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Breaking barriers, building bridges

State of the
Inner City
Report **2012**

**Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges:
State of the Inner City Report 2012**

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Introduction

The 2012 *State of the Inner City Report* is titled *Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges*. We called it this because we believe it captures the essence of the two chapters included this year. The first chapter, titled *Who's Accountable to the Community?*, speaks to concerns raised by our community partners that the current approach taken by governments and other funders often disregards what is most important—whether or not those in receipt of services feel that they are getting the supports that they need.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a forum for the Executive Directors of community-based organizations (CBOs) who believe that governments and other funding agencies should be more accountable to the community being served just as CBOs must be accountable to funders. This 'two way street' is not always easy to achieve, but is necessary if we are to move forward in a manner that best benefits those we aim to serve.

Breaking barriers and building bridges is also the dominant theme in our second chapter, titled *Fixing our Divided City*. Like most cities, Winnipeg is in many ways divided. The divide is not always intentional. It is sometimes simply the result of our not taking the time to talk to one another.

This year we brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, inner-city and non-inner-city youth, and Aboriginal Elders to do just that — talk to each other. Our hope is that the opportunity for dialogue we describe will be the first of many as we chip away at the barriers that divide us. There is a sense that many people who reside outside of the inner city continue to see it as a dangerous place. They also do not fully understand some of the challenges facing those who live in the inner city. We believe that dialogue is necessary if we are to build bridges, mend fences and work together toward building a more inclusive city.

This year marks eight very fulfilling years of collaboration between the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba and the many community-based organizations committed to making the inner city a better place by building on the strengths of the people who live there. The content, but also the process of developing this year's report, adds to the mounting knowledge we now have about what works in the inner city and what doesn't. This year's report also reminds us that we have a lot more to learn from each other, and more work to do as a community to break down the barriers that remain and build bridges that lead to a better city for everyone.

Who's Accountable to the Community?

The fact that so many people can't find a place to live, have to go to food banks because they don't have enough income to properly feed their families suggests that something is terribly wrong in our society.

When you bring together a group of Executive Directors (EDs) from inner-city non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) and ask them about their biggest challenges, they have a lot to say. They are quick to talk about the ongoing tensions and challenges they have with various funders, bureaucracies and systems. They express concerns about persistently negative, sometimes hateful, attitudes toward socially excluded individuals and families, and negative perceptions about the communities where they live and work. They also express frustration with the unreasonable expectations placed on under-funded CBOs and the committed, overworked and underpaid people who work for them.

Through a series of meetings, surveys, focus groups and discussions with individual EDs, we learned much about the frustrations of working in the non-profit world. We have captured what we heard under the general theme of "accountability". EDs believe that if the term account-

ability was used in a much broader sense than it is currently, things would be very different.

The Oxford dictionary defines accountability as "the fact or condition of being accountable; responsibility." Accountable is defined as "required to account for one's conduct."

EDs tell us that accountability is currently a one-sided expectation. CBOs are constantly reminded by funders that CBOs must be accountable to them. But who, ask EDs, is accountable to the individuals, families and communities that are being served, and to the dedicated people who work in the low-wage precarious non-profit sector?

EDs emphasized that accountability must not be a one-way street. They have no problem being accountable to their funders to demonstrate that they are putting their resources to good use. But they also believe that funders, and in particular government funders, should be accountable for the decisions they make about what they fund, the level of funding they provide, the terms of funding and the policy priorities that they implement that effectively steer funding decisions.

While the level of funding organizations receive is certainly a major issue, it is not the only one. There are many frustrations. This chap-

ter of the SIC will outline these frustrations. It will end with some recommendations that, if implemented, would go a long way to improve service to the community, a goal that is — or at least should be — shared by us all. In order to clarify the frustrations EDs face — funding being the main one — we asked a series of questions:

1. Have reporting requirements from funding agencies, including government, changed over the last 10-20 years? If so, in what way(s)?
2. What proportion or number of hours of your organization's overall time and/or budget is directed toward obtaining funding (including applying and reporting)?
3. How do reporting requirements affect your organization's capacity for program and service delivery?
4. If your organization's current funding came with fewer strings attached, what if anything would change?
5. If given the chance, what kind of accountability would your organization ask for from governments and funding agencies?

Responses to these questions are found within the report that follows. We chose not to categorize responses under the above headings but rather under themes of accountability that emerged from individual responses and focus group discussions. Throughout the report we include quotes (anonymously) from EDs that we believe provide insight into their work, their frustration, and their dedication to community.

Accountability shouldn't be a one way street

Respondents were quick to point out that they fully agree with the need for accountability. However, the current relationship with funders

is based on accountability in one direction — from funded organization to funder. Directors of CBOs told us that their primary concern is accountability to the individuals, families and communities they serve. This, they say, should also be the priority for funding agencies and especially governments.

A primary role of government is to provide service to the community. Government policies and programs are presumably established in response to the needs of individuals and communities. CBOs are often contracted to provide services. However, they do so within the boundaries of government policies and regulations. While CBOs should measure the effectiveness of their programs, government must also assess whether the policies and regulations they impose on CBOs' are reasonable and not an impediment to CBOs ability to meet the needs of individuals and families in an effective manner.

Accountability and funding

They put out requests for proposals, organizations spend a lot of time and energy preparing applications, then programs are cancelled. Where is the accountability? They have all the power.

Funding is an ongoing issue for community-based organizations. They never have enough to do all that is needed and they are increasingly competing with other organizations for scarce/time limited project funds. This creates a host of problems that are described throughout this report. It results in competition and sometimes tension across agencies that work best when working collaboratively.

Uncertainty about funding leads to high staff turnover in organizations serving vulnerable populations who do best when they can build trusting relationships with staff. But building trusting relationships is hard to do when programs come and go and staff are constantly changing — leaving for jobs that are more secure.

Accountability and reporting

Funders want multiple reports from all practitioners, but this needs to change, because we are spending almost as much time meeting to organize the reports as doing the work.

Most funders want the numbers, so staff have to keep track of numbers, keep track of participation and unique individuals, programs managers write their own program reports, there is a manager who reviews all of their reports etc, financial reports, tracking and sourcing funds, and we have another person who writes the proposals.

In general, CBO Executive Directors note that reporting requirements have become increasingly stringent and time consuming. Many noted the broad use of logic models that they find to be onerous and challenging. Others noted the trend to push non-profits to use for-profit models of reporting that do not fit well for them. They also note that many of their outcomes are simply not measurable — they don't capture the physical, mental and emotional energy used by staff who are often called upon to assist program users in times of crisis.

EDs also question the efficacy of requiring the same reporting process for projects receiving small grants as those in receipt of large grants. "You can't believe the hoops we jump through for \$10,000".

On a more positive note, participants applauded Neighbourhoods Alive! for its recent efforts to respond to concerns about reporting. That program has moved away from requiring reporting twice for each project funded, which was previously required even for projects lasting six months. Reporting requirements have been reduced to once per year. EDs say this will save them time that can be better spent providing service to the community.

Financial accountability

In addition to discussions about reporting in general, there was much discussion about financial

accountability and audits. This was referred to as "audit overkill."

As non-profits, we all have annual audits. But on top of that different funders do more auditing on specific projects. It's overkill.

Is this really accountability — or is it bureaucracy?

Participants of one focus group became particularly interested in a discussion about the auditing of programs when one ED gave the example of the audit of a program in which they received \$48,000 of federal funding. In addition to regular reporting, an auditor was sent from Ottawa who was in Winnipeg for one week conducting the audit. They presumably had considerable expenses — airfare, accommodation, meals, ground transportation. The ED questioned whether the cost was warranted and others agreed that this seemed a bit ridiculous and it led to a discussion about who is accountable for these kinds of decisions. Was this money well spent?

EDs want to know who is accountable for the kinds of funding provided and whether it is sufficient to serve the community properly. Who is auditing these decisions?

For some programs we get admin funding, but funders don't recognize the infrastructure that supports the program...some grants will only cover the immediate project staff, but not the administrative work that is required to support the project.

Every year we turn in work plans for the whole agency, even what they don't fund. It would be interesting to get some costing on how much goes to community and how much goes to monitoring.

