

# FCSS

## Strong neighbourhoods



### 1. The issue

In recent years, the neighbourhood has gained increasing attention as a venue and vehicle for social change. Interest in neighbourhood, or place-based, development has escalated in concert with the body of research identifying the ways in which neighbourhoods can influence both individual well-being across the lifespan and the social and economic conditions of cities, for better or for worse.

Research on neighbourhood effects has grown exponentially in the past few years, with more than 25,000 new research studies and other academic articles published since 2009. These and previous studies show that individuals and families are affected by the neighbourhoods in which they live. Some people are affected more than others, depending on a broad range of factors. Neighbourhood “effects,” defined as the “net change in life chances associated with living in one neighbourhood rather than another,” can be either positive or negative, although much more is known about negative than positive neighbourhood effects. There is considerable evidence that living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty can diminish the life chances of both children and adults. Neighbourhood is not as important as individual attributes, family features, socio-economic status, or macro-economic conditions, but it is widely recognized that neighbourhoods with certain characteristics, most notably, a high proportion of people living in poverty, can exacerbate and even cause broader social problems.

*\*A person in low income is someone whose income falls below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO) and this threshold is adjusted for every federal census. LICOs reflect an income level at which an individual or a family is likely to spend significantly more of its income on food, clothing and shelter than the average family. While no formal measure of poverty exists, LICO is commonly used as an acceptable measure of poverty for individuals and households, although it is not defined as such by Statistics Canada.*

Over the past few decades, neighbourhood decline in many American, European and, to a lesser extent, Canadian cities has prompted forward-thinking societies to revisit and further explore the nature of the relationships between people and place. In some cities, these issues have assumed an urgent dimension. Blighted neighbourhoods, often characterized by high rates of poverty, crime and victimization, housing problems and crumbling infrastructure, can have broad, negative consequences for individuals, municipalities, and society as a whole. The goal of improving the well-being of citizens via place-based interventions underpins massive neighbourhood renewal campaigns in the United Kingdom, along with more targeted initiatives in the United States, several countries in Europe, and Canada. This goal also underpins multiple strategies to “deconcentrate” poverty in the U.S., the U.K. and several Western European countries.

While most Canadian cities have yet to experience the depth of urban decay encountered in other countries, even relatively well-off municipalities such as Calgary include low-income neighbourhoods. Many of these are at risk of further decline. More recent information is not yet available, but 2005 data from the previous federal census revealed that, in 24 Calgary neighbourhoods, over one-quarter of households were living below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO).<sup>\*1</sup> Household poverty rates exceeded 40 per cent in six neighbourhoods and over 50 per cent in three of these six neighbourhoods.<sup>\*2</sup>

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FCSS Calgary has adopted a social sustainability framework to serve as a blueprint for its social planning, investment decisions, and funding practices. Within this framework, FCSS has identified two investment priorities: strengthening neighbourhoods and increasing social inclusion.

This research brief is one of six originally commissioned by FCSS in 2009 and updated in 2013 to include advances in research. These research briefs are not intended to serve as program development toolkits. The purpose of the briefs is to provide guidance from the research, where it exists, to funders and organizations working to:

- Increase social inclusion among vulnerable Calgarians by increasing positive social ties, improving family functioning or parenting skills, improving adults' personal capacity and individual and family economic self-sufficiency, and/or improving positive child and youth development outcomes.
- Increase neighbourhood capacity and social and individual capital in focus neighbourhoods.

For more information on the purpose and context for these briefs, please visit [calgary.ca/FCSS](http://calgary.ca/FCSS).

**Onward!** By 2020, Calgary will continue to be a vibrant, safe, healthy and socially inclusive city. Communities will continue to be resilient, complete and connected.



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During the past two decades Calgary and other major Canadian cities have seen a trend toward increasing economic spatial segregation and isolation.<sup>3</sup> This means there are larger congregations and concentrations of low-income people in certain neighbourhoods, leading to greater disparity between neighbourhoods and, some contend, shrinking social capital in low-income areas.<sup>4</sup> This is additional cause for concern. In fact, between 1980 and 2005, Calgary experienced more growth (81 per cent) in neighbourhood economic segregation than any other city in Canada.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that this was driven by the increasing tendency of “like to live nearby like” in conjunction with increasing family inequality. Increasing family inequality was largely driven by the poorer quality of jobs that residents held in lower income neighbourhoods,<sup>6</sup> rather than by unemployment or changes in government transfers or pension income. This trend has continued since 2005.

There is no single definition of a “strong” or “good” neighbourhood. It is generally agreed, however, that strong neighbourhoods feature (i) high levels of social cohesion and inclusion; (ii) good quality built and natural environments, including housing access, affordability and quality; (iii) accessible, affordable, and high quality amenities,

programs, and services; and (iv) positive community economic development.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, there is no agreed-upon definition of a “poor” or “poor quality” neighbourhood. In the literature, indicators of poor neighbourhood quality include rates of concentrated poverty, unemployment, residential mobility, and crime, along with density of single-parent households.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that Calgary’s lowest-income neighbourhoods lack many of the attributes of strong neighbourhoods. They feature characteristics that contribute to social exclusion, undermining the health and well-being of both child and adult residents. The larger and longer-running a neighbourhood’s problems, the stronger their cumulative impact on the people who live there.<sup>9</sup>

In Canada, neighbourhoods in which household poverty levels fall between 26 per cent and 39 per cent are often defined as “high poverty” areas.<sup>10</sup> These neighbourhoods are considered to be at a threshold or “tipping point,” where neighbourhoods that are at risk of decline begin tip downward. At this threshold social and economic problems accumulate and intensify, and residents either begin to move away or be negatively affected by the place in which they live. On the other hand, tipping point neighbourhoods

that are in the process of revitalization begin to tip upward. Problems diminish, property values increase, and so on. The tipping point for Canadian (and European) neighbourhoods is much higher than it is for American neighbourhoods. Some American research indicates that, once the proportion of low-income residents in an American neighbourhood reaches 15 per cent, the neighbourhood begins to discourage positive behaviours (such as working). When the poverty level reaches 20 per cent, the neighbourhood actually begins to encourage negative behaviours and problems (such as school drop-out, crime, and increased duration of household poverty).<sup>11</sup> These differences among countries may be attributable to more extensive social, health, and other support programs in European countries and in Canada, compared with the United States. These programs are believed to mute negative neighbourhood effects.<sup>12</sup>

Once a “very high poverty level,” defined as 40 per cent or higher in Canada,<sup>13</sup> has been reached, neighbourhood renewal becomes very difficult. Therefore, tipping point neighbourhoods are considered ideal for revitalization efforts to prevent further decline and the myriad problems associated with spatially concentrated poverty.

## 2. Neighbourhood effects: What are they and how do they work?

Theories about and models of how living in a particular neighbourhood affects residents’ outcomes, along with potential mediators and moderators of those effects, have abounded over the past several decades. In fact, there are now over 300,000 published articles on the subject. George Galster, perhaps the foremost researcher on neighbourhood effects, draws on his own and others’ research to identify 15 potential causal pathways within four domains: social, environmental, geographical, and institutional.<sup>14</sup> Sorting through the best evidence on neighbourhood effect mechanisms, Galster summarizes what we now know about neighbourhood effects and how they work as follows:<sup>15</sup>

- Spatially-concentrated poverty has been consistently linked with a range of negative outcomes. In some cases, the link between poverty and negative outcomes is weak social cohesion and lack of social

control, but this is not always the case.

This indicates that social cohesion is not the only mechanism at work.

- Spatially-concentrated poverty is not, on its own, definitively linked to labour market and employment outcomes. While a person living in a low-income neighbourhood may have worse life chances than an identical person in a better-off neighbourhood, this is not just because the neighbourhood’s residents are poor. Rather, other factors causing or caused by concentrations of poverty are also at play.
- Exposure to violence in neighbourhoods has negative psychological impacts on children and adults. Although the longitudinal evidence is still sparse, these impacts most likely endure and have long-term impacts on health, education, and economic outcomes. The same is true of exposure to environmental pollutants and

toxins in housing and in neighbourhoods as a whole.

- Neighbourhood effects on children and youth can be substantial. With the probable exception of environmental toxins, they are largely mediated through parents, who are themselves influenced by the social, environmental, geographic, and institutional dimensions of neighbourhood.
- It is probably true that neighbourhood stigma, lack of local amenities and services, and negative local market actors (liquor stores, drug trade) cause negative neighbourhood effects. It has been very difficult to identify the precise causal pathways through research, however.
- In the U.S., there is evidence that neighbourhood problems are transmitted among residents through social contagion and/or collective socialization. In Western European countries, however, the findings are highly inconsistent and not compelling.

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- The negative influence of disadvantaged neighbours is stronger than the positive influence of affluent neighbours, especially in the U.S. In addition, in the U.S., there is evidence that a certain threshold of affluent neighbours (with the threshold depending on the outcome being considered) influences social controls and collective socialization to the benefit of less well-off neighbours. The findings from research on Western European neighbourhoods is much less definitive.
- Mixing of income groups in neighbourhoods has been introduced as a strategy to address competition and relative deprivation. It does not appear to

be highly effective in countering negative neighbourhood effects, at least in Europe. (Note: As discussed in Section 3.2.3, recent evidence suggests some positive effects, under the right conditions, in several countries.)

- At least in the U.S., geographic barriers to accessing work (e.g., lack of public transit) and lack of access to good quality public services (e.g., education) have negative impacts on educational and employment outcomes.

Clearly, any one causal pathway is unlikely to exist on its own. Instead, multiple forces interact and have, at minimum, additive

and, probably, exponential effects. However, research has yet to sort out how the pathways work together or the threshold for particular problems (such as neighbourhood crime or social disorder) that is required to tip a neighbourhood up or down. From a public policy perspective, Galster is not the first to note that neighbourhood is not a “black box” where discrete, stand-alone interventions can be introduced to achieve a particular outcome.<sup>16</sup> Rather, strengthening neighbourhoods to improve residents’ outcomes and ensure that they contribute to, rather than detract from, a city as a whole requires intervention on multiple fronts.

