

ideas THAT MATTER™

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Neighbourhoods Matter

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A quarterly to stimulate public discourse

This issue of *Ideas that Matter* provides our readers with a glimpse of a remarkable community in transition. Last year *Ideas that Matter* was engaged by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (one of North America's largest public housing landlords) to convene a broad-based city-wide forum on the 'revitalization' process of one of their largest holdings, the community of Regent Park.

We took this assignment on because of our interest in and focus on city autonomy. Over the last few years, we've been making the case in our convening and writing that as cities go, so too the regions, even countries in which they are located. We've been interested to take this down to the most basic level, to the most local, of what comprises a city: its neighbourhoods. Here is a prime example of one about to be set loose from the confines of a single authority. In this case, the entity holding the power (the Housing Corporation) espouses an aspiration, at least, of wanting to loosen its control and provide the framework for a more organic evolution of the neighbourhood.

This issue includes excerpts from a presentation by Garland Yates, a senior advisor at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who was the keynote speaker at the spring forum. The

Foundation, a national philanthropic organization, has been involved in long-term efforts of community building in deprived urban neighbourhoods in the U.S. Then there is extensive material on the challenges, and opportunities, in Regent Park, and an overview of urban revitalization efforts in other jurisdictions. We've included some additional ideas concerning poverty alleviation both on a national level and through neighbourhoods.

We've also included in this issue a speech given by Jane Jacobs a few years ago when she was awarded the first Vince Scully Prize in Architecture from the National Building Museum. In it she discusses how time can be an ally to a neighbourhood; we thought it was apropos, and provided a larger context for the ideas here. In addition, at the end of this issue is an essay by John Stapleton, a senior civil servant and policy expert in the provincial government, who became a sort of "artist-in-residence" with a social service agency. Some of his reflections are relayed here.

We invite your comments.

Mary W. Rowe
Editor

editor@ideasthatmatter.com

Executive Publisher: Alan Broadbent, C.M.
Editor: Mary W. Rowe
editor@ideasthatmatter.com
Assistant editor: Ann Peters
Layout/design: Sarah Gledhill

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Contributors to this issue include:
Laurie Green, Jane Jacobs, John Stapleton,
Garland Yates, Ann Peters, Mary W. Rowe

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Time and Change as Neighbourhood Allies

Jane Jacobs

The following is excerpted from an address made by Jane Jacobs on the occasion of her receiving the 2001 Vincent Scully prize from the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

We take it for granted that some things improve or are enhanced by time and the changes it brings. Trees grow larger; hedges grow thicker; fine old buildings, put to uses not originally anticipated, as this building has been, are increasingly appreciated as time passes. But some other things are too seldom enhanced or improved by the workings of time. On the whole city and suburban neighbourhoods have very chancy records of dealing well with time and change. I'm going to discuss briefly four common kinds of failure for city neighbourhoods and make a few suggestions.

My first suggestion concerns immigrants. Right now, in locations extending from the Virginia metropolitan fringes of Washington and the Jersey metropolitan fringes of New York to the Los Angeles fringes of Los Angeles, striving immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, China, the Philippines, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, are settling in woebegone city suburbs to which time has been unkind. Right now newcomers are enlivening dull and dreary streets with tiny grocery and clothing stores, second-hand shops, little importing and craft enterprises, skimpy offices and modest but exotic restaurants.

Either of two fates can befall these newly minted immigrant neighbourhoods. On the one hand, if members of the new populations and their children melt away as they find their feet, the

sequel for the bottom of the ladder is probably followed by yet another population. Ample experience informs us that neighbourhoods serving only as immigrant launching pads repeatedly take a step or two forward, followed by two or three steps backward, while dilapidation inexorably deepens with time.

In contrast, as many a Little Italy and Chinatown attest, along with less celebrated examples, immigrant neighbour-

hoods that succeed in holding onto their striving populations are neighbourhoods that improve with time, becoming civic assets in every respect: social, physical and economic. Progress on the part of the population is reflected in the neighbourhood. Increasing diversity of incomes, occupations, ambitions, education, skills and connections are all reflected in the increasingly diversified neighbourhood. Time becomes the ally, not the enemy of such a neighbourhood.



Photo by Mark Trusz, copyright Ideas That Matter

Self-respecting people, no matter what their ethnic origins, abandon a place if it becomes fixed in their minds that it is an undignified or insulting place to be. Here's my suggestion: smart municipalities ought to contradict those perceptions before they take firm hold – no time to lose – by making sure that newly minted immigrant neighbourhoods receive really good municipal housekeeping, public maintenance, and community policing and justice services, along with some respectful amenities. Traffic-taming and street trees come to mind, and especially quick, hassle-free permissions for people to organize open-air markets if they ask to, or run jitney services, or make whatever other life-improving adaptations they want to provide for themselves.

Simple, straightforward municipal investments of the kind just mentioned, and sensitive, flexible bureaucratic adjustments are minor in comparison with costs and adjustments demanded by city megaprojects. But if those minor costs and adjustments attach newcomers to neighbourhoods in which they can feel pride and proprietorship as they are finding their feet, and afterwards, they carry a potential of huge civic pay-offs. Time and change will then have been enlisted as allies of these neighbourhoods.

My second suggestion has to do with communities' needs for hearts or centres and with a related problem: damage done to neighbourhoods by commercial incursions where they are inappropriate. The desirability of community hearts is well recognized nowadays. Much thought goes into designing them for new communities, and inserting them into neighbourhoods that have lost community hearts or never had them. The object is to nurture locales where people on foot will naturally encounter one another in the course of shopping, doing other errands, promoting their causes, airing their grievances, catching up on gossip, and perhaps enjoying a coffee or beer under pretty coloured umbrellas.

Let's think a minute about the natural anatomy of community hearts. Wherever they develop spontaneously, they are almost invariably consequences of two or more intersecting streets, well used by pedestrians. On the most meager scale, we have the cliché of the corner store or the corner pub that is recognized as a local hangout. In this cliché, "corner" is a significant adjective. Corner implies two streets intersecting in the shape of an X or a T. In traditional towns, the spot recognized as the centre of things surprisingly often contains a triangular piece of ground. This is because it is where three main routes converge in the shape of a Y. In communities where historically much traffic was waterborne, a heart often located itself at the intersection of a main waterfront street

with the exit from a busy dock where passengers disembarked; when water travel declined, the heart moved elsewhere. Large cities of course have typically developed not only localized neighbourhood or district hearts, but one or several major hearts, and these also have almost invariably located themselves at busy pedestrian street intersections. All but the very smallest hearts – the corner store – typically provided splendid sites for landmark buildings, public squares, or small parks.

The converse logic doesn't work. Living, beating community hearts can't be arbitrarily located, as if they were suburban shopping centres for which the supporting anatomy is a parking lot and perhaps a transit stop. But given the anatomy of well-used pedestrian main streets, hearts locate themselves; in fact they can't be prevented from locating themselves. Of course good design can greatly enhance or reinforce them, as I implied with my remark about landmark buildings and public squares.

Now for the related problem of commercial or institutional facilities intruding into inappropriate places. From time to time I glance at plans and artists' renderings for charmingly designed residences with their yards, and I wonder where future overflow of commerce can be pleasantly accommodated. Perhaps this consideration doesn't matter in a village which is destined to remain a village. But it matters very much in a city neighbourhood or in a town or village which becomes engulfed by a city. In cities, successful hearts attract users from outside the neighbourhood, and they

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also attract entrepreneurs who want to be where the action is. These things happen. In fact, if these things didn't happen cities would be little more advantageous economically and socially than villages; they wouldn't generate urban surprise, pizzazz and diversity.

So with time and change, originally unforeseen commercial and institutional overflows can occur in city neighbourhoods. Where do they go? They may have to find and convert makeshift quarters. Occasionally the makeshifts are delightful, but most commonly they register as ugly, jarring, intrusive smears into residential streets where they were never meant to intrude. Watching this happen, people think, "the neighbourhood is going to the dogs." So it is visually – and soon, as a sequel, perhaps socially; in the end, perhaps economically as well. So much is this form of deterioration disliked and feared, that one of the chief purposes of zoning regulations is to prevent it. Even if the regulations succeed at holding time and change at bay, as enemies, any success they have comes at the

cost of squelching city potentialities, meaning convenience and innovations.

Here is where the anatomy of natural neighbourhood hearts can come to the rescue. One important adaptive advantage of open-ended main pedestrian streets forming intersections is that these streets are logical places to locate convertible buildings before there is a need to convert them. They can be a designed form of neighbourhood insurance, so to speak. For example, row houses can be designed to convert easily and pleasantly to shops, small offices, studios, restaurants, all kinds of things. Several joined together even convert well to small schools and other institutions. And of course many buildings originally put up for work, especially loft buildings, convert pleasantly to apartments or living-and-working combinations. In sum, I am suggesting that urban designers and municipalities should not think about the street anatomy without also providing or encouraging easily convertible buildings on those streets as opportunity to do that arises. This is a practical strategy for dealing with time and change as allies, not enemies.

My third suggestion concerns gentrification of low-cost neighbourhoods to which time has not been kind but which have valuable assets. Typically, the first outsiders to notice those assets are artists and artisans. They are joined by young professionals or other middle-class people whose eyes have been opened by the artists' discoveries. For a time, gentrification brings heartening renovations and other physical improvements into a neighbourhood that needs improvements, along with new people whose connections, life-skills and spending money can be socially useful to the neighbourhood's existing inhabitants, and often are. As long as gentrification proceeds gently, with moderation, it tends to continue to be beneficial, and diversifying.

But nowadays especially, a neighbourhood's period of what might be called its golden age of gentrification can be surprisingly short. Suddenly, so many, many

new people want in on a place now generally perceived as interesting and fashionable that gentrification turns socially and economically vicious. It explodes into a feeding frenzy of real-estate speculation and evictions. Former inhabitants are evicted wholesale, priced out by what Chester Hartman, urban planner and author, aptly calls "the financial bulldozer." Even the artists, who began the process, are priced out.

The eventual ironic result is that even the rich, the people being priced in, are cheated by this turn of events. They were attracted by what they perceived as a lively, interesting, diverse and urbane city neighbourhood – in short, by the results of gentle and moderate gentrification. This kind of urbanity is killed as the place becomes an exclusive preserve for high-income people.

Urban designers and municipalities should not think about the street anatomy without also providing or encouraging easily convertible buildings on those streets, as opportunity to do that arises. This is a practical strategy for dealing with time and change as allies, not enemies.

Time is not kind to high-income preserves in cities, unless they are small and cheek-by-jowl with livelier and more diverse neighbourhoods. One need only notice that many a poor and dilapidated neighbourhood contains once-beautiful, proud and ambitious dwellings, to see evidence that exclusive preserves of the rich do not necessarily hold up well in cities. The rich it seems, grow bored with undiverse, dull city neighbourhoods, or their children or heirs do. This is not surprising because such places are boring.

When gentrification turns vicious and excessive, it tells us, first, that demand for moderately gentrified neighbourhoods has outrun supply. By now, experience has revealed the basic attributes of such places – attributes artists discover: the streets have human scale, buildings are various and interesting, streets are

safe for pedestrian use and many ordinary conveniences are within pedestrian reach and neighbours are tolerant of differing life-styles. It is pitiful that so many city neighbourhoods with these excellent basic attributes have been destroyed for highway construction, slum clearance, urban renewal and housing projects. Nevertheless, some currently bypassed civic treasures do remain, and where they do, moderate gentrification – I emphasize moderate – could be deliberately encouraged to help take the heat off other places being excessively gentrified. Another way of adding to supply could be by encouraging judicious infilling of housing in neighbourhoods with human scale but not excessive compactness or density.

However, more than increased supply of desirable city neighbourhoods is needed

to combat socially vicious evictions of existing inhabitants. Artscape, a Toronto organization concerned specifically with protecting and promoting the interests of artists,

has come to the conclusion that the only sure way of preventing artists from being priced out of their quarters is ownership – in this case, ownership by nonprofit organizations. The same is probably true for many other existing inhabitants – ownership by cooperatives, community development corporations, land trusts, nonprofit organizations – whatever ingenuities can be directed to the aim of retaining neighbourhood diversity of population.

My final suggestion concerns the hazards of a somewhat different form of popularity. As I mentioned earlier, some community hearts and their associated street anatomies attract many outsiders and are widely enjoyed. This is not a bad thing; on the contrary. The hazard is this: as leases for commercial or institutional spaces expire, tenants are apt to be faced with shockingly increased rents. Property

taxes on the popular premises can soar too, instigating even further increases. If zoning prevents commercial overflow, so much the worse. The upshot is that many facilities are priced out of the mix. The hardware store goes, the bookstore closes, the place that repairs small appliances moves away, the butcher shops and bakeries disappear.

As diversity diminishes, into its place comes a kind of monoculture: incredible repetitions of whatever happens to be most profitable on that street at that time. Of course these optimists don't all succeed. Six of the seventeen new restaurants, say, die off rather rapidly, and five of the seven gift shops don't make it through the next Christmas. Into their places come other optimists who hope something will be left in the till after the debt costs on renovations and the incredible rents are paid. But starting gradually while times are good, and rapidly when they aren't, the street becomes dotted with vacancies. The old conveniences don't return to fill them. They can't afford to. All this is not owing to competition from malls or big boxes - but because success has priced out diversity.

A popular main pedestrian street running through my own neighbourhood is now afflicted by this dynamic. However, fortunately the hardware store remains, so does the book store, one butcher shop with its associated European grocery, and a large general bargain and outlet store. Not only do these remain, they flourish; one - the hardware - has doubled its space. The secret of their stability is that they own the buildings where they do business, so were not vulnerable to being priced out by soaring rents. The banks also remain; they own their buildings.

This has caused me to think about home ownership. When it became public policy in the United States to encourage home ownership, financial devices such a

long-term mortgages, small down payments, and mortgage acceptance agencies, primarily the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), proved successful at promoting the policy. Tract housing sold to homeowners under these arrangements was sprawling and otherwise ill-conceived for fostering much

These four suggestions may seem trivial compared with other municipal concerns such as racism, poor schools, traffic, unemployment, illegal drugs, inadequate tax revenues, crime, persistent poverty, what to do with garbage, how to lure tourists, whether to build another stadium or a convention centre, and so on.

Nevertheless, neighbourhoods that decline are pretty serious too. Two steps forward, followed by three steps back, is no way for a city to progress, and it doesn't help solve other municipal problems either; the pattern makes them more intractable.

The pattern isn't new. It has practical causes and unless these forms of civic ineptitude are faced and overcome, North American city neighbourhoods are as unlikely to deal well with time and change in the future

as they have been in the past. The suggestions I've made may not be politically possible. There may be better, or at any rate different, means of accomplishing similar aims. My purpose is to help stir up some creative thinking, now lacking, about effects of time and change on city neighbourhoods; above all to stir up thinking about how to enlist time and change as practical allies - not enemies that must be regulated out and fended off on the one hand, or messily surrendered to on the other. We might as well learn how to make constructive alliances with the workings of time because time is going to continue happening; that's for sure.

For more information on the Vince Scully Prize and the National Building Museum, see www.nbm.org. Jane Jacob's most recent book is Dark Age Ahead.



The Annex Neighbourhood, Toronto

sense of community, but that is another matter. At least, fostering ownership worked. Today some 65% of American households own their own houses or apartments, the highest percentage in the world.

This has made me wonder whether similar techniques would enable or encourage small businesses - especially those whose success depends heavily on location - to own their own premises. Of course not all would want to, and among those that did, all would not be able to; but that is also true of households. Why shouldn't it become public policy to foster business stability, and stability of city streets and neighbourhoods, by enabling enterprises to protect themselves, through ownership, against abruptly rising rents? In other words, I've arrived at much the same conclusion as Artscape: that ownership is the surest protection against being priced out of a place of work.

Photo by Sarah Gledhill, copyright Ideas That Matter

Neighbourhood Revitalization

An Overview

Laurie Green and Ann Peters

What does it mean? 'Neighbourhood revitalization' is a term increasingly heard in relation to projects aimed at reinvigorating urban communities that have experienced concentrated poverty and marginalization. It also reflects a shift away from what have been traditionally top-down, issue-specific approaches, to locally-based, comprehensive, community-building strategies to achieve sustained economic and social neighbourhood transformation.

In North America, these efforts, also known in the field as 'comprehensive community initiatives' (CCIs) represent a new methodology in which funders, policy-makers and program designers explore a range of approaches to revitalizing distressed neighbourhoods by addressing a number of inter-related issues such as housing, health and unemployment. One of the common threads running through efforts in various jurisdictions is the recognition that community conditions, also called 'neighbourhood effects', play a significant role in either perpetuating or reducing poverty. In other words, 'place matters'. Factors such as educational attainment, income level, and access to social services and resources intersect within given geographic boundaries in ways that circumscribe the ability of residents to prosper.

