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Community – University Institute for Social Research

*Uprooting Poverty and  
Planting Seeds For Social Change:  
The Roots of Poverty Project*

**by Paula Grosso**



*Building Healthy Sustainable Communities*

## **Community-University Institute for Social Research**

CUI SR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUI SR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluates applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUI SR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUI SR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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## ABSTRACT

The *Roots of Poverty Project*, a participatory community consultation process about social policy, was based on a community empowerment/ development model. The *Project* had three main streams: community consultation about social policy, community and individual capacity building, and a qualitative research project documenting the process' impact on its participants.

Through a series of community roundtables, forums, focus groups, and workshops, *Project* participants contributed their experiences and ideas about poverty and its possible solutions. The qualitative research project's results indicate that both individual and community capacity in areas of leadership, public speaking, positive self-esteem, facilitation, partnership building, and social policy analysis were enhanced through participation.

While the *Project's* time frame was too short, as many participants indicated, a great deal was accomplished. These accomplishments will aid the community and, more specifically, the Anti-Poverty Coalition in the next steps of developing a poverty reduction strategy in which all sectors can agree to invest. It has been clear throughout this process that the *Roots of Poverty Project* is only one part of a larger strategy.

The *Roots of Poverty Project* is the result of dedicated community members who believe that citizens have a right to be included in social policy design. Through a series of roundtables, forums, and capacity-building workshops, these community members endeavoured to change the dynamics of community-government relationships into a more holistic, inclusive process of policy creation. People need to be heard, share their stories, and, for many, begin healing from the effects of poverty and social exclusion.

The *Roots of Poverty Project* is a dynamic, holistic, and community-driven process that has created momentum for change. It is a project that has valued the process as much as the results it has produced.

The *Project's* three main streams were:

1. Community consultation about social policy;
2. Community and individual capacity building;
3. A research project documenting the process' impact on its participants.

What follows is a documentation of the history, philosophy, structure, events, outcomes, and impact of the *Roots of Poverty Project*.

## **NATIONAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL POVERTY STATISTICS**

Before discussing the *Project's* philosophies, goals, and structure, it is necessary to describe the social and economic context that has been the impetus for anti-poverty work in Saskatoon.

Canada does not have an official measurement for calculating the “poverty line,” but Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-off (LICO) is often used to measure poverty’s extent. In 2000, for example, a family of four living in a city the size of Saskatoon was considered “below the poverty line” (LICO) if their pre-tax yearly income was less than \$29,653 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). However, poverty groups, such as the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, suggest that these low-income cut-offs should be set higher. They argue that poverty levels should not merely include the minimum income one needs to survive, but also take into consideration what people need for social inclusion. For example, Statistics Canada’s LICO levels do not make provision for basic necessities, such as newspapers, dental care, appropriate shelter according to age and family composition, recreational activities, reading material, babysitting costs, furniture, supplies for adequate household maintenance, basic personal care items such as toothpaste and shaving supplies, vacations, and public transportation. The Social Planning Council suggests that LICO’s should include minimal levels of these and other items and opportunities that people need to function socially in their own communities and in larger society.

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), Canada experienced a 1.3 million person increase of those living in poverty in a 25-year period, with 5.1 million in 1998, 1.3 million (20%) of whom were children (Ross et al, 2000, pp. xvi, 144). Further, the numbers likely do not reflect poverty’s true rate because these figures do not include Aboriginal people on reserves, residents of Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories, and people in institutions (prisons, hospitals, homes for the aged, and children in care). In 1999, the United Nations’ Human Development Report ranked Canada ninth out of seventeen industrialized countries on the Human Poverty Index (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2001).

The gap between Canada’s rich and poor is widening. The richest 20% of Canadians receive 46.7% of all income, while the poorest 20% receive only 3.3% (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2001). Economic trends fuel this growing gap. For example, there has been an increase in part-time workers with low paying jobs and no benefits, and most new jobs are in the low-paying service sector and tend to be filled by women and young people.

Based on the LICO measurement, Saskatchewan has a poverty rate of 12%, with 31,000 families living below the poverty line. While the LICO for a single person is \$14,727, a single person utilizing the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP), for exam-

ple, receives \$5,739 (National Council on Welfare, 2000, p. 8). In other words, SAP benefits for this group fall \$8,988 short of the LICO line. It is no surprise, then, that, in 2001, 22% of Saskatchewan residents included in the Survey of Social Assistance Applicants by the Department of Social Services reported visiting food banks and soup kitchens, and over 35% of people on SAP reported having to use money from their food allowances to pay for housing (Government of Saskatchewan, 2001, p. 10). The minimum wage has only increased 65 cents since 1992. Workers earning minimum wage are paid \$6.00<sup>1</sup> per hour in contrast to the \$7.40 per hour that a single individual needs to be able to pay for all necessities (according to the LICO). Saskatoon Communities for Children has identified that 26.9% of Saskatoon children live in poverty.

Research conducted by Saskatoon Communities for Children indicates that poverty is most prevalent on Saskatoon's west side. For example, more than 40% of residents live in poverty in the following neighbourhoods: McNabb Park, Riversdale, Pleasant Hill, Westmount, and Confederation Park. In other west side neighbourhoods, including Westview, Massey Place, Confederation Park, Pacific Heights, Fairhaven, Meadowgreen, King George, Holiday Park, Mayfair, Kelsey, and Caswell Hill, 20-40% of residents live below the LICO (Holden, 2001). Poverty in Saskatoon has escalated to the point where 850 people were fed at the Friendship Inn (a core-neighbourhood agency that provides free meals on a drop-in basis) on Easter Sunday 2002. Friendship Inn staff indicate that they feed, on average, 300-500 people a day. While clients have been mostly single parent families receiving social assistance, staff state that more and more working poor require assistance at the end of the month. The Saskatoon Food Bank has similar trends, where staff indicate that, on average, 10,000 people use the Food Bank each month, and that 200 new requests are received each month.

## **HISTORY OF THE SASKATOON ANTI-POVERTY COALITION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANTI-POVERTY PROJECT**

Saskatoon has a vibrant, diverse, and active antipoverty movement that includes organizations working on issues such as food security, housing, childcare, economic rights, and human rights. It is not surprising, then, that when these groups heard about possible reforms within Social Services' Income Security programs they quickly organized meetings to discuss their concerns. One major concern came out of these discussions—that policy and program changes might be created and implemented without input from those most affected by new policies and programs. Anti-poverty groups and involved individuals decided that the best strategy was to hold a press conference to publicize their concerns. In response to the media coverage, the provincial Deputy Minister of Social Services agreed to meet with anti-poverty groups.

On 10 January 2001, the quickly forming coalition met with the provincial Deputy

Minister of Social Services, Dan Perrins, and Department of Social Services (DSS) representatives to hear their plans for internal Income Security Redesign. After listening to this presentation, the coalition felt strongly that an adequate and appropriate level of consultation was needed, and, further, that community members should participate in the policy redesign to a greater degree than indicated in the government's presentation.

These concerned community groups requested that DSS lend its moral and financial support to a process of community forums, and were subsequently encouraged by the Department to submit a written proposal for consideration. The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition (APC) was created during the visioning process for this proposal. Current APC members include: Child Hunger and Education Program; Communities for Children; Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan; Equal Justice for All; Multi-Faith Social Justice Circle; Political Action Group on Poverty; Quint Development Corporation; Rainbow Community Centre Interim Working Board; Renters' Rights; Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers–Social Policy Committee; Saskatchewan Poverty Advocates Network; Saskatoon District Health Community Development Unit; Saskatoon Tribal Council; and the United Church Inner City Ministry.

APC believed in a need for a more thorough and participatory process for social policy (re)design. It was out of this belief that the *Roots of Poverty Project* was born. After receiving APC's proposal, DSS agreed to fund the bulk of the *Project*. APC and DSS began working on terms of reference to outline the *Project's* partnership (see **Appendix A**).

APC subsequently received funding from Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Health, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR). The range of funders illustrates the intended intersectoral nature of the project design.

### ***THE HISTORY OF THE SASKATOON ANTI-POVERTY COALITION***

APC began intensive work on the *Project's* structure and plan. They decided that it was important to form a sub-committee to oversee and guide the *Project* and its staff so that APC could focus on future directions at their meetings, rather than focusing on *Project* management.

#### *Management Committee*

APC formed the Management Committee to provide guidance and direction for the *Project* and its staff. They made all major financial decisions, chose the Forum panel, worked with the coordinator to ensure that *Project* goals were met, and had final executive authority over the *Project*. The Committee met as often as was needed, ranging anywhere from once per month to once per week. The Management Committee had one representative from DSS and seven from the Anti-Poverty Coalition, including John Nicholson (Department of Social Services), Kathie Cram (Community Development



Team at Saskatoon District Health), Nanette McKay and Janet Clarke (Inner City Ministry), Len Usiskin (Quint Development Corporation, who administered financial aspects of the *Project*), and Lou Rogers, Michelle Lee, and Bob Fink (community members).

### *Project Staff*

The *Roots of Poverty Project* employed four paid and one unpaid staff member:

- Amy Stensrud, project coordinator, was responsible for management of the *Project* and its staff.
- Sherri Doell and Debbie Frost, facilitators, were responsible for engaging the community in the *Project* and facilitating discussions about poverty's roots and possible solutions.
- Paula Grosso, researcher, designed and implemented a participatory qualitative research plan to track the *Project's* impact on its participants.
- Jennifer Sherwood, practicum student, led educational workshops for community members about social policy, wrote briefing papers for community groups, and assisted other staff with their responsibilities (see **Appendix D** for a more detailed description of staff job descriptions).

All staff participated in training and strategic planning sessions early on in the *Project*. During these first few weeks, the staff decided to make a concentrated effort to develop and maintain a team atmosphere and to hold regular staff meetings and check points to foster strong communication.

### *Project Outline*

- **Roundtable discussions:** Roundtables—one generally focused and seven issue-specific—were held to engage community members in the process and to begin to build consensus on the roots of poverty and possible policy directions.
- **Public launch:** The *Project* launch included free workshops, clothes swap, nutritious snacks and supper, an address by Peter Prebble, and a pep rally to build excitement about working together to reduce poverty's depth and incidence.
- **Community Outreach:** In an effort to engage as many people in the process as possible, the staff spoke with individuals and organizations from many different groups and gave presentations.
- **Community Forum on Poverty:** The Forum consisted of a series of panel presentations that were held every Friday in November. Community groups or individuals presented policy recommendations to an intersectoral panel comprised of both governmental and nongovernmental members.
- **Workshop Series:** Ten workshops were held in January 2001, all of which received

overwhelming community response. The workshop topics were created in response to community input throughout the first few months of the *Project*, and were intended to build capacity, both individually and collectively.

- **Qualitative research:** This was conducted to determine the extent to which the community (including the Management Committee, staff, Anti-Poverty Coalition, and community members) has built its capacity.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Central to the *Roots of Poverty Project* was the concept of *community empowerment*. Ronald Labonte and Glenn Laverick describe community empowerment as a gradual developmental process “effecting social, economic and political changes that improve the quality of life for whole communities” (Labonte and Laverick, 2000, pp. 255-262).

Social elements of community empowerment include:

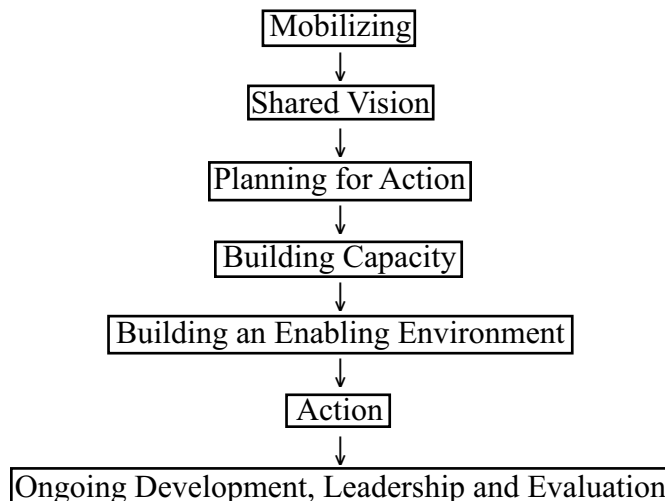
- **Relationships:** dialogue within community and with outside organizations and institutions;
- **Trust:** co-operation within community and with outside organizations and institutions, and willingness to work with government;
- **Social capital:** knowledge and skills of people;
- **Social inclusion/Participatory democracy:** ability of citizens to fully participate in all aspects of community and political systems;
- **Sense of community:** caring and sharing among people in a community, mutual respect, membership (feelings of belonging and a role to play in the community), influence or a feeling that individuals and community matter, fulfillment of needs, or a feeling that members’ needs will be met by resources received through membership, and an emotional connection or belief that members share common experiences and history;
- **Community connectedness:** shared identity, values, vision for the future, connectedness between neighbors, ability to participate in the community in a meaningful way, ability to access resources, and strong social and inter-organizational networks;
- **Sense of community history:** knowledge and pride of community and its history.

(Labonte and Laverick, 2000; Elshtain, 1993; Estava and Suri Prakash, 1998; Wantanabe, 1992).

Empowerment increases a community’s capacity to critically analyze problems in the community and people’s lives. It develops local leadership, builds empowering or-

ganizational structures and resources, and builds community control and ownership. It builds more equitable relationships between community, government, and service providers. Community capacity creates strong and effective community organizations (e.g. community associations, churches, and service providers) and establishes common vision for social change and community betterment (Labonte and Laverick, 2000, p. 260). **Figure 1** illustrates the community empowerment process.

**Figure 1. Community Involvement Process.**



**Source: Government of Saskatchewan, 2000.**

Most importantly, community empowerment enables communities and citizens to fully participate in the political process. By building capacity, creating leaders and strong and effective organizations, and developing and strengthening relationships with government, communities can analyze, change, and build public policy.

Citizens throughout Saskatchewan, Canada, and the world have used these concepts to better their communities and fully integrate lay people in the political process. Quebec's proposal to eliminate poverty, for example, is an excellent model of community empowerment and participatory democracy. The proposal aims to implement a permanent government action program for elimination of poverty in Quebec, while providing for the active civic participation in all stages of the program through the creation of a citizen-based council. The council is to be comprised of nineteen members, at least 50% of whom to be women:

- 10 representing anti-poverty organizations (at least 6 living in poverty);
- 4 government agencies (Health, Social Services, Education, and Professional Training and Local/Regional Development);

- 5 individuals representing areas of civil society.

