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Community Solutions: Promising Practices and Principles for Addressing Street Level Social Issues

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CORE CHALLENGES INITIATIVE

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Core Challenges Initiative Publications:

Hard Times: A Portrait of Street Level Social Problems in Western Canada by Karen Wilkie,
September 2007

Caring Cities? Public Opinion and Urban Social Issues in Western Canadian Cities by Dr. Loleen Berdahl, December 2007

Letters From Hastings and Main: Signs of Hope in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside by Jennifer Allford, February 2008

Drawing Lines: Defining the Roles of Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments in Addressing Urban Social Issues in Canada by Dr. Andrew Sancton, June 2008

From the Ground Up: Community's Role in Addressing Street Level Social Issues by Jim Diers,
October 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this final report of Canada West Foundation's *Core Challenges Initiative*, social challenges located in the urban cores of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg are examined. The report is intended to generate debate about solving these "street level" social problems. It does so by identifying four essential movements (or pillars) that have taken root in initiatives that seek to address street level social challenges. It also highlights a number of projects from Canada's western cities that are reflective of these pillars. The report concludes with a discussion of key principles and implications for public policy in Canada.

Four Pillars for Addressing Urban Social Problems

There are four broad movements that have gained considerable momentum among those seeking to solve the social challenges in urban cores. The first is *harm reduction*, which includes any program or policy that tries to reduce self-harm activities without requiring the cessation of that activity. Common examples of harm reduction strategies include needle exchange programs, medical prescriptions for heroin, methadone maintenance treatment, outreach, drug education programs and supervised drug use facilities.

A somewhat related approach—the second pillar—is called *housing first*. It focuses on providing stable housing as a prerequisite in assisting individuals who live on the streets. Programs that operate from a housing first framework attempt to move individuals into stable and healthy housing directly from their situation on the streets or in shelters. The newly housed resident is then offered a range of support services such as mental health, income support or addictions services. Even if a resident rejects these services, their ability to stay in the housing is not jeopardized.

A third pillar can be found in *community justice* initiatives. These are crime prevention and justice activities that explicitly include the community in their processes and set the enhancement of community quality of life as a goal. They are based on building community relationships and using proactive, problem-solving and partnership models to simultaneously address crime issues and community quality of life. Community justice initiatives also offer

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a way to draw in many service providers that may have been previously isolated from one another.

The final pillar is the concept of **community ownership**. This is not simply the practice of community consultation or including a broad range of professionals, service providers, businesses and government representatives in planning solutions to social challenges. Rather, it reflects the fact that community participation requires a commitment to putting clients at the centre of planning, their full participation in decision-making and their ability to make choices regarding their own lives.

Promising Practices

This report highlights five initiatives that incorporate the pillars. These initiatives illustrate some of the promising practices evident in the urban core areas of Canada's western cities. The initiatives are:

- The Vancouver Community Court—developed to more directly involve the public in the criminal justice system and to integrate justice with other service delivery systems in a triage approach to working with offenders.
- Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society (PEERS)—established by former sex trade workers in Victoria to provide a full range of service for current and former sex trade workers.
- Calgary Committee to End Homelessness—a long-term initiative that uses a housing first model.
- Street Culture Kidz Project—a program in Regina that is guided by youth to develop strategies to help children and youth develop personal skills and make positive life choices.
- The North End Community Renewal Corporation—an organization in Winnipeg that seeks to improve the quality and accessibility of housing, create employment opportunities, enhance commercial infrastructure, reduce crime, and contribute to the cultural richness of the community.

Adopting Principles that Work

These initiatives suggest that there are alternative solutions available for positively influencing the impacts of “street level” social issues. Drawing from

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these and other examples, a number of principles that hold promise can be identified:

Focus on Strong Communities—There are many barriers to positive change in our urban cores, including the complexity and fragmentation of our social service delivery system, limited vision and expertise dedicated to systemic change, and lack of incentives for collaborative activity. However, these barriers can be overcome by building a strong community base to address critical social problems. The initiatives highlighted in this report offer at least preliminary evidence that it is possible to build and sustain broader systemic responses to street level social challenges rather than simplistic programmatic responses.

Shared Ownership is Empowerment—Both communities and clients need to become far more integral to defining what goals are important to achieve in our cities. Dialogue and vital involvement of these stakeholders is in fact critical to achieve a broader community-level performance orientation in the future. This shared ownership is empowerment—when ordinary people develop the capacity to solve the problems they face, the ability to control the means to do so, and the authority to make real decisions that affect them.

Changes Will Be Long-Term and Complex—The street level social issues facing our cities are deeply entrenched and any realistic plans to address them require a generational perspective. The short-term goals and strategies so common to the dominant service delivery system are not compatible with pursuing community level impacts. It is important that the long-term impacts identified in this process be framed in positive community terms. These impacts will likely be indicators of the general social well-being of our urban cores and the people who live there.

Advocacy and Service Must Mix—It is through informed and reasoned advocacy that individuals and groups who work at the front lines of our urban streets can inform policy-makers and government officials about the challenges they face. They can, and should, help decision-makers to understand the need for structural changes to our systems and explain how these policies and procedures need to change. For their part, governments need to welcome this dialogue with community advocates.

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Government and Business Need to be Involved—Business has a legitimate role in helping resolve street level social issues. Business brings much more than the ability to generate revenues; it also brings a pragmatic goal orientation and a passion for action that is important in creating change. It offers ways of expanding the economic opportunities for individuals dealing with personal challenges, it knows how to develop human capital and it knows how to develop strong partnerships. The business sector also brings different perspectives to social problems, uses a different language, and often works differently than other sectors.

All levels of government are also critical and must work together with communities if any real progress is to be achieved. Governments need to become better at connecting and listening to local communities as they strive to address their social problems and must commit resources that support comprehensive, large-scale community change.

Implications for Public Policy

Measuring Outcomes that Count—Innovative programs such as those highlighted in this report challenge traditional evaluation frameworks. Over the last decade, as evaluation frameworks have shifted toward a performance measurement approach, evaluation has come to be seen primarily as a management and decision-making tool. However, there is a pressing need to focus on broader evaluation questions and strategies. There are important questions that cut across multiple organizations, are community-focused, and have complex answers that cannot be identified by monitoring parsimonious outcome variables within organizations. For example, how effective are a community's efforts to eliminate homelessness? To what extent are community resources effective in reducing the number of mentally ill individuals who live on our streets? To what extent are social services within a community overlapping, conflicting or absent? These are questions that ask about how well we are building healthy and vibrant communities, not about how well we are fixing specific individual or geographic problems.

Funder Roles—A necessary next step toward resolving street level social issues is to have all the members of a community engage in a shared dialogue in order to define what the critical outcomes should be in that community and to build shared initiatives for examining these larger goals. A critical stakeholder

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in this scenario is funders because they can facilitate a dialogue with other stakeholders such as clients, community groups and government.

Funding Structures—Long-term access to adequate resources (in-kind support, staff, equipment, materials, time and information) is one of the most important requirements for sustaining successful collaborations and community-level initiatives. Short-term funding cycles are inconsistent with, even detrimental to, achieving the 10-20 year community development goals that are inherent in addressing our cities' core challenges. This means that the short-term funding cycles so dominant in the non-profit sector must change.

The Nonprofit Sector—A shift toward more inclusive, community-based services for resolving street level social issues will demand strong and responsive nonprofit organizations. This is a prerequisite for implementing broad policies and services that link economic, health, social care and labour dimensions together. A shift toward more inclusive, community-based services for resolving street level social issues will demand strong and responsive nonprofit organizations. Those in the nonprofit sector need to buy into the case management model implied by the comprehensive and coordinated intervention that underlies harm reduction and housing first models. This also means that nonprofit organizations and staff must be prepared to work collectively and collaboratively. In many situations, they will need to give up autonomy and "territory" in order to streamline and coordinate service delivery. There may also be compelling reasons for some nonprofit organizations to engage in joint planning and service delivery activities, co-locate, or even merge.