The terms 'community' and 'neighbourhood' are often used interchangeably in the literature of revitalization strategies. 'Community' may be delineated by a local geographic boundary, territory relevant to regional government as in the case of amalgamated cities, or a community of specific interest such as a visible minority population or persons with disabilities. However, in the context of urban revitalization, and particularly the U.S. comprehensive community initia-

tives, 'community' is usually defined at the neighbourhood level. Literature pertaining to both North American and European efforts has suggested that there is no single definition; what is needed is the flexibility to allow a community to be identified by the needs being addressed, and the people experiencing those needs.

The Caledon Institute of Social Policy has identified a number of 'key features' which characterize comprehensive community initiatives:

- They are comprehensive, addressing local quality of life issues, building new social and economic infrastructure and addressing the broader social and economic policy context;
- They are holistic, engaging diverse sectors to break down artificial boundaries of bureaucratic compartmentalization, and to identify links among various issues;
- They are multisectoral, encouraging partnering and collaborative work and funding arrangements;
- They are long-term;
- They are developmental, addressing the need to build community capacity;
- They are inclusive;
- They are concerned with process and outcome.

Experience in other countries

Neighbourhood or community revitalization efforts have developed at different rates in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and in Northern European countries such as Germany and France among others. Responses to the need for urban regeneration have varied due to the diversity of national governance structures, funding and local circumstances.

The United States

In the United States neighbourhood-based, comprehensive revitalization strategies have been taking place since the early 1990s. Launched in 1992 and 1993 respectively, the HOPE VI and Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community programs are initiatives of the U.S. federal government that marked significant shifts in policy. HOPE VI, funded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, combined grants for physical revitalization of older, 'severely distressed' public housing developments with funding for management improvements and supportive services, to promote the self-sufficiency of residents. The program addresses both the traditional 'bricks and mortar' concerns as well as more complex needs of low-income neighbourhoods to improve overall conditions. One of the chief objectives of HOPE VI programs is to decrease or avoid the concentration of very low-income families in one area in a bid to end stigmatization, and to increase the sustainability of the neighbourhood. Evaluations of HOPE VI initiatives are taking place in an attempt to questions such as the extent to which HOPE VI has achieved its intended benefits, the impact these programs have had on original public housing residents, and the lessons HOPE VI has for other public housing projects and policy in general. As this program has evolved in legislation, regulation, implementation and practice over the last decade, answering these questions is difficult. Some objectives have been met, for example, substantially improved physical structures, good urban design promoting safety, the de-concentration of poverty through a mix of income levels, the leveraging of additional funds for community infrastructure, and experimentation with a range of management techniques. However, there is some evidence indicat-

ing that the original residents of HOPE VI neighbourhoods have not always benefited from redevelopment. This has been partly attributed to a lack of meaningful resident participation in planning, insufficient focus on relocation strategies and revised screening criteria which have made it difficult for 'hard to house' households to qualify for the new developments.

The program is currently operating with substantially reduced federal funding, after the Bush administration had proposed eliminating funding altogether. Meanwhile, housing advocates, cities, and housing authorities continue to support the program; significantly, HOPE VI is currently the only major source of redevelopment funding available in the U.S. Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZs/ECs) is a 10-year federal community development program, begun in 1994, with legislation providing an array of performance grants and tax credits to designated distressed urban neighbourhoods and rural communities to create job opportunities and expand business opportunities. The inclusion of rural communities makes this program unique among other revitalization initiatives mentioned here. All of the communities are eligible for tax-exempt bond financing that offers lower rates than conventional financing to finance business development opportunities. There was considerable flexibility given by the federal government to program requirements and distinct differences among the designated sites due to varying strategic plans developed at the local level.

While the concept of 'enterprise zones' was initially conceived as a vehicle for comprehensive community development, it is now associated primarily with economic development. The National Community Development Initiative, a separate program in place since 1992, as a joint effort between large philanthropic foundations, major financial institutions and the federal government had focused attention on notions of local determination, civic participa-

tion, through the creation of nonprofit community development organizations. Subsequently, EZ/EC initiatives have brought the issue of neighbourhood-based development to the policy arena, supported locally through partnerships among municipal and county or state governments, local corporations, local nonprofits, and residents from the communities involved. The initiatives share several elements in their approaches to revitalization: identification of a geographically delineated community; a focus on comprehensive development that links economic, physical, and human development activities; support for a process of strategic planning based on community assets and available resources/needs; and resident participation in the governance structure for planning and implementing activities at the local level.

The Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI), launched in 1994 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, continues the evolution of urban revitalization strategies in the U.S. and is an example of several major long-term philanthropic initiatives currently underway in the U.S. RCI was a seven-year initiative supported by partnerships with community-based organizations in five urban communities to re-build 'deeply distressed' neighbourhoods. The development of RCI signaled a departure from earlier strategies in three significant ways: a neighbourhood versus city focus, a comprehensive initiative not defined by a single, specific issue (i.e. affordable housing), and the acknowledgement and inclusion of local participation by community residents. Local self-determination was regarded as an essential component of RCI. These features produced strategies that were less 'top-down' in nature and by putting more emphasis on building community capacity, combined the concepts of individual and community 'empowerment' with neighbourhood revitalization. A second ten-year initiative, Making Connections, began in 1999 in ten communities across the U.S. building on lessons learned from RCI.

United Kingdom

British cities were among the first in Europe to experience a wave of economic restructuring and social change, partly as a result of poor industrial competitiveness, outworn infrastructure and social tensions in inner cities. In the 1980s the UK was the first Western European to initiate a dedicated program to deal with inner city issues. This program was strongly influenced by policy dissemination from the US, and growing recognition of economic competitiveness between cities as part of the creation of a single European economy and general economic globalization.

In 1998, the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside, examined the causes of urban decline in England and made recommendations to deliver an 'urban renaissance' through the creation of a co-ordinated cross-government program under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and through local strategic partnerships. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund enables funding to the country's most deprived neighbourhoods, eighty-eight of which have been targeted through an index of social and economic indicators. The local strategy can include better outcomes in a broad range of areas including employment and economic performance, crime, educational attainment, health and housing.

Some of these principles are in evidence in Scotland's South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership (SLCPP). Membership of the SLCPP was widened to include direct service providers following the preparation of a community plan in an effort to achieve broader and more representative community planning partnerships. A basket of issues reflecting the social determinants of health, e.g. community safety, social inclusion and health, is being addressed through seven theme-based partnership groups, each of which deals with a specific issue affecting overall community well-being. Various mechanisms have been used to cultivate increased community capacity, including the use of a peer

education program for youth to deal with health and substance abuse issues, and the integration of opportunities for training and employment by two companies in the neighbourhoods involved. Initial feedback suggests that there are a number of ongoing challenges such as the administrative workload with respect to meeting performance indicators and creating a culture of openness and transparency across organizations operating in the joint partnerships.

France

The experience of neighbourhood revitalization in France has differed from that of the UK and the US in some significant respects. For example, perhaps the clearest model of large-scale state intervention is its area-based social regeneration program, as demonstrated by former president Francois Mitterand's, "Developpement Social des Quartiers" which deals with peripheral social housing and older neighbourhoods in need of revitalization. Both France and the UK have leaned more strongly toward targeted compensation for cities in decline than other democratized nations; growing urban protest movements, particularly in France and the UK, have been very influential in this regard.

The concept of regeneration in France has evolved from one of 'renovation' with a physical or economic bias, to 'renouvellement', with a much wider scope. The process has also moved from being one that is publicly-led and managed, to being a more varied and cooperative process, fostering partnerships with private and communal agencies and placing an increasing emphasis on social and cultural aspects and on the encouragement of innovation and participation. One regeneration project in Lille, the Roubaix project, is an example of renouvellement, comprising an assortment of ventures that have required flexible collaboration between actors, and extensive consultation and negotiation.

The mayors of French cities involved in regeneration projects have been able

to develop strategies for areas in need, backed up by an agency geared to delivery, with the skills to negotiate, coordinate and assure the finances required to make things possible. It has not been necessary for municipalities to wait for an initiative to come from somewhere else. In some cases a need to broaden the base for collaboration has generated the creation of management organizations called SEMs (societe d'economie mixte). These bring in a range of other financial agencies such as private banks, chambers of commerce and local agencies to an integrated team.

Funding for French urban regeneration projects comes primarily from the Caisse des Depots et Consignations, particularly its Urban Regeneration Fund and its system of low-interest loans for major urban projects. Founded in 1816 as a state institution, this public sector bank has the ability to plan and invest in long-term strategies linked into national finance plans.

The Loi de Solidrite et Renouvellement urbain (SRU) established in 2001 is the latest legislative program aimed at regenerating French cities. SRU pulls together various initiatives of the 1990s, steering them toward more comprehensive ways of grappling with social exclusion, a primary objective of the new *renouvellement urbain*. Strong mechanisms have developed to ensure the integration of policy between the various government departments.

Germany

Because of damage suffered during the Second World War and subsequent rebuilding, German towns do not exhibit the physical decay evident in the cities of other industrialized countries. However a combination of the decline of the industrial base, and the need to improve housing standards in the properties built in the immediate post-war era has resulted in urban regeneration in Germany having a more economic and social dimension than in other countries.

The main actors in urban regeneration here are the municipalities, which have been given special powers under the Federal Building Code to extend their activity beyond its original remit for slum clearance and war damage repair to broader goals of regeneration. In order to accomplish this special redevelopment, agencies are often created, known as *Stadtebauliche sanierungsmafnahmen*. These agencies, for example the STEG agency in Hamburg, are granted wide powers that allow them to acquire land in order to implement projects. The goals of regeneration in Germany are multifaceted: to improve or replace housing stock, to provide new amenities, to provide public infrastructure, and to improve transport systems. One element that may set Germany apart from other jurisdictions, is the degree to which its regeneration initiatives are democratic; at all stages from plan formulation to final implementation, efforts are made to involve every potentially affected person or group in consultations. Any relocation expenses or other social effects of programs are dealt with by a strong Sozialplan, to which the program is linked. Other levels of government contribute to the financing of plans, but are not intimately involved in the process.

The Canadian context

In Canada, neighbourhood revitalization, particularly in an urban context, has been recent and limited in scope. Accordingly, Canadian initiatives have had the advantage of gleaning lessons from revitalization projects in other jurisdictions. The Regent Park Planning Team, for example, has been able to draw from the experiences of neighbourhood revitalization projects in the U.S., particularly the HOPE VI program which shares some significant similarities in its focus on the large-scale re-building of public housing.

Other Canadian neighbourhood revitalization initiatives include projects in both Winnipeg and in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (using the joint federal/provincial/municipal approach of an

Urban Development Agreement) and the Vibrant Communities project. As in the case of most revitalization strategies, the Vancouver Agreement is focused on strategic initiatives that are comprehensive in scope, striving for increased community capacity and expanded collaborations and partnerships among stakeholders. It is also marked by the development of 'horizontal' teams across the partnership organizations, and a structure that encourages the strategic targeting of resources.

The Vibrant Communities project, an initiative of the Tamarack Institute, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, is focused on poverty reduction through community-driven initiatives. Like

many revitalization efforts, it highlights the importance of building partnerships. An important component of Vibrant Communities is its linkage of up to 15 communities across Canada to facilitate the sharing of experiences from different projects, thereby creating opportunities for different communities to learn from each other. Four key approaches contained in Vibrant Communities projects are: comprehensiveness and locally-based initiatives, cross-sectoral grassroots collaboration, identifying and developing community assets, and a commitment to learning and evaluation. All of these contribute to the goals of comprehensiveness and enhanced community capacity.

Canada differs in some significant respects from other jurisdictions

involved in revitalization efforts. Canada does not currently have a federal program that allocates funding specifically for urban regeneration projects, as does France; it also lacks a federal housing program to assist with the revitalization of social housing, unlike the American HOPE VI program. Instead, a greater reliance on creative partnering with municipalities, the private sector, foundations, and nonprofit organizations will be necessary to undertake revitalization projects. Significantly, Canada's municipalities are also lacking the degree of autonomy possessed by those in other places, such as Germany. Though talk of 'a new deal for cities' to find new sources of revenue and powers for municipalities has been taking place at both federal and provincial levels, concrete actions have yet to be taken to provide local governments with greater independence in developing their own strategies to address urban issues.

Since neighbourhood revitalization is a newer phenomenon in Canada than in the U.S. and Europe, there are still many questions yet to be formulated and answered regarding policies and practices being used. Canadian initiatives will potentially benefit from best practices taken from these other jurisdictions, as well as knowledge gained from within the Canadian context. Common to Canadian, American, British and German contexts is recognition of the importance of comprehensive approaches, multi-sectoral involvement, creative partnering, and community/resident participation in community-based projects. The extent to which these neighbourhood- or 'place-based' strategies can be successfully combined within a broader context of national and provincial social and economic policies and programs to achieve significant impact will be tested in Canadian neighbourhood revitalization efforts.

For more information:

For background documents, see *Neighbourhood Revitalization Resources*, p. 43

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Rebuilding Communities

Garland Yates

Edited from a presentation by Garland Yates of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to the "Creating a Community of Opportunity" conference convened by Ideas That Matter and held in Toronto on March 26th, 2004.

I started working at the Annie E. Casey Foundation nine years ago managing initiatives which were committed to building capacity within their communities to be the driving force behind their own change and revitalization. We're not really talking about building a community in the physical sense but about engaging in a process as partners and in alliances with people in a transformative way. What we try to illustrate is that when, as a foundation, we enter into partnership with a community, in order to be an effective partner, we have to pay particular attention to shifting the power dynamics that are inherent in coming to the table with a lot of money and trying to work with people who have a lot of need. It isn't so much writing a cheque any more, the state can do that. It's failing together, it's succeeding together, it's learning, it's fighting when we're disagreeing, it's struggling around notions of equity and

justice and injustice. So you can envision that when you're through this process, you're really not the same any more. We are not the same foundation. We think about our mission and our work and our relationships with families quite differently. I want to emphasize that point; it isn't just about how we sit down and create a partnership to get something done but how we embark upon a journey together that will end up changing how we see the world.

The Casey Foundation was founded in 1948 by a man named Joe Casey, who was the primary founder of the United Parcel Services (UPS). When he turned his attention to being a philanthropist, he wanted to really focus on helping children who were disadvantaged, children who were vulnerable, children who were at risk. He named the foundation after his mother, in part because he wanted it to reflect what had happened in their family as they were growing up and the knowledge and the passion that they felt for their mother and their siblings.

The foundation now has about \$3 billion in assets and we make about \$200 million a year in grants. That number probably puts us near the top of the list in terms of domestic foundations in the US that focus exclusively on children, which is our real concern.

Our work in this area started with the Rebuilding Community Initiative in 1994 which worked with five communities across the country: Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Denver and Washington, D.C. The idea was to focus on helping each community build its capacity to lead the change process within their community. After investing about \$25 to \$30 million in this process, our evolution as a foundation brought us to the framework of *Making Connections*, our second ten-year initiative. An organized community can do a lot of things better: it can build self-esteem, for example, but it can't do the task alone. How do we keep creating an environment for this organized, capable and, hopefully powerful community to be able to build alliances and relationships with other partners and stakeholders in a way that actually reflects a local movement? Not a local organization or a local strategy, but a local movement that is committed to improving the welfare of children and families by improving the environment in which they live.

The Underlying Framework and Principles

The Making Connections theory of change is based on the fact that the environment in which children live matters a lot to their growth and their positive development. Families also matter tremendously. When you listen to the 'clanging' of the media and the noises coming out of scholars and research, as a family you can feel under siege. We don't have very much positive, at least in our country, to say about low-income families; they are dysfunctional, they're drug addicts, they're uneducated, they don't care, they're unsophisticated. Well, inasmuch as a child is going to rely on this family unit for basic survival, these mes-

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Garland Yates

sages are very difficult to navigate and to find some kind of positive involvement in the relationship. So we've concluded that there isn't any way for us to concede, after a lot of years of experience with child welfare, that children are less

help those communities and their families make those connections to their communities, to the kind of family supports they need and to each other through social networks and organizations that will help them become stronger.

A very important overriding principle is that residents and other representatives of those affected most by community conditions should be primary actors in efforts that are designed to change these conditions.

than the family unit that is strong enough to help them. The state cannot raise kids. In our country we have a lot of evidence that suggests that inexperienced or unenlightened social workers can't go in and decide in a very complex situation – whether it be cultures and diversity or thought and ideas – what is really right in the long run for children. So the idea is that for the immediate safety of children, community infrastructure is absolutely critical. And in that context, families are essential.

