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You Know You're Not Alone

Community Development in Public Housing

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By Sarah Cooper

ISBN 978-1-77125-002-3

MARCH 2012

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Acknowledgements

Funding for this project was provided by Manitoba Housing and by the United Way of Winnipeg's Organizational Development Fund.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of all the staff and tenants who participated in the focus groups, interviews and surveys.

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Cover Art

Illustration by Marie Smith at the Mayfair Family Resource Centre, Winnipeg. Marie grew up in Roseau River till the age of 12, then moved to Sandy Bay where she finished her schooling in her own language, Ojibway. She graduated with honours in 1983. Marie is a mother of 8 children and 7 grandchildren. Marie has been interested and involved with art since the age of 8, when she started making blueprints for houses. Marie and her family moved here to the Mayfair/River complex in May of 2011. She can be counted on for positive input in the community meetings, events at the Centre and the daily goings on in the area. Marie's kind and gentle manner is appreciated by everyone!

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Introduction

The Family Centre of Winnipeg runs six family resource centres in Manitoba Housing complexes in Winnipeg. Each resource centre provides a neutral space within the complex and meets some very basic needs for the tenants who attend the centre: food, essentials like phones, faxes or computers, and social interaction with friends and neighbours. There are programs for parents and children to learn new skills and to spend some time together outside the home, and tenants are always welcome to stop by and say hello, to have a cup of coffee and a snack.

The impact that the resource centres have had on the individuals, families and communities in each of the complexes is significant. Tenants talked about having more self-confidence, being able to stand up for themselves, and feeling more comfortable and safer in the community since participating in the resource centres. They talked about their children's improved self-esteem and social skills, and about having better communication and relationship skills with family members. People also talked about the importance of being able to say hi to their neighbours, and of having a neutral space within the complex where they can gather, get to know each other, and deal with conflicts in a proactive way.

These changes have greatly improved the quality of life for many people in these six complexes. Over the last ten years, the centres have become integral parts of the community, providing resources, programming and supports to the hundreds of families who live in those complexes. This study looks at the impact of these community development programs in creating positive environments in public housing developments outside the inner city, and seeks to better understand what works and what could be better in the programming offered through the family resource centres.

The report begins by looking at the context of public housing in Winnipeg and with a review of the literature pertaining to community development. It briefly describes the methods used in carrying out the research, then examines in detail the findings of the research, particularly the needs that the resource centres meet for tenants, and the changes that tenants have seen in their communities. It then considers the Woodydell Model, which guides the work of the resource centres, and the visions for the future of the resource centres put forward by staff and tenants. Finally, it closes with some recommendations for the Government of Manitoba, The Family Centre of Winnipeg and the advisory/community committees of each resource centre.

Poverty and Housing in Winnipeg

Winnipeg is by far the largest city in Manitoba, with a population of 684,100 (City of Winnipeg 2011). Poverty continues to be a serious concern for many Winnipeggers, with many households in Winnipeg continuing to live in poverty. About 15 percent of Winnipeg households earned less than the after-tax low-income cut-off in 2005 (City of Winnipeg 2006a). This is a high figure, especially when one considers that it includes 25 percent of children under the age of six and ten percent of adults older than 65 (City of Winnipeg 2006a).

When poverty in Winnipeg is discussed, the focus is often on the inner city. It is true that there is a serious concentration of poverty in the inner city, and as a result of inadequate and underfunded supports, the inner city faces numerous challenges, including safety, health, housing, and other concerns that accompany poverty. In 2005, just over 30 percent of inner city households lived below the poverty line after taxes (City of Winnipeg 2006b). In comparison, only about 12 percent of households outside the inner city lived below the poverty line after taxes (City of Winnipeg 2006c) (see Table 1).

However, although the proportion of households outside the inner city living in poverty is substantially smaller, the actual number of households in poverty is much higher. Sixty percent of households living in poverty after taxes in 2005 lived outside the inner city. This suggests that, although the problems faced by low income households in the inner city are particularly serious, there are many households outside the inner city who experience the challenges of dealing with poverty on a daily basis.

In fact, low income households outside the inner city face additional challenges. The inner city is relatively dense and walkable, with frequent public transit service, while outside the inner city most neighbourhoods follow typical suburban development patterns. This means that healthcare, grocery stores or schools may be less easy to access without a car. It may also be more difficult to visit friends or family, and because so many services for low income households are located in the inner city, it can be harder for these households to access supports and resource. Finally, it is not uncommon for hostility and stigma to be directed towards low income households in the neighbourhoods outside the inner city, where the location of low income housing in higher income neighbourhoods can emphasise difference and exacerbate the tensions between low and high income communities.

TABLE 1 **Poverty in Winnipeg**

	Population	Incidence of low income before taxes (2005)	Incidence of low income after taxes (2005)
City of Winnipeg	633,451	20.2 percent (125,688 households)	15.7 percent (97,689 households)
Inner City	121,615	39.6 percent (47,181 households)	32.5 percent (38,722 households)
Non-inner City	503,980	15.5 percent (77,977 households)	11.7 percent (58,860 households)

SOURCE: City of Winnipeg 2006a, 2006b, 2006c.

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty does not just mean a limit on household income, though that may be the easiest sign of poverty to measure. Poverty also means having fewer options in life: for education, where to live, what foods to eat, health, and so on. Poverty means having less power, both on a societal scale and at an individual level, to make choices for oneself.

Poverty makes it harder to meet essential life needs, which then makes it more difficult to meet other goals. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that the first level of need is very basic: first, people will seek to address purely physical needs, including food, water, and shelter, followed by safety and security for themselves and their families (Poston 2009). The next level of need is psychological, and includes emotional and social connections with friends and family, as well as self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment (Poston 2009). Finally, the highest level of need is for self-fulfilment and accomplishment of one's goals (Poston 2009). Maslow argues that the needs much be addressed in sequence, for example that one cannot achieve self-fulfilment if one's basic needs have not been met. Poverty interrupts this process, forcing people to spend undue amounts of time working to meet basic needs and not being able to move up the hierarchy to address their psychological or self-fulfilment needs.

The success that people have in meeting their needs is affected by the extent and ways in which people experience social inclusion or exclusion. Social exclusion means the extent to which and ways that people can access resources and participate in society. This does not only mean financial poverty, but also includes access or barriers to "health, education, access to services, housing, debt, quality of life, dignity and autonomy" (MacKinnon 2008). Galabuzi and Labonte (2002) identify four aspects of social exclusion:

- Exclusion from civil society: disconnection through legal sanctions, institutional mechanisms or systemic discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion.
- Exclusion from social goods: failure of society to provide for the needs of particular groups, such as housing for the homeless, language services for immigrants, and sanctions to deter discrimination.
- Exclusion from social production: denial of opportunities to contribute to and participate actively in society.
- Economic exclusion: unequal or lack of access to normal forms of livelihood. (1)

These four categories of exclusion govern all aspects of life, and as a result, the impact of social exclusion is serious for individuals and families. Social exclusion results in "a lack of recognition and acceptance; powerlessness and 'voicelessness'; economic vulnerability; and, diminished life experiences and limited life prospects" (Mitchell and Shillington 2002, viii). For society as a whole, social exclusion of people or groups can

contribute to economic and community instability (Mitchell and Shillington 2002).

In addition, when one does not have access to housing, other kinds of exclusion are much more likely (May 2007). A social determinants of health approach shows that people living in poverty frequently experience more and different health problems than those not living in poverty (Raphael 2010), as well as other challenges in accessing employment and education. For example, the quality of early childhood, employment and work conditions, education, and food security are all mitigated by relative wealth or poverty, and all have an impact on one's health.

In other words, the greater the inequality in a society, the greater the discrepancy in health between different groups. Housing is often the largest expense in a household's budget, and when housing costs take up too big a percentage of the budget, other areas, such as food or medications, may be reduced to make up the difference. One way to redress this inequality is through the provision of good, affordable housing.

Housing for low income households

Housing is an important, even essential, aspect of life. It provides shelter from the weather, especially in northern climates, and offers a base from which to access services and resources, including jobs and education. It provides a foundation for social connection and security and improves mental and physical health. Good quality housing reduces costs — not only of healthcare, as people's health improves as their housing does, but also of criminal justice costs and other social service costs. Poverty and poor housing are expensive for everyone — and if the quality of housing is improved, these other costs will be reduced.

Although for many years Winnipeg was considered to have an affordable housing market, in recent years housing costs have been rising as the economy and the population has been growing. As a result, one of the biggest challenges for low income households in Winnipeg is finding suitable, affordable, good quality housing.

Currently, Winnipeg's rental vacancy rate is extremely low, at 0.7 percent (CMHC 2010), and the cost of renting is increasing faster than the annual guidelines set out by Manitoba's rent regulations (CMHC 2010). Thirty-seven percent of renting households — who generally have substantially lower incomes than home owning households — spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing (City of Winnipeg 2006a).[1] For the 25 percent of Winnipeg households that earn less than $30,000 per year (City of Winnipeg 2006a), finding affordable good quality housing is a real challenge.

This is a particularly serious concern for individuals and families whose income comes from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). An individual on EIA receives $285 (plus a $50 supplement) per month, while a family of one or two parents and a child will receive $430-$471 (Government of Manitoba date unknown). However, Winnipeg's average market rent is $488 for a bachelor and $837 for a two bedroom (CMHC 2010), making it nearly impossible — particularly with the low vacancy rate — for households on EIA to find affordable housing in the private market.

Affordable housing is likely to continue to be a concern in Winnipeg as long as the rental vacancy rate remains abysmally low, little new rental is being built, and rents are rising. The provision of social and public housing is one solution to the housing challenges faced by low income households in Manitoba.

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1 Thirty percent of household income is a generally accepted benchmark of affordability for housing. However, how affordable 30 percent of income is depends greatly of how much income one has to begin with, and the household expenses relating to how big the family/household is, among others.

From the 1940s to the early 1990s, the Canadian government had an active role in housing provision for Canadians, building hundreds of thousands of units of public housing across the country. When the Government of Canada began to build public housing in the 1950s and 60s, it was seen as a way of addressing the problems of 'slums' and the challenges of rising housing costs (Hackworth 2009). However, it did not take long before public housing — indeed, all social housing — became stigmatised and seen as housing of last resort.

In 1993, the federal government withdrew from housing provision. As a result of the loss of federal funding, construction of public housing came to a standstill. This has resulted in "a long term deficit in affordable housing supply" (Carter et al. 2009, 3). Since then the responsibility for housing has fallen to the provinces, and there is little funding available to meet the ongoing housing needs of thousands of Canadian households.

Over the last few decades, housing through provincial programs has focused on provision, rather than considering other services or resources that may be required by tenants (Carter et al. 2009). In recent years, the Province has taken a more active role in public housing. However, as a result of the earlier neglect of the housing portfolio, much of the public and social housing requires repairs and renovations (Carter et al. 2009). As well, the needs of the tenants or prospective tenants for public housing have changed, and many households require additional services beyond simply the provision of housing (Carter et al. 2009).

Today, the Province of Manitoba provides some form of subsidy to about 35,000 households. These include subsidised units provided through Aboriginal housing organisations, co-operatives, and non-profit housing providers, and almost 18,000 units of public housing owned by Manitoba Housing (Manitoba Housing and Community Development 2010). The social and public housing is located across Winnipeg; much of it is in the inner city, but there are many complexes outside the inner city as well.

Public housing provides essential accommodations for low income people who would otherwise have a very hard time finding good quality housing in the private market. However, many public housing complexes have become sites for the concentration of poverty (Silver 2011). Because of a number of intersecting factors which cause or exacerbate social exclusion and social problems, such as the design of housing developments, the presence of gangs, concentration of poverty and lack of access to resources and supports, public housing developments are often seen as unsafe places by both the tenants and neighbours (Sewell 1994; McCracken 2004).

In recent years, the Province has begun to recognise the interconnection of other social issues with housing. One of the biggest challenges facing community development projects is that "social problems are inter-dependent and require integrated, multi-objective, multi-strategy responses" (Lane and Henry 2001, following Fordham). Although providing affordable quality housing is a step in the right direction, it does not address the full spectrum of challenges that low-income people face (May 2007). Public housing has the potential to support strong communities, particularly if it incorporates community development programs that build capacity among low income people.