The work of the programs highlighted in this report, and many similar groups we heard about during the *Core Challenges Initiative*, represent promising practices in dealing with street level social issues. Each of the individuals and organizations in these projects represents a willingness to see these issues differently, to imagine new solutions to those challenges, and to overcome obstacles in implementing those solutions. More than that, however, these promising practices point to the importance of connections. The projects highlighted here are promising practices because they connect many individuals and groups working collectively and pragmatically to create change. Through this new collective action these projects become a stronger force for change—one that promises to alter the nature of our urban streets.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of Canada West Foundation's *Core Challenges Initiative* (CCI). Based upon examination of social challenges faced in the core urban areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, the CCI sought to provide information and generate debate about solving the "street level" social problems faced by these cities.

This final report was preceded by an excellent series of five reports that added diverse perspectives to this debate. My perspective is informed by these reports, and there are certainly overlaps in some of the ideas I present. This report is also informed by a series of focus group conversations conducted in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver between April 2008 and January 2009. These conversations, held as part of Canada West Foundation's Honourable James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtables, brought together community leaders representing social services, police, business, government sectors and the citizens served by these sectors. As author of this report, I also spoke to representatives of the "promising projects" identified in the focus groups, in order to learn what makes them potential models for change. Together, it is hoped that this collection of CCI reports and community perspectives will help identify and stimulate public policy options that lead to a reduction of social issues in our cities' urban cores and a renewed vitality to the communities found there.

Like other authors represented in this series, I admit to a basic struggle in defining the focus and scope of this report. When someone mentions the "street level" social issues that can be found in our urban cores, thoughts of crime, drug use, prostitution or homelessness probably come to mind. As Diers (2008) points out, however, the very notion of "street level" social issues is problematic for a few reasons. First, it assumes that

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The reality, of course, is that these social problems are perhaps most obvious or visible in our urban cores, but they are in fact problems that cut across all neighbourhoods, classes and cultures in our cities.

these problems have their roots in those central city streets, and that these problems are only problems *within* those narrow geographic areas. The reality, of course, is that these social problems are perhaps most obvious or visible in our urban cores, but they are in fact problems that cut across *all* neighbourhoods, classes and cultures in our cities. Second, individuals at the centre of these street level issues are commonly understood only through stereotypes. These stereotypes paint the residents of these areas as problems—criminals, addicts, safety risks, mentally disturbed individuals. They are often described as lacking in capacity, personal drive, or knowledge. Such stereotypes make other citizens fear those found in our urban cores, and probably makes us care far less about them. Such characterizations are simplistic and wrong. These marginalized citizens have the same hopes and needs as the rest of us, fear the same things on those streets, and have many strengths that are critical to developing meaningful solutions to the “street level” challenges in our cities.

Another assumption I make in this report is that “street level” challenges need to be understood and solved by those involved in and impacted by the problems. Since this inherently includes all of us who live in our cities, any worthwhile solutions require committed and coordinated involvement by a diverse range of stakeholders: “clients,” governments, corporations, nonprofit agencies, concerned citizens. Because the challenges are complex, all members of a community need to work toward a solution, not just those individuals who live and work in specific core neighbourhoods.

This latter assumption is supported by public opinion regarding these issues. In an earlier report in this series, Berdahl (2007) found the majority of citizens in western Canadian cities believe that governments are doing a poor job in solving these social issues, think that reducing homelessness

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needs to be a priority and that illegal drug activity should be dealt with by targeting drug dealers rather than addicts. Together, I take these opinions to reflect a broad-based concern for addressing our urban social issues and a recognition that it is not government's job alone to find solutions.

This report attempts to illustrate important ideas that appear to be promising for addressing our "street level" social issues creatively and collectively. It does so by identifying four essential movements (or pillars) that appear to have taken root in initiatives to resolve social problems in our urban core areas. I will also highlight a number of projects from Canada's western cities that I consider to be reflective of these pillars or movements. All of these projects were identified during focus group discussions in the previously mentioned cities. The report concludes with a discussion of some key principles and implications apparent when one examines these promising practices, especially implications for public policy in Canada.

Finally, I should point out the conscious use of the term "promising" practices rather than "best" practices. The former is used to reflect two assumptions: 1) it is unlikely that there are any single best practices in dealing with the complex social challenges facing our cities; and 2) the practices that appear to work now will likely be replaced as the context and new knowledge change our understanding of these challenges.

2. FOUR PILLARS ESSENTIAL FOR ADDRESSING URBAN SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the last six years, over 7,000 injection drug users have registered to receive services from a program called Insite, operated by Vancouver Coastal Health. Insite is directly targeted at drug users who are often missed by other services. These individuals include people with multiple addictions, mental health challenges, the homeless, urban Aboriginal people and those who have been unable to beat their addiction through other means.

What makes Insite unique is that it is Canada's first supervised injection site. As such, it offers a legal mechanism for drug users to inject drugs to manage their addiction. It also offers education that promotes safe injection practices—a critical tool in reducing the risk of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C transmission. The

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The model that underpins Insite is one focused on stabilizing people's health and on fostering relationships that promote access to health care services.

presence of Insite in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) offers a vehicle to connect these marginalized drug users health care services that range from basic primary care to full addiction counseling and treatment.

The decision to create a supervised injection site in Vancouver's DTES was (and remains) controversial. However, it came in the midst of open drug use on those streets, HIV/AIDS rates that rival those seen developing countries, and mortality rates on the streets that were more than 10 times as high as other regions in British Columbia. Proponents of Insite argue that the service reduces the number of dangerous injections taking place in hidden corners of the street, reduces the transmission of multiple diseases from one drug user to another, and provides a level of stability for many individuals who have a long history of damaging behaviours on the streets. They also see Insite as a first step in getting addicted patients to enter detoxification or withdrawal services, addiction counseling and a range of addiction treatment services in the community.

The model that underpins Insite is one focused on stabilizing a person's health and on fostering relationships that promote access to health care services. It is a model built upon reducing the impact of injected drug use, not punishing it. It is a **harm reduction** model.

Ontario's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) defines harm reduction as: *any program or policy designed to reduce drug-related harm without requiring the cessation of drug use. Interventions may be targeted at the individual, the family, community or society.*

This definition naturally focuses harm reduction efforts on people who are already experiencing harm as a result of substance use. Harm reduction interventions do not demand elimination of drug use, but rather aim to reduce the severe harmful consequences of drug use as a pragmatic and realistic alternative. Cheung (2000) provides some common examples of harm reduction strategies, including needle exchange programs, medical

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prescriptions for heroin, methadone maintenance treatment, outreach and drug education programs, and supervised drug use facilities such as Insite.

Harm reduction programs typically operate from a consistent set of principles. These principles reflect a number of the promising practices addressed in this report. They include:

- a pragmatic recognition that drug use is a common and extremely complex human experience;
- a position that drug use results in diverse behaviours and degrees of personal and social harm;
- a non-judgmental stance that neither condones nor condemns drug use, but does encourage personal responsibility and self-management of drug use;
- prioritizing safe drug use and reduction in the negative consequences of drug use, rather than a blanket demand for abstinence;
- building action plans that emphasize small steps that are achievable by the drug user immediately; and
- informed participation by drug users, including the ability to make their own decisions and choices regarding drug use and treatment.