Our notions are, let's focus on revitalizing the neighbourhood that children have to grow up in and then let's provide the kind of strengthening support to families as they engage in raising children. That's the place we've come to as a framework of the theory: children do better when families do better and families do better when neighbourhoods are strong. This framework is also based on the premise, from our own research and the research of others, that families who live in these very vulnerable neighbourhoods are basically isolated and disconnected. They are disconnected from the economic opportunities that they need to build wealth and assets and to generate income. They are disconnected from each other because of culture, because of language, because of all kinds of orientation. They live in the same spot but they don't relate to each other often beyond a very small circle. They are disconnected from the kind of services and supports or institutions that provide them their well-being. So our commitment ought to be to

physical safety, children will be healthier and prepared to learn when they go to school, and neighbourhoods will be safe, nurturing places in which to live. To achieve this we are committed to a strategy that says, "Empowering and mobilizing local movements that are dedicated to these notions."

A very important overriding principle is that residents and other representatives of those affected most by community conditions should be primary actors in efforts that are designed to change these conditions. Now why would we conclude that? One, families really have the most to lose. They also have many strengths and assets. I don't think it's too difficult to plan what to do when you have enough resources to do it. My respect is for people who have to do things that they don't have resources for. They have three kids that need shoes and they can only buy one. The light bill, the telephone bill and the rent need to be paid but they can only pay one. They need to buy groceries for a whole week but they can only buy for a few days. How could you face those challenges day in, day out? You grow to respect their playing skills, their strength to face things that they can't get done. The power that it

takes to be able to look your children in the face and say, "I'm going to have to get this one a pair of shoes this week and maybe next week, I'll get somebody else a pair." To me, there's power, there's a capacity and the assets are there.

What we've witnessed too often in our country is that we go in and expend a lot of resources and money to rebuild a community only to see it 10 years later back in the same position. So sustainability is critical and then there isn't any way to avoid the fact that residents must play a primary role. We learned that from working with Rebuilding Communities but we've also learned that from the last 30 or 40 years of trying to do serious urban development. We always ask ourselves, "Why didn't we give more?" or "Why do these things seem to never change?" We're saying probably the missing part of the equation is that the capacity of the community is not [developed] so they didn't get to be a player. And I'm looking at the distinction between being a player and being a participant. When we have processes that invite people to give their input, we need to help them build the capacity to be a player in the implementation (the planning and design) and the

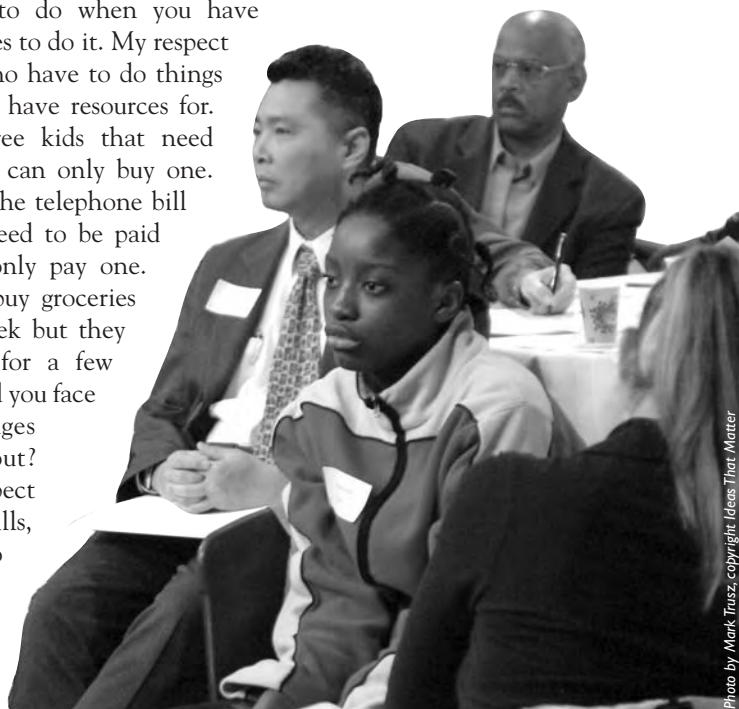


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evaluation (an overall way of judging which lessons will be gleaned and what successes are ultimately achieved). Many of the community change initiatives in our country have not been community-driven or have not been done in partnership with the community. For the most part, they've been either funder-driven, which means they've been foundations, government or other powerful external organizations to the community or they're professionally-driven, led pri-

bilities and the kind of relationships we need and to establish a mechanism that can help ensure mutual accountability of all the players. It also means creating opportunity through practice and celebrating the kinds of individual transformation, community transformation and institutional transformation that will be needed. Also, we've got to be committed to learning as a part of the success before you begin. And again, we've got to maintain a strong commitment to results.

We try to make guiding principles serve as a covenant; an agreement between the participants and the players...Are we going to be transparent in a power analysis and the inequities that exist within the initiative itself?

marily by planners or other professionals relying on professional skills and capacities, purchased or funded, external to the community.

So we have these principles about the value of community, we've got these principles that relate to us being transformed in this process and at the core, we are about taking action and mobilizing for results. In our country the trend that's emerging is a focus on outcomes and results. The irony for me is that our institutions have now reached this conclusion and so now results and outcomes are important. But they weren't when I started working in community; it was the families that wanted outcomes and results. In my very first job, in the early '70s working with communities, people wanted me to produce. They wanted housing. And I don't mean they wanted me to produce it alone, but they wanted me to take some responsibility and be accountable for better housing and for improved education.

So we want to make results and action the key cornerstone. This requires a new knowledge about issues and the skills to enact the changes that are needed. It requires a strong, capable organization, not necessarily an entity but organization to provide clarity of roles and responsi-

ing principles emerge from an exercise of just talking about it. But we try to make guiding principles serve as a covenant; an agreement between the participants and the players, not about what we're going to do outside the room, but how we're going to interact with each other. Are we going to be transparent in a power analysis and in the inequities that exist in the initiative itself?

We try to use principles and values to answer three fundamental questions. How do key players interact with one another in the process of creating this change? What is the responsibility that we have to each other in terms of supporting and owning the decisions that we make collectively? How does the initiative model become democratic, that is, values that we espouse around equality, fairness and justice? By emphasizing these things, we attempt to lift the guiding principle from a conversational process to a level of understanding that we refer to as the covenant.

Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons, if you couldn't tell already, is about the centrality of residents to change in their community. It is formed by our experiences and a variety of initiatives that have undertaken this work, all of which

As a way of bringing into play these notions, you've got to have a strong set of guiding principles. Often guid-

we would refer to as 'comprehensive community change initiatives'. In reality these initiatives are quite diverse and exist across a wide spectrum of possibilities. We, along with most other people in our country, started out trying to figure out what is the magic bullet for poverty. We came up with things like, 'if the neighbourhood is safe' -so we'll concentrate on neighbourhood safety. Or, 'if the education system is functioning well' - so we'll concentrate on education. And I think we have reached a point of accepting that there isn't any one magic bullet. The idea is relationships and alliances and accountability and respect and working together to achieve a common set of outcomes.

Community-change initiatives are dynamic initiatives. They are in a constant state of flux. The sheer number of participants, activities and projects in and of themselves result in constant change. If it is always changing, it is very hard to predict what's going to happen. So the notion that you can start out saying, "We will do A and that will lead to B and that will lead to C and that will lead D," has been dispelled by our experience. What happens more is that there are these spheres of activities and processes that happen and they happen when they need to happen, not in a linear way. So something that you think should happen after B, may not happen 'til later in the process, or vice versa. So what we've learned is to relax our notions about a linear process.

Community-change initiatives are unpredictable. Change happens at every point in time but not along predictable paths. Movement comes in bursts or sometimes not at all. The moment in which something just clicks or someone just gets it, or an idea catches on, cannot be claimed. I think in looking at some of the activities around Regent Park, I sense some of that reality. Somebody started 13 or 10 years ago, and they wanted something to happen. They might think because it didn't happen in the next couple of years, that they were a failure. Yet

I think continuous movement has gotten the initiative to where it is. So even though it may not have followed a plotted course, it's happening. And so we have to be open to that.

The elements of community change initiatives – people, groups, programs and organizations – are interrelated and entwined. This often leads to a complicated web of relationship behaviour and influences. The structure does not limit itself to linear or hierarchical patterns but actually forms spheres of influence that have cause and effect. Community-chaired initiatives are transforming and their interactions result in irreversible change: new leaders are developed, skills are built, knowledge is gained. Participants can never go back to where they started. We've seen it happen when people are in a setting or in an initiative together and they start seeing each other at a different place. In one of the com-

they don't go back. And so when the city government and the community interacts, for example, in a way to create change and feel good about it, relationships are changed forever. They don't go back to being what they were. So being prepared for that is part of the community-change process. And in fact, looking forward to it can be a motivating factor.

Control and order in community change initiatives are emergent. It's very difficult for them to be predetermined. Community change initiatives self-organize allowing new patterns and structures to establish, replacing older ones that become obsolete. These structural changes cannot be designed necessarily from the outside. In other words, a common saying that we use is, 'trust the process'. Now that's very difficult for everybody for obvious reasons. But for us, acting together, thinking together, working together, playing together is for work.

prudentially as valuable, credible information for planning, and as evidence of the achievement of results. Traditional practice would rely solely on community indicator data. However this is typically in relation to numbers, and resident wisdom tends to add depth to understanding what numbers alone cannot achieve. And as I said earlier, residents should be among the primary actors in the process of imagining and realizing their own future. So what we have to do is to remove this elite wall as a way of deciding who has something to contribute or not by figuring out how to quickly credential residents' knowledge and wisdom and to help them benefit economically from that credentialing. There is a depth of understanding that numbers alone can't achieve.

I'm going to list a few examples that illustrate this. We've got to see communities and residents as leaders, but then we have to work with them to help them grow and become leaders and not be threatened. We've got to provide opportunities – and this is an interesting one that we've come to embrace and understand a little bit more – for residents to challenge our knowledge, to challenge the tools that we think work, and to challenge the solutions that we think ought to be in play, and at the same time create their own. We've got to actively engage residents in issues of power and within that, the role of place, bias, culture and gender as a part of structurally changing the community. We're going to be constantly focusing on the achievement of meaningful and lasting results, recognized and celebrated in the community. So at the foundation, we may think that it's a substantive issue, but if residents don't share that belief, then we've got a caution, and we've got to question our definitions of success.

Addressing Structural Barriers

I want to mention some structural barriers that I think if left unattended, will systematically undo the progress that we might achieve. Individual transformation is needed which means that people



Carolyn Acker, Executive Director of the Regent Park Community Health Centre asks a question

munities I work in, the Vietnamese started seeing the Somali group [differently]. The Somalis started seeing other Asian populations differently. Wealthy people started then seeing people who are not as wealthy differently. Those things are irreversible. These perceptions will change as the relationships change,

Trust the process. And try not to orchestrate it or fabricate it too much.

We've got to be serious and seek very creative and innovative ways to credential resident wisdom. Resident wisdom is the intentional process of validating people's experience and credentialing them

do need to think about what change they need to be making within themselves. But that's not the complete answer. If you learn how to act better on a resume, if you become a better parent, all of that is part of the equation, but it won't make racism go away. It will not make the inequities that we experience in terms of providing public services to these communities go away. So we've got to think about these structural issues and then part of the movement that is mobilized to carry out the change initiative has to grapple with these kinds of structural impediments to real change.

[Support for] community development and anti-poverty issues, for the most part in our country, is categorical - which often results in resources and opportunities flown into the community in fractional and unconnected ways. So you think about that. What we've learned in building community initiatives, is that because these little pots of money and resources flow into the community around categorical ideas, they create sub-constituencies or mini-constituencies in the community that have to compete with each other to survive. So in effect, what we've done with our resources from the outside source is we've disorganized the community, contributing to its dysfunction and downfall. Before we can really take a serious step towards reversing it or changing the community on a permanent basis, we've got to look at our own behaviour [as a funding organization] in that regard. We've got to reduce the number of institutions with outside resources, to reduce the categorization of our support and encourage a collaborative effort at the community level that rallies around an agenda, a framework for accountability, and an elected authentic leadership base that is empowered to partner with other institutions. Otherwise, we never know who we're working with. Everybody says they're in the community, and in large part this dynamic is fuelled by our behaviour, not the community's. The community is distracted; they're trying to organize themselves to get our resources but

in the end, they become unorganized and it becomes a lot harder for them to make strategic use of our resources.

In terms of the patterns of institutional disinvestment in the community, can it be reversed? In our country, if the local government is not delivering high quality public services, not much can happen. If banks or lending institutions are leaving the community, we're going to have trouble building new houses and creating enterprise. So we can't ignore these things as we think about long-term community change. Another separate structural issue, and I know you hear a lot coming from south of the border on this question, is that racial discrimination results in a powerlessness that perpetuates poverty. So [if we are] talking about rebuilding, strengthening and change, and we are not willing to address these things, we are limiting our conversation.

Another structural impediment is the economic exploitation that happens in our communities which prevents families building wealth and assets. We've devised a kind of capital market into these kinds of tiers. The tier that operates in our community is what we call a 'sub-prime' market. I have this image when I think about sub-prime market: the badlands in the West where anything goes. The justification for a place to become a sub-prime market comes because you don't have any credit and economic ability, and if services do flow into your community and everybody's willing to go along and buy on these terms, so be it. Otherwise these communities wouldn't have resources. Well, in a very subtle perhaps but profound way, market activities and behaviours like that end up stripping wealth and assets from the families that have been able to accumulate them. So if you built up some equity in the hope that you're going to use it to invest in

other business and that equity is stripped away because someone made a predatory loan, then we are building wealth on the front end and watching it be taken away on the back end. To me this is a little bit like putting water in a bucket with a hole in it.

So if we're talking about homeownership, about micro-enterprises, about entrepreneurial activities, we're going to talk about the protections that we need to be putting in place so that people can keep more of their wealth. In the end, a powerful community with leadership, skills and capacity is simply crucial to a community being able to sustain progress.

So in closing I guess our notion is that this whole business of community building and community transformation is really about the transformation of heart.

Another structural impediment is the economic exploitation that happens in our communities which prevents families building wealth and assets. So if you built up some equity...and that equity is stripped away because someone made a predatory loan, then we are building wealth on the front end and watching it be taken away on the back end.

It's really about us transforming ourselves as individuals, of our families transforming themselves, helping people to transform their communities and transforming the institutions that we work with so that we can become a more useful partner. And in the aggregate, if we can mobilize institutions and partners who believe and share these notions about how you build a community and sustain it over time, and where the conditions for children and family can happen, then we'll have mobilized this local movement to make change happen and make it permanent.

The following questions and answers have been selected from an extensive interactive session which followed Garland Yates' presentation.

Q How can communities educate funders? Funders have their own ideas about what they want their money to do and maybe you luck out if the community is in line with that. But what if the community has a different understanding of what its goals are? How can we educate each other so that the priorities actually are the local organic ones.

A One, I think that it is important to build alliances from the community standpoint, with funders who may already get it. And then get those funders to help convene forums and events where there's interaction between community and funders. I think as we become more conservative politically and as we need to start talking about the return on our investments as foundations, the environment is self-created.

Now in another context, education might be more of a verb than a noun. One of the most successful communities in our initiative is the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative in Boston. What happened there was a funder came to the community and decided that it was going to invest a lot of money in a nonprofit organization that was delivering services. They had a public meeting to announce this and the community took that meeting over and began to illustrate to the funder why it was important to think about more than programs and equipment and capacity-building for nonprofits because the neighbourhood conditions were not categorical and they were interrelated. Their message was forceful and uninvited at the time, but it had such an impact on the funder that they started thinking about how they could use a relatively small amount of money to leverage a much larger community rebuilding process. That's how the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative was born. So on the one hand, we should look for allies that are in a friendly community share our values. But on the other hand sometimes we just have to agitate and reorganize and take our responsibility to educate by pushing people through change.

Q So do you think there might be a time when a community would say no to money?

A I think communities always say, "Don't lead with money." In our initiative, people always say, "Don't start the conversation by putting money on the table because you set off a mad scramble between organizations and residents who are trying to survive. Lead with resources to help us get organized around our own agenda and let that create the framework for how investment is done."

Q Since you've had experience with lots of cases in the past that worked, maybe you could give us one example of a funding model that's worked with foundations and various levels of government contributing to a successful community initiative.