This model is based on a belief that individuals in a state of poverty are the first to take action to improve their situation and that of their families, and that it is the responsibility of society as a whole to join with individuals living in poverty to re-establish solidarity and to eliminate unjust and discriminatory situations that condemn them to exclusion.

Article 16 of the “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” of the United Nations, Resolution of the General Assembly, 9 December 1998, says that individuals, non-governmental organizations, and relevant institutions have important roles to play in making the public more aware of questions relating to all human rights and fundamental freedoms through activities such as education, training, and research.

The council has six main roles: facilitator, moderator, watchdog, researcher, advocate, and educator. Council responsibilities and model components can be divided into the following:

- **Citizen input:** This involves promoting and ensuring citizen participation in program design and implementation, public debates, and consulting citizens to use that input to advise government.
- **Co-operation:** The council works with government, facilitates discussions and consultations, and encourages development of international solidarity between community-based organizations in the fight against poverty.
- **Vigilance:** The council monitors the Act’s implementation.
- **Research:** A subcommittee of the council, called the observatory committee, coordinates, orders, or undertakes research.
- **Education/Advocacy:** The council informs the public on the Act, as well as poverty issues in general.

An international example of community-government consultations resulting in thorough participation in public policy is the participatory budget process in the city of Porto Alegre, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The participatory budget process, much like the Quebec model’s objectives, involves ordinary citizens in the decision-making process. The guiding principles behind this new form of governance are designed to: create a more citizen-centered government; include poorer sectors of society; foster political participation; empower the community by making them key players in the decision-making process; strengthen and build local communities by allocating more resources and funding to community infrastructures and programs; and broaden democracy, because previous governments had only allocated money to political

supporters and the business sector.

The process involves a series of community meetings and consultations with local government. In 1989, 400 people participated in the process. By 1999, over 40,000 were involved in designing Porto Alegre's participatory budget. Since the budget process was implemented, many improvements have been made (for more information refer to **Appendix B**).

This community empowerment framework led to the development of four fundamental principles that informed the *Roots of Poverty Project's* design and continued to guide the *Project* during every phase. These principles are:

- **Participatory Democracy:** This is a belief that citizens have the right to be involved in creating the policies and programs that affect their lives and that this practice results in better and citizen-owned policy. Civic participation is a key factor in addressing poverty's root causes. The process of social policy redesign must therefore include significant measures of community organizing and development, including basic skills building, and a long-term vision of leadership development;
- **Root Causes:** The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition believes that dependence on social programs is a by-product of poverty rather than a root cause. Social programs are a respectable and significant part of a democratic society. They should serve citizens by reducing poverty and hardship and increasing social participation. Reducing social assistance recipient numbers should be an outcome of good social and economic policy rather than a goal unto itself. Given this, any poverty reduction strategy should begin by uncovering the "roots of poverty" (hence the project name) and use this context to inform all policy recommendations;
- **Broad Participation and Cooperation:** Poverty is a broad-based, complex social problem that cannot be tackled by any one department, level of government, or community. Rather, all sectors and communities need to be involved in finding solutions. The *Roots of Poverty Project* has consistently attempted to encourage different government departments to link more closely together on developing an integrated approach to poverty reduction;
- **Community Driven Capacity Building:** Community capacity-building has to be initiated and owned by the community itself. "Because we believe in community empowerment, communities are acknowledged as diverse and unique, each with its strengths, history, needs and vision. People in communities are seen to be in the best position to understand local issues and to create solutions based upon their strengths and resources. Inclusive approaches seek and respect community knowledge, wisdom and direction. They foster hope for the future and self-reliance in achieving a high quality of community life" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2000).

Six project goals were established from the fundamental guiding principles:

- To improve communication and relationships between community and government by working together in the redesign process;
- To build skills in the community for participation in research and policy recommendations. This will result in a more effective policy redesign process;
- To develop a process of social policy redesign that includes community in policy creation;
- To adopt a process that gives low-income participants the least concern about risking their income security through participation in the *Project*;
- To create short-term employment and develop skills in leadership, facilitation, and organizing. The Anti-Poverty Coalition employs four community members for this project;
- To recommend specific policy directions that come from, and are supported by, the community, which will reduce the incidence and depth of poverty in our province, give people an opportunity to access decent paying jobs and stable housing to give them a chance to exit poverty and improve their health and well-being.

During planning sessions in the *Project's* initial stages, staff discussed expectations and goals for each phase and event. Besides the obvious and clearly stated purpose and objectives for each event, staff identified three goals for each event in an effort to facilitate community empowerment:

1. **Establishing Atmosphere:** It was important to create a welcome and comfortable atmosphere at every event to allow participants to relax and enjoy themselves. This was achieved by: serving coffee, tea, water, and light refreshments at every meeting; greeting people at the door; encouraging people to wear name tags; building in breaks to our agendas; and offering reimbursement of travel and childcare expenses for low-income participants.
2. **Equalizing Power:** Because participants ranged widely in their income levels, educational backgrounds, occupations, and social group identities (gender, race, age, and ability), equalizing power during events and meetings was very important for the *Project's* health. If the power balance was not addressed, not everyone would be able to participate freely. Some of the ways to address this were to: encourage everyone to address one another with first names only; encourage people to introduce themselves without stating their workplace or title; use the same set of guidelines for participation at every event, which were always posted on the wall; encourage participation from everyone; have an open door policy; include participants' input into project design and events.
3. **Build Relationships:** One way that the *Project* has had a lasting effect on the community was to encourage relationship building between staff and participants,

and between participants themselves. The ways in which staff and community accomplished this are less tangible as the previous two goals, but these relationships grew partly because of efforts to equalize power and build atmosphere. Relationship building was both aided and hindered by time constraints. On one hand, because of the intensity of the short six month period, participants and staff spent a great deal of time together, which fostered relationship growth. On the other hand, time constraints meant that relationship and trust growth were abruptly cut off when they were still developing.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The *Roots of Poverty Project* was analyzed in a qualitative research piece centered on documenting, analyzing, and communicating both the results of the consultation process, and the impact that the process had on its participants.

The Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP), one of the Anti-Poverty Coalition members, received funding from the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) for a CHEP member to conduct this research.

The research had three objectives: (1) to analyze and summarize the impact of the consultation process and the *Roots of Poverty Project* on various participants; (2) to document the testimonies and presentations that Community-based Organizations (CBO's) and individuals made at the Forum; and (3) to help build research capacity in the anti-poverty CBO sector.

### ***WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?***

Qualitative research is interpreting and understanding people's opinions and responses to a specific issue or topic. To make interpretations, researchers have to perform in-depth, long-term interviews and focus groups with participants. Qualitative research, therefore, requires a great deal of face-to-face interaction as the researcher holds interviews, focus groups, takes notes or observes, or writes questionnaires and surveys during specific events. There is no "right" method for conducting qualitative research. It is a learning process for both researcher and participants. Indeed, that is one of the main goals of this type of research—to learn from one another and for participants to be involved in every aspect of the research. Qualitative research is also evolutionary. Research develops as the researcher becomes more and more involved and learns from participants. Therefore, some important strategies and considerations when engaging in qualitative research include building trust, equalizing power, and accessibility (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, pp. 4-9).

## ***RESEARCH DESIGN***

Evaluation of the *Project's* process was divided into two components: the “before look” and the “after look.” The research design consisted of a variation of the following research techniques:

- Focus groups were used to engage participants over a six month period to analyze changing views and opinions, and give participants a chance to reflect on capacity changes (personal and organizational);
- Interviews were used to collect participants’ stories;
- Questionnaires were an important aspect of the research because the Roots of Poverty Project was highly event-based. In many cases, the researcher was not working with the same people at every event. Questionnaires provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the Project at their own pace and to voice concerns and thoughts in an anonymous and efficient manner. Personal interviews with each participant may have overloaded participants given the time required for interviews and participants’ busy schedules. Questionnaires were also used to track participation and changes in viewpoints and capacity;
- Personal observations and note taking are always an important component in qualitative research;
- Video recording was used to document presentations made at the Community Forum on Poverty.

## ***ETHICAL ISSUES***

- Building Trust: The researcher conducted a transparent research process that established trust with participants. She encouraged feedback and input about research elements, reviewed with participants what they had said so as to correctly represent their opinions, and was clear about the purpose of the research and the information’s future use;
- Equalizing power: The researcher equalized power imbalances by making the focus groups’ atmosphere as informal as possible, using only first names, making the research and participation in the research as accessible as possible, and adhering to the code of ethics laid out by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (see **Appendix C**);
- Accessibility: Accessibility is imperative for full inclusion of participants in the research. The researcher made participation in the research more accessible by: making the language basic and changing the wording of questionnaires based on participants’ input and requests (recognizing that the power of language has the potential to promote exclusion); considering specific participants’ needs (e.g. completing ques-



tionnaires verbally or printing questionnaires in larger print); and providing access to transportation and childcare through project funds.

### ***INDICATORS OF CAPACITY***

A major component of the research examined the extent to which individual and organizational capacity was enhanced. In order to arrive at appropriate capacity indicators, the researcher reviewed various reports, documents, and other literature analyzing community health, poverty and community, community development, social inclusion and social development, and community economic development. The identified capacity indicators were developed using the guiding principles and conceptual framework of community empowerment underlying the entire *Project*.

During the first set of focus groups, the researcher discussed (Anti-Poverty Coalition, Management Committee, and Project Staff) the capacity indicators she had developed with each group and included their input into the final list. The capacity indicators for this project have been divided into the following two groups:

#### *Individual*

For the purpose of capacity building in this specific context, these skills were identified as: a sense of community, building personal awareness, and a new sense of identity within the community and poverty movement; a shared vision or a picture of the community at some future time; building trusting and open relationships with government; participation in the *Project* or new involvement in an active organization; a new sense of self-esteem and confidence; leadership skills (e.g. facilitation, conflict resolution, creating and maintaining partnerships, decision-making, and problem-solving); communication skills (e.g. presentation, awareness of the power of language and labels, research and writing, and media use); a capacity to analyze, change, and build public policy and a deepening knowledge/understanding of public policy; and ongoing learning, or reflecting upon what is happening within the *Project*, and then systematically exploring what is discovered in order to learn how to be more effective.

#### *Organizational*

In addition to the skills identified above, measures of organizational capacity included: participation in the *Project* and presentations at the Forum; strategy for co-operative work with government; confidence and capacity as an organization to analyze, change, and build public policy; administrative skills/briefs, reports, and research; learning how to effectively access available resources; membership expansion and development; and building inter-organizational networks.

### ***EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH***

- To produce a publicly accessible, basic language document that consists of a synthe-

- sis of the consultation and a list of recommendations to develop a long term integrated anti-poverty provincial strategy;
- To enhance the qualitative research capacity of participating CBO's by offering workshops on conducting qualitative research for partners and their members;
  - To document this process' impact on participants' skills in the areas of research, organizing, facilitation, and leadership;
  - To provide CUISR with a final report.

## **THE “BEFORE” LOOK**

During the “Before” examination, focus groups were held with the Anti-Poverty Coalition, Management Committee, panel members, and *Project* staff, with questionnaires regarding people's personal capacity. The focus groups' purpose was to examine *Project* expectations, group capacity and identities, participants' previous experience working and consulting with government, collectively setting up a criterion with which to measure improved community-government relationships, and a chance to review capacity indicators set out for the *Project*, and to give input into the research design.

The researcher also handed out questionnaires at the first roundtable, the Forum presentations, and each of the ten capacity building workshops to establish the “before look” of each event in an effort to determine the process' impact on occasional participants. Questionnaires dealt with individual capacity, changes in capacity, and ongoing learning. Finally, people's personal stories were collected for integration into the final report by holding a special “story telling” workshop at the *Project* launch in October.

## ***COMMUNITY REFLECTION***

### *Expectations*

Out of the first set of focus groups, participants identified what they wanted to achieve and what they needed in order to empower and build capacity within the community. The goals or expectations of participants can be divided into the following four categories:

Education: analyze the role of government in the context of community; knowledge of poverty issues (specific to Saskatoon); better understanding of policy and policy formation; raise political awareness within the community; learn new skills and build capacity (individual and organizational); extensive public education in order to change public opinion; and see things from new perspectives (new organizations).

Participatory Democracy: people and community gain a voice and take back control and power; build and enhance community through capacity building opportunities; government listening to the community; clients receiving better representation;

combine policy and community in a meaningful manner; long-term commitment from government (government accountability); apathy reduction; and citizenship education (rights and responsibilities).

Development of new strategies: stronger government ties; build a consultation model; develop, as a community, strategies for social change; build on co-operation within the community; establish credibility of poverty advocates and people living in poverty with both the public and government; and expansion of the Anti-Poverty Coalition.

Effective and Immediate Changes: real changes in social assistance rates to 2001/2002 standards and costs of living; and tangible change to resource allocation.

People also had personal goals and objectives to gain more skills, improve general knowledge about poverty and policy formation, and build contacts and networks within the anti-poverty sector.

Overall, most groups expected this project to be different because they felt it was led and owned by the community. Participants were quite enthusiastic about the opportunity to partner with government. Many indicated that they saw a true willingness on behalf of government to partner with community, and they felt that, due to current political circumstances, it was also to government's advantage to work with community. As one participant indicated, "No one's ever asked us before. We can't miss the opportunity." Another stated optimistically that, "While I don't think that government ever listens, at least now they are taking a step."

#### *Group Capacity and Identities*

Goals for group capacity were largely determined by the group's role in the *Project*. The Anti-Poverty Coalition, for example, was established to pursue inclusion of community involvement and input into social policy redesign. One of the Coalition's goals was to expand membership and become a more effective advocacy and lobbying group. The Management Committee wanted to establish a clear role around *Project* management. Many Management Committee members indicated that they were only on the committee because of their connection to the Anti-Poverty Coalition. The panel wanted to establish a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in order for presenters to feel that their presentations were taken seriously and that they had had their voice heard. Staff wanted to be as inclusive as possible, incorporate new faces and organizations into the existing anti-poverty sector, make connections in the community, and grow as a team.

