



One neighbourhood,  
Five years,  
Lots of heart

# The Centennial Neighbourhood Project





A tiny neighbourhood in Winnipeg's inner city, Centennial has long endured more than its share of challenges – violence, crime and crushing cycles of poverty. In 2003, The Winnipeg Foundation launched a special investment in the neighbourhood: a multi-faceted, five-year commitment to help rebuild, revitalize and restore hope to the families who call Centennial home.

## BACKGROUND

### Vision

To improve the prospects of students in one of Winnipeg's most economically-disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

### Strategy

The Foundation recognized that, while Centennial Neighbourhood faces a number of challenges, it also has many assets: a core of committed long-term residents, locally-based community service organizations and a natural hub in Dufferin School.

Based on the concept that "education is the ticket out of poverty" the Centennial Neighbourhood Project focused on building a support system for children and families at Dufferin School. Our strategy included: recognizing that social and economic conditions impact a student's academic success; enhancing programming and outreach at Dufferin; building on existing neighbourhood strengths; and engaging a wide range of partners.

### Guiding principles

The following principles guided our work:

- Focusing on education
- Focusing on prevention-oriented poverty reduction strategies, with emphasis on pre-school aged children and their families
- Building on existing neighbourhood resources
- Supporting a capacity-building, strength-based development approach that is resident-driven
- Including the Aboriginal community in planning and service delivery
- Promoting inclusiveness
- Committing to hiring locally and building a human resource development strategy
- Promoting collaboration and partnerships
- Developing sustainable funding models and best practices that can be replicated in other neighbourhoods



## Governance

From the beginning, the Foundation felt it was critical that Project planning and implementation always take place in consultation with neighbourhood residents. With three inter-related committees, the governance model reflected the commitment to build the community from the inside out.

The heart of the Project's governance was in the creation of a committee of residents called the Centennial Community Improvement Association. The Association first developed its constitution and by-laws, followed by a neighbourhood plan that identified local priorities (including housing and safety) and outlined strategies for community renewal. An elected Board of Directors oversees the Association's operation.

An Inter-Agency Support Committee, made up of representatives from local community organizations, coordinated and enhanced services provided in the neighbourhood. It also supported implementation of the community plan developed by residents.

Made up of representatives from voluntary, public and private sectors, the Funders Coordinating Committee promoted planning, collaboration and effective use of diverse resources.

## Staffing

With office space in Dufferin School to create a visible, accessible contact point, dedicated project staff worked with local residents, agencies and funders to develop and implement programming.

Initially, Project staff included a community grants coordinator from The Winnipeg Foundation and a staff member seconded from Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. Over the course of the Project, the staffing complement evolved, with an effort made to employ those living in the neighbourhood.

## Budget

The Winnipeg Foundation originally committed \$2.5 million over five years to the Centennial Neighbourhood Project. By the time the Foundation's role in the Project wound up in 2008, nearly \$3 million had been allocated. Financial support was distributed as follows:

In-school programming	\$744,402
Other education related initiatives	\$308,399
Housing related expenditures	\$355,671
Supporting community leadership	\$304,281
Dedicated staff leadership	\$402,200
Augmenting agency programming	\$291,820
Communication, evaluation, general administration	\$120,820
Transition to a new development corporation	\$130,000
New programming/Neighbourhood improvements	\$302,782
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,960,375</b>

## Centennial Neighbourhood at a Glance

- The neighbourhood measures approximately one half square kilometre, bordered by Princess Street to the east, William Avenue to the south, Sherbrook Street to the west and Logan Avenue to the north.
- In 2001, Centennial Neighbourhood had a population of 2,385, and showed a population increase of almost 8% since 1996, reversing years of decline.
- Half the neighbourhood's residents are Aboriginal, compared with 8.6% of the city as a whole. Another quarter of the population is represented by visible minorities, including people of Filipino, Southeast Asian and Chinese descent.
- 27.9% of residents over age 20 have less than grade nine education; another 30.1% haven't graduated from grade 12 (compared to the Winnipeg averages of 7.8% and 20.4%, respectively).
- The unemployment rate for neighbourhood residents is more than three times the city's average; household income is less than half that of the rest of the city.
- 41.7% of residents are part of lone-parent (female) households, compared with 15.4% of Winnipeg households.
- 78.6% of residents rent their homes, more than twice the Winnipeg average.
- The neighbourhood is home to many community service organizations, including Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs' Freight House location, Rossbrook House and Anishinabe Place of Hope.