A I'm not so sure I am aware of any that have completely worked, but we've tried to take bits and pieces of things that have worked. What we are trying to construct in Denver [one of the Making Connections sites] is a consortium of funders, including federal government, state government, local government and foundations who will not necessarily put their money into one pot, because that's very difficult to do to start off with—but they're willing to take the programs that they're responsible for delivering in these neighbourhoods and allow those programs to be tailored so that they can be held accountable to the community's set of outcomes. So the point is to create an opportunity to blend these resources by letting them go to activities and projects that will be framed to achieve the outcomes that the communities identified. Now when I say bits and pieces, in several places local agencies have received permission from local government, who in turn have gotten permission from state and federal governments to create blended pots of money that can be used at a local level to go towards initiatives like these. At one there was a very popular notion that you

could create these de-categorized pots of money to let that happen. I have not seen or read much information that suggests that they are so successful at what we're trying to do. We're really trying to reverse the notion and not just end up with the blended pot of money but decrease the amount of influence that outside institutions exert on that pot of money. And so we're trying to creep at it one bit at a time, so we're saying, "Okay, first, blend your program objectives with ours." The idea is to have this money that really is designed to respond totally to neighbourhood priorities.

Q There's an issue that has not yet come up today with respect to building assets. One of the most important points is that of financial literacy. Banking institutions are not prevalent in this field. However, on the other hand, there are a number of large banks who are interested in a financial assistance program for affordable homeownership because they see economic benefits. It's not just a social benefit, it's the economic benefit. In terms of the asset-building initiatives that your foundation is involved in, can you comment on the importance of these two things?

A We do promote asset-building through things like individual training accounts in partnership with banks and credit unions. However, one of the things that the data is suggesting to us is that residents are not using these services as much as we would have anticipated. During a consultation last summer, a couple of things emerged that that we're challenged to work on. One is that our notions about financial literacy are very middle-class oriented. They are based on an assumption that people make bad decisions because they don't know better. When we got into this consultation, we found out quite different. People make bad choices because they don't have an alternative. The immediate challenge financially for families in our neighbourhoods is they need access right away to small amounts of money. They don't need \$5,000. They need to be

able to find \$500, \$200, \$300, and if we really want to help them, we've got to figure out how to deal with that. Financial literacy campaigns are really about helping people get to a point of either opening a savings account or a bank account. They don't help people understand the basic economic factors operating in their neighbourhood. So they're not any wiser financially except they may know how to balance their chequebook better. How we can push the boundaries of how we've been approaching financial education to accommodate more of a popular economic curriculum?

On the asset-building side, especially homeownership which we're trying to grapple with as well, one of the challenges we find is that overwhelmingly the housing need in our neighbourhood

inadvertently become a tool for displacing people. We've got to explore various forms of ownership that are both individual and collective, like co-ops and land trusts and mutual housing associations. We just can't be so narrow and traditional about homeownership.

Epilogue

The last thing I would say is, why neighbourhoods? When we looked at the data, it was so obvious that poverty is not spread all over the place. It is concentrated. And it is concentrated geographically, and we know that from just looking at a couple of things. When we look at people who are in prison and who are being released, it's startling to do this kind of pin map and see where these folks are going. In our cases, they are always

spots. So for us, if we want to deal with poverty, if we want to break it up and try to dispense it or get rid of it, we've got to be serious about neighbourhood. The challenge is that the universe that we're playing in in our country increasingly is a regional universe. Poverty is spreading out a little bit. It's not totally just concentrated in inner city neighbourhoods, but it's now being concentrated in what we call inner-ring suburbs as well. So there has to at some point be a connection between the neighbourhood work in a policy context and the regional work. And the policies are interrelated for several reasons, one of which is, if we want to move from just getting programs to systemic change as a way of achieving larger scale change, then we've got to think in a context beyond the neighbourhood. So that's the dilemma that we have to face.

Garland Yates is Senior Associate of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private foundation based in Baltimore, Maryland. Garland is responsible for managing the Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) program activities, i.e., planning and coordinating the delivery of needed technical assistance, planning conferences and other initiative meetings, making grants that help expand the knowledge of comprehensive initiatives, and grants that help strengthen the capacity of the community building field in general. Prior to joining the Foundation in January 1995, Garland worked with a number of national organizations providing organizational development and management assistance to nonprofit organizations in local communities. Garland has served on the boards of many organizations, including the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the Management Assistance Group, the Discount Foundation and on an advisory committee to the Fund for Neighbourhood Initiatives of the John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



Garland Yates, Annie E. Casey Fdn, Hon. John Godfrey, Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Diane MacLean, Regent Park Resident Council, Derek Ballantyne, Toronto Community Housing Corporation

is for rental housing. We're encouraging families to think about homeownership as an asset-building base - which is right, we don't have any problem with that - but we've got to extend that because it isn't very popular in our neighbourhoods for obvious reasons. So we've got to extend it and not let homeownership

going back to our neighbourhoods, and they are coming back with bad health issues and so forth. When we looked at where the poor performing schools are, when we look at poor housing conditions, when we look at people who are economically disenfranchised, all of those pins go into these concentrated

For more information:

Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org

Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative

The Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative (DSNI) is a community-based organization in the Roxbury/North Dorchester neighbourhoods in Boston and was one of the five communities across the U.S. funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative in 1993. With a population of 26,000 people, the neighbourhood has been one of the poorest in Boston with over a third of residents living below the poverty line. The neighbourhood is ethnically diverse with 37 percent African American, 29 percent Latino, 25 percent Cape Verdean, and 7 percent white.

"Looking at the Dudley Street neighbourhood in the early 1980s, what you saw was low income, high crime, poor schools, burned-out buildings, acres of vacant lots used as dumping grounds, abandoned cars, and the night lit by fires. The smell of smoke hung in the air, mixed with the stench of rotting trash"¹. In 1984, residents and agency leaders, in conjunction with a local funder, came together to reverse this decline and form DSNI. The organization's mission is: "To empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create and control a vibrant, diverse and high quality neigh-

bourhood in collaboration with community partners".

At the outset the DSNI established a governance structure to ensure participation from a wide array of stakeholders. Its board of directors is comprised of 16 residents from the area (4 from each major ethnic group), 5 nonprofit agencies representing the health and social services field, 2 community development corporations, 2 small businesses, 2 religious organizations, 3 youths, and 2 other nonprofit organizations. In 1987 through a community visioning process, the DSNI developed an overall community plan which identified key themes for a revitalized community: a thriving local economy, environmental health, resident leadership and adequate services for children, youth and families.

As a result of work over the past 20 years, the neighbourhood has undergone a transformation: to date, 300 of 1300 vacant lots have been transformed into affordable housing, community gardens and public spaces have been constructed; a community land trust was created and through state designation acquired "power of eminent domain" to take over privately owned vacant and abandoned land within the area; local commercial

initiatives and youth programs such as the Nubian Roots, and a summer youth job program have been created; the area now has a neighbourhood community centre, a neighbourhood elementary school, and an annual multicultural festival. DSNI runs a Resident Development Institute, which provides members of the community with skills and knowledge necessary to lead the revitalization.

As of 2003, the DSNI has a membership of 3700 residents with a board of directors elected every two years. In 1999, John Barros, who had been one of the first youth representatives in the early organization, became the new executive director of DSNI. "Even more significantly, the neighbourhood has changed most in intangible ways since 1984. Where once there was isolation and fragmentation, there is strong neighbourhood identity. Where there was once powerlessness, there is community control. Where there was once that 'perception of a future already looted', there is a vision and plan of action. There is Dudley pride."²

Endnotes:

¹ Putnam and Feldstein, p. 77

² quoted from *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighbourhood* by Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, South End Press: 1994; see www.dsni.org/Community%20Information/demographics.htm

For more information:

Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative, www.dsni.org

Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org

Better Together: Restoring the American Community, Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, Simon & Schuster, 2003 (see Chapter 4: Grass Roots in the City)

Background

on the Neighbourhood of Regent Park, Toronto

Mary W. Rowe

In 2001, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) began a planning process to revitalize Regent Park, one of its largest and oldest housing projects. Built in the 1940s as an enclave of publicly supported rental housing, Regent Park has evolved into one of the most well known (at times even ‘infamous’) low income neighbourhoods in Canada. Dominated almost exclusively by rental units owned by a single landlord, and planned in such a way to discourage integration with the areas adjacent to it (i.e. the closing off of the original through streets) commercial activity and other forms of diverse land use has not developed, and the community has remained predominantly poor, with a mean income less than half of that of the city as a whole. What has developed, though, is an elaborate social structure of cultural groupings and social service agencies, and for many (including some who have lived and/or worked there for over 20 years), a strong attachment to their dwelling and surroundings, as home. The age of the buildings has necessitated they be re-built. The TCHC has undertaken to do that and at the same time remediate the structural mistakes that, in light of present understandings of city planning, has prevented Regent Park from developing into a more diversified community that would offer residents the ranges of choice and opportunity more prosperous urban neighbourhoods do.

The absence of through streets has meant that most Torontonians have not seen inside Regent Park, their perceptions principally shaped by its less attractive fringes where public transit and car traffic is routed. Municipal services like fire protection, garbage and snow removal, even policing, have been managed by the housing authority, (which

also manages 350 high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings, as well as about 800 houses and duplexes throughout the city), rather than the same civic services the rest of the city receives. There are no mail boxes in Regent Park. There are no cafes. All of this has contributed to a sense, by those who live ‘within’ it, of isolation, and disenfranchisement. The media’s coverage of various negative events taking place in the Park has often masked from the city-at-large the many positive attributes of the community.

The physical layout of Regent Park has hampered the kinds of movement and interchange, of vibrancy and interconnection, that a neighbourhood better integrated with its host city thrives on. The sharing works both ways: the adjacent neighbourhoods and the city as a whole have much to offer the Park, and its residents have much to offer them. Hampered by the absence of natural interplay (shared arterial roads for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, corner cafes), these kinds of lateral connections have not always been smooth and productive. Neighbouring areas have grown weary of negotiating with an absentee landlord. Some continue to be fearful of a concentration of lower-income people, believing that it makes their adjacent neighbourhoods less safe and devalues the worth of their homes.

Following an extensive community engagement process, in 2003 TCHC approved a redevelopment plan (see www.regentparkplan.ca). The plan proposes to replace the current 2100 rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units, and add 2700 home ownership units, of which approximately 500 will be affordable to households with lower incomes. The entire 69-acre site will be developed in six phases over a 12-year period, with

construction of the first phase beginning in 2006. One of the most compelling comments heard from residents of the existing community, was their wish that the new development look much like that of other downtown neighbourhoods. Therefore, the plan is to encourage the greatest diversity of built forms, typical to an urban neighbourhood, with mid-rise and mixed-use buildings along main streets and lower-rise residential units within the smaller, internal streets. In addition to housing, the mixed-use buildings will provide space for a variety of potential uses, including retail and commercial, which up until this time have not been present in the Park. Needed community and institutional space will be located primarily in buildings that provide level access on main streets, and some in buildings surrounding a large, centrally located, public park.

TCHC, and its landowner the City of Toronto, recognize that the redevelopment of the public housing stock also presents an opportunity for the creation of a healthier community overall. By re-introducing streets and public parks, re-integrating Regent Park into the surrounding city, and making the area more diverse and attractive to small businesses and other commercial activity, advocates of the redevelopment are hopeful there will be more economic opportunities for the predominantly low-income residents, and a dramatically improved quality of life.

Over the years, various social service agencies have emerged to serve the needs of the residents. Agencies located within the neighbourhood offer a wide variety of programs including English as a Second Language and other settlement services, youth recreation programs, employment and training programs, and support for

single parents. Over 50 social service agencies operate daily in the Park. Serving the neighbourhood for many years is one of the country's most innovative community-based health centres, the Regent Park Community Health Centre (with over 400 people on its waiting list). Faith communities, initially Christian now Muslim and Hindu and others, have found worship and fellowship space. There are two elementary schools, but no secondary school (the population numbers don't seem to warrant it) hence teenagers must leave their neighbourhood and finance their own travel to continue at school. For this reason, and other discouragements, over the years the number of teens quitting high school climbed. The community responded by creating an innovative program of mentoring to encourage high school students to complete their secondary studies and continue. (See page 29 of this issue for more information about this program, Pathways to Education).

As the composition of the residents of the Park has changed (waves of immigration and other social trends) the programs and services offered by the social service community has also changed. The average age of an agency in Regent Park is 28 years. On the one hand, this speaks to the resilience and stability of an elaborate network of community supports. But it also points to other challenges, posed by entrenchment, and the inherent ambivalence any organization might have towards proposed changes to the composition of a neighbourhood that might disadvantage their clients. For decades these agencies have been the principal advocates for the residents of the community; as the conditions for residents to self-organize were not present. Many agencies complain of being chronically under-funded, and resent scarce public resources being consumed by the redevelopment while their existing programs, to serve the present population, need greater support.

The redevelopment of Regent Park is

requiring agencies operating within it to re-examine their own mandates, programs and services, in light of the long-term demographic changes projected for the area. Collectively, they are working with TCHC and City planners to determine what the future social service needs of the community will be, as the newcomers who chose to settle in it may not require the same range of services currently offered (e.g. ESL classes), but instead have an expectation of other community amenities (e.g. access to ice time).

As the area has fallen into disrepair, tenants, many of whom are newcomers to Canada and Toronto and hence lack local experience of community involvement or the informal networks that facilitate 'getting things done', have found themselves petitioning to a slow-to-respond, under-resourced landlord. The corporate culture of the housing authority was not collaborative or perceived to be operating in the best interests of its tenants, resulting in higher levels of distrust and disappointment. Over the last few years, though, following a forced amalgamation which merged the municipal and provincial housing authorities into one consolidated entity, the demeanour of the new housing company (now TCHC) has gradually come to be perceived as more innovative and receptive to including residents' views in its decision-making. This redevelopment poses a real test to building increased levels of trust between TCHC, its residents, adjacent neighbourhoods, and the city itself.

Phased development is intended to minimize relocation disruption for residents; create large enough blocks to create a mix of housing types and tenures; provide sufficient time to install public infrastructure (including state-of-the-art environmental measures such as a steam-heating system); and create appropriate community facilities and commercial/retail space.

Community response to the proposed

physical redevelopment has been predominantly favourable. Current residents express concerns about being displaced first by the demolition and reconstruction process, and subsequently by the introduction of market-priced units and the impact of that on the existing neighbourhood. Other neighbourhood watchers (including housing activists) are concerned about the 'mix' of housing in the redevelopment. Some feel the proportion of rent-geared-to income (RGI) units should be higher, while others advocate a larger proportion of units should be available for purchase by lower income households. Still others want to see a further intensification of the area with more total units and a larger number of residents. TCHC has maintained its position that no matter what, the redevelopment will at minimum replace the existing number of RGI units (either on the Regent Park site or nearby), and that the creation of other housing types depends on what private developers are willing to build (and think they can sell). The current plan sets out as a goal that 500 affordable home ownership units be created, and various financing ideas, in the absence of government programs to either underwrite or stimulate it, are being explored. The debate is anticipated to continue as the construction phases of the project roll out.

In addition to changing the physical attributes of the community, it is anticipated that the social fabric will be transformed. Mixed-income neighbourhoods are able to attract additional economic and social resources that ultimately lead to healthier communities. In anticipation of this, TCHC convened a process to determine what aspirations the current residents had for their evolving neighbourhood. (see shaded box p. 22)

Developing strategies to realize each of these has been the focus of the Regent Park Resident Council (RPRC), a group formed in 2002 with a grant from the Maytree Foundation, to help organize the community's collective capacity to participate in the redevelopment

process. The RPRC formed committees to develop workplans in each of these areas, plus a fifth, to look at the particular needs of youth. Local community agencies have representatives on each of these committees.

In the fall of 2003, Ideas that Matter was retained to convene a process to engage funders and all sectors of the broader Toronto community in the creation of a Community Plan that would assist the RPRC and member agencies in implementing these strategies. A city-wide forum was held earlier this year with residents, agencies, funders, and representatives from the city's broader economic, social, government and non-profit sectors gathered at the downtown YMCA to learn about the project and begin to identify how they might become involved in the process. Extracts from the lead presentation, given by Garland Yates of the Annie Casey Foundation, are included in this issue of ITM.

Following that meeting, the RPRC has begun to expand its membership, funding base, mandate and capacity to represent not only the needs of the current residents, but also to anticipate the future needs of the community as it takes in new businesses, tenants, and homeowners. Various offers of expertise and funding support have emerged to assist the Regent Park Community Planning process, including the offer of extensive legal services free of charge. The University of Toronto has expanded an educational program offering residents access to a specialized curriculum. New partnerships with various city institutions continue to be cultivated.

Many interesting questions have arisen with these conversations. Who can speak for such a culturally diverse neighbourhood? (One voice? Many voices?) Can the current resident-based organization transform itself into a broader-based community organization that will represent the needs of future members of the community? How can the planning process ensure that the interests of the

Elements of a Community Plan for Regent Park

Regent Park as a Learning Community, where learning opportunities include school retention programs, programs to bridge the growing technology divide in the community, the development of language skills, literacy, adult learning and preparation for advanced learning.

