

Framework for Action

The mission of the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC) is to reduce poverty significantly in Winnipeg, with the aspiration that Winnipeg truly can be *A City Where Everyone Belongs*.

We are a city where everyone is valued, and we want to ensure that all Winnipeggers have the opportunity to realize their potential.

**A City
Where
Everyone
Belongs**

Background

The imperative to address issues related to poverty has been building in Winnipeg over the last eight years. Many organizations, from sectors ranging from social service, education, health, labour, recreation, and criminal justice have focused, or refocused, their energies on tackling issues that ultimately relate back to issues of poverty.

Journey Forward, a community engagement process facilitated by United Way of Winnipeg, began in 2000 as a long-term look at the problems and challenges facing Winnipeg. More than 3200 Winnipeggers from all walks of life identified five critical issues facing the community, including:

- **Poverty;**
- **Marginalization;**
- **Safety and a decline in social civility;**
- **Stressed families, children, and youth; and**
- **Systems that hamper independence.**

These five areas were further discussed by more than 170 community leaders in a series of discussions that sought to promote changes that would improve the well-being of all citizens.

Journey Forward was followed by *The Willing Community Forum*, a two-day conference that brought together Winnipeggers in discussion groups to build on and hone the work already done and to bring together the voluntary business, labour, and government-based sectors to improve the way we work together to create a better Winnipeg.

The Willing Community Forum posed a clear challenge. While Winnipeg is successful as a community in so many ways, we are also failing on a number of measurable indicators:

- **We have the highest number of children living in poverty;**
- **We have the highest rate of teen pregnancies; and**
- **We have deteriorating inner city neighbourhoods.**

The Willing Community Forum asked Winnipeggers, “When are we prepared to say as a community that this is no longer acceptable to us?”

Winnipeg has a national reputation for pulling together when faced with a serious challenge or exceptional opportunity. We have demonstrated our civic pride and community spirit in many ways, including fighting the 1997 flood and through the success of the 1999 Pan Am Games. The response from the *Forum* clearly indicated that it was time for Winnipeggers to take the legendary community spirit for which we are so famous and focus it on our city to find new partnerships and collaborations, new ways of working together to tackle the issues identified by *Journey Forward*, and create the city we want.

What was discovered in the *Journey Forward* and *The Willing Community* processes was an overwhelming sense that we are on the right track -- that by working together we can collect our human and financial resources to create a better Winnipeg.

Formation of the WPRC

The WPRC was formed in the summer of 2007 to continue the spirit of *The Willing Community Forum*. In coming together, community leaders from across numerous sectors recognized that Winnipeg can benefit from a community-wide, integrated, and cross-sectoral approach to tackling issues related to poverty in a strategic way for the benefit of everyone.

A community-wide, integrated, and cross-sectoral approach to tackling issues related to poverty.

The WPRC is a unique approach to poverty reduction in Winnipeg. It is not intended to replicate the good work that is already being done in our community. Rather, it is intended to bring together community leaders from business, social service, government, labour, arts and culture, recreation and sport, education, and health to address an issue that everyone has recognized explicitly as a significant risk to our city’s social and economic well-being.

The City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, Government of Canada, United Way of Winnipeg, the business community, educational institutions, health and social service organizations, organized labour, and interested community leaders have committed to engaging the community, combining their knowledge and marshalling their resources to make a significant impact towards poverty reduction in Winnipeg. This collaboration of diverse perspectives will encourage creative thinking towards addressing poverty and develop synergies by combining the diverse approaches and resources of each sector.

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Early in its existence, the WPRC developed the aspiration statement, *A City Where Everyone Belongs*. The WPRC determined that tackling issues related to the stigmatization of people living in poverty is as important as tackling the causes of poverty itself. Improving the quality of life for all people living in poverty is an important objective.

The WPRC endorsed a mission statement, governance policies, and founding principles by which it will operate (see Appendix A).

The potential for a positive and productive relationship between numerous sectors is exemplified in the STAR model for generative

relationships proposed by Brenda Zimmerman and Bryan Hayday¹ and include the following factors:

- **S** **Separateness or Differences** - To allow 'facts' to be seen as interpretations
- **T** **Tuning** – Talking and listening opportunities to challenge status quo and implicit assumptions
- **A** **Action Opportunities** – Permission or potential to act or create something new
- **R** **Reason** to work together towards a common goal

The WPRC is strong within all four points of the STAR model.