Community Development

Often, low income communities, including those living in public housing, are perceived to have more than their fair share of social issues (Sewell 1994; Lane and Henry 2001). Community development is a proactive way of addressing community concerns or issues by empowering and engaging marginalised communities (John Howard Society of Alberta 1995; Silver, McCracken and Sjoberg 2009; Lee 2003; Smith 1995; Lane and Henry 2001). It is an approach that includes "anti-oppressive practice, environmental protection, networking, access and choice, working from community perspectives, prioritising the issues of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, promoting long-term change, tackling inequalities and supporting collective action" (Gilchrist 2003, 22). In this sense, community development is a grassroots, bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down, bureaucratic approach to addressing community issues.

Before engaging in a discussion of community development, it is important to clarify what is meant by 'community'. The term is used for a wide range of purposes and has "potential for providing competing legitimacies for very different interests and purposes" (Shaw 2008, 24). Shaw (2008) describes the "contrived community", which acknowledges the notion that people who live in a particular area for lack of other options constitute a community (30). Although these people may come together to form a community, using the term uncritically hides the social and economic policies and structures that frame the choices people — particularly marginalised people — have in choosing where to live (Shaw 2008). As such, the term 'community' is somewhat problematic; we will follow Shaw's (2008) definition of community "as an intermediate level of social reality in which people collectively experience both the possibilities of human agency and the constraints of structure" (32). In other words, community is neither completely organic, nor completely manufactured, but is created by a combination of government policy and personal choice, among other factors.

There are any number of types of, and approaches to, community development, including early childhood education programs, supports for youth, employment training and support (John Howard Society of Alberta 1995), women's groups, community economic development projects (Lee 2003), and so on. Most community development is based on the idea of change rooted in the context and people who are part

of a community; it "sees people as having a right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their experiences and views listened to and acted on" (Lee 2003). In other words, community development is quite a simple idea — people should be able to make decisions that affect their lives.

This bottom-up approach is described in Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. The ladder outlines different stages or types of participation, from merely symbolic forms of participation, to token forms of participation that have no real power to effect change, to genuine participation where the community owns the process. Community development programs fall at various points along this continuum, though the ideal state, of having programs and processes that are led and managed entirely by the community is rarely achieved.

Nevertheless, it remains a goal that many community development programs aspire to. Research has shown that community development works best when community members are engaged in and take ownership of the process (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). This also creates a space for excluded and marginalized community voices, and empowers them to steer their own lives (World Health Organization 2002). Given that social exclusion acts to block people from accessing resources and meeting their needs, creating spaces where marginalized people can come together to make decisions about their communities is essential.

One way to redress the inequality born of social exclusion is to develop social capital — to focus on the relationships among community members, building on community skills and resources. Gilchrist (2003) notes "that robust and diverse social networks are of value in themselves, accelerating people's recovery from disease and trauma, reducing levels of anti-social behaviour and fear of crime, enhancing health and happiness generally, and creating a stronger sense of personal identity" (20). She further notes that these effects of social networks increase the collective capacity of individuals living and working together (Gilchrist 2003). Social capital is seen as an integral part of sustainable community development (Dale and Newman 2010, following Dale and Onyx). As such it holds great potential for supporting both individual and community well-being.

However, the idea of social capital must be used with caution, as it often focuses simply on relationship building without considering power relations and access to resources (DeFilippis 2001, following Bourdieu). Although a community may have very strong social networks, the outcomes of the social networks are unlikely to increase the resources available to the community unless community members have access to external resources as well (DeFilippis 2001, following Bourdieu). This reality means that despite the strengths and internal resources of a community, external resources — such as services and funding provided through government programs — are usually required to enable it to meet its community development goals.

Although community development has become a popular idea and there are numerous programs and policies determined to address community development, all too often the framing of these initiatives, combined with inadequate funding, "work[s] counter to the concept of *development*" (Ledwith 2007, italics in original). Too often, funding prioritises action over theory and research, so that programs and policies "react to the symptoms rather than root causes of injustice — and leave the structures of discrimination intact — dividing people through poverty, creating massively different life chances by blaming the victims of an unjust system" (Ledwith 2007). Writing about the Irish context, Lee (2003) identifies a number of challenges facing community development that also apply to the Winnipeg context. These include:

- Short term provision of funding, which results in short term programming, which

cannot address the long term needed to address poverty and related challenges

- The tendency among community development organisations to create positions for 'managers' rather than front-line workers, when the work is focused on the front line;
- The tension between providing services, as a form of ensuring funding, and the work of creating social change, which are often not compatible;
- The need for a strong connection between the local and the national levels, especially in working on the reduction of poverty and other forms of marginalisation, since local community development will not address the structural factors that create and maintain poverty;
- The tension created by short term electoral cycles contrasted with the long term goals of community development and social change;
- The need for clarity about where mandates for community development work come from, and to whom community development organisations are accountable.

These challenges make community development difficult, whether through extensive reporting requirements, "the requirement to prove effectiveness by quantifying outcomes that are simply not quantifiable" (O'Brien 2010, p.9), or the individualising of systemic problems (O'Brien 2010, following Bryant, Fainstein). They take time and energy away from the important work that community development is intended to focus on, complicating the already complex work of community development even further.

These critiques of social capital point to the fact that for marginalised communities, there is always a complexity of both the problems and the strategies required to address them. Essentially, there is no single solution that will address the issues raised by residents in public housing developments, and it is only by developing broad strategies that deal with the broad spectrum of challenges faced by public housing residents that change will take place.

The Family Centre of Winnipeg

The Family Centre of Winnipeg is a non-profit organisation that was started in the 1930s, and is "dedicated to strengthening families and building healthy, supportive communities" (The Family Centre, n.d.). Over the years it has evolved to offer a number of different programs, includ-

FIGURE 1 **The Locations of the Family Resource Centres**

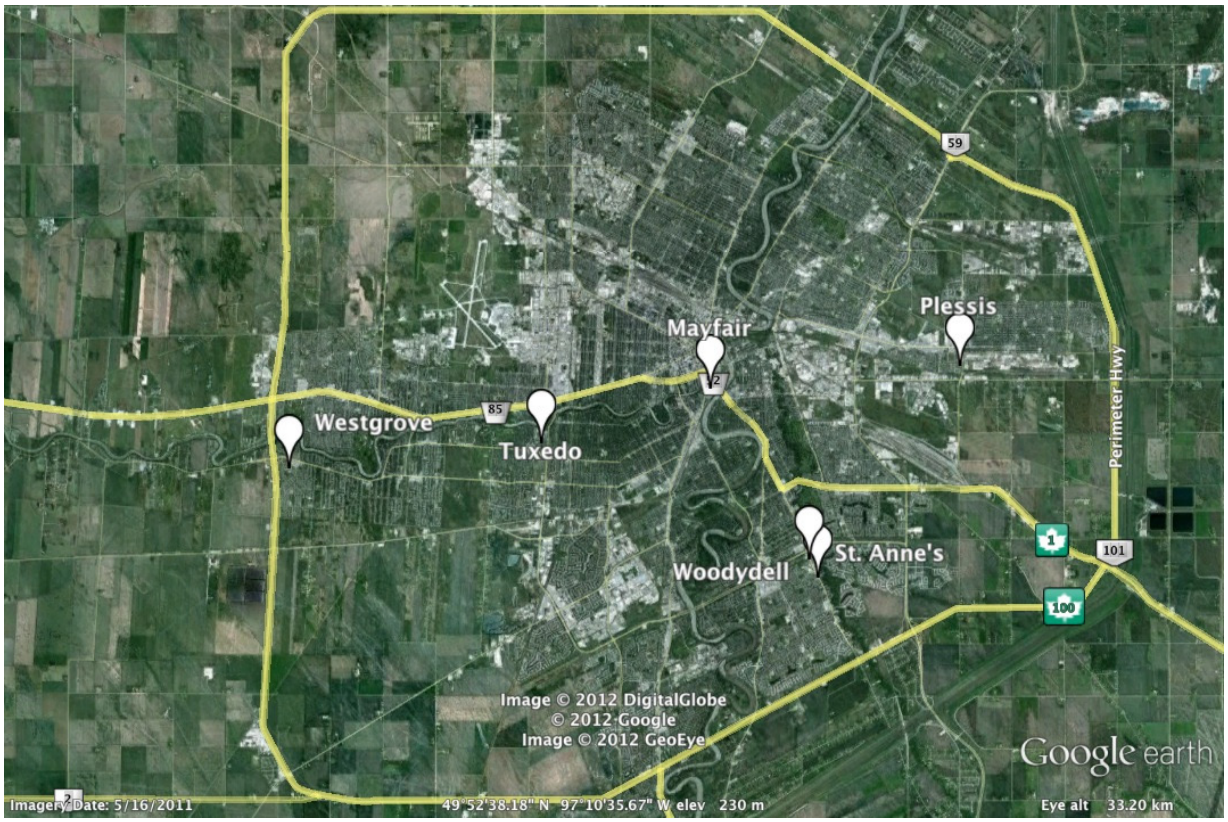

TABLE 2 **The Six Family Resource Centres**

Name of Centre	Established In	Housing Units Served	Participation Rates
Community Family Resource Centre (Plessis)	2006	100	95 %
Mayfair Housing Resource Centre	2008	75	89 %
St. Anne's Family Resource Centre	2004	42	98 %
Tuxedo Family Resource Centre	2009	147	54 %
Westgrove Family Resource Centre	2008	53	108 %
Woodydell Family Resource Centre	2002	98	97 %

SOURCE: The Family Centre 2010

ing counselling, direct family support, training and resources for families and those who work with families.

In 2002, The Family Centre was running the In-home Support and Family Education program at Woodydell Manitoba Housing Development, working in homes with individual families. At the time, there was a Tenants' Association at Woodydell, which was run entirely by volunteers from among the tenants. The Tenants' Association collapsed due to perceptions that the Association was not acting in the best interests of the community, leaving a gap in the community. After this happened, one family asked The Family Centre to provide summer programming for the children in the community. Following its principle that the family is the core of community development, The Family Centre agreed on condition that the parents attend as well.

After the summer programming, the parents requested parenting classes, and then Manitoba Housing asked The Family Centre to set up a family resource centre in the housing development. Manitoba Housing provided the space, and The Family Centre found money among their program budgets to hire staff. Tenants down the street at the St. Anne's Manitoba Housing development then requested a resource centre, and over the next few years, Manitoba Housing identified other housing developments where a family resource centre could benefit the community.

Today five of the six complexes with family resource centres operated by The Family Centre of Winnipeg are outside the inner city, and one straddles the border with the inner city (see Figure 1). The complexes range from being quite small (42 units) to quite large (147 units). These six complexes are all family complexes, which means that tenants can only live there while their children are under the age of 18.

Participation rates have been high in all the centres. In 2009-10, 89 percent or more of the households at five of the complexes participated in programs or used resources at the resource centres (see Table 2).[2] Each resource centre has a different character, depending on the people who participate and the ideas or priorities they put forward for the resource centre. This affects the types of programs and resources offered at each centre, though all are based on principles of community development with a focus on the family unit.

2 The exception is the Tuxedo Family Resource Centre, which had a 54 percent participation rate. However, it only opened in July 2009, which likely affected these numbers.

Methodology

You Know You're Not Alone began when The Family Centre of Winnipeg approached the CCPA-MB with interest in a research project looking at its six family resource centres. The CCPA-MB agreed, and Manitoba Housing provided funding and support for the research. This section describes the process used in undertaking the research.

The participatory research method used in this project involves communities in developing and carrying out research projects, and attempts to be "interactive" rather than "extractive" (Bennett and Roberts 2004, p.5). Often, non-participatory research is imposed on communities, particularly on marginalised communities, and 'takes' knowledge away from the community with little recognition or benefit in return. Participatory research attempts to address this by involving community members in planning and carrying out a research project, and by respecting community members as holders of knowledge rather than simply data (Bennett and Roberts 2004). This participatory approach informed all aspects of the project and involved community members as much as possible.

Staff and program participants of The Family Centre were involved in developing and carrying out the research. The principal researcher worked with staff from The Family Centre to design the process to be used, to ensure that the process would be relevant and appropriate for the staff and program participants. The researcher, with staff at The Family Centre, brought the project to the advisory committee meetings at each housing development, to ensure that the residents are in agreement with the process and to see if they have any suggestions for how best to carry it out.