Regent Park as a Working Community, with programs targeted to enabling greater economic participation including skills development, certification programs, and small enterprise incubation.

Regent Park as a Healthy Community, with initiatives including nutrition and food programs, illness prevention and health education.

Regent Park as a Settlement Community, with initiatives aimed at addressing the barriers to social inclusion and economic participation by new Canadians.

current residents continue to be heard, and not be drowned out by the enthusiasm (and often self-interest) of new, better resourced, players suddenly keen to get involved? How can a culture of collaboration and partnership be encouraged in a limited funding environment, where trust may be lacking?

There are enormous challenges working in such a complex environment. Although terrifically diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, the neighbourhood has been socio-economically monocultural, dominated by one all-powerful player: the landlord. Making the transition to a more varied, less controlled and less predictable environment is challenging enough. This is made all the more difficult by the complexity of decision-making required by the City's planning and approvals process, and by other initiatives taking place in parallel which involve many of the same community players (i.e. the exploration of tri-level government agreements to renew neighbourhoods, see the United Way of Greater Toronto's Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, page 35)

Without dramatic shifts in Canadian public policy with respect to income support, a high needs, low-income population will always require the RGI units located in Regent Park. (In 2004 there were 65,000 households waiting for subsidized housing spots in the City of

Toronto) Will those residents in the larger, redeveloped Regent Park have access to adequate services, when we know that the current services are scarce and under-funded? Will agencies have greater difficulty making their case for funding, when the new neighbourhood, with the addition of higher-income residents, is no longer deemed an area of 'highest poverty'?

Although fifty years old, and despite years and years of promises and anticipation, it's early days for Regent Park. ITM will continue to work in a facilitating capacity with the RPRC and other groups with an interest in the redevelopment. We are engaged in this work because of our ongoing interest in how communities self-organize. Despite some research to suggest that other factors have as significant an impact on the elimination of poverty, we instinctively know that where we live has a direct impact on our capacity to thrive.¹ Neighbourhoods do matter. Updates on these discussions will be reported on in future issues of ITM.



Endnotes:

- ¹ For a discussion of this research see the report of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force:
www.strongneighbourhoods.ca

Mary W. Rowe is the editor of *Ideas That Matter*.

The Present Community

At A Glance

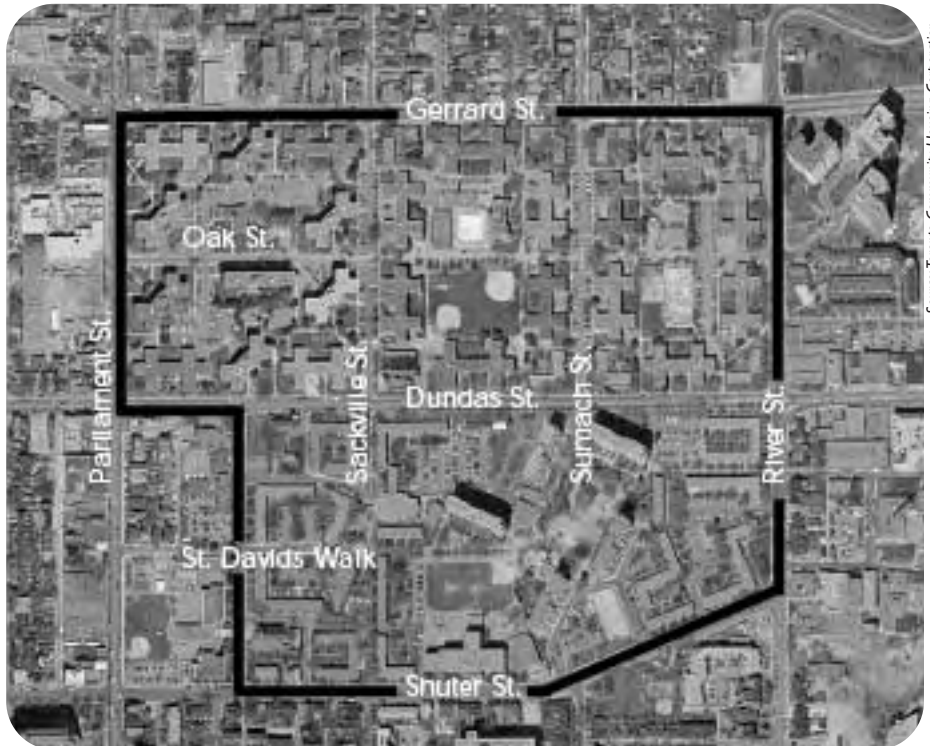
Area Characteristics

The Regent Park neighbourhood is a 69-acre area in east downtown Toronto bounded by Gerrard, River, Shuter and Parliament Streets. With the exception of a block at the southeastern corner of Dundas and Parliament Streets, all of the housing within the area is owned and operated by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) as rent-g geared-to-income units.

Dundas Street, the neighbourhood's only through street, bisects Regent Park North from Regent Park South. North Regent Park contains a mixture of three to six-storey walkup apartment houses and townhouses while South Regent Park has several high-rise apartment buildings in addition to townhouses. TCHC supplies services normally associated with traditional residential neighbourhoods, such as policing and garbage services. However, Regent Park lacks such amenities as pay phones, mailboxes and banking services.

There is a single small privately owned commercial building south of Dundas Street housing a small grocery store, diner and launderette. Other commercial activities lie outside the area, primarily on Parliament Street with a few small convenience stores on River, Gerrard and Shuter Streets.

To the north of Regent Park is the Cabbagetown neighbourhood, an upscale, gentrified Victorian neighbourhood containing primarily single family dwellings, which have been extensively renovated.



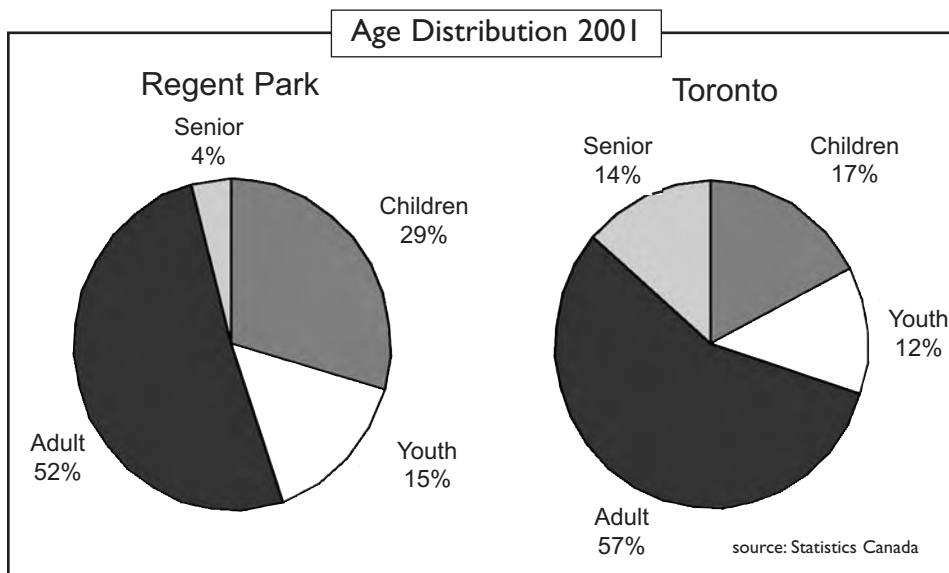
Source: Toronto Community Housing Corporation

Along the eastern boundary between River Street and the Don River is a mixture of privately owned high-rise apartment buildings and the Oak Street Housing Co-operative. Several small pockets of vacant or under-utilized land parcels in the area have recently been redeveloped with private townhouse developments.

South of Regent Park is the historic Trefann Court neighbourhood, which was slated for urban renewal in the 1960s but after intense public pressure, was preserved with a combination of renovated housing and small infill developments. Moss Park, another large high-rise public

housing project, is situated south-west of Regent Park. Commercial and industrial buildings south of Queen Street, in an area known as Corktown, are currently being converted to residential lofts for young professionals. The West Donlands, part of the larger Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Plan, lies further to the south and is targeted for significant investment and development.

The South Cabbagetown neighbourhood lies to the west of Regent Park between Parliament and Sherbourne Streets. It is a mixed residential area of gentrified single family dwellings, rooming houses and apartment buildings.



Neighbourhood Demographics

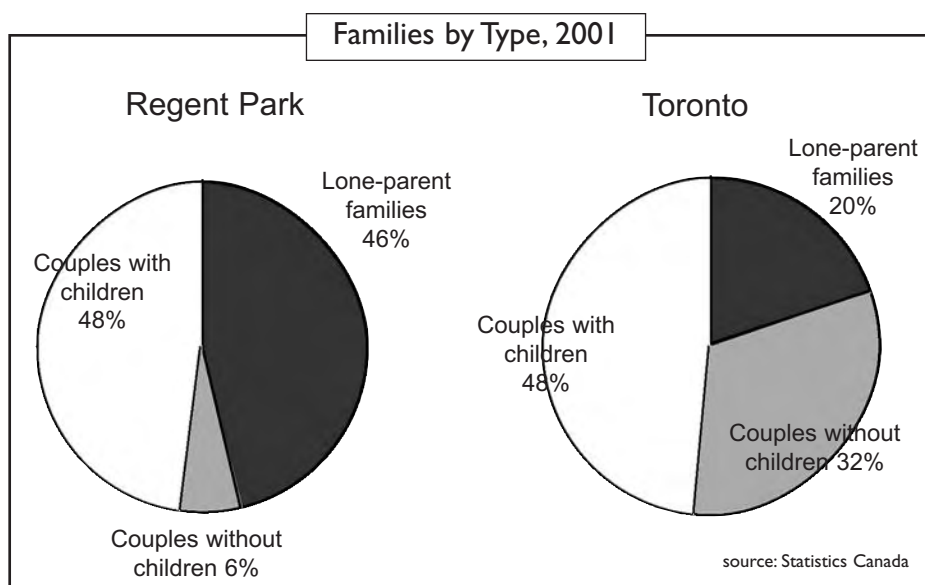
According to recent census data¹, the neighbourhood bounded by Parliament, Gerrard, River and Queen Streets contains approximately 11,300 people. However, many agencies note that the actual population is likely higher, due to a transient homeless population and significant under-reporting of household size. Overall the neighbourhood has significantly more children and larger household sizes than adjacent neighbourhoods and the rest of the city. 44% of residents are under the age of 24 years old. In the last ten years, the proportion of children in Regent Park has risen slightly and the number of seniors has fallen significantly. Regent Park has substantially more single-parent families and substantially less couples with children than the general population. The relatively large size of households in Regent Park is determined more by regulatory requirements for rent-g geared-to-income households than general urban demographic shifts.

In comparison, the population in the city of Toronto is aging. In addition, two trends are apparent in looking at new households moving into neighbourhoods adjacent to Regent Park: new condo units are being occupied by young adults with few or no children, and new

houses are being occupied by older, wealthy couples with no children. If these trends continue, the revitalization of Regent Park will involve significant demographic shifts with the introduction of approximately 2,800 units of market housing and an estimated additional 4,500 adults and 500 children.

Regent Park is an immigrant settlement area: 65% of residents have arrived in the last ten years compared to 43% in the City of Toronto. More than half of the newest immigrants have arrived from

mainland China and Bangladesh. Vietnamese, Somali, Jamaican and Tamil residents make up the majority of the remaining residents. Continued strong immigration has led to an ongoing rise in the number of people who do not use English as their home language. A recent survey of TCHC residents² found that 47 languages are currently spoken in the area; no single agency in the area is able to provide service in the seven major languages.



Size of Household, 2001

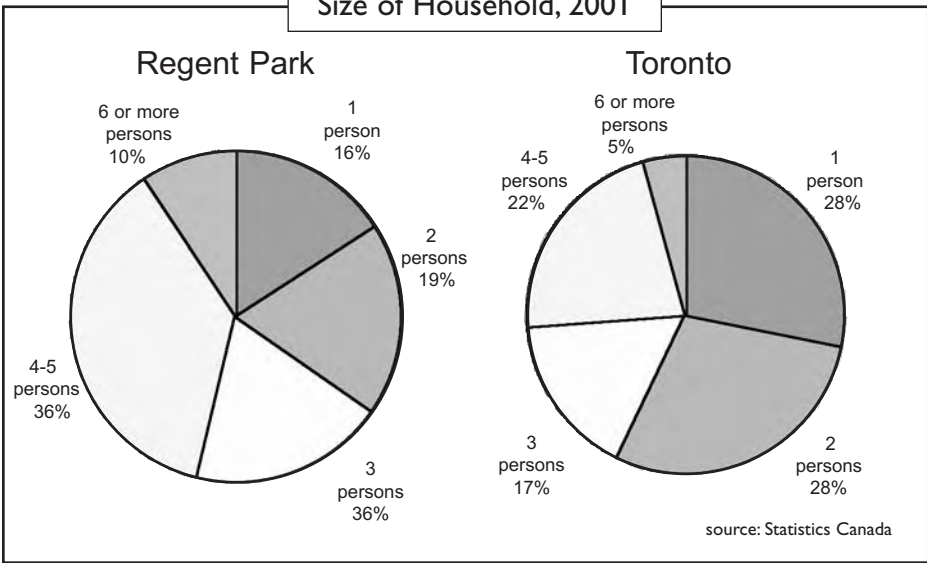
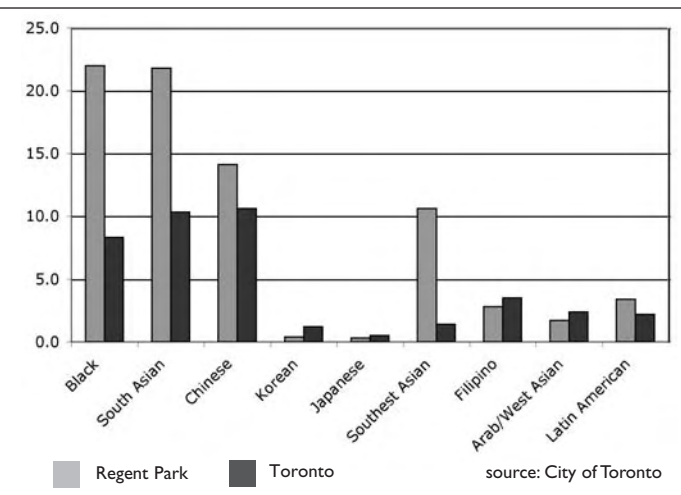


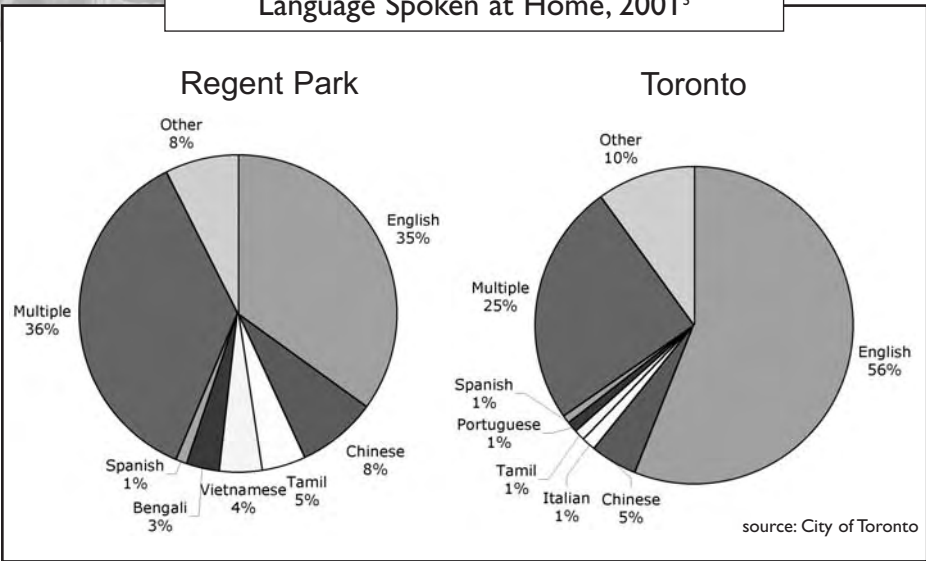
Photo courtesy Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Used with permission.

