaking barriers, building bridges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who's accountable to the community? (two way accountability government to community-based organizations)</li> <li>• Fixing our divided city: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, inner city and non-inner city and Aboriginal Elders' dialogue on breaking down barriers</li> </ul>
2013	<i>A Youth Lens on Poverty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature of youth &amp; poverty: safety, housing and education</li> <li>• Youth photovoice</li> </ul>

# Introduction

The *State of the Inner City Report* is an annual research collaboration between the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba and community organizations based in the inner city of Winnipeg. This year marks its tenth year anniversary. Since the beginning, the State of the Inner City Reports have celebrated community-based development and have advanced progressive policy alternatives put forward by those working and living directly in the community.

Winnipeg's inner city has a long history of struggle with poverty and a comprehensive, geographically focused response emerged. This began in 1981 with the Core Area Initiative (CAI), a multi-year tripartite agreement between the three levels of government, which stimulated creative community-based development projects. The State of the Inner City Report series emerged with an impetus to highlight the subsequent achievements of community-based development.

"Its more than a collection of stories," by one of the founders of the State of the Inner City Report, Shauna MacKinnon, highlights the objectives and accomplishments of the Report series. The Report celebrates community-based development efforts to improve quality of life in the inner city. The Report itself is informed by community development philosophy and documents

the strengths of the inner city while building local research capacity. At the same time, the State of the Inner City Report identifies service gaps and policy shortcomings and provides policy alternatives identified by experiential people and inner city leaders. The second paper in this year's Report advances these objectives based on a research priority identified by inner city leaders.

"It takes a community to support a family", is about the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) in supporting families involved in the child welfare system and struggling with poverty. The number of children in care in Manitoba continues to rise, and Aboriginal children are severely over-represented. The root causes are complex - families struggle with inter-generational trauma caused by the impact of colonization along with the retreat of the social welfare state, lack of social housing and low Employment and Income Assistance rates.

The Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, *Achieving the Best for All Our Children*, released a year ago highlights the importance of community-based supports for child and family health and well-being. The approach used by CBOs can be described as anti-oppressive; they see the problems faced by families as rooted in the socio-political structure of society, and as a result of lack of ac-

cess to power and resources. Therefore families must be at the centre, leading their healing process, surrounded by wrap-around supports and a strong social safety net.

Given the high proportion of Aboriginal children in care, it follows logically that the Aboriginal community should be resourced to respond to the needs of children and families. However, many CBOs feel that the devolution of the child welfare system has not yet led to Aboriginal self-determination as originally intended. The prevailing paradigm of the child welfare system is one of protection, which focuses on risks and individual deficits. An alternative approach that builds on family strengths and assets is needed to reverse the trend that has seen the number of Aboriginal children in care almost double in the past ten years. CBOs are well-placed to provide holistic prevention services based on relationships of trust supporting families to build natural, peer support networks.

Through interviews with community leaders, the paper recommends that on top of implementing the recommendations of *The Legacy of*

*Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*, a number of additional efforts should be employed to build partnerships, understanding and supports for children, youth and families. These efforts must involve regular communication and meaningful collaboration between CBOs, government, child welfare authorities and child welfare agencies. Intermediary organizations like the CFS Community Network should be resourced to support direct service CBOs interacting with the child welfare system. Anti-oppressive training should be provided to all who work with vulnerable families. Families need access to social housing to create stability and reduce the stress of making ends meet.

After ten years of research with members of the inner city community, we have been honoured to witness the benefits of community-led development. We are grateful to our many community partners on this journey with us and acknowledge it is our collective strength and perseverance in the face of poverty and colonization that keeps us motivated to do research for positive social change.



# It's More Than a Collection of Stories

By Shauna MacKinnon

In 2005, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) – Manitoba began a journey with inner-city organizations that has evolved into a research collaboration that marks its tenth year with the release of this report. Throughout this period, several hundred individuals, from diverse backgrounds and experiences, have been involved in the *State of the Inner City (SIC) Report* project in various ways. Previous to this CCPA Manitoba had been actively engaged in community collaborative research for many years and had developed a reputation for conducting research in areas of importance to the inner city. A significant level of trust had already been established, making it possible to explore new ways of conducting research and sharing inner city stories.

But the State of the Inner City Report has always been more than a collection of stories. As outlined in our first *State of the Inner City Report* titled “*The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal*,” a central purpose has been to share the many stories of strength and perseverance that are common in Winnipeg’s inner-city neighbourhoods. But the aim has been broader than this. We’ve wanted to demonstrate what can be done when governments and other funding agencies invest in community-based develop-

ment and we’ve aimed to remind funding agencies, and in particular governments, that they have an important role not only as funders, but as policymakers.

Within the context of these broader aims, the State of the Inner City Report continues to have four interrelated objectives. One, to celebrate the community-based development work and those committed to improving the quality of life in the inner city. Two, to shift attitudes about the inner city by dispelling myths and illustrating strengths. Three, to identify service gaps and policy inadequacies, and four, to provide policy and program solutions identified by those working on the frontlines.

The SIC project uses a participatory action research framework that puts community in the driver’s seat while also emphasizing the importance of creating tools that can be used to advocate for policy change. CCPA-Mb researchers work closely with community-based organizations to identify research priorities and to develop methods of inquiry that are consistent with their values and practice models. As the past director of Winnipeg’s Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre and a key SIC community partner describes it, “We tell the researchers what the issues are and what research we think we need. They come back

to us with some ideas and together we make it happen...I feel like I'm driving it."

This sense of community ownership is a central benefit. The SIC gives voice to a community that is otherwise not heard and provides tools that can be used to advocate for improved policies and programs. The SIC makes it possible to highlight the achievements of community-based organizations (CBOs), which is important generally given that poverty is so hidden and governments are not always appreciative of, nor ideologically sympathetic to, the positive benefit that adequately financed CBOs can bring to community. While they understand the usefulness of research, CBOs do not have research capacity and are busy with the day-to-day, front-line work that they are mandated to do. The SIC can help by providing researchers while also contributing to the capacity-building goals of inner-city organizations by hiring and training community researchers. These individuals gain new skills, and as described later in this chapter, for some the experience has been transformative.

Although the State of the Inner City Report project marks its 10th year, the work that we describe and celebrate began much earlier and the initial idea of doing the SIC was in part inspired by historical challenges and the individuals committed to inner-city development long before 2005.

The inner-city communities that are the focus of this research have had a long history of struggle (Loxley 2012; Silver 2006). While poverty exists in pockets across the city, it has long been concentrated in Winnipeg's inner city. An increasing number of new immigrants, and in particular refugees, have more recently added to the diversity of the inner city, however the 'face' of the inner city continues to be disproportionately Aboriginal. Winnipeg generally has a large and fast growing Aboriginal population—the highest among census metropolitan areas in Canada. And while Aboriginal people live in all areas of the city, they are disproportionately located in the inner city. The Aboriginal popu-

lation continues to fare poorly compared with the non-Aboriginal population on several social and economic indicators (Fernandez, MacKinnon and Silver, 2010). The growing number of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg is in part due to relatively high birth rates of urban Aboriginal people, but it is also a function of Aboriginal people relocating from First Nation communities to seek education and employment opportunities. Many live in poor Winnipeg inner-city neighbourhoods, where residents in general experience lower incomes, higher rates of unemployment, a higher incidence of single parenthood, lower levels of educational attainment, housing insecurity, a higher level of crime-related violence, and greater dependency on welfare. Aboriginal people from reserve communities often gravitate to the inner city because this is where they find family and friends from their home communities, and because rent is generally lower in the inner city than elsewhere in Winnipeg. All too often they become trapped in a cycle of poverty, caught up in oppressive systems, and lose hope. But while this hopelessness and despair is clearly evident in the inner city, community-based organizations have refused to give up and there is a strong spirit of hope, reclaiming of culture, neighbourhood revitalization and community building taking place.

#### The Political Context: Past and Current

The initial interest in this project resulted from earlier research with community-based organizations and an awareness that much of the work in recent years has been made possible due to an advantageous political climate. If history is any indication of what the future might hold for community-based organizations, the current level of support will inevitably come to an end. Throughout the 2000s inner-city organizations have been in a more positive financial situation than was the case throughout the 1990s. This is the case because the provincial New Democratic Party

(NDP) government has been committed to supporting inner-city work. Documenting the good work being done will help organizations make their case in the future with governments that might be less amenable to investing in the inner city. This is important because history tells us that investment in Winnipeg's inner city has always very much depended upon the political landscape.

### Support for Inner City Development in the 1970s and 1980s

Urban revitalization through comprehensive, geographic focused strategies began to replace more narrowly focused sectoral approaches in the mid 1970s (Layne 2000). This shift in philosophy had a particularly strong impact in Winnipeg in the 1980s with the introduction of programs such as the Core Area Initiative, a multi-year tripartite agreement signed between Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg. The initial Core Area Initiative was signed by a federal Liberal government, a provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) government and a municipal government led by Mayor William Norrie. The 5-year, \$96 million agreement (1981 – 1986) was geographically focused on the inner city and downtown and emphasized both poverty reduction and physical revitalization. A subsequent agreement, Core Area Initiative II (CAI-II) was signed in 1986 between a Conservative federal government (Brian Mulroney), a provincial NDP government (Howard Pawley), and Mayor Norrie. The Core Area Initiatives provided the funding necessary for creative community-based development projects including community-based education and training initiatives, infill housing, and inner city neighbourhood renewal projects (Layne, 2000).

Midway through the CAI II, Manitoba elected a Conservative government led by Premier Garry Filmon. The CAI II ended in 1992 and it was three years before another tripartite agreement was signed. The new agreement, signed by a federal Liberal government (Jean Chretien),

a provincial Conservative government (Garry Filmon) and Mayor Glen Murray, moved away from the previous geographic, poverty reduction focus. While the inner city and downtown were not excluded, fewer resources were available as government priorities changed. The focus of the Winnipeg Development Agreement (1995-2001) was more generic, with new objectives focused broadly on creating safe and productive environments, creating skills, work experience and education (labour market focus) and job creation (private sector focus).

The focus on inner-city development returned in a new tripartite agreement signed in 2004 under the leadership of a federal Liberal government (Paul Martin), Provincial NDP (Gary Doer) and Winnipeg Mayor Glen Murray. The 5-year, \$75 million tripartite agreement known as the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement expired in 2009 and the federal Conservative government under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has shown no interest in continuing the tradition of entering into cost-shared urban development tripartite agreements with the Province and City of Winnipeg. It should also be noted that the Provincial government had a key role in shaping the parameters of the previous Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, bringing the focus back to inner-city development, a focus that was lost when the Provincial Conservative government was in power in the 1990s. This shift in focus from a narrow to broad geographic focus is not surprising given the historical and very clear ideological/ geographical divide in Winnipeg.