A combination of focus groups, interviews and surveys were used to hear about the impact of the resource centres. The principal researcher conducted focus groups with staff at each resource centre and at the main office (six in total). Community interviewers from each of the housing developments were hired and trained to conduct interviews with program participants; the interviewers were also interviewed by the principal researcher (eight interviews at each centre).

A total of 54 interviews were conducted, including the community interviewers. Interested tenants were invited to sign up for interviews at the resource centres, and in cases where more than eight people signed up, the names were put in a bowl and selected randomly. Of the interviewees, 50 were women and four were men. Ages ranged from 19-66, with most respondents

TABLE 3 **Interviewee Profiles**

Centre	Age Range	Gender	Length of time in complex
Mayfair	21-49	8 women, 1 man	6 months-2.5 years
Plessis	26-50 (1 unknown)	8 women, 1 man	3 months-12 years
St. Anne's	24-57	9 women	2 years-17 years
Tuxedo	19-66	7 women, 2 men	1.3 years-11 years
Westgrove	26-46	9 women	3 months-12 years
Woodydell	27-64	9 women	1 year-14 years

in their 30s. People had lived in the complex for a wide range of time, from only a few months to 17 years. About half the respondents had lived in the complex for two to five years. Thirteen had lived there for less than two years, and the rest had lived there for five or more years (see Table 3).

When the project was initially introduced to the housing complexes, tenants raised questions about the limited number of interviews that would be conducted, as they were concerned that not everyone's voice would be heard. To address this concern, a survey questionnaire was added to the project. A copy of the questionnaire was distributed to each house in each complex, and staff also handed them out at the centres. People had the choice of dropping them off at the centres, or mailing them directly to the CCPA-MB office. Ethics approval for all stages of the project was obtained from the University of Winnipeg's Senate Committee on Ethics in Human Research and Scholarship.

The training for interviewers included an introduction to the research project, how the data will be used, the importance of confidentiality, and the process of conducting an interview, and allowed the interviewers to practice interviewing. Each interviewer was provided with an audio digital recorder and a copy of the interview guide, and received support in setting up and carrying out the interviews as needed. The CCPA-MB has used this model in the past, and community interviewers have reported that this can be a very empowering experience for them (MacKinnon and Stephens 2008).

Once the interviews and focus groups were completed, they were transcribed and analysed using HyperResearch 3.0, following Strauss' three levels of coding (described in Neuman 2003). The community interviewers worked with the principal researcher to identify initial themes and topics of particular importance. The initial findings were shared with The Family Centre of Winnipeg and with Manitoba Housing to check that the project was on track. The researcher also attended advisory/community committee meetings at each of the centres to talk about the findings and recommendations that would be put forward to check that the communities' perspectives were being accurately represented and to offer a last opportunity to comment on the project.

The Impact of the Family Resource Centres

The resource centres play an important role in the communities they serve, and they have a strong impact on the individuals and communities they serve. Many of the interviewees commented on the importance of the centres in helping them to meet basic needs on a regular basis. As well, interviewees and staff identified positive changes taking place in individuals, families, and the communities as a result of participation in the resource centres.

Basic Needs, Everyday

The resource centres play a variety of roles in the communities. For many people, the programs are the most important aspect of the centres, but the resource centres also meet essential, basic needs that tenants would either not have access to or would have a harder time accessing if the Centres were not there, such as food and other basic resources. They offer residents a chance to get out of the house to socialize, meet new people and contribute to their community. They also provide a place to learn and a space for addressing conflict and accessing supports when crises arise.

Food and resources

People need to meet basic survival needs first, before they can consider other needs or wants. Manitoba Housing provides for resource centre participants' shelter needs but for many of these tenants, low-income levels mean that other basic needs remain unmet. The resources available to the community vary by centre, depending on the priorities identified by the advisory/community committee in each centre.

For many households, there are often times in the month when money is tight. The community store (selling essentials, such as food, toilet paper, bus tickets), clothing depot, food bank, and counselling services are well used, as are the washing machines. Many people do not have regular access to a phone, fax or computer. Food security is a big concern for many families. Access to food banks, the cooking programs, the community store and to snacks or small meals on a regular or occasional basis through the resource centres fill the gap. One staff member mentioned that

> There's a lot of people who are not, didn't make ends meet, and so they're supplementing through the day and they're, you know, something to eat, and they count on that, so they're really, you know, struggling. (08-03)

When asked what they liked about the centre, respondents said

> It helps out. It helps out with day-to-day living, and the community store helps out when you're kind of in a bind, between, you know, paydays. (05-05)

> When I first got here I didn't have a washing machine, I have one now, but you know the simple things like that, a place to come and do my laundry, a place for me and my kids to come hang out that's a safe place, there's many positives. (06-02)

> For school, especially… I needs to come for languages for everything. For everything help to do and for the computers, to print it, to fax it, especially for the workers needs that, and have the helpers a lots in here too. For the Community Kitchen and for food bank too, for everything its have. I like that too. (05-01)

> With the resource centre, my kids know if we are short on something or having to do something, we do have the resource centre here now, that would help us with, either we're short on bread or something we can always come ask, and not be scared to ask. (05-02)

Since these complexes are located outside the inner city, it can be hard to access services or organisations that offer the resources people need.

> I really like that we have access to a fax machine and the internet and the phone, otherwise I don't know where else I'd go, I'd have to go downtown to some other organisation, and that's a way out of the way, especially with my baby, but really like that clothing depot, it helps me a lot, the clothes that we go through so much, too fast, it's really helpful. (03-05)

One staff member noted that beginning with the basics is a way to build trust and to create a safe space for people. The resource centres have to address these basic necessities before addressing broader community development issues:

> They started off [with] people requesting basic needs, help with basic needs. Food, and clothing and fax machines and telephones and laundry facilities, and bus fare and… and as people became more comfortable it seemed as though they then wanted help with more sophisticated issues, like their parenting issues, addictions, and… so it seemed to evolve from very basic to, over time, to being willing to take risks to deal with other personal and family issues. (08-05)

Once people feel comfortable and secure, they are more interested in participating in programs and engaging with their neighbours, working with their neighbours, to build a better community over time.

> But then the whole thing is people have said around wanting to belong and have support systems—natural support systems and not being able or feeling safe to do that with their neighbours until they met in a safe place with food and then they felt safe to begin to open up to neighbours. (08-05)

Once people's basic needs are met, they have the opportunity to participate in the programs offered by the resource centres.

Programs

Each centre offers a wide range of programs based on the priorities and needs of the community members. Some are annual events, such as the Summer Barbecue, Festive Dinner in December, Earth Day community clean up, or income tax clinics. Others are short-term programs that run for a specific length of time, such as Nobody's Perfect (a parenting program), Three Stars and a Wish (an intergenerational storytelling/literacy program for children), or StressBusters (a stress management program for adults).

There are also programs that run fairly consistently throughout the year, such as Community Kitchen, Breakfast Club, Family Night, and arts and crafts programs, as well as occasional outings to the beach or bowling. Some programs focus on older children and youth/teenagers, in-

cluding Brownies and Girl Guides, after school programs, bike building programs, Kids in the Kitchen (a cooking program), and summer day camps (which hire staff from the community). Three of the complexes have Youth Advisory Committees, and often the centres partner with external youth-focused organizations to organize programs and outings. In addition, each centre offers time for drop-in and coffee.

The programs vary from centre to centre, and change over time as the tenants' priorities change. What programs or resources are available is determined through conversations at the advisory/community committee. The programs offer something different for the tenants, for the whole family together.

> I like the programs. I like the fact that they have the parent, like the family programs in the evening, that we can come to together, and even though [my son]'s not like, physically ready to do some of the crafts, we do it together, and he understands it and it's the idea that we're doing something together. (02-06)

> The programs are very good. The programs here are very well organised, they're well run, the children have fun… It's a family resource centre, but ideally it's mostly about the kids in my world. (06-02)

Since everyone in the complexes is on a limited income, the programs being free (or close to it) is very appealing. Outside the inner city, bus fare to access programs or for outings can be a barrier for many people. One woman noted that

> It's hard to do anything with your kids when you don't have very much funds. You know, it's like, okay, we've gotta, we could go to the Forks but it's money and kids are like mom, I want an ice cream and mom I want a drink, and it's like, I can't — I go, I can't afford it, and then I feel bad because you see all the other kids… (07-01)

For her, the centre provides a place to go with her children to have fun and do something different, without the pressures of the added costs:

> …it's like let's go to the centre and let's make some popsicles, or you know, and then let's go to the park with the centre or let's go do crafts down there, or movies, whatever, you know. (07-01)

By far the most often mentioned program was Community Kitchen. It is offered at every centre, and is very popular. Once a week, participants come together, pay a few dollars (the remaining cost is subsidised by the resource centre), cook a meal for four, and take it home to their families. As noted above, food security is a concern for many families, and Community Kitchen offers a chance for people to cook a full meal for a very reduced cost. As well, it is an opportunity to try out new recipes or new foods, and to socialise with others.

> I really like that they have the Community Kitchen because when you're on a budget, that really, it helps out, it's two dollars, you cannot beat that for a meal for four people, I got big eaters around [laughter] so you know that really helps out and plus it lets you kind of bond with the other women around here and get different ideas, and it's nice, I like it. (03-07)

> Community Kitchen is great, like I think being able to take food home for four people for two dollars, it's just amazing. Like, you know, so I think that's a wonderful program that they have. (07-05)

The programs offered through the resource centres, including the informal programs such as the drop-in, offer a way for people to become engaged in their communities. Whether making lunches for the week for the local school, volunteering with a kids' program, or participating in the advisory/community committee, tenants have the opportunity to do something for the community. When asked what motivates them to come into the centre, two women replied

> just to get involved, and to contribute to the community, because I'm on assistance and I don't like sitting around, and I wasn't doing anything

> else so I really needed to feel like I was useful… it gives me a purpose and to feel part of things and to contribute to what goes on here. (03-07)

> …knowing that I could make a difference to the centre, to the complex… maybe something good will come out of this, I think maybe the neighbourhood might find a new way to deal with the drunks and the parties… (06-07)

The programs also offer an opportunity to learn and grow as an individual. Some of the resource centres have educational programs, for literacy or English conversation, or empowerment programs that are intended to support participants in making strong decisions for their lives.

> … at home nobody, but English class here, talking or eating food together, talking together, listen for people. (04-06)

> My three favourite things — the craft table, cause you get to learn new crafts. And the women's group, interesting topics, helpful topics. The Community Kitchen, they're true, get to learn new recipes, try it out. (02-01)

> …the women's group because it, like, when they discuss things about your boundaries and if someone cross your boundaries and how to be assertive, stuff like that. And… finances, cause I'm not, I used to have a hard time with my finances before, hard time paying my bills, but then I realised where I was going wrong…(07-03)

Just as often, participants mentioned informal learning as a side benefit of the programs. Often, this learning comes from other participants in the resource centres. Having a chance to hear from others who may have similar life experiences, challenges or questions can reduce one's sense of isolation, and make problems seem more manageable. It also affirms people's skills as solvers of their own problems, and reinforces their knowledge and life experience.

> She said she likes the idea that we all get together, we get to chat, we get to try different foods, we get to try to learn about each other. She said she likes the most whenever she comes here and they have Community Kitchen, she's learning new recipes, she goes home she tries and her kids love it and every week she's learning something new. (04-08, translated)

> Because I know how to, we talked lots of things here, how to take care, how to deal with problems that arise with children, and I think yeah. There's a lot of difference now, that I can see with [my son]. (03-08)

In addition to the resource and support of people who come from similar life experiences and can share their wisdom, the resource centre staff are available to assist with any requests or crises, and are discreet and non-judgemental in finding solutions or referring people elsewhere. This support can be practical (e.g. addressing a housing problem) or emotional (e.g. mediating a dispute, listening and counselling).

Crisis intervention, conflict resolution and advocacy

As in any neighbourhood, conflicts between neighbours are not uncommon in public housing complexes. Domestic issues, family issues, tensions between neighbours, and gang issues have all come up at the resource centres, and staff are available to support and help out when crises happen. Staff will also advocate on behalf of the community, and provide support to community members to advocate on their own behalf.

One of the staff noted that

> We end up doing a great deal of that, [my colleague] and I do a huge amount of crisis counselling, intervention, bridging into other resources and services that people here in the community are connected to, so we spend a huge amount of our time running. (08-01)

The support may be direct, with staff providing mediation or conflict resolution services, or it

may be indirect, with staff (or other community members) providing emotional support and advice to the affected person or people. Staff may also connect tenants to external resources or supports if needed.

