



Community Voices

SUMMARY OF A SERIES OF CROSS-SECTORAL DISCUSSIONS



As a participant at one of the consultation meetings, I could not help but feel inspired, supported and hopeful as a vision for Winnipeg was being created. These are all very necessary ingredients to create a city of equity, inclusion and caring. The meeting also served to remind me of Margaret Mead's words, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world...indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

- Journey Forward Participant



PURPOSE OF THE REPORT



These comments capture the spirit of a series of cross-sectoral discussions held in April 2000 as part of United Way's Journey Forward community involvement initiative. In this case, the small group of thoughtful committed people comprised 173 community leaders from business, government, labour, Aboriginal and ethnocultural groups, health, education, social service, justice, faith, sport and neighbourhood groups.



The leaders came together, 20 at a time, in a series of nine three-hour discussions to answer these questions:

- 1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the most important social issues identified by the community, what would our community look like in the future?
i.e.: What changes would have occurred, what would be different?**
- 2. What things would need to be in place to effect these changes?**

This report summarizes the answers to the two questions. It includes, as did the discussions, a brief context on the Journey Forward initiative, the principles that have guided it, a description of the five priority issues identified by the community during the first phase of the initiative, some next steps and a full list of participants. But first, a few reflections based on observations of the discussions and feedback from participants.

REFLECTIONS

While this written summary of the key themes of 27 hours of intense dialogue may adequately describe the results of the discussions, it is challenging to effectively capture what many participants noted as the value of the discussions themselves.

Participants were able to hear from and interact with people with whom they would not normally meet. They were able to step back, take off their professional hats, contemplate how our community could be strengthened in the future and share their views as citizens of Winnipeg. New connections were made and former connections were renewed.

The discussions were dynamic. They reflected participants' understanding of the interrelationships between the social issues and the entire social, political and economic landscape. Participants did not engage in debate, rather they dialogued in an atmosphere of respect where many and diverse experiences and perspectives were encouraged, shared and valued.

Participants came from many different backgrounds, experiences and ideologies, but were united by their commitment to this community and their fellow citizens—a commitment to use their collective wisdom and together, based on shared values, create opportunities for positive change in the lives of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and our city. Their input to the discussions demonstrated the value of leadership groups with different roles, approaches and philosophies, coming together to work collectively towards a common objective in a way that does not require them to abandon or compromise their unique mission, vision or values.

There was broad recognition that no one entity alone can address the scope and complexity of social issues facing Winnipeg today, and there was agreement that positive change will require the combined strengths and collective efforts of all sectors. These discussions demonstrated the potential and possibilities of collective action.

It was clear from the discussions that we are all on a journey forward. While at many different points in the journey, and travelling in many different ways, we are headed in the same direction and towards the same destination—a stronger, safer more caring community. This common focus creates value in the journey, as well as in reaching the destination.

JOURNEY FORWARD—A COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT INITIATIVE

What is it and Why has United Way Undertaken it?

Increasingly over the last several years, there has been a sense that as important as the work of raising and allocating money is to our community, it's just not enough. We are raising more money, but feeling less successful. We are allocating more money, but agencies simply can't meet all of the need in our community.

Increasingly we are aware that we're failing as a community on many measurable indicators. Poverty, teen pregnancies and the perception that we're not safe on our streets are all increasing. The non-profit sector alone simply does not have the capacity to meet all the need.

There are many reasons for these realities, but one of the most fundamental is the shift that has come from a restructuring of the relationship between the private sector, the public sector and the non-profit sector. The private sector and the public sector have changed dramatically over the last decade. The private sector has become global in its perspective and operation. At the same

time, the public sector has sought to become more local, by pushing responsibility down toward the community level in an increasing number of areas.

Missing in this restructuring are effective citizen mechanisms to participate in and guide public policy formation and resource allocation at the local, volunteer-based, non-profit level. This has profound implications for the non-profit sector.

Increasingly, agencies, donors, governments and the community have been asking United Way to provide leadership to the community in responding to these challenges. Journey Forward is an attempt to provide that leadership.