Average number of persons in private households:
Regent Park: 3.3
Toronto: 2.6

Visible Minority Population as % of Population, 2001



Language Spoken at Home, 2001³



Regent Park: The Present Community

Photo courtesy Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

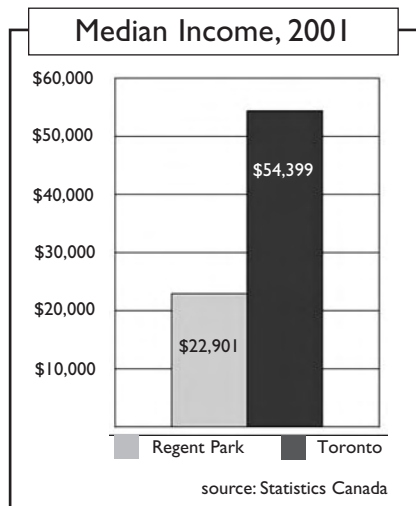


Basic Needs

A study of Toronto neighbourhoods published in 2004 by the United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, *Poverty by Postal Code* (see page 35 in this issue) identified North and South Regent Park as the two communities with the highest poverty level in the City of Toronto. The median family income is substantially below that of the City of Toronto, \$22, 901 versus \$54, 399, and the poverty rate is 66% in Regent Park versus 19% for the City of Toronto.

In most areas of the east downtown, sharp income increases have been occurring in the highest income groups as new housing accommodates wealthier individuals and couples. So, in fact, income disparity between income groups has been growing both in the downtown area and across the City of Toronto as a whole.

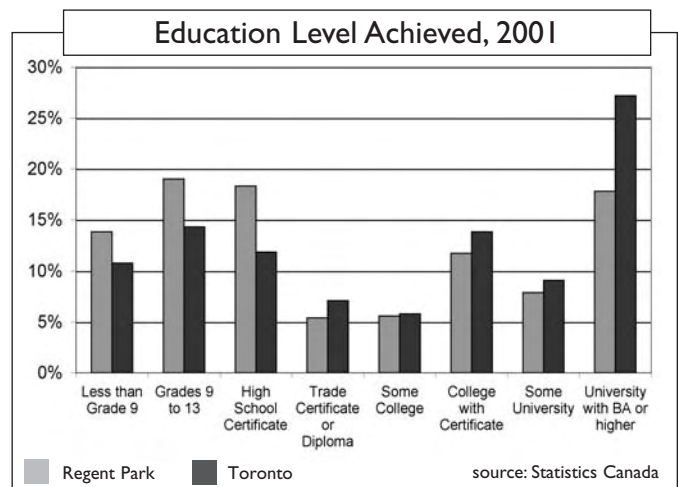
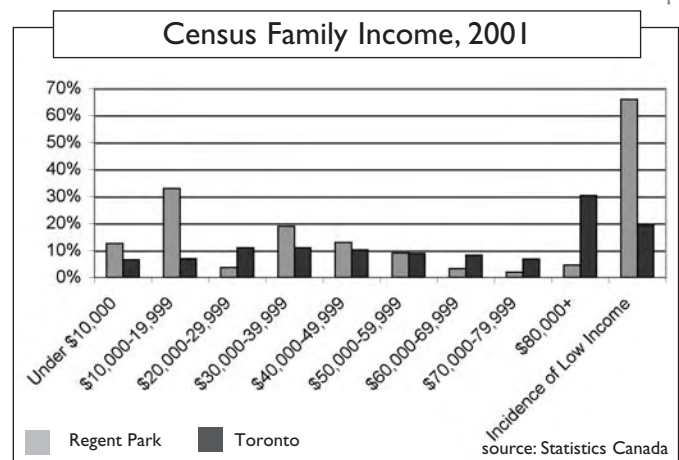
An increasing proportion of Regent Park residents receives income from employment. An average employment income of \$20, 793 per household is received by 43% of households, however only 31% of Regent Park children live in these households.



Only 26% of Regent Park families receive income from welfare with an average income of \$11,770. However, 44% of children live in families whose primary income is from this source.

In terms of educational attainment, there are significant disparities

between Regent Park residents and the City of Toronto. Half of the adult population in Regent Park has no post-secondary education compared to slightly more than a third of the city's adult population (see chart below). Pathways to Education, an initiative developed through the Regent Park Community Health Centre, has zeroed in on this disparity and supports students and their families through the crucial high school years and provides financial incentives for post-secondary education (see page 18). Interestingly there are a significant number of adults in Regent Park who are highly educated with at least one university degree. Many of these residents are immigrants who have difficulty translating these educational credentials into Canadian qualifications and relevant work experience.



Endnotes:

- ¹ In this article, 2001 Census data is used and refers to Census tract areas 30 and 31, which include a slightly larger area than Regent Park with the following boundaries: Parliament Street, Gerrard Street South, Don River and Queen Street East.
- ² Survey by Community Engagement Team, January 2004.
- ³ Home language refers to the language spoken most often or on a regular basis at home. "Multiple" refers to more than one language as a response.

Community Resources

The Regent Park community has a diverse number of community agencies serving residents. According to a survey done in 2003, the primary funder in Regent Park is the City of Toronto followed by the provincial government. Charitable foundations are the third major source of funding with the federal government playing a small role principally in settlement agencies.

The **Regent Park Resident Council (RPRC)** which has played a strong advocacy role in Regent Park over the years, was reconstituted in 2002 and through funding support has been able to hire a staff coordinator. The mandate of the RPRC is to advocate and protect the interests and assets of residents. Six committees address community issues: Revitalization, Health and Safety, Employment and Economic Development, Education, Diversity/

Council is now expanding its mandate and taking a lead role in the development of strategies towards a community social and economic development plan. This community plan will link into a number of other planning processes which are currently underway with the anticipation that together they will form an overall social development strategy for the revitalized community.

At the southeast corner of Dundas and Parliament Streets is the **Regent Park Community Health Centre** which provides primary health and dental services to area residents. In addition, the Health Centre supports two broader health initiatives – Parents for Better Beginnings, an early years parenting program, and Pathways to Education, an innovative program providing mentoring and tutoring support for youth and their families during the high school years (see page 29).

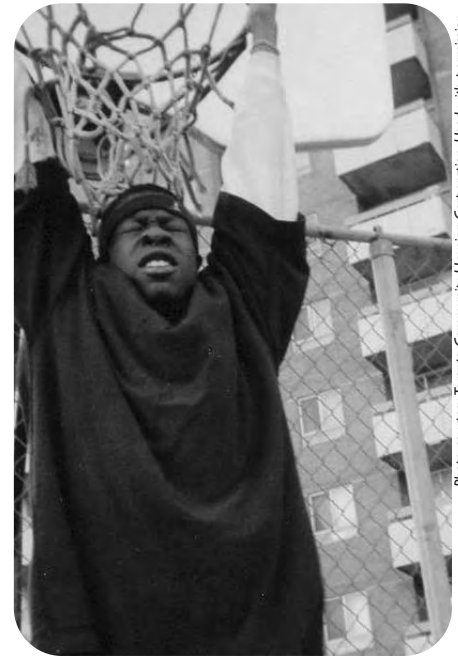


Photo courtesy Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Used with permission.

education programs.

The **SEAS Centre**, established in 1986 to provide settlement services primarily to Regent Park's Southeast Asian community, expanded its mandate in 2002 to provide language and employment programs to newcomers in the broader Chinese-speaking community. They remain the primary agency for settlement services in Regent Park.

Historically the **Toronto Christian Resource Centre** has played an advocacy and leadership role in social issues in the community. The Centre, located at 40 Oak Street, serves the homeless and marginally housed as well as providing arts programming for children and youth.

The **Yonge Street Mission** is a multi-service agency which operates a variety of educational and recre-

Dixon Hall, a multi-service neighbourhood agency located south of the Park, provides a range of educational and employment services to Regent Park residents, including the Regent Park Learning Centre providing literacy and computer skills

for adults and LabourLink, an employment agency for homeless and marginally housed individuals. They also serve the area's youth through a range of recreation and



Photo by David Peters. Used with permission.

Settlement and Youth. The Revitalization Committee of the Council has taken an active role in the early consultative process around the revitalization plan. The

ational services at a community centre immediately west of Parliament Street and a computer literacy training program and used clothing store on the northern edge of Regent Park.

Regent Park Focus is an innovative arts organization which uses media arts skills (radio, video and newspaper production) as a tool to engage and employ young people. The facility, located in Regent Park South, produces a radio series, a print and online newspaper and video features as well as sponsoring the annual Regent Park Film Festival.

The Umar Bin Khattab Mosque provides education, recreation, social and settlement services as well as religious services to the Muslim community in the Regent Park area. The mosque has a limited budget primarily raised through donations. Their clients speak over 11 different languages and many of the agency's services, including interpretation, are provided by volunteers.

Adult educational services are provided at **Toronto East End Literacy**, an agency located at Gerrard and Parliament Streets. The centre provides services in nine languages and serves both Regent Park residents and the homeless.

The Salvation Army, located on River Street, has been operating in Regent Park since 1904. More than half of their clients live in the Regent Park neighbourhood and receive service and pastoral counselling as well as adult education services. With an annual budget of approximately \$150,000, the Salvation Army is one of the smaller agencies operating in the park.

Other community agencies serving the area include Central Neighbourhood House, Neighbourhood Information Post, Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, the Cabbagetown Youth Centre and Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, all of which are located physically outside of, but adjacent to Regent Park.

The majority of the community and institutional space available in Regent Park is provided through Toronto Community Housing, which over the years has converted housing units into day care space and office space. For example, the City operates several facilities on TCHC owned land including the Regent Park Recreation Centre on the south side of Dundas Street. The Centre provides indoor and outdoor recreational programming for adults and youth with a gymnasium, multi-purpose rooms and office space. The only swimming facility for 8,000 residents is an outdoor pool in North Regent Park. The majority of other active recreational space are school playgrounds at Nelson Mandela Park Public School, Duke of York/Regent Park Public School and Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School.

While the area has numerous agencies serving Regent Park residents, the community services and facilities survey conducted in early 2004 concluded that in general, facilities and programs are limited given the size and diversity of the population. Furthermore, agencies operating out of free or borrowed space from either TCHC or the City of Toronto will be obviously impacted during the redevelopment process. Due to limited space, adding additional services to respond to

changing settlement demographics over the years has not been possible and Regent Park now lacks, for example, culturally appropriate recreational programming for the large Muslim youth population that currently lives in the area. In addition, with the rapid increase in the Muslim community, there is also a strong demand for a place of worship. While residents identified programs for children as a strength there is considerable frustration around the lack of access to youth programming and adult and senior programs due to language and/or cultural barriers.

Each of the community agencies operating in Regent Park has to re-examine their own mandates, programs and services in light of the long-term demographic changes which are projected for the area. A community services plan will examine how community services and facilities in Regent Park will be replaced, rebuilt or expanded as part of the redevelopment and how future needs can be met. The plan is being developed through a consultative process with the community agencies, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the City of Toronto and is due to be completed by the fall of 2005.



Endnotes:

- ¹ Mary Neumann, Sean Meaghar and Tony Boston. *Regent Park Community Services and Facilities Study* (March 2004), p. 43.

Experiments in Social Innovation: Pathways To Education

The Pathways to Education Program (P2E) is a unique initiative of the Regent Park Community Health Centre. Its broad mission is to end the cycle of poverty and unemployment that has marginalized the Regent Park community by addressing education and income, two fundamental social determinants of health. The program, which began in September, 2001 helps students better meet academic challenges by creating a 'culture of achievement and high expectations' in which students are enabled to more fully realize their potential. Specifically, P2E focuses on the transition of Regent Park's youth from the area's grade schools to various high schools by providing an integrated set of academic, financial, and personal supports.

Significant challenges have historically impeded the success of many children living in Regent Park. An ongoing problem for Regent Park's young people has been the travel distance to area high schools; the only high school in close proximity to Regent Park, Jarvis Collegiate, has a strictly academic program, which has not been appropriate for all Regent Park students. Family poverty, unemployment and the lack of financial stability experienced by many families often makes it impossible to buy a TTC metropass that would provide their children with regular transportation to school and to other events with peers. It has also made purchasing school supplies, lunches and fieldtrips difficult at best.

A lack of fluency in English for many Regent Park families also presents obstacles. Language barriers make it difficult for these families to help their children with homework, and to advocate for

their children at school. The preponderance of single-parent households in Regent Park also takes a toll on families. The need to work long hours, often at more than one job, means that these parents are not able to be at home when children arrive home from school. These multiple challenges require a multi-faceted approach to give children and youth the support that will best enhance their educational outcomes.

The P2E program has been designed to meet these challenges in several ways. Academic support is provided through twice-weekly tutoring in core subjects (English, French, Math, Science and Geography); social support through a group mentoring approach with related social activities and fieldtrips; financial support through the provision of TTC tickets earned through attendance at school and a \$1,000 per student per year bursary for post-secondary education held in trust until graduation; and advocacy support through student/parent support workers who provide critical linkages to school guidance staff, attendance counsellors and social workers.

Program results to date have been remarkable. Currently 97% of Regent Park's eligible youth are participating in the program. Absenteeism among students in grades 9 and 10, for example, has dropped significantly during the first two years of P2E, with absentee rates in grade 10 (the program's second year) dropping to less than half what they were prior to the program's implementation. High school credit accumulation has greatly increased; Regent Park's grade 10 students surpassed grade 10 students from three main downtown Toronto high schools in overall credit accumulation. Initial program results seem to indicate that the program has had a particularly strong impact on

those students most at risk (achieving 5 or less credits): the proportion of these students was substantially reduced from 38.6% to 18.7%.

Looking at the social return on this type of program investment, the potential benefits are enormous: the incarceration rate for high school dropouts is 15 times what it is for those with some post-secondary education; social assistance and unemployment payments to dropouts are estimated at twice that of high school graduates; dropouts are twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates and three times as likely to be unemployed as university graduates. A federal government study estimated the private market rate of return for completing high school at more than 40 percent for Canadian graduates relative to those who dropped out in Grade 10.

The P2E program is now in its fourth year with the first cohort scheduled to complete high school in June, 2005. It is hoped that the program ultimately supports the original community vision articulated by the Regent Park Community Health Centre: *"The children of the community will become the doctors, nurses, social workers, community health workers and administrators of the Health Centre."*

For more information:

Pathways to Education, www.p2e.ca

Regent Park Community Health Centre,
www.regentparkchc.org

Regent Park: A Brief History

Laurie Green

“Any citizen who has any interest at all in the betterment of his City and his less-fortunate fellow man should go all out for public housing.”

Robert H. Saunders, Toronto Mayor (1945-1948)

The impetus for the initial development of Regent Park came largely from an address given in March 1934 by then Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario Dr. H.A. Bruce, who spoke at Toronto’s centennial celebrations. He warned that Toronto had acquired “inevitable slum districts” which “exert unhappy environmental influence upon many of our citizens”.¹ Bruce bemoaned the development of slum areas in Canada’s largest cities, and emphasized their detraction from Toronto’s ability to reach its greatest potential; upon this basis he urged that action be taken to eradicate such areas. His remarks that day made sufficient enough impression on Mayor Robert Saunders and Toronto’s Board of Control that an Advisory Committee was subsequently formed to inquire into housing conditions in several areas of the city, with Bruce appointed honorary chair. The committee would focus specifically on 1) the quality of the accommodation; 2) rentals paid by tenants; and 3) environmental conditions. What ensued was the most comprehensive investigation of urban housing conditions in Canada, culminating in the influential Bruce Report in 1944, which detailed the living conditions within Toronto’s slum areas.

An intensive special study was conducted of two of the most seriously blighted areas; the area then known as Moss Park whose boundaries encompassed present-day Regent Park, and the Ward, an area closer to central down-



Row houses on Gerrard Street East, circa 1940

town. Moss Park was deemed as presenting the greatest challenges as it was more seriously overcrowded. The study of over 3,000 dwelling units classified nearly three quarters of these units as substandard. Conditions in the homes studied by the committee were bleak; most were without adequate indoor plumbing facilities or central heating and were invariably overcrowded, thereby posing significant health risks to residents. Many of the houses in the area, row housing for example on Sumach Street, were rough-cast construction – plaster over wood lathing. Photographs of these houses exhibit serious deterioration such as

missing plaster on exterior walls revealing bare lathing and broken windows. Interior photographs reveal evidence of overcrowding, a lack of sanitation, and cracked walls and ceilings. There were virtually no recreational facilities for the area’s children; the only play area for many were the streets and tiny, often cluttered backyards.

The Bruce Report gave the general public greater insight into the deplorable living conditions of Toronto’s poorest citizens, and provided significant momentum to civic groups who sought the redevelopment of sub-standard resi-

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub-series 33B, Item 68

dential areas. At the time of the Bruce Report, federal and provincial governments had shown little interest in public housing as a social or economic public policy tool. Federal housing legislation was virtually non-existent, and planning departments did not yet exist in Ontario. The Bruce report proved pivotal in 1943 as the efforts of civic groups were rewarded when the City Planning Board proposed redevelopment of the area presently known as Regent Park North, bounded by Dundas St. East, Gerrard St. East, Parliament St., and River St. Buildings in this area were 60 to 70 years of age, in poor physical condition, and 48 percent of the homes had only stoves for heat. There were 628 houses and 35 commercial and dwelling units, however 822 families were living in these small homes, along with many roomers and boarders, and likely others of whom researchers were not informed. In addition there were 18 industrial and commercial buildings and 33 parcels of vacant land of varying sizes that had contained housing previously torn down due to its dilapidated condition.