Political power in Manitoba has historically moved from the right leaning Conservative party to the left leaning NDP. Members of the NDP have consistently been elected in the inner city and therefore these neighbourhoods have been best off when the NDP is in power. After eight years out of office throughout the 1990s, the NDP was elected in 1999. One of the first initiatives the NDP government introduced, after a decade of cuts under a Conservative government, was

an inner-city initiative called *Neighbourhoods Alive!* (NA!). NA! and the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement gave a much-needed injection of support for inner-city community development. *Neighbourhoods Alive!* was initially limited to project funds for community projects, but in part as a response to the advocacy efforts of the community, it soon expanded to include multi-year core funding for Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations in targeted neighbourhoods. After a long stretch of deep cuts to social spending in the 1990s, the federal Liberal government began to again contribute to inner-city development through various project funding later in the 1990s and through the WPA. However, much of this funding was eliminated when the federal Conservatives came into power. While the funding environment remains far from perfect, the current provincial government has been instrumental to the boost of energy, enthusiasm and creativity we have seen in the inner city over the past 15 years.

In part, the State of the Inner City research project has evolved from the belief that documenting inner-city stories to demonstrate the positive impact of investment over the past 15 years will be useful to organizations. It can arm CBOs with evidence that shows they are making a difference in the lives of inner-city residents while also serving to have a positive social and economic impact for all of Manitoba. The hope is that this evidence will ensure that the experience of the 1990s will not be repeated and that governments of all stripes will see the benefit of investing in the inner-city development work that has evolved since that time.

#### Inner-City Development in the 1990s

There is a long history of community-based response to inner-city challenges in Winnipeg. Some of the organizations that participate in the State of the Inner City Report project were actively engaged in inner city community devel-

opment long before the year 2000. For example, The Community Education Development Association (CEDA) was formed in 1979 by inner-city parents who wanted a stronger voice in issues concerning the education of their children. The Native Women's Transition Centre, also established in 1979, continues to provide safe transitional housing for vulnerable Aboriginal women and children. The North End Women's Centre has provided services to women and families in the North End since 1984.

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. was formed through grass roots efforts in 1984 by a group of mostly female Aboriginal leaders in Winnipeg's inner city. Their aim was "to reclaim Aboriginal people's inherent role and responsibility as the caregivers for Aboriginal children and families in Winnipeg" (Ma Mawi Wi chi Itata, n.d.). A few years later Ma Maw Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. took a leading role in establishing a safe home for Aboriginal youth. Ndinwemaaaganag Endaawaad was established in 1994 and has since grown to provide a range of services for Aboriginal youth. Andrews Street Family Centre was formed in 1995 with a mandate "to be a family resource centre that builds on its community's strengths and encourages its individuals, children, elders, families and youth to reach their full potential through support, friendship and positive experiences."

These organizations survived and thrived in spite of severe government cutbacks in the 1990s. Others did not.

The early 1990s were difficult times for many Canadians and in particular for those living on the edge—surviving from pay cheque to pay cheque. By 1992, Canada was deep into a recession. Like in many cities, Winnipeg's unemployment rate had risen to levels not seen in several years. In 1992 the unemployment rate in Winnipeg was 11.3 percent compared with 7.9 percent in 1990 (Statistics Canada 1996).

In keeping with the general shift to neoliberalism that began to take shape under the lead-

FIGURE 1 Cartoon



SOURCE: Retrieved from CHOICES archives, University of Winnipeg, November 2014

ership of the federal Conservative government in the 1980s, the governments of Canada and Manitoba were focused on retrenchment, deregulation and privatization of public services.

Governments at all levels made severe cuts to health and social services in the name of deficit reduction. This focus on deficit reduction continued with a federal Liberal government, elected with a majority in 1993. Finance Minister Paul Martin, as depicted in the above political cartoon featured in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1995, continues to be known for 1995 “deficit busting budget” that led to major cuts to transfers and programs. Government debts and deficits were indeed rising in the 1990s although ar-

guably a problem of the government of Canada’s own making through restrictive monetary policy and contradictory fiscal policy (Stanford 1999). The neoliberal solution was to cut spending, and Manitoba’s Conservative government followed suite by drastically reducing program spending between 1992 and 2000 (Figure 2).

Provincial cuts and sweeping federal policy changes made life difficult for many in the 1990s, but in particularly for individuals and families living in poverty. The inner city was hit particularly hard. Many community-led initiatives became easy targets and much of the progress made prior to this time was setback as a result. For example, in 1992 a provincial Conservative

FIGURE 2 Program Spending as percent GDP Manitoba



**SOURCE:** Investing in People: The 1999/2000 Budget of CHO!CE. CHO!CES Coalition for Social Justice and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

government eliminated funding to several community-based organizations in Winnipeg’s inner city. The social justice coalition, CHO!CES, highlighted these and other cuts to non-government organizations in the publication titled *The Real Deficit* (1993) while also featuring stories of inner-city residents who were negatively affected. Similar to the current actions taken by the federal Harper government, the Filmon government cut funding to organizations advocating for the most marginalized, including the Manitoba Anti-Poverty Organization, Aboriginal and Métis Friendships Centres across Manitoba, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. The Manitoba government also cut important social services and supports. For example, childcare subsidies for low-income families were reduced, financial supports to assist low-income, multi-barriered individuals return to school were eliminated, and social assistance benefits were reduced. As described by one inner city resident, who felt she had no choice but to pull her four children from childcare as a result of program cuts, “I know

daycare was a safe place for them.... [now] I just don’t have the money.” Another individual spoke of the effect program cuts had on her attempts to return to school: “I grew up on the streets. I stole for food. I know how my children’s lives will turn out if we don’t get an education and jobs.... they have to open their eyes and see what they’re doing is wrong.” (CHO!CES 1993).

Many community-based organizations continued to survive throughout the 1990s but their ability to do creative and innovative work was greatly reduced as program funding disappeared. As described by one long-time inner city CBO Executive Director, “we were in maintenance mode... just barely surviving and doing what we could to help inner-city residents with very limited resources.” (personal communication, November 2014.)

Community-based organizations persevered and residents began to mobilize in an effort to stem the deterioration they were seeing in their neighbourhoods. They looked to neighbourhood revitalization strategies in other jurisdictions and new organizations began to emerge.

## Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations – A New Era for Community Development Practice

As noted, disinvestment in the 1990s led to serious inner-city decline in the 1990s. Winnipeg's North End became known across Canada as the Arson Capital of Canada (CBC, 1999). Winnipeg's reputation for violent crimes grew, neighbourhoods began to deteriorate and public and private housing stock was left to decline. Community residents began to mobilize in response. The West Broadway Development Corporation (now West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO)) was established in 1997 with the aim to revitalize a struggling neighbourhood. The Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) was established in 1997 by volunteers seeking to improve conditions in that neighbourhood. In response to troubling trends and inspired by community development corporations in other jurisdictions, The North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC) was established in 1998 to promote social, economic and cultural renewal in the North End.

But these organizations struggled to survive in their early years, with few resources. Soon after being elected in 1999, the provincial NDP government set its sights on supporting community renewal efforts. In 2000 the Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!) Initiative was introduced. Initially NA! was limited to a project fund that community organizations could apply for to assist them with their community development work. While grateful to have this dedicated source of funds, NRCs called upon the government to do more. They proposed that NA! be expanded to emulate a similar program established in Saskatchewan which provided neighbourhood-based organizations in Regina and Saskatoon with multi-year core support to fulfill their neighbourhood renewal mandates. To its credit, Manitoba responded accordingly, establishing the Neighbourhood Development Assistance (NDA) Fund, a multi-year funding stream for Neighbourhood Renewal

Corporations (NRCs) in designated neighbourhoods and communities across Manitoba. The NDA initially supported the West Broadway Development Corporation, Spence Neighbourhood Association and the North End Renewal Corporation in Winnipeg as well as the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation and the Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation. It has since expanded to include the Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation, The Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation, and Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation in Winnipeg as well as Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations in Portage la Prairie, Flin Flon, Dauphin, The Pas and Selkirk. In addition to the NDA, NA! provides project funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Community Initiatives Fund, and in more recent years has expanded support for smaller localities outside of the inner city, through the Localized Improvement Fund for Tomorrow (LIFT).

Although far from perfect, NA! and government investment in general has made a significant difference in Winnipeg's inner city. By the mid-2000s we were beginning to see these benefits and felt that documenting this progress, while also identifying continued gaps, was essential to the development process taking place. With this in mind, the State of the Inner City Report project began.

### The State of the Inner City Report:

#### Research and Action Toward Social Justice

From the onset, the State of the Inner City Report has been a project driven by the same values that guide community development work in Winnipeg's inner city, aiming to contribute to the capacity building efforts that our community-based partners are engaged in. For this reason, *how* we do our research is as critical as what we do. It is our view that documenting the inner-city journey is best told through the voices of

those who live and work in the neighbourhoods, and that policy prescriptions should be rooted in their experiences.

Although our research is directed by our community partners, the process that we follow is no less rigorous than other research. We obtain ethics approval for our research through the University of Winnipeg Senate Ethics Committee, and various drafts are reviewed and modified prior to publication. A common theme through all State of the Inner City Reports is that they identify community strengths while acknowledging continued challenges and proposing ways in which public policies and programs might better respond.

Through an annual process that can involve a series of meetings, participants define a topic or theme that will shape the direction of research for that year. The sense of ownership is established at this stage of the process because community rather than researchers determine the focus.

Beyond specific research objectives, the SIC has always been viewed as a capacity building project. University students and community residents are often involved as research assistants supervised by experienced university and community researchers. Inner-city residents are often trained and employed to conduct interviews, and assist with transcription. Some community partners take a more active role in developing research tools and participating in research design and implementation while others choose to take a less active role. Community partners are viewed as “the experts” in that they are working on the frontlines and know the issues and obstacles best. We encourage them to identify ways that governments and other funders can better respond to their needs and objectives. All partners are given the opportunity to review draft reports and provide input into final publications.

As further described in the following pages, some of the most important outcomes of the project have been the intangible contributions to the lives of participants and to the advocacy

efforts community-based organizations (CBOs) undertake upon completion of the SIC report. The more tangible ‘deliverables’ (as our funders like to call them) have been the publications and tools produced. To date we have produced ten annual State of the Inner City Reports, two videos and several supplementary and summary documents designed to be accessible to community residents and program participants.

Our reports have been broadly disseminated to policy makers, CBOs and the broader community. Our various reports have been downloaded from the CCPA website over 100,000 times. Our videos are available on YouTube, and we regularly use them as education tools in the classroom, at academic conferences, invited lectures, and government professional development events. As noted, an important aspect is that we include in each and every report, public policy recommendations that we believe respond to the social and economic challenges that we explore. This is a central component of our research because it responds to our community partners’ interest in research that will make a difference in the lives of inner-city residents.