## 2.1 Evidence of neighbourhood effects in Canada

Canada has a much smaller body of research on neighbourhood effects than the U.S., the U.K., Western Europe and Australia have. Nonetheless, substantiated research on neighbourhood effects in this country includes the following.

### 2.1.1 Child and adult health

There is considerable evidence that neighbourhood income levels influence residents’ health. The most-accepted explanation is that

*“individual poverty is compounded by the attributes of the poor neighbourhood, which might include both material and social characteristics: underinvestment in neighbourhood services and public goods; exposure to noise and pollutants, crime, conflict or disarray; socialization effects on behaviour and transmission of health-compromising social norms; social isolation and isolation from economic opportunity.”<sup>17</sup>*

Variations in adult health based on neighbourhood residence have been documented on a wide range of outcomes, including physical health, overall mortality, health-related behaviour, and mental health.<sup>18</sup> For example, research reveals a high concentration of health and social problems among Montreal residents living in the city’s lowest-income areas. These residents have significantly lower life expectancies, higher rates of adolescent pregnancy, asthma, and other serious health issues, and higher rates of avoidable hospitalization and mortality than residents

in other Montreal neighbourhoods than those in many other Canadian cities.<sup>19</sup> Other Montreal research has documented an association between depression and within-neighbourhood social capital, as measured by generalized trust, trust in neighbours, and perceptions of neighbourhood cohesion.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most compelling Canadian research investigating neighbourhood effects on health is a recently-published, 22-year longitudinal study which reported higher mortality rates among Canadians living in “materially deprived” neighbourhoods, as measured by income, employment, and education, and among Canadians living in “socially deprived neighbourhoods,” as measured by lone-parent families, adults living alone, and adults who were separated, divorced, or widowed. Material and social deprivation often coincide at the neighbourhood level. Both were found to result in a shorter life span for low-income individuals who lived in lower-income neighbourhoods, as compared with low-income individuals living in higher-income neighbourhoods.<sup>21</sup>

Most Canadian research suggests that neighbourhood income, along with

neighbourhood ethno-racial diversity and the proportion of residents over the age of 65 years, has a modest impact on seniors’ health, but seniors’ health is more affected by individual characteristics, including involvement in physical activity, alcohol consumption, sense of community belonging, household income, and education.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, for seniors and for persons with physical and mental disabilities, neighbourhood structure (e.g., walkability, “wheelability”), amenities (e.g., gathering places, public transit), and accessibility to services (e.g., grocery stores, banks, health care) are associated with social participation, which is associated with health-related behaviour and to physical and mental health.<sup>23</sup>

The following are examples of Canadian studies that demonstrate how children’s physical health can be compromised by neighbourhood conditions:

- Research using data from Canada’s National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)\* revealed that small children were at greater risk of physical injury in low socio-economic status neighbourhoods. This was partly due

\* The NLSCY, now discontinued, followed, a large, representative sample of Canadian children from birth to 25 years of age, with a view to measuring the well-being and development of Canada’s children and youth into adulthood. Data collection commenced in 1994 and continues at two-year intervals. Researchers have analyzed data to produce a range of papers on the biological, social, and economic characteristics influencing child outcomes. NLSCY data and research have greatly enhanced our knowledge about the conditions in which Canadian children live and the ways in which we can improve children’s well-being. See Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). 2000. *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. (Ottawa, ON: HRDC).

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to higher levels of family dysfunction, but also to parental perceptions about neighbourhood cohesion and neighbourhood problems. Notably, the researchers concluded that strategies to increase families' socio-economic status, without improving parenting skills, would not lead to significant reductions in childhood injuries.<sup>24</sup>

- Research from Saskatoon reported that, among kindergarten students living in low-income neighbourhoods, physical health and well-being (as measured by the Early Development Index) declined from one group of students to the next over a five-year period.<sup>25</sup>
- A Saskatoon study found that neighbourhood socio-economic status (SES), neighbourhood physical condition (condition of infrastructure, proportion of houses in need of repair, street width,

road conditions, appearance, noise level, stoplights and crosswalks), and large household size were independently and collectively linked to child hospitalization rates, even when researchers controlled for individual risk factors. Interestingly, social disconnection (voting, household moves, ethnic diversity, and crime), availability and accessibility of programs and services, and smoking prevalence were not linked with hospitalization rates, possibly because neighbourhood SES and physical condition captured the underlying mechanisms of neighbourhood effects better than the other factors individually.<sup>26</sup>

Canadian research also documents many ways in which neighbourhood influences children's and adolescents' health behaviours. For example:

- Research using data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey reported that perceptions of neighbourhood safety were highly correlated with levels of physical activity among Canadian students in grades 6 to 10. Interestingly, no association was found between physical activity and the number of parks and recreational facilities within five kilometres of schools, irrespective of perceptions about neighbourhood safety.<sup>27</sup>
- Canadian Community Health Survey data show that youth aged 12 to 18 years, especially Caucasian girls, living in low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to smoke than boys and non-Caucasian girls. Living in a low-income neighbourhood and experiencing a strong sense of belonging to that neighbourhood put youth of both genders at increased risk of smoking.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.1.2 Child development

For children, neighbourhood is less important than family and individual factors,<sup>29</sup> but neighbourhood conditions can interact with family and individual functioning to the detriment of children's development. It is widely believed that neighbourhood effects on children's development are largely mediated by parenting. As summarized by Roosa and colleagues,

*"[L]ike most risk factors, neighbourhood factors rarely, if ever, have direct effects on children. Instead, neighbourhood factors are expected to influence children primarily by triggering one or more events or processes or a chain reaction of processes that are more proximal to the child; it is these more proximal influences that influence child development."<sup>30</sup>*

There are many theories about how neighbourhood and parenting factors interact to shape children's developmental outcomes. Research substantiates various theories to varying degrees. Canadian research from the NLSCY indicates that neighborhood disadvantage manifests its effect via lower neighborhood cohesion. Lower neighbourhood cohesion is associated with maternal depression and family

dysfunction, which in turn is associated with poor parenting practices that lead to negative child outcomes.<sup>31</sup> These findings are consistent with a large body of research from around the world.<sup>32</sup> They suggest that, at least for young children, addressing neighbourhood income and/or cohesion without also strengthening parenting practices may not be sufficient to improve developmental outcomes. However, "failure to acknowledge [neighbourhood] influences may mean overlooking key factors that differentiate successful and unsuccessful low-income urban children."<sup>33</sup>

A full discussion of the research in Canada documenting links between neighbourhood quality and child and youth development<sup>34</sup> is beyond the scope of this document, but a few examples are provided here.

- Canadian research using data from the NLSCY has found that school readiness is influenced by neighbourhood affluence, employment rates, and safety and cohesion, along with family characteristics, including income level and parental education. In one large study, neighbourhood effects on preschool children were found to be significant, even

after controlling for family SES. For toddlers, neighbourhood effects were mediated more strongly by family characteristics, suggesting an association between neighbourhood effects and child age.<sup>35</sup>

- Other research using NLSCY data found that the strongest predictors of conduct, emotional, or hyperactivity problems among young children were a one-parent family structure and family SES. However, neighbourhood independently accounted for a small and significant part of differences.<sup>36</sup>
- Willms' large study using data from both the NLSCY and the Understanding the Early Years (UEY)\* surveys concluded that "[t]he four most important family and community factors related to children's early vocabulary skills, aside from SES and number of children, were the amount that parents read to their children, the extent to which the family functioned as a cohesive unit, the degree of social support in the neighbourhood, and the stability of the neighbourhood."<sup>37</sup>
- Research by Hertzman and colleagues<sup>38</sup> on Vancouver neighbourhoods and children's development revealed

\* *Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a federal government initiative that provides communities with information on the "readiness to learn" of their children, the family and community factors that influence child development, and the local resources available to support young children and their families. This neighbourhood-specific information is used by communities to design and implement focused policies, programs and investments that enable their young children to thrive in the early years. UEY is currently underway in 12 pilot communities across Canada, and will be expanded to 100 communities by 2011.*

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strong associations between children's development and the socio-economic status and other features of the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Low neighbourhood income was clearly paralleled by developmental vulnerabilities among children. Consistent with previous research showing that children in low SES families can benefit from the presence of more affluent neighbours,<sup>39</sup> Hertzman

found that Vancouver children from families with socio-demographic risks (e.g., low-income, single-parent, low education, etc.) who lived in mixed-income or more affluent neighborhoods did not appear to be at as high a developmental risk as their counterparts in low SES neighbourhoods. Another study completed by Hertzman revealed the ongoing impact of living in a low-income neighbourhood in early

childhood. When he followed children living in low-income neighbourhoods in B.C. from kindergarten to grade seven, Hertzman found that neighbourhood disadvantage that children experienced at ages five and six negatively influenced their language and cognitive development seven years later, even when researchers controlled for current neighbourhood conditions.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.1.3 Adult income and employment

There appears to be only one Canadian study investigating a relationship between neighbourhood and employment. Retrospectively analyzing the economic outcomes of adults who grew up in Toronto, In 2003 Oreopoulos concluded that "youths in low-income families gain no advantages from living in middle-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs and no disadvantages from living in the poorest neighbourhoods in downtown Toronto."<sup>41</sup>

Oreopoulos did not explore any other neighbourhood factors, and studies from elsewhere in the world indicate that neighbourhood income alone may not explain employment outcomes. Rather, it is the factors associated with spatially concentrated poverty that can directly or indirectly contribute to education, labour force participation, and income levels. Examples of such factors are: neighbourhood stigma,<sup>42</sup> distance from suitable

employment,<sup>43</sup> and a wide range of other factors, including crime and social disorder, neighbourhood norms and cohesion, social capital, built and natural environment, and amenities and services. The international research shows that, the larger and longer-running the neighbourhood's problems, the stronger their cumulative impact on economic well-being.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.2 Factors that cause or perpetuate neighbourhood low income in Canada

### 2.2.1 Neighbourhood stigma and isolation

The issue of neighbourhood stigma may be less of a problem in Canadian cities, particularly Calgary, compared to cities in other countries. However, neighbourhood isolation, in terms of the distance between residential locations and jobs for unskilled workers, can be a problem. In Calgary, suitable jobs for unskilled workers are often located in the periphery of the city. Some of these jobs are not accessible by public

transit. Even when public transit connects neighbourhoods and jobs, the travel time required may make it impossible to arrive at work on time.