Specifically, the aims of Journey Forward are:

- to involve the community in identifying Winnipeg's most important social issues;
- to create an environment for inspiring and shaping long term resolutions to the issues;
- to mobilize community in a collective effort to work towards these solutions.

There are three phases to achieve these aims and two have now been completed.

- In the first phase—information gathering—over 3200 Winnipeggers—including people who provide social services, people who use social services, the general public, and many community leaders—identified the five most important social issues in Winnipeg today. These issues are: poverty; marginalization; declining safety and social civility; stressed families and youth; and systems that hamper self-sufficiency and independence.
- The second phase—a series of nine cross sectoral discussions—involved 173 community leaders in moving the initiative beyond investigating issues and problems and towards identifying some desired changes which must take place in our community to address them. These changes will form the basis of a community agenda—an expression of the community's shared vision, goals and values as identified in the process.
- The third phase will be a fall Community Forum. It will provide opportunities to learn from local, national and international experts about some of the innovative things being done here and elsewhere and how our community could build on these successes and create others to achieve the shared vision identified by Winnipeg citizens. It will also provide an opportunity to recognize and celebrate successes at work in Winnipeg.

Guiding Principles

In designing the Journey Forward initiative, a volunteer task group, itself representative of the many sectors in the community, established principles to guide the process. These principles were respected throughout the cross-sectoral discussions:

- broad community involvement and participation;
- respect for divergent viewpoints and perspectives;
- political impartiality;
- the independence and interdependence of sectors, organizations and individuals;
- a focus on the future, not the past;
- a focus on solutions, not problems;
- acknowledgement that there are no quick fixes or simple solutions;
- recognition that there currently are solutions and strengths to build on in our community;
- discovering common and shared vision, goals and values.

Format of Cross-Sectoral Discussions

In each of the nine sessions participants reviewed the five priority issues identified by the community and then focused on answering the questions noted earlier. Each group answered these questions for two to three of the priority issues. The issues were rotated for each session to ensure all were discussed several times. A range of answers was identified and documented for each issue.

Format of the Report

Following is a brief description of the process and principles, of the priority issues, and the common themes of the answers for both questions.

The issues identified by the community were highly interrelated and overlapping. So too were the changes and conditions participants identified to address the issues. Many could impact several issues, but in the reporting that follows, for the sake of brevity, most are noted only under one issue.

Reflective of the discussions, the changes outlined on the following pages are strongly value based and include a broad range of ideologies. They answer the question: “What?” and represent the collective wisdom of the 173 community leaders who participated. Agreement on the “Whats”, now provides a strong and fundamental foundation from which to address the questions of: “How?” and “Who?” A range of answers to these questions will be discussed at the Journey Forward Community Forum and beyond.

THE COMMUNITY WE WANT

moving beyond issues to creating the stage for change

A. POVERTY—the growing incidence and negative impacts of no/low income

The Issue Today: Growing numbers of individuals and families are unable to independently meet their basic needs for adequate food, shelter and safety due to a lack of sufficient income. This applies to people who are working and those who are not. At the same time Canada's economy is growing.

This has a pervasive economic and social impact on the people directly affected, on many neighbourhoods—especially the inner city—and on the community at large. It contributes to:

- feelings of desperation, isolation, hopelessness and helplessness;
- poor health, addictions, violence;
- family and social instability;
- housing, infrastructure and neighbourhood decline and deterioration;
- a negative image of the community—internal and external to Winnipeg.

1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the issue of poverty, our community in the future would...

Have a social conscience and take collective responsibility for the basic needs of its members.

Have an integrated and person centered social safety net that:

- meets the basic needs of individuals and families;
- provides a foundation on which individuals and families can build their potential or restore their level of functioning.

Be a place where all people feel they have self worth and have opportunities, support and resources to build their capacities and lead meaningful lives with hope for the future.

Be a place where poverty is not sustainable and where there is less need to rely on the social safety net.

2. The following would need to be in place to effect these changes:

Public awareness and understanding of the economic and social reasons for, and impacts of, poverty on individuals, families, neighbourhoods and the city.

A public, and community institution that supports equality of opportunity and values and respects the capacities of all individuals.