#### *Previous Experience Working with and Consulting with Government*

Most participants had experience working and consulting with government. Unfortunately, the majority of these encounters were negative. People criticized government for using community to suit their own purposes, and for not listening to the community or making community a priority. As one participant stated, "The processes usually are just for show with the public policy direction pre-determined." Of 21 people, all but one felt

that community-government relationships should be strengthened.

*Strategies for Strengthening Community-Government Relationships*

Participant responses can be divided into three categories: what community needs to do, what government needs to do, and what both community and government need to do together:

Community: more involvement by community members; community needs a stronger voice; community needs to build an awareness of city poverty issues; community needs to develop parallel strategies of how to work with government; encourage a dialogue with government; community needs to acknowledge and appreciate some government endeavours to strengthen these relationships; and skills-training and capacity building to even the playing field.

Government: needs to place staff in the community; needs to listen to, and dialogue with, community; needs to remember that bureaucracy is there to support and serve the community; priority needs to be on community, and social issues such as poverty; needs to be more active on such issues; needs to be accountable to community and their constituency; and needs to work intersectorally.

Both: facilitation of communication on working together; and trust with continuing dialogue.

## **PROJECT EVENTS**

In an effort to achieve staff goals, as discussed earlier, great importance was placed on each event's structure. For example, time was set aside at each event for meaningful "get-to-know-you" introductions, establishing an informal atmosphere, serving refreshments, incorporating frequent breaks, and offering opportunities for reflection and participant involvement.

This section is divided into six event-based sections. Each section describes the event's structure, its outcomes, and the research conducted at each event.

### ***FIRST ROUNDTABLE***

On 19 September 2001, the first Community Roundtable was held to begin discussing the roots of poverty. The roundtable was intended as a consensus- and relationship-building exercise to begin mobilizing the community. The *Project* staff began planning for the roundtable immediately after completing staff training in early September. A planning session was held where four goals were decided on for the first community meeting. These goals were to: (1) introduce the *Project*; (2) begin discussing the roots of poverty; (3) develop some preliminary recommendations for policy change; and (4)

help determine community needs throughout the *Project*. In order to accomplish these goals, a structure was designed for the roundtable to facilitate equalizing power and cooperation.

### *Community Input*

The meeting began with a description of the *Project's* philosophies, history, and main elements, and distribution of a newsletter describing the *Project*.

While there were many different opinions and ideas on poverty's roots, many followed similar basic themes. These were: physical, financial, cultural, and social barriers to quality education; ism's, such as heterosexism, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, ethnocentrism, and classism; inadequate access to nutrition for growth and learning; a social and economic system based on greed not need. This has resulted in "corporate rule" and damaging globalization trends, lack of employment opportunities, and disability due to unsafe working conditions; health determinants that hit marginalized populations especially hard, such as addictions and mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health problems; historical roots and context, such as the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal children, their families, and communities; devaluing children and their importance for our communities' health, manifesting itself in a lack of adequate childcare, early childhood intervention programs, and safe, healthy school environments; community is not involved in policy creation; and devaluing women and "women's work," such as childcare and elder care.

Preliminary recommendations include:

1. Introduction of a "food care card" to ensure that all people have equal access to nutritious food. Like a health care card, this would be issued to everyone, so as not to create a two-tiered system. The food care card might cover basic necessities and provide substantial discounts for supporting local producers.
2. Use a community development strategy to work intersectorally and cooperatively to find better solutions. This strategy would better address the roots of poverty.
3. Act locally and use local links to build communities.
4. Mobilize disenfranchised voters through a popular education strategy.
5. "Privatize" Addiction Services, changing it into a community-based organization from a governmental organization.
6. Increase social assistance rates to reflect actual costs.
7. In addition to raising social assistance rates, provide tangible resources to aid in the transition from social assistance to employment, such as subsidized bus passes.
8. More money and resources should be allocated to programs for children pre-birth to five years of age. Development of physical, spiritual, emotional, sexual, and mental

health begins in the first few years. What happens during these years becomes a very large part of who we become. Programs focusing on pre-natal health, mentoring, sexual health, and self-esteem development (for parents and children) are all examples of ways to address this concern.

9. Establish adequate core funding for CBO's so that less time is spent fundraising, and more on building a healthier community.

On the questionnaire handed out towards the beginning of the roundtable, participants were asked to list the skills that they would like an opportunity to develop.

### *Community Reflection*

At the first roundtable discussion, people were provided questionnaires and asked to reflect on their expectations and goals for the *Project*, past experiences working with government and efforts at changing public policy, and understanding of public policy, the current capacity of community-based organizations, and government-community relationships. Information gathered from these questionnaires determined, in part, how to measure the success of the *Project* and whether the model should be used again.

Despite participant diversity, several common expectations and goals for the *Project* were identified: education; inclusiveness; networking/sharing/communication; new strategies with which to work with government; problem-solving; effective and immediate changes; and participatory democracy.

People were quite enthusiastic about the *Roots of Poverty Project* as a whole and expressed hopes for its outcome. Everyone was excited about coming together, networking, and learning in order to help “capture” and eventually tackle the roots of poverty. People also came with open minds, which, in the end, contributed to wonderful discussions held in small groups. Although people wanted to make sure that their particular group's needs were heard and represented, they also expressed a strong desire to learn about poverty from different perspectives and to gain insight into others' ideas and plans for eradicating poverty in Saskatoon. Many also stated that they would take information back to their organizations and help with further networking.

People wanted to bring about positive change. Common goals included: dignity, respect, a better quality of life, solutions, inclusion, education/awareness about poverty in Saskatoon, building networks and community, better participation, and communication on behalf of all “stakeholders” (working poor and people on assistance, CBO's, and government). People expressed a desire for tangible, as well as long term results, solutions, and strategies. Participants felt that this process was going to be different from any type of consultation that they had been involved with in the past. They suggested that it would be a more inclusive and constructive experience because community was involved in so many aspects, from planning to voicing their opinions and having input into future policy design. Also, because this process was going to build networks, many

stated that this would help expand solidarity among groups already working on such issues. Lastly, because the entire process was to be documented with a final report prepared for government indicating the importance of community- and capacity-building, this process would help create a “model” for future use.

Participants were asked their thoughts on ways to influence public policy. Responses and innovative ideas can be divided into formal and informal areas.

### **Informal**

- Advocacy: joining community organizations, lobbying;
- Education: building awareness and bringing issues forward to all those involved (including government) and changing public opinion;
- Communication: personal contact with government (phone, letters, involvement in CBO meetings and table discussions), ensure that all voices are heard, communication within government (intersectoral) and with community (listening to the community), and media co-operation;
- Capacity building: evaluation of existing programs and bringing forward coherent, tangible solutions; be in a position to be part of the decision-making process, and have goals beyond just getting “more money”;
- Networking: working together to find solutions, creating broad-based support from various sectors of society, and developing solidarity between CBO’s and government on key goals; and
- Inclusion: people from various backgrounds and government in discussion and planning.

### **Formal**

- Voting;
- Joining political parties;
- Running for office.

Participants were also asked whether they felt that CBO’s current ability to influence public policy was effective. Nineteen of 25 people indicated that, currently, CBO’s were only somewhat effective in influencing public policy.

The following changes were suggested for improving CBO’s effectiveness: working collectively, working toward more inclusion of previously marginalized groups, solidarity, and not fighting with other CBO’s over meagre funds; creating forums to share information and educating the public on poverty issues; and developing common goals and doable solutions, being organized and vocal, having appropriate and solid information to evidence poverty and document how the process affects people, and having a council

appointed to track changes and progress.

Participants suggested that government could be improved by opening the process of community input.

Strengthening and building trust and co-operation between communities and government requires opening channels of communication to allow contact with politicians in a meaningful way, opportunities for discussions such as forums and roundtables to enable more community involvement, and a chance to voice opinions without diluting mandates. Consequently, community needs to become a priority for government. Because the goal is to establish a mutual relationship based on trust and co-operation, communities also have to make an effort to include government in their discussions and work, and acknowledge existing government programs and policies that work well. Communities also need to take initiatives in helping build social policy by developing their own capacity, working towards solidarity, analyzing current policies, and using available resources.

### ***PROJECT LAUNCH***

On 17 October 2001, the Day For the Eradication of Poverty, a community gathering was held to officially launch the *Roots of Poverty Project*, begin capacity-building workshops, and recognize this United Nations-declared day in a fun and relaxing way.

The Day for the Eradication of Poverty Community Gathering began at 1:00 pm and ended at 8:30 pm. Events during the day included:

- **The Clothes Swap:** This was an opportunity for people to drop off unwanted clothing and “shop” for “new-to-them” clothing. While the idea behind the Clothes Swap was to offer an opportunity for people to trade clothes, shoppers were not required to bring clothing in to trade in order to participate. The Clothes Swap was presented as an example of an inexpensive or free opportunity that community members could cooperate to “take a bite” out of poverty.
- **Children’s Activities:** Free onsite childcare was provided during the entire event. Activities were planned to give children an opportunity to participate in the celebration.
- **Community Workshops:** “Storytelling—From Personal Experience to Action”; “Aboriginal People and Poverty”; and “Introduction to Social Policy.”
- **Supper:** The group shared in a soup and bannock supper provided by a small local catering company. During supper, Greystone Member of the Legislative Assembly Peter Prebble spoke about recent successes and future challenges in the struggle to end poverty.
- **Pep Rally:** Children performed a parade using shakers and noisemakers they had



created that afternoon. Following the parade, Carolyn Rogers, Nanette McKay, and Don Kossick each spoke for a few minutes to inspire and mobilize the group.

- **Social:** The evening ended with light refreshments and an opportunity to visit and unwind.

### *Community Reflection*

#### **Storytelling Workshop**

The workshop gave participants an opportunity to share stories, reflect on their own lives and situations, and propose solutions. Participants were asked questions about their typical day, their dreams, barriers and challenges to achieving those dreams, and, if given the opportunity, what one thing they would tell one person in power to change in policy. People needed an opportunity to share their stories and thoughts in a safe and supportive environment in order to begin the process of healing and reconstruction of their lives. What did they say?

People are living month-to-month on small incomes and tight budgets, fighting mental and physical ailments, and generally struggling to get by. People are paying rent from their food budgets, moving from slum housing to slum housing, trying to create meals for their families with small budgets and food from the Food Bank, while facing inadequate food supplies in the core neighbourhoods (i.e. lack of grocery stores and other places to purchase nutritious food at a reasonable price). As one participant indicated, “I am just trying to create a ‘somewhat’ normal life for my children.”

During the workshop, people shared their dreams, as reflected in the following quotes:

- “I want to have my own business and raise my own children.”
- “I would love to work. I’m not allowed to work because of my heart. If I could, I would go into social work and be a social worker. I am big hearted. I want to help others, feed people and shelter them.”
- “I want to be a writer.”
- “I want a decent home and finish my education.”
- “I want to be an artist”
- “I wanted to be a nurse, but based on my experiences, I now want to go into policy work or law.”
- “I feel more in touch with myself.”
- “It made me feel great because I’ve been through it.”

Six people participated in this workshop. In general, people felt good about sharing their stories. Participants indicated that it gave them a sense of relief and was some-

what therapeutic.

After participating in the workshop, people revealed that they felt more confident about sharing their stories with others. Sharing stories, in general, was seen as a way to raise awareness in the public and each other, build connections with others, feel part of a community, and develop a sense of commonality and belonging.

### **Social Policy Workshop**

The participants were led in an interactive workshop about policy creation. The information and discussion at the workshop was intended to give participants a basic understanding of how policy is created and how it translates into practice.

Although most did not have a strong knowledge of public policy, they had experience trying to change public policy through political action and advocacy. Participants stated that, by the end of the workshop, they felt more confident about their understanding of public policy. Participants also expressed a desire to continue participating in a community policy group to learn more about policy formation and processes.

How did participating in such a workshop affect participants? One person stated, “It just confirms that most people that have knowledge need to stand and face government together.” This workshop reinforced a need to learn and mobilize in order to change public policy.

### **Aboriginal People and Poverty Workshop**

Sally Kahnapace, a student of Indian Social Work, led participants in a discussion about colonization’s effects on Aboriginal people in Canada and how it relates to poverty. During the workshop they focused on: the pre-contact definition of poverty (poverty of spirit) versus the current definition (poverty of resources); alienation from traditional culture; poverty as a result of marginalization (i.e. marginalized groups are invariably disproportionately poor); and brainstorming to heal the effects of “poverty of spirit” and “poverty of resources.” Because this workshop ran late, no questionnaires were completed, and, thus, there is no community reflection available.

## ***MINI-ROUNDTABLES***

During October, the *Project* hosted six mini-community roundtables, each geared toward a specific issue or set of issues, including: Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP) transitions, education, and childcare; food security and housing; health and disabilities; economic development and youth; adequacy of SAP rates; a justice.

The mini-roundtables’ intent was to continue discussion about the roots of poverty and possible solutions begun at the general roundtable in September, expand the number and diversity of people involved in the *Project*, and build trust between *Project* staff and

community.

In preparation for the mini-roundtables, a structured agenda of activities was designed. The agenda included a short discussion about social policy's definition and participants' past levels of involvement in social policy, a presentation of past recommendations found in old reports on the roundtable topic, and a brainstorming session to determine social/cultural, political, and economic issues and recommendations related to the roundtable topic. For the brainstorming session, a worksheet was created for participants to express their ideas, with spaces provided for political, economic, and social/cultural issues, barriers, and recommendations. The detailed structure was intended to focus participants' energies so that everyone involved could make constructive use of the short two-hour period. Facilitators felt that with an issue like housing, for example, two hours would be quickly used up with some feeling like they had not been heard. It was hoped that this structure would help keep everyone focused.

### *Community Input*

Attendance for the mini-roundtables was significantly lower than expected. There are two possible reasons for this. First, the *Project* was still relatively new, as were the relationships being built between the *Project* and the CBO sector, government, and community. Ideally, the roundtable sessions should have been scheduled later into the process to allow time for these relationships to develop and provide more notice to potential participants. Unfortunately, given the short time frame with which to work, the roundtables could not be delayed any longer. Second, initial outreach was conducted by phone, rather than in person. Because of people's already busy lives, finding time to return phone calls is often difficult. Consequently, the facilitators were unable to reach a number of individuals and groups.