As much as possible, the staff at the resource centres try to stay neutral and not to take sides in conflicts between neighbours or families. Keeping the centre as a neutral space in the community means that everyone is comfortable coming in, and that there is trust that their voice will be heard. One tenant talked about the change in how conflicts are handled in her community since the resource centre opened:

> When the community centre wasn't here, a lot of people sort of pushed their way around the community… and there was no outlet that you could go to to discuss what each other's points of view, where each of them was coming from in the dispute. So I feel that the centre is like a place that the community… they can be sort of an in between, a neutral person, that hears both points of view and sort of can defuse the problem and I think because the centre's here, the community has become a little bit more relaxed. (03-02)

Another interviewee mentioned the importance of having someone from outside the community — someone not involved in the conflict — to be able to mediate between the involved parties:

> It's hard to find people that will help a person resolve the debates with out actually interfering on the party or the event. They actually help you just by being there and talking. They're good. I'll just say that. They're good. (06-07)

In addition to using the resource centre as a neutral space for conflict resolution, people apply the skills learned inside the community centre to their relationships outside the resource centre.

> Now they have this choice to come over here, tell their problems, so… you don't see a lot of issues out, because we have a community. People they know how to talk, and they will put their problems, and contact that the person, solve without screaming in the street. And she say when the crisis comes, also community learns all together, help each other… 'cause then family, and helping each other, that's the big change for her. (02-08, translated)

Staff also work with tenants to advocate on their own behalf. In some cases, this is about pushing people to take on the responsibility of advocating for themselves:

> Sometimes we have to… have to step back and say: 'you guys know how to do this; you need to do it. It's in your corner now; you've got to do it. We can't take you any further'. I mean of course if they're still in dire straits or they're starting to have hard anxiety about it, of course we're still gonna be there for them. (08-04)

It can also be about helping people figure out who they need to talk to and talking through the steps to achieve their goals.

> We also do work with, and communicate with Housing, and advocate for people that are waiting for work to be done. Advocacy's huge here… we get them to go through the proper channels, phone it in, get their MMS number, and just sort of give them the steps, the proper steps to getting that ready. (08-02)

This form of advocacy can be very empowering for tenants as they are able to connect with others who are experiencing similar challenges. Tenants can rally together as a community to achieve common goals:

> I think that the resource centre is really good at addressing everybody's concerns and taking them up for us if we feel like we're not in a position to deal with them, and they're really good advocates and sometimes when you're not getting an answer out of Housing, the resource centre helps. And they set up things like community clean up which we desperately needed when the snow melted, so, you know,

> and nobody would have done that without the resource centre... (06-08)

The opportunity to gather to address conflict and work together to better the community is not only practical in that it enables people to work towards common goals, but it also offers a chance to get out of the house and socialise with each other.

Socialising and isolation

Although the resources and programs may be the initial draw for people entering the resource centre, the social opportunities presented by the resource centre are also very important.

Many people feel isolated or 'stuck' at home. Particularly for those with small children and with limited money, the resource centre offers a place to go to meet others, to socialise, and just have a change of environment.

> It definitely offered me… somewhere to go and something to do, especially when my children were a little bit young, you know, I kinda felt a little isolated and stuff cause you know, you're stuck at home breastfeeding, and then being in the new community… so it gave me a place to go to, it helped me form relationships with my neighbours, which I have quite a few close relationship now with a lot of the ladies here. (07-05)

> I always found it a good environment when I, you know, being a stay at home mom, when my children were younger, it was good to get out of the house and get fresh air and get in a different environment. (03-06)

One woman, whose son has special needs, describes the importance of the resource centre as a safe space where her son come and play and she can have a little break:

> For my sanity. We live in this little bubble at our house, so this is somewhere safe that he feels comfortable coming, because he knows it's close to home, like he knows our house is just right there…like the ladies here are very, like they're quieter, and you know, they're okay with him being with me, which is hard, because a lot of places I could go, you go for a grown up program, they don't want kids there. (02-06)

The resource centres are a good way to meet your neighbours, and to connect with people that you might otherwise not meet.

> Takes away the monotony of winters, you get to have coffee with the girls and discuss the latest news... just keeps you focused and puts a little bit more joy in your life (03-02)

As noted above, the programs offer people a chance to contribute to and feel a connection with their community.

> …because it gives me a purpose and to feel part of things and to contribute to what goes on here, I like to see more people, there are a lot of people are home all day long. (03-07)

> At the time I was working with The Family Centre at Christmas, doing the Christmas supper, and really enjoyed cooking all day, and the volunteers that came in. You came in and made salad, and just socialising and you know you're not alone. (06-01)

The resource centres are also a place people can come for support, whether through formal counselling or informal chatting with staff or other participants.

> It's somewhere I can get away from my problems at home. I can just come here and sit, you can just come here and talk to [staff] or just talk to [staff] about anything, you know. And if I need to talk to [staff] privately, you know, she'll do that, if I just need a shoulder to cry on or I can just sit in the kitchen and talk to [staff] about nothing… (05-03)

> I had depression before I had my son. I was depressed, and I think it got worse after he was born. I think I had post-partum, but I never went for help, so if this centre wasn't here, like I had to struggle to come, but I made myself come and if it wasn't here, I would have just shut myself in my house forever. And I come in here and it helped me get through it. (03-05)

People talked about the importance of knowing other people who have had similar life experiences or faced similar challenges to what they are facing. The shared experiences mean that other tenants will frequently be able to offer advice or expertise in addressing similar issues. It is empowering to know that others have been through the same struggles, that they survived and then have advice to share.

> It's just nice to know that everybody else is kind of either been there or going through it, or going through another stage, so it makes you not feel so alone. (07-04)

One of the staff said that having a welcoming space is very important:

> It's that they're always welcomed, it doesn't matter who they are or what they've done or what they're going through, it doesn't matter, they're always accepted into the group. And everybody that comes in knows that they have to be accepted, so they'll be introducing themselves, and explaining where they are, and asking where the new people are, the connections start right away. (08-01)

Sharing food also offers a way of building community and connecting with others, whether through the organised programs or just dropping in to have a snack and a coffee with neighbours.

> Her favourite part is the potluck, where [other participants], they bring their country's food, and she get to test what their food is all about, and it's not only the food but the cultural aspect of it, so she's learning a lot, and that she likes. We get together, it doesn't matter where we are from, but we are here having fun. (04-08, translated)

> And also… breakfast club is another great one, because it just brings the community together, gives us an opportunity to sit down and get to know one another and talk and not just be neighbours, you know, to be friends. You know and we're all taking turns cooking, and we all have different responsibilities, so it's not all laid on one person's shoulders and you know we just work together without ever really having to talk about it. (07-05)

All of these factors — the resources and basic necessities addressed through the programs offered by the centres, as well as the social aspects of the centres — have had a significant impact on the people living in the complexes.

Changes in Self, Family, Community

Each centre has been open for different lengths of time, and people have lived in the complexes for different lengths of time. Responses about the impact of the centres on individuals, families and communities varied greatly; some people saw no changes, but most described changes ranging from small to great.

Changes in self

The resource centres have helped improve many people's lives by improving access to basic necessities of life, including food, resources and social opportunities. In little ways — that add up to make big changes — the resource centres make people's lives easier. One person said that

> I would definitely say that having access to their computer room and doing faxes and stuff like that has made a lot of changes in my life because it saves me from paying the money to do these things, or from finding a way to get to these places, dragging my kids along with me. So yeah, it's made some good changes, definitely. (01-01)

Many people identified overcoming shyness and getting to know their neighbours as a result of attending programs at the resource centre. Many feel safer and more comfortable now that they can say hi to others in the complex.

> It's really opened me up to being more comfortable with my neighbours. I've lived in places in the past where I haven't even really talked to any of my neighbours. (07-05)

> Yeah, I feel easier to talk to everybody in the whole community… I met all the parents, and then the tons of kids, and then my kids knew kids, and then we would go to sports, it's just the community, just from walking in one resource centre I met all of [the community] it felt like. (01-04)

> Before if I came this area, I don't understand, I don't listen, I don't speak. I come family centre, I talk to people, I understand people, even people now understand my English, before no understand. (04-08)

People noticed changes in how they managed their relationships and emotions after attending programs at the resource centres. Their self-confidence increased, and they are better able to stand up for themselves.

> I just take things too seriously, but now I don't take so many things seriously, because now I know it's like okay, not everybody have to get along with everybody, you know. But it helps me help to control the, so like not to be so much emotional and then when everybody asking to borrow stuff I always say yes because I can't say no, but now I'm saying no, something that I can stick up for myself and my kids. And mostly for myself, you know. (03-04)

> Yeah, I'm a better person, I'm a better person. I find that it's wakened me up, it's made me a better person in the sense that I'm doing something, I feel like I'm accomplishing something, I'm helping people, I think, and I'm giving my time, which is good for me. (01-06)

For some, the resource centres provide a sense of purpose to the day, a routine, or a sense of responsibility to the community.

> It gives us a purpose, you know, I haven't been on assistance and not working, you know, it doesn't give you a lot to wake up for in the morning. So yeah, we're involved in some things. Yeah, you're happier, you're like, I'm okay, yeah, I gotta go do that, you know, you feel better. (05-03)

> [The Family Resource Centre] opens up people's minds, makes them feel so much better about themselves when they participate or volunteer, I've seen a lot of people that have done volunteering and it's given them jobs, which they never thought they would. It's a great thing for communities to get together and to know one another and help each other as neighbours. (01-06)

One staff member described the change she saw in one woman, who began to stand up for herself and her community when she attended programs at the resource centre.

> Very timid lady, would never stand up for herself, is now like 'excuse me? This is a safety issue and I want it dealt with'. Very outspoken and—and will get things done. Two years ago, if you looked at her, she would almost be in tears. But she kept taking the empowerment group and hanging out with the people at [the Centre] and got stronger and stronger and realised her voice counts too. But when you're told all your life to 'be quiet' and 'women should be seen and not heard' and 'your place is in the kitchen' and 'you raise the kids' and 'you have no say in the house' and 'you have no say in this', you learn to live like that. And to keep yourself from getting hit, you listen. (08-04)

Another staff member described the impact that attending the resource centre has had on quality of life for one tenant, as well as for her family:

… the quality of life that this individual now has because she's in charge of [one of the centre's programs], and but yes, she has significant disabilities and isn't going to go into the workplace with a full time position, doesn't mean that what she has experienced hasn't changed the quality of her life significantly, and there's validity behind that. Which has allowed her to be a healthier parent as best as she can, and access resources and services that I don't think she would have allowed us to access with her, because the trust wasn't there. And her believing that she can make a difference. (08-01)

These changes, from making people's day to day lives easier, to getting to know neighbours and building self-esteem also have an impact on the families of the participants in the resource centres.

Changes in family

As noted above, the family resource centres focus on building stronger relationships within the family, and this is reflected in changes people noticed in their families. These included higher self-esteem and self-confidence in children, better communications and relationship skills, and generally being happier as a family.

Kids in the Kitchen, where children learn to cook and prepare meals, is a very popular program at all the resource centres where it is offered. It is a program just for children, and parents are not involved. Programs like this one, as well as having the opportunity to meet and play with other children at the resource centres, have helped children to socialise and build social skills and self-esteem. Many parents talked about the changes they had seen in their children since they began attending the resource centre.

Oh my son's a lot more confident, the eight year old, for sure. And [my younger son] loves it, like every Thursday there's a program, like he reminds me… so obviously he's really enjoying that. And my daughter loved Kids in the Kitchen, and she's just waiting until it comes around again. So yeah, we're happier, we're very very much happier now. (07-04)

About Kids in the Kitchen: it's good for the children's self-esteem, and makes my kids feel good about themselves. It's something they did on their own, without Daddy doing it for them type of thing, so I mean, that in itself is positive, to see your kid come home with a smile on their face, feeling good about themselves and doing something that they did to themselves at age eleven or age eight, you know, it's an accomplishment for this child. (06-02)

Having a space for parents where they can come for a little break, where their children are welcome and there are other parents there to chat with helps to take the pressure off. The staff and other participants in the resource centre are always available to help with parenting or relationship tips, and this helps people be better parents, which makes the whole family happier.