Social policies and resources that encourage and support economic independence.

Quick, easy, integrated and coordinated access points for information and services, including neighbourhood-based resources.

Safe, stable and affordable housing and shelter—emergency, temporary and long term.

Accessible, nutritious food for everyone.

Diverse, easy to use and affordable transportation.

A continuum of learning and educational opportunities including: literacy; social skills and pre-employment readiness training; encouragement of young people to stay in school; universal access and equal opportunity to pre, post secondary and adult education.

A full range of employment opportunities and supports to transition to become and stay employed.

Real choices for employment, with wages that go beyond survival.

A wider definition, understanding and valuing of meaningful work, including non paid work in the home.

Adequate resources to support those unable to work for a variety of reasons.

Local economic development, with a focus on hiring from within the neighbourhood.

Fuller employment and less income inequality.

Accessible, affordable, flexible quality day care for infants and children.

Opportunities for everyone, regardless of financial means, to participate actively in the life of their neighbourhoods and the community.

A well-defined economic policy that complements a social policy, which is based on a justice, not a charity model.

B. MARGINALIZATION—growing numbers of people are feeling left out or on the margins of society as the population grows increasingly diverse, and as the environment continues to change rapidly and constantly and becomes more complex

The Issue Today: The complexity and speed of societal changes have significant impacts on seniors, Aboriginal people, people living with disabilities, and new immigrants and their children. There are new stresses on individuals, families and the social service network.

Fear, loneliness, isolation, reduced mobility and health issues hamper many seniors' struggles to remain independent. People living with disabilities face unemployment and other barriers and are defined by their disabilities instead of their abilities. Aboriginal people experience economic, demographic and social challenges created by historical and current conditions. These factors negatively impact quality of life and contribute to:

- misunderstanding and intolerance;
- stereotyping and labeling;
- discrimination based on age, ability and ethnicity;
- inter and intra-generational tensions;
- inter and intra-cultural tensions.

1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the issue of marginalization, our community in the future would...

Be a place that recognizes and respects the intrinsic worth of each person and creates opportunities for all citizens to build their capacities and reach their fullest potential.

Promote self-determination that signals the worth of individuals to themselves and society.

Value and celebrate what is common to us all, as well as our differences.

Be a place where everyone feels a sense of hope, dignity, control, belonging and connectedness.

Provide everyone with equitable and meaningful opportunities and choices for participating in and influencing life in our city, and for success.

Be a place where people are and see themselves included and reflected in all parts of the community and at all levels of policy and decision making.

2. The following would need to be in place to effect these changes:

Public awareness, understanding and recognition of the value of the abilities, capacities and contributions of all persons.

Equitable application of the benefits of being a citizen.

Social and economic inclusion of all people.

Interdependency of systems and sectors is recognized, valued and accounted for in planning and decision making.

More diversity in groups that have power, make public policy and influence decisions as well as more sharing of power and responsibility.

Value of diversity internalized and practiced.

People valued, not only for what they do for a living and for their economic success, but also for who they are and all their assets: social, intellectual, etc.

New vehicles for conflict management in place, improving capacities to manage disagreement and differences.

Safe and comfortable opportunities—both formal and informal—for frequent intercultural and intergenerational interactions, especially ones that allow seniors and youth to interact with one another.

Community institutions that are inclusive, inviting and welcoming.

Freedom from barriers to achieving the highest possible and desired levels of self-sufficiency.

Opportunities for seniors, at the end of their primary career, to remain physically, economically and socially engaged in society.

Supports for seniors and persons with disabilities experiencing limitations in mobility or other aspects of daily living to participate in activities they enjoy and reside in their desired living arrangements.

Accommodations and supportive services for persons of all ages living with disabilities, so that limitations in one area of life do not unnecessarily limit activities in other areas.

Media is an asset in reducing marginalization.

C. DECLINING FEELING OF SAFETY AND SOCIAL CIVILITY—violence, fear and isolation increase as respect and caring for self, others and community declines

The Issue Today: The emphasis on violence in news and entertainment, the increased pace of life, globalization and many other influences on individuals and society have led to a harsher, more violent and distrustful society. This in turn contributes to more concern about self and less concern and interest in the well-being of other people, neighbourhoods and community.