The following year the Toronto Citizens' Forum created the Citizens' Housing Association, later known as the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association. In their constitution, the Association highlighted the fundamental importance of decent housing to "sound family and community life". The resolution illustrated the concerns from which civic action for the construction of Regent Park North arose. It stated:

The Association grows out of the increasing concern of the citizens of Toronto for the conditions under which the families of servicemen and low-income groups have to live...It believes these conditions to be...a serious danger to the health, morale, and efficiency of the families and of the community, and a shameful commentary on the community's neglect of the larger welfare of its citizens.²

The Association liaised with different levels of government, members of the

federal and provincial legislatures, and City Council, in a renewed effort to engender action to address the City's need for low-rental housing. The demand for public funds to meet this purpose gained strength. The Association believed that overcrowding that was taking place following the war left the government of Canada with a responsibility both to servicemen and their families, and to municipalities. They also pointed out that the federal government had the financial means to deliver housing funding.

The challenge at the time for municipal housing redevelopment was that the provincial government had formal responsibility for housing, but not the funding, while the federal government had no formal responsibility, yet had

appeal to the public for support. At a November 1944 housing conference, keynote speaker Nathan Straus, the first administrator of the U.S. Public Housing Authority, addressed the audience. He emphasized the success of programs providing subsidies to house low-income citizens in the United States. Straus' position was used to support claims that the growing blight of sub-standard housing in Toronto was causing the decline of property values, loss of tax revenues; and increased costs to tax payers. The Association advocated that slum clearance was the answer to these problems, and was a necessary step to safeguard the city's present and future progress. The Toronto Board of Control responded to the mounting pressure for action by putting the question of the Regent Park project before the electorate. In the



Small businesses on Gerrard Street East, circa 1940

funds. To address this situation, the Association put pressure on the federal government to provide legislative and financial resources, pressed the province to provide similar resources through planning and housing legislation, and pushed City Council to proceed with slum clearance and the housing project.

Finally, the Association also made an

January 1947 municipal election an intense publicity campaign ensued that included letters to all municipal candidates, the distribution of thousands of hand bills, interviews on local radio stations, and letters to the press.

The wider sharing of information with the general public about the city's worst housing conditions enabled voters to

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub-series 33B, Item 86

engage in the matter in a way that they hadn't before. This dynamic, along with the strong support of Mayor Robert Saunders, helped to secure a "yes" vote for the slum clearance and construction of Regent Park North. The desire of civic groups to improve the current health of the city, provide opportunities for its less fortunate citizens, and to maximize the future potential of Toronto, was combined with an assurance of financial responsibility assumed by the newly created Toronto Housing Authority. In a July 1955 article in the Board of Trade Journal entitled *Toronto Can Be Proud of Regent Park*, Frank E. Dearlove, Administrator of the Regent Park Housing Project extolled the virtues of the project, claiming that the project was an economic asset to the city, due in part to an increase in the level of tax revenues generated by the area. The level of optimism for the future of the project and its benefits was very high.

To make way for the development of Regent Park, the City expropriated existing homes. The first acquisitions of land for Regent Park were approved in September, 1947. The authority to acquire the land was bestowed upon the newly created Housing Authority by city

by-Law, and passed by Council on September 29, 1947. Once the land was secured, the physical designing of the space commenced.

Regent Park's design was based on Le Corbusier's concept of "City in the Park", and was in effect a test case for emerging postwar planning theories and modernist

architecture. The design was based on the notion of building vertical cities in the park, leaving large common areas of green, street-free space throughout the community. At the time, this layout was viewed as an ideal solution for providing the area's children with safe space in which to play, and for community recreational use. With idealistic enthusiasm, proponents of this new approach believed it would eradicate Toronto's slums, and perhaps poverty itself. Frank Dearlove concluded:

"Reports from district schools indicate that because of improved living conditions the children are cleaner, healthier and happier and that they are getting better grades since moving into the Regent Park Project. Reports from Police and Fire Departments, and Departments of Public Health and Public Welfare, indicate that municipal costs in this area have notably decreased. Even more important is the fact that the incidence of crime, juvenile delinquency and family problems has materially declined... indications are that it's citizens will be better off morally, physically and mentally as a result of living in this



Houses on Oak Street, circa 1940

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub-series 338, Item 84



City of Toronto Archives, RG 28, Item 117

Mayor Saunders inspects a pile of debris in Regent Park - July 24, 1947

model housing development.”³

By the time Regent Park North was completed, it had become home for 5,211 residents and marked the start of an urban renewal program, considered both beneficial and necessary by planners and city officials. Hailed a success, all of the original inhabitants of the pre-existing housing were re-housed, and many experienced indoor plumbing, and hot and cold running water for the first time. By comparison to the housing it had replaced, Regent Park's units were clean, large, bright, well-heated, and were provided at very affordable rent-geared-to-income costs. Looking back, one can appreciate the enthusiasm with which many citizens and civic leaders embraced the beginnings of Regent Park.

The second phase of the project, Regent Park South was developed between 1957 and 1959, financed primarily with federal housing funds under the National Housing Act, which had been enacted in 1954. All of the lands south of Dundas Street West were demolished to make way for a series of five high-rise towers interspersed with ground-related townhouses. While the focus of Regent Park North had been the resettlement of the area's 'working poor', the selection of tenants for Regent Park South focused more on affordability and income levels, partly due to the involvement of the federal government. As a result, the area quickly became home to only the most disadvantaged households in the city, a situation which has continued to the present day.

In the intervening fifty years, the physical design of Regent Park as well as the social policies which helped shape the current community, have been called into question. The coupling of Le Corbusier's design concepts with a disproportionately poor, visible minority population encountering multiple barriers to full participation in society has contributed to Regent Park's present difficulties. The termination of smaller streets once part of the street grid, for

example, has resulted in a lack of access for policing and a general lack of “eyes on the street”, as the interior of the community is not visible to main pedestrian and motor traffic moving at the area's periphery. Rather than providing “safe space” for the community as intended, this configuration has resulted in physical disconnection from the surrounding neigh-

province to the city and amalgamation of the city's nonprofit and public housing portfolios, there is now a more positive climate in which to consider a major revitalization of the area.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1266, Globe & Mail Collection, Item 132432

The Bluett family in the kitchen of their old house, prior to re-locating to the first re-developed unit in Regent Park, 1949

bourhoods, an absence of commercial and retail activity, and the creation of public spaces, blocked from view of the street and ideal for illegal activities. In addition, the housing stock itself is physically outdated and requires significant upgrading and modernizing of appliances, layout, plumbing, heating and elevators.

Beginning in the 1980s, several re-design initiatives have been discussed to improve neighbourhood conditions. In the mid-1990s, the City of Toronto and the Ontario Housing Corporation discussed a significant redevelopment of the area and proposed a pilot project for the northeast quadrant however the effort was unsuccessful. With the recent transfer of housing responsibility from the

Endnotes:

- ¹ Albert Rose, *Regent Park: A Study in Slum Clearance*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1958).
- ² Frank E. Dearlove, “Toronto Can Be Proud of Regent Park”, *Board of Trade Journal* (July 1955).
- ³ Ibid.

Laurie Green is a fourth-year student in the Urban Studies program at the University of Toronto and was an intern at Ideas That Matter during the 2003-2004 academic year.

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Regent Park Parade, undated



Regent Park Construction, 1948

Neighbourhoods Matter: Poverty by Postal Code

Poverty by Postal Code (PPC), published in April 2004 by the United Way of Greater Toronto profiles the 'geography of neighbourhood poverty' in Toronto over the last 20 years. The report presents a startling portrait of how poverty in Toronto is becoming increasingly localized, 'racialized' and 'feminized' and lays the groundwork for developing place-based strategies to deal with neighbourhood poverty issues.

Changes to the spatial concentration of poverty in Toronto were examined by:

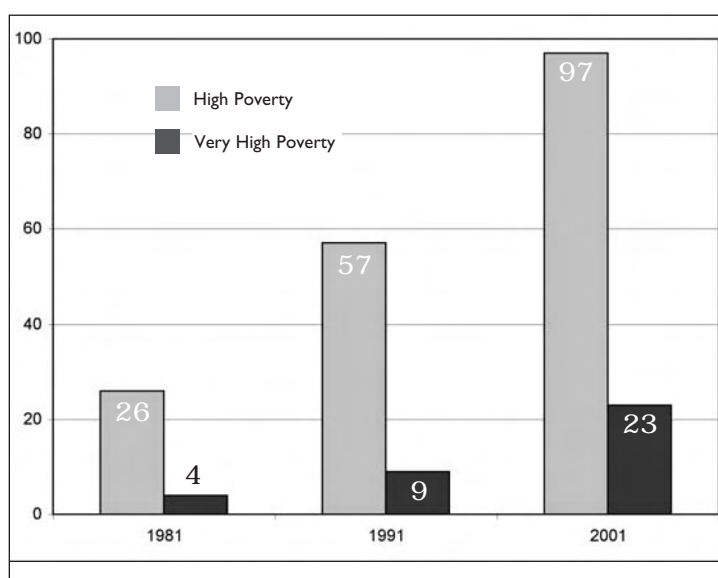
- Determining the percentage of the city's 'poor' families that were living in higher poverty neighbourhoods in 1981, 1991, and 2001;
- Identifying the number of higher poverty neighbourhoods that existed at each of these three points in time; and
- Plotting the changes in neighbourhood poverty over time.

The study illustrates the dramatic increase in the rate of poverty among Toronto's families over the last 20 years, rising from 13.3% of all family households in 1981, to 16.3% in 1991, and 19.4% in 2001 (the comparable national figure in 2001 was 12.8%, a slight decline from 1981). Average family household income in the lower income census tracts actually declined over the twenty-year period (from \$41,611 to \$39,298 in constant 2000 dollars), while in the top income census tracts income levels rose dramatically (from \$135,801 to \$215,344 in constant 2000 dollars).

Over the study period 'very high poverty' neighbourhoods ('very high poverty' defined as 40% or more family households in poverty) in the city increased from just 4 in 1981, to a total of 23 neighbourhoods in 2001. Further, in 1981 more than 80% of poor families lived in mixed-income neighbourhoods but that figure has now declined to 47%, a dramatic change in the concentration of poverty. In 1981 poor neighbourhoods were those primarily located in census tracts dominated by public housing, in other words, 'poverty by design'; neighbourhoods such as Jane/Finch, Alexander Park, Regent Park and Moss Park and a few scattered neighbourhoods in Scarborough formed a distinctive U-shape across the City of Toronto. By 2001 the map of poor neighbourhoods shows a very different picture: the U-shape has been replaced by an O-shaped 'donut' around central affluent neighbourhoods in the former cities of

Toronto and Etobicoke (see map on page 36). Toronto's map of poor neighbourhoods now largely reflects the search for affordable housing; with families moving out to the 'inner suburbs', (the former municipalities of Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, York and East York). Many of these suburbs were expanded during the 1960s and 1970s with substantial blocks of high-rise rental apartment buildings. These developments were built without sufficient consideration to community infrastructure such as youth recreational services, adequate transit and access to social services. The growth and concentration of poor neighbourhoods have consequences that have been well-documented in the United States and Great Britain. The out-migration of local businesses and middle-income households leads to a breakdown of social cohesion and the marginalization of residents.

Number of Higher Poverty Neighbourhoods, Toronto



Source: Statistics Canada, Census 1981, 1991 & 2001

Neighbourhoods Matter: Poverty by Postal Code

In addition to the spatial concentration, the profile of these 'higher poverty' neighbourhoods reveals that increasing numbers of the most vulnerable members of society reside within these neighbourhoods. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of children raised in these neighbourhoods increased by 100%, rising from 80,590 in 1991 to 160,590 in 2001. There was also a 60% increase in the number of youth and over time, this figure will naturally increase. Lone parents raising children in high poverty neighbourhoods increased by a staggering 91.7% between 1991 and 2001 (88% are female-led). However, while the absolute number of these families increased, the proportion of lone-parent families of all families in poor neighbourhoods has remained relatively sta-

ble. Sixty-five percent of poor immigrant families now live in these neighbourhoods, as do three-quarters of Toronto's poor visible minority families. To further compound the issue, 87% of the employable population in 'very high' poverty neighbourhoods in 2001 was employed. It is not that these families are not working, but that they are working in low-paying or part-time jobs which provide an inadequate family income. The study confirms that recent immigrant families are experiencing increasing difficulty in integrating economically into Canada likely due in large part to the high price of housing combined with the barriers in labour market integration for internationally trained professionals.

The trends documented in *Poverty by Postal Code* clearly demonstrate the complexity of issues of economic disparity, such as income supports, affordable housing, and economic integration strategies for newcomers. The United Way has identified newcomers and young people as high priority recipients of increased resources to build stronger neighbourhoods, to help offset the processes of decline that are underway. The report also emphasizes the need for cooperative action to be taken by government, business, labour, community organizations, and local residents. This study confirmed what many community leaders knew: urban poverty is increasingly based on place.

City of Toronto 2001 - Economic Family Poverty Rates



The 2001 map of the city of Toronto is divided into census tracts, with each tract coloured according to the level of family poverty in the tract, relative to the average national LICO (low-income cut off). 'Higher' poverty neighbourhoods are those where 26% or more of the families in the neighbourhood have incomes below LICO. They include neighbourhoods that have been defined in the study as 'high' poverty (where the range of poverty rates is between 26% - 39.9%), and 'very high' poverty (where the level of family poverty is 40% or more).

Source: Poverty by Postal Code, p. 21

What's Next?

The United Way of Greater Toronto, in partnership with the City of Toronto, has formed the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, composed of members from government, community, labour and corporate sectors. The task force is studying the challenges of distressed neighbourhoods, and will articulate a vision for healthy neighbourhoods and set benchmarks for their revitalization. An interim report is due in the spring of 2005.

For more information:

United Way of Greater Toronto,
www.unitedwaytoronto.com

Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force,
<http://www.strongneighbourhoods.ca/index.html>

Asset-Building: Addressing Poverty in Canada

*"The dynamics of escaping poverty on a more permanent basis are fundamentally linked to the access to assets, shaped by savings and investment decisions. This requires asset-based supports in addition to income transfers if governments are to fulfill their role in ensuring a more equal opportunity and shared well-being for all Canadians"*¹

Many studies have shown that in the last decade the gap between rich and poor, particularly in urban areas, is growing. When the data also includes patterns of savings and asset ownership, the gap becomes even larger. In Canada, most asset accumulation programs have traditionally been directed through the tax system (e.g. RRSP, RESP), which low-income Canadians, through lack of sufficient income, have not benefited from. In addition, many low-income Canadians are in fact faced with asset-saving **disincentives** such as means testing to verify eligibility which discourages and/or penalizes savings.

Asset-building has emerged as one approach for addressing poverty based on the work of U.S. researcher Michael Sherraden. In his book *Assets and the Poor*, published in 1991, Sherraden pointed out that people living in poverty tend to be more short-term focused in their thinking and behaviour, not so much because of their values as because they are compelled by the environment within which they must make decisions. This can result in patterns of decision-making that may ultimately present structural barriers to escaping poverty both presently and throughout life for members of the household.² Post-secondary education would be one example of this: families with no capacity to generate savings believe that higher education is unaffordable and therefore consistently make decisions based on the assumption that their child will not

attend post-secondary institutions.

Asset-building programs use a tool known as Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) to provide a structured and incentive-based method for savings. Essentially dedicated savings accounts, typically deposits by participants are matched at varying rates by governments and/or other sources. The personal savings remain the property of the participant but the matched accumulated savings can be dispersed for authorized uses for home ownership, training programs and adult education or micro-enterprise development. In addition participants normally participate in financial literacy programs and other supportive services.

In Canada asset-building programs and policies are in the infancy stage. Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI), established in 1997, is one national organization attempting to address problems of poverty through several demonstration projects targeted particularly to immigrants, visible minorities and aboriginal Canadians.

SEDI is currently involved in two demonstration projects. Learn\$ave, begun in 2001, with funding from Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC), encourages eligible low-income individuals set up IDAs. Each \$1 of an individual's contribution is matched with \$3 from funding sources

for savings towards adult education, training or micro-enterprise start-up. Delivery of the program is through community-based organizations who are responsible for recruiting, screening, financial literacy training and case management support. The program permits low-income individuals to save up to \$1500, and matched funds can be accumulated and disbursed to an approved "vendor". Initial findings indicate that the program leads to improved long-term self-sufficiency.