A more recent, but related, approach to solving urban social problems is rapidly taking root in programs that address chronic homelessness in urban areas. It is the second pillar among the promising practices identified in western cities. The movement, called **housing first**, focuses on providing stable housing as a basic and necessary prerequisite in assisting individuals who are homeless. Housing first projects, pioneered in the US, offer permanent housing to homeless individuals and families without any particular demands for intervention for issues such as addiction, psychiatric treatment or rehabilitation. This can be contrasted with traditional housing intervention models, which typically demand that homeless individuals succeed in prerequisite treatments before long-term housing is considered. In these traditional housing projects

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The housing first movement focuses on providing stable housing as a basic and necessary prerequisite in assisting individuals who are homeless.

chronically homeless people are typically placed into a temporary shelter where they can work on getting sober, deal with a mental illness, or engage in some other stabilization program. Only when these efforts are successful is the homeless individual ready and eligible for permanent housing.

Traditional approaches have certainly placed many homeless individuals into secure housing. However, for many others, such approaches have failed, especially for those facing multiple barriers due to issues such as mental illness or addiction. Such approaches have also failed for those who are chronically homeless after living for years in shelters or on the streets.

Housing first approaches operate from two basic assumptions: 1) that housing should be considered a basic human right; and 2) that stabilization and personal/social development are more successful once the state of homelessness is removed from an individual's life. The former assumption is controversial, while the second awaits more evidence.

Programs that operate from a housing first framework attempt to move individuals into stable and healthy housing directly from their situation on the streets or shelters. Using a variety of service professionals, the new resident is then offered a range of supports such as mental health services, income support or addiction treatment. Whether the resident rejects these services or not, their ability to stay in the housing is not jeopardized. The individual is encouraged to commit to steps and actions that will enhance their functioning, but they need not fear being thrust back onto the street. In essence, these programs match a harm reduction model to the immediate provision of stable housing.

Housing first models remain controversial. Critics argue that providing housing regardless of success in dealing with other issues can be considered a process of enabling. That is, by providing housing without preconditions, we simply

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Proponents of the the housing first model argue that individuals who have stable housing will make fewer demands on other public resources such as hospitals, the police and courts and social service agencies.

allow those with other problems to continue their problematic behaviour (drinking, drug use, etc.).

Proponents of the this model, however, argue that individuals who have stable housing will make fewer demands on other public resources such as hospitals, the police and courts and social service agencies. There is some early evidence to support this position. A recent study by Larimer et al. (2009) in Seattle compared 95 participants in a housing first program (actively using alcohol) with 39 wait list control subjects. The researchers examined usage patterns and the cost of service delivery to these individuals including shelter and detoxification centre use, days incarcerated, and use of hospital and medical services. They found that the 95 housing first participants on average cost \$2,440 less per person per month in the costs identified above for a savings of about 53% over the wait list controls. In addition, the housing first participants showed a significant reduction in alcohol use while maintaining their housing over the first year of the study. The researchers concluded that their results support the basic premise of the housing first model, and state that use of such a model can reduce public costs associated with these participants by supportive medical, mental health, addictions, and case management services.

A third significant approach to addressing street level social challenges is alluded to by Sancton (2008) in another report in this series (*Drawing Lines: Defining the Roles of Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments in Addressing Urban Social Issues in Canada*). Sancton describes the “broken windows” theory, which posits that issues such as street lighting, broken windows (hence the theory’s name) and people sleeping on the streets are a product of social disorder. This social disorder emerges when a community fails to pay attention to the minor events and signs that erode the sense that it is safe, well-maintained and a good place to live. By addressing these signs of

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social disorder, however, communities can prevent their streets from becoming overrun with violence, drug abuse and other criminal activities.

It is this focus on community that can be seen in current shifts toward **community justice** initiatives—our third pillar. Karp and Clear (2000) define community justice as “all variants of crime prevention and justice activities that explicitly include the community in their processes and set the enhancement of community quality of life as a goal.” Such approaches are based on building community relationships and using proactive, problem-solving and partnership models to address crime issues and community quality of life simultaneously.

There are a number of significant community justice initiatives in Canada. They share some common principles and characteristics. These include steps to make the courts more responsive and connected to local community needs, and finding ways to better engage both local citizens and the other core service providers in a community. In this new engagement, justice officials (both members of the courts and police) work with a range of community organizations and stakeholders to address safety and crime concerns raised by citizens and identify the complex causes of crimes in the community. Within the courts, this approach demands that both legal counsel and judges examine the circumstances underlying a specific crime, how these underlying causes might be addressed, how reparation can be made to the victim and community, and how a reintegration of the offender into the community can be successfully achieved.

To illustrate these principles, consider a recent example from Calgary. In July 2009, the Calgary Police Service received three-year funding from the province to create the Police and Crisis Teams (PACT) program. This program, centred in the city’s downtown area, will see police and mental health professionals working in teams to identify repeat offenders who experience mental health problems. The intent is to divert individuals with mental health challenges to appropriate mental health services in cases of minor, non-violent offenses. This program is seen as a proactive way for the community to address mental health issues on the street before they subsequently become justice issues when these individuals commit minor crimes. It is a community-based, localized and partnership-based model of justice.

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Within the courts, the community justice approach demands that both legal counsel and judges examine the circumstances underlying a specific crime, how these underlying causes might be addressed, how reparation can be made to the victim and community, and how a reintegration of the offender into the community can be successfully achieved.

A particular characteristic of community justice programs is important to this report. Working from a community justice framework draws in many service providers that may have been previously isolated from one another. For example, dealing with a particularly complex offense might require the police, court officials, mental health professionals, addictions specialists, housing advocates, Aboriginal elders and extended family members to work together collaboratively. Doing so requires a common language, trust and consistent goals. Developing these assets is not easy and must be based upon strong relationships among all members of a community. However, if these relationships can be built, community justice programs may offer both a faster and more effective way of dealing with complex social problems in the community.

Finally, community justice programs offer promise in building the “bridging social capital” referred to by Putnam and Feldstein in *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (2003). This social capital is created by linking diverse individuals and groups and by engaging the residents of a community in creating local solutions to the issues they face. It is also this social capital that is critical for promoting the re-integration of offenders back into a community, and the chance to restore social bonds and cohesion within that same community.

The final pillar evident in the promising practices focuses on the concept of **community ownership**. Not necessarily geographic communities, but rather communities as defined by geographic, social, cultural and economic connections. This idea of community ownership, therefore, is not simply the

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practice of community consultation or including a broad range of professionals, service providers, businesses and government representatives in planning solutions to social challenges. Rather, it reflects a growing recognition that viable solutions to these problems must include the community members most impacted by these problems. As a result, community participation requires a commitment to putting clients at the centre of planning, their full participation in decision-making, and their ability to make choices regarding their own lives. Based on this, the goal of community ownership is simple. It should create broad inclusion of citizens in all aspects of processes designed to improve their lives, so much so that they develop ownership of the process and themselves make it sustainable (Homan 2004).

I would argue that this contrasts with the traditional paradigm adopted by government and social service delivery organizations. In the traditional expert-driven model, service delivery is often planned by people and in regions that are distant in many ways from local communities. Professional expertise is powerful and clients often defer to it. On the basis of their previous experience, these individuals learn that professionals have all the ideas, resources and power. This makes many service programs removed from local realities and lacking in the local knowledge and skills required to make programs successful over the long-term. Even more critical, these top-down models may contribute to devaluing and disempowering the members of a community who require assistance. In many traditional programs, clients are viewed as passive recipients of care rather than active contributors to society.

The examples of community participation and ownership evident in this report are based on principles of community development. This brings with it a profoundly positive set of assumptions about the capacity of people to contribute to their community and benefit from this involvement (Homan 2004). In community development, there is a strong commitment to enhancing community capacity and social capital by establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. The talents, assets, skills and experience of *everyone* in a community are highly valued and are seen as untapped resources. Participation is informed and entirely voluntary. Clients own and control the community development process. The agenda is theirs.

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Vancouver Community Court was developed to more directly involve the public in the criminal justice system and to integrate justice with other service delivery systems in a triage approach to working with offenders.