Accountability and privatization

A major concern raised was what looks to be a trend toward marketization of community programs. The latest buzzwords they are hearing at

the federal level are ‘Social Impact Bonds’ or ‘Social Investment Funds’. The way this appears to work is that governments look to private investors to support specific programs. Programs are funded based on their performance. If programs don’t show the kinds of outcomes the funder is looking for, they do not get paid. This model was introduced by the Conservative government in the U.K. and is raising eyebrows for its private sector approach to public concerns. As noted by Dexter Whitfield in his analysis of this model:

The creation of a social market will inevitably produce gaming, distortions and failures with major implications for fulfilling equalities duties. The contracting or market system is not designed to address those with the greatest need, but to obtain the maximum outcome at the lowest cost. Those most in need in training and work programmes often end up being ‘churned’ — either repeating or moving from one programme to another. In seeking to reduce the overall reoffending rate, prisoners with a combination of housing, education, skills and/or mental health needs are unlikely to be prioritised. There are also concerns about the quality of employment in new social enterprises when staff transfer regulations have been weakened. Social markets are, in effect, a new form of financialization, a means of transferring risk and responsibility to individuals and of reducing the scope of the welfare state. Privatization has mutated into many new forms, designed to widen and deepen the role of the private sector in the design and delivery of public services. (Whitfield, 2012, 23)

In the 2011 *State of the Inner City* report we talked about the effects of neoliberal economic policies on communities and there has been growing concern about the privatization of public services—a policy practice inherently related to neoliberalism. CBOs are correct to be concerned that privatization is creeping into the manner in which their work is funded.

Accountability and evaluation

Governments have unrealistic expectations about outcomes.

Crime prevention programs — we have to show that kids are criminals when they start, and that they are not criminals at the end. How can you really show that?

We have different levels of funding — they don’t care what we really do, but want us to fit into a box, they don’t want to know the reality, because we have different ideas of success — for them it’s not what’s successful in the community but what is successful to them.

CBOs welcome the opportunity to effectively evaluate their programs so that they can learn what is working and continuously make improvements. However, they have many questions about evaluation. They wonder about government decisions on who is hired to evaluate, the methods that are used to evaluate CBOs and how evaluations are used. They noted examples of programs that had positive evaluations but lost funding because their objectives no longer aligned with government priorities.

A major challenge is that governments and other funders often subscribe to evaluation tools that don’t necessarily capture the true value of their programs to participants, their families and the broader community. One exception noted was a component of the evaluation process at the CEDA Pathways to Education Program. While funders continue to be focused on quantitative outcomes, Pathways to Education supported the development of a culturally appropriate participatory evaluation model to capture the qualitative data gathered through sharing circles and interviews. More of this type of evaluation is needed, but it must also be accepted by funders as valid and useful and not be put on the shelf to collect dust.

EDs also told us that evaluation processes can sabotage programs thereby making it near

impossible to show the kinds of outcomes governments and other funders demand. For example, a recent evaluation of crime prevention programs in Winnipeg was critical of organizations for their failure to demonstrate long-term impact. But one ED argued that the evaluation was destined to fail because they did not collaborate with organizations to develop appropriate assessment tools.

For example, intake surveys included invasive, inappropriate questions such as “are you in a gang?” As stated by one inner-city ED:

Do they really think a kid is going to admit to being in a gang before having established any trust with program staff? Of course not. But six months down the road they might tell you that and a whole lot more. The result is that data is inaccurate and works against us. If a kid tells you six months down the road that they are in a gang and taking drugs, something they didn't admit to when entering the program, the effect is that it looks like they became gang-involved while in the program while in reality they have made progress by being honest with us.

Others said this about evaluation:

The feds will pay for an outside evaluator — but even the results the evaluator and the feds would have is different.

Even if we do our own evaluation using participatory models, they shelve it.

EDs stated the need for evaluation to be in place at the beginning of projects and designed with the participation of program staff. It should be ongoing so that it can be used to continuously make improvements — not administered at the end only to show what didn't work.

This isn't rocket science, but in the quest to minimize cost, corners are cut and evaluations are not contributing to the objective of creating evidence — the thing that governments and funders say that they want. It's crazy.

Evaluation must also be holistic. “That almost never happens because each individually funded program is evaluated separately...funders don't look at the overall impact the organization has on the lives of individuals, families and the broader community. “

CBO directors also wonder how funders are accountable for what they do and the decisions that they make. “Do they have logic models and evaluations for Triple P Parenting, for example?” “What about the provincial “After the School Bell Rings” program? Where did that idea come from? Nobody asked us.” If evaluations do exist, EDs want to know where they are and whether they are available to the public.

One ED gave this example. “I really wonder how much money has been spent on the development and promotion of Triple P Parenting. All the billboards and travel costs to bring people in from Australia to train bureaucrats on how to use Triple P. What is the ongoing cost and could that money be better spent?”

Accountability and ‘evidence’

Evidence-based research. This is a buzzword that haunts CBOs. It isn't that CBOs are resistant to evidence-based research, they simply wonder what counts as “evidence.” Harvard Senior Fellow Lisbeth Schorr also asks this question.

...our definition of what counts as credible evidence when judging what is worth funding to scaling up should be expanded to allow for continuing improvement and innovation... evidence based does not have to mean experimental-based. When we draw on evidence from many kinds of research—not just program evaluations—and from theory and practice, even innovations can be evidence-based. (Schorr, 2011, 3)

CBOs believe that governments and other funders have a very narrow view of what counts as evidence. Funding decisions are increasingly based on ‘evidence’ of successful outcomes. But who

determines what successful outcomes means? While CBOs don't dispute the importance of demonstrating effectiveness, they don't always agree on what evidence is determined to be most important.

Schorr (2011) notes that most programs that have been identified as successful have been validated by experimental methods that are severely circumscribed or highly standardized. Yet there are many successful local programs that are disregarded because they haven't been "scientifically" tested. EDs asked "why are our outcomes not used to build evidence for local program solutions?"

Governments and other funders push for 'evidence-based' programming yet they make unilateral decisions as what evidence means. CBOs question why governments don't use the evaluations of their programs to build evidence about local programs. Instead they turn to programs from far-away places and spend millions of dollars pushing them locally. The best example of this is the Triple P Parenting Program. One government official estimated upwards of one million dollars has been spent on the operating and promotion of the Triple P program in the last few years. One program director told us that many organizations she knows tried to use Triple P in their parenting programs but it didn't work. It required literacy levels far too high for many of their participants and required far too much 'homework'. They returned to a program that they believe to have worked well for them in the past. This program — called Nobody's Perfect — has been used for years by Winnipeg CBOs and is based on many of the same principles as Triple P, but is believed by some to be more appropriate for the families that they serve.

A 2008 CCPA study by MacKinnon and Stephens titled *Is Participation Having an Impact: measuring success through the voices of community-based program participants* shows how outcomes defined by people who use programs provides evidence of what works. But funders

need to be open to a broader definition of what constitutes "evidence."

Accountability and Sustainability

The concept of "sustainability" is often raised in discussions about funding and accountability. It is a buzzword that is repeated constantly by funders. Organizations are continuously asked to demonstrate how they will be "sustainable." The idea that organizations should be sustainable — able to operate without government funding — infuriates individuals struggling to meet the needs of people who are falling through the cracks.

The idea that organizations like ours will ever be sustainable without government funding is ridiculous." Our organizations are here because governments have failed to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. We are picking up the pieces. For some reason they seem to think we should be doing this out of the goodness of our hearts. We are here because we are committed but we too need to earn a living. We need to earn a fair wage. Do government decision makers, who make far more money than we do and enjoy benefits that we won't ever see, really feel that their work is more valuable than our work?

Every funder is interested in having someone partner with you on a project to avoid duplication — they want to see budgets with everyone's money, then want to look at sustainability — how to sustain the project — but isn't that the government's part of it, to talk to each other? But they don't talk to figure out how to make it sustainable.

I think they set us up to fail — they won't support ongoing successful stuff, we have to 'new-ize' everything — this comes with a human cost that doesn't show up anywhere.

Sustainability is an issue that has been raised in several *State of the Inner City Reports*. CBOs are clear on this. They will not be sustainable without government and other funding and they should

not be expected to be. They are providing a valuable public service that should be publicly funded.

If we all walked away, what would they do then? Seems to be the perspective that they just have to dangle the carrot and we jump...they know that we won't walk away.

Accountability and pilot projects

A common theme of frustration is government's approach to pilot projects. It's not that EDs think pilot projects are a bad thing. They can generate program ideas to tackle complex and evolving challenges. It's the manner in which they are funded that is a problem. The federal government in particular has a reputation for funding pilot projects and then walking away from funding these programs that communities have come to rely on.

When asked if the problem is getting better or worse, all EDs say it is getting worse. A recent example is cuts in funding from the federal government's National Crime Prevention Strategy Gang Prevention Program. Five Winnipeg programs including the Spence Neighbourhood Organization West Central Youth Outreach; Ndinaiwe's Turning the Tides program, Ka Ni Kanichihk's Circle of Courage, West Broadway Neighbourhood's Just TV and New Directions, Project Oasis all lost funding for programs providing valuable supports to youth at risk.

A recent provincial government pilot project is being met with a bit more hope but also a healthy dose of skepticism. A 2011 Manitoba press release describing the new non-profit funding states that the pilot will establish "multi-year, multi-program funding with a representative group of non-profits with proven track records of success. Additional groups will be added after the pilot is evaluated." (Province of Manitoba, 2011) The government identifies more than 40 organizations to be included in the initial pilot.