A second project, Home\$ave, builds on the Learn\$ave experience by allowing eligible low-income individuals to open an IDA and utilize savings and matched contributions towards a down-payment on a first home, home repair, or first and last month's rent. The project is currently in the design phase and it is expected to be implemented in late 2004 in a number of urban and rural communities. The Regent Park redevelopment is one of the communities being considered for the pilot project.

Endnotes:

¹ *The Case for an Asset-based Approach to Social Policy in Canada*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2001, pg 3. available at: www.sedi.org

² *Ibid*, p.4

For more information:

SEDI, www.sedi.org;

Urban Development Agreements: The Vancouver Agreement - Downtown Eastside

The Vancouver Agreement is a five-year urban development agreement between the federal government (through the Western Economic Diversification Fund), the province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver. Signed March 9, 2000, the agreement commits these levels of government to develop and implement a coordinated strategy to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development within local communities in Vancouver. The first focus of the Agreement has been Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), an historical area with distinct drug and related crime issues.

While the agreement itself does not provide for funding for specific projects, it does agree on three basic strategic initiatives: community health and safety including primary health care and harm reduction strategy, economic and social development including affordable housing, and community capacity-building. According to Isobel Donovan, the Executive Coordinator of the Vancouver Agreement, the advantages of the agreement are that it provides structures for collaboration and expanded opportunities for partnership, encourages innovative approaches to programs, encourages strategic targeting of resources and establishes horizontal teams across governments at each level (policy, management, implementation and communication).

The initial projects undertaken in the DTES were funded through a five-year Community Crime Prevention program by the National Crime Prevention Centre. Community capacity-building was undertaken through an initiative called Community Directions which provided outreach to marginalized resi-

dents through the support of community-based working groups. A second major initiative has been the revitalization of the Chinatown business area, including leadership development, community crime prevention and marketing and promotion.

A 2002 Strategic Plan refined the three broad goals of the Vancouver Agreement into an integrated set of specific objectives which included the redevelopment of the Woodward's department store site, urban design initiatives, the dismantling of the open drug scene through a combination of prevention and enforcement strategies, expansion of the Neighbours First program (street cleaning and street patrols), and improvement of living conditions in single-room occupancy hotels. A March 2004 Economic Revitalization Plan now proposes to lever additional economic development opportunities from several key linkages: the 2006 UN World Urban Forum, the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, and the federal government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy. A major objective is to ensure that residents of the Downtown Eastside benefit from these major events and programs.

"A fundamental challenge is to improve economic and living conditions without displacing low income population", says Nathan Edelson, Senior Planner, City of Vancouver. A commitment to develop social and community economic development initiatives has been essential and one innovative approach includes the Social Purchasing Portal, an initiative of Fast Track to Employment (FTE), and BC Technology Social Venture Partners which links private business purchasers and suppliers with community economic development activity. While not

directly funded by the Vancouver Agreement, proponents of urban development agreements point to these types of spinoffs as one of the significant advantages of a 'platform' of coordinated collaboration.

On the other hand, urban development agreements are not always a panacea to inner city revitalization for several reasons. An agreement is not a substitute for large cities having adequate and sufficient powers for making long-term, sustainable investment in their communities. While the agreement can provide a 'multi-sectoral table' for coordinating programs and investment, accountability still resides in senior levels of government, there is no guarantee of funding and significant local community engagement is difficult to achieve.

For more information:

Vancouver Agreement,
www.vancouveragreement.ca

Downtown Eastside,
www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/index.htm

Four Pillars Coalition,
www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars/coalition.htm

Social Purchasing Portal,
www.sppvancouver.org/

Winnipeg Tripartite Agreement,
www.gov.mb.ca/ia/tripartite/

Connecting Public Policy with Frontline Experience

John Stapleton

The St. Christopher House Community Undertaking Social Policy (CUSP) Project

Agencies that deliver social services have been increasingly frustrated with worsening social conditions. Workers and volunteers at the frontline repeatedly find government policies and income support programs that hinder or even worsen the financial situation of individuals: - often unintentionally. Concerned about the gap between frontline experience and policy design, St. Christopher House, a multi-service community agency located in west central Toronto, began the Community Undertaking Social Policy (CUSP) project in 2000 with funding from the Atkinson Foundation and support from Massey College.

CUSP is based on the model of an “artist in residence”. A policy expert temporarily joins the St. Christopher House community of program participants, volunteers, frontline staff, management, Board of Directors and partner agencies to share and analyze stories of their lived experience. The

goal is to ground current social policy work in our community: creating an informed dialogue between policy-makers and affected community members in order to improve the quality of social policy. Policy-makers gain greater sensitivity to the nuanced issues facing diverse low-income people while low-income people and frontline agencies improve their ability to contribute to improved social policy.

In addition to the CUSP policy ‘fellows’, St. Christopher House works with volunteer technical experts from the financial services and business community to deliberate on solutions to some of the income policy problems identified during these projects. St. Christopher House and its networks are building more awareness about these income policy problems with lower-income people and with the broader public. As a result, some government policy-makers are listening more attentively to frontline community issues.

Observations by John Stapleton, CUSP Fellow, excerpted from “Learning from the Public and the Lived Experience of St. Christopher House Participants”, August 2003.

In my interviews [with St. Christopher House participants and staff during my fellowship program], I started by asking participants on social assistance how they saw themselves. Interestingly, they saw themselves first and foremost in terms of what they do for a living even if they are temporarily not doing it. They then saw themselves, as mothers or fathers, as friends, as volunteers, as community members, as citizens, as immigrants, as voters, as taxpayers, and as advocates.

I now believe that what often gets mistaken for apathy or lack of interest in

their situation as social assistance recipients is really a detachment from political and social debates over issues in which they do not see themselves as having a real interest. Like society at large, participants see themselves as individuals struggling for self-sufficiency. Like anyone else, they think that they would do better if they had more money from the system and they don’t like stigma, but they see themselves as solving this dilemma by individual effort or perhaps with personal assistance to help them individually out of poverty.

Part of this viewpoint may be explained by the times we live in. Paid work, mostly outside of the home, is valued highly in our society by both men and women. Like governments that see work as an alternative to welfare, they largely share this value and vision for

themselves, even when they are raising young children alone.

Insofar as St. Christopher House helps them to achieve their own goals to become self-sufficient, they are very much advocates of the work of St. Christopher House and other agencies. However, few had strong feelings in favour of a social policy agenda to make changes in society and social policy in general.

In social policy terms, government, agencies and advocacy groups from both left and right, argue the pros and cons of welfare reform, some believing in further cuts while others call for increases to strengthen the safety net. But from the perspective of welfare recipients, perhaps agencies like St Christopher House could achieve more success by promoting the

quality and equality of opportunity in the workplace itself, rather than trying to improve welfare. In this way, the “deconstruction of welfare” as a policy alternative could be of interest to advocacy agencies. This approach is not new. It was originally championed in Ontario with the publication of the *Transitions* document in 1988. It is often referred to as the SARC report or (Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee).

For the last ten years, government policymakers have paid much attention to a type of welfare reform that has resulted in lower rates and tighter rules. These changes are designed to get people to go to work. This approach needs to change. More emphasis should be placed on the quality and adequacy of paid work itself.

People become trapped on social assistance because the workplace simply does not offer them an economically viable set of opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency. Minimum wages, tenuous hours, and equally tenuous work-place experiences we have do not support independence from programs. Moreover, benefit structures for welfare programs were designed to support non-work. What is needed is work-friendly policies such as improved childcare, financial literacy, and income supplementation, private and public job security, and advancement regimens.

A particular work-unfriendly policies are the tax advantaged savings vehicles available to the middle class and well-to-do but not the poor. The Registered Development Savings Plan (RDSP) concept that I [developed] as one of the written products of this fellowship is a vehicle that policymakers could use to promote opportunity in new and creative ways.

One other reason people become trapped on social assistance is that they simply cannot afford to save. They are also prohibited by welfare rules from taking on the arduous process of returning or entering the workplace.

In the US, polling results suggest that a majority of people favour welfare savings going into providing greater opportunity for the recipients from whom the savings have been realized. Making a case to the public that some of the savings should be spent on recipients themselves will fall on receptive ears.

Participants at St. Christopher House seem to be simply asking governments, their agencies and the public to help them get ahead and to refrain from policy efforts that stop them from doing so. They are asking for no special favours – they are just asking for policies that level the playing field to give them the same opportunities that others with higher income and wealth already have.

By pigeonholing people into the very unpopular label of social assistance recipients, advocates see participants as people who are outside the labour force who have needs, yet the wider society sees them as people who don't work. The reality is neither. Most working poor will either go on welfare or alter their life patterns as a result of a fear of ending up on welfare. Most welfare poor experience a constant cycling between welfare, EI, and work. They take their identity from the less stigmatizing role of “worker temporarily not working”.

By focusing on social assistance, agencies, governments, and the public divert themselves into a debate over entitlement vs. forced work when the real debate is over the availability vs. the non-availability of opportunity to enter the mainstream. We need to focus on that mainstream, improving both its reality while breaking down the barriers to access to it.

Access to income security programs is still a problem for low income people

Richard Shillington, the first recipient of the CUSP fellowship at St. Christopher House discovered that governments do not actively notify people of eligibility for government income security

programs even when they are aware (through large computer systems) that people are eligible for them. He was able to elicit real changes to policies at the federal level to use these computer systems notify people of their eligibility for basic income security.

The fact that people are unaware of the programs for which they are eligible reveals that social inequality in Canada results in part from the availability and quality of basic information. The good news is that there are a number of areas where progress can be made.

For example, the federal government could do a better job to notify low-income families with children in Ontario of their potential eligibility for the National Child Benefit and other tax-based benefits. St. Christopher House has taken an active interest in this area and has written to Canada Customs and Revenue Agency in order to make progress on this matter. A positive response to begin a dialogue on these issues has been received.

I was struck by the low quality and lack of availability of information on basic income security program eligibility experienced by St. Christopher House participants. Program complexity, difficulty in access, language and cultural barriers all conspire to keep needed information and assistance on eligibility and application processes away from needy low-income people.

Repeatedly, I interviewed people eligible for social assistance who did not receive it and did not know how to go about receiving it. The same was true for processes to lower public housing rents, to apply for Canada Pension Plan (CPP), disability benefits, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)

People living sometimes chaotic and disorganized lives, often living without the help of others, have particular problems in accessing information, processes and services. Information requirements

involving photocopying, faxing, filling out forms and access to third party verification are often onerous enough to prevent people from receiving benefits for which they are eligible.

Governments and the public alike often believe that potential recipients of benefits are expert in the rules surrounding access and eligibility. However true this may be for a small minority of people, it is not the case for a large cadre of people who come to the attention of social service agencies with a host of issues that find their root cause in lack of access to basic income.

As we move in to a period of greater automation of access for government services, these same governments should provide needed assistance to those who have difficulty with these innovations. Many simply do not possess the set of skills required to understand and access basic income security.

Living on low income accentuates the important role of minor windfalls

In all of the discussions about helping low-income people to build assets to save towards an income for later life, much of the discussion in the literature tends to centre on savings (e.g. Individual Development Accounts or IDA's).

Although important, the whole idea of saving money while on welfare is not only rare and difficult, it also invokes serious debate over the adequacy of social assistance rates in two important ways. The first centres on the level of deprivation that one would have to endure in order to save money while receiving welfare while the second invokes the possible adequacy of social assistance rates if one is able to save in the first instance.

In my immediate experience before coming to St. Christopher House, I worked in a social assistance field office talking to clients on a daily basis. Only two recipients had questions around sav-

ing money while on assistance. Each was in a special situation with special housing and other supports which allowed them to entertain the possibility of building assets. I was impressed with the number of people calling on the subject of how to handle a minor windfall.

These windfalls came in three varieties:

- minor inheritances or payback of money owed in a personal situation;
- compensation awards of some type;
- or
- lump-sum payments from a program where amounts had accrued over a period of time

Put together, these three varieties of windfall result in a fairly common phenomena experienced by welfare recipients (or people worried about needing welfare in the near to medium term). In many instances, governments exempt these windfalls under social assistance rules. However, the common denominator among recipients, their trustees, and advocates is how to use the windfall in a responsible way to meet the needs of the recipient.

In my mind, windfall management is a whole area that relates to the daily, lived experience of low-income people that requires much more policy consideration by governments and policymakers. On the one hand, a concerned public can be driven to distraction over stories of "welfare spending sprees" where clients spend their assets just to remain eligible for a program. On the other, explicit policies insist on real impoverishment as a requirement for eligibility. These policies are often complicit in forcing these hurried spending sprees in the first instance.

At St. Christopher House, we are proposing the Registered Development Savings Plan (RDSP) as a place to park a windfall until a point in time is reached where recipients can put the money to its best use.

Poor people are used to living in their

private boom and bust economies made up of long droughts and minor windfalls – they learn to manage their money to meet these realities. Social policymakers should study these realities and try to make policies that reduce recidivism among social assistance recipients. Good evidence from the US shows that recidivism is dramatically decreased where former recipients are able to retain and save a cushion of funds to call on during the inevitable rough patches that occurs from time to time.

Low Income Individuals and Communities

A demanding public wants to have social programs that exact responsible behaviour from those who benefit from them. Those who may benefit from social programs must be prepared to change their behaviour in positive ways in order to derive the maximum benefit.

But the public also wants programs that work and perform in the best interests of individuals and society. There is no point putting a program in place that is too hard to access or which creates incentives to work where the rewards of work are too meagre.

Low-income people are in agreement with society at large on the best ways to alleviate poverty. They share a common view of dependency and have the same dreams for themselves and their children.

At the community level, the same is true. Community activists have started new approaches to reverse the negative view of low-income communities as vulnerable and weak. They portray low income communities as strong, innovative and resilient (just like so-called rich communities). Through such approaches as community assets mapping these activists replicate the positive approaches that agencies use commonly when they approach their donors for funding.

By reversing the safer and more traditional approaches that emphasize weak-

ness, under funding, discrimination and vulnerability, these new approaches show the hidden assets that these communities contain.

But we need to be mindful of the reasons that low-income communities hide their assets in the first instance. This is not a simple paradigm shift. It is the reality that communities hide assets for the same reasons that individuals do – the fear that if exposed, the assets will be at risk of being taken away.

We need assets retention strategies for individuals to gain traction to live, work, and build their assets in plain view. Communities need the same strategies and need them even more urgently when

they take pride in the assets and strengths that low income communities possess. Just like individuals, communities need to be able to live, work, and build their assets in plain view.

John Stapleton joined St. Christopher House as the second CUSP "policy fellow" in 2002/03 after 28 years in the provincial civil service as a senior policy analyst. Stapleton worked with diverse members of the St. Christopher House community to explore issues such as access to different income security programs, the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the National Child Benefit and how the civil service and politicians respond to

public opinion to shape social policy. Through his experience in St. Christopher House, Stapleton developed a proposal for a "Registered Development Savings Plan" (RDSP) to help secure the assets of low-income people. This RDSP model is an improved alternative to RRSP's for low-income people.



For more information:

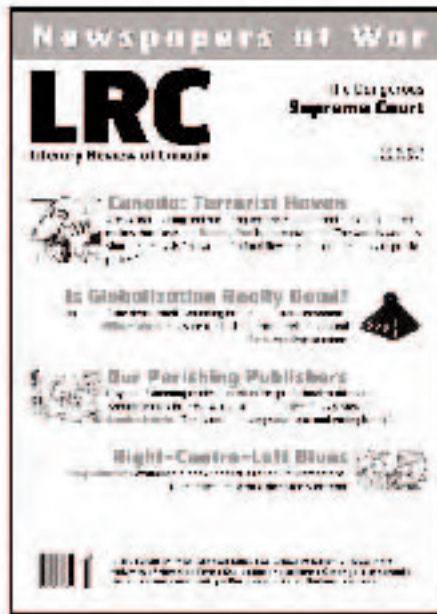
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Neighbourhood Revitalization Resources

A selected list of resources on neighbourhood revitalization and comprehensive community initiatives. Most of the websites contain related resources and bibliographies. An additional index for comprehensive community initiatives is the Community Building Resource Exchange at www.commbuild.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002). *Learning from the Journey: Reflections on the Rebuilding Communities Initiative*. www.aecf.org

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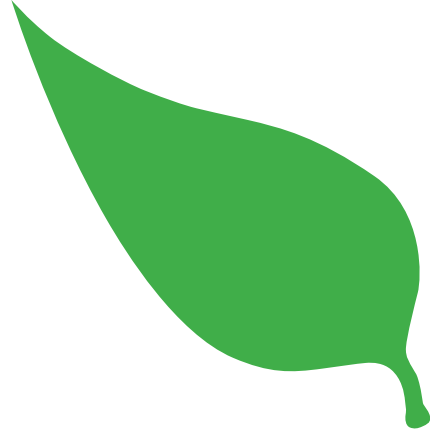
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