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Inner-City Voices Community-Based Solutions

On November 30th, 2006, approximately 150 individuals gathered at the Circle of Life – Thunderbird House, to celebrate the release of *Inner City Voices: Community Based Solutions – State of the Inner City Report, 2006*.

We first reported on the state of the inner city in the 2005 study – *The Promise of Investment in Community Led Renewal: State of the Inner City Report 2005*. At that time we concluded that there are no easy solutions to the challenges that continue to exist in the inner city. We learned that community-based solutions work best when people in the community are involved, when they participate in deciding upon what is to be done and when their community-based organizations (CBOs) are provided with sustained core financial support. We saw that these important ingredients can result in slow and steady improvement for neighbourhoods. In *Inner-City Voices, Community-Based Solutions: State of*

the Inner City Report 2006, we continued with this project to look deeper into issues identified by our community partners. Our findings reflect a similar theme to that in 2005. Communities that have adequately funded community-based organizations working daily to address the multitude of physical and

social challenges in their neighborhoods, are making slow but steady progress.

There is a level of frustration reflected in each of the sections of the report that is articulated through the voices of the community people that we spoke with. They want more of a say in how systems respond to their communities. They want to be heard. They want more control over the decisions that affect their lives. They want an action strategy that starts from the community.

Another theme emerged over the past year that is troublesome, yet solvable. We found that there is a disconnect between what people say they need, and the way that the systems that they encounter everyday responds to those needs. There is a level of frustration reflected in each of the sections of the report

that is articulated through the voices of the community people that we spoke with. They want more of a say in how systems respond to their communities. They want to be heard. They want more control over the decisions that affect their lives. They want an action strategy that starts from the community. In other



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words, they want government systems to be more democratic.

Decolonization researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that: "Community action approaches assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) community-based projects".¹ We have seen that the CBO's that are most effective are those with meaningful community involvement. Policy makers can learn from this. As is demonstrated in this report, individuals most affected by government policy and programs have insight into how those policies and programs might be improved. Governments should take advantage of those insights by improving their delivery of services.

In this second State of the Inner-City Report we continue to measure and report on the factors that are most important to the people who live and work in the inner city. They are the people whose lives revolve around the inner city and therefore any discussion of the state of their community must begin with them. Central to this project is the belief that community members are most knowledgeable about the dynamics of their communities and have significant insight into what they need. The pages of the report include the voices of the many individuals that we interviewed and worked with over the past year. They kindly and often passionately shared with us their hopes and dreams, their joys and sorrows, their frustrations and anger. We report on our findings of the strengths and the progress as well as the problems and challenges that continue to persist.

Over the next few months, through our *Research for Communities Series*, the CCPA Manitoba will provide a summary of the various research projects that were part of this project. Beginning with a profile of two neighbourhoods, West Broadway and North Point Douglas, we show how persistent community-based work can make a difference. We also reveal some of the contradictions involved in the process of neighborhood revitalization. In *Inner City Refugee Women: Lessons for Public Policy*, we describe some of the challenges that refugee women face as they struggle to adapt to a new language and culture and try to negotiate and navigate public policy to help them to get the renewed start they need. They provide creative ideas for systemic change that can help with

making it possible for all of Winnipeg to benefit from their arrival.

In a summary of the report *Bridging the Community-Police Divide: Safety and Security in Winnipeg's Inner City*, we provide an overview of our findings that there is a deep divide between inner-city communities and the police service. We propose that bridging this divide will involve both a re-framing of the issue of safety and security, and a shifting of the core of the Winnipeg Police Services inner-city policing strategy from one centred on reactive, incident-driven policing, to one centred on community policing and community mobilization.

Each of the above topics and other research in Winnipeg's inner city is discussed in detail in the full report *Inner-City Voices Community-Based Solutions: State of The Inner City – 2006*. This project is the result of a collaboration involving several community-based organizations, community researchers, students and university professors. The full report is available at www.policyalternatives.ca.

1. Tuhiwai Smith, Linda (1999). *Decolonization Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books and University of Otago Press.

- By Shauna MacKinnon and Margaret Haworth-Brockman

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