3. PROMISING PRACTICES

3.1 Rethinking Justice Initiatives: The Vancouver Community Court

Consider a young man named Thomas, arrested for mischief and drug possession in downtown Vancouver. Thomas is one of the 50% of offenders in this region who have a mental illness, addiction issues, or both. In a traditional court process, Thomas might wait for several weeks to have his case heard by a judge, and it might take many more months to resolve the case. Thomas may simply fail to attend subsequent court appearances, could end up in jail for other crimes, or simply be sentenced to time served while in custody. Clearly such a process offers little to Thomas or the community.

There is now an alternative court process in Vancouver. Called the Vancouver Community Court, it was developed to more directly involve the public in the criminal justice system and to integrate justice with other service delivery systems in a triage approach to working with offenders. It is a partnership between the Provincial Court of BC and a wide range of health and social service agencies and businesses, all working together.

This court is different than traditional courts in both function and process. It does deal with the same crimes and offenders that other courts do. However, within the Community Court you will find a Provincial Court judge, a court co-coordinator, a Crown counsel, a defense lawyer, Vancouver police officers, court clerks, probation officers, forensic liaison workers, a forensic psychiatrist, a nurse, health-justice liaison workers, employment assistance workers, a victim services worker, a BC Housing support worker and a native court worker. In total, there are about twenty dedicated staff committed to the Community Court, with about the same number again from related social and health service agencies.

When Thomas arrives at the Community Court he is met by the court's defense lawyer, who he chooses to work with in the absence of his own lawyer. After discussing his case with the defense lawyer, Thomas agrees to resolve his case in the Community Court. He next meets with members of the triage team—representatives from probation, health and social services and housing. Because he is Aboriginal, Thomas also meets with the native court worker. Together, the triage team attempts to understand Thomas' case, his unique circumstances and needs, and the actions that might serve him best.

The team learns that Thomas' case is indeed complex. He is referred for drug rehabilitation treatment and is connected to others for assistance with housing and income supports. A case management plan is also created to ensure that Thomas follows through with the plan developed by the triage team.

All of this information is presented to the judge when Thomas goes before the court, within a few days—not weeks or months. The judge considers all of this information and sentences Thomas to community service, rather than jail time. He is directed to do this service to compensate the community for harm done by his crime. Again in typical fashion, Thomas begins his community service within days of sentencing by the judge.

Thomas' case illustrates the features that make Vancouver's Community Court different than traditional courts. First, the court operates in a very timely fashion, with most cases being heard within two to fourteen days. This offers the opportunity for offenders to see the consequences of their behaviour immediately, and to compensate the community almost as quickly. Second, the court is in fact a *community* court. It involves many health and social service agencies directly, as well as residents, businesses and community organizations. Many of these local organizations and businesses work with the court to develop community service projects and opportunities for offenders to serve sentences. These projects can also help offenders gain new job skills and work experience.

The third and perhaps most unique aspect of the Community Court is that the court takes an integrated and problem-solving approach to the crimes they encounter. Included in each case is an assessment that addresses underlying health and social problems that often lead to crime. These include, for

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example, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, poverty and poor job and social skills, which make it difficult for an offender to break the cycle of criminal activity.

Community Court Coordinator Allan Shoom suggests that this latter element is a critical component of the court. He says: “The problems we see are complex. But we have collective minds seeking solutions to the problems. All the agencies are here, we have 40-50 people working in open cubicles to develop the right case plans. It just works.”

3.2 Rethinking Service Delivery: Prostitutes Empowerment, Education and Resource Society (PEERS)

Established by former sex trade workers to provide a full range of service for current and former sex trade workers, PEERS has operated in Victoria since 1995.

On a general level, these services include outreach to Victoria’s sex trade workers, offering them needle exchanges, condoms, food and coffee via a mobile RV. It also offers help with finding affordable housing, fetal alcohol syndrome (FASD) prevention and education, access to health professionals, and advocacy regarding custody and legal concerns that sex trade workers encounter.

It is how these services are operated, however, that makes PEERS somewhat unique. PEERS operates from a clear set of principles. Based upon a harm reduction model, PEERS is explicit in its assumption that people in the sex trade have choice. This often leads to their decision to exit the sex trade, but it is not the intention of PEERS to exclusively support people who want

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to stop working in the trade. In this way, PEERS' philosophy is to support sex trade workers, not force them out of the trade. The Executive Director of PEERS—Chris Leischner—believes that the organization's philosophy is simple. All of its initiatives are informed by, created by, and guided by the sex trade workers it serves. This makes PEERS, in her opinion, the most grassroots and anti-oppressive organization she has been involved in.

The product of this harm reduction orientation is that PEERS has developed a diverse range of specific services designed by former sex trade workers. In a current *Access to Justice* program, the organization seeks to improve outcomes for children by working with families that face multiple barriers in their life, such as homelessness, poverty, FASD, addictions or domestic violence. Working with the Ministry of Children and Families and legal professionals, this program increases access to positive parenting strategies and to alternative dispute resolution and justice system processes.

Another example of PEERS' programming is *Elements*, a six-month program for those who want to transition from sex trade work to mainstream employment or education. Funded by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, the program offers a curriculum that covers topics such as mental health and addictions, understanding trauma, personal growth, communication and employment skills (including basic computer literacy). The program also offers preparation for post-secondary training and a range of mentorship opportunities for those interested.

The outreach services are also somewhat unique. During the night, PEERS workers provide more than the instrumental supports mentioned above. They also provide access to advocacy services and referrals to a range of health and social services. For safety, workers circulate a regularly updated "Bad Date Sheet" which keeps sex workers informed about dangerous offenders. Every Thursday night, a nurse comes on board the RV to provide access to health care, and every second Wednesday a doctor is on board to do the same. On average, the RV is visited by between 400 and 500 workers over the course of a month, many of whom are homeless or staying in shelters.

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The PEERS program is a promising example because the organization is structured to allow for genuine and meaningful participation in every aspect of the organization from front line work to the Board level.

During the day, these outreach services continue. Day outreach efforts provide a bridge to critical services for women not ready to leave the streets. Workers offer rides to appointments such as doctors, dentists and lawyers. For women who want to explore treatment for underlying issues, PEERS helps them find treatment by offering advice on their options and help with the necessary paperwork and interim supports such as housing subsidies.

One feature that makes the PEERS program a promising example worthy of including in this report is that the organization is structured to allow for genuine and meaningful participation in every aspect of the organization from front line work to the Board level. For example, the staff at PEERS are consistently hired from within the community of current and former sex trade workers. They possess considerable decision-making power over the day-to-day operations of the organization, and both the direction and development of new PEERS initiatives. This ownership extends right to the Board level, which includes both former sex trade workers and other individuals.

This meaningful inclusion of both current and former sex trade workers permits the values, beliefs, knowledge and culture of the clients served by the organization to be reflected in its operations and services. The result is a supportive environment in which those most directly involved in the issue of prostitution can be at the centre of public policies and programs that directly affect them.

3.3. Rethinking Complex Social Problems: The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness

The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness (CCEH) has a simple mission: to end homelessness in Calgary. Simple perhaps, but ambitious. Struck in

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January 2007, this effort is a community-based initiative meant to respond to Calgary's growing homeless population—estimated at over 4,000 in 2008 (City of Calgary 2008). The Committee is comprised of representatives from a broad range of frontline agencies, the private sector, faith groups, foundations, Alberta Health Services, post-secondary institutions, the Aboriginal community, the City of Calgary, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada.

The CCEH is an initiative driven by the housing first approach described in this report. As such, it seeks to move homeless people into permanent housing with the services and support necessary to make the housing sustainable and successful. The approach taken provides people with permanent housing and, after housing is secured, treats other issues such as mental illness and addictions through other service programming.

