



The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council
A Report on Year One: 2007 - 2008

June 29, 2008

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Introduction

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC) was established based on the understanding that no single sector or organization can successfully address poverty on its own. For this reason, the WPRC has engaged senior leaders from all sectors in what will be a comprehensive, sustained effort. (See the appendix for a list of council members.)

In April 2007, the WPRC's Steering Committee met for the first time. Since then it has met over fifteen times and the full council has met five times and held a weekend retreat.

This report highlights the council's progress during its first year. This progress includes creating a strong foundation through governing documents, learning about poverty in Winnipeg and what other communities are doing to reduce poverty, taking action on four early initiatives, beginning work on a long-term plan, and hiring staff and building collaborations to support the council over the coming years.

The progress achieved during the council's first year is due to the leadership and commitment demonstrated by the steering committee and council members, the assistance provided by consultants and subject experts, the secretariat and in-kind support provided by United Way, and the support and funding provided by the City of Winnipeg, the Government of Manitoba, and the Government of Canada.

Creating a Strong Foundation

The council has ensured that its governing documents lay a strong foundation for its current and future members to work together on behalf of the community. The following excerpts from the Statement of Principles illustrate the council's philosophy and commitment:

- **The council is non-partisan, respects divergent viewpoints and perspectives, and acknowledges the interdependence of all sectors in tackling the council's mission.**
- **The council does not intend to duplicate what already exists nor does it intend to build infrastructure.**
- **The council will:**
 - **be action oriented,**
 - **focus on the future and on sustainable solutions to its mission,**
 - **support healthy, sustainable communities, and**
 - **set objectives, track progress and communicate achievements.**
- **The council will report to the community through a community forum or similar vehicle organized by United Way of Winnipeg.**

mission

To reduce poverty significantly in Winnipeg

aspiration

A city where everyone belongs

Learning about Poverty

From the beginning, council members have understood the importance of learning about poverty so that their decisions can be based on a shared understanding of the nature of poverty in Winnipeg, the work already being done by community and other groups to assist people in moving out of poverty, the experiences of poverty reduction groups in other Canadian cities, and the insights gained by people who study poverty and social policy.

At their first meeting in June 2007, members shared their motivations for joining the council by explaining how reducing poverty would affect them, their families, their community, and their organizations.

In October members reviewed highlights of a discussion paper prepared by consultant Garry Loewen. This poverty compendium presents several definitions of poverty, identifies types of poverty (transitional, chronic, intergenerational), and lists the causes of poverty (individual deficiencies, culture of poverty, situational poverty, and structural poverty). The paper provides an overview of poverty reduction work in North America and information about eighty-five of the most common poverty reduction strategies.

Council members also heard from Dr. Judith Maxwell, founding president of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), who is an expert on how social policy and economic policy can complement each other. During her presentation, Judith provided a historical perspective on poverty in Canada and looked at reasons for wanting to reduce poverty, the reasons people are poor, poverty's long-term consequences, and why a poverty reduction council can be effective in addressing poverty's root causes.

At the same meeting, Ramona Johnston, the founding director of Vibrant Communities Calgary, explained the importance of a theory of change and highlighted the criteria her organization uses to evaluate potential poverty reduction initiatives.

Paul Johnson, a member of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and its former project director, described how his organization selected its focus (Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child) and moved quickly to achieve some early successes.

At the February 2008 meeting, Grant Doak (assistant deputy minister for disability programs and EIA at Manitoba Family Services and Housing) talked with the council about the province's Rewarding Work program. This program is a four-year strategy to address barriers to employment for welfare recipients by advancing four objectives:

- **enhancing employability,**
- **encouraging work,**
- **easing the transition to employment, and**
- **supporting employment retention.**

During a weekend retreat in April, Sherri Torjman, vice president of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, presented her thinking about the way that a communities agenda builds resilience in communities by focussing on three things:

- **substance – what we are trying to achieve,**
- **process – how we organize to deal with poverty's complexity, and**
- **context – the enabling environment.**

Based on the experiences of other communities, Sherri suggested several ways to reduce poverty using a communities agenda. Her suggestions include involving individuals who live in poverty, engaging children and youth, working with existing organizations and networks, scaling up models that are proven effective, and balancing long-term plans with short-term wins.

In June 2008, the council invited Leonard Harapiak, chair of Manitoba's Apprenticeship Futures Commission, to talk about the commission and its recommendations. In talking with the council, Leonard noted the similarity between the topics that appear in the council's reports and those that his commission considered.