The research materials we produce are also used by organizations as education and advocacy tools and as we have found, they sometimes make their way to unexpected places. For example, in the 2006 *State of the Inner City Report* titled “*Inner City Refugee Women*” *Lessons for Public Policy*, we explored the challenges of refugee women, primarily from African countries, struggling to adapt to life in Winnipeg’s inner city. Women shared with us the tension they felt—on one hand grateful for the refuge Canada provides, but on the other hand learning to accept that their new home is not the paradise they dreamed it would be. As described by the women we interviewed, they continue to face many obstacles. When we completed this project the Somali women who guided our project and worked as research assistants, asked us if we could translate the summary document (which



we call ‘research for communities’) into Arabic. We did so, assuming it was for other refugees in our community for whom Arabic was a first language. However, when we presented the translated document to the women, we learned that they had other motives. The women told us that they would send the research summaries to their families in Somalia. They said that this was important to them for two reasons. First, because they were proud of the work they had done and they wanted their families to see it. More surprising to us was the second reason. The women had shared with us how overwhelming was the pressure they felt to send money back home to help support their families remaining in Somalia. They explained to us that their families back home had an impression that life in Canada came with wealth and stability. They tend not to understand that in relative terms, refugees in Canada often struggle financially and are unable to help families they left behind as much as they would like. The guilt that the women felt weighed heavily, and they believed that sharing their research might help their families in Somalia to understand that life in Canada, while better in many ways, is complicated and at times very difficult. They hoped that if their families better understood this, it might relieve some of the pressure and guilt. For researchers involved in this project, this was a pivotal lesson in the value of fully engaging communities in the research process. We would not have thought that what was for us a fairly simple gesture (translating a short document) could have such an important impact for our community partners.

### What We’ve Learned

The past 10 years have been extremely gratifying for those involved in this project. We have learned a lot, and have developed a particular kind of ‘expertise’ in conducting community-driven research with what we describe as a “critical edge”. But it has also been challenging.

This is largely due to our commitment to a participatory community-based model that sometimes results in the participation of local residents with complicated lives. While some of our community researchers move smoothly through projects, embracing newfound skills and developing confidence along the way, others involved have needed more support and encouragement, and this can be time consuming. In some cases, unforeseen circumstances have led community researchers to “drop out” and we have found ourselves at times scrambling midway through projects to fill in the gaps. While we acknowledge our model is by no means perfect, we feel that the challenges and tradeoffs that are inevitable in projects such as this are overshadowed by the benefits to individuals, organizations and communities. Our partners do too. After completing the fifth *State of the Inner City Report* we suggested ending the project. Our community partners insisted that we continue. Many have told us that it is the first time that they have felt research to be of direct value to them, and they continue to believe the exercise is worth doing.

Having now completed ten *State of the Inner City Reports*, we find it useful to reflect back on how the project began; why it is widely embraced in our community; some of the impact it has had; and why we believe that the project is important to keep alive.

**Building Capacity Through the State of the Inner City Report: The “How” and the “Who”**  
The success of the *State of the Inner City Report* project can be attributed to the community-based participatory framework that we use. This model is particularly appealing as it is both consistent with the CCPA Manitoba’s social justice mandate, and the transformative community development principles that guide our community-based partners. Fundamental to our model is that we study issues identified by the community. While there are many examples of partici-

patory research that is community “based,” our model is better described as community “driven.” Our aim is less about producing research for academic publication, although we do this too, than it is about producing research that can be widely disseminated and in accessible forms that the community can use. While the level of participation in the research process may vary from project to project, we aim as much as possible to have a high level of community participation throughout the research process.

The project was developed in the spirit of a full participation community-led and community-based research paradigm and it is highly dependent upon the well-established trusting relationships that have been nurtured over a long period. It is notable that the majority of participants have been women, and Aboriginal women in particular have played a leadership role.

### The Aboriginal context

Given the high concentration of Aboriginal residents in the inner city, the organizations that they represent provide services primarily, although not exclusively, to this population. Some have built their programming around an anti-oppressive theoretical framework and they integrate a strong cultural component into their programs. Teaching participants about the effects of colonization and oppression is fundamental to their transformative goals.

The demographics of Winnipeg’s inner city led us to agree very early in the research process that a framework from which to proceed would need to recognize the historical context of the Aboriginal experience. Many of our community partners know all too well that healing from the damage caused by colonization and oppression is slow and painful work. Further, oppression through racism, sexism and classism continues to be systemic, therefore healing occurs within a context of recurring injury. As a result, our research is grounded in an understanding

of systemic forces. As described by Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhawai Smith, governments and social agencies have failed to relate indigenous problems with historical experience, and therefore decolonizing research is essential to the reframing of issues to acknowledge historical contexts (2006, 153).

The impact of colonization in Manitoba has been considerable. Indigenous Manitoba researcher Michael Hart, as cited in Silver (2002, 27) describes the deep damage caused by internalized colonization: “Aboriginal people start to believe that we are incapable of learning and that the colonizers’ degrading images and beliefs about Aboriginal people and our ways of being are true.” Reversing the damage of colonization is a critical step toward transformation and it is central to program models of many inner-city CBOs. It is from this philosophical basis that this project has developed and we are careful to ensure that each of our research projects is designed with this in mind. Careful attention is given to all aspects of the research process including identification of projects, research design and data analysis.

Our aim is that the research process remains true to the inclusive, empowering, anti-oppressive and transformative objectives of our partner CBOs. But this is no small feat. Engaging inner-city residents in the research process requires that we understand the controlling relationships imposed by various “systems” that marginalized individuals often experience. Many of our community researchers and those that we interview exemplify this experience. Many are living their lives under the watchful eye of representatives of the state including child welfare authorities, the criminal justice system and welfare authorities. These systems have significant power over their daily lives. This has implications for research because establishing trust becomes more complicated, yet essential, if participants are to feel safe enough to fully share their stories and be empowered through the process. We believe that

our community researchers have been extremely important in this regard as they bring shared experience and sensitivity to the interview process.

It has been our experience that conducting research guided by a paradigm that acknowledges the importance of cultural identity and an understanding of the role that colonization and oppression has played in shaping lives, can contribute to consciousness raising, empowerment, renewed cultural identity, individual emancipation and ultimately, transformative change. Broadening involvement of the community in the research process, building egalitarian relationships with participants through ongoing collaboration, training and hiring community researchers, sharing findings in various forms, and requesting feedback from research participants, are important elements of our research design.

Our community-led process is consistent with the anti-oppressive orientation guiding our CBO partners, and in keeping with transformative and participatory research models and decolonizing methodologies. We learned of this importance early on. For example, in our first *State of the Inner City Report* we looked at housing issues in the inner city because the community told us that the lack of affordable and decent housing was a critical issue for families and individuals. And we know that without safe, reliable housing it is near impossible for individuals to move forward. This housing theme has continued to be present in subsequent years and our research is being used by community groups advocating for policy change and has been effective in steering the province toward a renewed investment in social housing. In fact, the provincial government's investment in social housing, especially since 2009, has been exemplary.

Beginning in our second year, our community partners expressed an interest in examining the difficult to measure outcomes for individuals and families participating in community-based programs. This theme emerged as a result of their frustration with the reporting demands of their

fundors. In our third year we worked with our partners to develop a research model to gather information about the experiences of inner-city residents participating in various community-based programs. Their insight was critical to the design that evolved, and the project provided significant insight into the benefits of participation for individuals, their families and the broader community. In our seventh *SIC Report* our community partners took our research to a deeper level, choosing to focus on the ideological model that has resulted in a scaling back of public support and growth in poverty and inequality that deeply affects their communities. The report—*Neoliberalism, What a Difference a Theory Makes*—reflects the politicization of participants as they began to consider the limitations of community development work in the absence of strong state support, in particular the absence of strong federal government support.

In keeping with Smith's decolonizing research framework, which stresses that "intervention is directed at changing institutions which deal with indigenous peoples and not at changing indigenous peoples to fit the structures" (Smith 2006:147), the SIC project aims to be interventionist at the structural level. We are not interested in blaming individuals living in the inner city for their poverty-related problems, but rather in examining the context within which they live, how community development activities contribute to their lives, how state policies have failed them, and where those policies might be changed to address the issues that emerge through the research that we conduct together.

### Research Methods Emerge Through Participation

In keeping with community-based participatory research, we believe that our community research partners must be involved in the decision to select the methods that fit best with their research objectives. The role of the 'outside researcher' is

to provide information about various methods and tools and to assist community members in the research process. While we use both quantitative and qualitative methods, consideration is always given to choosing methods that allow us to tell the story that needs to be told while also engaging the community in the data gathering process and analysis. We consider this to be important because it provides a capacity building component that can have lasting benefit for the community. While we have found quantitative data to be useful, it is insufficient for this project. As noted by Aboriginal research partners in one SIC research project, it is the stories that have the most meaning (MacKinnon & Stephens, 2007). Quantitative data do not capture the richness of the stories, or the experiences and perceptions of those most affected by policy. Quantitative data also do not capture the impact of structural forces that are at the root of poverty and social exclusion.

It is notable that while government and other funding agencies continue to emphasize the collection of quantitative data demonstrating measurable outcomes, they too know the value of hearing individual stories. In fact it is often the stories rather than the measurable outcomes that are used in funding agency promotional materials and fundraising campaigns.

### Moving Beyond the ‘Story’ for Broader Social Impact

Sally Westwood (1991) emphasizes the value of narratives to research that is transformative. She notes that research that is transformative requires that those involved are not simply offered a voice “but a speaking position through the narrative mode” (p.4). Just as research that focuses solely on quantitative methods will miss an important opportunity to provide a potentially empowering experience for interviewees, and the depth of knowledge that transpires through hearing the voices of the ‘researched,’ the potential impact

of the individual ‘story’ will be lost if not told in the context of historical, social, economic and political injustice.

The idea of giving voice to the oppressed as a necessary stage of emancipation and transformation was central to Paulo Freire in his classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 2006). Freire noted that “if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming their world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way in which they achieve significance as human beings” (2006, 88). From an anti-oppressive/decolonization perspective, dialogue is an essential precursor of action and reflection, or “praxis.” Narrative research can provide an opportunity for meaningful dialogue that leads to praxis, especially in the context of community-based participatory research that is aimed at building capacity and moving from research to action. Stories must be situated within the context of broader conditions (poverty, colonization) to draw a connection to structural problems. If we are to move individuals from self-awareness to empowerment, researchers must “redefine informants to be those *with* whom they study, and redefine their own activities far beyond the production of a document describing events experienced, recorded, and analyzed” (Le Compte, 1993, 14). When conducted through a critical framework, such as we do, narrative research can be an appropriate methodology to complement quantitative measures, to ensure that in our efforts to quantify through numbers and statistics, we don’t lose sight of the uniqueness of the individual experiences behind the numbers, and to ensure also that we don’t lose sight of the historical, social and political factors that have contributed to each individual’s experience.