Role of the WPRC

The WPRC recognizes that there are strengths in our city upon which to build in addressing the issue of poverty. The WPRC does not intend to duplicate what already exists or build infrastructure to do its work. Rather, the WPRC intends to work collaboratively with, and through, not only those already working to combat poverty, but with a broad, multi-disciplinary group, ultimately including all Winnipeggers, so that collectively we can significantly reduce poverty in Winnipeg.

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The role of the WPRC is to:

- Take a fresh and broad look at the issue of poverty in our city in a structured way;
- Assess the strengths and challenges of existing approaches;
- Create a strategic plan to, as appropriate, build existing strategies to scale, fill in gaps in approaches, and bring intellectual, financial, and leadership resources to bear on issues related to poverty;
- Use its influence to change attitudes;
- Set goals and measure results; and
- Engage with, and report back to, the community.

The WPRC wants to help Winnipeggers build a resilient community. According to Sherri Torjman,² resilience is the result of strategic actions taken in four independent, but associated, clusters which relate to:

- Sustenance;
- Adaptation;
- Engagement; and
- Opportunity.

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The WPRC intends to engage in the process of connecting the actions of the many independent groups working within these four clusters so that their work increasingly becomes interdependent. It is this cross-sectoral, “cross-pollinating” approach to poverty reduction, by interdependent participants, that the WPRC believes will produce innovative approaches to reducing poverty and improve the quality of life in our city.

¹ Zimmerman, B. and Hayday, B. 2003. *Generative Relationships: STAR in Voices from the Field*. Eoyang, G. (ed). Minneapolis: HSDI Press. Pp. 197-214.

² Torjman, S. 2006. *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Methodology

The WPRC dedicated a full year to learn about the context of poverty in Winnipeg. This learning took place through discussions between Council members, engaging with community stakeholders, listening to experts from various perspectives on poverty, and reviewing current research.

The following are examples of some of the activities and sources of information that provided background and context for the work of the WPRC:

- Presentation from Garry Loewen on poverty reduction work in North America;
- Presentations from Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction;
- Presentation from the Province of Manitoba on Manitoba statistics on income assistance and Manitoba's Rewarding Work program;
- Presentation from Dr. Judith Maxwell, founding President of Canadian Policy Research Networks;
- Presentation and research from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy;
- Discussions and consultation with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement;
- Presentation from Sherri Torjman, Vice President of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and a review of Caledon Institute research;
- Poverty matrix developed by the Department of Family Services and Housing;
- Presentation from Strini Reddy on the Positive Parenting Program;
- Several open-invitation community consultations;
- Discussions with many community leaders and residents with an expertise and understanding of poverty in Winnipeg;
- A WPRC retreat, at which twenty-three identified issues were focussed into four broad priorities; and
- Input and discussion from and among WPRC members.

This Framework for Action for the WPRC has developed out of the work done by the Council over the last year. While this Framework for Action will be the blueprint to guide our activity over the next few years, the WPRC does not view this Framework for Action as a static document; rather, it will grow and evolve as we implement and learn.

Perspectives on Poverty

The WPRC understands that poverty is a highly complex, multi-faceted issue. It has many causes, is experienced in many different forms, and needs to be addressed through an array of diverse interventions.

While the WPRC wishes to tackle some immediate and pressing issues related to poverty reduction, in the longer term the WPRC wishes to focus on initiatives aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty.

Education as a Stepping-Stone

Education is an important stepping-stone out of a life of poverty. High school completion is the first milestone on this path, but in our increasingly knowledge-based economy, high school graduation alone, without subsequent education or training, is no longer a guarantee of employment. However, the lack of a

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high school diploma remains a significant predictor of negative outcomes: poverty, unemployment, reliance on social assistance, and teen motherhood.³

But positive educational outcomes are elusive for those living in poverty. Studies have long demonstrated that the proportion of students with good educational outcomes is lowest among children from low-income areas, and increases with each step up the socio-economic status (SES) ladder.

A recent Manitoba population-based analysis of educational outcomes by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) has shown that studies markedly under-represent the extent of the challenge, and that the social gradient in education is much steeper than previously reported.⁴ This is because the largest part of the social gradient relates to drop-out and retention, rather than test performance.