For example, the commission has noted that over the next ten years Aboriginal people and new Canadians will be the most significant sources of new workers in Manitoba. The council's poverty matrix shows that low income rates in Winnipeg for these groups are about double the overall rate: 44% for Aboriginal Winnipeggers and 38% for the recent immigrant community compared to 20% of the total population.

Taking Action on Early Initiatives

In November 2007, Garry Loewen met individually with most council members to talk about the early initiatives/actions they would like the council to consider pursuing. Based on these conversations, Garry prepared a list of twenty-three potential early initiatives that fell into three broad categories: advocacy, brokering/programming, and social marketing. At its December meeting, the council reviewed this list and selected four initiatives to pursue while a longer-term plan is being developed. Task groups have formed to advance each initiative and progress to date is described below.

Early initiative 1: **Expand the impact of asset building programs**

In Winnipeg, the non-profit organization SEED Winnipeg offers two asset building programs. Both provide financial management training and counselling. The IDA (Individual Development Account) program targets people who plan to save \$1,000 over a two-year period for first time home ownership, home renovations, post-secondary education, or small business capitalization. The Saving Circle program supports people who plan to save \$250 over a six-month period. Most Saving Circle participants use their savings to advance their education or to acquire household supplies, furniture, or a computer.

With funding from United Way, SEED has developed a train-the-trainer component and engaged six other community organizations in forming the Winnipeg Asset Building Network and delivering asset building programs. These organizations (Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, Ma Mawi, Nor'West Co-op, Rossbrook House, Urban Circle, and Villa Rosa) report positive results for clients and staff who have participated.

With additional funding, the program could be extended to more community organizations. It could also be offered by employers that want to provide a benefit to low-income employees.

In addition to providing matched savings, the asset-building programs provide financial management training and build self-esteem, confidence, hope, and inter-personal connections among participants.

In conversations with other council members, the asset building task group has identified three opportunities:

- **the possibility that the program's financial management workbook/course could qualify as a credit at Red River College,**
- **the possibility that participants saving for an education could receive matched funding from a bursary program or from the provincial government, which is looking for new ways to assist low-income people in obtaining education, and**
- **the possibility that the Business Council of Manitoba could modify its bursary program to provide matching funds for people saving for their educations.**

The task group has scheduled a meeting with the Winnipeg Asset Building Network to explore other opportunities to expand the program in Winnipeg.

Early initiative 2: Improve educational opportunities for low-income youth

The educational opportunities task group plans to consult with some of the groups and programs already working to provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal and other low-income youth. The task group hopes to learn more about the work being done, identify gaps in service, consider successful models, and develop recommendations for the council to consider.

Early initiative 3: Enrich supports for elementary schools in low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods

This task group has already learned that there are many good things happening to support elementary students in some of Winnipeg's low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods but that these things are not happening consistently across the city.

The group wants to talk with teachers, parents, and others. To prepare for this, one member is preparing an outline of Communities That Care, a US model for community consultations. He is also developing a description of projects that have demonstrated their effectiveness with children in elementary schools.

Early initiatives 2 and 3 both focus on education but for different age groups (initiative 2 on high school and post secondary students and initiative 3 on elementary students). As they proceed, the task groups will consult with each other and perhaps consider the continuum of programming from early childhood, to elementary, to high school and beyond.

Early initiative 4: Support the retention and expansion of accessible recreation opportunities for low-income community residents

This task group working on accessible recreation has identified four potential activities:

- advocacy,
- strengthening the leadership and volunteer base of inner-city recreation centres by matching them with suburban communities,
- providing resources such as sports equipment, coaches, transportation, etc. to increase inner-city youths' access to organized sports, and
- matching corporate sponsors to specific community centres and/or recreation programs.

The task group is now looking at expanding its membership to include people who deliver recreation programs to youth in low-income communities.

Developing a Long-Term Plan

During the April 2008 retreat, council members took a big step toward setting long-term priorities. After hearing from Sherri Torjman about the communities agenda, they reviewed 2001 Census data organized into a poverty matrix for Winnipeg that shows the poverty/employment status for specific age groups, household types, and marginalized groups (visible minority, disabled, etc.). Council members also identified what they believe are the eight most common reasons people in Winnipeg are poor, listed underlying root causes, and considered potential goals to address some of these root causes.

At its June 2008 meeting, council agreed on a process to develop long-term plan by December 2008. This process will begin in the summer, build on the poverty matrix, root cause analysis, and the preliminary goals that the council has already developed, and engage the broader community in consultations during the fall.