The resulting shift in values, especially lack of respect for people and property, leads to isolation, fear and loss of connections—between individuals, and within families, neighbourhoods and the community.

1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the issue of declining feeling of safety and social civility, in the future our community would...

Be a safe place where everyone is and feels secure and free from violence, all the time and everywhere, in their family, neighbourhood and community.

Be a caring and compassionate place where all people are respected and respectful, accepted and accepting, welcomed and welcoming.

Be a place where people:

- value and care for one another;
- feel they are valued and belong;
- can contribute and are a part of the community.

Actively encourage, provide and support a full range of opportunities for individual and collective participation in neighbourhood and community life.

Have a well understood and agreed-upon code of ethics/conduct for treating one another that would include rights, responsibilities, expectations and obligations.

Have a shared sense of hope, self-esteem, pride and spirit.

2. The following would need to be in place to effect these changes:

Community values that are commonly understood, promoted and followed by individuals, families and systems.

Regular opportunities for people of all means, from all walks of life, all cultures, all ages and all parts of the community to come together, interact with each other and celebrate together.

Knowledge of and a focus on reducing the conditions that can lead to crime, violence and lack of civility, including poverty, feelings of hopelessness, isolation, fear, low self-worth, disparity in means, etc.

Consistent understanding of acceptable behaviour and meaningful consequences for unacceptable behaviour.

Strong, vibrant and stable neighbourhoods throughout Winnipeg, where people know each other, have roots, feel a sense of pride and are involved and connected.

A growing incidence of people consciously creating space in their lives to get to know their neighbours and to participate in their neighbourhoods and city.

A rejuvenated inner city, an active downtown, and less separation of people based on wealth, age, culture, etc.

Safe infrastructure, and flexible, creative and round the clock use of neighbourhood facilities and institutions, including community centres, churches, schools, etc.

Quick and consistent response times for fire, police, and other emergency services, and adequate and timely supports for victims of crime and violence.

Accurate, objective and appropriate communication about crime and violence in Winnipeg.

Public awareness and understanding of the actual incidence of crime and violence in the city.

Reduced fear and increased trust and security.

Individual and community activities for the prevention of crime.

Programs to build individual, family and institutional skills in conflict resolution and crisis mediation.

Programs to prevent and reduce the effects of domestic violence.

Media meeting an increased demand to:

- play a positive role in shaping public views;
- help dispel myths and misperceptions;
- provide responsible content and accurate representation of crime and violence, balanced with the strengths and assets of the community.

Diversity in all parts of the community.

A telephone in every home.

D. STRESSED FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH—many children and youth are growing up in changing and unstable family environments without appropriate opportunities to develop and succeed

The Issue Today: Economic, health, social and other stresses, as well as changing societal values that place less importance on the family unit, are contributing to and resulting from family breakdown and separation. Many families are neither safe nor nurturing. Many parents and children are disconnected resulting in a feeling of hopelessness.

These realities negatively affect the physical, emotional and social development of children. They contribute to family and youth violence and to children and youth joining gangs, having babies, and/or using alcohol and drugs. There is a lack of appropriate opportunities to meet the emotional, recreational and social needs of youth—including under-utilization of community facilities such as churches, schools and community centers.

1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the issue of stressed families, children and youth, in the future our community would...

Recognize, value and celebrate families as the prime assets in our community and the strongest, most effective resources for nurturing the growth, health and vitality of individuals, neighbourhoods and our city.

Be a caring community that works to ensure that each family, and the individuals in the family, thrive and achieve their highest potential.

Value children and collectively work to ensure that every child succeeds.

Be a place where children are living in healthy, safe, supportive and nurturing families and neighbourhoods.

2. The following would need to be in place to effect these changes:

Respect for families of all kinds.

An accessible system of formal and informal resources, services and supports to meet the physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social needs of families and their members.

Flexible policies, practices, and decisions throughout the private, public and non-profit sector that recognize and respond to the needs of families.