The MCHP report shows that this gradient, so strong by Grade 12, is already established in Grade 3. Further, the report indicates that the results from the Early Development Instrument in Manitoba schools, and research from British Columbia, reveal that the gradient is present at school entry.

MCHP examined health data to determine whether the gradient exists at birth, and concluded that the majority of children from all SES backgrounds are equally healthy at birth. However, by the time a baby is one year old, the risk of being admitted to hospital is much higher for infants raised in families with low SES backgrounds.

An important finding of the MCHP work is that a significant portion of Manitoba children are at risk of not achieving their full potential, based on educational outcomes, and identified three primary risk factors:

- Having a mother who was a teen when her first child was born;
- Being raised in a family that received income assistance at some point during the period when the child was aged 10 to 17; and
- Being in care (removed from the family), or in protection (in a family monitored by social workers) at some point during the period when the child was aged 10 to 17.

Interestingly, MCHP also discovered that 34 per cent of students with one risk factor, and *up to 81 per cent of students with all three risk factors*, failed to complete 8 credits by the end of Grade 9. However, those at risk who did complete 8 credits by the end of Grade 9 had a much greater likelihood of completing high school.

Social Infrastructure Helps Break the Cycle

While education is a critical element on the path out of poverty, recreation and cultural opportunities provide substantial benefits related to health and well-being, skill development, and social inclusion. Research indicates that children who are involved in structured developmental recreational programs have fewer social and behavioural problems, and that this is especially true for children of lone-parent

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³ Brownell, M., Roos, N., Fransoo, R., Guevremont, A., MacWilliam, L., Derkson, S., Dik, N., Bogdanovic, B. and Sirski, M. 2004. *How Do Educational Outcomes Vary with Socioeconomic Status? Key Findings from the Manitoba Child Health Atlas*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, June.

⁴ Ibid. See also Brownell, M., Roos, N., and Fransoo, R., et al. 2006. *Is the Glass Half Empty? A Population-Based Perspective on Socioeconomic Status and Educational Outcomes*. Montreal: IRPP Choices, October.

families, a very high proportion of which live in low-income situations.⁵ Studies also have shown that a strong arts presence was correlated with reduced poverty and population growth, while areas with poor arts development had declining populations and lower incomes.⁶

Economic Development Critical for the Long-Term

The WPRC also believes that economic development tools need to be applied to enhance the transition into the workforce and minimize labour-market impediments. Families living in poverty also need tools and supports for building assets and creating wealth, in order to provide an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty.

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Mental Health and Disability Issues Must Be Addressed

It is well documented that mental health and poverty are closely linked and interact in a complex negative cycle; poverty increases the risk of mental disorders, and having a mental disorder increases the likelihood of descending into poverty. Studies have shown that:

- Common mental disorders are about twice as frequent among the poor as among the rich;
- People experiencing hunger or facing debts are more likely to suffer from common mental disorders;
- Common mental disorders are more prevalent among people living in poor and over-crowded housing; and
- The highest prevalence of mental disorders can be found among people with the lowest levels of education or people who are unemployed.⁷

Interestingly, World Health Organization studies indicate that “[most] mental illnesses are relatively simple, and cheap, to treat, and evidence from clinical trials shows that efficacious treatment is associated with significant reductions in overall health care costs.”⁸

In Manitoba, it is estimated that approximately fifty per cent of the 30,000 adults on income assistance suffer severe physical or mental disabilities and face multiple barriers to employment. Of the remaining 15,000 adults on income assistance, roughly two-thirds, face multiple barriers to employment, which often include mental health issues (including depression), addictions, and lack of child-care.

Income supports for individuals who face barriers to income and employment must be enhanced, and innovative interventions for individuals facing mental health issues must be undertaken if we are to achieve meaningful results in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for those living in poverty in Manitoba.

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⁵ Browne, B. Roberts, G., Watt, E., Schuster, U., Kingston, R.T. 1998. *When the Bough Breaks: Provider-Initiated Comprehensive Care is More Effective and Less Expensive for Sole Support Parents on Social Assistance*. Hamilton: Haldane System-Linked Research Unit, McMaster University.