Because of the small number of participants at each roundtable, facilitators felt that the original design structure would be cumbersome and unnecessary. Instead, they gave introductions, facilitated a short discussion on policy, and initiated brainstorming. Despite limited numbers, the mini-roundtables were still successful as they provided a wealth of information that formed the basis of the Interim Report (released 22 October 2001).

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Throughout October, an outreach strategy was carried out to consult with individuals or groups who did not attend roundtables, build relationships, encourage people to consider presenting at the Community Forum, and offer assistance to individuals and groups in preparation for Forum presentations. More than two-dozen focus groups and interviews were held in October with individuals and groups, such as Pleasant Hill Community Association, Gay and Lesbian Health Services, Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, Crocus Co-op, YWCA, and Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op. This community outreach

effort resulted in three positive outcomes. First, stories, opinions, and recommendations were heard from a much more diverse group than at the roundtables. Second, the information gathered during the earliest interviews and focus groups (those held in the first half of October) was used in conjunction with information gathered from the large and small roundtables to form the Interim Report. Third, many of those involved in the interviews and focus groups agreed to present at the Community Forum on Poverty.

In an effort to inform the public about the *Project* and educate groups about poverty issues, every opportunity was taken to speak in university classrooms, at conferences, and to alternative media journalists. These led to increased numbers of individuals and groups interested in the *Project*, which, as a result, raised awareness throughout Saskatchewan.

### ***THE COMMUNITY FORUM ON POVERTY***

Over four Fridays in November, an intersectoral panel (see **Appendix E**) heard 37 presentations from 63 presenters (see **Appendix F**) on various issues and concerns related to poverty. The role of the panel was to hear and synthesize presentations, and extract common themes, concerns, and recommendations to form this report. The section entitled “Voices of the Community” is a synopsis. The concerns and recommendations listed in “Voices of the Community” come directly from the presentations.

When reading the issues and recommendations, please note that: some recommendations call for programs or policies that already exist or are being developed; some recommendations are vague and do not offer detailed prescription; and there are important issues not addressed by any of the recommendations, such as massive debt loads for post-secondary students that often keep them poor. These three issues are not regarded as limitations of the Forum, but rather as inevitable outcomes of a new way of approaching social policy design.

The first issue is indicative of a communication gap between policy and program makers and policy and program consumers. Programs or policies are often in place, but those who need them are unaware of their existence. In some instances, this is due to inaccessibility in the design or implementation of a policy or program, and sometimes due to passivity on the part of the consumer (i.e. community member). In all cases, policies and programs, no matter how well designed, are ineffective without good communication. Community forums like this one can play an important role in the improvement of communication.

The other two issues are not only to be expected, but are desired outcomes of an early stage in a process of participatory democracy. Presenters at the Forum were not asked to design detailed policy or perform cost calculations, but rather to speak from their experiences. They were not asked to provide a comprehensive description of issues related to poverty, nor were they expected to compile an exhaustive list from the presen-

tations. The Community Forum on Poverty and, more generally, the *Roots of Poverty Project* will be a part of a longer process of citizen and government cooperation in the development of policy and programming. The experience of the Forum and the recommendations that came out of it will provide a basis for an ongoing dialogue that works toward a poverty reduction strategy. In short, this Forum is simply one component in a much larger plan.

### *The Roots of Poverty*

While there were many different ideas and opinions expressed at the Community Forum on Poverty, a consensus emerged after hearing all presentations, mainly that poverty is not the result of individual shortcomings. While many presenters felt that individual choices and initiatives played a role in escaping poverty, they believed that there are forces beyond an individual's control at work that create and maintain poverty. What, then, did presenters state were the "roots" of poverty?

Many presenters believed that the fundamental root of poverty is the social and economic structure of our society. In a capitalist society, where the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, where profit is made at the expense of environmental and social well-being, and where certain groups continue to be marginalized, it is clear that the poor pay a price. Forum presenters cited an "unequal distribution of wealth" (Marta Juorio, YWCA Child Development Centre Forum Presentation), "tax cuts at the expense of our social programs" (Alternative Budget of Choice Strategy *Project* Forum Presentation), and low wages (cited in nearly every presentation) as proof that the current economic system creates poverty.

Marginalized groups bear the brunt of this economic system. Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, visible minorities, single parents, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately poor due to a society based on exclusion through discrimination and socialization. The West Flat Parent Group, Alternative Budget of Choice (ABC) Strategy *Project*, Janice Dawson, Political Action Group on Poverty (PAGOP), and many other presenters said that racism, ageism, ablism, classism, and heterosexism are fundamental roots of poverty.

Within all these social groups, women are the poorest and most marginalized. Poverty is certainly not gender-blind. Violence against women and girls, wage inequity, family role expectations, and socialization leading to poor self-esteem, were all cited as examples of elements of our society that lead to women living in poverty. As Melissa Christopherson and Julie Bergen argued in their presentations, even when women live with male partners with a decent income, they often face poverty if the relationship ends.

In general, Forum presenters agreed that marginalization and discrimination are roots of poverty. Any poverty reduction strategy must understand issues within the con-

text of these roots if the strategy is to be successful.

*Voices of the Community*

Issues that arose from Forum presentations fell under several common themes, including housing, food, health, childcare, Income Security policies and procedures, social inclusion, and education/transitions/workforce attachment. Many issues and recommendations for change were repeated in the thirty-seven presentations at the Forum, indicating a strong collective vision for change in our community. The following themes and recommendations represent voices of the presenters.

***HOUSING***

“Decent, accessible, affordable housing is virtually a misnomer in our community, especially for people living on social assistance” (YWCA of Saskatoon Shelter Forum Presentation).<sup>2</sup>

Adequate, safe, and affordable housing is a basic right that provides security and stability. Many citizens in Saskatoon are being deprived of that right. Slum housing, absentee landlords, lack of subsidized housing units, and insufficient rental allowances for Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP) recipients all contribute to this problem. At the Saskatoon YWCA, they “hear stories of people living in homes unsuitable for human habitation, tales of hunger because rent had to be paid or face eviction, that two and three families share cramped quarters.” Those living in inadequate housing do not choose this reality, but, rather, they have no other choice. As Heather Pocock, YWCA Housing Director, relates, “people show up at the [YWCA] shelter because they gave notice hoping to find a decent place—and found nothing.” The result of inadequate and inaccessible housing for YWCA shelter users is that “the doors are revolving ... the disruption of family life is incredible, schooling is interrupted” and life is generally unstable (YWCA Forum Presentation). Even when an individual or family is able to find suitable housing, paying rent often comes at the expense of food or other basic needs. Using the food budget to pay rent was revealed in nearly every presentation at the Forum.

Absentee landlords—those who do not live in Saskatoon—own many of Saskatoon’s rental units, especially in the core neighbourhoods. Rent money flows out of neighbourhoods and into the pockets of individuals and companies with no vested interest in the well-being of neighbourhoods in which they own property. Affordable home ownership programs were positive alternatives brought forth by several presenters. Both the family and neighbourhood benefit when people are able to own their own homes. Not only does home ownership offer family stability, it enhances the neighbourhood and fosters community. To this end, many presenters agreed that programs like Quint Development Corporation’s affordable housing program were a positive step, and felt that community and government should build on that success and provide increased support for programs of that nature. The Saskatoon Community Plan for Home-

lessness was cited as another positive body of work that could serve as a foundation for addressing housing issues.

### *Recommendations*

1. Immediately increase the rent allowance for SAP recipients to reflect the true cost of housing in Saskatoon.<sup>3</sup>
2. If SAP is not raised to meet the cost of living, increase the amount that SAP recipients are allowed to earn before it is deducted off their benefits, so that allowable earnings plus total SAP benefits equals total dollars needed to live above the LICO.
3. Increase the minimum wage so that low-income earners can afford a decent homes.<sup>4</sup>
4. Guarantee the full amount that SAP recipients require for a damage deposit. Currently, Income Security provides a letter of guarantee to the client's landlord to be considered a damage deposit. This letter only guarantees up to the maximum allowable rental rate as determined by DSS. In many cases, rent, and therefore the required damage deposit, is higher than the rental allowance issued by DSS.
5. Ensure that sheltering facilities are adequately funded and have resources to meet Saskatoon's needs. Further, recognize that sheltering facilities are an essential service in our community, and that they exist because a lack of resources and safe housing force people to rely on shelters.
6. Develop higher standards for housing and give regulating bodies resources to enforce them. Ideally, a partnership between the City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Police, Saskatoon Fire and Protective Services, Saskatoon District Health Board, the Rentalsman, Saskatchewan Justice, and the Department of Social Services would be formed to take a more aggressive stance against persons providing unsafe housing, and would send a zero tolerance message regarding slum housing in Saskatoon.
7. Create more subsidized housing units to decrease lengthy waiting periods.
8. Increase government support for community-based housing initiatives, including transitional housing, supportive housing, and home ownership programs.
9. Government, the business community, and local Community Economic Developers need to work together to find ways to combat the "absentee landlord" phenomenon. Use housing to stimulate the local economy and build equity in the community, rather than allow millions of dollars of DSS rent allowances flow out of our community and into the hands of absentee landlords.

### *Vision For the Future*

All citizens in Saskatoon will have real access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing that is stable and comfortable. All rental housing will meet basic safety standards, and safety infractions will be taken seriously. Housing will be used as a means to stimulate

the local economy, providing jobs and creating wealth that benefits our communities. Crisis, transitional, and supportive housing projects will be adequately funded and recognized as an integral part of a poverty reduction strategy.

### ***Food***

“A community enjoys food security when all of the people, at all times, have access to nutritious, safe, affordable, personally acceptable, culturally appropriate foods, produced in ways that are environmentally sound and socially just” (Saskatchewan Child Nutrition Network Forum Presentation).

Good nutrition is essential for fostering growth and learning in children, and continues to be a major health determinant in our adult lives. Lack of nutrition “affects cognitive development for children, increases colds and headaches, and contributes to development of type-2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer” (Saskatoon Child Hunger and Education Program Forum Presentation). Advertisements regularly urge us to eat healthier and watch our fat intake. This seems simple enough, and suggests that good nutrition and good health are within our control through wise choices. However, for most people living in poverty in Saskatoon, nutritious food is a luxury. For the poorest citizens, food of any type, nutritious or not, is often hard to acquire. This is seen in the enormous strain put on the Saskatoon Food Bank and other charity providers each day.

Lack of food is closely linked with lack of housing. For many, housing comes at the expense of food. In effect, “people are forced to choose housing or food, [and often] parents go hungry so children can eat” (Child Hunger and Education Program Forum Presentation). Low-income earners, SAP recipients, Employment Insurance recipients, and students relying on student loans do not have enough money to buy nutritious food. For those living in Saskatoon’s core, the problem is compounded by a lack of adequate food sources (grocery stores or food co-ops) in these neighbourhoods. There are many positive initiatives and programs developing in Saskatoon, such as community gardening, community kitchens, and CHEP’s Good Food Box. These programs need more support, and new ways of addressing hunger in our city are needed.

#### *Recommendations*

1. Recognize that high school aged children need more nourishment than younger children, and raise child tax benefits accordingly.
2. Increase allowances given through SAP for special diets and make them more accessible.
3. Provide supports for transportation to and from grocery stores for low-income people who live far from adequate food sources. A shuttle or food delivery service could meet transportation needs temporarily until a more permanent solution, such



as a new food co-op or grocery store, is established.

4. Municipal governments should ensure that a food source is located in all neighbourhoods.
5. Increase access to vacant land for community gardens so that people can grow their own fruits and vegetables.
6. Increase support for community nutrition and health programs.
7. Subsidize CHEP's Good Food Box program for low-income people so that they have access to fruits and vegetables year-round.
8. Create a municipal food security policy. Further, create a council whose role is to better support food security initiatives in the local community, and initiate a similar council at provincial and federal levels.
9. Develop cooperative business models for a sustainable food system.
10. Insist that grocery stores choose local and Canadian content first in an effort to support local growers. Supporting local growers and family farms instead of factory farms will, in turn, improve the economic and social future of rural Saskatchewan.

### *Vision For the Future*

All people in Saskatoon will have access to enough nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food because it will be regarded as a basic right. Further, food will be considered a social good and treated as a public resource. Everyone will have access to community gardens should they choose to participate. Local growers will be supported and valued, and emergency food sources will be seldom used.

## ***HEALTH***

“When I am sick and tired, that is when my hand washing increases and so does mental illness ... there is no potential for complete healing in poverty but rather almost impossible” (Kevin Norlin's Forum Presentation).

The connection between poverty and physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health was repeated in every Forum presentation. A person's health is influenced by many internal and external factors called health determinants. Socio-economic status, social support networks, education, housing, employment and working conditions, and available health services are all determinants of health external to the individual. Lack of nutritious food, unsafe housing, lack of transportation, low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and the stress that invariably comes from lacking money all contribute to deteriorating health. Further, these conditions often prevent recovery because recovery “is aided by well-balanced meals, adequate sleep, and regular exercise” (Saskatoon Housing Coalition Forum Presentation). Beyond the multitude of health determinants dis-

cussed in other sections of this report, such as housing and food security, Forum presenters focused on five main gaps and issues that they felt were important.

First, there is a lack of resources and support to maintain good health for people living in poverty. For example, the working poor have no prescription or dental plan to rely on, which leads to a deterioration of health and, in some cases, an inability to work.

Second, services in the area of sexual and reproductive health are inadequate and sometimes inaccessible. Saskatoon District Health's Birth Control Clinic is open one evening per week and does not provide birth control at cost, a service sorely needed in Saskatoon. This inaccessibility, coupled with a lack of sexual health education programs, is a major barrier to sexual health.

Third, addictions were seen as a key health issue for people in poverty. While addictions do not affect the poor exclusively, poverty often compounds an addiction, and it is felt more acutely because of a lack of resources. Larson House, Saskatoon's detoxification centre, is constantly full and many wait a week or more to get in. This waiting period is dangerous and unacceptable.

Fourth, the link between mental health and poverty was also an important issue for many presenters. "Poverty affects everyone's mental health negatively," said Gayle Mast, Program Director for the Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatoon Chapter. For those dealing with mental health issues, "substandard housing, lack of social support, unemployment, and inability to move around because there is no money for transportation all contribute to keeping people sick, inhibiting recovery" (CMHA Forum Presentation) and, ultimately, keeping them poor.

