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FAST FACTS

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State of the Inner-City Report: We're in it for the long haul

Defining the focus of the 6th *State of the Inner City Report* unfolded as it does every year. We began the process by meeting with representatives from various organizations working in the inner city. Some of our partners have participated in the *State of the Inner City* since we began the process in early 2005. Others have more recently become involved. What has been consistent each and every year is that the individuals and organizations who have contributed are deeply committed to improving the quality of life for individuals and families living and working in the inner city.

In spite of the many challenges that persist, our partners see the positive impact of their work. They know, as described by Lucille Bruce, Executive Director of Native Women's Transition Centre, that "there is a long way yet to go". But, says Sister Maria Vigna of Rossbrook House, they are "in it for the long haul".

Three priorities for this year's report emerged in the early months of 2010. One priority, and one that has been a constant theme each year, was housing. Our partners from the south end of the inner city are concerned about rising rental rates and the shrinking supply of affordable rental units as a result of rent-to-condominium conversion. They wanted to explore this issue further in the

2010 State of the Inner-City Report. While the conversion of rental housing to condominiums, and the displacement of renters due to rising rents, has been less of an issue in the North End, it has had an impact as displaced renters move further north where the supply is not keeping up to demand. Fully understanding the housing challenges in these neighbourhoods allows community organizations to better respond and advocate on behalf of residents.

A second priority came from participants who are also part of the coalition Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT). CLOUT is a unique coalition of inner-city service providers who have found strength in working together. Each has 'clout' in her own right but working in collaboration allows them to more effectively advocate for their communities and transfer knowledge from the elders in their group to a new generation of leaders.

CLOUT members desire to spread the word about the work that they do and the collaborative model that they have built. We tell their story in this year's State of the Inner City Report as well as in a video that will be released in early 2011.

The third issue we describe this year came to us from members of the *FACT* Parent Child Coalition in Winnipeg's North End. Although



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there are pockets of children throughout Manitoba who do not benefit from Early Childhood Education and Care, the coalition's concern stems from recent findings reported by the Province of Manitoba dealing specifically with Aboriginal children. The Province found many Aboriginal children to be far behind non-Aboriginal children when they begin school. Aboriginal children score lower on Early Development Instrument (EDI) indicators including physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and thinking skills, and communication skills and general knowledge. They are behind before they get started and this all too often leads to their falling further behind as they proceed through primary school, putting them at greater risk of dropping out of school altogether. In collaboration with members of *FACT*, we explored the cause of early learning challenges for Aboriginal children and we show how programs like Turtle Island Tots and Families and the Four Feathers Child Care program in Gilbert Park have integrated a culturally relevant curriculum that are showing positive results.

While all three chapters are unique, they share at least 2 things in common.

First, each of the issues identified evolved from collaborative work being done at the community level.

Neighbourhoods like Spence, Daniel McIntyre and West Broadway are identifying common challenges and potential solutions through ongoing dialogue and collaboration with each other, as well as with the people who live and work in their communities.

Members of *FACT*, parents and early childhood educators are concerned about the school readiness of their children and they are developing their own ideas about what works best. They caution government about fully embracing the Triple P parenting approach without consideration of the specific needs of Aboriginal

children. They want governments to be more open to culturally relevant practices that are evidence-based in a Manitoba setting.

The members of CLOUT have long known that their strength comes from working together. As described in "Together We Have CLOUT", CLOUT members have developed long-lasting relationships built on mutual respect and collaboration as they work toward a common goal.

The second common theme is that the journey to social and economic justice for people living in inner-city communities is long and slow. But while outsiders are bombarded with media images of crime and despair, inner-city organizations know that many positive gains have been made. They also know that the inner city is extremely vulnerable and outsiders continue to lack understanding about the complexity of issues and how best to address them. The answers, they say, are in the community, and the best way policy makers can help is to listen to the community and support them on their journey.

Whether providing services for families, developing relevant early learning education for children, or working to improve housing, community organizations are committed; but they can't do it on their own. They have made it clear that they are "in it for the long haul" – they need governments and other funders to show that they are too.

Shauna MacKinnon is the director of CCPA-MB



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