Family Centre empowers me more to try and do different, try different techniques with my son to get him to cooperate a little bit more, and if he doesn't… just to try and go with it and stuff like that instead of beating myself up for it. (01-08)

…to help with the kids, that you know, cause I had a lot of problems sometimes with my daughter and my son now, so it helps me to be more not yelling so much, and trying to be calm and they're okay. (03-04)

Like [my partner] and I aren't arguing as much any more, we are not even saying a word until the kids are sleeping, or we'll go outside in the backyard and talk quietly about it, or we'll, if we need to really really sit down and talk, we'll get rid of the kids, we'll like bring them to his mom's, you know, we don't do it in front of them any more like we used to. (01-02)

Having better communication with children and other family members, and having a place to go

that the children enjoy, benefits the whole family. Family nights and outings organised by the resource centres offer something inexpensive for the whole family to enjoy, and make parents more willing to spend time with their children.

> Through the summer program with, like, they took families and their children and their parents to like Bird's Hill and Tinkertown, and you know, I don't have a vehicle myself and that's something I couldn't have done with them and you know they gave us an opportunity to do that and that was really exciting for them, so yeah. It's a good thing for me and for them, cause yeah it helped us bond more together and to experience some situations like that and with other families too in the community. (03-06)

> Before we didn't all sit at the kitchen table and eat together, and now we do and we talk and where we go, all of us want to go. So that we're all together. So we want to be together more often now than before. (07-06)

These supports for children and parents alike, and the opportunity to spend more time together in a space outside the house takes some pressure off families, and helps to create better connections and relationships. The resource centres are also bringing people together in the broader community, by creating a space for people to get to know each other.

Changes in community

People identified a number of changes that they had seen in the community or neighbourhood as a whole as a result of the resource centre. Increased connections with other tenants in the area, better relationships with neighbours, supports for each other, and increased trust and pride in the community were all mentioned as important aspects of the resource centres' presence in the community.

The resource centres provide an opportunity to meet other people in the neighbourhood. Some people said that before going to the resource centres, they did not know their neighbours. Now, even if they are not friends, people can say hello to others outside the resource centre, which helps to build a sense of connection and belonging.

> Because we see our neighbour, those people living in our area, right now we seeing each other outside and saying hi, how are you, become a friend because we came into the centre we see each other. (04-02)

It also helps people to feel safer in the neighbourhood, creating a sense of ownership and belonging. People are more likely to watch out for those that they feel a sense of connection with, and that they feel are part of the community.

> When you see them all the time in the resource centre, you almost get a feeling like you know them a little bit, so when you see them outside in the neighbourhood, you wave to them and you feel like, you know, you're gonna watch out for that person if somebody tries to attack them or something, you know what I mean, you just keep an eye out on the people that you see everyday. (05-07)

As described above, the resource centres provide a neutral space within the complexes to gather and get to know each the neighbours. When conflicts arise, staff at the resource centres are available to mediate and provide supports. But even before this, the neutral space at the resource centre can ease tensions between neighbours, as people get to know each other and can discuss issues before they become problems.

> It almost seems like outside of the resource centre sometimes you don't interact as much, but then you come into, you know the Centre, and it's a sense of easiness and you don't feel so, well, they're walking on my grass, and I'll share coffee, I'll have coffee with them in the resource centre. (03-01)

> All I know is that the resource centre's helped make these relationships not so hostile, because

> you live amongst these people and they're your neighbours but then you go to the resource centre and you're able to get to know a little bit about them, and although you may not like them, you get to know them and you get to know what their issues are, and you are more — it creates better relationships. (01-03)

The centres also enable people to build networks to support each other outside the centre. Parents get to know other parents, which increases their comfort outside the resource centre. If there are problems between children at the park or in the common spaces around the complex, parents know who to talk to. Getting to know other parents at the centres also makes it possible for parents to establish informal support networks, for example to help with looking after each other's children or running errands.

> I know more people, I know more families, which helps in terms of watching out for each others' children when they're out playing. (02-03)

> I think [the centre] helped with the community. It's helped bring us together… like it's made us closer and more helpful with one another. Like you know, I have neighbours that will come to my house and bring me a bag of diapers, because 'oh I saw this diaper for really cheap' or 'it was given to me' and 'I know you need them', you know, so just little ways of helping one another and supporting one another outside of the resource centre. (07-05)

The activities and networks built through the resource centres also enable a sense of pride in the community. The advisory/community committees provide an opportunity for community members to come together to talk about issues of concern, and to decide on actions they can take together.

> I like the earth day things, and the things like that that we do, where we're, where everybody is pitching in to help keep it a clean place. This is one of the nicer Manitoba Housing complexes that I've ever seen… a lot of the people here don't seem to have a problem with helping each other out, or you know, helping keep our community clean. (01-01)

> We talk about stuff within the community, like things that would be beneficial, things that, the good and the bad about what people are willing to do with the community, including tenants, like cleaning up, thing cleaning up around here, just trying to think here, as it comes like garbage, like anything that we think is going to be beneficial for us, garbage being left outside, garbage being picked up, they discuss things that go on outside that are to do with gas leaks — gas tanks outside, things like that, so I think that that's good for people to know about that too, to be informed about that, you know? (06-03)

Self-advocacy, whether for a bus to take children to school in the winter months, or for increased safety and security through community patrols, has helped tenants to make changes in their lives and communities. Having the neutral space and support of staff in the resource centre to share information among community members, make plans and take steps to address concerns that affect the whole community brings more of a sense of community, a sense of being able to achieve something by working together, and is both empowering and strengthening for the individuals and the community as a whole.

In addition to these comments from tenants, staff at the resource centres noticed changes in the community as well. Some of these changes include:

- Less movement in and out of the complexes, as people want to stay rather than moving just to get away from the neighbours.
- Fewer petty complaint calls to Manitoba Housing and to Security, and relations with the tenant coordinator are better and more respectful.

- The compliance rate with spraying for bedbugs has increased substantially, as people now have a place to go while the spraying happens, as well as education to know how to deal with bedbugs and resources to be able to do so.
- In one centre, parents did not want to enrol their children in kindergarten because the children weren't prepared. The Centre established an early childhood education program and teachers have commented that now these children are among the best prepared for school.
- There is a difference in the centres as people develop natural support systems (rather than relying on outside supports). Before getting to the resource centres, people are often nervous and distrustful, but getting to know the community and the staff builds trust and helps to develop informal supports in the community.

These comments from staff indicate that there are tangible implications to the changes described by tenants, resulting in stronger communities and reduced costs for Manitoba Housing as the complexes become more stable. In addition, all of these changes point to a better quality of life overall for tenants in the Manitoba Housing complexes. From changes in people's self-esteem and level of comfort in their community, to better communication and stronger relationships among family members, to networking and mutual support among tenants, interviewees had a lot to say about the impact the resource centres have had on their lives and on their communities.

The Woodydell Model

The approach used by The Family Centre in supporting and developing community development in its six family resource centres is called the 'Woodydell Model' after the resource centre where the model was first developed. The Woodydell Model is an informal educational model that supports families and communities by building skills in positive parenting, and role-modelling responsible behaviours. It is based on attachment theory, putting the family unit at the centre of the community, and using family relationships as a model for relationships across the community. It has evolved over time as the centres have grown more established in the communities.

Attachment theory describes the bond between a parent and a child. Children depend on their parents to provide basic needs and to keep them safe. Having a strong attachment to parents or caregivers, particularly from a young age, is essential for children to feel secure, and for them to develop into strong adults. This is important not only in terms of the physical presence of parents or caregivers, but also — especially for older children — to open communication between parents and children (Kobak and Madsen 2010, following Bowlby and Ainsworth).

Attachment also forms the basis for all relationships in society, not just those between parents and children. It is

> … at the heart of relationships and of social functioning. In the human domain, attachment is the pursuit and preservation of proximity, of closeness and connection: physically, behaviourally, emotionally, and psychologically. As in the material world, it is invisible and yet fundamental to our existence. A family cannot be family without it. (Neufeld and Maté 2004, 16-17).

Despite the importance of attachment in families, too often it is not considered in policies that affect children or families (Neufeld and Maté 2004). The Family Centre's approach takes attachment theory as fundamental to developing strong family, neighbour and community relationships.

Building respectful relationships based on trust is at the core of the Woodydell Model, and the family resource centres "provide a nurturing, safe environment…[to] celebrate accomplishments, share failures, help in resolving conflicts and teach new skills" (Barchyn 2006, p.3). This creates a secure base where participants can access resources, get to know their neighbours, and build support networks.

This holistic approach, focusing on community relationships, sees all members of the community as contributors to the resource centre. The programs and resources offered through the resource centres are available to everyone, and staff build on the skills and strengths offered by each community member to create a sense of community and interdependence among community members (Barchyn 2006). The resource centres also rely on leadership at the grassroots level, particularly through the advisory/community committees.

The Woodydell Model provides a very solid grounding for the work of the resource centres. Four priorities emerge from the Woodydell Model in the operation of the resource centres. These are:

- advisory/community committees
- consensus and responding quickly to community priorities
- hiring from the community
- connecting with the wider community through steering committees

These priorities create a structure that is very grassroots oriented, growing out of the needs and priorities of the community members, and working to empower members at the same time. Three of these — the advisory/community committees, the consensus approach, and the steering committees — relate to how decisions are made and dealt with in the resource centres, and the last — hiring from the community — relates to the model's overall engagement with and commitment to the community.

Decision-making at the Resource Centres

Growing out of the Woodydell Model's emphasis on community leadership, the decision-making processes are driven by the tenants that participate in the resource centres. There are two main parts to the decision-making structures at the resource centres: the advisory/community committees, which operate at the local resource centre level, and the steering committees, which bring together actors from the broader community.

The advisory/community committees

The advisory/community committees in each centre are made up of tenants who meet twice a month to discuss programs and priorities for the centre. The role of the committee is to provide direction on what happens in the resource centre: what kinds of programs and priorities should be offered. It also provides an opportunity for tenants to find out what is happening in the centres, and to get involved in the programs and events taking place.

These committees are coordinated by the resource centre staff, who will also seek out external resources and supports and ensure that the plans made by the advisory/community committee are carried out. Since each centre has different concerns, challenges and priorities, the role of the committees is to ensure that programming addresses community needs. One staff member described it as "a grassroots approach, where you're the expert in your life, you tell us what you'd like or need or want" (08-02). Having the community direct what happens in the resource centres is fundamental to meeting community needs.

The agenda for the meetings is usually posted in the centre, and anyone is welcome to add new topics to the agenda. Decisions are made by whomever is there that day, and are made by consensus. If there is disagreement about what direction to take, or if the discussion is too big to resolve in one meeting, it will be carried forward to the next meeting. In some instances, conflicts or ideas have taken several meetings to deal with; this process is essential to ensure that everyone's voice has been heard and is included in the final decision. At the same time, once priorities have been established by the advisory/community committee, the staff work to implement the requests as quickly as possible. The advisory com-

mittee can then see their voices being heard, and the impact of their decisions on the community.

The advisory/community committees will also address any issues that might arise in the resource centre, from the large (e.g. programs would people like to see) to the small (e.g. the policy on selling bus tickets in the community store). Because the resource centres are intended to be safe havens where everyone is accepted, each centre has rules for how to behave in the centre, which are determined by the advisory/community committee. Usually these are posted on the wall, and provide a common framework for acceptable behaviour in the centre; one example of a rule popular in all of the centres is the "no gossip" policy.

Conflicts or decisions about the resource centre are discussed at the advisory/community committee meetings, as are any other concerns people want to discuss as a community. These other concerns may be external to the resource centre itself, but still very important to the lives of the tenants, such as problems with their housing or safety concerns in the community.

Tenants identified a number of motivations for why they attend the advisory/community committees. Most said that it is a fun way to hear what is going on in the resource centre, to gather ideas, get more actively involved and take on some responsibility in the direction of the centre. One person said:

> … you can't just sit there and say oh I wish, I wish they did this, I wish they did that. You have to come and have your voice heard. You know, if you want something done then come and see if it's feasible, volunteer your time if there's not enough, you know, resources for volunteers. And also you get to collaborate and hear other people's ideas that you might not have thought of… Basically, if you want your voice heard, you need to come and speak up. (07-04)

People also said that it is important for the community to have a voice, so that it is not just staff or outside organisations deciding what programming is needed.

