



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

June 27, 2013

It's getting great: Government investment in social housing

Over the last few years, the Province of Manitoba has invested millions of dollars in renovating and providing resources in two public housing complexes in Winnipeg, Gilbert Park and Lord Selkirk Park. These investments have re-energized the two communities, and are making a positive difference in tenants' day-to-day lives.

Along with the programs and support offered by service agencies and the ongoing leadership and engagement of tenants working to improve their communities, the investments included complete renovations of each housing units; new Manitoba Housing Security presence, cameras and lighting; a new, client-oriented tenant services approach to housing provision and community development; and new community amenities, including play structures and parks, childcare and resource centres.

Gilbert Park is a family complex with 254 townhouse units. Tenants there like the renovations, and are especially pleased with the fences that Manitoba Housing put in around each house's yard. One tenant said

"The gardening is a good one, the flower beds that we're allowed to have is a good one, and the fences, I like, because then everybody's responsible for their own yard, and then it takes a lot of stress off of Manitoba Housing..."

Safety is a big issue for many tenants in Gilbert Park. Although many tenants feel comfortable walking around during the day, many said that they do not feel safe at

night. Manitoba Housing Security now has a presence in the community, and is working with community members to make the community safer. One tenant said:

"Biggest change I've seen is in the Security. Number 1, having it... Manitoba Housing Security has invested a lot of time and energy in building relationships, which is awesome."

The resource centre, which was established in the mid-2000s, also helps provide services to Gilbert Park. It creates a space for organizations to work together to address individual and community issues, and means that tenants can also easily be referred to other organizations.

One of Gilbert Park's strengths is its strong sense of community. One tenant noted that:

"It's nice to have a new park that's a nice place for the kids to play. With that as well is the common areas being more welcoming to families and community members, they're able to get out and converse with their neighbours more."

The renovations and new amenities have contributed to a sense of pride in the community. One person mentioned that:

"It's a better place to live, but it, like it's not, it had to do with the renovations, but I think it was like an overall feeling because there's still so many long term tenants there, who have been there since

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone
(204) 927-3200

email
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website
www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba

blog
www.policyfix.ca

twitter
@ccpamb

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before the renovations and they kind of uplifted those long term tenants, you know to be more prideful.”

Overall there is a sense that each small change moves the community in a good direction, and people are feeling more optimistic and hopeful now than three years ago. There is still a great deal of work to be done, but progress is being made and community members are looking forward to the next steps on the journey.

Lord Selkirk Park is primarily a family complex with 306 units, including a number of units for seniors and singles. Along with complete renovations of each housing unit, the Lord Selkirk Park Resource Centre, childcare centre, adult literacy program and Kaakiyow li moond likol were established as permanent agencies in the community.

Safety continues to be a common concern, although half of the tenants who were interviewed said they felt safer now than three years ago. Others said that it is somewhat safer, while others do not feel safe at all.

“The violence in the area, I noticed it’s gotten better but during the summer time it gets worse... Since they closed down the Merchants [Hotel on Selkirk], there’s a lot of people coming up this way and towards Main Street there, where those two bars are, there’s a lot of bars along there.”

Manitoba Housing Security has increased its presence in the area, and volunteers wearing bright jackets walk around the North End, keep an eye out for trouble. Manitoba Housing has made a concerted effort to remove individuals or households that were involved in gangs and drugs. Tenants noticed changes in who lived in the community, and see these changes as good for the community.

“New people moving into the area I live in, and getting rid of the bad ones that are not around here no more, it’s changed a lot, it’s a positive change... There’s more families in here, and plus, more cultures... ’Cause now

a bunch of cultures living together, playing together. Never seen that before.”

For many tenants, one big impact is the security that comes from having a stable, affordable, quality place to live.

“I’m stable and I’m in housing. So even if I, say I did get off of welfare and I had to find a job, they would probably lower my rent a lot, so it would probably be affordable, so that makes me feel a little more secure, knowing I wouldn’t be on the street.”

The renovations and other changes are also having an impact on the children in the community:

“It’s really affected my family... I see my daughter growing more, getting more comfortable, way more friendly. She’s more accepting of things. I like the way the school and community and Lord Selkirk Park and other things are working together for the same thing, which is helping, because each one is supporting each other.”

Although there is more work to be done, Lord Selkirk Park is living into its vision as a strong community where people can access the supports they need.

In both Gilbert Park and Lord Selkirk Park, the Manitoba Housing investment provided a significant spark to the ongoing work in the two communities. The renovations were a major investment, and provided a sign of commitment on the part of Manitoba Housing to the communities. As one staff at Lord Selkirk Park said,

“The renovations were the physical uplift that resonated into everything.”

Ending poverty is a long-term goal, which requires a multi-pronged strategy. Access to good quality, affordable housing is an essential component of this strategy. Implementing this strategy is a long process, but one that is worth continuing to invest in.

Sarah Cooper is the Researcher—Housing and Community Development at CCPA-MB.

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CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone

(204) 927-3200

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