In 2008, the community representatives on the CCEH developed a comprehensive *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* and charged the Calgary Homeless Foundation to lead the implementation of this plan. The 10-Year Plan is based upon a set of important principles, such as the community's collective responsibility in solving homelessness, the importance of independence for homeless individuals, prioritizing the most chronically homeless, and the importance of consumer choice in provision of affordable housing options in the city. Specific strategies within the plan include building effective prevention programs, finding ways to re-house homeless Calgarians, advocating for and building sustainable housing and treatment, improving data systems to monitor the issues surrounding homelessness better, and working to strengthen and coordinate the nonprofit organizations who address homelessness.

What became clear in the first year of the 10-Year Plan's implementation was how comprehensive the actions and strategies were and how much progress has been made already (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2009). A multilateral agreement was reached between the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government to fund long-term housing strategies. A *Pathways to Housing* pilot found housing for 54 people in its first year. A Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) pilot called the *Rapid Exit for*

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Singles Program found housing for another 45 chronically homeless people. The Trinity Place Foundation re-housed approximately 125 chronically homeless individuals. Together, over 200 chronically homeless individuals were housed through these new and innovative programs operated by representative organizations involved in the plan.

However, re-housing is only one dimension of the work being done. In the first year, a comprehensive case management project was launched to move 125 people out of shelters and into permanent housing, with plans to initiate another 500 case plans. To address other common issues, such as addictions, the Fresh Start Recovery Centre is currently constructing a 50-bed treatment centre, the Scope Society has acquired two four-plexes to house eight people experiencing mental illness and developmental disabilities, and the Recovery Acres Society is working with the Homeless Foundation to create a facility that would add approximately 50 more treatment beds for people experiencing addictions.

3.4 Rethinking Youth Engagement: The Street Culture Kidz Project

Kim Sutherland, Executive Director of the Street Culture Kidz Project in Regina, suggests that this project is successful in part because of its immediate engagement with youth and the spirit of social entrepreneurship that pervades the organization's culture. He adds that long-term involvement in the lives of youth is critical, even if these same youth are served initially through short-term programming.

These principles have worked well for the Street Culture Kidz Project. Established in 1997, the initiative delivers a variety of programs to help children and youth develop personal skills and make positive life choices. In particular

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it seeks to engage youth that are at risk because of poverty, addictions, or family circumstances.

This focus is not unique. What is unique is that the Street Culture Kidz Project is guided by what youth want to do. They are directly involved in organizing, implementing and evaluating its activities. Of the 35-40 staff who are employed by the organization, over 80% are youth or young adults, including 14-15 positions filled by youth in need of services.

Together the people involved in the Kidz Project deliver a diverse range of services. For the last 14 years they have operated a traveling face-painting and children's entertainment service, an odd job squad for others in the community, a youth-led public speaking group that addresses issues related to youth, and access to healthy social outings and adventure programs. For the last six years, participants have also filled all employee positions in a 1950s style diner in Regina, providing hands-on cooking and business skills to the youth involved. Most recently, the project has added kite-skiing opportunities for youth and housing supports for youth and young adults. Just to ensure a complete experience for youth, the Project also offers peer counseling, addictions groups and mentorship.

Those involved in the Kidz Project believe that youth experience tremendous personal development by participating in these activities. Even organizing something as deceptively simple as a public speaking event requires youth to learn organizational, public speaking and business skills—not to mention the confidence and understanding that come with such opportunities. These diverse activities become the way to teach youth about contributing to the community, to teach them about life-long learning, and to give them the skills to become self-sufficient.

As with other projects highlighted in this report, the Street Culture Kidz Project has relied on strong community partnerships. It regularly connects with social service providers to ensure that youth receive the supports they need, and many businesses in the community contribute financially and with materials for the project's activities.

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Kim Sutherland explains that the project has been around long enough to see newcomers be welcomed into a community formed by earlier participants. This builds a natural mentorship network, and encourages the development of trust and the close relationships so crucial to youth. It is this meaningful participant engagement and open youth culture that creates the safety and nurturing space that allows youth to develop.

3.5 Rethinking Community Development: The North-End Community Renewal Corporation

The residents of Winnipeg's North End have a powerful force working to improve the economic, cultural and social conditions in their neighbourhoods. This force is the North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC). In place since 1998, this corporation strives to identify and implement strategies to revitalize the North End—a geographic region north of the city's CP tracks, south of Carruthers Avenue, east of McPhillips Street and west of the Red River.

NECRC is a community renewal organization comprised of representatives of other organizations in the region and community residents. This includes representatives from Aboriginal, cultural, business, community service, religious and labour organizations. Together these individuals oversee activities directed at improving the quality and accessibility of housing, creating employment opportunities, enhancing commercial infrastructure, reducing crime in the community, and contributing to the cultural richness of the community.

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NECRC has changed the North End by adopting a comprehensive approach to community development. This includes investing in property development in the area, facilitating loans for local businesses, offering training and counseling to local residents, fostering local leadership and supporting local “social entrepreneurs” who contribute to the North End’s economic and social capital.

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The specific initiatives undertaken by NECRC are diverse. One successful initiative is the *Path Resource Centre*, which offers career assessments, counseling support, job search and placement, and skills development services to area residents. In the last fiscal year, the *PATH Centre* served more than 800 residents, with close to 10,000 resident visits to access computers, workshops, counseling or other services. It also works with community stakeholders to run the *Lord Selkirk Park Resource Centre*, where partnering organizations provide counseling services, free laundry, a clothing depot, community phones, a regular community feast and a variety of arts and crafts and educational workshops.

Comprehensive services would not be complete with just employment assistance. So NECRC partners in a range of property developments to enhance the vibrancy of the North End. Just this summer, for example, the North End Wellness Centre opened, with NECRC as a key partner in the development. The Centre provides local community members with a comprehensive recreation facility and programming to promote physical health, recreational opportunities, and community participation among

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residents. Other property development partnerships focus on housing, with NECRC supporting housing renewal projects, workshops for landlords and tenants, and a housing registry for low-income renters in the area.

To complete the range of community development services, NECRC engages in an array of projects to support the culture and diversity of the area. For example, it has sponsored a *Picnic in the Park* to celebrate diversity in the North End, and has supported a local National Aboriginal Day event every year since 2004.

4. ADOPTING PRINCIPLES THAT WORK

Over the last two decades, resources have been dedicated to solving the social challenges that pervade western Canada's urban cores. Evidence shows, however, that homelessness, addictions, mental illness, prostitution, and criminal activity remain as significant issues, with the challenges becoming both more intense and complex (Wilkie and Berdahl 2007). These problems are obviously interconnected, yet many of the programmatic responses developed in this time have failed to connect the issues and groups attempting to resolve them.

These issues are deeply entrenched in our communities, and it is clear that it will be virtually impossible to completely eliminate them. There will always be individuals who are addicted, who commit crimes or who struggle with mental health challenges. However, comments made by community champions at the Honourable James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtable series, and examination of the case studies presented in this report, suggest that there are alternative solutions available for positively influencing the impacts of these "street level" social issues. Drawing from these sources, a number of principles that hold promise can be identified.

4.1 Focus on Strong Communities

Our cities benefit from the presence of robust and diverse service delivery organizations and programs, not to mention the array of government responses

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The promising programs and practices highlighted in this report demonstrate that these barriers can be overcome. This is accomplished by building a strong community base to address critical social problems.

to our cities' street level social challenges. Why is it, then, that these services – with many committed and capable people involved – have failed to make substantial progress in resolving these problems?

In 1997, I wrote a report for Canada West Foundation that identified several barriers to positive change in the social service delivery system. These barriers include the remarkable complexity and fragmentation of our social service delivery system, limited vision and expertise dedicated to systemic change and lack of incentives for collaborative activity. The barriers also include a political context that makes scarce resource distribution a competitive arena, and funding structures that are short-term, restrictive and competitive. I believe, that for the most part, these barriers are still standing strong.