> Without the advisory committee, how would people that are coming into our community know what we want, not just bringing in whatever they feel like should be brought in kind of thing. It felt more, they're asking for our opinions, they're asking for what we want, not what they think we want… it opened a lot of stuff. We got a school [for adults in the community] set up, and we asked for that. We got the school year. We asked for the Kids in the Kitchen [program], we've got that… all the issues we have at the outside part, to help us pull in together, like we have construction coming now, and we all did that through all the advisory meetings and the security, and like those things were all brought to the advisory when it first started. (05-02)

As people become more involved in the centre, they learn that they are not the only ones facing particular challenges, and they can both learn from others' experiences and share their own strategies. The information-sharing that goes on at meetings about issues coming up in the community is valuable, as is the strategising and working together to address the issues. It is empowering for tenants to see that their voices are valued and important in how the centres are run, and that they can make changes by working together through the resource centre.

Although most people interviewed were part of the advisory committee, some were not, often because of work/scheduling conflicts. Some people talked about the difficulty of attending when they have small children, and in a couple of cases, people identified conflicts with staff or other individuals within the resource centre as the reason why they do not attend. A few people mentioned that they do not feel their voices are heard in decision-making, and do not see their suggestions reflected in outcomes or feel that change is too slow. However, these comments were rare and most people felt that the advisory

committees are an important way for the community's voice to be heard in the centres.

The steering committees

The other part of the decision-making process in each centre is the steering committee. The steering committees are made up of outside organisations, such as government departments or health and safety personnel, that provide services or supports to the complexes, as well as local organisations or businesses. The role of the steering committee is, along with the staff from the resource centre, to support the communities in each complex by hearing tenants' voices and priorities and making resources available to the community.

The advisory/community committee and the steering committee operate separately, with the staff in each centre as the liaison between the two. When priorities are identified by the advisory/community committee, the staff bring these priorities to the steering committee, who work to find the resources or programs needed to address the priorities. At the same time, if a representative on the steering committee has a program or idea that they would like to offer to the resource centre, the staff will bring the suggestion to the advisory/community committee. The advisory/community committee will then discuss it to determine if it is something they would like to see in the centre.

In each of the six housing developments, there are programs offered by a variety of organisations. Coordinating all the different people and projects and tracking the issues and concerns in each complex is a complicated task. The steering committee also enables these organisations to have a more holistic understanding of events or issues in the complexes.

Steering committee members do not necessarily attend every meeting, but may be involved in different ways over the course of the year. Although the actual participants differ from centre to centre, the steering committees could include organisations such as:

- Manitoba Housing, tenant service coordinators
- Manitoba Housing Security
- Winnipeg Police Services
- the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority; public health nurses
- elected government representatives
- local schools
- local churches
- community organisations
- local businesses
- provincial or municipal program staff
- health clinics
- immigrant and refugee organisations
- Winnipeg Harvest and other food banks

Because of the challenges faced by many tenants on a day to day basis, as well as the stigma of living in public housing, many tenants leave their complex as little as possible. As a neutral space in the community, the resource centres are well-placed to build a bridge between tenants and service providers by distributing information or hosting presentations, meetings or mediation sessions for service providers with the community.

The resource centres provide a more comfortable environment for both tenants and those organisations that may have historically had an uncomfortable relationship with Manitoba Housing tenants. The relationship between the advisory/community and steering committees creates a channel for tenants to share their concerns or ideas with service providers, and helps to build trust so that tenants are more willing and able to access needed services.

This model of decision-making brings resources to the community through the steering committee, while empowering tenants to determine what they want their resource centre to look like. As it has become established in the

centres and tenants work together to see change taking place, trust grows both among the tenants and between the tenants and The Family Centre.

Building Trust in the Community

When each Centre started, it took awhile to gain community members' trust. In some complexes, the resource centres were preceded by Tenants' Associations, which often were quite political with tensions among tenants about how resources should be used and who should make those decisions. Other complexes had centres run by other organisations, or did not have resource centres at all. In all cases, The Family Centre of Winnipeg was a new organisation in the complex, and people were concerned about how it would affect their community.

With each new centre, staff would begin by talking to tenants, assuring them that they would have an opportunity for input, and that decisions would be made by consensus. As each centre has established itself, they have all gone through the processes of group formation: forming, storming, norming, performing (Hedrick, Dick and Homan 2011). The first stage takes place soon after the centre opens, as people come and enjoy the novelty of the centre (forming). After a while, conflict over what the centre should be arises (the storming phase), and then people settle on some rules to guide the centre (norming). This stabilises the centre, and it begins to operate in a way that meets people's needs and priorities (performing). Each centre might go through these processes a few times, as different groups enter and leave the centre, shifting the dynamics and the priorities for the community within the resource centre.

The Woodydell Model sets out the commitment for the resource centres to be willing to go through these processes — through the tumult of community-building — and requires staff with the skills to guide the community through this process. Community development is a long process, and requires long term commitment in supporting the community as it grows and refines its priorities and concerns. Fundamentally, this willingness to work with the community to address its needs grows out of the recognition that the tenants are experts in their own lives, and know what they need; the centres' role is to find the resources to support people in meeting these needs.

Part of the process of building trust lies in ensuring that the staff and the resource centre are seen as neutral within the complex. In many respects, the idea of the contrived community, where individual choice in where to live is limited, describes public housing. At first, neighbours may have little or nothing in common, other than the location of their homes. In contrast to the previous Tenants' Associations, which were volunteer-run and were sometimes perceived as taking advantage of their position for personal benefit, having paid staff from an external organisation avoids volunteer burnout and helps to maintain neutrality and consistency. Whether mediating conflicts between tenants, carrying out the ideas put forward by the advisory/community committee, or using the space for various programs or presentations, the resource centre is a space that is open to everyone.

One of the staff noted that although not all the families in the complex participate in the resource centre, sometimes when an individual or a family is in crisis or has a problem that they need help with, they will come into the resource centre for support. This suggests that there is awareness of the resource centre and that it can fill an important role in times of need for families in the complex, even if they are not participating in the programs or events on a regular basis.

The staff noted that the process of building trust reveals the endless needs in the community. People manage within the resources they have, however limited, and so it can be difficult to trust that opportunities to improve their situation might be genuine. Some staff said that

> On the community side though, I think there's an excitement and a feeling of hopefulness that maybe change can really happen, because people really mean it. There have been so many broken promises and these are people who usually have a history of people letting them down, whether it's their family or their partner, or — their government, or governments, or their school [or] — service providers so, to have somebody who seems to really be listening and trying to make things happen in a tiny way… (08-05)

Building trust within the centres takes time. At the beginning there are frequently tensions, particularly around food. As people participate in the programs and realise that there will be enough for everyone, these tensions dissipate. However, the resource centres must work through these tensions before addressing other concerns. For this reason, the centres have focused a lot of their efforts on addressing the basic needs in the community — food, essential resources — before moving into more complicated issues such as relationship or conflict resolution skills.

Once the initial trust is built, the resource centres provide a place where people get to know each other. The Woodydell Model's approach of strengthening the relationships between each member of a family creates a core from which members can reach out to their neighbours or to other people in the resource centre to build networks of support. This adds depth to the community building work carried out through the resource centres, by working to help the families in the complexes meet their needs and support each other.

The centres' dependence on volunteer labour and the priority placed on hiring from the community — from among the tenants and participants in the resource centre programs —ensure that there is a clear presence of community members in the leadership of the centres.

Hiring from the community is a way to build capacity and work experience among tenants. Many people begin as volunteers with the family resource centre, and in fact the resource centres depend on about 30 hours of volunteer labour each month (Barchyn 2006). This reliance on the community's willingness to provide input and direction to the resource centre, as well as the need for volunteer labour to ensure that programs and events happen, offers a way for tenants to contribute to building their community. As noted above, many people feel isolated, and many find that becoming involved in their resource centre is a way to engage with the community.

For many tenants, volunteering is a way to build their résumés. If they are interested, they can then be hired for a few hours a week for casual positions including cleaning and upkeep, assisting with the drop-in programs, and child care. As their skills build, they can go on to become family support workers with The Family Centre. Staff receive training through regular get-togethers, both for all staff and for specific sub-groups of staff. Learning happens at many different levels through these gatherings, both through the more formal process of training, but also in recognising oneself in the subject matter (e.g. how to support a parent in crisis, and recognising how to support oneself in crisis). Following community economic development principles, this approach builds capacity and work experience among tenants.

Limitations of the Woodydell Model

The Woodydell Model, focused on strengthening the bond between the parent and the child as the core of community development, has clear benefits and strengths. As described above, many people in the resource centres appreciate the family focus. They like having a place to come with their children, to chat with other parents, to get parenting tips and share their experiences. Many people saw beneficial changes in their families, in themselves, and in the communities because of the resource centres. The decision-making processes, bringing together the com-

munity voices and external resources, and the commitment to building trust among tenants and between tenants and the resource centre are integral to the successes of the resource centres.

At the same time, however, the Woodydell Model also has one key limitation that must be mentioned. Although the community focus of the model specifies that programming at the Centres should come out of the community and should be based on community needs and priorities rather than being imposed by outside organisations, the focus on attachment theory and on the family unit imposes limitations on the kind of suggestions that will be acted upon.

This tension emerges in part because of the great need in the community. When families are struggling with complex interconnected challenges, it becomes impossible to focus on only one; a holistic approach is required. Although the Woodydell Model strives to focus on parent-child attachment, this is near impossible when basic needs are not met, and at times these basic needs seem to conflict with the Woodydell approach.

For example, this tension arises when discussing childminding or programs for unaccompanied children. Some people mentioned that it can sometimes be hard to participate in programs or events at the resource centre without childminding. Others said that they would like to have someone else watch their children so they can have a break even for a short while at the Centre. In most of the communities, there are children who would like to participate but cannot because their parents do not attend the centre, and the resource centres require a parent to accompany children. A few people mentioned that they would like to see programming for these children.

From the Woodydell Model's perspective, parents must be engaged with their children in order to strengthen their bond. Programming for children alone will not meet this goal, and although childminding may happen informally (or for specific programs), it will not be part of the structures that The Family Centre uses in its regular work.

From the tenants' perspective, it can be frustrating to be asked for ideas but then to have those ideas refused because they do not fit with the framework. It may not be clear to tenants why some programs — which do not focus directly on the parent-child bond — are part of the Woodydell Model but others are not.

Essentially, tenants' self-identified needs do not always match up with The Family Centre's focus on attachment theory. If the resource centres are to be driven by tenant needs and priorities, and respite for parents or support for at-risk children are concerns for the community, then the resource centres should reflect that. Alternatively, it must be clear to the tenants as well as to the staff what those limitations are and the reasons for them.

Looking to the Future

Staff and tenants had much to say about what they would like the centres to offer in the future. At the same time, there are some significant challenges that affect how the centres will continue to work.

The Future of the Centres

Tenants offered a number of suggestions for how to improve the resource centres and for the kinds of programs they would like to see offered there. The most common comments related to space, hours, staff, community outreach, transportation, childminding, bigger programs and new programs.

Space

Space is a concern in each of the resource centres, even the larger ones.

> If this community centre, since the community's so big, if we had a bigger space, so that there's more room and then we're not all so crowded in the kitchen, cause the kitchen fits about like ten people, and there's more than ten that come at a time. So a bigger space for this one would be better. (07-06)

It is not uncommon to fill a centre up completely, particularly during a popular program or for seasonal events such as the festive dinner. For programs such as Community Kitchen, which rely on kitchen space and appliances, space is at a premium, and it can be a challenge to fit everyone in.

Hours

Many tenants commented that they would like to have longer hours at their resource centre.

> I would love to see the resource centre open more often. We're not open a lot, we are a smaller community, we do have less people accessing the resources and the resource centre, but, a lot of the time when we're even open, we're not open, either because we're closed for programs that not everybody can access, or we're closed because staff have training, so I think that needs to be consistent as well, and I think we do need to be open more often. (01-03)

Some centres are not open full-time, which can make it harder for some tenants to participate. Most centres are only open one evening a week, and some tenants said that they would like to see more after-school or evening programs.

Staff

Tenants had many positive things to say about the staff: how friendly and welcoming they are, and how much the tenants appreciate the emotional and other supports that the staff provide. Tenants also talked about needing more staff in the resource centres. A tenant in one of the larger complexes said:

> because you know one person can only be in one place at one time, and yeah, they need to have more people around just to deal with all the people. (03-07)

Two resource centres share staff, and this creates particular challenges for those resource centres as the staff have to juggle two sets of schedules, programs and priorities. Tenants said that having full-time staff at each of these centres would alleviate the pressures for the staff, and would allow the centres more flexibility in their hours.