Fifth, persons with physical disabilities often live in poverty because they cannot cover their daily care costs. One presenter related that even though she was university-educated and employed full time in her field of study, she was reliant on DSS because Saskatchewan Health did not cover her required level of care costs.

### *Recommendations*

1. Create a prescription, therapy, and dental plan that can be accessed by all low-income persons, regardless of family status. There are many possible ways of structuring this, such as providing an optional subsidized plan that requires a nominal fee dependent upon monthly income.
2. Payment for private home care workers for the physically challenged should be moved to the health system, thereby circumventing the need for people to become financially dependant on Social Services.<sup>5</sup>
3. Ensure that birth control is free or inexpensive, and readily accessible, along with accurate, non-judgmental information on sexual health.
4. Increase funding for mental health services in our community to make lessen the

wait for services.

5. Addiction services in Saskatoon are inadequate. Saskatoon needs more detoxification and treatment centres, and increased access to counselling services.
6. Open a “mattress detoxification centre” where people could go to sleep off the effects of drugs and alcohol. This would provide a warm, safe place for people to get off the street and decrease the likelihood of incarceration. This type of facility would also improve working conditions for police officers, who often find themselves removing intoxicated people from the streets and then have little choice but to detain them at the police station. A mattress detoxification centre would change the focus on acute addictions from the criminal to the health sector, provide more effective treatment and benefits to persons with addictions, and reduce overall costs to taxpayers.<sup>6</sup>

### *Vision For the Future*

Neither health nor type of care received will be dependent on economic status. Housing, food, social structures, and accessibility are vital to promoting good health. Health levels will be regarded as directly indicative of the city’s poverty levels.

## ***CHILDCARE***

“They say that children are our future and they deserve to be cared for and treated equally, experience all they can experience in their first five years, but only if you can afford it” (Lisa Gibb and Judy Smith-Jones, Forum Presentation).

For two main reasons, accessible, affordable, and quality childcare is a key component of any poverty reduction strategy. First, it allows parents to participate in the paid workforce without worrying about who will care for their children and the quality of their care. Second, if childcare has an Early Childhood Development (ECD) focus, children will be better prepared in the critical 0-5 years, improving their chances of escaping poverty in their adult lives.

Childcare in Saskatoon is neither accessible nor affordable, and because of the high child-worker ratio in many centres and the low average pay of childcare workers, most childcare providers cannot offer desired quality care. For many women, childcare is particularly difficult to access, especially for those “in lower paying jobs where shift work can be impossible to avoid. Very few daycares operate 24 hours per day” (Julie Bergen’s Forum Presentation).

### *Recommendations*

1. Raise childcare subsidies so that parents can afford quality childcare and continue to participate in paid labour.

2. Create more quality childcare spaces.
3. Parents need childcare with more flexible hours (i.e. 24 hour care).
4. Develop provincial standards for accredited childcare staff and regulate their wages.
5. Encourage quality childcare workers to stay in the field by improving their wages.
6. Offer higher subsidies to parents of special needs children.
7. Provincial and federal governments need to develop a universal, comprehensive childcare/early childhood development (ECD) program.
8. Do not separate ECD from childcare, rather use childcare to build skills and develop self-esteem at an early age.

#### *Vision For the Future*

Value will be placed on child caregivers by recognizing their importance. Caregivers will be paid their worth, which will translate into stable and quality childcare. Childcare will be universally available and delivered from an Early Childhood Development perspective. The economic status of a child's parent will not determine the quality of care. Parents (most often mothers) will not be penalized for choosing to stay at home with their children. Instead, that choice will be respected and supported by society through a living wage for her and her new child. This focus on quality childcare will result in healthy, confident children who, in turn, will grow to be contributing members of their communities.

### ***INCOME SECURITY***

“In order to build a healthy community and reduce poverty, encourage everybody in the system (clients and workers alike) to be responsible, accountable, and respectful” (Melissa Christopherson's Forum Presentation).

Many presentations referred to disrespectful treatment of DSS clients, inaccessibility of Income Security due to its policies and practices, and need for “a different way of doing things” at Income Security.

#### *Recommendations*

1. Create easy to understand policy manuals, test their accessibility by asking clients for their opinion, and make these manuals available to everyone who requests one. Clients could choose to pick up the manual at the Financial Services office or have one sent to them by mail immediately after it is requested.
2. Be transparent to clients. This means less bureaucracy, honest and helpful answers, and more patience. Do not “make secrets [to] what [clients] are entitled” (Melissa Christopherson, Forum Presentation).

3. Make sensitivity training a requirement for working at DSS and require all employees to participate in sensitivity training throughout their employment.
4. Simplify the appeal process.
5. Reduce social workers' caseloads so that they have more time to spend with each client (Note: Introduction of the Call Centre for intake of SAP applicants is intended to reduce the number of recipients and remove this initial work from the job description of Income Security social workers. DSS hopes that this reduces social workers' caseloads and allows them more time to work with each client on a case plan).
6. Create alternatives for repaying overpayments, such as a fine options program similar to that used for parking and speeding tickets.
7. Do not force a mother to seek child support from the father of her child(ren), and recognize that such action is not always safe.

#### *Vision For the Future*

Income Security will be a respectful and caring place for both clients and employees. Suspicion, distrust, and hostility will rarely be felt, and clients and employees will be partners working toward the same goal. Policy will be simple, everyone will understand his or her rights and responsibilities, and power will be equalized.

### ***SOCIAL INCLUSION***

“Sometimes the demands of survival itself seem too overwhelming. It can stifle the spirit. Poverty carries with it, often, a sense of being less important, left out of society's mainstream, alienated from the good life (whatever that means)” (Brian Zimmer, St. Paul's Hospital Mission Forum Presentation).

Positive self-esteem, a flow of social interaction, a sense of belonging to a community, and social inclusion were presented as some of the most important factors in reducing the incidence and depth of poverty. Poverty is often highly isolating because there is no money to participate in recreation, or to secure transportation for visiting friends or attending community events. Poverty often leads to low self-esteem, which tends to keep people “in a rut,” prohibiting them from seeking new experiences. The experience of social exclusion often begins in childhood when parents cannot afford school or extracurricular activity fees, school trips, proper school supplies, or decent, properly fitting clothes.

Feeling excluded and alienated from social policy creation and government decision-making was another reoccurring theme in Forum presentations. This contributes to feelings of hopelessness and fosters an “us” versus “them” environment. Alternately,

community research has shown that “involvement of the community in creating policy greatly enhances the likelihood of success and adherence to the prescribed plan” (Anti-Poverty Coalition Forum Presentation). Presenters believed that being engaged in the *Roots of Poverty Project* process was a positive opportunity to voice their opinions and be included, to some extent, in the social policy creation process.

### *Recommendations*

1. Provide all SAP and Provincial Training Allowance clients with a bus pass to counter social isolation.
2. Provide accessible counseling for families to help them cope with poverty’s effects.
3. Include a pet allowance or provide pet supplies to SAP clients to help foster good mental health, and to counter feelings of isolation.
4. Provide a spring and fall clothing allowance for SAP recipients to make budgeting more manageable and to encourage self-esteem.
5. Provide self-esteem-building programs.
6. “To retain children’s full participation in their community of peers, their interest and excitement about learning, their connection with teachers, and their opportunity for full development, eliminate all financial barriers to children’s participation in school funded and sponsored activities, curricular and extra curricular” (Political Action Group on Poverty Forum Presentation).
7. Acknowledge and support the important role that community development principles play in revitalizing communities and citizens.
8. Community and government, at all levels, need to work together to create social policy that advances a common goal—poverty reduction—instead of developing policy solely at the government level.

### *Vision For the Future*

All Saskatoon residents will enjoy full economic and social inclusion. No one will feel isolated or excluded because of economic or social status. Positive self-esteem will not be inhibited by exclusionary social policy. Further, all social policy will be developed in cooperation with the communities that the policy affects.

## ***EDUCATION, TRANSITIONS, AND WORKFORCE ATTACHMENT***

“Publicly funded and administered education is both a foundation and an expression of democracy. For democracy to be effective it is necessary to have an educated, effective, and relatively economically equal population” (Political Action Group on Poverty’s Forum Presentation).

Educational concerns raised in Forum presentations ranged from (in)accessibility of primary and secondary schools and overcrowding of core neighbourhood high schools to inadequate financial support for recipients of the Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) and long waiting lists for training programs. Many presenters felt, however, that programs like the Teacher Associate in Training (coordinated through Mayfair Community School), the PTA, development of community schools, AAT Wraparound, and summer job initiatives for students have had positive effects on people and communities, and should be continued and expanded.

The transition from receiving SAP to entering the work force is often a long process that should not be rushed. However, clients are often pressured into a job search or training program before they are ready. People often lack the most basic life skills needed to participate in their communities and in the work force, such as conflict and anger management, communication, literacy, and practical skills (e.g. cooking, personal hygiene, grocery shopping). Not providing opportunities for development of these basic life skills prior to job training and employment can set people up for failure. According to several presenters, Saskatoon has a shortage of life skills programs.

Once an individual is ready to enter a training program or look for a job, there are often barriers to success, such as a lack of childcare and transportation, and few job opportunities, especially those that pay a living wage. Many presenters identified these barriers.

People in the workforce also face barriers to continuing employment and succeeding in their position, such as low wages, part-time hours, lack of health benefits and job security, and workplace inequity.

### *Recommendations*

1. Increase PTA amounts.
2. Increase childcare and transportation allowances for those who wish to look actively for work.
3. Increase the amount that SAP clients can earn before deducting it from benefits.
4. Allow one or two months to overlap between SAP benefits and a new job. This allows clients a chance to “get on their feet” (i.e. save for damage deposit or buy new clothes for work).
5. Raise the minimum wage.
6. Open a new high school in the core neighbourhoods.
7. Expand on the Teacher Associate Training programs’ success and continue to offer them through community schools.
8. Allow SAP recipients to reinvest small business profits back into their businesses

for an initial start up period to improve chances of success. Monitor their financial records to ensure that this is happening. Quint Development Corporation has offered to perform this monitoring.

9. Expand summer job opportunities for students. Make these jobs accessible for teen parents.
10. Recognize that life skills and self-esteem programs are integral for transition to the workforce, and that many people need this type of programming before they move into more traditional training programs.
11. The federal government must accurately represent employment opportunities to potential immigrants.
12. There needs to be stronger support of mentorship and employment programs for immigrants.
13. Offer employment supplements to single people similar to the Building Independence income supplements for parents, recognizing that this can be an investment in their eventual independence.
14. Make prescription drug, complementary therapy, and dental services accessible to all low-income people. For many, it is impossible to participate in the workforce because they cannot earn enough to cover medical costs.
15. Penalize corporations for mass layoffs.
16. Make the workforce more family-friendly by insisting that workplaces be more flexible to allow for family demands.
17. Develop proactive strategies to make the workforce a more equitable place for women, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, disabled persons, and other marginalized groups. Insist on pay equity.

#### *Vision For the Future*

Education will be made accessible by building on the success of community schools, ATT Wraparound, and PTA. Children and adults alike will have enough supports, both financial and social, to foster opportunities to learn and grow. SAP recipients will work with their social worker to develop a feasible plan for moving toward workforce participation. Clients will not be forced to work, and it will be recognized that not everyone is capable or ready to participate in paid labour. People will have the resources to make the transition to training or work. Everyone will have an opportunity to earn enough money to live above the low-income cut-off, and will have access to resources needed to continue working, including health care and income supplements. The workplace will be family-friendly and will promote a healthy balance between work and family. People will be paid a living wage, and workplace equity will be the norm, not the exception.



## ***COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

“Community development and community economic development approaches build on the strengths of the community, building citizens and building community, enabling people to do for themselves” (CHEP’s Forum Presentation).

Many presenters believed that strengthening communities should be emphasized in a poverty reduction strategy. Presenters represented many different communities often defined by geography, ethnicity, race, ability, sexuality, religion, place or sector of employment, or socio-economic status. Some were narrowly defined, such as the disabled community, while some were more broadly defined, like core neighbourhoods or Saskatoon in general. Regardless of the community presenters represented, the general consensus was that community development strategies need employment both within and between different communities. Economic development was identified as a key concern for all groups.

### *Recommendations*

1. Governments should understand, embrace, and integrate community development (CD) and community economic development (CED) into their policies, procedures, and practices.
2. Build leadership capacity and citizenship.
3. Make links between different neighbourhoods and communities. Core neighbourhoods and local CBO’s cannot tackle poverty alone. The business sector, wealthy communities, and people of all ages need to find common goals and strategies to address poverty.
4. Reinvest and build equity in core neighbourhoods.
5. Value volunteer work by recognizing it in a concrete way. One example cited was crediting volunteer hours towards an education savings account or pension.
6. Phase out regressive taxation,<sup>7</sup> which disables low-income citizens by taking more tax than they can afford to pay. Progressive taxation, on the other hand, facilitates individual growth for low and middle-income individuals, which, in turn, helps communities grow.
7. “Maintain resource revenues that ensure Saskatchewan people get a fair return from the resources, ensure environmentally wise management of resources, ensuring future generations can benefit from them” (Alternative Budget of Choice Strategy Project Presentation, p. 2)

### *Vision For the Future*

Communities will be strong and inclusive. The local economy will be strong and regres-

sive taxes will be non-existent. All communities in Saskatoon will work together as equals towards common goals, understanding that growth for one means growth for the other.

## ***PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS***

### *Communication*

During several presentations, the panel observed that the gap or recommendation asserted by the presenter was already addressed by a policy or program in one provincial government department or by an existing community-based program. The panel concluded that, in general, this gap was due to poor communication between government and community, and within communities themselves. A simple truth emerged from this discussion—policies and programs cannot work if an appropriate and effective communication strategy is not employed to promote them within the community.

Therefore, service providers, both governmental and non-governmental, need to develop audience appropriate and effective communication strategies for new and existing policies and programs, so that these policies and programs can serve the community in the manner to which they were intended.

### *Intersectoral Work*

“Intersectoral” has recently become a popular term used within government and CBO sectors to address a need to work collaboratively to address complex issues. Many panel members agreed that, while there has been a shift toward this type of thinking, governments and communities must work harder at working together intersectorally. A few panel members expressed concern that the recent push for intersectoral work within government has resulted in little more than ornamental policy that often does not translate into procedure—that, in short, intersectoral work is paid lip service.