### The Benefits: Individual, Community and Policy Outcomes

As outlined earlier, the overarching benefits of the State of the Inner City Report project are

quite broad. A central purpose is to document the journey taking place in Winnipeg's inner city at a time when there is relatively significant political support (provincially) for community-based initiatives. Community-based organizations currently receiving state support are vulnerable, and this has become increasingly apparent with serious federal cuts in recent years. Research that demonstrates the effectiveness of community development work will provide organizations with important evidence to justify continued state commitment to their work. This will become increasingly important should a Conservative government be elected in Manitoba, as the current NDP government, in addition to their own continued commitment, has filled many of the funding gaps left by the federal Conservatives. For example, in the absence of federal and municipal interest in renewed inner-city focused tripartite agreement, the Provincial NDP has taken the lead in a scaled down partnership in the form of the Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy (WRS). The WRS is a provincial strategy in response to the lack of a tripartite agreement. Although the federal and municipal government have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and have come to the table with some in-kind contributions, poverty related projects funded through the WRS are almost entirely provincially funded with the exception of some municipal contributions through Tax Increment Financing (TIF) toward affordable housing units downtown.

State of the Inner City research is also beneficial to community organizations that become consumed by their own mandates, and as a result drift away from collective efforts. This project brings them together to share their experiences, successes and challenges. For example, dialogue with community organizations led to a housing focus in several *State of the Inner City Reports*, including the 2008 *Putting our Housing in Order*. This research continues to be used by community groups advocating for policy change and renewed investment in social housing. Partici-

pants are beginning to see a shift in policy focus as demonstrated in recent provincial government investment in repair of existing social housing after several years of neglect. The province has also responded, for the first time in more than twenty years, to calls for the development of new social housing units.

In 2009 our report was titled *It Takes All Day to Be Poor*, a term coined by a community partner to describe the complexity of life for people living in poverty. In this project we used a variety of methodologies to illustrate the complex lives that many people living in poverty endure. In 2010 our report titled *We're in it for the Long Haul* included the story of Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT), describing the collaborative model the eight member organizations use to serve youth and families. As noted, in 2011 our community partners asked us to examine the political and economic context within which they are providing services. They observed that in spite of all of their efforts, poverty seems to be getting worse. They wanted to know why.

We returned to our focus on program evaluation in the paper titled "*Who's Accountable to the Community*", featured in the eighth *State of the Inner City Report* published in 2012. This project evolved through discussions with several community organization's Executive Directors who described their frustrations with the expectations of government and other funding agencies, and the unacknowledged power imbalance that results in the absence of reciprocal accountability. We have currently taken this research further, working with community organizations to develop guiding principles for evaluation that community organizations can use collectively and independently to ensure that government and funding agencies evaluation expectations align with community priorities.

The above provides some examples of how community organizations are using this research project to help them in their work. There is also

evidence of how the SIC has benefited many individuals who participate as community researchers as well as those who share their stories with us as participants in interviews, focus groups, sharing circles, and other projects. Our commitment to hire and train community members as research associates has proved beneficial for individuals. For example, one community researcher, a refugee from Somali, later enrolled in the University of Manitoba Bachelor of Social Work program and has since graduated. Another was hired as a community helper at an inner-city agency after having completed her work with us, which was also her first paid work experience. University students who have worked with us have gone on to further their education as Masters and PhD students, and others have gone on to work in CBOs. While we provide community researchers guidance, we also allow them freedom to be creative. For example, Jil Brody, a social work student and the principal researcher in the 2009 Report titled *It Takes All Day to Be Poor*, was given freedom to take a general idea discussed at a community meeting (to explore journaling as a method to capture the day-to-day experiences of people living in poverty) and developed an innovative project that provides valuable insight into the complexity of poverty.

Others have benefitted in ways far more profound than we would have imagined. For example, in the report titled *“Is Participation Having an Impact?”* an inner-city resident who we hired and trained as a research assistant said this about her experience: “Participating in this project gave me my voice back.”

As noted, community-based organizations benefit from the project in several ways. In sum, it provides an opportunity to come together to identify issues of shared concern, investigate the issues, identify policy solutions, and use the tools that are produced to advocate for improved policies and programs.

Broadening involvement of the community in the research process, building egalitarian re-

lationships with participants through ongoing collaboration, training and hiring community researchers, sharing findings in various forms, and requesting feedback from research participants, have made this project an important part of the development process that continues to evolve in Winnipeg’s inner city. CBOs are on the frontline and they know best what the issues are.

### Year Ten and Still Going Strong

In 2012 we completed our eighth report called *Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges*. Our partners identified two priorities. As described earlier, they wanted to talk about the current process of accountability between CBOs and funding agencies, especially governments. Their aim is to improve current practice in such a way that governments are accountable back to communities in addition to CBOs being accountable to governments. The second focus they asked for was to look at ways to build relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and inner city and non-inner city youth. This they believe is the hope for our future. We moved forward with this idea by bringing thirty youth from various backgrounds together with Aboriginal elders, to learn about each other and dispel some lingering myths as a first step to healing our city which remains very much divided racially and geographically. As requested by our community partners, we produced a film in addition to a report. The film is currently being used to advocate for the development of an ongoing project emulating the 2012 experience with youth and elders. In 2013, the *State of the Inner City Report* again picked up on the theme of engaging youth, integrating a photo-voice project.

In addition to this chapter reflecting on the history and purpose of the SIC, community partners identified child welfare as a priority for the 2014 report, which is the focus of the paper titled *It Takes a Community to Support a Family*.

The SIC – A Celebration of Inner-City Work  
The final and equally important purpose of the SIC has been to celebrate the work of inner-city CBOs. Since our project began in 2005, we have held an annual celebration at the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, a sacred Aboriginal meeting place in the centre of the city. We profile our work and tell our stories; we share food, hugs, laughter and tears. And we leave knowing that in a few months we will get together again to begin the process for the next year. But while the release of the report is the impetus for our

gathering each December, it is the shared love of our community, our pride in the work that we do and our appreciation for the tireless, dedicated people who do it that is what we are gathered to celebrate. For those of us who are primarily researchers, great satisfaction comes from knowing that our research is useful to the community. In the words of a long-time, community leader who previously dismissed research because, she said “we have been researched to death,” the State of the Inner City Report project is important because it produces “research that belongs to us.”

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# It Takes a Community to Support a Family: Community-based Supports and the Child Welfare System

By Molly McCracken and Julia Higgins

The African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” is often cited to recognize the role many take in the development of our youngest citizens. In traditional Indigenous cultures, the child is at the centre of the community, with concentric circles surrounding the child: parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, relatives and community-members; children are at the centre of the interconnected web of life (Anderson 2011). It follows that if we are to support children, we need also to support parents and create healthy communities. In Manitoba today this requires collaboration between family, informal and formal networks, community-based organizations (CBOs), child welfare authorities and agencies and government departments and programs. It takes a community to support a family.

Families struggling with poverty in the inner city often interact with the child welfare system. In the *State of the Inner City Report 2009: It Takes All Day to be Poor*, nine people living in poverty maintained a journal about their experiences. Several of the participants described their involvement with Child and Family Services (Brody 2009). Individuals and families who struggle with navigating the child welfare system often turn to community-based agencies, with

whom they have good relationships, for support with the child welfare system.

The community-based organizations involved in the discussions for this year’s *State of the Inner City Report* focused on the challenges they have with the systems families interact with, most notably the child welfare system. These discussions took place on the heels of the recent release of *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*, by the Honourable Ted Hughes. CBOs explained that the recommendations in the Hughes report are similar to recommendations from previous Inquiries like the 1991 *Aboriginal Justice Inquiry*, yet they continue to see families struggling with the child welfare system. Representatives of inner city CBOs told us that they wanted the 2014 *State of the Inner City* research to focus on community-based supports to families, and on the policy and program alternatives to improve supports.

## Methodology

An advisory committee of leaders of local CBOs, including Aboriginal leaders, guided the process for this report. The report is intended to bring forward the perspectives of grassroots leaders and parents involved in CBOs. We spoke to 22 lead-

ers in community-based organizations through one-on-one interviews and focus groups to look at the policy and program options required to support families involved in the child welfare system. The feedback from leaders was analyzed and themes and patterns were identified. Quotes from the leaders that speak to the themes are cited anonymously in the report.

Two community-based researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with mothers and fathers with open cases with the child welfare system. Parents were asked about their experience with the system, what types of community supports they use, what supports they require and what changes they believe are needed in the child welfare system. These interviews were conducted in three women's centres and an Aboriginal family centre so that follow up supports could be available to families if requested. A summary of preliminary findings is included later in this paper, and a more detailed report based on these interviews and focus groups with parents is forthcoming.

The central finding arising from the interviews and focus groups conducted with parents and community workers who have direct experience with the child welfare system is that much greater use needs to be made of community-based organizations. CBOs develop relationships of trust with families and are well-placed to offer preventative supports. CBOs have a different philosophical approach to child welfare from which the system can learn. Potentials for collaboration and partnership should be explored.

In what follows we describe how the child welfare system works, and then turn to the words of those we interviewed, and their view that a more community-based, Indigenous approach to child welfare is needed.

## Background

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) documents the vastly divergent worldviews between Indigenous people and European settlers (1991). Euro-

pean families were organized along patriarchal lines, with the father as the head of the household having authority over children. Children were expected to do as they were told and father/mother family units were expected to care for and discipline their children. Conversely, Indigenous child rearing taught children:

...to assume adult roles in an atmosphere of warmth and affection. Learning emphasized such values as respect for all living things, sharing, self-reliance, individual responsibility and proper conduct. Children also had to learn how to utilize the environment most effectively for economic survival. Integral to all aspects of the education of the young was the spiritual, and events in the life-cycle from birth to death were marked with ceremonies stressing the individual's link to the spiritual and sacred.

Cultural continuity was thus ensured (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, in AJI 1991).

With regard to child welfare, colonization negatively affected Aboriginal children in two profound ways. First it contributed directly to inequality between Aboriginal people and other Canadians in terms of poverty, inadequate housing and lower levels of education, factors linked to increased referrals for child neglect or maltreatment (McKenzie and Shangreux 2010). Second, government created institutional interventions beginning with the residential schools and then when mainstream child welfare agencies removed Aboriginal children from their families, communities and culture instead of policies and services to keep children closer to home (McKenzie and Shangreux 2010). Residential schools and the "Sixties Scoop" (which continued until the 1980s), removed children permanently from their families and communities and in many cases placed them in non-Aboriginal homes. Although there are more and more Aboriginal child welfare services and resources, many children do not remain within their cultural and community networks, causing

significant disruption to children, families and communities (McKenzie and Shangreux 2010).