When we got the three year funding for one staff it was the first time she had more than

twelve months of contract. How can we build capacity of staff when we don't know if they will be funded after one year? The work is stressful enough without having to worry whether you will have work at all after one year.

EDs agree that multi-year funding is a great idea that was a long time coming. Non-profits that qualify will have greater stability. Time will be saved since the application process will be on a three vs. one-year cycle and reporting requirements will also be lessened. Staff anxiety will be reduced knowing that they will have stable work beyond one year. This policy decision makes good sense and it doesn't cost government a nickel. It is an example of government listening to community. However the skepticism comes in the form of concerns over the level of funding. While extending grants is hugely helpful, it doesn't address the issue that if the pie doesn't grow, multi-year funding won't help resolve the most critical issue — there just isn't enough money.

Accountability and community service

CBO directors told us that what frustrates them most is the impact that funding cuts, reporting requirements and other administrative requirements have on the people that they serve. Onerous reporting takes an inordinate amount of staff time, which is already in short supply, away from the people that they are there to serve.

EDs say that they spend close to half of their time reporting to funders, meeting with funders about reporting, and justifying the work that they do.

Government and funder requirements also jeopardize CBOs' ability to hire local people who may have lower skill levels but have potential to build capacity. The onerous administrative tasks often lead to the need to hire people with skills beyond what is required to do the important community serving work. However, higher skilled people often leave for greener pastures. The promise of better wages, benefits and opportunities is difficult for qualified staff to resist. In

fact the CBO world has become a training ground for government employees. There are numerous examples of staff who have left non-profits to work for government after having gained valuable experience in the community. Governments might want to include this free training when measuring the outcomes of CBOs.

I'd love to be able to offer staff a pension, or a health plan — a lot of us are working on trauma and what happens to traumatized people, and the only way we can do it is by traumatizing people because we can't pay staff benefits etc.

You need healthy staff to help people who need help. But how can you have healthy staff when people are always worried about whether or not they will have a job?

We need healthy staff [because] we are working with people who are not in a healthy place — how can you have healthy self-assured staff — one staff, every March she's looking for a job, every April she's re-hired, this has been going on for five years, now it's moved to a six month funding model so in the last year she's been looking for a job twice — how can she feel confident and secure in her job to help other people?

Program cuts and service interruptions

Many of the CBO EDs we spoke with have experienced cuts in funding that have led to either the elimination of programs, interruptions in programming and/or laying off of program staff. They told us that this takes a huge toll on program users and staff. It often takes a long time for individuals to feel confident enough to walk through their doors. Many program users have had negative experiences with various government systems and this has left them hesitant to trust service providers. This makes it particularly important for CBOs to have consistent staff able to develop trusting relationships with program users. Every time a program is interrupted as a

result of funding delays or cuts, program staff are forced to find jobs elsewhere. This has a significant impact on program participants.

One inner-city service provider described it this way:

This situation would apply to programs that offer counselling services. For example, an addicted person comes out of addiction treatment and signs for a program that helps people like him/her to stay clean and sober and make healthy choices. The first three months after treatment are critical as most of the relapse happens in this period. If an organization gets funding for such addictions program for twelve months, this means that participant intake has to stop after the ninth month of project implementation. Without confirmation for continuation of the funding, it would be irresponsible for a CBO to take new participants. They will make an effort and stay sober while in the program but, if it ends before that three-month critical period, the participants will face a very high risk of relapsing. In such case the progress of the participants, the work of the CBO staff, and the government funding for those last three months will be forfeit.

Now imagine that the funding continuation is announced one or two months after the end of the project. All staff is gone. The CBO will not be able to pick up the program from where it stopped — new staff will have to be hired, participants who didn't complete the program will have to be contacted (which is difficult considering the transiency of people with addictions).

Interruptions in service decrease the effectiveness of the program; damage the trust between participants and CBO's team working with them increase the cost per participant as the last three months of the program are time and money lost; erase/damage the progress made by participants so far; decrease the staff morale.

Accountability and collaboration

Governments and other funders require CBOs that they fund to collaborate and work together. CBOs have become increasingly diligent in doing so and service delivery has improved as a result. In past *State of the Inner City Reports* we talked about the collaboration among organizations involved in the Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT) coalition. Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations have also benefited from collaboration. CBOs are collaborating all the time. The EDs and other CBO representatives who participate in the *State of the Inner City* process are very familiar with the work that each other's organizations do and often work with each other on various projects.

But CBOs are also put in a difficult position because they are increasingly forced to compete with one another for limited funds. EDs also pointed out the double standard that prevails—while CBOs are expected to collaborate, there appears to be little collaboration between government departments and different levels of government, and almost no collaboration between government and CBOs.

They say that while CBOs are sometimes consulted what they say is often ignored. In other cases they aren't consulted at all. A recent example given was the massive amount of funding that was given to the Youth for Christ Centre on Higgins and Main. CBOs working directly with the youth learned of the multi-million dollar/multi-year federal/municipal contribution to Youth For Christ only when it was announced. Nobody asked them what they thought of the idea (Christensen & Roussin, 2010).

Systems accountability

The nonprofit industry supports a government industry, which is completely unrecognized — they get paid more money than us, and we're the ones on the ground doing the work.

Much of what we do is necessary because people have been failed [by the social and economic

model] we have in place and by governments who are not doing what is necessary.

Government systems. This is an issue that comes up frequently when speaking with people who work in the community. Child and Family Services and Employment and Income Assistance are the two “systems” most referred to.

When are funders going to look at systemic barriers — we are told that we have to fix people, when it's the system, the society that's the problem — what is the purpose of welfare? If it is to provide basic needs, it is failing. So we need to evaluate that.

EDs talked about the root of the problem, that our social and economic system and our government systems are failing people.

The fact that so many people can't find a place to live, have to go to food banks because they don't have enough income to properly feed their families suggests that something is terribly wrong in our society.

Others talked about the frustration that government actions come from a “place of mistrust rather than trust” of CBOs, even though CBOs are providing a valuable service to the community on their behalf.

Some bureaucrats act as though it's their personal cheque book. They don't trust people.

They also talked about the disconnect between various systems. A common example is that of families that are forced to place their children in foster care because they don't have sufficient housing. Once their children are in care they lose much of their social assistance allowance so they now have even less income for housing making it near impossible to get their children back. The irony is that the government ends up spending more to keep children in care, both in the short term and in the long term.

Another example is the disconnect between Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) policy

and government's Education First policy. There seems to be a double standard at work. While education is often referred to as the "ticket out of poverty", people on EIA are essentially discouraged from pursuing post-secondary education because EIA won't support them beyond minimal training. Government Employment and Social Assistance Policy continues to be based on "work first" principles.

These are just a few examples of government policies that don't align and in some cases conflict. Why are governments not accountable to the community for this?

Accountability and policy priorities

Another buzzword at both federal and provincial levels is "employability."

The federal government is very clearly focused on "employability." If you aren't fitting into this box then you aren't a priority.

The Executive Directors we spoke with expressed frustration that government policies and programs are influenced more by ideology than community need. One example was the trend to fund programs with a specific employment focus that is also narrowly defined. Employability for the federal government means that the purpose of the program is to prepare people for jobs and the outcome measured is attainment of a job. While EDs agree that employment is an objective for many people that they work with, it is not the only one and for some it is an objective that may come later.

The focus on employability frustrates CBOs for two important reasons. Healthy families and communities are about so much more than employment. And even when employment is a focus, many individuals first need to deal with a host of challenges before they can even think about employment. They need adequate housing, some have addiction issues, others are not able to work for other reasons.

Don't policy makers understand that if you don't address these issues first, people won't be 'employable'?

Another example of policy priorities that don't align with community priorities is policies under the Employment and Income Assistance banner. For example, the Province now has various pots of funding that individuals on social assistance may or may not be able to access to help them pay their rent.

It's confusing for people...why don't they just increase the EIA rental allowance? That's what people want and need. It would be so much more simple.

Moving toward reciprocity in accountability

There is nothing wrong with being accountable and this is particularly important when it comes to public funds. But too much emphasis is placed on the accountability of small CBOs for relatively small amounts of money, distracting from more important issues.

As the Executive Directors we spoke with pointed out, accountability is a two way street. CBOs are working hard to meet needs in their communities while also responding to the onerous expectations of funders—all in the name of 'accountability'.

CBOs are frustrated. They sometimes feel that the only way that governments will recognize their value is if they all just walked away. But governments also know that they won't do that because they care too much. So how to move forward?

Much of what we heard from our community partners is not new. What is troubling about what we heard is that so little has changed. In fact in some cases, it has changed for the worse.

In 1997, Lisbeth Schorr wrote about the need for governments, funding agencies, and leaders of community-based organizations delivering

services in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to step back and recognize what they all have — or should have — in common. More than a decade later, our community partners are essentially saying the same thing. In particular, they want governments and other funders to recognize the good value they get from CBOs and begin to relate with them based on greater trust and respect.