Canadian research shows that, nationally, residents in poor quality neighbourhoods express growing dissatisfaction in their personal life over time. They consistently identify employment, improved finances,

housing, and enhancement of services (e.g. policing, health and social services, recreation) as factors that need to be addressed to improve their quality of life.<sup>45</sup> Problems in each of these areas undermine social cohesion, preventing residents from fully participating in social, cultural, civic and economic aspects of their communities, and improving neighbourhoods from within.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.2.2 Poor quality of and lack of access to amenities, resources, and services

The links between poor resources and poverty and other negative adult outcomes are usually explained in terms of an instrumental model, where the absence of institutional resources in poor neighbourhoods limits individual agency.<sup>47</sup> Poor quality neighbourhood resources and lack of access to existing neighbourhood resources foster social exclusion of residents. (Neighbourhood resources include: public transportation; neighbourhood maintenance; retail services; schools; health care;

recreational opportunities, including those in natural settings; child care and other key social services; informal organizations; and employment.<sup>48</sup>) For example, as neighbourhoods decline, so does positive economic development. Important retail services such as banks are gradually replaced by payday loan companies and, sometimes, bars, liquor outlets, and "adult entertainment" stores, along with other less desirable services. This contributes to lower levels of neighbourhood affiliation.

Middle-income residents begin to leave the neighbourhood. This leads to lower property values, higher concentrations of poverty, and further neighbourhood decline, at which point crime and social disorder (e.g., the sex trade, drug trafficking) can set in. When a neighbourhood declines to this point, intensive and expensive, even Herculean, initiatives can be required to turn things around.

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## 2.2.3 Poor quality built and natural environments

A neighbourhood's natural environment includes the quality of the soil, air, and water. Vehicular traffic in and around the neighbourhood, the age of the neighbourhood, previous uses of the land, and the proportion of green space and volume of trees can influence each of these components of the natural environment.

Housing is a feature of a neighbourhood's built environment. In addition to the health and other consequences of poor quality housing, research indicates that the type of housing, length of residence in that housing, and residents' perceptions about their housing influence perceptions about neighbourhoods and the way residents interact with their neighbours. Higher-density housing, with smaller houses on smaller lots mixed closely with low-rise apartments and multi-level buildings and well-landscaped lots, provides both privacy and sense of community. Short building setbacks and front porches and balconies near the street encourage community interaction.<sup>49</sup> For example, residents, visitors, and international studies agree that Vancouver's densification plan, guided by "complete neighbourhood" and "pedestrian first" policies, has improved the quality of life in affected neighbourhoods.<sup>50</sup> However, housing density that is too high can be detrimental. Controlling for socio-economic status, residents of multi-family dwellings, compared with residents of single-family homes, report greater marital and parent-child conflict. High-rise housing has also been associated with less socially supportive relationships with neighbours.<sup>51</sup> In addition, very high-density housing developments are sometimes associated with crime.<sup>52</sup>

Research suggests that, in addition to housing, certain features of neighbourhood design encourage social cohesion and social sustainability and directly benefit residents of all ages. These include:

- Street characteristics that discourage heavy vehicular traffic, such as discontinuous street patterns and narrow roads. These features encourage informal contact among neighbours "that develop into social networks [and] are at the root of feelings of belonging and security, which are prime factors in resident satisfaction."<sup>53</sup> In addition, households on streets with higher traffic volume interact less with their neighbours relative to those residing on less congested streets.<sup>54</sup>
- Pedestrian-oriented design and "wheel-oriented" design, for bicycles, wheelchairs, and strollers, with pathways connecting all neighbourhood uses and with the majority of parking behind buildings, to improve safety, noise levels, and encourage social contact among residents and healthy activity levels.<sup>55</sup>
- Green space has social and psychological benefits. It "provides visual relief and opportunity for relaxation, becomes a place for casual contacts, and forms a haven for kids' play."<sup>56</sup> In addition, research shows that proximity to green space and trees in neighbourhoods buffers both adults and children from stress and adversity.<sup>57</sup> However, if poorly designed and supervised, green space can become a locale for crime and drug use.<sup>58</sup>
- Public art, featured prominently, and arts and cultural activities help bring people together, draw newcomers into the community, and provide opportunities for learning and communication.<sup>59</sup>
- The application of environmental design principles that help to prevent crime, which are often called CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles.
- Physically- and visually-accessible public spaces, located along major pedestrian thoroughfares, to serve as focal and gathering places for community events and activities.<sup>60</sup>

The United Kingdom has shown particular interest in the social value of public spaces. Research there has helped to clarify the ways in which good public spaces can contribute to social inclusion, social capital development, and sense of community and neighbourhood attachment.<sup>61</sup> The idea of public space is not limited to traditional outdoor spaces, such as parks. It includes:

*"gatherings at the school gate, activities in community facilities, shopping malls, cafés and car boot [garage] sales... where people meet and create places of exchange. To members of the public, it is not the ownership of places or their appearance that makes them 'public,' but their shared use for a diverse range of activities by a range of different people."*<sup>62</sup> For example, British research has found that street markets which, admittedly, are not common in Canadian neighbourhoods, are crucial social hubs in the daily lives of seniors, "more important than for any other group."<sup>63</sup>

As summarized by Worpole and Knox, research indicates that "successful" social spaces in England:<sup>64</sup>

- "are physically accessible and welcoming, and have extended opening hours;
- foster or feature the exchange of goods and services (beyond simple consumerism);
- are managed well but discreetly, leaving room for residents to organize their own activities;
- are shared by diverse age, social, and ethnocultural groups, for a range of activities;
- avoid over-regulation of design and space, as security and well-being are more likely to grow out of active use; and
- encourage a strong sense of "local distinctiveness."

## 2.2.4 Low levels of personal capital, social capital and social cohesion

In life, personal (or human) capital (education, skills, and other personal attributes) and social capital (connections and support) enable personal and economic success and social mobility. Low-income neighbourhoods typically include high proportions of residents with no or low market income, a high share of income from

transfer payments made by governments, low educational attainment, and low school enrolment among adolescents and young adults. The effects of these variables are more profound when they exist in combination. In addition, many of these neighbourhoods feature high concentrations of population groups who face many social

and economic barriers and are at high risk of living in poverty. These include recent immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, unattached adults and lone-parent families.<sup>65</sup>

Poor neighbourhoods often lack positive role models due to the absence of a successful middle class.<sup>66</sup> They may feature social

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ties and subcultures that stress short-term goals over, for example, education.<sup>67</sup> Also, because of higher unemployment levels, lone parenthood and, sometimes, a high number of seniors, residents of low-income neighbourhoods tend to spend more time in their local areas than do residents of wealthier neighbourhoods “[and] ...contacts tend to be between people with networks which do not extend into the world of work.”<sup>68</sup>

On the one hand, both families and individuals may be very isolated, with little connection at all to the neighbourhood in which they live. On the other hand, even if they have high levels of within-community or bonding social capital, depending on role models and peer associations, this may constrain, rather than enable, routes out of poverty.<sup>69</sup>

As Bradford observed,

*“the poor ... not only live in poverty but among other people who are also poor and separated from those who are not, signalling the absence of social networks linking to opportunity, or even information about where potential opportunities might exist. This leads to place-specific ‘neighbourhood effects,’ whereby social exclusion, perhaps originating in individual human capital deficiencies or unemployment, is compounded by features of the locality itself.”*<sup>70</sup>

It is generally agreed that social capital is both a cause and a consequence of social

cohesion, that social cohesion<sup>71</sup> is one requirement or component of social inclusion, and that social exclusion undermines social cohesion. Not surprisingly then, low-income neighbourhoods often have low levels of social cohesion. The term “social cohesion” is used by researchers and policy analysts to mean a range of different but inter-related concepts, including common values and a civic culture, social order and social control, social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities, social networks and social capital, and place attachment and identity.<sup>72</sup>

Differences in approach have led to many definitions of social cohesion, exploration of which is beyond the scope of this research brief. For purposes of this discussion, the Government of Canada’s Social Cohesion Network’s simple approach serves nicely. The Network describes social cohesion as “the sum of individuals’ willingness to cooperate with each other without coercion in the range of collective activities and institutions necessary for a society to survive and prosper, as well as in the complex set of social relations needed by individuals to complete their life courses.”<sup>73</sup>

Four key elements were identified by the Government of Canada’s Social Cohesion Network as necessary and interactive parts of social cohesion:

- Widespread participation in community and social life.
- Social capital.

- Institutions (e.g., the Charter of Rights) and infrastructure (e.g., transportation) that facilitate public involvement.
- Income distribution, equity, inclusion, and access.<sup>74</sup>

At the neighbourhood level, social cohesion generally refers to a sense of social unity and cooperation among neighbours, and the desire and willingness to work together for the collective good of community members. Like social cohesion in general, neighbourhood cohesion has been conceptualized in many ways, but most approaches include sense of community, neighbourhood affiliation or attachment (e.g., neighbourhood pride, residential mobility rates), and neighbouring (or neighbourliness). Measures of neighbourhood cohesion generally include such things as neighbouring practices (e.g., exchanging favours), within-neighbourhood participation and volunteerism, and social networks or ties and social support.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, the neighbourhood’s services and resources as well as its built and natural environments and economic development also influence neighbourhood cohesion, as discussed above. As just one example, people who live on streets with higher traffic volume interact less with their neighbours relative to those residing on less congested streets.<sup>76</sup>

## 3. Strengthening neighbourhoods

The strengthening neighbourhoods, or “place-based,” approach seeks to provide a direct path to better outcomes for residents. The place-based approach considers neighbourhoods to be a vehicle for preventing social exclusion. This is accomplished by increasing social cohesion and social capital, addressing barriers to employment and social mobility, and helping to prevent negative developmental outcomes among children and youth by supporting children and families. This can be accomplished by improving one or more of the four dimensions of neighbourhood: social cohesion and inclusion; natural and built environments; resources and services; and positive economic development. In Canada and the U.S., large-scale neighbourhood strengthening initiatives are sometimes

referred to as “comprehensive community initiatives,” with “comprehensive” meaning that “people strive to combine strategic action or project work with systems-wide change that will ensure deep and durable outcomes.”<sup>77</sup>

Efforts to revitalize neighbourhoods are rarely guided by a strictly-defined model. Rather, these efforts strive to involve residents in building social and human capital and fostering collaboration among residents, community organizations, and sources of support, expertise, and power beyond the neighbourhood. The purpose is to improve neighbourhood conditions and, ultimately, the quality of life and life course of those who live there.<sup>78</sup> What works in one place may not necessarily work in another.<sup>79</sup>

Strengthening neighbourhoods is not a “magic bullet” that will prevent or redress all social ills. The primary source of poverty generally lies outside poor neighbourhoods, and sustained governmental intervention is needed to ensure a basic quality of life for Canadians via adequate health care, education, income, and social services which, concurrently, foster social and residential mobility and reduce and prevent spatially-concentrated poverty, and to ensure that low-income families and individuals can obtain supports and services wherever they live.