Family friendly workplaces.

A healthy balance between work and family life and regular opportunities and time for families to work, play and volunteer together.

Programs to teach good parenting skills and to offer respite and support to single parents.

Coordinated and integrated systems of services for children as they move from birth through high school and then transition to adulthood, working and/or continuing their education.

Quality, affordable and flexible care for infants, pre-school and school aged children, available 24 hours daily.

A focus on early childhood development and readying children, physically, mentally and socially, for school.

A focus on prevention, early identification and treatment of children's problems.

A broad range of free/low cost recreational opportunities for children and youth.

Positive role models, mentors and someone that every child can rely on.

Opportunities for involvement in volunteer activities, leadership development and civic participation.

Programs to prevent teen pregnancy and provide support and services to pregnant teens and their babies during and after pregnancy.

Well informed, trained and experienced professionals to enhance families' and children's assets when they are experiencing difficulties in effectively dealing with the challenges they face.

Awareness and understanding of effective practices in helping families and children thrive.

Neighbourhood and community wide events to celebrate family and children.

Accessible community celebrations that families can attend together.

E. SYSTEMS THAT HAMPER SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND INDEPENDENCE—the complexity and inter-relatedness of individual, neighbourhood and community issues can only be addressed through a broad-based, collective community effort

The Issue Today: There are many barriers to accessing and providing social services in a timely, convenient and sensitive manner. The fragmented nature of the social services network, tightened service criteria, long waiting lists for some services, and challenges in accessing transportation, information and advice, confront those requiring services.

The delivery and continuity of social services is negatively impacted by poor coordination among and between providers and funders, an emphasis on project funding, a focus on treatment rather than prevention, and increased administrative, accountability and service demands on providers by funders and consumers.

1. If we were successful in collectively addressing the issue of systems that hamper self-sufficiency and independence, in the future our community would...

Have user centered systems that:

- are partnerships between formal systems of care and citizen-led efforts;
- focus on creating opportunities for positive change and improvements in the lives of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and community;
- are strong, dynamic and compassionate and balance social and economic values;
- reflect a shared community vision, goals and principles and citizen identified priorities;
- are well resourced and integrated and take a holistic, solution focused approach to build individual, family, neighbourhood and community health and capacity;
- are accessible, equitable, effective, efficient, transparent and accountable;
- provide a net not a trap.

2. The following would need to be in place to effect these changes:

A citizen developed long range community plan that supercedes government and economic cycles.

Buy in, internalization and ownership of the long range plan by all sectors.

Social policies that enable self-sufficiency and independence.

Quick and easy access to clear, current, accurate and thorough information about services.

Proactive and continuous communication of information about systems and services.

Services that are client focused, adequately resourced, flexible, adaptable, accessible, culturally and linguistically appropriate, consistent, dependable, and timely.

Services that serve defined purposes and are decentralized, localized and neighbourhood based.

Knowledgeable and continually trained service providers who treat people with respect and dignity, and who have and take the time to work with, not do to or for people.

A continuum of services and systems that balance both continuity and creativity, as well as prevention and treatment.

Services that reach out to people, enable them to get into systems, use systems appropriately to their best advantage, and where possible get out of systems.

Services and systems are coordinated and collaborate and share resources as much as possible.

Systems and services that can describe the outcomes and impact of their work.

Recognition and rewards for improvements and innovation in service development and delivery.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this document has outlined community leaders' perspectives on what is needed to address the most pressing social issues identified by over 3200 Winnipeggers. This diverse and engaged group has expressed a vision of a future Winnipeg that lives by a set of common civil values while maintaining and celebrating the diversity necessary for a dynamic and successful city of equity, inclusion and caring where all have maximum opportunity to develop their full potential.

The proceeding information will be used to develop a community agenda outlining the shared vision, goals and values identified by the community in phases one and two of the Journey Forward initiative. The agenda will be broadly circulated and discussed during phase three of the initiative—a fall Community Forum. It will form the basis of Forum plenaries and interactive workshops featuring local, national and international experts and create a foundation for dialogue on how collectively we can create the changes we want.

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