⁶ *Culture and Recreation Links to Well-Being*. 2004. Ottawa: The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. April.

⁷ World Health Organization. Mental Health, Poverty & Development. 2007. *Breaking the Vicious Cycle Between Mental Ill-Health and Poverty*. Geneva: The WHO Mind Project: Mental Improvement for Nations Development.

⁸ Miranda, J.J., Patel, V. 2005. *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Does Mental Health Play a Role?* PLoS Medicine 2(10): e291.

A Robust Poverty Strategy

In her recent research on *Poverty Policy*, Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy writes that “a robust poverty strategy involves a combination of *safety net* elements that help offset the impact of low income and *springboard* components that create opportunities for success over the longer term”.⁹

Torjman identifies eight interdependent elements to a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy: (i) affordable housing, which in turn serves as the underpinning for (ii) early child development, to ensure the best possible start in life. Healthy early child development provides a solid foundation for learning in the form of (iii) education and literacy. These three factors comprise the building blocks for (iv) training and employment and (v) income security (both income supplementation and income replacement). Because of its complexity and relationship to technical supports, (vi) disability income is viewed separately, as are (vii) asset-building initiatives, which can begin to address some of the inadequacies of income supports. Lastly, the building or rebuilding of (viii) social infrastructure, focusing on place-based initiatives, allows communities to build local amenities and supports, which provide coping mechanisms, improve the quality of life, and help grow individual and community resilience.

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-Sherri Torjman

Focus of the WPRC

The WPRC understands that in order to be successful in tackling poverty, it will have to focus and prioritize its objectives and activities.

Fortunately for Winnipeggers, there are a number of groups already doing important, high-quality work in the area of poverty reduction, which will allow the WPRC to take a focused approach.

For example, the *Raise the Rates* campaign, undertaken by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, presented a petition to the legislative assembly with recommendations to improve the situation of welfare recipients, while *Make Poverty History Manitoba*, a collaborative of agencies and groups working in the sector, produced an important discussion paper for the provincial government identifying numerous policy recommendations in relation to housing, income security, labour-market policies, education, recreation, transportation, and disability supports.

The WPRC wishes to build on the strengths within our community and foster opportunities for synergistic activity. At the same time, the WPRC respects the diverse perspectives of the many groups working to better our community and recognizes that other initiatives may, from time to time, work towards different goals and objectives. The WPRC will support the work of other agencies, organizations, coalitions, and groups and will find avenues for collaboration where missions and objectives coincide.

In the first years of its work, WPRC will focus its work on the following:

1. **Early childhood development** - Focusing on ensuring that our youngest children get the best possible start in life;

⁹ Torjman, S. 2008. *Poverty Policy*. Ottawa: The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. October.

2. **Early education** - Focusing on providing support for elementary and middle schools in low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods;
3. **Post-secondary education** - Focusing on improving post-secondary educational opportunities for low income youth;
4. **Social infrastructure** - Focusing on improving and enriching recreational and cultural opportunities for children and youth living in low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods;
5. **Asset building and wealth creation initiatives** - Focusing on measures to facilitate home ownership, to support savings for adult learning and a child's education, and to encourage personal savings for retirement income;
6. **Affordable housing** - Focusing on supporting new housing initiatives and the maintenance of existing housing;
7. **Disability income** - Focusing on providing a minimum standard of living and improved quality of life for people with mental and physical disabilities; and
8. **Public education and engagement** - Focusing on reducing the stigmatization and discrimination associated with living in poverty and engaging Winnipeggers in the work of the WPRC to create *A City Where Everyone Belongs*.

The WPRC will develop action plans related to each of the eight areas of focus. The action plans will include:

- Research relating to why it is believed that the initiative is aimed at a root cause of poverty, and why the initiative has the potential for long-term success;
- Outcome indicators related to the initiative which can be tracked on a yearly basis;
- A funding plan for implementation;
- A strategy for consulting with stakeholders; and
- Assigned responsibility for tracking and reporting outcomes.

The WPRC recognizes that certain population groups within Winnipeg are disproportionately affected by poverty. These populations include women, Aboriginal people, newcomers, and the disability community. Where applicable, the action plans will acknowledge this unfortunate reality.