In the book titled *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America* (1997), Schorr outlines essential program attributes and effective strategies that remain relevant today and reflect much of what has been expressed by the EDs we spoke to for this report. We have adapted and enhanced these recommendations somewhat to respond to the Winnipeg context.

Many inner-city CBOs have demonstrated the following attributes outlined by Schorr. We propose that they should be adequately funded to ensure that they are able to further develop and maintain them.

1. Programs that are comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering.
2. Program models that view children in the context of their families rather than narrowly focusing on policies and programs targeting children exclusively.
3. Recognition that children and families are part of neighbourhoods and communities.
4. Design and delivery of programs that are long-term, preventative with clear missions and continually evolving.
5. Programs that are well managed by competent and committed individuals.
6. Adequately trained and supported staff to ensure the provision of high quality responsive service.
7. Building strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect is central to all that they do.

Given the large proportion of Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg's inner city we would add an

eightth attribute. Much has been written about the devastating impact that Canada's colonial policies have had on generations of Aboriginal people. The residential school system is the best known example. Reversing the damage will require much more than apologies. Aboriginal organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people should include opportunities for healing and cultural reclamation. It follows that this element of their programming must be financially supported.

Consistent with Schorr's research, our community partners tell us that:

1. The cookie cutter approach doesn't work.
 - Policy makers and funders need to distinguish between what can be replicated, what might be adapted locally. They also must create the conditions in which effective interventions will thrive (i.e. ensuring adequate funding is in place).
2. Root causes must be addressed.
 - We must not focus only on program solutions. Systems change is also required and governments need to balance their bureaucratic needs (i.e. accountability) with accomplishing short- and long-term goals for the public good.
3. True collaboration is needed.
 - Funders, CBOs, policymakers need to be working toward the same ends; however there must also be recognition that partnerships are not equal — funders hold a great deal of power in the “partnership.”
4. Funders must take a broader view
 - Recognize there are no quick fixes, no single solutions.
5. Funders must take a longer-term view
 - Results won't happen overnight and problems won't be solved within election cycles.
6. Interventions must be significant in scale to effect real change for large populations.

- This means adequate funding, broad participation, and genuine collaboration among all stakeholders.

Finally, there must be a recognition that communities can't do it all. We need both community-based solutions and strong state support including sufficient income assistance, funding for childcare, healthcare, housing etc. The expertise of CBOs must be respected and adequately supported and they need to be able to access sufficient funding to do their work. While CBOs will also need to draw upon expertise from outside of the community, community knowledge must be equally respected for what it bring to the table. This leads to a final discussion on the idea of 'partnerships'.

Accountability and partnerships as we move forward

If we are to move forward to a new accountability structure, we will need to have an honest discussion about "partnerships". The term "partnerships" has been a popular buzzword for years. But what

do partnerships really look like in the context of community work? Partnerships are not really partnerships unless everyone is treated equally. This is not the case in the government/funding agency/community partnership dynamic. Governments and funders hold the power. CBOs are essentially at their mercy. If they don't do what their funders want them to do they jeopardize losing their funding.

Ideally we would like to minimize the power imbalance but this may not be fully possible as long as governments and outside funders hold the purse strings. We need to at least be honest about this as we move forward.

However, a major change in attitude toward the work of CBOs can help. If governments and other funders pay attention to the concerns raised in this paper, and begin to employ the strategies outlined, they will be demonstrating greater respect for the work of CBOs. They will be acknowledging that the work of CBOs is equally important and should be treated as such.

Accountability will have a whole new meaning.

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Fixing our Divided City

We talk it out, we don't just judge each other

Like most cities, Winnipeg is in many ways a divided city. Hall (2006, 24) describes cities as typically divided “by class and wealth, by right to and over property, by occupation and use, by lifestyle and culture, by race and nationality, ethnicity and religion, and by gender and sexuality.”

Cities are often most visibly divided geographically and this certainly holds true for Winnipeg. For example, the North End has historically been home to working class immigrants and lower-income households while the South End has been the preferred destination of middle and upper income earners (Artibise, 1977).

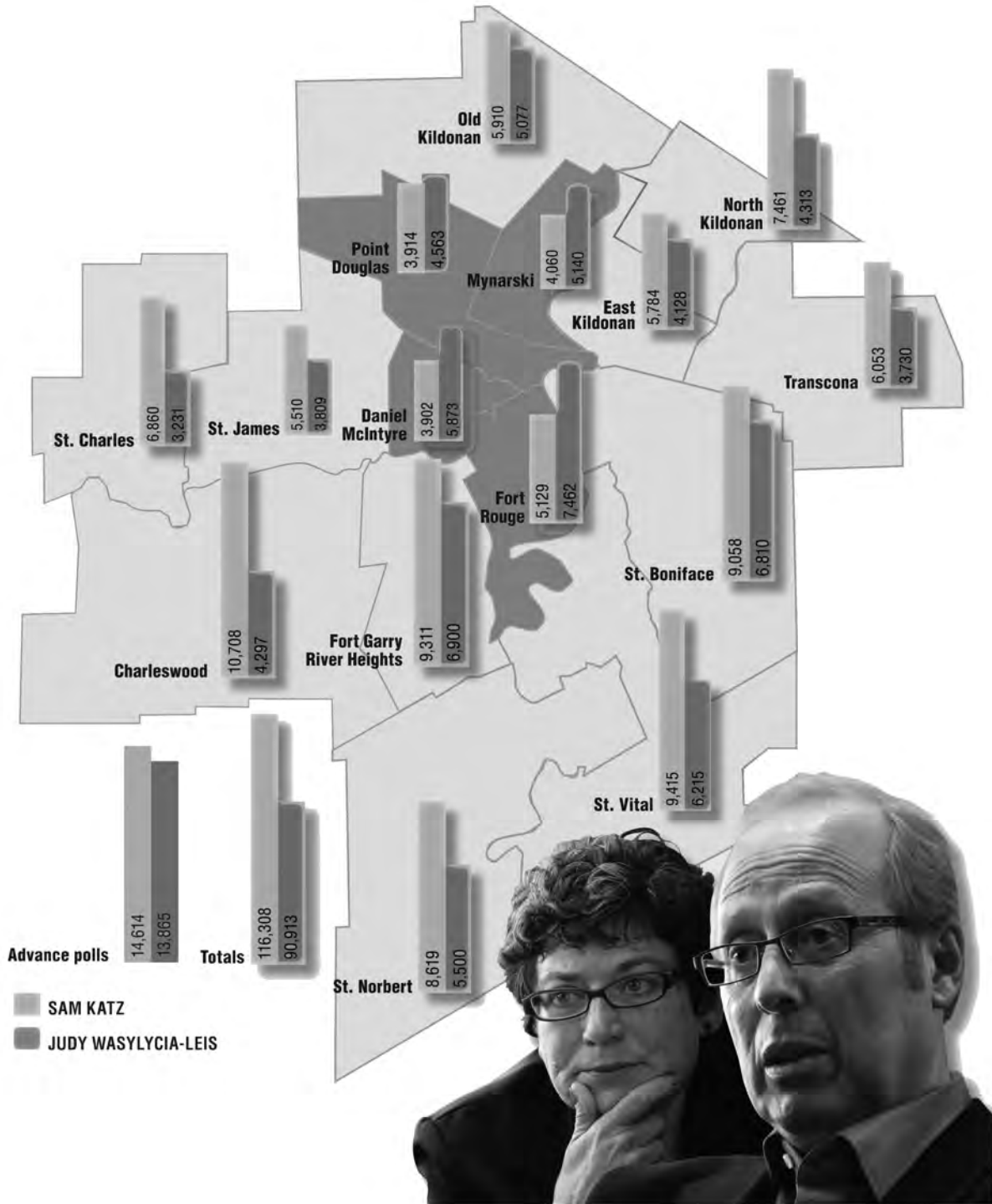
One example of how the class divide is evident today can be seen in voting patterns in the most recent municipal election. Our current Mayor, Sam Katz, is widely seen as the conservative candidate representing the interests of business and middle/upper class Winnipeggers. His main challenger in 2010 was Judy Wasylycia-Leis. Ms. Wasylycia-Leis is a long-time resident of the North End and was a long serving NDP Member of Parliament. Ms. Wasylycia-Leis was widely viewed as the candidate on the political left. As

seen in Figure 1, the majority of voters in higher-income neighbourhoods outside of the inner city chose the incumbent, Mayor Katz while a majority of inner-city residents voted for Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Our recent history tells a story of a city with racialized and spatialized pockets of poverty (Silver, 2006). For example, Table 1 shows that households in the inner city are far more likely to have low income compared with non-inner-city households.