Source: Statistics from 2001 Census Data, City of Winnipeg and Statistics Canada

# THE IMPACT



With much of the Centennial Neighbourhood Project aimed at long-term change, it's difficult to measure progress after five years. For example, what percentage of the young students who have taken part in the enhanced programs at Dufferin School will go on to graduate from high school? It's hard to say, though there are many encouraging signs that the current generation will have a greater rate of success. We've already seen many positive changes in the neighbourhood and, given the project's focus on sustainability and partnerships, we expect to see many more in the years to come. We've seen tangible results in the following areas:

## Education

- Literacy levels of grade one to six students at Dufferin School have improved substantially, with the majority at or above the literacy level for their grade.
- School stability has increased, with fewer neighbourhood families moving.
- An Aboriginal Head Start early childhood development program was established in Dufferin, the only program of its kind located in an urban school. The program strengthens academic skills, cultural awareness and community stability.
- An Aboriginal Elder on staff at Dufferin School provided cultural support to students and families.
- A three-year, anti-racist education training program for teachers provided professional development with particular relevance to an inner-city school.
- Two groups of local residents have been trained as teacher assistants and have become community role models, helping bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students.
- A model for Aboriginal teacher education has been developed; a working group is creating a program that would train 125 Aboriginal teachers.





*Students and Elder at Dufferin School*

## Community Engagement

- Seventy-five local leaders were identified in the early stages of the Project; 30 of them took part in a planning session to identify a vision for the community, with safety and housing emerging as primary concerns.
- A local, resident-led group, the Centennial Community Improvement Association, was established to provide grassroots leadership that has been integral to the Centennial Neighbourhood Project's community focus. The Association has been active in development and implementation of the overall Project and continues to help the neighbourhood strengthen its voice, identity and sense of hope.
- A family resource centre located in Dufferin School, staffed by local residents, has provided a gathering place for families and increased community ownership of, and participation in, school activities and services.
- At least 35 neighbourhood residents gained employment through the Project, as teacher assistant interns, family resource centre workers, housing coordinator, safety coordinator, community development worker, life skills coach and home insulation trainees.
- Community events, including annual barbecues and neighbourhood clean-ups, were well attended and helped reduce isolation and build local pride.

*Centennial Neighbourhood teacher assistants*





# IMPACT

## Safety

- Safety audits were performed by local residents and a youth forum on community safety had 60 attendees.
- Based on strong community partnerships and funding from the City and Province, Centennial Neighbourhood secured a School Resource Police Officer who works out of three local schools.
- Neighbourhood residents advocated for a community policing approach by Winnipeg Police Service – a change that was reflected in the hiring of the current Chief of Police.
- Community residents have also played a role on both the Inner City Safety Coalition and the Aboriginal Advisory Committee of Winnipeg Police Service.
- Residents also encouraged City Council to establish a Police Advisory Board to provide greater accountability by police; the Board was established in 2007. People in the neighbourhood continue to advocate for a civilian police commission.

Community barbecue at Dufferin School



## Housing

- As the result of community advocacy work, Centennial Neighbourhood has been designated to receive on-going funding from: City of Winnipeg Housing Improvement Zone program, and both the Province's Neighbourhoods Alive! and Community Schools Partnership programs.
- The Centennial Community Improvement Association developed a registry of local boarded-up houses.
- Community leaders have worked with inspectors to address concerns about neighbourhood rental properties.
- Individual families have received advocacy support from the neighbourhood housing coordinator.
- Kinew Housing constructed 15 new rent-geared-to-income houses in the neighbourhood.
- Seventeen new home ownership units, 24 rental apartment units and 36 single resident occupancy units have been developed; a former boarded-up warehouse has been transformed into an apartment block.
- Two existing homes were renovated and sold to local residents by the Housing Opportunity Project.
- Habitat for Humanity Winnipeg worked with St. John's-Ravenscourt School students to add another new home to the neighbourhood.
- Through a partnership with Manitoba Hydro, 120 houses were retrofitted for energy efficiency.
- Thirty housing renovation grants have been provided to homeowners for a range of upgrades.
- Since 2003, the number of vacant lots in the neighbourhood has dropped from 30 to 18, with ten of those identified by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corp. as sites for homes.
- Assiniboine Credit Union has committed to financing five local mortgages per year.
- Work through the Project has helped to revitalize the Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association.
- The BUILD home insulation initiative has combined environmentally-sustainable development with community economic development. In partnership with Manitoba Hydro, the program has trained and employed inner-city residents to insulate homes and apartments in Centennial and throughout the inner city.