Governments and communities must continue working toward establishing links that can facilitate cooperative work that addresses complex social issues such as poverty.

### *Community Reflection*

Shortly after the Community Forum on Poverty, a “Presenter’s Reunion” was hosted as an opportunity for presenters to relate their experiences at the Forum, discuss future directions and strategies, and get to know other presenters over lunch.

In order to examine the extent to which participants were empowered by participation in the consultation process, and how that consequently changed participants’ view of, and potential future relationship with government, presenters were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their experience. They were asked general questions regarding their previous experiences working with government and about their expectations with the Forum. The questionnaire also included more specific questions about how

presenting made them feel, the location, environment, and suggestions on how community-government consultations should be conducted.

### *Expectations*

People had high expectations of the consultation process. Most expected this consultation to be different from others because government was asking people to get involved. As one participant stated, “you can’t miss the opportunity. No one has ever asked us before.” Because the panel was so receptive, people hoped for, and in some cases expected, immediate results. However, some still had trust concerns and were apprehensive about whether government would take their recommendations into consideration. Despite this concern, participants felt that this human interaction (real people and their stories) would make a genuine impression on the panel. Participants wanted to raise awareness of poverty and decrease “poor bashing” attitudes in society.

### *Evaluation*

Overall, people stated that their experience met the following criteria because they: **met** with government in a meaningful way that involved CBO’s and the public; engaged in open communication; felt that ideas were considered important by the panel and would be considered in future policy decisions; and built mutual respect and understanding.

People were pleased with the location (St. Paul’s Hospital cafeteria meeting room), informal atmosphere, and the panel’s openness and responsiveness. Some participants’ comments include:

- “Everyone was very open and good listeners.”
- “I felt my issues/concerns and recommendations were taken very seriously.”
- “I felt that the panel did their best to make me comfortable.”

### *Capacity*

The atmosphere contributed to people’s positive comments and experiences. Overall, participants felt more confident about presenting and speaking to government. Although many had given presentations before, they, and those who had no previous experience, indicated that they felt more confident. When asked how participating and speaking about issues while government listened made them feel, people’s responses were quite similar. Many indicated that they felt empowered, or that they were glad to be able to share something of themselves, or that it gave them a feeling of pride and hope.

- “The experience was validating, empowering. I felt more enabled to speak to government. This encourages me to try.”
- “I felt proud to speak of my profession, its needs, its relevance. I felt I represented the children in our care and their families. It gave their predicaments a voice.”
- “This was an empowering experience for me. I feel good. I am honoured to be a part

of the project. I hope the process continues.”

*Reflection and Analysis*

Participants were also asked to reflect on their and the organizations’ ability to influence public policy. Most indicated that CBO’s current ability to influence public policy was only somewhat effective over time and that individual ability was, for the most part, ineffective. People suggested that opportunities like the Forum were an effective way for CBO’s and community to influence public policy. One participant stated, “Forums like today strengthen the community and increases the community’s awareness and knowledge.”

First, as one participant said, “It gives everyday people a chance to voice their views and experiences, knowledge and hope.” Second, as another participant stated, opportunities like the Forum are ways to influence public policy because “it promotes intersectoral and cross-community collaboration, which will likely result in more realistic policy change.” People learned that their experiences mattered and that they had something to offer. It is often thought that learning is a one-sided process, but this is not true. Community can learn and build their capacity, but there is also extensive knowledge based upon experience in the community. The community has a great deal to offer.

One participant offered the following observation: “I’ve learned that my life experiences matter and that I can make a difference. There’s a willingness from government to listen to people. Not all government people are bad. You get to see the individual—the person.” While this participant clearly feels that she has something to offer and teach, at the same time she has learned something new—a theme consistent throughout the entire process. While panel members and government learn from the human interaction inherent in this process and from putting faces and real situations to poverty statistics, the community also learns that there is humanity within government.

Although participants felt that their individual ability to influence public policy was, for the most part, ineffective, they also indicated that they held a measure of power. While this may seem a contradiction, it indicates that it is a lack of opportunity to voice opinions and participate in politics that makes people feel ineffective.

- “This has confirmed my belief that individuals and groups have the power to make changes.”
- “I have learned that we should not be afraid to present our cause, and create pressure to get what we need.”
- “There are strong CBO’s who are able to mobilize and make a difference for the community. Very powerful.”

People’s sense of empowerment also contributed to a renewed sense of community, which, in this sense, can mean both a geographical community and a community of

interest (anti-poverty work). One participant said that, “Being included in this process has been a great way to feel involved in antipoverty work.” Participants stated that learning about other groups working in the anti-poverty sector and hearing stories from people in their community made it easier to draw connections and to feel like they were fighting a common cause and working toward a common goal.

Although participants felt that, overall, the Forum was an excellent venue for public participation in politics and policy formation, they also indicated that the community needs specific skills such as communication, leadership, and the ability to carry out research. People also need to mobilize, gain knowledge, network and create solidarity with other groups, work with the media, dialogue and partner with government, and rally and protest. Public forums, although regarded as important, were considered only a part of a complex strategic plan.

### ***CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP SERIES***

Throughout the *Project*, community input was crucial. It was believed that the process should be community-directed so that it would better serve the community. The Workshop Series was the most community-driven element of the *Project* because topics were developed in response to community desires. Based on input given at roundtables and the *Project* Launch in surveys and evaluations, a list of ten workshop topics were drafted. A flyer was then created with a pre-registration insert that was sent out to one hundred individuals and agencies. Anyone interested in participating was asked to mail, fax, drop off, or phone in the pre-registration form to indicate which workshops they were interested in attending and what time of day would be most convenient. Surprisingly, there was sufficient interest for all ten-workshop topics and so all were offered.

Over five weeks, ten workshops were held, averaging fifteen participants at each workshop. Each participant received a booklet of materials for each workshop to take home. The *Roots of Poverty Project* Workshop Series included:

1. **“That’s the Way the Cookie Crumbles: Facilitation Skills-Building”** dealt with positive traits in a facilitator, differences between a facilitator and a chairperson, conflict resolution, managing over-participation, group decision-making, and equalizing power. Resource Persons: Sherri Doell, Debbie Frost, and Michelle Turner, *Roots of Poverty Project*
2. **“Speaking so Others Will Listen: Presentation Skills Building”** led participants through the process of preparing a speech, from making an outline to addressing an audience. Participants created their own speeches and were given the opportunity to deliver it in front of the group. Resource Person: Carol Marquis, Saskatoon Victim Services
3. **“Take a Bite Out of the Blues: Budgeting and Cooking on a Low Income”** gave participants an opportunity to share with each other tips and strategies for making it

through the month with few resources. Resource Person: Shirley Ashton, Persons Living With AIDS Network

4. **“Sticks and Stones Are Nothing, Words Can Definitely Hurt Me: How Language and Labels Affect People”** discussed the power of language, especially when used to label or exclude people, and how we can challenge the labeling tradition and use language to empower people. Resource Persons: Charlotte Huculack and Garnett Woloschuk, Gay and Lesbian Health Services
5. **“We’re Equal Partners Until ... Creating Collaborative Community”** focused on how partnerships have become increasingly important. Participants were led through discussions, activities, and small group exercises to learn what it means to work in a partnership and the characteristics of a good partnership. Resource Person: Michelle Turner, Community Development Unit, DSS
6. **“Life Beyond Statistics: Using Qualitative Research to Build Community”** led participants through creating a research design and implementation. After hearing a few positive examples about how research can benefit community, the facilitator led participants through a step-by-step process to assist them in creating their own mini-research project. Resource Person: Paula Grosso, *Roots of Poverty Project*
7. **“If You’ve Got It, Flaunt It: The Confident Me”** was a participatory, supportive workshop that covered self-acceptance, looking/feeling good, positive self-talk, and developing a solid network of support, while dismantling harmful relationships. Resource Person: Vanessa Charles
8. **“How To Work with the Media and Get Them Working for You”** involved the who, what, when, where, and why of contacting the media for organizational or personal needs, with a special focus on alternative media sources. In the second half of the workshop, participants broke off into small groups with the task of coming up with creative strategies for communicating the findings of the *Roots of Poverty Project* to the public. Resource Person: Don Kossick, CFCR Community Radio and Independent Journalist
9. **“Someone’s Got to Stay with the Ship: Leadership”** used lecture, discussion, and small group work to teach participants the traits of an effective leader and organization (which are often one and the same). Resource Persons: Betty Mutwiri and Jason Aebig, Leadership Saskatoon
- 10 **“Work and Fun”** was an energizing and uplifting presentation followed by an experiential learning game that taught participants how to reduce pressure and stress while still ensuring individual and group success. Resource Person: Monica Coneys, DeVere Consulting Group

On 7 February 2002, the “Next Steps” brainstorming session was held for everyone who had been involved in the *Project*. The purpose of this three hour session was to

offer participants an opportunity to reflect and relate their experiences with the *Project*, facilitate discussion about whether they saw a need for a second phase of the *Roots of Poverty Project*, and brainstorm ideas on the second phase's focus.

### *Community Reflection*

The capacity-building workshops were quite successful. Participants indicated that they felt more confident in the specific skills outlined and addressed at the workshops. Most participants had some previous experience or knowledge, but everyone felt that they had learned something. For those who had no previous experience, a majority (eleven of thirteen) stated in their questionnaires that they felt "confident" or "somewhat confident" after their first experience with the skill(s) presented at the workshop.

For the most part, people felt more confident because of what they had learned, the opportunity to work on specific skills with a "professional", and, in some cases, the chance to practice and perform hands-on activities.

People also felt more confident for more personal reasons. For many, the support and encouragement given at the workshops helped build self-esteem. Participants related some key reasons for their increase in confidence, such as: "knowing that it's okay to be yourself;" "realizing what I believe is important;" "I am special, strong, and brave;" and "because I am a person and my ideas are real."

Additionally, many were more confident because this opportunity also made them aware of skills and knowledge that they already possessed. This process allowed for self-reflection and self-admiration.

People also felt a renewed zest for learning. One participant revealed, "I feel stronger because I am looking for new ideas," while another stated, "I've recognized the mistakes I've made and how I can learn from them and move on."

Participants were also asked to identify what they would need to feel even more confident. The responses included:

- Experience: An opportunity to practice in a safe environment;
- Knowledge: learning over time, learning with groups and people, building on knowledge, getting feedback and having positive experiences, opportunities for further development of basic skills, and quick and easy tips;
- Co-operation: sharing and working with others, networking, getting support and giving support, and communication;
- More Workshops: this is tied to more practice and further learning;
- Personal: many people gave personal reasons, which indicates that there is still a great deal of confidence building that needs to be done.

Participants, however, were disappointed that workshops were not longer, or that

they did not extend over a longer time period. One participant indicated, “We were just getting to the meat of it, when the workshop was over.” Overall, people enjoyed themselves, made connections with others in their same situation, or who had similar interests, learned new or enhanced specific skills, and, in general, felt better about themselves as persons with capabilities and skills. After one of the workshops, one participant said that, “these workshops really help. I learned a lot.” For her, participating and being asked her opinions and ideas were fundamental to continued participation. While the capacity-building workshops’ intention was to enhance people’s capacities in certain skills, in the end there were more benefits than initially anticipated.

## THE “AFTER” LOOK

During February 2002, a second round of focus groups was held with the Anti-Poverty Coalition, Management Committee, and *Project* staff. Due to geographic and time constraints, the researcher was unable to hold a focus group with panel members, but instead sent questions via e-mail. The second round of focus groups’ purpose was to evaluate the success of the *Roots of Poverty Project*. A focus group was also held with *Project* participants who had been involved throughout (i.e. involved in three or more events). Up to this point in the research, participant feedback was collected about each event, so there was no way of knowing participants’ thoughts about the *Project* as a whole. The focus group was used to compile participants’ insights about the *Project* in general.

At each focus group (with the exception of the community focus group) a summary of what was said at the “before look” focus group was handed out, and people were given an opportunity to review the summary and make appropriate changes.

The second round of focus groups examined these questions:

- Did the *Project* meet peoples’ expectations and goals as stated in the first round of focus groups?
- Were community-government relationships strengthened?
- Did views of government change?
- Did individuals and groups build capacity?
- Did this project help create a sense of community?
- Is there a shared vision for the community in the future?
- Is this a good model to use?



## **COMMUNITY REFLECTION**

Whether a participant felt the *Project* was a success was dependent on his or her original expectations of the *Project*. While there was an original vision and set of objectives adopted at the beginning of the *Project*, individual expectations often varied.

Generally, all groups were ecstatic about the Project's capacity-building component. Indeed, many stated that it went beyond their expectations. People were happy about networking, community consultation, and the Project's inclusiveness (although one participant would have liked to have seen more Aboriginal representation). Furthermore, as one participant indicated, "This was the only project that I've been in where the people that actually mattered were involved." Participants included SAP recipients, the working poor, employees from community-based organizations, and government employees. Some participants indicated that solutions to poverty's roots as presented by the community were not new. This, however, might reflect what the community had been saying all along: that they have not been heard, so they must repeat the same concerns and demand the same solutions.

Participants and staff are quite proud of the *Project* and agree that it has built up a lot of momentum. People made statements such as:

- "I think there is more momentum now."
- "I think this is a strong group. We did a lot."
- "We've learned more about the skills and background of people, which builds community."
- "We are becoming militant—we are strengthening."

Participants were generally quite happy with the panel's response and the friendly and inclusive atmosphere that they helped create. Participants felt that the panel learned from their presentations, which is a starting point to developing stronger ties. One participant stated, "I anticipated this report would sit on a shelf and collect dust. But the panel members were affected. They learned something."

Panel members shared what they learned:

- "I have learned about the community in a different way. Consequently, I have new contacts and opportunities to explore to see if our department can assist the community in some way."
- "I believe community and government relations are more positive. I think government may realize that there are people in the community with strengths. Community can play an integral part in helping with solutions to their needs."
- "I learned that we need to continue listening to the people who are able to identify their needs and solutions to meet their needs. Many community members have great

strengths to build on. All members of the panel learned something or took a story home with them from one of the presenters/presentations. Not everyone is used to working this way.”