The AJI documented the systemic issues that led to the failure of the Manitoba legal system to treat Aboriginal people fairly. The Inquiry was sparked by the shooting of J.J. Harper and the murder of Helen Betty Osborne, events that became emblematic of Manitoba's cultural divide. Judges Murray Sinclair and Alvin Hamilton traveled the province, visiting reserves, towns, cities and jails to craft 300 recommendations on justice, treaty relations, resource rights and child welfare. Although progress has been made, Manitoba is still struggling with many of the same documented challenges today.

When elected in 1999, the provincial NDP government took up the AJI's recommendation to devolve responsibility for child welfare to First Nations and Métis authorities. The *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* (2002) creates three Aboriginal authorities with a province-wide mandate to provide culturally appropriate services: Northern, Southern and Métis. The General Authority (GA) is responsible for delivery of services to non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people who choose service from the GA. All authorities are governed by the *Child and Family Services Act*, must provide services consistent with provincial child welfare standards and follow accountability and reporting requirements. Within the four authorities there are 23 Child and Family Services Agencies, 19 of which are First Nations or Métis.

The *Child and Family Services Act* is the legislation governing the well-being and protection of children. Under this legislation, the role of child protection authorities is to provide services that "strengthen families to enable children to have nurturing caregivers that provide opportunities to establish lifelong relationships; engage communities to resolve issues that affect the safety and well-being of children; and protect children" (Manitoba Family Services 2014).

Funding for child welfare services is determined based on agency caseloads from the pre-

vious fiscal year; these numbers are collected by the four authorities, who report to the Child Protection Branch of Family Services. Each year's funding formula is based on how many cases were open at year-end the previous year. In 2013/14, \$427 million was provided to the four child welfare authorities to fund mandated child welfare agencies (Family Services 2014).

In terms of funding for prevention, currently the province funds two main types of prevention work through the four authorities to the child welfare agencies, family enhancement and family support services.

The family enhancement model is a response to a 2006 external review to improve early intervention with selected families. This model is delivered through all four of the child welfare authorities to provide more intensive supports to families with social workers with lower case loads. It is intended to prevent more child protection interventions later on.

Authorities and agencies also receive funding for family support services. Based on the previous year's caseload as of March 31, each agency receives an allocation based on a formula of \$1,300 per family, but it is not earmarked as case-specific. Agencies can use this prevention funding as they wish, for example by contracting with community organizations to deliver services, reserving counseling services or hiring family support workers to work within family's homes. It is not clear if this prevention money is reaching direct-service CBOs, or being retained within the child welfare system. CBOs interviewed for this study report that they are not getting what they need:

There is no prevention money that's come to the community, we're always chasing project money. There is no real support. Family enhancement should be done at the community level. Not only is it more effective, that's the approach the families need. It's rebuilding our community.

Family group conferencing is something we want for all our sites but its another job that

somebody else has to do that already has too much work to do.

Resources are not brought to the families until the child is in care. Not even before. The prevention piece is not there.

Foster families receive supports that birth families do not.

The cultural values and principles should be recognized and supported more by the government of Manitoba. Right now we do things but we're not completely funded for them. It's a gap.

The funding model is rewarding an agency for taking children when it should be rewarding them monetarily for taking steps they need to unite families or keep families together amidst crisis.

The goal of devolution was to advance Aboriginal self-determination, which means developing community-based services that incorporate Aboriginal values, beliefs and traditions, and to build capacity at the community level for alternatives to conventional services models (McKenzie and Shangreux 2010). However, as we will discuss, community members do not see these goals being realized.

## Root Causes

Of course it has to do with poverty so where are we going to fix it, as opposed to just thinking the child welfare system needs to be fixed? It goes beyond the capacity of the child welfare system to deal with these issues. They have an obligation. You can't turn people away. It's like the fire department. But what is causing the fires? We need to take much more of a public health perspective and work upstream.

The rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s has had a profound effect on supports and resources available to communities, families and children. The negative influence of neoliberal policies and programs has been documented in a previous *State of the Inner City Report* (Mackinnon, Li and Cooper 2011). Neoliberal thinking assumes market forces should govern societies, and they will liberate individual initiative (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is largely hostile to social welfare programs, limiting revenue available for the social welfare state through government tax-cut agendas.

In Manitoba, in the midst of the devolution process, the child welfare system was rocked in 2006 by the tragic death of five year old Phoenix Sinclair, whose death was undiscovered for nine months. Phoenix Sinclair had on and off

contact with the child welfare system and died at the hands of her parents, who had also been in care when they were young. Subsequently, the provincial government commissioned six external reviews in 2006, two of which focused on the case, and the other four on child welfare system.

Continued focus on the circumstances and questions unanswered from the previous six reports about the circumstances leading to the death of Phoenix Sinclair led the province to commission an Inquiry in March 2011. This Inquiry was in three phases: phase one on the specific details of the circumstances of Phoenix Sinclair's case; phase two focused on the child welfare system; and phase three looked at the systemic reasons why families have contact with the child welfare system, and program, policy and legislative changes needed to improve supports to families and children. Commissioner Ted Hughes concluded the Inquiry in December 2013 with the release of his report, *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*. The Inquiry made a total of 62 recommendations to improve the welfare of children in Manitoba. Many of these recommendations deal with the systemic issues facing children and families, especially poverty and colonization.

As a response, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), released *Bringing Our Children Home*, based on open forums intended to provide a voice to those who had been affected by child welfare. AMC demands systemic changes to the child welfare system and self-determination for First Nations people. *Bringing Our Children Home* calls for transition to a First Nations system that is based on the original systems of child rearing, education and nurturance of individual spirit (AMC 2014). Recommendations include a shift to a new system based on First Nations principles, a model of care based on prevention, a new funding model focused on prevention and strengthening families, a First Nations advocate for families, and a youth advisory committee within each authority.

The reasons these changes have not been made to date can be traced to the legislation governing child welfare in Manitoba. A study of the experiences of Aboriginal mothers involved in child welfare, *Jumping Through Hoops*, finds that the child welfare system has not instituted alternative responses, like family group conferencing, which have been promoted within family law and child welfare in other provinces and countries. These alternative measures and practices are not mandated or enshrined in Manitoba's child welfare legislation (Bennett 2008). The report argues that the rights of parents within the child welfare need to be upheld and Aboriginal parenting practices and culture need to be recognized, which means new child welfare legislation (Bennett 2008:141).

### Manitoba Government Response

In 2006, Manitoba Family Services created the *Changes for Children Action Plan* to address the recommendations from the six reviews of the child welfare system. Subsequently, the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry was completed and the Manitoba government has committed to respond in January 2015 with a plan to implement the Inquiry recommendations. Implementing a plan

is complex, because so many aspects of government policies affect families, and because of the devolved structure of the Manitoba child welfare system.

The Province has a focus on healthy child development and child care. The Province provides \$23 million annually to a variety of community support programs through the Child Protection branch of Family Services, and Healthy Child Manitoba also funds community-based organizations supporting families. The Province has taken steps to address poverty by creating new social housing, and in 2013 began to bring Employment and Income Assistance shelter rates back up to 1992 levels, with the introduction of Rent Assist. But the impact of years of lack of resources is exemplified in the persistent poverty rate in the inner city.

The most recent neighbourhood-level data available found that 32.5 percent of inner city households lived below the low income cut off rate (LICO) while outside the inner city it was 15.7 percent (City of Winnipeg 2009). Families continue to struggle with high rates of unemployment and underemployment, limited access to training, limited support networks and a shortage of affordable housing options. This poverty takes its toll on parents and on their children, as several of our key informants describe:

Parenting is hard enough but I can't imagine with bed bugs in my house and not having enough food to feed (them) and you don't have heat, you can't afford to hire a babysitter to get a break to go out for a little while.

Some children are in need of protection, but what happens is children get apprehended because families don't have resources to provide care for their children or keep themselves sane so they can parent appropriately.

Aboriginal children are over-represented amongst those struggling with poverty. Sixty-two percent of status First Nations members are in poverty



in Manitoba, the second highest in the country after Saskatchewan (Macdonald and Wilson 2013:6). For Métis, Inuit and non-status Aboriginal children the poverty rate is 32 percent (Macdonald and Wilson 2013:6).

The federal government is responsible for on-reserve funding of social services, health care, education and social supports. Transfer payments for on reserve services have increased by only two percent per year since 1996, and during that time have not been adjusted for population growth or need (MacDonald and Wilson, 2013). The federal government spent only 78 cents for on-reserve child welfare services for every dollar spent by the province for off-reserve children and

families (Rabson 2009). In Manitoba the Aboriginal population is growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population (Lezubski 2014). Many Aboriginal families migrate between reserve communities and urban centres; limited social services and economic opportunities on reserve lead families to come to Winnipeg (Brandon and Peters 2014). Families should be able to access the resources they require in the community they prefer to live in, reserve or urban centre.

The child welfare system is but one stop among many for children and families struggling with intergenerational trauma and loss of culture. Unfortunately the number of children in care continues to rise.

## Numbers of Children in Care

Manitoba children are taken into care more often than in most other parts of Canada (Hughes 2013b:446). In the Province of Manitoba, the overall percentage of the number of children in care has steadily increased from 1.9 percent (2000/01) to 3.6 percent (2013/14) (Family Services 2014).

In Winnipeg, where 2.58 percent of children age 17 and under are in care, the proportion is much higher in the inner city. For example, in 2003-2006, 17 percent of all children in the North End and North Point Douglas were in care and 13.82 percent of children in the remainder of the Inner City were in care of the child welfare system (Peg 2014).

In 2004-2005, the number of children in care was 6,118. This number has almost doubled in ten years, to the current 10,293 children in care in 2014.