This is not a statement condemning the remarkable work done by social service organizations and the staff of funders and government. It is, however, a statement that points to the complex array of service delivery organizations, political agendas, lack of coordination within the sector and the absence of significant client involvement in resolving the issues that directly impact them.

The promising programs and practices highlighted in this report demonstrate that these barriers can be overcome. This is accomplished by building a strong community base to address critical social problems. The programs highlighted here offer at least preliminary evidence that it is possible to build and sustain broader systemic responses to street level social challenges, rather than simplistic programmatic responses. This can be achieved by focusing efforts on relationship-building, shared leadership, inclusive practices, and a commitment to broad-based, long-term community goals.

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For example, one of the keys to the examples described in this report is a perspective that clients need to be integrated into their community, not removed or segregated from it. These individuals are part of our cities, part of our communities. The implications of this position are profound. Rather than simply trying to hide, contain or manage the problems present in places like the DTES of Vancouver, being truly inclusive means that we accept the existence of those issues considered problematic. Moreover, we invite *all* members of a community to help set goals and priorities for the community, and ask them to help develop and implement responses that make sense at a local level. In order to do this, both government and service organizations must be willing to give up top-down control in favour of community ownership.

It is important to note that this concept of community ownership and control over social challenges does not eliminate the importance of organizations that maintain basic social order. Police still need to respond to criminal activity such as street gangs, drug dealers and acts of violence. Sanctions should still be applied to the johns who seek out prostitutes on our streets. However, it can be argued that the best solutions to these social order situations will come with the full engagement of local communities.

There is an interesting parallel between the process of building strong communities and ensuring strong and helpful service organizations. Community development creates social capital through processes of bonding (linking similar or homogenous individuals and groups) and bridging (linking dissimilar or heterogeneous groups) (Putnam and Feldstein 2003). In order to build communities vibrant enough to successfully address street level social challenges, therefore, our efforts need to focus on multiple efforts simultaneously. Similar community groups and citizens that have a lot in common need to work collaboratively, as do the service organizations that share many goals and assets (bonding capital). We also need to connect local citizens, community associations, church groups, and businesses to the service organizations (bridging capital).

This mutual process of bonding and bridging can only happen when all the key stakeholders in a community develop a shared understanding of the problems they face, a common language to communicate about them, trust that they are all there to develop viable solutions and a common set of strategies to guide action.

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The inclusion of clients and other stakeholders in shaping solutions to street level social issues should be considered a positive development. The knowledge, experience and perspectives of these individuals is critical to defining the important problems to address and how to best do so.

4.2 Shared Ownership is Empowerment

In order to effectively develop the capital that will enable long-term solutions to street level challenges, both communities and clients need to become far more integral to defining what goals are important to achieve. Dialogue and vital involvement of these stakeholders is in fact critical to achieve a broader community-level performance orientation in the future. Therefore the inclusion of clients and other stakeholders in shaping solutions to street level social issues should be considered a positive development. The knowledge, experience and perspectives of these individuals is critical to defining the important problems to address and how to best do so. This practice, and its positive impacts, can be seen in examples like PEERS and Street Culture Kidz Project.

This stance is a likely a controversial one. It implies both a vital involvement of clients and their ownership in the issues that impact them. This shared ownership is empowerment—when ordinary people develop the capacity to solve the problems they face, the ability to control the means to do so, and the authority to make real decisions that affect them.

This shared ownership of street level social issues and solutions is therefore a compelling form of empowerment. It begins with full engagement of these individuals, including spending time to learn who they are, where they are at, and their hopes, dreams and assets. This information should then be incorporated into the goals of any possible actions, as it is their goals that should matter more than service provider goals. Finally, taking action needs to be consistent with the goals and desires expressed by clients.

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Policy-makers need to give up control as well, and be willing to take risks on innovative pilot projects and long-term preventative programs. Everyone involved will need to become comfortable with ambiguity and uncertain timelines as a shared vision, common language and mutually-developed strategies are created.

These principles are connected closely to harm reduction models, but they can be traced directly to basic principles of effective community development. Incremental changes, in the face of serious economic, health and cultural realities, may be all that we can expect of any client at any one point in time. The goal is to create solutions that actually serve client needs, and to do so on terms that they approve of.

It of course needs to be recognized that not all members of a community have the capacity to be engaged, or even want to do so. And there are certainly those engaged in illegal activities that would preclude them from full participation in shaping solutions to those issues. Those at the centre of street level social issues will all be at a different stage of readiness for change. What is required, however, is the expectation and invitation for individuals in these communities to share their values, beliefs and knowledge. They are, after all, the experts when it comes to the realities of their lives on the streets of our cities.

An implication of a shift toward a more “horizontal” ownership of the issues facing our cities is that the professionals and policy-makers who shape and deliver services need to redefine the nature of their relationship with service recipients. A new balance needs to be found. This balance needs to see service providers learn new inclusive practices and share control over decision-making, as additions to the skills and practices they already possess. Are clients at the table when we decide on programmatic priorities? Do they have choice in the services they receive? What can they say no to? How would they evaluate their situation and the progress being made?

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involved will need to become comfortable with ambiguity and uncertain timelines as a shared vision, common language and mutually-developed strategies are created.

4.3 Changes Will be Long-Term and Complex

This brings us to the issue of time. The street level social issues facing our cities are deeply entrenched, and any realistic plans to address them require a generational perspective. The short-term goals and strategies so common to the dominant service delivery system are not compatible with pursuing community level impacts. For example, consider the goals inherent in the programs and projects outlined in this report. The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness (CCEH) states its goal as eliminating homelessness in Calgary over a 10-year period. The North End Renewal Corporation (NERC) in Winnipeg seeks to restore the economic and social vitality of that particular region in the city. The Vancouver Community Court seeks to create a new way of addressing justice issues in the DTES. All of these goals are long-term in nature—perhaps taking decades or generations to fully realize.

The long-term focus inherent in community development requires communities, service delivery organizations and government to view resources contributed to community change as both preventative and an investment in community well-being. This investment mentality will require a shift from the efficiency mentality so common in the sector now. As Putnam and Feldstein (2003) declare, those who engage in effective community building must be comfortable with “redundancies and apparent inefficiencies” in those efforts. The complexity of what is being achieved demands no less.

There are a number of processes that demand a long-term perspective when developing and assessing progress in dealing with street level social issues. Consider the challenge of developing a shared purpose, vision and clear roles among those who target issues such as mental health, addictions or gang activity. Each of the potential participants in any of our cities bring their own expectations, expertise, language, capacity to contribute and organizational needs. Blending these into a collaboratively defined purpose

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Each of the potential participants in any of our cities bring their own expectations, expertise, language, capacity to contribute and organizational needs. Blending these into a collaboratively defined purpose and vision requires constant negotiation, dialogue and review.

and vision requires constant negotiation, dialogue and review. And once this is accomplished, a coordinated and large-scale action plan must be designed and fully implemented.

Another basic element for successful collaboration is shared leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2002) define leadership as simply the process of enabling others. In the context of restoring urban streets to a healthy state, leadership might refer to the process of enabling a collective of clients, concerned citizens, service and business organizations, government and other stakeholders to build and sustain mutually defined goals and tasks. This leadership comes not only from individuals, but the organizations they represent as well. Given the complexity of the changes we need to see, leadership will occur at many levels and from all participants over time.

Finally, it is also important that the long-term impacts identified in this process be framed in positive community terms. These impacts will likely be indicators of the general social well-being of our urban cores, and the people that live there. For example, the long-term impacts of successful strategies for addressing street level social issues might include reductions in crime and drug use. They should also, however, include indicators of education, health, the relationships between community groups, and financial stability.