According to the 2006 Census, the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Winnipeg has the highest number of Aboriginal people of all CMAs in Canada and this population is expected to grow. This is in part because the Aboriginal population is younger and growing at a faster rate, but it is also the result of migration from reserve communities as individuals and their families relocate to Manitoba's largest city in search of better opportunities. The Aboriginal population in the inner city is markedly higher on a per capita basis than in Winnipeg more generally. Fully 21 percent of the inner-city population identify as Aboriginal and in some inner-city neighbourhoods more than 50 percent of residents are Aboriginal. Within these

FIGURE 1 Election map



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neighbourhoods Aboriginal people are among the most disadvantaged.

Table 2 shows that while Aboriginal people

live in neighbourhoods across the city, there is a high concentration of Aboriginal people in the inner city.

TABLE 1 Low income in Winnipeg

Percentage incidence of low income	Inner City Winnipeg		City of Winnipeg	
	Before Tax	After Tax	Before Tax	After Tax
Total economic families	32.5%	25.8%	14.9%	11.1%
Female lone parent	60.9%	52.9%	42.0%	33.6%
Total private households	39.6%	32.5%	20.2%	15.7%
Children under 6 years	62.6%	54.3%	31.7%	25.9%

SOURCE: Census 2006, as cited in MacKinnon, 2011

TABLE 2 Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Poverty in Winnipeg

Year	Households in Poverty	Aboriginal Households in Poverty	Aboriginal Households in Poverty in the Inner City
2006	20.2%	46.0%	65.0%

SOURCE: Census 2006 as cited in the State of the Inner City Report 2010

CCPA Manitoba researchers have written extensively about racialized and spatialized poverty in our city. A major problem is that the inner city has been increasingly stigmatized as the place where you go when you can't afford to live anywhere else, and a place where you shouldn't go if you can afford to live some where else. With the exception of the few inner-city neighbourhoods that have been gentrified, we continuously hear anecdotes of people seeking to move away from their inner-city neighbourhoods, and of other people being fearful of the inner city.

While the media has contributed to the extreme perceptions of the inner city as a group of dangerous, unappealing neighbourhoods — places you would not want to step foot in even in daylight— the challenges in many inner-city neighbourhoods are quite real for those who live in them. There is much to celebrate in the inner city but it is also true that disadvantaged inner-city youth feel pressure to join youth gangs, are dropping out of school at higher rates than those living outside of the inner city, and are all too often stuck in cycles of poverty that have trapped their families for generations. The bigger problem is that the broader community, while concerned, responds by turning the other way... moving further and further outwards feeling that they can't do anything to change the situation,

choosing to save themselves and their families by staying away.

The education divide

There is a very clear divide in terms of educational attainment. While educational attainment alone does not determine future employment and earnings, it is an important indicator of employment and earnings potential. Statistics show that globalization has resulted in an increase in precarious employment for both skilled and unskilled workers (Livingstone, 1998; MacKinnon, 2011), and that individuals with low education levels have a higher risk of long-term, low-wage, precarious employment (Chung, 2006 as cited in MacKinnon, 2011).

Education levels for the Aboriginal population have improved in recent years, however they continue to lag far behind the non-Aboriginal population. For example, while the number of Aboriginal Canadians completing high school has increased, there continues to be a significant gap in contrast with the non-Aboriginal population. According to Statistics Canada 2006 Census, one in three (34 per cent) Aboriginal persons between 25 and 64 years had not completed high school compared with 15 per cent of all adults between 25 and 64. Fully 60 per cent of all adults between 25 and 64 years had com-

TABLE 3 Highest level of Education Age 25-64

	Total Population Less than high school	Total Population High school certificate or equivalent	Total Population With university Degree	Aboriginal Population Less than high school	Aboriginal Population High school certificate or equivalent	Aboriginal Population With university Degree
Canada	15 %	24 %	23 %	34 %	21 %	8 %
Manitoba	20 %	25 %	19 %	40 %	12 %	8 %

SOURCE: Census 2006 as cited in MacKinnon, 2011

pleted some form of postsecondary education in 2006, compared with 44 per cent of Aboriginals. The good news is that the number of Aboriginal people with a degree has increased from 6 per cent in 2001 to 8 per cent in 2006. Data from the most recent 2011 Census are not yet available.

In Manitoba, while educational attainment for the Aboriginal population lags behind the non-Aboriginal population in general, the gap is narrower than in Canada as a whole. The percentage of Aboriginal people in Manitoba with a university degree is keeping pace with the national rate of Aboriginal people with degrees (Table 3). The relatively positive changes in university attainment in Manitoba could in part be attributed to the various ACCESS programs in Manitoba post-secondary institutions. These are programs specifically designed to encourage and assist multi-barriered students wishing to pursue post-secondary education.

While statistics show that there has been progress in Aboriginal educational attainment, there is much to be done to improve outcomes of Aboriginal and inner-city students. An important first step is to break down the barriers that deter students from attending school. As shown in Table 3, high-school completion rates are lower in Manitoba than in Canada generally, but they are particularly low for Aboriginal Manitobans. This is particular concerning because high-school education is a minimum requirement for most jobs in the current market.

High school attainment for inner-city youth continues to fall far behind that of those who reside outside of the inner city. Researchers at the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (2008) looked

at high-school completion rates by following two cohorts of grade nine students for six years. Students enrolled in grade 9 in 1997/98 were followed until the 2002/03 school year; students enrolled in grade 9 in 2000/01 were followed until the 2005/06 school year (Brownell, et al, 2008, 241). They found the rate of Manitoba youth completing high school increased from 74.3 per cent to 77.7 per cent in these two periods. In Winnipeg, the rate increased in most areas. However, it remained significantly below the provincial and city average in inner-city neighbourhoods. Only 52.8 per cent of the second cohort in Point Douglas and 59.5 per cent of the downtown cohort graduated, compared with city average of approximately 79 per cent.

Racism — Yes, this elephant is still in the room

According to Environics (2011), many Aboriginal people in Winnipeg believe that they are viewed negatively by non-Aboriginal people. Fully 75 percent of Aboriginal people responding to the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Survey (UAPS) believe non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people is generally negative. Aboriginal people believe that non-Aboriginal people continue to hold many stereotypes of those who are Aboriginal. Fully 75 percent of UAPS participants report having experienced racism personally. While many are hopeful about changing attitudes, the majority believe that there has been either no change in these perceptions (34%) or that they are getting worse (23%).

The historical context of colonization and systemic racism as a root cause of the social and

economic divide illustrated in the statistics outlined above has been well documented (Cannon & Sunseri 2011; Laneui 2000; Silver 2006; TRC 2012). Recommendations advanced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) give new hope that youth in Manitoba will be provided with more accurate information about the Aboriginal experience in Canada. Winnipeg school divisions are responding by integrating Aboriginal issues into the high-school curriculum. This is an important step in the right direction. However, the content and manner in which it is delivered must be carefully considered.

Research and anecdotal evidence suggests that the schooling experience for many Aboriginal learners has been extremely negative (Huffman, 2008; Silver, 2006; TRC, 2012 as cited in MacKinnon, 2011). For many the experience of residential schools has left grandparents and/or parents psychologically and spiritually damaged, causing them to pass their distrust of schools on to their children. Adding insult to injury, the continued use of Eurocentric content and teaching styles, a shortage of Aboriginal teachers, and a lack of evidence that education equates with a better life, leads many Aboriginal youth to drop out at an early age. The effect has been high levels of illiteracy, absence of hope for a better future, and a perpetuation of poverty.

Improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people requires that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike be exposed to a process of decolonization if we are to tackle the problem of racism that is so deeply entrenched.

Breaking down barriers and challenging racism

In one form or another, CCPA Manitoba has examined the social and economic divide in our city through eight annual *State of the Inner City Reports*. We have learned much about the damaging effects of colonization, racism, the concentration of poverty, low educational attainment rates, higher incidence of crime and street gang

involvement, and the causes and complexity of the glaring and persistent, concentrated disadvantage in our city.

In this 8th edition of the *State of the Inner City Report* we begin to explore how we might begin to transform our city by breaking down the barriers across class/ geography and race. We believe this to be important because the divide we are perpetuating comes with a steep price for us all. After much discussion with our community partners we chose to begin this process by tapping into the wisdom of Elders and the optimism of youth.

Turning to our Elders and youth

Early in 2012 representatives of community-based organizations met with CCPA researchers to discuss the focus for the 2012 *State of the Inner City Report*. The conversation quickly turned to a discussion about how we might better engage people who live outside of the inner city and have minimal access to knowledge about the inner city. We felt this would help to build a better understanding across our divided city and encourage the broader community to engage in solutions rather than run away in fear. We also thought that this would provide an opportunity to introduce non-Aboriginal people to the idea that they too have been affected by colonialism, to the extent that ingrained personal and systemic racism are part of its legacy.