In all of its work, the WPRC will consult with:

- Representatives of organizations doing work in the particular area;
- Representatives of different levels of government;
- Individuals representative of the impacted group(s);
- Representatives of the WPRC; and
- Community members and business leaders.

Work of the WPRC

The WPRC will:

- Map the work that is already being done in the community towards accomplishing the objectives;
- Assess the results of the mapping against clusters required to build a resilient community and seek to fill in gaps in the clusters;

- Initiate policy research and, where appropriate, conduct research through polling or focus groups, particularly related to issues of stigmatization and discrimination;
- Bring the cross-sectoral perspective to bear on action plans;
- Draw on contacts and expertise to:
 - Maximize the potential for success of the action plans;
 - Influence participation in an initiative by key groups or organizations; and
 - Influence policy and funding decisions relative to an initiative.
- Ensure that action plans related to various initiatives are complementary;
- Approve action plans and initiate action;
- Work to create linkages between existing programs and new initiatives;
- Inform and/or educate key stakeholders and the community on action plans and issues related to poverty reduction;
- Develop, if applicable, and coordinate the measurement of outcome indicators for various initiatives;
- Develop an evaluation plan and regularly evaluate its work; and
- Report to the community.

Agencies and individuals working in the community to combat poverty will have the opportunity to participate.

Community Engagement

On an on-going basis, agencies and individuals working in the community to combat poverty will have the opportunity to participate in the work of WPRC Working Groups.

It is anticipated that many of the initiatives arising out of the action plans will be implemented by one or more community groups or agencies, or coalitions of such groups, working in the sector. In addition, the WPRC, working with organizations such as the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and Winnipeg Harvest, will convene low-income advisors to provide input.

From time to time, the WPRC may also conduct public polling or focus groups on particular issues, including the issue of the stigmatization and discrimination associated with living in poverty.

On an on-going basis, the WPRC will engage the community in its work in a number of ways:

- The WPRC's Working Groups will draw on participation from the community, in addition to representatives of the WPRC;
- The WPRC will establish a website to communicate information and facilitate broader community involvement;
- The WPRC will undertake informational and/or educational strategies to inform key stakeholders and the community about its work and about issues related to poverty;
- The WPRC will prepare and circulate an annual report on its activities and outcomes; and
- The WPRC will convene a community forum to engage the community in its work every two years commencing in 2010.

Reporting

The WPRC will:

- Report on the progress of action plans;
- Prepare and circulate an annual report on its activities and outcomes; and
- Report on its work at a bi-annual community forum.

Appendix A: Founding Documents

Mission Statement:

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council's mission is to reduce poverty significantly in Winnipeg.

Aspiration Statement:

A City Where Everyone Belongs

Governance:

1. United Way of Winnipeg will appoint to the Council community leaders who are collectively able to contribute and mobilize resources from all levels of government, business, labour, and the not-for-profit sector, which includes social service, health, education, arts, sport, and other organizations.
2. The Council will appoint a Steering Committee comprised of a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 7 individuals, all of whom will be members of the Council.
3. The Steering Committee will be responsible for recruiting Co-Chairs for the Council and acting as an executive committee to the Council between meetings.
4. The Council will be comprised of not less than 15 and not more than 22 individuals.
5. The Council will operate under the direction of Co-Chairs, one from the non-profit sector and one from the business sector.
6. Decisions of Council shall be made by consensus, as determined by the Co-Chairs.
7. The Council will report to the community through a community forum or similar vehicle organized by United Way of Winnipeg.

Principles

1. Council members are community leaders who are committed to cross-sectoral initiatives to reduce poverty in Winnipeg.
2. The Council will strive to be a model for collective community action.
3. The Council will seek collaboration and partnerships based on common mission wherever possible.
4. The Council respects the independence, while acknowledging the interdependence, of all sectors in seeking to achieve the Council's mission.
5. The Council approaches its mission knowing that there are no quick fixes or simple solutions.
6. The Council recognizes that there are strengths in our city upon which to build. The Council does not intend to duplicate what already exists, nor does it intend to build infrastructure.
7. The Council will:
 - Be action-oriented;
 - Focus on the future and on sustainable opportunities to its mission;

- Support healthy, sustainable communities; and
 - Set objectives, track progress and communicate achievements.
8. The Council will report to the community through a community forum or similar vehicle organized by United Way of Winnipeg