4.4 Advocacy and Service Must Mix

The concept of advocacy has become a controversial one in Canada over the last decade. The term “advocacy” has become almost a dirty word, somehow synonymous with rabid lobbying and extreme positions. There is a

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role for advocacy in addressing street level social issues, however. It is through informed and reasoned advocacy that individuals and groups who work at the front lines of our urban streets can inform policy-makers and government officials about the challenges they face, and the actions that would help deal with these issues. It is these front line groups, many of who are charities, that are able to respond quickly to emerging issues and opportunities for change.

In Canada, any organization that is registered federally as a charity must abide by rules created by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). These rules limit the charity's ability to engage in certain types of political activities. While the boundaries around these "political activities" have been hotly debated, a very real impact has been that these rules have led many charities to restrict their advocacy activities in order to avoid the risk of losing their charitable status.

From the examples highlighted in this report, it is clear that advocacy is an important part of creating and sustaining changes that contribute to resolving street level social issues. Large scale projects such as the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness and the revitalization of Winnipeg's North End Renewal Corporation demand policy and structural changes to our systems. For example, the *10-Year Plan* in Calgary includes specific plans to advocate for increases to Alberta's Income Support and AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) rates, and changes to income support regulations that are obstacles to homeless people collecting income assistance. With these examples in mind, it is clear that those who care about these issues should not be shy to engage in advocacy efforts. Advocacy and service do, and *must* mix.

There are of course limitations to advocacy, as outlined by the CRA. Their definition of advocacy is simple. It is a charity's "demonstrated support for a cause or particular point of view." This definition makes activities such as public awareness campaigns, presentations to elected officials or leading groups aimed at policy reform all advocacy activities. And there is a new "10%" rule that stipulates charities must spend at least 90% of their resources

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on their charitable purposes and activities as set out in their governing documents. This means they can spend no more than 10% of those resources on “political activities.”

In order to develop comprehensive and successful strategies for resolving street level social issues, those organizations with charitable status (many service organizations and church groups, for example) must be willing to explore the advocacy possibilities open to them. Even with the 10% rule in place, these organizations are allowed to launch public awareness campaigns about the issues our cities face. They can lobby or communicate with elected officials and government representatives to discuss those issues. They can, and should, help decision-makers to understand the need for structural changes to our systems, and explain how these policies and procedures need to change. For their part, governments need to welcome this dialogue with community advocates. It comes not as undue or ill-conceived attempts to influence, but rather as direct communication from diverse communities who have local knowledge about street level social issues and the solutions that may work to resolve them.

4.5 Government and Businesses Need to be Involved

Any successful strategy to resolve street level social issues will directly involve both government and businesses. Both have many talented people, broad influence, and assets that can directly change communities.

For its part, the business sector (sometimes called the private or corporate sector) also has a deep vested interest in resolving the issues facing our urban core areas. Many of Canada’s western cities have business revitalization zones (BRZs) in areas that also include the most visible of our street level social issues. Revitalization in this sense is economic—ensuring that business owners can earn a reasonable profit for their work.

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It is also evident, however, that many business owners maintain a serious commitment to social responsibility. The notion of social responsibility may mean something slightly different to many people, but it essentially refers to the ways in which business can become responsible to a community's social needs on top of economic needs.

The cases highlighted in this report point to corporate partnerships that offer working examples of this social responsibility. In Vancouver, the *Community Court* benefits from community service projects and employment opportunities created by local businesses. In Calgary, the Committee to End Homelessness has enjoyed strong corporate support. Business leaders have been critical to developing and championing the comprehensive 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness, and businesses are tasked with developing employment opportunities and skill training for people at risk of being homeless. Winnipeg's North End Renewal Corporation is an example of strong business skills and activities being used to revitalize *both* the economic and social fabric of the community.

Given recent reductions in fiscal spending by governments across Canada, we can expect the business sector to play a more active role in plans to address street level social issues. Some may react with distrust to this trend. It is possible, however, to balance economic prosperity and a social change and cohesion agenda. This can be achieved through inclusion of the business sector as a critical stakeholder in shaping solutions to our urban social problems.

Business cannot replace government, service delivery organizations, or even the role of committed citizens in our urban cores. However, they bring their own capacities to partnerships aimed at addressing key social issues. These capacities are much deeper than simply the ability to generate revenues or act as donors. In many cases, they bring a pragmatic goal orientation and a passion for action that is important in creating change. They offer ways of expanding the economic opportunities for individuals dealing with personal challenges, they know how to develop human capital and they know how to develop strong partnerships. They understand issues such as risk management, effective planning, and how to develop new ventures.

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Once again, however, developing strong partnerships between the business sector and other stakeholders in our urban core areas requires considerable investments of time and resources. The business sector brings different perspectives to social problems, uses a different language and often works differently than other sectors. In order to successfully benefit from business involvement in resolving street level social issues, those involved must be prepared to build new relationships—a complex long-term operation that has to be actively sustained. For these business-service-provider-citizen relationships to be productive, there has to be trust between business and other sectors based on accountability, transparency and shared purpose. One thing is clear: business does have a legitimate role in helping resolve these issues.

It is clear that municipal, provincial and federal governments are also key stakeholders in resolving street level social issues. I certainly agree with Sancton's (2008) assertion that provincial governments need to be responsible for addressing the root causes of these issues, and that municipal governments need to have more local control over maintaining social order at a local level. However, it is also clear that all three levels of government must learn to be more open and responsive.

What do I mean by this statement? It is a recognition that all levels of government must become better at connecting and listening to local communities as they strive to address their social problems. Traditional government structures are based upon top-down hierarchies, command and control procedures, and performance measurement approaches. On top of that we can add the realities imposed by short-term political cycles. None of these factors are well-adapted to solving long-term, complex urban social problems. The firmly established structures inherent in government tend to reinforce hierarchical relationships, sector silos, and short-term goals and short-term funding.

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The projects I've described demonstrate that governments can assume a different and more adaptable role in resolving social issues. Government departments at all levels must be willing to commit resources to exploratory and participatory projects, and be willing to invest in them over a longer period than we have typically seen. And rather than focusing on discrete funding pockets and reporting mechanisms, they also need to support large scale, systemic change programs that offer significant lessons about "what works well."

Much of this relates to government's willingness to give up control over programming. Examples such as those I've highlighted offer the potential to inform and guide important policy initiatives, but they will only do so if given the room and flexibility to fully develop as local community programs. Granting more control at local levels is consistent with a community development approach and offers real benefits in terms of inspiring creativity and commitment to local projects.

Finally, government bodies need to be willing to commit resources that support comprehensive, large-scale community change. This includes resources (and patience) for activities such as community goal setting, taking the time to build strong relationships and for meaningful evaluation procedures. It is through these less discrete and tangible supports that our governments can build restore our communities' capacity for positive change.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

5.1 Measuring Outcomes that Count

Innovative programs such as those highlighted in this report challenge traditional evaluation frameworks. Nonetheless, they must be evaluated to determine what works. Current evaluation frameworks must change in order to adequately capture the complexity offered by these programs.

Over the last decade, evaluation frameworks have shifted markedly toward an approach based on performance measurement and standards. For example, consider the Federal government's own conceptual model of evaluation, as outlined by the Treasury Board Secretariat (Treasury Board Secretariat 2001).

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The most pressing requirements for developing better solutions to street level problems is a collective agreement to answer broad questions. Questions that cut across multiple organizations, are community-focused, and have complex answers that cannot be identified by monitoring parsimonious outcome variables within organizations.

This model establishes evaluation primarily as a management and decision-making tool. In this model, evaluation serves a technical and instrumental function—to provide answers about practice improvement. The common thread that cuts across programs in this performance measurement approach is the demand for more accurate and timely information regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of programs. Many stakeholders—from government, to funders, to clients, to the general public—demand information that will allow assessment of program impacts across organizations within a particular substantive area.