There was agreement that there are a growing number of young people showing concern about social and economic injustice generally, and we have neglected to fully tap into their optimism and hope. Youth have been the leaders in a number of important social events across the world in recent years and they are effecting change in ways that we have not seen for decades. From the fight for democracy through the revolutionary wave known as the Arab Spring, to the international Occupy Movement, to the Quebec student movement protests, youth are increasingly aware that something is seriously

amiss in our world and they are eager to get involved to change it.

As we discussed this idea further with our community partners through a series of meetings, we also talked about the role of Aboriginal Elders. A vibrant Aboriginal activist community emerged in Manitoba in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these leaders are still actively involved and have much to teach a new generation of Aboriginal leaders and the non-Aboriginal youth committed to being their allies as they work together for greater social and economic justice in Winnipeg.

It was agreed that our best hope of breaking down barriers and building bridges will come from our youth but they can learn much from the experience of Elders. We decided that our role is to encourage and support them.

The following pages describe how we proceeded to engage Elders and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth from inner-city and non-inner-city communities in dialogue. We began by obtaining ethics approval for this project through The Senate Committee on Ethics in Human Research and Scholarship (SCEHRS) at the University of Winnipeg. This allowed us to undertake a series of interviews, workshops and sharing circles with participants, and document the process and findings in this report.

Talking to Elders

We began our process by interviewing five Elders, asking them to share a message to youth to inspire discussion prior to bringing the two generations together. The Elders spoke about their experiences as Aboriginal youth, how they dealt with racism, and what inspired them to become involved in their communities. We captured these interviews in a brief video, which we presented to three separate groups of students in preparation for an intergenerational learning event. In addition to showing the film, we asked youth to share with us their perceptions about the inner city and about Aboriginal people. We also

asked them to talk about the perceptions they believed others (media, parents) hold of the inner city, Aboriginal people, and teenagers in general. We asked them to talk about where they believed these perceptions come from.

We then brought the youth and Elders together at an intergenerational/intercultural learning event at Circle of Life Thunderbird House on October 13, 2012. This provided the students the opportunity to meet each other and to share and learn from each other as well as the Elders they were initially introduced to through the video.

Talking to Youth

The group included ten students from Collège Béliveau, eleven students from Pathways to Education, and ten students from Grant Park High School. There were approximately five students from Collège Béliveau and Grant Park who identified as either Aboriginal or Metis. All but one of the students from Pathways were Aboriginal.

Our pre-event workshops were held at each of the two schools and at the Pathways program site during the two weeks preceding the event. Unsure of what to expect, we planned to spend two hours with each of the groups but were prepared to end our discussion after one hour. We were pleasantly surprised that in all three cases we had no problem filling up the full two hours allocated for discussion. In fact, we could have used more time. We were extremely impressed with the honesty, openness and thoughtfulness of students who very respectfully shared their thoughts and concerns.

We were also interested to see that although there were a few notable differences across the three groups, there were more similarities than we might have expected.

Neighbourhood perceptions

We didn't ask the Collège Béliveau students about their neighbourhood — that idea came to us later — but it is notable that all but one of the Pathways students said that they didn't like their neighbour-

hoods while all but one of the Grant Park students said that they liked their neighbourhoods.

Pathways students described concerns about street gangs and violence in their neighbourhoods while the Grant Park students talked about quiet, safe and peaceful neighbourhoods.

We asked students about their perceptions of the inner city and the perceptions they believed others hold of the inner city. Students from all three groups said that the media portrays the inner city very negatively. This, they said, is a major factor contributing to their own fears of the inner city. For the Pathways students, media played a role but their fears were also based on the lived experience of being exposed to violence and street gangs.

Interestingly those living in the inner city or North End described their neighbourhoods more negatively than those living elsewhere. While all three groups used violence, street gangs, drugs, crime, poverty etc. as words they identified with the inner city, the Grant Park students also talked about positive things they thought about. This included organizations like Art City, the West End Cultural Centre and more generally the abundance of music, good restaurants, culture and diversity.

Adult perceptions of teenagers

We asked students about perceptions they believed adults hold of teenagers. All three groups had similar responses typical to what adolescents say about parents. They thought that parents saw them as lazy, moody and rebellious. Some students said that their parents were generally very supportive and encouraging.

Barriers and supports

We spoke with students about barriers and supports related to education. Here too there were many similarities across the three groups in terms of what individuals felt that they need for support and what barriers might keep them from completing their education.

There were also some significant differences between the Pathways students and the other two groups. For example, Pathways students talked more about the supports they receive from Pathways, while other students talked more about supports from parents. This speaks to the importance of community-based programs and supports for inner city-students who have more complicated lives, often associated with poverty.

Perceptions of Aboriginal people

Finally, we talked about perceptions of Aboriginal people. There was quick agreement that racism continues to exist. Most felt that this has improved somewhat over the years but they agreed much more work is needed.

It was interesting that the students at Grant Park and Béliveau schools held more positive perceptions than did Pathways students. We were encouraged by the fact that students did not perceive Aboriginal students to be anything less than their equals. They seemed to understand that their disadvantage was not a reflection of personal failings but rather a reflection of societal inadequacy.

This is instructive for at least two important reasons.

First, it demonstrates that internalized oppression continues to run deep and that the media has served to perpetuate this by failing to contextualize the realities of the inner city and Aboriginal people. As described by Freire, “self-deprecation is a characteristic of the oppressed... so often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.” (2006,63).

The phenomenon that Freire describes is happening now in our inner city. Young people are growing up to believe that all of the negative things the media says about them and their communities are true. This contributes to their belief that there is nothing better—that they are

destined to fail, and this can sometimes lead to poor, albeit not entirely irrational choices.

Second, it reminds us that there is hope. The youth from outside of the inner city who participated in this project are keenly interested in learning about what they can do to make a difference. These individuals are the natural allies of a new generation of Aboriginal inner-city leaders. What they need to learn however is *how* to channel their interest in social justice — to see that their role is not as “helpers” or “saviours” through a charity approach, but as supporters who will follow their Aboriginal peers, walking beside them and working together for social and economic justice.

We were inspired to learn that there is much greater awareness among youth than many think. While our sample size is small and participation in this project was voluntary, it shows that there is leadership among Winnipeg youth. It was also important for inner-city Aboriginal youth to see that they have allies. The challenge will be to develop a means to continue the dialogue and provide guidance and support where needed. It became clear at the learning event that Elders have an important role to play in this regard.

We were somewhat surprised but also inspired by the fact that the non-inner city students had a pretty good understanding of what is going on in our city. They identified a lot of negative things about the inner city, but they were also far less naïve than we imagined. For example, they expressed much skepticism of the manner in which the inner city is portrayed in the media. They were very aware that the media focus on the negative/sensational events that occur and rarely share anything positive about the inner city. One student astutely noted that he thought parents sometimes used the inner city to scare them—implicitly telling them that if they don’t behave and do as they are told, they will end up “like them”. While well intentioned, this message exacerbates the problem because it can be interpreted to mean that bad things hap-

pen in the inner city because the people who live there are bad.

It was refreshing to hear that students are questioning what they hear about the inner city and Aboriginal people. They instinctively seem to understand that there is something more profound going on and they want to find out what it is and how they can contribute to fixing it.

Intergenerational Learning at Circle of Life Thunderbird House

On October 13, 2012, we brought together the three groups of youth we first met at Grant Park High School, Collège Béliveau, and the CEDA-Pathways to Education Program—a program providing educational, social and economic supports for low-income students residing in the North End of Winnipeg. We gathered at Circle of Life Thunder Bird House and were joined by their teachers, mentors and four Aboriginal Elders.

The day began with an opening prayer by Elder Clarence Neepinak. Elder Neepinak also explained the history of Thunderbird House. He described the use of sage, the significance of the Smudging Ceremony and the importance of tobacco. Barbara Neepinak followed with an explanation and demonstration of the Water Ceremony, which was described as a sacred indigenous ceremony traditionally led by women.

Following a brief lunch break, Claire Friesen, the mentor coordinator from Pathways to Education, led some activities with students to encourage them to reach out to students that they did not already know. The group then returned to the circle and Elder Mark Hall introduced participants to Dakota teachings and traditions and welcomed the group with a song and a prayer.

Kathy Mallett, Director of the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) followed with an explanation of the Sharing Circle in Indigenous cultures. She talked about her life as an Aboriginal woman growing up in Winnipeg in the 1960s and 1970s. She talked about the racism that she experienced and expressed sad-

ness and anger that it continues to exist in the 21st century. She introduced her colleague, Rebecca Blaikie, a non-Aboriginal woman 30 years her junior. Rebecca spoke about her relationship with Kathy and her role as an ally—continuously learning, taking the lead from her Aboriginal colleague as they work together to challenge racism and social and economic injustice.