Community outreach

Bringing new people into the centres was mentioned by a few tenants as an important priority.

> I think that it takes a little bit more, I know you can only, these flyers are sent out, and but I think that sometimes it takes a little bit more coaxing or convincing as to what they offer. (01-06)

The centres distribute a newsletter every month to each of the houses within the complexes, and when time allows, staff phone or visit new arrivals in the complex to let them know about the resource centre.[3] Tenants said that outreach is important for two main reasons: first, to let people know about the supports and services provided by the resource centre; and second, because having more volunteers from the community would share the work for those who already volunteer.

Transportation

One of the centres used to have a van, which was shared and used frequently by two centres.

> Because in the summer, the past two summers, we have went all over the place, we went to museums, we went to Bird's Hill, we went to Tinkertown, we went to the zoo, and we were able to do that because one of the centres had a van and the van's gone now. (01-04)

The van was particularly useful for outings, as transportation costs can add up, especially for larger families, and the van was also used for other errands by the resource centres. Having ready transportation opens up many new options for the resource centres.

Childminding

Some tenants mentioned that it can be difficult to participate in programs and watch their children at the same time, or that they would like to have a space for respite at the resource centre.

> Sometimes when I come down here and I come and have coffee and… I feel so rundown, just… well like at least, even 20 minutes just to myself, just to sit there and have a cup of coffee. (06-04)

In some cases, this happens already, informally, as tenants watch each other's children for a few minutes here or there. Tenants also suggested that it could be a more formal system, with paid staff or through a volunteer arrangement rotating among the tenants.

Bigger programs

Often, especially in the bigger centres, there will be more interest than available spaces in a program.

> It's a lot of people sign up for it and then they don't get a chance to do it, and sometimes some people from before did it, or, yeah it's just, I don't think there's enough space. They always say there's not enough space, but it's like, if you're gonna get a program you can't tell people they can't come to it. Because they're gonna be like,

> okay, I didn't get into this, I don't want to go again, they're just going to not accept me. (07-06)

In order to make it possible for as many people as possible to participate, tenants said that programs should be bigger, or should be offered more often.

New programs

Tenants offered a number of suggestions for new programs that they would like to see in the resource centres. These differed by resource centre, but some common themes across the resource centres included

- more outings
- more programs for boys (especially older boys and teenagers)
- more programs for teenagers

For a detailed list of new programs that were suggested by resource centre, see Appendix 1.

Staff's vision for the future

Staff also had a number of ideas for the resource centres. Many of these are similar to the ideas expressed by the tenants — more space and more programs are a priority for everyone. More time in the community was mentioned by one staff person:

> Rather than just running around doing one program after another, trying to get all those things done and not having any time for someone, other than just saying hi, you know, cause I'm running, and I think we're always feeling a bit, it's really a time thing, it seems there's just more and more work and you can't keep taking that on without something going. We're here for people, but really, it's becoming very difficult to really deal with people. (08-03)

Because of the constraints imposed by funding requirements and the large amount of high priority work, there is constant pressure on the staff, and less time for them to spend engaging with the community.

The staff also identified community economic development, adult learning centres, education supports for teenagers, as part of the vision for the centres. They mentioned the ongoing evolution of the Woodydell Model and the need for The Family Centre to seek a balance between its own values and focus, and community development led entirely by tenants. The idea of expanding, of establishing resource centres in other complexes was also suggested. But before moving towards these long-term goals, the centres have to meet the more immediate goal of stable core funding, to be able to plan effectively for the future.

Challenges in Reaching the Vision

Despite all the successes that the family resource centres have had, they continue to face challenges in carrying out their work. The three biggest challenges are funding, pressures on staff, and safety in the complexes.

Funding

As is the case with too many non-profit organisations, the family resource centres struggle to find adequate funding for their programs. The funding for the resource centres comes from a variety of sources, including the Government of Manitoba, the United Way, the Winnipeg Foundation, and others. Manitoba Housing provides the space for each centre, but not the costs of operating the space. Some centres receive the funding that would previously have been used for the Tenants' Associations, but this is a very small amount.

Although the resource centres can access project funding from a number of different sources, core funding — the funding to pay for the regular expenses of the centres, including the main staff — is very difficult to find. Not having core funding is a strain on the centres. It means that the centres are more dependent on project funds, which often cannot be used to cover core

operating costs. It also makes it much more difficult to do long term planning, when the centres do not know what their financial situation will be like in six months or a year.

The time spent finding funds — researching, applying for, and meeting the report requirements of these funds — is considerable, and each smaller grant has different reporting requirements. In addition, many grants are not available to the resource centres because the grants are focused on the inner city, although the challenges faced by the tenants are often the same as those faced by inner city residents. Finding funding occupies a large amount of time that could be better spent working with the communities to address their needs.

Pressures on staff

Managing programs and funding along with other administrative demands create a busy environment for the staff. Especially for those who work in more than one centre, staff may feel pulled in multiple directions. Being in the community is the greatest strength of the family resource centres, but it is also lends an intensity to the work which is often exhausting for the staff.

As noted above, the grassroots leadership approach is visible in the advisory/community committee, as well as in hiring people from the community. The advisory/community committee is essential in creating a sense of control for community members, and provides opportunities for them to get involved in the centres. However, as tenants' self-confidence grows and they feel empowered and a sense of ownership over the centres, the priority placed on implementing decisions as soon as possible can create pressure for the staff, especially if the decisions are more complicated or require a few steps to implement. As well, although community staff bring expertise and community leadership to the resource centres, additional supports are often needed to help them transition into the workplace, such as training or social supports.

As in any community, tensions and conflicts are inevitable. Conflict comes up in many different ways in the different centres. Personality conflicts, cultural conflicts, different approaches to problem-solving, and external stress all contribute to tensions that can occasionally flare up in the resource centre. The advisory/community committee provides an avenue for decision-making and conflict resolution, but although decisions are made by the advisory/community committee, the staff are responsible for enforcing those decisions.

Each of these areas adds to the already busy workload of the staff, and, when combined with the high emotional and social facets of the centres, can contribute to stress and pressure for the staff. The level of need is high and there are crises that cannot be anticipated, so although there are set work hours, overtime is not uncommon. Despite all of this, the staff are dedicated to their work, and if anything, wish they could spend more time with the tenants in the community.

Safety

Whether through the lived experience of violence, the physical environment or the presence of gangs, safety and security for the tenants living in the complexes and for the staff at the centres is a regular concern at many of the centres. This adds to the intensity of work for the staff.

One reality of life in these complexes is that many people living there have experienced violence. This may be the conflict of war, as in the case of many refugees, or it may be domestic violence, as Manitoba Housing prioritises women and children leaving violent situations. In some cases, the violence may follow families to the complexes.

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3 One staff mentioned that because of privacy concerns, Manitoba Housing no longer gives out information about new families moving into the complex.

Many of these families are still traumatised by their experiences and may experience vicarious trauma if violence flares up in other parts of the complex. The resource centres offering counselling and other supports for these families, as well as an emergency refuge in times of crisis.

The physical environment at some of the complexes raises safety concerns, particularly for families with small children. People have found needles, used condoms and broken glass in parks and greenspaces around their complexes. Cars drive quickly through lanes and parking lots and sightlines are often blocked by other cars or dumpsters, making it hard for drivers to see children playing or running around. Although these dangers are not the responsibility of the centres, tenants are understandably concerned. In many centres, the advisory/community committees are working to address these concerns, but change is slow and depends on outside actors as well.

Another safety concern that has come up at different complexes at different times is the presence of gang activity and violence. Staff are aware of tensions in the community when gangs are present, and try to stay neutral, but also to provide support to the families who may be affected by the gangs. The resource centres encourage tenants to call Manitoba Housing Security when needed, because otherwise safety issues can go unreported and Security will be unaware of them. Often, however, tenants may be afraid of repercussions for reporting or documenting crime or violence in the complexes. For this reason it can be harder to establish community safety groups, such as the Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP) to address violence in the community.

In all of these cases, despite the neutrality of the resource centres, there is potential danger for the staff and for those in the resource centres. The Family Centre works closely with Manitoba Housing Security and has taken precautions to protect the staff and participants in the Centres, such as making sure that no one is ever alone in the centres. At the same time, however, staff have said that although it can be a bit scary at times, there is a strong sense that the community supports the resource centre and that people keep an eye on the centre.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerge based on what the tenants and staff had to say about the six family resource centres run by The Family Centre. These recommendations are directed to Manitoba Housing and the Government of Manitoba, The Family Centre of Winnipeg, and the advisory/community committees at each of the resource centres.

Manitoba Housing and the Government of Manitoba

1. Recognise the integral role that the resource centres play in improving the quality of life of the tenants in the Manitoba Housing complexes.

The changes that tenants and staff have seen in individuals, families and communities as a result of the supports provided by the resource centres are remarkable. By providing a neutral space within the community, external inputs to support community priorities and depending on community leadership and direction, the resource centres play an essential role in meeting basic needs for many families in these Manitoba Housing complexes. They also offer supports that, especially for complexes that are far from the services available in the inner city, are not otherwise available to the tenants. Manitoba Housing should recognise and support in tangible ways the importance and contribution of the work done by the resource centres.

2. Ensure that the resource centres have access to core funding to cover basic costs such as space and core staffing.

Core funding is essential if the resource centres are to be able to plan well for the future. Although funding for specific projects is relatively easy to get, this usually does not cover costs for space or staff to coordinate the program. The government of Manitoba should provide core funding for the resource centres to support them in carrying out their work in Manitoba Housing complexes.

3. Investigate options for increasing the size of the resource centres.

The size of the resource centres is a challenge in all complexes. The centres are full to capacity for many programs, especially for programs such as Community Kitchen that require counter space and appliances. Expanding the centres would make program delivery easier and would enable far more people to participate. In new builds or renovations, consideration should be

given to creating spaces designed for resource centres/community space.

4. Ensure that tenants in all Manitoba Housing complexes have access to resource centres.

Although there are many other resource centres located in Manitoba Housing complexes, there are many complexes that do not have access to resource centres. Given the types of impacts the resource centres have had for tenants in these six complexes, it is likely that tenants in other Manitoba Housing complexes could also benefit from resource centres. These may be family resource centres in family complexes or complexes where there are many families; in other complexes resource centres with different focuses may be more appropriate.

5. Revise Employment and Income Assistance amounts to enable recipients to meet basic needs.

As noted many times in this report, the resource centres meet basic needs, some of which are directly related to low levels of income, particularly for families who receive Employment and Income Assistance. Although for Manitoba Housing tenants housing is not the huge expense it too often is in the private market, other expenses (e.g. food, transportation, clothing) all too often overwhelm the EIA-budgeted amounts. EIA must provide an income that enables a decent standard of living.

The Family Centre of Winnipeg

1. Continue to strengthen the advisory/community committees.

The advisory/community committees are an excellent way to engage the tenants in determining the priorities and work of the resource centres. Combined with the steering committees, they are a good way to mobilise the resources of the community. The Family Centre should continue to support and strengthen the advisory/community committee and should, as becomes possible, create opportunities for training or increased leadership from the community (e.g. through participatory budgeting processes).

2. Seek out new transportation options.

Transportation is a big challenge for outings. It can be difficult and expensive to rent vehicles or take public transit. Having a van for each centres — or even shared among centres — would make this much easier, and would also simplify the transportation of materials for programs or donation and food bank supplies.

3. Wherever possible, open the centres for longer hours, and have bigger programs.

Many tenants requested longer hours or evening hours for the resource centres, especially in those that are only open part-time currently. In addition, there is often more demand than available spaces for programs. Inevitably, this depends on funding, but if possible, having longer hours in the resource centre and more options for people to participate in programs (whether through larger programs or running programs a few times) would enable more people to benefit from the resource centres.

4. Investigate options for increasing the size of the resource centres.

As noted above, space is at a premium in the resource centres. The Family Centre should continue to explore options with Manitoba Housing for expanding the centres, and each centre should explore opportunities to share space in the local neighbourhood with community organisations (e.g. community centres, public libraries, churches/religious organisations). This could also have additional benefits in building stronger links between the complexes/resource centres and the wider community.