These demands have focused considerable attention on developing logic models for service delivery programs. Most social service organizations have now spent years developing models that detail their goals, activities, outputs, short- and long-term outcomes and specific indicators of program success. While the data generated in this way can be useful for understanding program effectiveness, there are significant limitations in how the performance measurement orientation can assess the complex, long-term and community-based achievements we seek.

Reliance on these performance measures alone can create what might be called an “outcomes myopia” (Sieppert 2006). This might be considered an undue reliance on a few basic performance measures at the expense of other information regarding service effectiveness. For example, attempting to measure “housing first” or “community court” initiatives belies a focus on short-term or simplistic outcome indicators. What should we measure: housing stability, client relapse, recidivism, the use of alternate programming, direct costs of such programs or the preventative savings that might accrue?

I would argue that one of the most pressing requirements for developing better solutions to street level problems is a collective agreement to answer broader questions. These are important questions that cut across multiple organizations, are community-focused, and have complex answers that cannot be identified by monitoring parsimonious outcome variables within organizations. For example, how effective are a community's efforts to eliminate homelessness? To what extent are community resources effective in reducing the number of mentally ill individuals who live on our streets? To what extent are social services within a community overlapping, conflicting, or absent? These are questions that ask about how well we are building healthy and vibrant communities, not about how well we are fixing specific individual or geographic problems. These community development outcomes are more process oriented and less concrete than those now measured in our logic models. Yet measuring them will more accurately assess long-term changes in the issues prevalent in our urban cores.

A specific evaluation framework that is appropriate in the midst of this complexity, uncertainty and innovation is *developmental evaluation*. This model of evaluation is meant to assess programs that are constantly evolving and adapting in the midst of unpredictable environments. An excellent primer that explains developmental evaluation is offered by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation (Gamble 2008). Every policy-maker in Canada should read this document, and be prepared to adopt developmental evaluation to assess our progress in resolving street level social issues.

5.2 Funder Roles

It is not just service providers who struggle with making sense of their outcomes statistics. There is an exploding volume of outcome data collected by the hundreds of social service organizations that address street level social problems in our cities. The millions of discrete bits of data pose a risk of overwhelming both services organizations, funders and government staff who must make sense of the picture painted by all this information. In particular, funders may be headed toward decision gridlock in the face of these volumes of data.

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It is funders who are in a position to act as a catalyst for these discussions, and funders who possess the resources to support the dialogue that needs to happen.

A necessary next step toward resolving street level social issues is to have *all* the members of a community engage in a shared dialogue in order to define what the critical outcomes *should be* in that community, and to build shared initiatives for examining these larger goals. A critical stakeholder in this scenario is funders, who can facilitate a dialogue with other stakeholders (e.g., clients, community groups, government and staff). It is funders who are in a position to act as a catalyst for these discussions, and funders who possess the resources to support the dialogue that needs to happen.

In terms of addressing street level social challenges, this role can be translated into the role of community advocate. It is government bodies, foundations, and funders such as the United Way that can link community stakeholders and ensure that meaningful participation occurs. This is a daunting task, as there are significant conceptual challenges in identifying community-level outcomes, aggregating diverse data across multiple organizations, and isolating causal factors that explain the observed changes.

All of this is not to devalue the valuable contributions made by outcome measurement and the emerging systems to document performance measurement. Systematically assessing our performance on a community level, however, is an inescapable next step for addressing these street level challenges.

5.3 Funding Structures

An equally important issue related to funding is the structural nature of funding agreements. Examples like PEERS and the Street Culture Kidz Project have been working and evolving for years, building relationships in the community and working collaboratively with many other organizations. However, long-term access to adequate resources (in-kind support, staff, equipment, materials, time and information) is one of the most important requirements for sustaining

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successful collaborations and community-level initiatives. Short-term funding cycles are inconsistent with, even detrimental to, achieving the 10-20 year community development goals that are inherent in addressing our cities' core challenges.

It is unfortunate that almost all funding agreements are for short-term periods of just a year or two. It is equally unfortunate that funding restrictions often focus exclusively on direct service provisions, rather than allowing organizations to dedicate resources to relationship-building, planning innovative projects or taking risks. In the name of accountability, most funding goes to single organizations or small collaborations, rather than coalitions of community organizations and stakeholders. Long-term, systemic funding strategies are required by multiple funders working closely together—not the fragmented and competitive funding structures that create small pockets of money for community change.

5.4 The Nonprofit Sector

The promising programs identified in this report point to changes that are required in the nonprofit sector. A shift toward more inclusive, community-based services for resolving street level social issues will demand strong and responsive nonprofit organizations. This is a prerequisite for implementing broad policies and services that link economic, health, social care and labour dimensions together. The nonprofit sector is well positioned to assume this linking role, as the people who work in the sector already have skills and experience in bridging the world of street level problems and policy-makers.

Those in the non-profit sector need to buy into the case management model implied by the comprehensive and coordinated intervention that underlies harm reduction and housing first models. These case management models typically adopt a coordinated intake system that cuts across service providers and geographic regions within a city. Upon intake, clients are assigned a central case manager, who serves to assess the client's economic, housing, mental and physical health and service needs. This role is one of facilitator, connector and advocate for the client.

These case management services can be expected to last for significant durations, as the clients will require ongoing supports and long-term case

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Nonprofit organizations and staff must be prepared to work collectively and collaboratively. In many situations they will need to give up autonomy and “territory” in order to streamline and coordinate service delivery.

management follow-up. It is reasonable to expect routine and intensive intervention and follow-up services in many of these cases to last for six months to a year (perhaps even more). Each will also require the input and assistance of multiple professionals, businesses and community advocates.

The implications of this for operations within the nonprofit sector are profound. Nonprofit organizations and staff must be prepared to work collectively and collaboratively. In many situations they will need to give up autonomy and “territory” in order to streamline and coordinate service delivery. Managing the seamless information required in a comprehensive case management model will require nonprofit organizations to share information with one another—not just “client” information, but organizational costs, resources, planning and so on. There may also be compelling reasons for some nonprofit organizations to engage in joint planning and actual service delivery activities, co-locate or even merge. A coordinated case management model may even make some organizations redundant and we need to prepare those organizations in order to achieve long-term community goals.

6. CONCLUSION

In the book *Getting to Maybe*, Westley, Zimmerman and Patton (2007) speak of the complexities faced by social innovators. They say “there is no road map for social innovation; it is not a route that can be mapped step by step.” This is certainly the situation faced by those directing the promising practices highlighted in this report. Yet the book also speaks about the commitment, vision, ability to communicate, skill at connecting with people and disdain for barriers that social innovators demonstrate. This too, is something evident in the examples described in this report.

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The work of the programs highlighted in this report, and many similar groups we heard about in this project, represent promising practices in dealing with street level social issues. Each of the individuals and organizations in these projects represents a willingness to see these issues differently, to imagine new solutions to those challenges and to overcome obstacles in implementing those solutions. More than that, however, these promising practices point to the importance of connections. The projects highlighted here are promising practices because they connect many individuals and groups working collectively and pragmatically to create change. Through this new collective action, these projects become a stronger force for change—one that promises to alter the nature of our urban streets. ■

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About Canada West Foundation

Our Vision

A dynamic and prosperous West in a strong Canada.

Our Mission

A leading source of strategic insight, conducting and communicating non-partisan economic and public policy research of importance to the four western provinces and all Canadians.

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In 1970, the One Prairie Province Conference was held in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sponsored by the University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge Herald, the conference received considerable attention from concerned citizens and community leaders. The consensus at the time was that research on the West (including BC and the Canadian North) should be expanded by a new organization. To fill this need, Canada West Foundation was created under letters patent on December 31, 1970. Since that time, Canada West Foundation has established itself as one of Canada's premier research institutes. Non-partisan, accessible research and active citizen engagement are hallmarks of the Foundation's past, present and future endeavours. These efforts are rooted in the belief that a strong West makes for a strong Canada.

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