However, a few participants were quite disappointed that politicians and people whom they thought had more political clout were not on the panel. Some also felt that, while this was a great opportunity to be heard, it was not an effective process for policy change because they did not think their recommendations would go anywhere. Participants also indicated that they still did not completely trust government. People were quite upset that income redesign went ahead before the report was released and that consultation with the community had ended. “I don’t know about trust,” one participant said. “The government said they wouldn’t cut until this project was over and they did it anyway.” These concerns, again, are related to differing expectations or goals for the *Project*. Furthermore, relationships take a long time to build and repair. But, as many indicated, this was a good starting point.

Participants, however, were less enthusiastic about community-government relationship-building. One participant explained, “I don’t think we built trust with government. But we did between ourselves. I don’t think that relationships were strengthened, except between ourselves.” Relationships were strengthened to some degree, however, as misconceptions and stereotypes were challenged and broken down. Participants realized that, indeed, there are allies within government with whom to build relationships. One participant commented, “I’ve seen more of a human face to government.” A staff member also concluded, “Although policy and structures such as capitalism and patriarchy are still intact, people have learned that there are individuals within those structures that are human.” Participants felt that this process put humanity back to an otherwise perceived cold, inhuman, faceless entity often considered “the enemy.” While people agreed that community-government relationships were not necessarily strengthened, participants agreed that this was a good foundation and starting point. As one panel member concluded, this model “provides an opportunity to build confidence in each other.”

### *Indicators of Capacity*

#### **Personal**

Generally, people feel that the community’s capacity, and specifically people’s individual capacity, was enhanced. The *Project* coordinator stated that, “It was interesting and exciting to see how everyone has grown throughout the process, myself included. It is sometimes difficult, though, for people to recognize how much has changed.” As indicated throughout the report, people’s self-esteem, as well as their capacity in leadership, communication, research, and other necessary skills increased substantially. Participants began building their capacity to analyze, change, and build public policy. Finally, this project was a learning experience and process for all involved. Participants

were able to reflect on what they experienced and learned throughout the *Project* by answering questionnaires and participating in focus groups.

### **Organizational**

It appears that organizational capacity-building was achieved in several ways. Many groups previously unknown to the anti-poverty movement participated in Forum presentations. Some came to realize that allies exist in government, and that employing multiple strategies can be effective. Building personal capacity and learning new skills in the various workshops (e.g. facilitation, presentation, leadership, research, media and partnership workshops) enabled individuals, and, consequently, organizations, to enhance confidence and capacity to analyze, change, and build public policy, and effectively access available resources. Participants felt a stronger sense of community from meeting others from their community, and by feeling included in the anti-poverty movement.

The research component itself allowed organizations, especially APC, to reflect on the progress, success and overall process of the *Project*, and enabled them to identify what they needed to be more effective. The questionnaires' anonymity, opportunities to discuss concerns, thoughts and future strategies in the various focus groups all aided in this learning and reflective process.

As an organization, APC expressed enthusiasm for, and pride in, the personal accomplishments of those involved. However, some individual APC members questioned or demonstrated concern as to whether APC's capacity-building had been noticeably achieved. As one member opined, "The APC hasn't grown in numbers or really in new faces." Some members noted decision-making and communication tensions during the *Project's* course. However, evidence from this research suggests that APC's growth and effectiveness has improved throughout this process as a result of its individual members' extensive personal growth and skill development. Furthermore, links made with previously unknown or unconnected anti-poverty related groups has enhanced public awareness of APC, and, in and of itself, constitutes increased capacity for APC.

The *Roots of Poverty Project* Management Committee (notably, all APC members), its staff, and, to some extent, the panel developed a strong sense of group identity and felt confident in their roles within the *Project*. It can only be speculated that this was less a function of the nature of the roles that people played than a result of how people's participation in the *Project* connected them to a common cause and goal.

### *Evaluation of the Model*

The model was evaluated by reviewing the Anti-Poverty Coalition's original objectives, the indicators of capacity agreed upon during the first set of focus groups, and people's personal expectations. People were asked:

- Did the *Project* meet its original objectives and your own personal expectations?

- Was capacity built?
- Was this a good model to use?

Overall, people seemed to agree that this model was effective in increasing capacity within the community and building foundations with which to strengthen community-government relationships. One participant stated, “I thought the participatory nature of the model was great.” There were many different levels (groups and responsibilities) in this project and a variety of ways that people could involve themselves. People were thrilled to voice their opinions, views, and feelings. Even most panel members had not been involved in community consultations of this nature before.

Face-to-face interaction with government, as outlined in this model, allowed stereotypes and misconceptions to be broken. One participant stated, “I think you can’t help but to learn something from hearing stories and putting faces to poverty. It lets you see the true nature of the situation. It would be great if the government did walkabouts in the community. I think organizations should continue using this strategy.” The *Project*, all agreed, was a great learning experience. As one participant noted, “We proved that the idea that the community is studied to death is wrong. There is always something to learn.” Another panel participant added, “I think it was probably a unique experience for all involved. The fact that the community was so instrumental in developing and ensuring the successful implementation of the process is a true testament to the wealth of resources that can be ‘tapped’ within the community.” Furthermore, the community learned many new skills at the capacity-building workshops.

By and large, participants enjoyed meeting and working with new people and organizations, felt the community was empowered by the experience, and that the *Project* generated a great lobbying tool to use in the future. Staff felt that they created a warm and welcoming atmosphere in which to build capacity, awareness, and relationships. Participants praised staff’s attempts and successes at facilitating such an atmosphere. One staff member noted, “We modeled what we preached [i.e. fairness, equality and compassion].”

Participants also acknowledged the *Project*’s limitations. The *Project*’s time line was too short, and, as a result, expectations were, perhaps, unreasonably high. At times, the *Project* felt rushed, and, as one staff member indicated, “Communities have so much work and development to do that six months is hardly time to accomplish everything.” Another participant indicated that perhaps there were too many things happening. He suggested “less activities in a longer amount of time. You want people to understand the process.”

#### *Shared Vision for the Future*

After six months of the *Roots of Poverty Project*, participants held a common vision for the future community: equality, harmony, and inclusion. The vision for community is

one of co-operation, meaningful interaction, and a sense of fulfillment and belonging.

This future would include: better standards of living (economic and social success) and social inclusion; placing poverty on the public and political agenda; a broadly-based Anti-Poverty Coalition that includes all groups and sectors of society; government inclusion into community dialogues and strong relationships between community and government; no biases and prejudices; co-operation within community and with government; community within the community; the city has to believe it has a soul; use economic indicators to shape policies to bring people together; citizen participation in all aspects of life (economics, health, community, education, and government); a time where an individual's worth is not related to material wealth; and permanent staff to work on community capacity-building projects and community-government relationship initiatives.

The following quotes illustrate this vision:

“I picture a community where no one is hungry and no one goes without support. Communities where all people are respected regardless of race or wealth, where all people of many cultures live in harmony.”

I picture a community where all citizens have the opportunity to reach their full potential and be proud of who they are and where they came from.

“I picture a community where all agencies—our society (community, business, health, justice, education, social services, and service clubs, etc.) all work together in an integrated and truly collaborative way, where there are no boundaries, stovepipes, and roadblocks to prevent families from receiving the support they require.”

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

This section's purpose is to summarize the process and provide a general analysis of outcomes. It is divided into two parts—successes and limitations.

### ***SUCCESSES***

#### *Diversity*

The *Project* was diverse in its participants and structure. An eclectic range of groups was made up of people who varied in age, gender, race, ability, sexuality, and socio-economic status. Further, participants came from many different communities, such as the CBO sector, provincial government, neighbourhood organizations, volunteers, and concerned citizens. The *Project* was also diverse in structure because it offered different opportunities for involvement, including as committee members, staff people, APC

members, volunteers, Forum presenters, workshop participants, panelist, or any combination of the above. Participants could be as involved as they wanted, from attending one workshop to partaking in every event.

### *Flexibility*

The *Project* and its staff were flexible in order to meet a diverse and complex set of communities' needs. For example, to negotiate the difficulty of involving organizations in the *Project* through roundtables or the Forum, facilitators met with people on their terms and in their space. Flexibility also gave participants opportunity to have input into *Project* design. For example, the Workshop Series topics were determined by community-identified needs. Finally, flexibility within the *Project* allowed the Management Committee, in consultation with staff, to rework the *Project* budget to extend its length by two months. The time frame was changed in response to participant, staff, and Management Committee's fears that the *Project's* capacity-building element would suffer under the original time frame. While these extra two months did not alleviate all time constraints, they definitely improved the *Project*. The *Project's* flexible nature meant that it was more accessible to the communities. The *Roots of Poverty Project's* success was directly connected to the informal and flexible approach inherent in this model.

### *Debriefing and Reflection*

The Research component, along with two debriefing sessions held after the Forum and Workshop Series, gave participants an opportunity to reflect on what they had learned and contributed, successes, and future directions. Participants repeatedly stated that this opportunity for reflection was an integral part of the *Project's* success.

### *Community Growth*

As the *Project* unfolded, particularly during its last month or two, a definite shift in collective thinking from "me" to "us" was noticed. Participants entered this process with individual goals and interests, and, in many cases, exited the process with a more developed sense of collective vision and community identity. In the first roundtable discussions, people were coming from their own perspective and wanted to learn about poverty as it directly related to their own world. Toward the *Project's* end, specifically during workshops, participants became more cohesive and were thinking of the *Project* and the group before their own interests. Group identity development was especially true for a core group of participants present at almost every *Project* event. This group developed trust, friendship, and a network of support over a five-month span. Most of this growth was concentrated in January during the Workshop Series, likely because workshops both gave participants an opportunity to build skills together in a participatory way and were concentrated in a short four-week duration.

During a discussion session on whether there should be a second phase, people were quite enthusiastic, ready to mobilize others, organize a strategic plan, and act.

Furthermore, some core group members met outside of project hours and started to organize independently of the *Project*. This project has awakened the participants' "political consciousness." They are now clear of their rights and the roots of poverty. One participant indicated, "We built capacity to the point where people are willing to talk." Talking and sharing stories and opinions is the first step to political action.

The community also developed a different sense of government and its employees. It seems that if this project did not help build relationships between community and government, it definitely broke down some of the barriers and stereotypes that dissuaded co-operation, partnership, and eventual building of trusting relationships.

## ***LIMITATIONS***

### *Realities of People's Lives*

Participation in this process was limited by the numerous and overwhelming demands on people's time. Many are overworked, underpaid (or unpaid), and dealing with the stress that invariably comes from too little time in the day and too little money in the bank. CBO workers, for example, often spend every spare minute writing funding proposals to keep their doors open. This leaves little time for participation in a consultation process. However, despite this reality, many made the *Roots of Poverty Project* a priority, an indication of this type of process' value.

### *Time Frame*

Perhaps the most critical limitation of the *Roots of Poverty Project* was its short time frame. The *Project* length was dependent on funding, which was only enough to sustain the *Project* for seven months. During initial planning stages, APC worried that the *Project's* effectiveness would be limited by insufficient time for each phase. Despite these concerns, APC decided to move forward using available funds. This less-than-ideal time frame hindered the *Project* in three fundamental ways. First, event scheduling did not allow adequate time for staff to prepare groundwork. The coordinator needed more time to conduct staff training, spend time with APC members to understand the group's vision for the *Project*, and create public awareness about the upcoming *Project* and its events. The facilitators needed more time early in the process to establish links in the community and to engage people in the process. The researcher required more time at the beginning to hold "before" focus groups before the *Project* began instead of conducting the "before look" research after events had already started. As well, more time at the end of the *Project* would have enabled her to gain a clearer picture of how the *Project* affected the community.

Second, because there were so many events in such a short time period, community was not always provided with sufficient notice of upcoming events. Further, because the *Project* and its events were community-driven, planning and advertising for an event had to be delayed until community and APC input was received. These constraints meant

that many could not participate because of previously scheduled commitments.

Third, the *Project's* original goal included development of a social policy group that would use the process as a tool to learn more about policy creation. The practicum student attempted to establish this group, but, due to time constraints and the *Project's* rushed nature, it was never formed.

Fourth, the Community Forum on Poverty received overwhelming response from the community, but time limitations restricted the number of Forum presentations and the length of time for each one. Further, because the Panel was only able to spend four days together, they could not truly become involved in, and connected to, the process. More time to develop this connection would likely have led to a deeper involvement of government in the process.

It is worthy of note that all the major project successes are attributed to the strength, drive, will, and knowledge of the community, while the limitations were all associated with inadequate resources and structures. Given time and resource constraints, the *Project's* (community members, APC, Government, Management Committee and staff) accomplishments are little short of amazing. Imagine, then, what the community could accomplish given adequate resources and inclusive structures that are realistic for the people using them.

## NEXT STEPS

APC is developing a series of next steps rooted in experiences the *Roots of Poverty Project's* experiences. Members of the Coalition see the *Roots of Poverty Project* as a component in a larger strategy. This strategy includes not only the history of this particular project, but also the lengthy history of anti-poverty work in our community. It also includes the aspects of the *Roots of Poverty Project*, such as the panel presentations, the research-based evaluation piece, and the capacity-building workshops. Other components that the APC is working on include:

- Providing feedback to stakeholders by hosting two events in May 2002. The first gathering involved a presentation and discussion about the results of the Community Forum on Poverty. The second event included a Media Conference and celebratory barbeque to promote awareness about the *Project* and to bring officially to a close this part of the *Project*.
- Building on the overwhelming success of the capacity-building workshops. A grass-roots leadership and citizenship development strategy—"Becoming Conscious Citizens"—aimed at people living in poverty is being developed. APC is currently seeking financial support.
- Developing APC's organizational structure, such as membership recruitment and



responsibilities, mission, objectives and activities, communication approaches that reach across differences, and strategic planning. Some of this work has been accomplished. APC's mission statement reads: "We are a coalition of concerned citizens and organizations who are dedicated to addressing the causes and effects of poverty." APC has created a subcommittee to move forward on development of more specific objectives and membership recruitment. Some who were involved with the *Roots of Poverty Project* as panel presenters and workshop participants have already joined. Although APC's long-term future is not yet determined, members have discussed the possibility of moving to a more multisectoral model.