Rebecca then led the circle in a Smudge Ceremony, advising students and others in the circle that their participation was voluntary. Elder Ann Callahan shared her experiences as an Elder and expressed encouragement to youth as the leaders of the future. For the next hour a speaking stone was passed around the circle. Participants were asked to share whatever they were comfortable sharing about who they were and why they chose to spend a Saturday afternoon with Elders and others at Thunderbird House. Many students chose to share while others silently passed the stone.

There were some very powerful moments in the sharing circle that won't be described in detail out of respect for those who participated. However, to illustrate the power of the sharing circle, one example is provided. Several adults were brought to tears as we watched the surprising response of two Aboriginal boys toward a visibly upset younger non-Aboriginal boy. The two Aboriginal boys that some might describe as being somewhat intimidating, applauded the young boy who broke into tears while speaking of the privilege he was aware that he had in comparison with the injustice he saw his Aboriginal peers experienced. When the circle broke for a break, the boys went directly to their younger peer, shook his hand and chatted with him. It was truly heartwarming and inspiring.

At the end of the lunch break the group reconvened into four smaller circles to allow students to spend more time with Elders.

They were asked to discuss the following:

- Describe an Elder who has been important/influential in your life and talk about how s/he helped you.

- Describe a situation in which you felt you didn't belong, when you felt unwelcome and/or different. This situation may have been brief, extended or ongoing.
- What do you think you can do about racism?
- What is something that you will take away from your participation in today's event?

The youth and Elders engaged in lively discussion, filling up every bit of the final few hours of the day. Participants were also given an opportunity to respond to these questions on film in the "speaker's booth."

The Speaker's Booth

Throughout the day students were encouraged to share their thoughts at a "speaker's booth", which was set up in a quiet, private room. The idea of the speaker's booth was to provide participants an opportunity to share their thoughts about racism, social and economic injustice, and reflect on what they believe they can do. Youth were advised that a film is to be made following the event and their stories may be included. Parental consent was provided, however students will be given an opportunity to review the film and provide final consent for the use of any footage profiling them.

The following are some examples of what students shared in the speaker's booth.

A young woman from Grant Park High School said this:

The amount of racism, the oppression, the discrimination that Aboriginals and other people of different cultures deal with in our society is extremely high and it is definitely something that we need to work on and being involved in this program and seeing, listening to the Elders speak and seeing what they had to offer, it really showed the beauty of the culture and the incredible heritage that comes with it.

We should all be so proud as Canadians to be able to, to learn about, to have that past, to have

that source, these people who are, who have lived through so much, that to have that readily available to us, it's an incredible experience to be able to, to listen to their stories, to be able to experience a bit, just a small amount of that beauty, the incredible life lessons that can, can come from that, the struggle that they've been through and the fact that they are still able to stay so strong and still be proud of their culture and what they have offered the world and, yeah, it's been a really, a life changing experience and I hope that the people who come here today including myself don't just leave and forget about this, that they keep that fire, that passion to make a difference and to improve our society, to break down those barriers, to eliminate stereotypes and to provide a more community-oriented environment.

One inner-city Aboriginal man focused on his own experience living in the inner city. He said:

I guess I'm just going to talk about my experiences in the inner city. So well usually the inner city is pretty much crap, you get, it's just mostly gang life but there are good people in the inner city, you know what I'm saying. I met a lot of good people and you know man, the inner city is, it's a place full of diversity, well I guess that would be the word, but anyway it's full of diversity, it's full of people mostly of an Aboriginal culture but most of it's, all over the place basically.

Well anyway, yeah, inner-city life is just, it's probably harder than most lives, it's kind of difficult dealing with gang members and drugs and alcohol, like usually people, usually youth that's all they do in the inner city is drink and do drugs and all that.

But you know police, police are a big deal. Like I've run into a lot of police and while most of them aren't nice, they'll throw you to the ground they'll do stuff to you, they'll hurt you, they'll talk trash, they'll, they'll just be a

nuisance, man, and what I'm saying is just you know don't avoid the inner city, just you know get used to it cause I don't even think it's going to change man, like really.

Racism was discussed throughout the day and several youth talked about it in the speaker's booth. One young woman said this:

My mom is super racist and I just don't get it. I just don't know what to say, it's like I can't see the world she sees, like we don't understand each other.

Until we are ready to face racism head on we will never fully address the barriers of Aboriginal students. The good news is that, as indicated in the above quote, non-Aboriginal youth are aware that racism exists and they are keen to talk about it.

Aboriginal youth will also talk about racism if you ask them. Young Aboriginal men often talk about in the context of being judged by their appearance. One Aboriginal man talked about respect and racism this way:

...well I can try to be more respectful to everyone else cause like I want respect all the time and I hate when people treat me like I'm a piece of shit just, just because I'm a youth from the North Side. People think like oh look at him, baggy pants, fuckin big t-shirt, saggy ass, look at that kid. It doesn't mean that I have no class, I hold doors for people, I help people in need whenever I can, but it just gets so hard sometimes when people make stupid allegations about you and then they get you locked up and they, they don't believe me because like [you're] guilty until proven innocent when you're a youth like me in Winnipeg, straight up. If you've been through the crap I've been through you, you, people wouldn't be racist... no one would be racist if they've, if they've gone through what other people have gone through. Never judge a book by its cover... when you live in the inner city it feels like everyone's against you...

Respect was a common theme raised in the speaker's booth:

... respect, you've always got to have respect, don't always look down on people, you've got to, don't have a high head, higher than anyone else, you've got to have the same type of level head, you've got to respect someone, that's the way you get respect back. You can't push people around, you can't, can't, just don't be rude it's not good, it really isn't.

Whenever I see people picking on someone or doing something what goes through my mind at that time is how can they do it, how can they have that, that mentality I guess, that hatred towards someone, what did they do to you. You can't do that to someone it's, it's, it gets me so mad when I see people do that, that's just, you can't, it gets me so angry. You've got to have some respect, you've got to have love, you've got to, you've got to have humility, don't treat, treat people how you want to be treated, don't judge them because on judgment day the Creator he'll make the final judgment. You've got to stand strong, stand together and yeah.

A young Aboriginal woman spoke about the anger she felt when she was the target of racism and didn't know what to do. She said "well there was nothing really I could do but one time I got on the bus and then I sat next to this woman and [she] was like thirty and she was white, and I just sat next to her. She had her bag and then all of a sudden she pulled it and then turned away...it was like holy hell, I'm not going to pull a knife on you."

In response to the questions "what can I do" youth talked about the need to speak up and act. One student said:

... you've got to be involved, you've got to stand up, you've got to, you've got to do something. You can't just be sitting there and complaining, you've got to actually stand for people. If someone's down you help them up, if someone's

bullying someone you stop it, you, you get in there, you help, that's what, what you can be to be different, that's what, that's what you can do to help to change the world, to make it a better place, but yeah something.

One time, one time when I saw racism, what I did to stop it is I literally told the person to go away, to leave him alone, why does he have to judge him because of how he looks or how he acts, it's, it's not right. I really don't like it, so I stood up for him but I don't know man it's, you just got to stand up, you've got to help, you can't just be sitting there and letting people bully people, you can't let them be racist to them, you can't let them push them down. You've got to help each other stand up, don't be crabs in the bucket, you've got, you've got to be like buffalo, stand together. Yeah, that's what I got to say.

As we circulated around the room, making ourselves available to assist, we watched in fascination as the youth listened carefully and intently to the Elders. Several youth later expressed how they felt about the experience when they entered the speaker's booth.

A student from Collège Béliveau said this about learning of the Elders' experiences in residential schools.

I watch the news and I hear about it and I have an appreciation for it, but just hearing it in person and being with the people who went through that is, is really a different experience and it brings it all home.

One individual simply said:

I learned a whole lot [from the Elders]. All these Elders they're truly amazing and they taught me to be myself,...and cherish who you are and that's I think a really important lesson. And I just think these Elders are really amazing and they really opened up my eyes and it was amazing. This really has been an amazing experience...yeah.

Another young woman said this:

You know listening to the Elders speak about their past in residential schools just makes me, makes my heart break on the basis of that they really went through that, that it's not something, that it's not something they could go without living and my heart goes out to all of those who lost their voice, couldn't speak, who were physically, emotionally and mentally damaged by the residential schools. My heart goes out to all those people.

Another said this:

One of my favourite parts was when, well most of it's been awesome so I've really liked it but specifically one of my favourite parts is ... when he first introduced himself to us he started speaking in his Aboriginal language and I thought that was really cool that most of the people here have been speaking like, start speaking in their Aboriginal language and then talking to us and he, he sang and it was just so breathtaking like not in the sense of like it was like so breathtaking like it was beautiful it was breathtaking but even though it was very nice, but it was more so like empowering and it was, it was very like it just gave me shivers through my spine it was very, very strong.

I'm glad I got to meet a lot of the Elders, I learnt a lot from them today, I've learnt some of their stories, they've been like open enough to share their stories and I think that's really good and awesome because if we don't share our stories we won't be able to learn from other's mistakes or our own mistakes and we, by sharing our stories we can learn from our mistakes.