At the current rate there could be more than 22,000 children in care in Manitoba by 2030, doubling the current government expenditures of \$0.5 to \$1 billion, with further cost implications for social assistance, health care and other public expenditures (Welch 2014). These costs will become a long-term cost driver for the Manitoba budget. Journalist Catherine Mitchell (2012) reported that between 2004 and 2012, Manitoba's child welfare budget grew by 350 percent, leading her

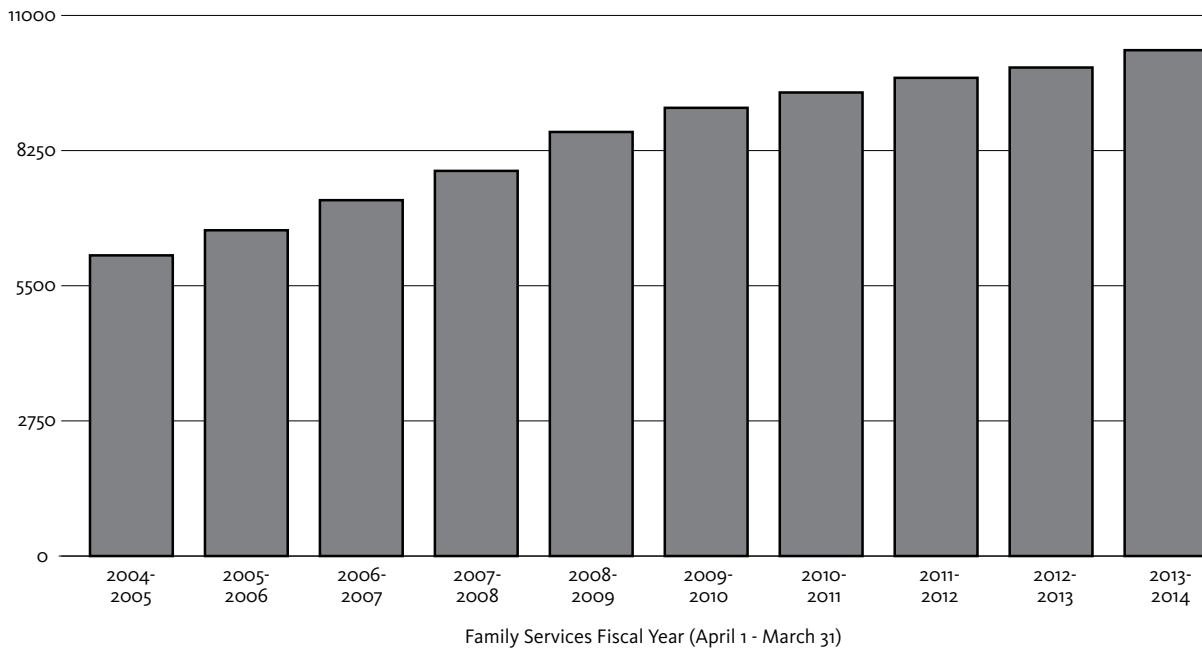
to ask: "Is child welfare the new health care, the insatiable black hole of the [provincial] budget?"

Adding to these cost problems, children who grow up in foster care fall behind other children, are less likely to graduate from high school, and have a greater likelihood of suffering from mental health problems, chronic unemployment, homelessness and incarceration (Conference Board of Canada 2014). A child "aging out" of foster care today will earn \$326,000 less income over his or her lifespan and will cost all levels of government more than \$126,000 in the form of higher social assistance payments and lower tax revenues (Conference Board of Canada 2014). The high number of children in care is costly socially and financially. Most importantly, our society has a moral obligation to support the best possible outcomes for all children, especially the most vulnerable.

### Over-representation of Aboriginal children

The over-representation of Indigenous children in care is common across Canadian child welfare systems (McKenzie and Shangreux 2010). As of March 31, 2014 there were 8,960 Treaty Status, Non Status, Métis or Inuit children in care in Manitoba, representing 87 percent of all children in care (Family Services 2014).

FIGURE 3 Total Number of Children in Care in Manitoba



In the 2004-2005 fiscal year, the percentage of Aboriginal children in care was 83.6 percent. Over the past ten years, this number has steadily increased to 87 percent. This is an overall increasing trend in the number of Aboriginal children in care, whereas the number of non-Aboriginal children in care continues to decrease.

Research on Canadian and international child welfare trends points to a widening of child welfare mandates to include chronic need and a variety of family problems beyond urgent child protection matters, which has increased the number of children in care (Trocmé et al 2014). Policies and services must be able to disentangle urgent protection from chronic need. In Manitoba, the increase in the numbers of children in care took place after intense public attention on the tragic death of Phoenix Sinclair. Strega and Esquao explain that a shift to a child protection focus is accelerated by high profile child death investigations and those working in child welfare need to be reminded of the important contextual matters such as poverty, lack of resources, supports and impact of colonization (2010:19).

When asked about root causes that lead families to become involved in the child welfare system, community leaders explain that it is an inter-related web of problems:

Isolation, poverty, housing and in some cases trauma from past experiences so you never learnt parenting yourself because you were never parented. If you have severe trauma from the past and inter-generational trauma that creates coping mechanisms and unhealthy choices that can make an impact such as alcoholism, gambling...

Community organizations want to do as much as possible to keep families together, because the impact of removing a child from a family can have very negative effects.

We ask: "is there some way we can put a plan together to keep that child at home?" Sometimes kids are three years old and they are apprehended and all of a sudden mom who was really trying to be healthy because she had this baby, now she has nothing to be healthy for.

TABLE 2 Winnipeg private market rents & EIA total monthly incomes (2014)

	Single parent, one child (2 bedroom)	Couple, two children (3 bedroom)
Low end private market rent	\$713	\$812
EIA income	\$1,724	\$1,859
Rent as a portion of income	41%	44%

SOURCES: Manitoba 2014; CMHC 2014.

Housing issues are another challenge facing families. Research shows a link between poverty, homelessness or substandard housing and involvement in child welfare (Dhillon 2005). Housing instability, a result of poverty, is one reason families get involved with child welfare (Torrico 2009). In many cases addressing a family's housing need (i.e. rent subsidy, security deposit, social supports) can help prevent a child from being apprehended (Dhillon 2005).

Public housing, non-profit, Aboriginal and co-op housing are important housing types that serve about 20,000 households in Winnipeg. Manitoba Housing policy prioritizes families with children in the application process but wait lists remain. If parent(s) are in arrears with Manitoba Housing, this can result in eviction and an inability to repay the amount owed is a barrier to re-entry into public or subsidized housing.

Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) incomes are insufficient to afford even modest private rental accommodations. Households would have to spend between 41 – 63 percent of their total income if they are not in public or rent-geared-to income housing (Brandon, forthcoming).

For Aboriginal families, many of whom experience cyclical migration from reserves to ur-

ban centres, finding housing is especially challenging (Peters and Brandon, 2014). Children in unstable housing experience increased rates of chronic and acute health issues, emotional and behavioral problems and developmental delays (Torrico 2009). Parents also experience the impacts of housing instability and stress.

Housing is a key factor in reunification of parents with their children (Torrico 2009). If a parent is on EIA and children are apprehended, the housing allowance for her child(ren) ends after three months, however the amount of time needed for a parent to be reunited with her child(ren) is often indeterminate. Parents working toward reunification with their children must follow their case plan and take steps to demonstrate self-improvement through parenting classes, anger-management classes, addictions treatment and/or counseling. If parents have taken these steps and a reunification plan is made, without adequate housing with enough bedrooms based on National Occupancy Standards, parents cannot be reunited with their children. Another complicating factor is that families on EIA are reliant on the federal Universal Child Tax Benefit, which they do not receive for six weeks or longer after they are reunited with their children.

# Parents' Experiences of the Child Welfare System

Two community researchers interviewed 30 parents, mothers and fathers, with open child welfare cases in inner city Winnipeg. Parents voluntarily identified themselves and were interviewed in community-based organizations (CBOs) or other locations familiar to them. All parents signed a consent form and received a \$25 honourarium. Follow up community-based resources or supports were offered. Parents interviewed were self-selected; they are not a representative sample of parents with open child welfare cases. Most of the parents interviewed volunteered at, or dropped into CBOs. Most were on EIA or disability and not working for pay.

The mothers and fathers who were interviewed wanted to tell their stories. Each interview was emotional and there were tears at most. The parents told us that change is needed so that other families do not experience the intense challenges they are going through, or have gone through.

Many parents said they went to child welfare agencies seeking help, resources and support. Some had good experiences and received the help they needed. Some felt that they did not get the resources they needed or wanted. Some felt judged if, for example, their home was messy. One parent explained that their home was at times messy with dirty dishes, as they were too

busy interacting and playing with their children to keep up with the housework. Parents wanted recognition of the efforts they were making to care for their children, and acknowledgement that no one is perfect. One parent quit her job to take care of her children as she was fearful her worker would think she was not spending enough time with her children. She is now on EIA. Another parent wanted to go to university but felt the child welfare system was not supportive. Another parent was trying to find a way to go to university so she could be a role model for her children.

Parents felt when they were interacting with the child welfare system they did not understand the process, what was happening, what was required of them and what their rights were. Parents talked about being asked to sign voluntary placement agreements but not understanding what this meant. Under these agreements, the parents are still the legal guardians, but sign over care and control of their child to the child welfare system. One mother explained that she has a voluntary placement with her mother, but finds it unreasonable that she needed to request visitation rights to visit her own mother and children.

Parents' experience of the child welfare system depended on their worker. Parents identi-

fied power struggles with workers, as they know workers make decisions on management of their case. This is exemplified in the experience of one parent who had a file open with her younger child with one agency and another file with her other child with a different agency, at the same time. She felt treated differently depending on which worker she was interacting with. She had different custody arrangements with the two children and did not understand why. This parent struggled to deal with two different workers, two different agencies for her two children.

Parents felt a change in worker was a set-back and they needed to start again. A new worker may go back through their file to the original reason the case was opened, and parents do not feel the progress they were making is understood by a new worker. Parents felt that this unnecessarily delayed reunification with their children.

Many of the parents did not feel the child welfare system connected them to community-based services. If their children were apprehended and they were required to take a parenting class for a certificate, the parents had to do

their own searching to find where to take the required program. Parents wanted better access to counseling, addictions treatment and follow up supports. Parents involved in CBOs wanted them to be open longer hours. They wanted safe places to spend time with other families. Once parents were reunited with their children, they wished for long-term supports and help.

Parents felt that Indigenous programs were not recognized by child welfare agencies, and that efforts to get in touch with their culture were not recognized as progress. Several parents said it was only when they learned about the history of residential schools and intergenerational trauma that they began to understand their struggles were not unique to them. Indigenous parents with children who were apprehended wanted their children to be placed within the kinship network or, if that was not available, for their children to be placed in an Aboriginal home so they could connect with their Aboriginal identity.

This is a brief summary of some of the experience of the parents interviewed. A more detailed report on the interviews is forthcoming.

# Community-Based Approaches

Community-based organizations play a key role in supporting families and addressing the root causes of poverty. *Achieving the Best for All Our Children* documents the importance of these organizations to child and family health and well-being (Hughes, 2013b). Hughes finds that CBOs play an important role developing trusting relationships with families involved in the child welfare system and act as resources and advocates for families (2013b). He explained that CBOs are “critically important” to helping families increase their capacity to care for their children and resolve the problems that place them at risk (Hughes 2013b:477-478).

Non-profit CBOs located in the inner city are directed by, and accountable to the community of identity and/or geography that they serve. CBOs are funded by a variety of sources, government, foundations, donations and fundraising. Several CBOs have service agreements with the province or federal government to deliver supports to children, youth and families. Research has shown that neighbourhood-oriented CBOs are more likely to engage residents of neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty than government agencies (Fleischer and Dressner 2002, 12).