An assessment of Victoria, Australia’s Neighbourhood Renewal Project drew similar conclusions:

# Strong neighbourhoods

*“[W]hile local community strengthening strategies can lead to real improvements in community networks, infrastructure and capacity, they are no substitute for the inclusive and redistributive taxation, income security, service delivery and labour market policies needed to create the conditions for sustainable reductions in poverty, inequality and social exclusion.”<sup>80</sup>*

That being said, there is a compelling need for local action to influence national and provincial policy agendas, and ensure the coordination and supplementation of government programs in place-based initiatives. The place-based approach to building and sustaining strong neighbourhoods by creating lasting changes in community conditions is a vital component of a broader social inclusion strategy and a means of directly improving residents’ lives. This approach may be particularly important in Calgary where, as noted earlier, economic spatial segregation, and its attendant problems, is on the rise.

## Key learnings from neighbourhood strengthening initiatives<sup>81</sup>

**Strengthening neighbourhoods takes a long time, though some “quick fixes” can have a significant short-term impact.** Depending

on neighbourhood conditions and pre-existing capacity, efforts to strengthen social capital and social cohesion, and mobilize communities to address even simple issues can take between three and 10 years.

**There is no single best approach to strengthening neighbourhoods.** Determining how to proceed requires assessment of the neighbourhood’s social and demographic profile, current capacities, conditions and, most importantly, residents’ needs and desires. Funders or other external players must not draw a specific blueprint for neighbourhood building.

**It is vital that residents, rather than people from external organizations, drive and lead neighbourhood building.** The success of any initiative, regardless of its scope, depends on resident “ownership.” External organizations can support the work, but must refrain from driving the community. Other residents must perceive project leaders to be legitimate community representatives. Leaders should represent the diversity of the local community (for example, Aboriginal people, members of non-dominant ethno-cultural groups, persons with disabilities, persons from all age groups). It is usually essential to invest in initiatives that focus on fostering

and nurturing new leaders from within the neighbourhood.

**Existing or ad hoc neighbourhood organizations, or multiple residents’ organizations working in collaboration as a steering committee should spearhead and manage neighbourhood strengthening initiatives.** However, such entities may require many supports to help them move forward. All initiatives should include a capacity-building component. It can’t be assumed that existing community associations in low-income neighbourhoods have the capacity to take on issues or projects, or that they are viable mechanisms for promoting resident participation in neighbourhood affairs.

**Place-based initiatives need to be combined with other relevant policies.** Neighbourhood strategies should watch for and connect with or leverage their initiatives with wider opportunities. Planning and development in the broader city context, such as municipal transit, density, and recreation plans shape neighbourhood renewal. Often neighbourhood renewal even depends on municipal planning and development.

## 3.1 A brief summary of outcomes and learnings from large, neighbourhood revitalization schemes

### Canada

Vibrant Communities Canada and Action for Neighbourhood Change were Canada’s largest multi-site initiatives. Both focused on poverty reduction. Neither initiative has been empirically evaluated in a comprehensive way.

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) was a two-year action and research project from 2005 to 2007 to “explore and assess approaches to locally-driven neighbourhood revitalization that can enhance the capacity of individuals and families to build and sustain strong, healthy communities.”<sup>82</sup> ANC targeted neighbourhoods in Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto, and Halifax. With funding from local United Ways, ANC project staff worked with neighbourhood residents with a view to revitalizing neighbourhoods. At the conclusion of two years, among its

accomplishments ANC identified increased leadership capacity and community engagement in the target neighbourhoods, an extensive collection of neighbourhood development resources, and leveraged resources.<sup>83</sup> Action for Neighbourhood Change has continued beyond the research project, most notably in Toronto and Hamilton (discussed below).

Vibrant Communities (VC) was initiated in 2002 by Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation as a poverty reduction research initiative in 13 Canadian cities. Tamarack’s eight-year evaluation of VC concluded that, overall, VC had contributed to increased community efficacy and capacity, had influenced public and private poverty-related policies, improved community responses to poverty challenges, contributed to initiatives that assist

households out of poverty, influenced overall levels of poverty in neighbourhoods, and contributed to the neighbourhood change and poverty reduction knowledge base.<sup>84</sup> Vibrant Communities continues in 12 cities, including Calgary, where it has been a strong advocate on local policy issues. Vibrant Calgary has played a successful role in influencing The City to reduce the cost of the low-income transit pass and to implement a municipal poverty reduction strategy.

Gardner, et al. summarize the outcomes of comprehensive community initiatives in Canada as follows:<sup>85</sup>

- Overall, initiatives have been successful in moving poverty up the public policy agenda, building broad-based collaborative initiatives, and supporting community capacity building, although it is not known whether these outcomes will be sustained over time.

# Strong neighbourhoods

- Some initiatives have supported the development of comprehensive, effective, integrated services in low-income neighbourhoods, which ameliorate the impact of poverty on residents, and may improve child developmental outcomes.
- Some initiatives appear to have enhanced the individual strengths of some people living in poverty by increasing individual and household assets (e.g., skills, employability, savings) but these efforts have not affected large numbers of people.
- Many initiatives have influenced policy and funding changes at the local level. Initiatives have not succeeded in reducing overall numbers or proportions of people living in poverty in neighbourhoods or beyond.

Gardner, among others, concludes that, to reduce poverty at the population level, within or beyond neighbourhoods, community change initiatives in Canada must also address the wider roots of poverty and inequality.

Toronto's neighbourhood change initiative has been among the most successful in the country so far. Briefly, the United Way of Toronto's Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy continues the ANC and other work in 13 priority neighbourhoods through direct and leveraged investments, resident grants, youth initiatives, and improved access to community supports through the establishment of neighbourhood hubs (discussed further in Section 3.2.4).

The City of Toronto's neighbourhood revitalization efforts parallel United Way's Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy by funding Neighbourhood Action Teams in each priority neighbourhood and investing in neighbourhood built and social infrastructure.<sup>86</sup> Important, tangible outcomes of the strategy thus far include a 19 per cent reduction in reported incidents of crime across all priority neighbourhoods, dramatic growth in programs and services, community groups, and resident-led neighbourhood improvement projects in the priority neighbourhoods.<sup>87</sup>

Hamilton's neighbourhood development strategy provides another example. This initiative shows promise in that it clearly draws on learning from initiatives in other Canadian cities that are at more advanced stages of development. The City of Hamilton is targeting 11 low-income neighbourhoods. They are providing community development workers to support residents to develop neighbourhood improvement plans and facilitate their implementation with neighbourhood grants from the City and the Hamilton Community Foundation. Some neighbourhoods have developed plans, which are action-oriented and measurable.<sup>88</sup>

## United States

Hundreds of neighbourhood improvement strategies of varying scope and size have been undertaken in the U.S. over the past

few decades, many of them stand-alone initiatives. An American policy think tank, the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (the Aspen Institute) undertook a comprehensive review of 48 major community change efforts launched since 1990.<sup>90</sup> This review reported mixed results. No initiatives demonstrated widespread improvements in child and family well-being or neighbourhood poverty. The key findings of the review are as follows:

- Almost all initiatives increased community capacity in such forms as stronger leadership, networks or organizations, and/or improved connections between the neighborhood and external entities in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- Some initiatives resulted in physical improvements to neighbourhoods and related positive outcomes, such as increased property values and decreased crime. Physical neighbourhood revitalization can be an effective catalyst for neighbourhood change.
- Many initiatives improved the quantity and quality of neighbourhood-based programming for low-income families, resulting in improvements in the well-being of individual program participants, but not in population-level improvements,
- "Place-based efforts have had difficulty stimulating broader economic development, as too many of the forces that drive economic activity are outside of the control of neighborhood actors."<sup>91</sup>
- Some initiatives have succeeded in increasing funding and leveraging new sources of funding for the neighbourhood and, by working in partnership with other communities, organizations, and individuals, in influencing policy change at the local level. However, they have not been able to influence policy or reform systems at a sufficiently high level to reduce poverty rates in neighbourhoods.<sup>92</sup>

According to the Aspen Institute, the most successful American neighbourhood initiatives included five specific features:<sup>93</sup>

- (i) A clear mission, desired outcomes, operating principles, and plan, including a time frame and specific tasks.

## KINGSTON-GALLOWAY/ORTON PARK (KGO) IN SCARBOROUGH, TORONTO<sup>89</sup>

KGO is a low-income community with a high immigrant population. It is now identified as a "model for positive change. In 2005, United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto identified KGO as one of the Priority Neighbourhoods. A University of Toronto study attributed neighbourhood revitalization to pre-existing community capacity featuring high levels of resident engagement and leadership. Investments of services and staff support increased this capacity. Lessons learned from KGO include the following:

- Investing in social and physical infrastructure of under-resourced communities is critical.
- Greater funding for the City's Neighbourhood Action Partnership (NAP) would improve its effectiveness.
- Some community engagement models may exploit residents' time and energy. Clear lines of accountability and multiple forms of participation, including policy and program design and community and organizational governance, are required. The current model is over-reliant on volunteering, resulting in burnout and frustration among residents.
- Direct commitments to social justice and anti-oppression in community development are needed. This includes staff training and opportunities for residents to make their voices heard.
- Flexible and sustained funding is essential for building social infrastructure.
- It takes more than community development to reduce poverty. Policy changes are required to address broader issues such as precarious work, unaffordable housing, and limited access to transportation.