Moving Ahead and Building the Collaboration

Over the summer of 2008, the council will be supported by consultants Derek Pachal and Garry Loewen and in the fall by two staff who will each join on a half-time basis:

- **Harry Finnigan will serve as the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council's managing director. Harry's experience includes working as executive director of the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, as director planning, property and development for the City of Winnipeg, and as a consultant.**
- **Jason Granger, is currently executive director of Art City, a non-profit community art centre located in Winnipeg's West Broadway area, an inner-city neighbourhood. Jason will work closely with Harry while also supporting United Way of Winnipeg's own poverty reduction work.**

With staff in place, the council will become more active in the Tamarack Institute's Vibrant Communities Pan-Canadian Learning Community and hopes to secure a position as one of Vibrant Communities' Trail Builder initiatives. Acceptance as a Trail Builder would provide the council with

The eight most common reasons Winnipeggers are poor*

- **Health/disabilities**
- **Mental health/addictions**
- **Parents are poor**
- **Systemic poverty**
- **Discrimination**
- **Education**
- **Skills**
- **Labour market**

*As identified by council members in April 2008

up to \$100,000 in annual funding for up to three years, a fourth year of transitional funding, and up to \$50,000 per year for an additional three years. In addition, Vibrant Communities would provide coaching, tools, and other supports.

Trail Builder communities must secure funds to match those provided by Vibrant Communities. To this end, the council hopes that all three levels of government will continue to support the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council and will renew their funding commitments.

The WPRC has been structured so that community leaders from all sectors can join together, work creatively, and create synergies and new opportunities within the council, within their own organizations, and between their organizations. Early signs suggest that this hope is becoming a reality. Possible opportunities have been identified to advance asset building programs by working with the Business Council of Manitoba and Red River Community College (whose presidents serve on the council). The Business Council is also interested in encouraging some of the seven hundred young adults who have received its Aboriginal Education Awards Program to act as mentors to elementary students in inner-city schools.

Connections are also being made with other groups and initiatives. For example, several WPRC council members were invited to participate in a May 2008 Early Childhood Development event, which was attended by the premier, four provincial cabinet ministers, and approximately forty senior leaders from various sectors including twelve from business. The event's lead organizer is acting as advisor to the WPRC's early initiative task group on enriching supports for students in elementary schools in low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods.

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council is positioned well as it heads into its second year – a year that will include progress on four early initiatives, development and implementation of a long-term plan, and identification of new opportunities and synergies to reduce poverty in Winnipeg.

Appendix: Council Membership

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council includes community leaders from all three levels of government, the education and health sectors, business and organized labour, and community-based non-profit organizations.

Cindy Coker, executive director of SEED Winnipeg Inc. and Jim Carr, president of the Business Council of Manitoba, are the council's co-chair and serve on the Steering Committee along with the following council members:

- **Ms Jan Lederman**, LLB, partner, Thompson Dorfman Sweatman,
- **Ms Susan Lewis**, president United Way Winnipeg,
- **Ms Heather Grant-Jury**, education and training director for UFCW Local 832 and former president of the Winnipeg Labour Council.

In addition to the members of the Steering Committee, the following community leaders serve on the council:

- **Mr. Bill Belan**, acting vice president finance and administration, University of Winnipeg,
- **Dr. Judy Bartlett**, director of health, Manitoba Metis Federation,
- **Mr. Martin Billinkoff**, deputy minister of Manitoba Family Services and Housing,
- **Dr. Denis Bracken**, rector, St. Paul's College,
- **Mr. Mark Chipman**, president, McGill-Stephenson Company and governor of the Manitoba Moose hockey team,
- **Mr. Wayne Helgason**, executive director, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg,
- **Ms Josie Hill**, acting executive director, Child Protection Branch, Province of Manitoba,
- **Mr. Daren Jorgenson**, founder and chief idea officer, Jorgenson Group of Companies,
- **Mr. Edward Kennedy**, president and CEO, The North West Company,
- **Mr. Eugene Kostyra**, recently retired from his position as secretary of the Community and Economic Development Committee of Cabinet, Province of Manitoba,
- **Mr. Glen Laubenstein**, CAO, City of Winnipeg,
- **Mr. David Northcott**, executive coordinator, Winnipeg Harvest,
- **Dr. Brian Postl**, president and chief executive officer, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority,
- **Ms Louise Simbandumwe**, community member,
- **Mr. George Skinner**, regional executive head, Service Canada Regional Headquarters,
- **Ms Annitta Stenning**, executive director, CancerCare Manitoba Foundation, and
- **Dr. Jeff Zabudsky**, president and CEO Red River College.

United Way acts as the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council's secretariat.