5. Consider formal or informal childminding during programs

Childminding was mentioned by a number of tenants as a way to enable them to participate more fully in the resource centres. Although childminding is provided for counselling or similar programs, in many cases, people found

it hard to participate in programs if they were also watching their children. In other cases, people talked about the need for a break and respite from childcare. If this continues to be requested through the advisory/community committees, consideration should be given to developing volunteer childminding arrangements among tenants, or (particularly for programs such as advisory/community committee, where full participation is integral) hiring childminders.

6. Consider the tensions and limitations inherent in the Woodydell Model.

As noted above, there are some tensions between the Woodydell Model's focus on parent-child attachment and the broader needs and priorities in the resource centres. Community development that meets tenant needs and priorities requires the model to expand beyond attachment theory, and meeting these needs is an essential step towards stronger family attachments. Increased flexibility in the Woodydell Model would allow tenants a bigger say in ensuring that the resource centres address their concerns, while still allowing a focus on parent-child relationships.

Individual Centres and Advisory/ Community Committees

1. Consider ideas for new programs.

Tenants suggested numerous ideas for new programs and ways to improve the resource centres. In most cases, these are applicable more to the individual centres than to the centres as a whole. Appendix 1 has a list of all the ideas that were suggested, arranged by complex; the advisory/community committees should consider these suggestions to see if they are interested in implementing any of them.

As youth/teenagers were identified as a priority for programming in many centres, this may be an opportunity to create or strengthen the youth advisory committees to gather input on priorities and programs to serve their needs.

2. Plan more outings.

Although programs and events happen differently at each resource centre, tenants at each centre requested more outings. Outings can be expensive, but with some research more affordable options for outings might be available. Tenants should, through the advisory/community committee, assist staff with researching and organising outings as much as possible.

3. Consider informal arrangements for childminding during programs.

As noted above, childminding is a concern in some of the centres. One solution may be to developing an informal network or rotation of volunteers to care for children during programs or drop-in times. This can be arranged as needed through the advisory/community committee or through community networks.

4. Set time aside for outreach to the complex.

Although it can be difficult to find time for outreach to the complexes, making sure that everyone, especially new tenants, is aware of the resources available through the resource centres will benefit both the community and the resource centre. In addition to the monthly newsletter (which is distributed to all households in each complex), the resource centre should leaflet for special events or programs that people might be particularly interested in. As tenants living in the complex, the advisory/community committee members can play a particularly welcoming role in outreach to other members of the community.

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Appendix 1 — New Programs and Ideas

This appendix describes the new programs and ideas for improving the centres that were suggested by tenants in the interviews and surveys. The rationale for the program is also included, where tenants mentioned why they would like to see this program or change. The suggestions are presented by centre, but are in no particular order within each centre. Each idea is mentioned once, even if more than one person mentioned it.

APPENDIX **Community Resource Centre (Plessis)**

Suggestion	Why?
Run programs for longer	
Women's self-defence group	• It would be fun.
Children attending with siblings	• Maybe they could let the kids come with an older sibling, instead of the parents having to come every time, like for the family night.
Programs for little children	
Parenting support groups	• For adults to talk about their kids
Different activities for the children	• They should do something more active for the kids. It seems like it's always the same thing and I feel the kids get bored. • E.g. bouncy castles, slides; more outings
Childminding	• When they do advisory meeting, and some kids get bored, they should do a movie for the kids.
Women's groups	
Bigger programs	
Cooking with kids	
Programs for boys	• They have girls' programs, they don't have boys' programs.

APPENDIX Mayfair Family Resource Centre

Suggestion	Why?
Healthy relationship class	• I had taken healthy relationships at the Elizabeth Hill Centre, and I think that would be very beneficial for everybody, not just the women, it's for children as well
Gang and drug awareness	• Making kids aware of drugs and stranger danger • E.g. Presentations by police officers
Single fathers' night	• They've got ladies night, what about men's night?
Mothers' group	• All moms are going through the different stresses maybe within themselves and maybe they don't have a lot of friends to talk to.
Community clean up program (monthly)	• If the whole community had to stay involved in keeping it clean, people would be less likely to just chuck their garbage off the landing and might start to see how much we care about our community.
Moms and kids cooking night	
Childminding	• It helps moms, maybe somebody doesn't have childcare, maybe somebody isn't on social assistance, but isn't pulling in enough money to go out.
Special needs program for children	• Maybe there are people in here that have a child who's special needs too, so we could do like an arts and crafts night, you know a scrapbook night.
Brochures and pamphlets	• I never knew that I would be, my child or myself would be eligible for these things and you can't find pamphlets on them. Even if people have to type it up themself and fold it and stick it
Family counselling for teens	• It would be nice if there is someone as a drop-in for teens to talk to them about condoms and birth control and that.
Arts and crafts for children	• What would be good too for all the kids to interact together, is to do arts and crafts.
Safety talks for children	• If the kids were coming in here they should be taught about the consequences of finding stuff, or picking up certain items, and the bedbugs, or getting sick from that, it's dirty.
More activities for toddlers	• To help kids interact with other kids and maybe a timeslot for infants and toddlers for snack and stories time, not just for school age children. Just to help toddlers and infants develop.
Healthy start programs	• The ones that they do have are always far away.
More outings	
Exercise class or a yoga group	
Empowerment/encounter group	• Instead of having all the differences and fighting amongst each other, these encounter groups/empowerment groups might have a way of people connecting.
Drum groups/Aboriginal ceremony	• People could use supports, and I do advocate for the ceremonies. I think they have a really strong healing power.
A parenting course	• Basic parenting skills, good discipline skills, what's age appropriate. Getting together with a group of parents and sharing what works or doesn't
Babysitting course	• For the older kids, just to show them what things you could do with the babies.

APPENDIX **St. Anne's Family Resource Centre**

Suggestion	Why?
More outings	• A lot of times I find that the things that are going on here at the resource centre, I could basically do with my children in the comfort of my own home. • E.g. an indoor pool, an indoor golf place, miniature golf, videogaming, roller skating, beach trips, the free water parks, going to the park, a picnic, tobogganing, bowling.
Woman's group	• To come in and talk about our issues that we can't get rid of from the past.
Walking club	
Outreach	• Sometimes it takes a little bit more coaxing or convincing as to what they offer. • Get people's opinions at the door, like a survey, what they would like to see happening.
Outdoor activities	• E.g. soccer, where the parents can go and watch their kids play.
More activities for children	• Workshops for children, where they could actually try building something like a little house out of wood.
Longer hours	• If they were open more in the evenings, like, they could twice in one week. • A lot of the time when we're open, we're not open, either because we're closed for programs that not everybody can access, or we're closed because staff have training.
More staff	• Some of the employees can't be alone, so have someone be with them.
More summer activities	
Reconsider specific programs	• One thing I don't like is that when the resource centre is closed for specific programs that only cater towards, let's say infants, when there's maybe two people in the community that benefit from that program, and then everybody's shut out because of that.
Programming for kids at risk	• We have a lot of kids who are at risk, and if our community can't even reach out to them, who's going to?
Transportation	• The van made it a lot easier for the kids to go on outings.
Programs for teenagers	• I see the teenagers around, and we don't really know what to do with them, stuff for the moms and the teenagers, cause the moms are bored half the time and the teenagers, being bored, could end up really bad in the end.
Childminding	• If there was like some kind of program where childcare was available to do some things just for yourself, I think that'd be lots of fun. • Sometimes I can't even go on adult fun night, because I don't have a sitter or anything. • We used to be able to do crafts where there was someone there to look after the children and keep them occupied. They're not really doing the childcare because they just sit there and not participating with the children.
More activities	• E.g. Crafting, games day, bingo day.
Speakers, bringing in an Elder	• People enjoy a place where they have an opportunity to learn something new.
SEED Winnipeg Savings Circle	• You're matched three to one.

APPENDIX Tuxedo Family Resource Centre

Suggestion	Why?
A bigger budget for the community kitchen.	• We're limited to certain things or sizes —a lot of the families around here are a lot bigger than only four people.
Programs for youth	• There's not a lot for older kids to do here.
Afterschool programs for kids	
Bigger space	• More space for more people. • Since the community's so big, if we had a bigger space, 'cause the kitchen fits about 10 people, and there's more than 10 that come at a time.
Programs for adults	• She wants to learn how to drive a car, but it's $45 for one hour and a half. So she's looking for a way if I can have people volunteering to teach whoever needs that kind of services. • E.g. cooking, sewing, karate, driving school
Programs for younger adults	• More activities rather than just sitting down and drinking coffee, with the ladies just talking... something to do, rather than just sit there and listen to them talk.
Programs for kids	• E.g. swimming, basketball, football, hockey, soccer, tennis, golfing, ping pong, babysitting courses.
Gender-specific programs for children	• They should have programs for boys, programs for girls and then also co-ed.
Men's group	
More staffing	
Longer hours	
Sharing circle	• I'm into that, like more Aboriginal, more programs for children.
Intergenerational gatherings	• A get together with friends and family and mixed generations and get to know each other • If they had more potlucks, or we went out to a park all of us together and have fun there, instead of having a program just for the kids and just for the parents, if there was more programs for the families. • Family teams for sports.
School	• E.g. English as an Additional Language.
Halal meat	• At community kitchen or breakfast club, for example, a spoon, if you put it in the non-halal meat, you shouldn't be dipping it in the halal meat, so have everything separate.
Summer programming for children	• We need a lot of good programs, because two months the children have no school.
Food bank	• It would be good if they got a food bank here, because I know a lot of people don't have jobs or they have so much kids that they would appreciate just a little bit of extra food.
Childminding	• The whole day at home we are with the kids, and when we come here we want to spend an hour or so with the ladies so that we can discuss without the constant worry what the kid is doing.
Bigger programs	• Instead of making it a limited amount of people that can attend, making it bigger.
Sports programs	• E.g. baseball, basketball, walking, throwing a football, Frisbee, tennis, badminton

APPENDIX Westgrove Family Resource Centre

Suggestion	Why?
Sewing class	
Longer hours	• During the summer we're open really good for the kids, but in winter due to the school and having the resource centre only open certain times of the week, it's not that much. • Make the programs later in the afternoon.
More funding	
More outings	• Programs where we can get out as a family more often. • E.g. the beach, bowling, camping
Counselling	
Parenting classes	
After-school programs	• After-school something for the kids, programs to get them off the street.
Minutes for advisory/community committee	• If somebody writes down minutes, and then everybody gets a copy of it, because I've seen where they'll discuss certain things and then they'll say they didn't discuss them, or stuff gets left out.
Computers for the community	
More participants	

APPENDIX Woodydell Family Resource Centre

Suggestion	Why?
An exercise program	• Using one of the rooms for a treadmill and an exercise bike
Summer fun for children	• E.g. balloon tent, a sprinkler system set up like a water area
After-school homework program	• For reading with their parents and either they bring their homework, or have books available so that the children that are having difficulty get the help that they need.
Supports for parents of teenagers	• A program for adults that will help them out with their teenagers.
Food bank	• A lot of people who don't make a lot of money, that would help us out.
Programs for boys	• Especially for boys, cause they don't have too many. • I would really like to see something geared towards our young men because there's a lot of vandalism. • The older boys from 7-14, they need to have somewhere to be and something to do, 'cause otherwise all they're doing is running around looking for trouble.
More community volunteers	• Sometimes when I volunteer it's always the same people.
Activities for babies	• It would be nice to have a baby activity day, like where we sing songs and teach different things, and maybe do a scrapbook about it.
Programs for teenagers	• They have programs for littler kids and school age kids but they don't really have things for the teenagers.
More staff	• Often they are short-staffed, and things are changed and cancelled because they don't have things like childcare.
Counsellor	
Childminding	• Because you have kids, but you can't participate. Maybe we can set up a volunteer thing, where one parent will hang out with the kids and the rest of them can go work out.
Training for adults	• They have this child-minding training for people to take, it's a two day training course and they have a certificate, and you do your first aid, all inclusive.
Longer hours	• It would be great to have it open maybe from 9-4, and then we could implement more programs.
Limits on the clothing depot	• Because there's lots of boys around the ages of 6 and 8, so those kinda go really really fast.
Community kitchen	• I wish it was all year round, but maybe we can do things that don't require cooking with the oven, or do the food prep and we cook it at home?
Programs for dads	• For the parents — we need some programs to get some of the single dads or the dads that are staying home in.

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