The inner city of Winnipeg is home to Indigenous CBOs that support children and families

in contact with the child welfare system. The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre is one of the inner city’s most established Aboriginal organizations. It was created by Aboriginal people, mainly women, in 1984 to reclaim their inherent role and responsibility as the caregivers for Aboriginal children and families in Winnipeg. Ma Mawi provides a continuum of supports to families from community centres, foster parent programs and safe homes for youth. Ndinawemaaganag Endaawad is an Indigenous youth-serving organization that provides shelter, culture, recreation, education and outreach. Wahbung Abinoojiiag works to prevent domestic violence by offering programming and services offered through culturally appropriate teachings and activities. Ka Ni Kanichihk develops and delivers a range of culturally appropriate education, training and employment, leadership, community development, healing and wellness programs.

There are several family centres available throughout the inner city including, for example, Andrews Street Family Centre and Wolseley Family Place. They offer drop ins with access to emergency food, laundry, and child care and a variety of programs. Women’s centres such as the North End Women’s Centre, North Point Douglas Women’s Centre and West Central Women’s

Resource Centre offer drop ins and a range of programs specific to the needs of women. Youth-serving organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, Spence Neighbourhood Association and Rossbrook House offer a range of supports for children and youth. We created a map of CBOs with services available to children, youth and families and found 43 located within Winnipeg's inner city. It is our hope that this map will serve as a resource to parents, practitioners and social workers (Appendix A).

In addition to these direct-service organizations, several promising initiatives are developing innovative responses to supporting parents and children in inner city Winnipeg. These projects and networks are operating at the intermediary level, networking direct service providers with research and policy in order to influence system change while being community-directed.

### **Child and Family Services (CFS)**

#### **Community Network**

The Child and Family Services (CFS) Community Network is a group of over 50 CBOs that support children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system. The Network was formed as a result of a need felt by community agencies to better understand Manitoba's child welfare system, and to work more effectively to support those involved in the system (Larios and Spring 2013). The CBOs in the CFS Community Network use a client-centred approach to build family capacity. CBOs in the CFS Community Network want more preventative resources in place. They want to work collaboratively with child welfare case planning to build on family strengths and to reduce the number of children removed from their families (Larios and Spring 2013). The CFS Community Network meets monthly to share best practices and engage with the child welfare system. They are creating tools and resources to help the children, youth and families they work with to understand the child welfare system. They receive no funding as a network.

### **Block by Block Initiative – Thunderwing Project**

The *Block by Block Initiative* aims to improve community safety and social outcomes for families. The objectives are: to improve collaboration between government and community; to improve systems, policies and the delivery of government and community programs; and to increase agency and community engagement and capacity. The first Block by Block project is Thunderwing, which aims to increase community safety within a 21 block area in the North End (Salter to McGregor, Burrows to Dufferin). By coordinating and mobilizing existing resources across sectors, Thunderwing provides families the support they need so they can prevent and permanently stabilize crisis situations. Funded by the province, Thunderwing reports to a high-level steering committee and identifies policy changes needed to remove systemic barriers experienced by families.

### **The Winnipeg Boldness Project**

The Winnipeg Boldness Project is a new initiative working alongside the North End community to improve outcomes for children ages 0 - 6. It is a child-centred, early childhood development project that will bring together deep community wisdom, Indigenous knowledge and research in order to bring about large-scale change. The three main objectives are: to design a six-year Early Childhood Development (ECD) intervention strategy; to create a strengths-based narrative that highlights the positive and spirited aspects of Winnipeg's North End; and to build a child-centred model, focusing on best practices for raising children through the deep pool of community wisdom that exists in the North End. Boldness is funded by the province and the McConnell Foundation.

### **Community-Based, Anti-Oppressive Approach**

The philosophy guiding community-based organizations can be described as an anti-oppressive



approach (AOA), which sees that the problems faced by families are rooted in the socio-political structure of society rather than in personal characteristics, therefore social change is key. AOA sees that inequalities are based in the profit-model of the economic system and patriarchal, racialized, colonial capitalism (Baines, 2011: 19). While not all CBOs explicitly name anti-oppression as informing their work, the anonymous comments from community leaders fit within an AOA.

An AOA recognizes that helping work involves power and politics. Problems faced by people are a result of access, or lack of access, to power and resources. AOA recognizes that participatory approaches are necessary—those being served can and need to be active in their own liberation. Their experiential knowledge is a key starting point in the development of knowledge and political strategies of resistance (Baines, 2011:7).

Who's included in the discussions, who gets to define problems, who gets to define solutions, who gets to allocate resources, who has the power, who gets to decide? Certainly families don't get to decide, systems decide and families have to do what they're told.

An AOA is exemplified in the family-centred and family-directed approach of CBOs.

If we believe that families know what they want, if we consider them as the experts, they are in the driver's seat, it would be their job to determine what they need, this is self-determination of families.

It's about just getting to know the person in front of you. Asking them what they need instead of telling them what they need.

Given the high proportion of Aboriginal children in care, it follows that Indigenous organizations should lead the work with children and families. The prevailing paradigm, however, is one of "child protection," which is based on individual deficits and stands in opposition to an

Indigenous worldview of child development that is holistic (Bellefeuille and Ricks 2003). Devolution appears to have changed little, if anything, in this regard.

I was one of those people who danced on the rooftop when devolution came and they said there was going to be some change. I mean no disrespect but the poor Aboriginal agencies and the main authorities, they are really doing the white man's work and nothing has really changed. You have some awesome workers. Because they are Aboriginal people they got into the work, but as a system they are doing the same work with a whole bunch of new social workers to turn over. It's not unusual to have three to four workers in a year, sometimes in a month. I'm sure if I were a worker I wouldn't be sticking around long either. It's not doing the work from the heart, it's doing the same minimum standard and we want more than that.

Many CBOs, by contrast, use a holistic approach, guided by the seven sacred teachings and the medicine wheel.

We are all relatives; we are all about the community. It's about respect, respect of the people we walk with ... It's keeping your word, it's not judging, it's creating an environment where people feel welcomed.

Indigenous world view and knowledge have so much potential to inform society of a way of working with families that will benefit all kids and families, not just Indigenous kids. It's so holistic, it goes from child rearing practices, to how we treat the environment, to our water...

One CBO representative we spoke to developed a parenting program based on traditional teachings after observing that the mainstream program did not resonate with parents. This parenting program is now recognized by child welfare agencies. The holistic and positive nature of such approaches is key.

The environment is value-based not rule-based. It's not about judging, it's about appreciating the smaller steps and recognizing the youth as individuals and tailoring your approach. Make them feel important, special. Give them access to resources when they are with us, and providing this continuum of care so when they leave they still have access to the community of supports and they can still come home.

We are such a value-based organization and our approach is quite different than other places so sometimes we are having to defend why we do things the way we do. And that's something as simple as consequences: we don't punish; we are about natural consequences, about educating our youth on the impact of their behavior.

We understand there are reasons children need to be removed from their family. But there's still things that can be done to help and bring the family back together and that's where we see our strength.

CBOs use a "nothing about the family without the family" philosophy, acting as facilitators on a family's journey.

I really like the family group counseling model. The family is at the centre and they are an equal partner and leading the process. So the focus becomes the families leading it, and the people (child welfare) are there to make it happen, not get in the way and say no, we can't, all the time.

CBOs recognize that there can be no barrier of entry for families. "Parents know they need support. It's a matter of creating easy access supports and not marginalizing families even more."

This community-based approach differs from bureaucratic approaches where people must fulfill certain steps to access services.

Right now systems tend to dictate to families what they need to do and then families have to figure out how to follow through what the system is telling them to do.

A strong theme of the interviews and focus groups was the ways CBOs create welcoming spaces for community members and families. This is a conceptually simple but powerful difference between the community-based approach, and a more bureaucratic approach.

Trust is about how you set up physical space. You walk in and someone greets you, and says hello, offers you a coffee. It is inviting in how it looks and smells and how it's physically set up. There is a couch, there's access to a telephone, the internet, laundry, food. CBOs set themselves up that way. And I've walked in doors where you're greeted with a sign that says "report in here, sign in here, sit down over there and wait for your appointment and if you don't have an appointment phone us and make one." There is plexiglass and you have to speak into the little cut out hole. So how are we going to start this relationship, and how do these things tell me about your self-worth?

We try as hard as we can to make our community centres Kookum's house. When you go and visit grandma's house what do you do there? You go and help out, you might eat, enjoy Nana, your word is appreciated, you're valued, and that relationship becomes strong. So in our community care centres that's what we're working on, building on relationships.

Some of the best conversations would be just sitting in the playroom, while I was watching their kids ... finding out what motivates them and interests them and taking an interest in them. Not everything needs to be a formal counseling session.

An important part of the goal of CBOs is community-building, which includes building up the natural support systems of families and communities.

CBOs recognize that there are natural support systems out there, that those are more important than any service or program. CBOs

know how to work and support those natural support systems. CBOs are never trying to be the lifeline. Our job is to work with the family to figure out what their natural support system was and to further build and support that natural support system.

Creating opportunities to build the natural support network means people can go to extended family or to their neighbours for help.

When I was growing up and my mom was drinking, my granny and grandpa were taking care of us so there was no need to be in child welfare. The family all lived together and there was some support for my mom and support for us kids and so we never felt the need for intervention.

Building more opportunities for parent-peer mentorship and local hiring is also important:

We end up hiring not necessarily with all those degrees and letters behind their names, and we just do training and the staff act as a peer mentor because they lived in the community.

We had families who had gone through similar situations and advising on the project and they speak so openly about their past and what they went through and they say the unhealthy choices they made at the time and honestly it's so honouring. ...The fact that they are able to give back and input into a project is making them feel fantastic.

CBOs have a role in supporting families using Indigenous, holistic and strength-based approaches that build natural and peer support systems, and that value the experiential knowledge of community people.

#### CBOs and the Child Welfare System: Opportunities for Partnership

In order to reduce the upward trend of children in care, concepts of prevention need to be explored.

One of our big questions is, what is prevention? Is it preventing a crisis that if left unaddressed would lead to involvement of child welfare, preventing kids coming into care or kids from being permanent wards?

There are different levels of prevention. Primary prevention is universal programs that help all parents, such as early childhood education. If parents have access to child care, it is a form of primary prevention. Drop in family centres can be considered another form of primary prevention. Secondary prevention includes supports provided to families who are already involved in the child welfare system. CBOs are well-placed to provide both primary and secondary prevention services with families, and need partnerships with the system to be able to do this.

Every plan needs to be individualized on whatever the issue is that is going on with that family and those individuals so the role of CBOs is crucial because some people might need the specialized support over at Ndinawe or some may need to connect to Boys and Girls Club or any other number of resources. To be able to have a tailored approach and tailored case plan is a critical piece for forward motion.