# Strong neighbourhoods

- (ii) Deliberate, intentional investments in all the relevant domains of change for that neighbourhood (i.e., initiatives that assumed that investments in one domain would have spillover effects in others were ineffective).
- (iii) A focus on significantly building the capacity of residents to set agendas, gain access to resources, and respond to community needs.
- (iv) A large investment of time and political, social, and economic capital in managing partnerships and collaborations, essentially “subsidiz[ing] the relationships, sectors, and interests until new habits of thinking, acting, and collaborating enable alignment to occur more naturally.”<sup>94</sup>
- (v) Ongoing evaluation and adaptations to the original plan as required.

## United Kingdom

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was launched in 2001 with the vision that “within 10 to 20 years no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live,” and two goals: (i) to reduce unemployment and crime, and improve health, skills, housing and the physical environment in poor neighbourhoods, and (ii) to narrow the gap on these measures between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country.”<sup>95</sup> The strategy was multi-faceted, with a complex governance and implementation structure comprising national oversight; regional networks of government offices responsible for the development and implementation of local neighbourhood renewal strategies and for the support of local strategic partnerships; and local strategic partnerships to bring together the public, private, community, and voluntary sectors. The U.K. government provided flexible funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to help address locally-identified problems.<sup>96</sup>

The strategy has been and continues to be subject to comprehensive evaluation. Although there are variations by country and by neighbourhoods (“areas”) within countries, by 2007 the overall key findings for England were as follows:

- There were modest improvements in math and reading scores among elementary school students in the most deprived areas. Effects were not immediate; rather,

the impact increased over a four-year period, particularly among boys.<sup>97</sup>

- Unemployment declined slightly in deprived neighbourhoods, by about three per cent, and this improvement was sustained over time.<sup>98</sup> Areas receiving higher levels of funding saw the greatest reductions in unemployment.<sup>99</sup>
- Crime rates, including violent crime rates, declined from 87.4 per cent to 66.9 per cent in deprived neighbourhoods, compared to a smaller decline in the rest of England (69.3 per cent; 54.0 per cent).
- There was no effect on health (standardized illness ratio, standardized mortality ratio, low birth weight) in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Qualitative evidence indicates improvements in housing and the environment (streets, parks and open spaces, and environmental conditions) in deprived neighbourhoods.

It should be noted that, in 2010, the U.K. government responded to the global financial crisis with extensive cuts to public spending and major structural reforms in many social policy areas, including neighbourhood renewal. It remains to be seen whether the positive changes identified below were sustained after the government withdrew funding for many programs. The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Political Science, under the title *Social Policy in a Cold Climate*, is currently completing a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of economic and political changes in the U.K. since 2007, including neighbourhood renewal. They will publish their interim findings in 2013 and 2014, and plan to release the final report in 2015.<sup>100</sup>

## Australia

Launched in 2001, the State of Victoria has now implemented its Neighbourhood Renewal Project in 21 metropolitan and regional areas. Targeting areas with high concentrations of public housing, the project seeks to reduce inequality, increase community cohesion, and make government services more responsive to the needs of communities. Strategies to achieve these goals include increasing pride and participation; enhancing housing and the environment; improving employment, training, and education and strengthening

local economies; reducing crime; promoting health and well-being; and increasing access to services. The specific interventions vary from site to site.<sup>101</sup>

It is widely recognized that evaluation of the project has not been undertaken in a thorough and comprehensive manner. However, a few stand-alone empirical evaluations have produced some interesting and encouraging findings:

One study found that perceptions of well-being were related to quality of services and opportunities in the neighbourhood (e.g., public transport services, employment assistance), safety, community pride and, to a lesser extent, satisfaction with the physical environment. Contrary to expectations, however, perceptions of well-being were slightly negatively associated with connections in the community.<sup>102</sup>

In a study of two target communities, public housing residents reported an increase in community participation and no change in opportunities for education, health, and social services. Private housing residents, on the other hand, reported a decrease in such opportunities. The quality and accessibility of services were reported to have improved in one community and worsened in the other. In both target communities, residents’ reported increased control over decisions made in their community. In comparison communities, perceptions about controls became more polarized over time. In both the target and comparison communities, there were limited changes in community participation as measured by neighbouring behaviours, and there were no clear patterns with respect to changes in community sense of belonging.<sup>103</sup>

A pre-post outcome study of an urban renewal program in one target social housing project found no statistically significant changes in perceptions of safety, aesthetics, or walkability or in health status of behaviours as a result of a 16-month intervention. The intervention focused on internal and external upgrades to housing (e.g., replacing kitchens and bathrooms, painting, roof repairs, landscaping, etc.), along with community engagement activities (street picnics, community meeting place) and learning and job search programs.

# Strong neighbourhoods

Sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and intention to stay in the community for a number of years increased, however.<sup>104</sup>

Based on research and the evolution of Australia's social inclusion agenda, in 2010 the Australian Social Inclusion Board responded to the government's call for advice on place-based social inclusion initiatives. The Board argued that while improving the built environment and infrastructure are important, it is insufficient on its own to transform communities, and should be seen as one of the means to the end of increased community capacity. While the context of the Board's recommendations is governance models, the recommendations have broad application for neighbourhood development initiatives in both Australia and Canada. The Board advances specific

recommendations for locations with 5,000 or fewer residents. Key recommendations that may be applicable in a Canadian context are summarized as follows:<sup>105</sup>

- Initiatives should focus on building local capacity in three areas: i) economic and human capital capacity (e.g., health, education, skills, and links to employment), ii) physical infrastructure that allows residents to participate in social and economic activity (e.g., public transportation, child care), and iii) social capital, including leadership and governance capacity. Capacity-building requirements will differ among locations.
- Community economic development is vital to social inclusion. Initiatives should be founded on an understanding of the economic situation in priority

locations, including (i) mapping the local community's economic capacity, (ii) involving major local employers and educational providers (or their representatives) in the governance of initiatives, and (iii) local alignment between social and economic policies and programs.

- Long-term, flexible funding is required. If multiple levels of government are involved, they should pool their funding.
- Local governance structures are required to represent the community and drive local engagement and participation in decision-making, and they should be responsible for coordinating the local delivery of services provided by all levels of government, the non-profit sector, and the business sector.

## 3.2 Effective approaches to strengthening neighbourhoods: Lessons from Canada and around the world

### 3.2.1 Engaging residents and building neighbourhood capacity for change

Resident engagement and capacity is the cornerstone of any successful neighbourhood strengthening initiative.<sup>106</sup> "Neighbourhood capacity" refers to the ability of residents to work together to find local solutions to particular problems and to collectively influence local and higher-level change. At risk of oversimplification, the key, overarching components of neighbourhood capacity are:<sup>107</sup>

- Sense of community – connectedness among residents and recognition of mutuality of circumstance, including a threshold level of collectively held values, norms, and vision.<sup>108</sup>
- A level of commitment among residents – willingness to participate and the sense of being stakeholders in the outcomes.
- Access to resources – economic, human, physical, and political, within and beyond the neighborhood; and, most importantly, the ability to solve problems via:<sup>109</sup>
  - Fostering and sustaining leaders from within the community.
  - Building connections beyond the neighbourhood and partnering with non-neighbourhood members.
  - Negotiating and facilitating support for initiatives.
  - Working collaboratively (e.g., facilitate a group discussion; negotiate conflict; build consensus).

In low-income neighbourhoods, low levels of personal and social capital and social cohesion often mean that, individually or collectively, residents do not have the ability, skills, or resources to respond creatively and effectively to local challenges. Without sufficient neighbourhood capacity, residents are unable to mobilize around issues, to exercise the political clout required to attract public or private resources, and to forge vital connections beyond the neighbourhood ("bridging" social capital).

Although there is no single model for neighbourhood development or capacity building, it generally involves:

- Equipping people with skills and competencies they would not otherwise have.
- Realizing existing skills and developing potential.
- Promoting increased self-confidence.
- Promoting people's ability to take responsibility for identifying and meeting their own and other people's needs.
- Encouraging people to become more involved in their neighbourhood and in the broader society.

In other words, neighbourhood capacity building involves skill development, but it is also intertwined with neighbourhood cohesion and inclusion. Capacity and cohesion are mutually reinforcing.

Getting to the point where capacity building can occur requires that residents are interested and engaged in what is happening in their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood

#### Capacity building 1-2-3

Increase basic community capacity by:

- Providing resources and support.
- Developing and diffusing neighbourhood leadership.
- Building processes for resident participation.

Take the first steps toward increasing social cohesion and social capital by engaging residents and building connections among neighbours via:

- Sense of community projects (e.g., neighbourhood spring clean-up, block parties).
- Neighbouring projects (e.g., snow shovelling for seniors).
- Empowerment projects (e.g., small neighbourhood improvement projects that are likely to be successful and involve influencing an external player, such as changing parking zoning or having stop signs installed).

Increase residents' capacity to mobilize for change by:

- Building organizational capacity.
- Building networks outside the neighbourhood.
- Developing policy capacity.

# Strong neighbourhoods

strengthening initiatives are often initiated by non-residents, such as a level of government, which has identified concentrations of poverty and other problems within the neighbourhood. However, as noted earlier, such initiatives must be led by residents, and engaging them in the process can be challenging. Residents may simply lack interest or they may not have sufficient time and other resources to devote significant energy to a project.<sup>110</sup>

It is generally agreed that neighbourhood strengthening initiatives require the support of external, paid community development staff. Paid staff can assist in capacity-building efforts by:

- Convening and covering the cost of meetings.
- Providing research.
- Teaching and helping with resident engagement strategies, leadership development, project management, and policy development.
- Technical assistance (e.g., social issues, funding).
- Managing information and information flow.<sup>111</sup>

However, as learned from the U.K.'s neighbourhood initiative, both community development staff and social services can inadvertently or deliberately undermine, rather than strengthen, neighbourhood capacity. When community capacity is low, and a great deal of effort is required to increase it, an influx of social service professionals and services can mean that decisions are made without residents' involvement. It can also mean that representation from residents is "tokenistic." Those in a position of power may use it to portray an inclusive process and provide legitimacy to externally-driven neighbourhood strengthening efforts.<sup>112</sup> Davies comments that, in these situations, neighbourhood residents become the audience for the play, rather than its actors or playwrights.<sup>113</sup>

## What works to engage residents in neighbourhood change initiatives

Many community engagement guides and tools have been developed in Canada, often for use in a specific project. Useful tools include B.C.'s Smart Growth Toolkit: Part III Citizen Involvement Tools, retrieved February 1, 2013 from <http://www>.