Photos: [1] BUILD home insulation crew  
[2] Jennifer Spence, active Centennial  
Neighbourhood resident, with son Matthew  
in front of their home, built by Kinew Housing

## Partnerships

Dozens of partnerships – with funders, government programs, local businesses and community service agencies – were formed over the course of the Centennial Neighbourhood Project. These collaborations have brought lasting strength and long-term commitment to the neighbourhood. Some highlights are:

- In addition to the investment made by the Foundation, we estimate approximately \$10 million has been leveraged from other funding sources in support of the neighbourhood.
- Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre played a key administrative leadership role in the project, overseeing grants and payroll functions for neighbourhood-based projects.
- Key long-term partners included all three levels of government, Winnipeg School Division and the United Way of Winnipeg. New partnerships were developed with the Manitoba Business Council, Winnipeg Real Estate Board and Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association, to name just a few.
- The Inter-Agency Support Committee, made up of community service organizations based in the neighbourhood, continues to meet regularly to share information and coordinate services.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Centennial Neighbourhood Project was The Winnipeg Foundation's first long-term, multi-faceted initiative. It was also unique among Canadian community foundations and is becoming an example for focused investment in neighbourhood renewal. With no model to follow, the Foundation approached the Project as a learning opportunity and a chance to develop a framework that could be adapted for use in other Canadian neighbourhoods. During the five years of the Project, the Foundation has learned:

- Working with neighbourhood residents to set a direction, create a plan and implement change is critical to community ownership and, ultimately, a project's success.
- Working with a variety of partners that share the vision is vital. At the same time, leadership is essential to convene stakeholders and maintain focus.
- A community's existing strengths provide a solid, recognized foundation on which to build.
- Dedicated, consistent staff working in the neighbourhood provide leadership and maintain momentum.
- Funding organizations can learn from the process and consider how their own policies and procedures might be changed to better serve the community.
- Concrete initiatives with tangible results can inspire further change; abstract policy discussions do little to build support.
- The charitable sector does not currently have the resources to facilitate transition of short-term projects into long-term solutions on issues as complex as poverty.
- Experiences and learning from the past should inform current initiatives. Groundwork already done in the neighbourhood provided an effective framework for some Project elements.
- Community development can be a slow process, requiring persistence, determination and passionate leadership.
- A significant investment in a geographically small area can make a meaningful difference in the lives of neighbourhood residents.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

One of the most exciting outcomes of the Centennial Neighbourhood Project has been the recent creation of the Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation. This resident-driven organization, which serves Centennial, West Alexander and Central Park neighbourhoods, was established in May, 2008 through the Province's Neighbourhoods Alive! program. The new Corporation works with resident associations (including the CCIA) in each of the three neighbourhoods to support social and economic development. The Corporation is already benefiting from the lessons learned and leadership built through the Centennial Neighbourhood Project – three of its staff members and several volunteers are Centennial residents who have been actively involved with the Project.

While its five-year, focused commitment to Centennial Neighbourhood has come to an end, the Foundation will continue to make grants to charitable agencies in the neighbourhood and support projects benefiting area residents, just as it always has. And, the Foundation will share what it has learned with other foundations and funders interested in our community development model.

Much of the Centennial Neighbourhood Project involved laying groundwork and building long-term relationships and support systems. Now established and strong, these will continue to benefit the neighbourhood for generations.

*Photo: Staff of Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation who are residents of Centennial Neighbourhood*