The above are just a few examples of the powerful learning and reflection that took place at this very special event.

Before ending the day, we returned to the larger circle to talk about how we would move forward. Upon the request of Elder Ann Callahan, we held hands in expression of solidarity and

commitment to work toward ending racism in our city and making it a good place for everyone to live. Students were advised that they would be invited back to view the film and to participate in the release of the *State of the Inner City Report* and that we would look for ways to continue the process of learning that they began.

Several students approached the Elders as they left the building, thanking them personally for sharing their knowledge with them. Elders also talked about what they took from the day. Elder Mark Hall told us how impressed he was that "the youth have a voice and they're using it positively...they are being very proactive in their approach against racism...in our time we didn't have that." He emphasized the need for Aboriginal youth to learn more about their history because "identity...knowing who you are and where you came from is one of the most important things."

Elder Barb Nepinak said: "I go home hopeful, I go home happy and I'm happy for these young people to have this forum available to them...You know they're going to go back to their classrooms and they're going to look at things in a different way." Elder Clarence Neepinak told us "I enjoyed this day, I really enjoyed talking with the young people and it made me feel good that they do care."

Where to from here?

This project was an experiment of sorts. We had no idea how it would unfold—we had no idea whether the students would show up and/or what their participation would look like. While we are extremely pleased with the outcome we also know that much more must be done to fix our divided city. Nonetheless, participants left feeling hopeful. Mark Hall spoke of the importance of bringing youth of different cultures together with their Elders. He hopes the youth will "continue forward in a proactive way."

The youth too left with hope. The words of a young woman from Collège Béliveau speaks to the need to build on the momentum that was started through this project:

What kind of has been going through my mind is that like this is an amazing experience. I'm so glad I came and it's just been phenomenal and how often do you meet people and just you discover them and you discover something about yourself or you can see how, like we had a sharing circle and almost every time someone said something I could relate to at least a part of it and I think that's really awesome that we have the same values and like even if we come from different point of views or even if we have like a couple of different values we still can share something together and I think that's really important and I think that we should do that more with each other cause then we'd learn how to help ourselves by helping others and that's really important because we need to learn how to respect others more than we do cause I find a lot of youth today don't respect people as much as they should or like their Elders or like people who they should be respecting like the teachers.

And I really feel like we should like I almost feel like I have so much inspiration but I don't know what to do with it and that sometimes I find the problems like with especially myself because I want to do something but I'm not too sure how and coming to like activities like this has really helped me like figure out okay if I want to like if I let's say I want to help racism, like stop racism like this how we get together, we talk it out, we don't just judge each other and not say anything cause we really like essentially we need to talk things out cause otherwise they won't go on and we will have a worse relationship than we should.

And yeah that was my point of view and I'm glad that I came and I thank everyone who came today and all the Elders and thank you for sharing their stories and it was an amazing experience. Thank you.

Several things will need to happen if we are to continue the momentum that we began at the event at Thunder Bird House and further assist

those youth who, as stated above, are inspired but don't "know what to do." The following are some recommendations as we move forward:

1. The enthusiasm with which youth responded to this project tells us that there is a real need to establish a forum for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, inner-city and suburban youth, to talk and learn from one another. Dialogue is the first step toward breaking down barriers. We must provide students with opportunities to engage in dialogue.
2. Non-Aboriginal and non-inner city youth need to better understand what their role is. They need to understand social and economic injustice and the limitations of charity as a remedy for social ills. They need to understand that social and economic difference is not an individual problem, but rather a societal problem. They need to understand that disadvantaged youth do not want their pity, they want their respect their support and not their charity. Solutions will come from working side by side with them to break down barriers, build relationships and most important, to effect change at a societal level. This means speaking out and working toward solutions that will end poverty, racism and the damage that results. Providing guidance and ongoing opportunity for dialogue will help make this happen.
3. Inner-city and in particular Aboriginal youth must be provided with every possible opportunity to reclaim their pride. They must embrace their identity and show the world that its perceptions about and attitudes towards them are wrong. They must take guidance from their Elders and spiritual leaders. They must know that they are not all the terrible things that outsiders see and say about them so

that they can move forward, as the Elders say in the film, from a place of strength. Ensuring Aboriginal youth have continued, structured opportunities to access the knowledge of Elders who can help them to reclaim their culture through traditional teachings is essential.

4. Adults have an important role to play. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and mentors must provide support and guidance to youth who are desperately looking for a way to make real change. They need our help to sort out “what to do.”
5. A final recommendation speaks specifically to the role of Elders and the Circle of Life Thunderbird House. The majority of the students who attended the event had never been to Thunderbird House. Many had never met an Aboriginal Elder. The history and symbolism of Thunderbird House provides a powerful backdrop for events such as this. For Aboriginal youth it was powerful because it was an opportunity to showcase a bit of their culture to their non-Aboriginal peers. There was a sense of pride among the Aboriginal youth that we did not anticipate yet made so much sense when we saw it before our eyes. They were proud because they were welcoming more privileged youth into their space, with their Elders. These non-Aboriginal youth were seeing the positive spirit of Aboriginal culture that too often goes unnoticed. This was an important learning for us all because it tells us that Thunderbird House as a space can be an important part of the learning process. For example, educators who will be teaching students about Aboriginal history and culture in the new curriculum could (should) bring their students to Aboriginal spaces like Thunderbird House and Aboriginal Elders should be engaged in the process as should Aboriginal youth.

We all have something to learn

In addition to the participation of youth and Elders, teachers from the two participating schools as well as program staff from CEDA Pathways to Education also participated in the sharing circles and the speaker’s booth.

One teacher was particularly open and honest, sharing the lessons he learned throughout the day. We felt it important to include his words because he inspires us all to be honest with ourselves about the racism that is so deeply engrained in our society and subsequently internalized within us all.

Well I think one lesson I took home from today is that we’re not that different after all. Sometimes we feel like we’re different or you know.

What I learned from the Elders today is to trust myself, to be honest and to not be scared to share and to share what I know, share my knowledge, share my, my wisdom. I kind of wish that I could be an Elder one day and hopefully I will be and I kind of am right now cause I’m a teacher so I have to, have to teach but I think the way they taught was very, well very good for me, for my learning style.

What kind of world do I dream of living in as an adult? I think I live in a pretty good world but for my children I want them to live in a world where they are proud of who they are but one that does not, it does not hold them back from being open to other cultures but being proud of their own culture but still being open to others, but being proud of who they are and by being proud of who they are they’re not scared to, to learn about others.

Another thing I learned today is not to be scared...you get a feeling from the media that, that going downtown is dangerous and I walked here today and I have to admit I was scared at the moment, I even hid my earphones because I had an iPhone and I didn’t want to get it stolen and it’s kind of stupid and I feel guilty about

feeling that way. But not looking people in the eye like I was coming here and I would, I would refrain from looking at people in the eye and I think today that I should, I should not be scared of, of looking people in the eye.

Countering racism. Well I kind of realized today that I thought I wasn't racist but I still have some stereotypes in my head that I need to get rid of and I need to learn how to take away those barriers because you come with a cultural background and then you come in listening, reading in the media and looking at TV and movies etc. and we're taught and I teach my students to be open-minded and sometimes I'm not that open-minded as I think I am, so I need to really open up my mind and that's what today, that's what I learned today and I'm, I'm proud that I did and I still have lots of work to do and lots of wisdom to, to accumulate still and hopefully I can be one of these Elders one day.

Yeah and be in touch, I learned to, to be in touch with who I am and I think there's somebody inside that wants to get out and hopefully it will. I can learn to let that person out some day.

Concluding thoughts

It was, by all accounts, an event that reached far beyond our expectations, thanks to the commitment of the Elders, but especially to the youth who listened so intently and shared so openly, trusting in the power and safety of the Circle.

In spite of the overwhelming success, there were a few limitations of note. One individual observed that in his group, students tended to direct their thoughts to the Elder rather than to the other students. This is not particularly surprising but it is something to consider in future. We expect that students felt more comfortable speaking with the Elders but the fact that they shared in the presence of other students was an important first step. The next step is to encourage greater dialogue between students as outlined in the recommendations above.

Another limitation is that in the short time frame we were not able to spend a great deal of time discussing "how" we make change. It is important for youth to understand that just as causes are systemic, so are solutions. As noted in the recommendations, this should be a focus of future initiatives.

In spite of these limitations, those of us who participated in this event are grateful for having had the opportunity to spend our Saturday with such an inspiring group. It was a transformative event for all, but especially so for the most cynical among us who know all too well that Winnipeg is indeed a divided city, but were inspired and reminded through the optimism of youth, Elders, teachers and others who participated in this event, that there is great hope.

Our city may be divided, but it doesn't have to be.

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