## CASE STUDY:

### Evaluation of a neighbourhood capacity-building program in Long Beach, CA

This evaluation demonstrated that resident training can be an effective means of both engaging residents and increasing their skills to spearhead neighbourhood strengthening initiatives.<sup>114</sup> This training initiative, entitled the Neighbourhood Leadership Program (NLP), is a 13-session, bi-weekly class delivered primarily in two-hour sessions over six months to existing grassroots neighbourhood leaders to improve quality of life in their neighbourhoods. The city funds the program and social workers, program alumni, and other agency staff deliver it. Translation and childcare are provided. The program culminates in six-person "community project groups" who apply for "mini grants" and then implement their projects (e.g., tree planting, neighbourhood clean-up, health and safety classes).<sup>115</sup> Outcome evaluation of the program revealed increased skills and experiences. Qualitative evaluation found that, over 10 years of alumni, participants had used their training in the following ways: working with neighbours, participating in groups or organizations, starting a project or involvement with community projects, contacting officials when necessary, directing others to resources, growing personally, and starting a group or organization.

Over half of the alumni said that the NLP training contributed to the development of working relationships with neighbors and improvements in neighborhoods. Program participants identified the most useful parts of the training as the Human Relations and Team Building Weekend Retreat and the Day of Discovery, which introduced participants to locations and services in the city and showcased successful projects undertaken by residents of other neighbourhoods.<sup>116</sup> An outline of the program's curriculum is provided below.

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM CURRICULUM <sup>117</sup>	
Session Topics	Objectives
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase understanding of the roles and responsibilities they have as participants in the Neighborhood Leadership Program (NLP).</li> </ul>
Human Relations I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase participants' understanding of human relations and to be aware of how their social entities impact their relationships.</li> </ul>
Weekend Retreat: Human Relations II, Team Building, Conflict Resolution I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop participants' understanding of human relations.</li> <li>• To build relationships with class members through personal reflections, peer-group discussions, and shared team building experiences.</li> <li>• To explore participants' leadership development</li> </ul>
Project Skills and City Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide participants with an overview of the Community Project Group (CPG).</li> <li>• To provide samples of CPGs.</li> <li>• To understand the function of the Neighborhood Services Bureau.</li> </ul>
Day of Discovery (bus tour around the city)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To learn about the city.</li> <li>• To establish relationships with NLP alumni and learn about their projects.</li> <li>• To understand what tools/resources are needed to develop a project.</li> </ul>
Fundraising and Fund Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop knowledge and skills around fund development.</li> <li>• To develop fund development skills and gain knowledge of resources.</li> <li>• To provide the CPG an opportunity to work on their Request for Proposal (RFP).</li> </ul>
Conflict Resolution II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop and implement conflict resolution skills &amp; strategies.</li> </ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the difference between advocacy and other forms of community organizing.</li> <li>• To understand how the different types of advocacy work.</li> <li>• To learn to choose and frame a community issue of concern.</li> <li>• To learn how to schedule and hold an effective meeting with an elected official regarding an issue of public concern.</li> </ul>
NLP Community Project Group Working Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore the dynamics of effective teamwork.</li> <li>• To review the progress of their projects.</li> </ul>
NLP Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To network with current and previous NLP participants and city/community based organizations.</li> <li>• To gain knowledge related to sustainable neighborhood organizing and personal growth.</li> </ul>
Public Speaking and Graduation Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify personal presentation strengths.</li> <li>• To learn techniques for organizing a presentation.</li> <li>• To understand the process and purpose of completing a display board of the projects.</li> </ul>
City Council Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To showcase NLP class of 2003's accomplishments and community projects.</li> <li>• To evaluate the NLP experience.</li> </ul>
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recognize and reward the participants' hard work.</li> </ul>

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smartgrowth.bc.ca/Portals/0/Downloads/J1\_ToolKitPart\_III.pdf. Also, Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, features a comprehensive community engagement resource library on its website, <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s4.html>.

Drawing on lessons learned from its New Deal for Communities Programme, various governmental bodies in the U.K. have produced engagement guides and tools. Scottish government's Effective Interventions Unit produced a particularly helpful, research-based guide: Effective Engagement: A Guide to Principles and Practice, retrieved February 3, 2013 from [http://www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU\\_commeng.pdf](http://www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_commeng.pdf). This publication focuses on engaging neighbourhood residents in drug prevention work, but the content is useful for any or multiple issues, and has application in Canada. Scotland has also produced the useful Resource Guide to Engagement Standards, Guidance and Tools, retrieved February 3, 2013 from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/294561/0091084.pdf>.

The Country of West Yorkshire produced a concise summary of effective steps in engaging community in neighbourhood change initiatives. The summary reflected lessons learned from the New Deal for Communities Programme.<sup>118</sup> Note that Steps

3 and 4 overlap to some extent with the neighbourhood change process itself.

## Step 1. Before undertaking a community engagement strategy:

- Complete an area assessment to assess the environment for community participation and local receptiveness to engagement (e.g., cohesiveness, economy, intensity/persistence of poverty).
- Assess baseline community capacity for engagement (e.g., organizational strength, networking capacity).
- Determine the type of engagement strategy that will be used to account for things like residents' personal concerns, other initiatives that are underway, dependency on other players).

## Step 2. Developing the strategy

- Be clear about the why's and how's of community engagement:
- Agree on the meaning of community participation and engagement.
- Be clear about the purpose of engagement, i.e., the key issues and needs to be addressed.
- Identify a baseline and clear, realistic expectations about what you see to achieve.
- Identify who is to be engaged and why, and the methods that will be used in relation to different groups and activities.

- Find a lead organisation has the capacity (i.e., the right staff, with the right skills) to develop and implement a strategy and the style of working that will enhance the prospects of success (i.e., a culture of openness).
- Start early, recognizing that some decisions have to be made before partners are fully engaged.

## Step 3. Launching the strategy

- Create an action plan setting out the means of engagement and who is responsible.
- As required, put in place capacity building activities/resources to support engagement.
- As required, produce training/guidance materials and/or learning events for partners.
- Develop clear accountability structures.
- Put in place mechanisms to review and measure progress.

## Step 4. Ongoing implementation and development of the strategy

Progress to a more evidence based and sophisticated approach. This may include:

- Developing a wider range of engagement mechanisms, including the involvement of residents in policy theme areas.
- Undertaking more intensive targeting of groups or sections of the population.
- Developing a local infrastructure, such as forums, that enables groups to work together and the emergence of representative and accountable spokespersons and delegates.
- Using and supporting local infrastructure organisations that can provide ongoing community development and training and support for community groups.
- Developing projects with residents in the lead in planning and delivery.
- Working with mainstream agency partners to establish closer links with residents.
- Moving towards ensuring that community engagement becomes a permanent feature; for example, moving from developing new groups and/or supporting fledgling ones to helping them develop business plans for long-term sustainability and shifting from concentrating on engaging people within the neighbourhood's own structures to enabling them to engage with other mainstream organizations.

## CASE STUDY:

### Quasi-experimental evaluation of a three-year community capacity-building demonstration project in Australia and New Zealand

The capacity-building objectives of Being Active Eating Well, a childhood obesity reduction strategy in three neighbourhoods, included broad actions around governance, partnerships, coordination, training and resource allocation. The desired outcomes of this successful project included the development of networks and partnerships, increased local leadership and community ownership, improved skills among health professionals, and the development of sustainable health promotion strategies. The project is now being replicated in five additional neighbourhoods. Key learnings from the project included the following:

- Capacity building approaches should be flexible and adaptable to varying local contexts (for example, age of target group, locality, ethnicity, existing capacity, resources);
- Ensuring that initiatives are community owned and operated and involve reorienting existing resources promotes sustainability;
- Promising resident-led initiatives can be scaled up with an injection of external funds for a defined period of time (for example, three to four years) to enable the organizational, training and resource issues to be oriented toward the desired outcome(s), followed by increased internal organizational funding for these initiatives and reduced external resources;
- A community capacity-building approach has greater potential to strengthen communities than externally designed and applied programs or campaigns.<sup>119</sup>

# Strong neighbourhoods

## What works to increase neighbourhood capacity

Case studies of comprehensive community initiatives in the U.S. have shown that it is easier to build associational networks among residents by targeting specific neighbourhood issues than by direct efforts to create intimate ties among individuals.<sup>120</sup>

As the U.S. Local Initiatives Support Corporation, pointed out,

*“[t]he semantics of ‘community building’ can sometimes give the impression that the task is mostly personal, involving discussions and social gatherings in which people supposedly get to know and trust one another. In reality, comprehensive community initiatives*

*generally ‘build community’ by pursuing concrete projects – anti-crime projects, graffiti removal, policy advocacy, retail promotion, and so on. People’s time and trust aren’t long engaged by mere talk, no matter how friendly. The activities produce the social network, not the other way around.”<sup>121</sup>*

## 3.2.2 Increasing neighbourhood cohesion and social capital

As noted earlier, increasing neighbourhood cohesion is the flip side of capacity building. Neighbourhood cohesion leads to decreased social problems, such as crime and social disorder. For example, Savoie observes that “high neighbourhood crime rates appear to reflect the absence, disruption or ineffectiveness of social networks that enable people to participate in the community and exert social control. Crime appears to be a symptom of social exclusion, with social exclusion in turn blocking neighbourhood residents from exerting social control.”<sup>122</sup>

As discussed earlier, social control and the monitoring of residents’ (and, especially, children and youth’s) activities and the willingness to intervene, supports positive child and youth outcomes. This occurs both directly, by helping to keep kids safe and out of trouble, and indirectly, when neighbourhoods are cohesive and supportive of families raising children. High neighbourhood cohesion also increases collective efficacy as residents begin to draw on resources and relationships, grow their own leaders, and build processes for people to participate in broader community development, from raising funds and building playgrounds to challenging or enforcing municipal bylaws and other legislation.

