

*Research for* **communities**

## The North Point Douglas Neighbourhood's Community Strengths

Many people in North Point Douglas are working hard and effectively to re-build their neighbourhood.

**R**esidents organizations are playing an important role in communities throughout Winnipeg's inner city. The organizations are effective in promoting community development and represent one of the real strengths of these communities.

There are several such organizations that operate in North Point Douglas, an inner-city community that is located between Main St. and the Red River, from the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks north to Redwood Avenue. Point Douglas is home to the North Point Douglas Residents' Committee; the Norquay Community Centre with a variety of associated programs for children and youth; the Norquay School; the community newsletter, *The Point*; housing initiatives including the North End Housing Project and the North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC).

As is the case in other parts of the inner city, women are disproportionately represented among the community leaders in North Point Douglas. Two of the most interesting community organizations, the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, and

Sisters Initiating Steps Towards a Renewed Society (SISTARS) Community Economic Development Co-operative, are the product of their initiative. The work of both of these organizations is highlighted in a report on North Point Douglas in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba's *State of the Inner City Report-2006*.

### **NORTH POINT DOUGLAS WOMEN'S CENTRE**

The North Point Douglas Women's Centre is organized as a drop-in centre. In a community of one thousand homes, it often provides service to over five-hundred people a month. People who use the Centre



have access to a community telephone, a washer and dryer, computers and photocopy services.

The Centre also provides advocacy around such issues as safety, employment, childcare and social assistance. It serves as a safe space in the community for women to meet and talk and take advantage of counseling services. The Peace Begins@Home program, which was started at the North End Women's Centre, helps parents identify when their children are being pulled into gangs.

Housing continues to be a problem for many in North Point Douglas.



One woman said, "The Women's Centre here is pretty amazing. I mean, the Women's Centre started as a women's

committee who picketed this place when it was still a store because it was selling sniff to the kids and making outrageous profit by breaking up packs of pampers and packs of cigarettes and selling them one or two at a time. They managed to come together and figure out how to make this place into a Women's Centre and clearly this is making a difference to women in this community."

The Centre also helps residents address the inadequate housing options that face

many local residents. One person noted that "A lot of the people in the Women's Centre are either looking for housing, struggling in rooming houses which means they don't have their own kitchens, they don't have their own bathrooms, which also has safety issues. Food disappears from shared kitchens or you keep it at hand and it goes bad and you're on low income and you don't have the money to replace the food."

### SISTARS

The Sisters Initiating Steps Towards a Renewed Society Community Economic Development Co-Operative (SISTARS) is a women-driven, community economic development organization active in North Point Douglas.

It takes an innovative approach to the need for jobs. SISTARS has established a childcare centre, temporarily located in a church basement in the area, with

40 spaces for children. They have worked with Red River College to establish, in association with the childcare centre, a community-based early childhood education training program for 25 students. Once they graduate, students will have the opportunity to work in the childcare centre. SISTARS is in the process of creating a permanent 'hub' on a large piece of land in the area (at Barber

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House), where they will locate the childcare and educational facilities, and open a neighbourhood coffee house, a service that many in the community feel is needed.

One woman described the work done to date on this project by SISTARS. “We identified that there was a need for daycares, and a couple of women began planning instead of complaining. They decided to attend school and at the same time provide daycare space for their kids so they could go to school. So after the ladies complete their course, they’ll be able to work in the daycare.”

Nineteen women are involved in a trades training component attached to the initiative. Because the training is located in the area and has childcare attached, the opportunities are being seized. Rather than pushing low-income people into pre-existing programs, women in the community have designed the program for the people who live there. Rather than people in the community traveling across the city to Red River College, SISTARS has invited Red River College to

come to the community. Its success makes clear that, however deep and complex their problems may be, low-income inner-city people want to work, and—when appropriate supports are available—will take advantage of opportunities. The new ‘hub’ being created by SISTARS will be the product of genuine community involvement via a series of well-attended community workshops.

In the words of one participant, “The

### **The housing contradiction**

Thanks to provincial government support there has been considerable housing activity in North Point Douglas. Dilapidated and boarded-up houses have been renovated; in-fill housing has been placed on vacant lots; existing owners have been prompted to spend on their houses. “As the money began to become available in terms of housing grants and things like that, that made a huge difference. It was so encouraging to hear hammers and saws going all around the neighbourhood. It was an incentive to other people to get to work and do what they could to improve their own places”. The neighbourhood looks better as a result, and housing conditions have improved. Middle-class people are starting to trickle into the neighbourhood, attracted by the housing values, and by the pleasant tree-lined streets and the significant numbers of friendly people committed to the improvement of the neighbourhood.

The result is a situation that is contradictory. Poverty-related problems persist. Housing continues to be a problem for many as in-fill housing and renovated housing is priced beyond the range of lower-income people.

Many point out that a greater diversity of housing is needed, and that this may require imaginative housing solutions. North End Housing Project is building an 11 suite, not-for-profit co-op, expected to open at the end of 2006. Six of the suites will be subsidized, with rents set at 27 percent of income; the remaining five are for tenants whose incomes do not exceed \$46,379.

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amount of community involvement in this program has gone from that initial group of 14 women to over 100 people who have community involvement in the consultations....When that building goes up people in this community can actually say, 'I designed that.'

The design architect for the project told the community newsletter, *The Point*, that: "We have been overwhelmed by the openness and vision of the people who have come out to the workshops, and turnout has consistently [been] in the range of 30. It has been an amazing commitment in terms of time and personal energy."

The work being done by SISTARS and others in North Point Douglas is a wonderful example of what is possible when initiatives are developed from the ground up, with the needs and interests of the community driving the process, and when governments fund such projects. This kind of community-based work, when adequately supported by governments, is transformative.

**THE NEED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

While there is a lot of activity in North Point Douglas, with a core of dedicated community workers and many highly effective community-based organizations, there are problems, most of which are typical of inner-city neighbourhoods. One resident interviewed for the study said "There are some really good organizations in this community and that's where I feel the strength is, but it is by no means enough."

Many people in North Point Douglas are working hard and effectively to re-build

their neighbourhood. They are taking responsibility. Others in the neighbourhood have seized the opportunities created, for example, by SISTARS, and are in the process of turning their lives around, and they will then give back to their community with their skills and energies.