CBOs build relationships with the family, not just the child, and help families understand the process. CBOs can work with parents to ask for help when parents don't know how to ask.

We have professionalized the talk of child safety so much, child welfare is complicated, technical with a specific language. We can't separate child safety conversations from normal community responses for families having challenges.

CBOs translate the system to families and what families are saying back to the system. CBOs balance the power dynamic. There are otherwise very little checks and balances with CFS.

Indigenous CBOs identified the need for more family-based services that include the whole family,

including men. Fathers interviewed for this project identified a lack of men's supports and services.

70 percent of the kids we are working with, their dads are missing. We are the dads. So if we can get our dads back involved in families I think we will be able to do a lot more and create stronger families.

The system has long pulled the dads away, they can't be there, welfare tells them they can't be there. Meanwhile they can't get a job,

there's no opportunity to get. There is nobody with young couples, we have always wanted to do a residential program with young couples providing that kind of support, regaining cousins, uncles and aunties and making it much more Aboriginal than two people stuck in an apartment with no money fighting with each other and no way to do it differently.

CBOs continue to call for adequate long term funding for wrap-around, family centred, community-based services.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

The recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry are comprehensive and if adequately implemented, would address many of the concerns of CBOs. Recommendation 25.5.1 is for sustained long term funding for delivery of holistic services, with emphasis on Aboriginal-led organizations and programs that promote cultural identity within Aboriginal communities (Hughes, 2013b:481). 25.5.3 recommends that child welfare agencies accommodate families wishing to have CBOs or others present as support in dealings with the system (Hughes, 2013b:480). Recommendation 25.5.4 is that child welfare agencies meet regularly with CBOs that serve their clients to collaborate and best meet community needs (Hughes, 2013b:480). Implementing these recommendations will take systemic change. CBOs have long called for such change.

The approach used by CBOs can be characterized as anti-oppressive as it attempts to rebalance the power dynamics when doing helping work. CBOs use a strength-based, holistic approach that builds trust and creates opportunities for people to get involved and build skills, social networks and community. This community-building work develops peer networks and natural support systems. CBOs believe in family-directed services

and the inherent wisdom of community people. The child welfare system could benefit greatly from learning more about the approaches, practices and services provided by CBOs.

CBOs want a seat at the child welfare table. Their skills and expertise can inform the child welfare system and empower children, youth and families. Complex problems require collaborative responses and families need supports and resources wrapped around them. The values of CBOs can only enhance preventative approaches in child welfare.

Collaboration between CBOs, child welfare authorities, agencies and government and families involved in the child welfare system needs to grow. One step in this direction is information-sharing forums where child welfare authorities and agencies learn about CBOs and vice-versa. System-community partnerships could be highlighted and the conversation could be based on building on strengths and opportunities. Families with experience in the child welfare system should be included. Topics for further discussion and collaboration could be identified and regular learning events and methods for collaboration planned. These activities could go a long way to get multiple perspectives on issues that have a shared importance from stakeholders, build un-

derstanding and reduce the polarized nature of the child welfare context.

The CFS Community Network is building capacity amongst CBOs who support children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system. This Network acts as an intermediary between busy direct service providers and the complex child welfare system. The Network should be adequately resourced with a dedicated staff person and communications resources to do its work.

Anti-oppressive training is available and ought to be provided to all of those who work directly with vulnerable families, especially those in agencies with the mandated authority to remove children from families.

Housing is important for prevention and supporting families, currently parent(s) on EIA can retain their shelter benefit that includes their children in the calculation, for three months after their children are apprehended. This should be extended to at least one year to give the parent(s) sufficient time to work on their case plan and retain their housing for reunification. Moreover, the province has committed to building 500 more

units of social housing. More research with families and community partners should be done to identify what kinds of housing families involved with the child welfare system need and want.

The Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry includes recommendations to deal with the systemic issues of poverty and recommends the province implement the outstanding recommendations in the *View From Here: Manitobans Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan*. First released in 2009, a new draft of the *View From Here* is being released in early 2015.

By bringing forward the voices of community-based organizations and parents involved in the child welfare system, it is our hope that we may once again shine a light on the community wisdom of those in the inner city. Outlining the root causes of family involvement in the child welfare system and the promising approaches applied by direct service organizations helps to deepen understanding. CBOs are organizing to work with the child welfare system. Governments and the system need to be open to their approaches so that prevention efforts can be expanded based on a spirit of collaboration.

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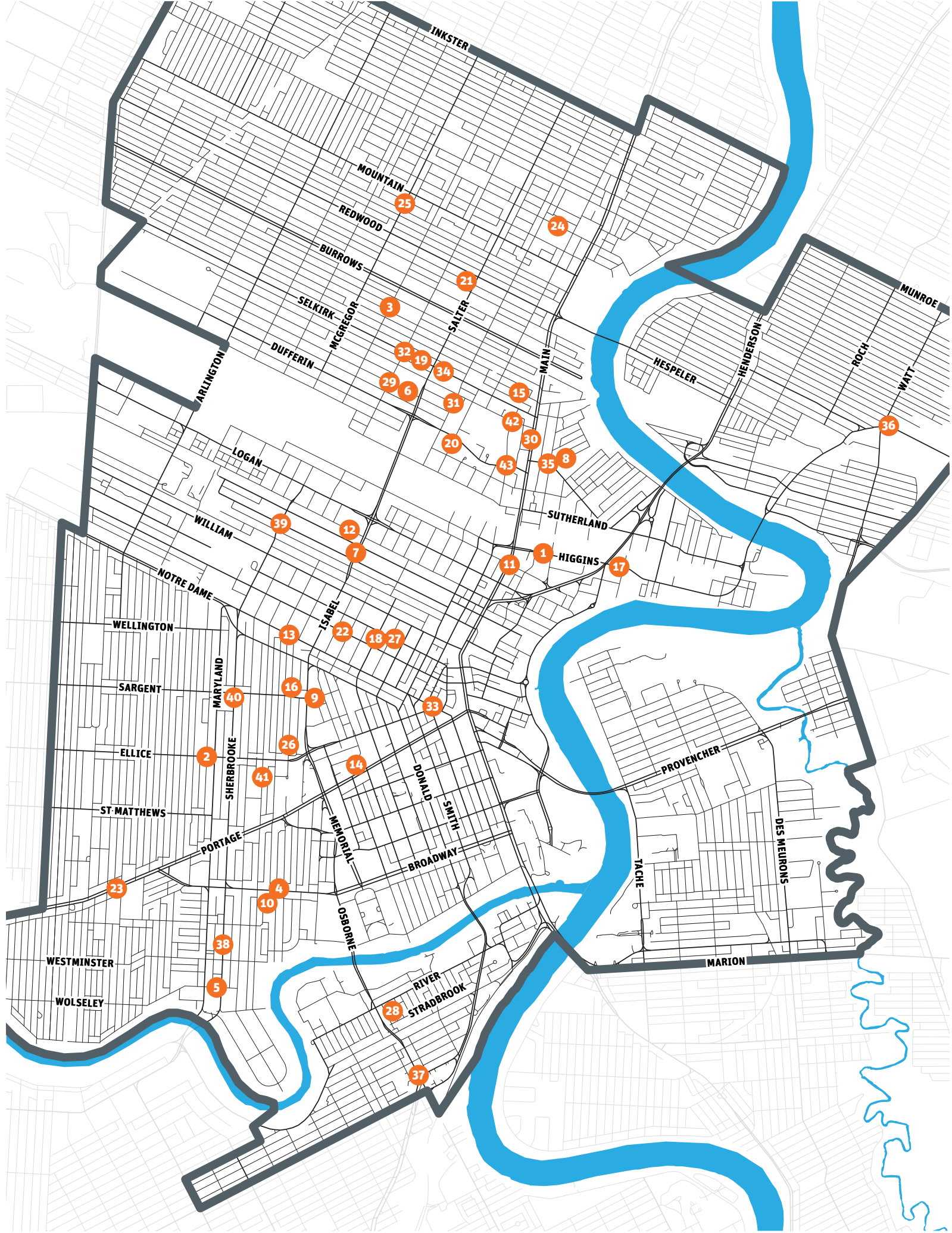
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## Appendix: Map of Community Based Organizations for Children, Youth and Families

1. Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg, Inc., 215-181 Higgins Avenue
2. West Central Women's Resource Centre, 640 Ellice Avenue
3. Andrews Street Family Centre, 220 Andrews Street
4. Art City, 616 Broadway Avenue
5. Wolseley Family Place, 691 Wolseley Avenue
6. Boys and Girls Club, 415 Stella Avenue
7. Boys and Girls Club, Door #4-200 Isabel St.
8. Boys and Girls Club, 132 Lusted Avenue
9. Boys and Girls Club, 460 Sargent Avenue
10. Broadway Neighborhood Centre, 185 Young Street
11. Circle of Life Thunderbird House, 715 Main Street
12. Dufferin School Family Room, 545 Alexander Avenue
13. Eyaa-Keen Healing Centre Inc, 547 Notre Dame Avenue
14. Family Dynamics, 393 Portage Avenue, Unit 401
15. Family Life Centre, 240 Pritchard Avenue
16. Family Resource Centre, 555 Spence Street
17. Graffiti Art Programming Inc., 109 Higgins Avenue
18. Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), 95 Ellen Street
19. Indigenous Family Centre, 470 Selkirk Avenue
20. Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, 45 Robinson Street
21. Inner City Youth Alive Inc, 418 Aberdeen Avenue
22. Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc., 455 McDermot Avenue
23. Klinik Community Health Centre, 870 Portage Avenue
24. Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, Inc, 318 Anderson Avenue
25. Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, Inc, 363 McGregor Street
26. Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, Inc, 443 Spence Street
27. Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP) – The Peaceful Village, 357 Bannatyne Avenue
28. Men's Resource Centre, 115 Pulford Street
29. Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, and Pathways to Education/ CEDA, 470 Stella Avenue
30. Mount Carmel Clinic, 886 Main Street
31. Native Women's Transition Centre, 105 Aikins Street
32. Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc., 472 Selkirk Avenue
33. N.E.E.D.S. Inc, 251-A Notre Dame Avenue
34. North End Women's Centre, 394 Selkirk Avenue
35. North Point Douglas Women's Centre, 221 Austin Street
36. Chalmers Community Centre & TIE Tykes, 480 Chalmers Ave.
37. Rainbow Resource Centre, 2nd Floor 1-222 Osborne Street
38. Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY), 125 Sherbrook Street
39. Rossbrook House, 658 Ross Avenue
40. Waa Pina Kosiis Miiki Waahp – Snowbird Lodge, 591 Sherbrook Street
41. Spence Neighborhood Association, Magnus Eliason Recreation Centre (MERC), 430 Langside Street
42. Turtle Island Neighborhood Centre, 510 King Street
43. Wahbung Abinoonjiag, 225 Dufferin Avenue





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