Clearly, neighbourhood cohesion requires interpersonal connections among residents. Kubisch, et al. note that “[t]he fundamental prerequisite for increasing social capital is no different from the prerequisite for any programmatic outcome: intentionality, in the form of deliberate investment in actions designed to produce the desired outcome.”<sup>123</sup>

## What works to increase cohesion and social capital

There is some evidence that community programming, services, and events can increase social ties among neighbourhood parents and improve neighbourhood

cohesion. An evaluation of a government-funded, community-led community-building initiative in Sacramento County, California provides such evidence. This initiative specifically seeks to create new relationships and increase trust among neighbours. The evaluation found that parents who had attended parenting programs; events promoting neighbourhood safety (e.g., Neighbourhood Watch); programs promoting early childhood education (e.g., reading programs); arts programming for children; health promotion events (e.g., community bike rides for children); or neighbourhood celebratory events (e.g., holiday festivals, barbecues) in the past three years knew more of their neighbours, visited neighbours’ homes, had more friends in the neighbourhood, and rated their neighbourhood much more positively than parents who had not attended any programs or events. For example, they responded positively to questions such as: “People in my neighbourhood can be trusted” and “My neighbourhood is a good place to raise children.” These parents were also more likely to make use of community-based support services (e.g., food programs, utility bill assistance) and educational programs (e.g., ESL classes, family literacy programs, job training), and to have higher personal self-efficacy scores than parents who did not attend programs or events.<sup>124</sup>

- A handful of empirical studies from the U.S. indicated that community gardens can provide a positive venue for social interaction<sup>125</sup> and increase neighbourhood satisfaction.<sup>126</sup> Similar findings have been reported in Canada. A Toronto study reported that community gardens increased neighbourhood pride and social interaction among participants.<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, a recent study on community gardening and social capital in Flint, Michigan found that within the

neighbourhood, social ties, trust, and reciprocity, along with neighbourhood satisfaction, were higher among residents who participated in community garden projects than among those who did not. They were higher still among those who participated in both gardens and neighbourhood meetings about a neighbourhood problem or neighbourhood improvement, however.<sup>128</sup>

- Neighbourhood groups and organizations can also generate social capital, although there are only a few, older empirical studies to substantiate this theory. For example, increased sense of community has been associated with participation in block associations,<sup>129</sup> sports association, cultural organizations, and other groups.<sup>130</sup> At least one study has shown that the higher the level of a resident’s involvement, the greater his sense of community, as well as his leadership competence, knowledge and skills in neighbourhood development, and organizational (although not neighbourhood) sense of collective efficacy.<sup>131</sup>
- There is also evidence that resident participation in specific projects to improve the built or natural environment in a neighbourhood increases participants’ sense of community, positive social ties and frequency of interaction with neighbours.<sup>132</sup> This is consistent with a handful of recent American studies that show that working toward change in neighbourhood conditions (“neighbourhood activism”) may be more effective in increasing social ties within the neighbourhood, improving individual psychological well-being, and creating sense of efficacy than volunteering to provide services.<sup>133</sup>
- There appear to be no evaluations of the effects of improvements to neighbourhoods’ built or natural

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environment on social capital or social cohesion within the neighbourhood. However, research from Montreal does reveal clear associations between seniors' social participation and neighbourhood walkability and access to services and amenities.<sup>134</sup> Australian research has identified an association

between good quality services and amenities and participation in local community groups, leading the researchers to recommend government investments in services and recreational facilities as a means of promoting social cohesion,<sup>135</sup> and between neighbourhood walkability and sense of community.<sup>136</sup>

Other neighbourhood features associated with sense of community include perceptions of neighbourhood safety, encountering neighbours while out in the neighbourhood, and having interesting or attractive sites in the neighbourhood.<sup>137</sup>

## 3.2.3 Mixed evidence on “social mixing”

“Social mix” policies seek to increase socio-economic and, sometimes, ethnocultural diversity in a neighbourhood or larger urban area. This is not a new concept; it has roots in 19th century Britain and has played a role in Canadian urban planning since the 1950s. A desire to encourage social mix was one driver of Canada’s social housing policies until 1992 when, as part of the federal government’s withdrawal from the social housing policy sector, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) determined that income-mixed social housing (i.e., co-op housing, subsidized housing) was too expensive and provided no benefit to low-income residents.<sup>138</sup> However, since the 1990s, increasing social mix has been an explicit or underlying goal of strategies around the world to decrease spatially concentrated poverty. Champions of social mix in Canada at the municipal and neighbourhood levels have included Jane Jacobs and, more recently, Richard Florida.

Social mixing is intended to “[b]reak up and deconcentrat[e] social housing to recreate communities with a more heterogeneous socioeconomic mix. Residents are seen as instruments to facilitate less stigmatised and more dynamic and cohesive communities.”<sup>139</sup> Briefly, the desired outcomes of social mixing include: (i) improvements to neighbourhoods via increased social cohesion with consequent benefits, including reduced crime and anti-social behaviour, and higher-income neighbours to support more and better amenities through political influence and taxation, and to attract desirable commercial growth; and (ii) countering the negative

effects of spatially concentrated poverty on low-income residents by increasing their social ties with higher SES people, resulting in the expected attendant positive outcomes.<sup>140</sup>

For the most part, in the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Canada, three methods of increasing social mix have been undertaken: dispersal by marginally reducing the number of social housing dwelling in a neighbourhood (e.g., by selling social housing to tenants or private purchasers or by increasing the quantity of private dwellings); diversifying by ensuring that new housing developments have a proportion of social housing properties; and dispersal by relocating residents from concentrated areas of social housing to other social housing dispersed throughout the city.<sup>141</sup>

A great deal of research completed in the past few years has explored the pros and cons of social mixing, with mixed findings. As just one example, a systematic review of studies from the U.K. identified some positive effects on social outcomes, mixed effects on economic outcomes, and little effect on health and education outcomes.<sup>142</sup> The effects of social mixing in Canada are still murky. Existing research appears to concentrate almost exclusively on problems resulting from gentrification in large cities over several decades in the absence of strong social housing policy.<sup>143</sup> The only exception appears to be a qualitative study of tenure mix in Toronto’s Regent Park Community. This study reported high levels of neighbourhood satisfaction among both low- and higher-income residents, but low levels of social interaction between them.<sup>144</sup>

## What works to generate positive outcomes in social mixing

Summarizing the recent research from around the world, Bolt and van Kempen<sup>145</sup> claim that social mixing can be effective on many fronts, but positive outcomes from socially mixed neighbourhoods depend on several factors:

- High quality built architecture (e.g., buildings allow for natural light, good sound insulation) and no clear architectural distinction between private and social housing in terms of style, size and quality.
- Social housing and neighbourhood common areas (e.g., streets, parks) are well maintained.
- Considerable investment in community development and high quality social programs.
- Public spaces that are well maintained and designed to encourage use by all residents.
- Good quality amenities, including facilities where residents can come together.
- Desirable and good quality retail industries.
- A range of housing prices to enable lower-income residents to move out of social housing, purchase private housing, and remain in the neighbourhood, even when they can afford to move elsewhere, to promote social cohesion.
- Avoid a very high level of income diversity.
- Distribute social housing throughout the neighbourhood, rather than create a ‘superblock’ of social housing.<sup>146</sup>

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## 3.2.4 Improving amenities, programs, and services

Low income neighbourhoods require but often lack amenities, programs, and services. These include family support, child and youth development programs, social services and health care; recreation facilities and programs, and libraries; local employment; and public transit. While some of these resources may be present, they may not be of sufficient quality or may be inaccessible to residents for various reasons. As mentioned earlier, Calgary's poorest neighbourhoods are far from the peripheral locations where jobs suitable for unskilled workers tend to be found. This can mean that these jobs are not accessible to residents, because transit service may not start early enough in the day to get people to work on time. Lack of accessible, quality childcare available very early in the morning compounds these challenges.

Neighbourhood leaders in conjunction with funders external to the community can successfully spearhead efforts to improve service quality and accessibility. They may need help from funders and/or elected officials if improvements require relocating existing services, developing new services, or integrating existing and new services. For example, existing services may include cross-community services, such as food assistance programs, arts and youth development programs; government services such as provincial Seniors and Community Supports, community health centres and long-term care facilities, municipal Community and Neighbourhood Services, and not-for-profit social service agencies.

Vital to the long-term success and “community ownership” of such initiatives is the involvement of community residents in identifying needs, engaging other residents, and developing and implementing solutions. This requires community capacity, as described above. Clearly, some of the types of amenities and services required in a given neighbourhood, and the ways in which they are developed or acquired, will depend on the neighbourhood's demographic mix and the capacity of residents. For example, a neighbourhood with a high concentration of seniors may require improved public transit in the form of neighbourhood shuttle busses, or may want to re-zone part of the neighbourhood to allow for the construction of a seniors' residence. In this case, the seniors may have sufficient capacity to organize a change initiative with little external support. On the other hand, a neighbourhood in which many families with young children live may need extensive support to bring family support services or child care into or near their neighbourhood.

### **Community hubs as a promising way to improve neighbourhood amenities, programs, and services**

In the context of this paper, the definition of “community hubs” borrows from the United Way of Calgary. Community hub refers to co-location initiatives that promote economies of scale (through resource sharing and cost efficiencies); economies of scope (resource and cost efficiencies across systems); and perhaps most importantly, transformation of

the relationship between service providers and community members from a model in which community members are recipients of service to one in which community members are actively involved in service design and delivery as part of a broader neighbourhood development process.<sup>147</sup>

The ideal form, structure, and governance of a community hub depend on the needs, capacity, and desires of residents, with individual programs “situated and coordinated within the broader goals of the community hub.”<sup>148</sup>

There appear to be no empirical evaluations in Canada or elsewhere of community hubs and whether they strengthen communities on any dimension. The sparse existing research primarily focuses on the efficiencies of co-location for agencies (although other research on co-location unrelated to community hubs has identified improvements in service accessibility and, sometimes, quality). That being said, integrated community hubs may have capacity building and social cohesion benefits. Inferring from the experiences of the United Way of Toronto's Building Strong Neighbourhoods Project, which has integrated community hubs into some of its target neighbourhoods, the United Way of Calgary notes that the hubs have served to engage neighbourhood residents and strengthen their capacity through their involvement in planning, delivering and evaluating services provided through the hubs. In addition, the hubs are required to provide free community space, ensuring a venue for residents to come together for a range of purposes.<sup>149</sup>

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## 3.2.5 Community economic development

As defined by the Canadian CED Network, community economic development (CED) is

*“action by people locally to create economic opportunities and better social conditions, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged. CED is an approach that recognizes that economic, environmental and social challenges are interdependent, complex and ever-changing. To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. CED promotes holistic approaches, addressing individual, community and regional levels, recognizing that these levels are interconnected.”*<sup>150</sup>

Very briefly, CED strategies are generally initiated and operated by community economic development organizations (CEDOs) in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments and the private sector. CEDOs work for structural change, seek to attract new businesses to the community, and encourage training and employment for local residents. Depending on neighbourhood capacity, CED strategies can take more than 10 years to come to fruition. Each stage of development requires different forms of support to nurture the neighbourhood from a point of systematic self-evaluation to the final stage of fostering financial capital through various means, such as tax incentive programs and community-based loan funds.<sup>151</sup> Very large and comprehensive community economic development strategies are one of the cornerstones of neighbourhood building programs in the U.S., the U.K., and some neighbourhoods in Canada.

As noted earlier, CED initiatives have not generally succeeded in decreasing low income at the neighbourhood-level. However, there are many examples of successful CED initiatives that have assisted or shown promise of assisting individuals in low-income neighbourhoods to increase their income and their overall life chances. Examples of successful initiatives include self-employment and community-based finance strategies, micro-lending programs, often in conjunction with skill-building opportunities (job training, academic upgrading, accreditation, life skills), and removing direct barriers to working (e.g., child care, transportation). Neechi Foods in Winnipeg, profiled, is a true Canadian CED success story.

Comprehensive CED initiatives require either strong mentorship or a relatively high level of neighbourhood capacity in several domains:<sup>152</sup>

- Resource capacity – Ability to acquire and manage funding from grants, contracts, loans and other sources.
- Organizational capacity – capability of internal operations – Management, staff skills, board role and capacity, ability to manage finances.
- Networking capacity – Ability to work with other institutions both within and outside the community.
- Programmatic capacity – Ability to design and deliver programs.
- Political capacity – Ability to represent neighbourhood residents credibly and advocate effectively on their behalf in larger political arenas.

### NEECHI FOODS CO-OP WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Neechi Foods is a flourishing business in Winnipeg's North End, one of the poorest postal codes in Canada. Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg worked with the Métis Economic Development Training Program in the 1980s to create an Aboriginal-owned and controlled business with a view to providing employment for Aboriginal people in the local community and improving access to healthy, affordable food. Full operations began in 1990, and Neechi Foods has since grown into a thriving enterprise offering a wide range of local and specialty products and consistently providing stable employment.<sup>153</sup> With money raised by selling shares to the public, Neechi Foods has just expanded into new space, which is soon to house the Neechi Commons Community Business Complex that will include a supermarket, cafeteria, bakery, fish market, specialty foods boutique, books, crafts, music and clothing, a seasonal farmers' market and hardware.<sup>154</sup> Neechi Foods also sparked the development of the Northern Star Worker Co-op, whose members sew traditional and contemporary Star blankets, which are sold at the store.<sup>155</sup>

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## 4. Strengthening Calgary neighbourhoods

With a view to strengthening disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Calgary, The City has drawn on the research described in this research brief and developed a neighbourhood theory of change, provided below. Neighbourhood strengthening efforts by community social workers are also guided by Calgary's community development model, provided below.

### The City of Calgary, Community and Neighbourhood Services (CNS) NEIGHBOURHOOD THEORY OF CHANGE

CNS improves the lives of Calgarians by changing community conditions to sustain and strengthen tipping point neighbourhoods. An extensive body of research shows evidence of neighbourhood effects on adult and child health, child and youth development, adult employment and individual and family income, all of which influence overall life course and quality of life. . In other words, a neighbourhood can contribute to, and perhaps even cause, the social exclusion of those who live in it. On the other hand, as eloquently summarized by Kearns and Parkinson, neighbourhood can be "an important component of a competitive social and economic world; a reservoir of resources into which we can 'dip' in pursuing our lives; an influence upon our lifestyle and life-outcome; a 'shaper' of who we are, both as defined by ourselves and by others; and an important arena for public policy intervention."<sup>156</sup>

Research shows that strong neighbourhoods that benefit residents feature the following four components:

**The neighbourhood is socially cohesive and inclusive.** This means that the neighbourhood features a positive social climate with a strong sense of collective efficacy, sense of community and neighbourhood pride, sense of attachment to the neighbourhood, and high levels of participation and neighbourling.

**The neighbourhood has sufficient, accessible, and quality services, amenities, and infrastructure.**

This includes social, health, education, employment, childcare, and other services, along with amenities, such as public transit, libraries, schools, community centres, parks, and recreational facilities and programs.

**The neighbourhood has healthy and safe natural and built environments.** This includes land uses to enable appropriate development; adequate housing for

a range of household types and income levels; environmental considerations such as parks and open spaces, along with air, soil and water quality; infrastructure such as police, fire, and EMS hubs; and community design that promotes safety, health, and active living.

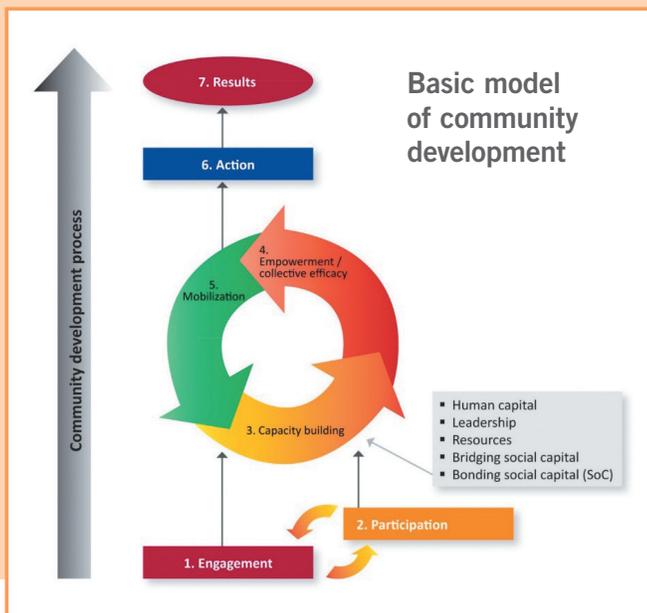
**The neighbourhood fosters, attracts, and sustains appropriate business and economic development.** Community economic development is the process by which neighbourhoods can initiate and generate their own solutions to economic problems.

This includes (i) residents' individual capacities to be self-sufficient and (ii) the neighbourhood's economic climate, which encourages "appropriate" businesses, such as banks, grocery stores, and theatres, and discourages a high concentration of businesses such "adult entertainment" stores, liquor stores, and so on. In the longer run, CED may also include (iii) enterprises the neighbourhood itself develops and runs locally and that employs neighbourhood residents.

The CNS Strong Neighbourhood initiatives seek to achieve at least one and, ideally, all of the four components of strong neighbourhoods in focus neighbourhoods in order to achieve the following outcomes for residents:

- Increased social capital, social support, and social networks.
- Increased personal capacity and economic self-sufficiency and reduced family poverty.
- Improved family cohesion and parenting skills.
- Improved child and youth positive development.

The research is clear. Residents must lead neighbourhood strengthening initiatives. This means that residents must have the collective capacity to identify and address problems in their neighbourhood. Low-income neighbourhoods often lack the capacity to even begin this process. CNS plays a vital role in assisting residents to build neighbourhood capacity. This is CNS's the first priority for action in the focus neighbourhoods. CNS also encourages the development of resident-identified initiatives to increase positive social ties, increase adults' personal capacity and economic self-sufficiency, improve family cohesion and parenting skills, and improve child and youth developmental outcomes.



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In this document:

- “Evidence-based” means that a program or practice has been tested in a well-designed and methodologically sound experimental (randomized controlled trial (RCT)) or quasi-experimental study (and, ideally, multiple studies and replicated in more than one site), and has been shown to produce significant reductions in poor outcomes or associated risk factors or significant increases in positive outcomes or associated protective factors.
- “Best practices” refer to programs or components of programs or delivery methods that have been identified as effective (i.e., produce significant

reductions in poor outcomes or associated risk factors or significant increases in positive outcomes or associated protective factors) by repeated methodologically sound studies using an experimental (RCT) or quasi-experimental design.

- “Promising practices” refer to programs or components of programs or delivery methods that have been identified as effective (“effective” as defined above) in at least one well-designed and methodologically sound study using at least a pre-post design with a large sample of participants that has been subject to peer review.

- “Prevention” means creating conditions or personal attributes that strengthen the healthy development, well-being, and safety of individuals across the lifespan and/or communities, and prevent the onset or further development of problems in each of these domains. In the research-based risk and protection prevention paradigm, prevention occurs by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.

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- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, Langlois, A., Marois, C. 2004. “Quality of location and quality of life in central Montreal neighbourhoods.” CMHC Research Highlights, Socio-economic Series 04-005; Sun, Y. 2002. *Development of Neighbourhood Quality of Life Indicators*. (Saskatoon, SA: Community-University Institute for Social Research, University of Saskatchewan); Peters, A. 2002. “Is your community child-friendly?” *Canadian Social Trends*, Winter 2002, 2-5. *Note: It is recognized that there are at least three main theoretical approaches to quality of life – economic, sociological, and psychological – each of which results in different measures. However, approaches specific to neighbourhood quality of life generally mirror the four components of neighbourhood.*
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