- Moving forward some recommendations from the panel presentations, by clarifying and analyzing immediate actions and longer term measures, and building strategies to ensure implementation of some recommendations.
- Negotiating with the Provincial Government and, specifically, with the Departments that funded the *Roots of Poverty Project*, for development of an advisory council that would work towards longer-term solutions to poverty. Some of this work will be based on a model out of Quebec that, itself, is based on a proposed piece of legislation to work towards the elimination of poverty.
- Linking with a national partnership between the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, and the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement to develop a comprehensive community-based poverty reduction strategy.

## CONCLUSION

The *Roots of Poverty Project* was driven by principles of community empowerment and, more specifically, participatory democracy. Because it drew on Saskatoon citizens' knowledge, experience, and wisdom, it was truly a community-owned and -guided process.

Participants invested a great deal of time and energy into the *Project*. Whether preparing a presentation for the Forum, participating in focus groups, or cultivating new relationships, each participant's contribution helped build a unique and empowering process.

While participants put a great deal of work into the *Project*, they also gained many new skills that will hopefully benefit them and their communities. As documented in the *Project's* research component, individuals learned or enhanced skills such as leadership, public speaking, and policy analysis. Organizations/groups gained a common vision, new partners, and an opportunity to give voice to their issues and concerns in new ways.

Momentum built with each roundtable, Forum presentation, focus group, and workshop, creating excitement and energy. The community is now faced with the challenge of maintaining that momentum and working towards positive change.

## NOTES

- 1 On 8 March 2002, the Saskatchewan Government announced that, effective 1 May 2002, the minimum wage will increase to \$6.35 per hour, and, effective 1 November 2002, it will increase to \$6.65 per hour. While this raise does not meet the poverty line, it is a positive step.
- 2 For access to written Forum Presentations, please contact Kathie Cram, Community Development Team, Saskatoon District Health.
- 3 Raising SAP rates was a common recommendation. While it is listed here in the housing section, the recommendation to raise SAP rates was voiced in relation to every issue and in many contexts.
- 4 See Note 1.
- 5 Shortly after the Forum ended, Saskatchewan Health announced that they had developed, and would soon implement, an individualized funding program to cover the cost of private home care workers.
- 6 After hearing this recommendation, many panelists said that they believed a mattress detoxification program was already being developed by a group of community-based organizations, government employees, and concerned citizens.
- 7 Regressive taxation refers to taxes that disproportionately burden citizens with lower incomes. For example, sales tax takes the same amount for a given item from high-income earners as it does from low-income earners, thereby taking a greater percentage of the latter group's income.

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**Appendix A. Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition/Government of Saskatchewan Terms of Reference. Community Forum on Poverty: Root Issues and Solutions (*Roots of Poverty Project*)**

*Intent*

The goal of the Community Forum Process is to develop a process that will bring together the interests of the two parties, the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, and Saskatchewan Social Services.

The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition supports the need for a thorough, participatory process to gather input from social assistance recipients, low-income individuals, grassroots partner organizations, and concerned sectors regarding the root causes of poverty and redesign of Income Security programs. The Coalition emphasizes that there should be a long-term interdepartmental strategy to reduce poverty and hardship, and facilitate social participation of low-income people. Community capacity must be encouraged through basic skill building and a vision of long-term leadership development.

The Department of Social Services is redesigning the Income Security program to develop supports outside of social assistance, which to the greatest extent possible will allow low-income people to be employed and participate in the economic and social life of their community. These supports, while addressing issues of adequacy, will reduce barriers to independence and improve services and programs for all low-income persons. The goal is that social assistance be a program of basic income support for those in transition to employment and those unable to support themselves, and that the government response to reducing poverty is co-ordinated through all departments involved in social issues.

*Purpose*

The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition and Saskatoon Region, Saskatchewan Social Services agree to work collaboratively on a community forum process related to social policy redesign and intersectoral co-operation toward the goal of reducing poverty. The forum process will provide recommendations on policy approaches and services to address the root causes of and solutions to poverty, build community capacity, and facilitate the citizenship of low income people through their participation in social and economic activities of their communities.

*Timeframe*

The forum process will commence in August 2001 with a final report to be submitted by February 28, 2002. An interim report will be submitted by December 31, 2001 regarding policy recommendations.

## *Goals*

The intent of the consultation process is to develop a process of Social Policy Redesign that engages community members in discussion of programs, policies, and practices, which will facilitate the participation of low-income people in all aspects of community life, focusing on economic and social participation. The policy directions will reduce the incidence and depth of poverty, through participation of low-income citizens in all phases of the consultation.

The process will build capacity within the community for research and democratic participation, which will contribute to effective redesign, and develop skills in leadership, facilitation, research, and organization. The process will allow low-income persons the least concern about jeopardizing their income security through participation.

The process will recommend policy changes that will allow low income persons access to employment with adequate income and housing to assist them to exit poverty, which contributes to overall health and well being.

A report will be produced with recommendations regarding Social Policy redesign and specifically Income Security Redesign.

Related goals are to foster communication among government partners and community members, for co-operative policy development, and to encourage community linkages.

The process will be managed by a joint management committee, with representatives from the Anti-Poverty Coalition and government.

Planning to develop supports outside of social assistance to make these more widely available to all low income persons will involve community input into the following themes which Social Services identified to be addressed, include but are not limited to:

- Housing - to improve quality, affordability and accessibility;
- Child care - to provide options which promote the provision of quality child care and increase the range of opportunities;
- Education and training - to increase opportunities for low-income people to develop skills and abilities necessary to participate in the labour market;
- Youth transitions - to enhance opportunities for youth to remain or retain their independence;
- Disability supports - to address the impacts of disability and improve access to health needs, income support and enablers for employment;
- Economic Development - to provide opportunities for employment. Transition from social assistance to work - to ensure the supports are available to make the transition

in a supportive manner, such as clothing, security deposit guarantees, travel, and other transition needs;

- Adequacy of rates and other income - to discuss adequacy to allow access to the above areas.

The community forum process is complementary and builds on recent and ongoing provincial research in these areas, as well as the community development done in Saskatoon over the past few years.

#### *Process*

The process should be inclusive, transparent, and co-operative, create opportunity and support, and give low income participants the least concern about jeopardizing their income security through participation.

The cost of the consultation will be negotiated and agreed upon by the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition and the Department of Social Services. Where possible, in-kind resources will be provided through the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, the Department of Social Services, and other government departments.

#### *Evaluation*

The evaluation work is linked with an independently funded communitybased research project, sponsored by Child Hunger Education Program (CHEP). The Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) is funding the research through a community sabbatical position. The objectives of the research are:

- to document the testimonies and presentations that CBO's and individuals make to the panel
- to analyze and summarize the results and impact of the consultation process on participants
- to write, in consultation with the panel, and other staff and management committee, a final report
- to help build research capacity in the anti-poverty CBO sector
- To document the impact of the consultation process on the participants.

#### *Expected Outcomes*

- To produce a publicly accessible, basic language document that will consist of a synthesis of the consultation and a list of recommendations to develop a long term integrated anti-poverty provincial strategy.
- To enhance the qualitative research capacity of participating CBO's by offering two workshops on conducting qualitative research for the partners and their members

- To document the impact of this process on the participants, in terms of building research, communication, organizational, facilitation and leadership skills, as well as assessing impact on self esteem.
- To provide CUISR, the Coalition, Social Services, and other interested parties with a final report on the project.

### **Attachment A**

Suggested Questions for Consideration (including but not limited to):

- 1) Housing: How can we increase the supply of safe, affordable and accessible housing options and link financial support to quality housing?
- 2) Child Care: How can we increase the range of child care options and ensure quality child care? What types of child care arrangements should be financially supported?
- 3) Education and Training: What supports need to be in place to facilitate participation in education and training programs and to ensure successful completion and graduation?
- 4) Youth Transitions: What supports are required to ensure that at-risk youth can attain and maintain independence?
- 5) Supports for Persons With Disabilities: What are the key supports for persons with disabilities to allow their full participation in work and community life?

### **Attachment B**

#### *Management Committee*

The interim Management Committee will:

- Develop terms of reference;
- Realign the proposed budget depending on resources available;
- Develop a fair and transparent process for hiring staff, including job descriptions, interview guides, and advertising for candidates;
- Hire the Co-ordinator.

The ongoing Management Committee will:

- Plan and manage the overall process used in the community forum process;
- Provide direction and supervision to the staff hired;
- Manage the funds allocated to ensure they are spent appropriately according to the approved budget;•



- Ensure the expenditures are documented;
- Assist the Coordinator to hire additional staff;
- Assist the Coordinator with contact with various interested agencies and departments.

The management committee consists of representatives of Nanette McKay, Kathie Cram, Len Usiskin, Lou Rogers, Bob Fink, Michelle Lee, and John Nicholson.

The funding for the *Project* will be managed by Quint Development Corporation.

## **Appendix B. Participatory Budget Process, Porto Alegre, Brazil**

Since the budget process was implemented, many great improvements have been made.

For example:

- the number of residences with access to running water has increased from 65% to 98%
- the number of residences with access to sewage systems has increased from 46% to 85%
- 25-30 kilometres of roads are paved in poor communities
- enrolments in schools have doubled between 1988 and 1996.

### *Structure*

The municipal government has divided the city into a number of regions reflecting geographic, social and community considerations. Currently there are 16 regions in Porto Alegre and five thematic councils to look at long term planning issues in the areas of city planning and development, transportation and circulation, health and assistance, education, sport and culture, and taxation and economic development. Furthermore, outreach workers have been hired to mobilize the community through public education and other activities. Based on the upcoming budget, the residents at the meetings first prioritize what in their community needs improvement or funding and secondly vote on their findings. Each community, therefore, first assesses and defines their specific needs, and then determines an action plan based on their ranked priorities. While some communities might feel that building a school is most important, others might decide on upgrading local roads. A second round of more focused and thematically organized discussions are then held (municipal government officials are at these meeting to answer any questions). Finally, a third series of meetings are held. Participants elect two “budget councillors” for each region or thematic council and a number of delegates to meet and discuss the priority of all public spending initiatives identified around the city.

## **Appendix C. Code of Ethics—Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada**

- Participants (those being interviewed etc.) should always know the purpose and nature of the research as well as how the information they reveal will be used and who else will see this information;
- Participants should always know the risks and benefits of participating in the study;
- Participants' privacy should always be kept. Since concepts of privacy vary from culture to culture, the question of invasion of privacy should be considered from the point of view of those being studied;
- The researcher should always have the consent of the individual/group before gathering data (if working with children, the researcher must have the permission of the parent). Consent should be documented in writing;
- Cultural groups have a right to accurate and respectful description of their heritage and customs;
- Information given to subjects should respect their levels of comprehension;
- Participants should be informed of their right to inquire about the research, and that they may withdraw at any time;
- There should be no coercion, constraint or undue inducement of participants.

For more information see, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada SSHRC Fellowships Program: Detailed Guide, SSHRC, 1994; cat no.1-8/1995: pp. 21-24.

## **Appendix D. Project Staff**

1. Amy Stensrud, Coordinator: responsible to the Management Committee and acting as direct manager of staff, resources, and communications.

- Was the direct liaison between the Management Committee and the *Project* staff, reporting regularly and following the overall direction of the Management Committee,
- Planned and coordinated activities to meet the timelines and expectations of the consultation process,
- Provided overall guidance to the staff by coordinating and supervising work plans, coordinating staff training, managing conflict, and ensuring accountability,
- Planned and executed a communication strategy to keep the community involved and informed throughout the process,
- Wrote, in cooperation with the Forum Panel, the panel report, and co-wrote, in cooperation with the *Project* Researcher, the final report, and
- Ensured that basic administrative functions are met in the carrying out of the *Project*.

2. Sherri Doell and Debbie Frost, Facilitators: responsible to the Coordinator and acting as outreach workers and mobilizers.

- Developed and carried out an outreach plan to engage and connect various communities in the process,
- Facilitated groups to ensure that goals were met and that everyone had the opportunity to participate,
- Assisted groups and individuals to prepare presentations for the Community Forum,
- Designed and coordinated a 10-workshop series, focusing on topics of interest previously identified by participants, intended to build individual and community capacity, and
- Worked within the guidelines and plans set by the Management Team and the Coordinator.

3. Michelle Turner, Trainer and Facilitator: an employee of DSS in the Provincial Community Development Unit, Michelle acted as a facilitation trainer and resource person for the staff.

- Provided ongoing facilitation training and support,
- Assisted the facilitators in the design of workshops and roundtables, and
- Acted as a motivator and support person during stressful and hectic phases of the

*Project.*

4. Paula Grosso, Researcher: employed by Child Hunger and Education Program through a grant from the Community- University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), and reporting to the Coordinator.

- Designed a research plan to document the impact of participation on the community,
- Conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups,
- Documented the Community Forum on Poverty,
- Held a storytelling workshop to collect personal stories,
- Held an interactive workshop to teach participants about qualitative research and wrote a community handbook on the “How to’s of Qualitative Research”, and
- Co-wrote, in cooperation with Amy, the Coordinator, the final report.

5. Jennifer Sherwood, Social Work Practicum Student: was interested in learning and practicing ‘non-traditional social work’ in the area of community development and social policy. These interests made her an excellent fit with the *Project* and the staff team. A student of the University of Regina Social Work Program, and reported to the Coordinator.

- Wrote a briefing paper on behalf of a local anti-poverty organization,
- Attempted to organize a social policy discussion and action group by holding two workshops and one planning meeting, and
- Assisted in organizing and running project events, and participated as a full team member in the *Roots of Poverty Project* staff.

## **Appendix E. Community Forum on Poverty Panellists**

Danea Armstrong and Dale Botting  
Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority Inc.

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Chris Broten  
Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services

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Pat Inglis  
Community Care Branch, Saskatchewan Health

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Mark La Rocque  
Aboriginal Affairs, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs

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Gordon Martell  
Indian and Metis Education, Saskatoon Catholic Schools

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Ron Sotski, James Turner, and Paulette Mazenc  
Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, Municipal Affairs and Housing

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Bob Pringle  
Cosmopolitan Industries Limited  
(Community-Based Organization Representative)

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Ron Pollock and John Nicholson  
Department of Social Services

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Lori Pulai  
*AAT Wraparound Project*

(Community Representative)

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Kathie Cram

Community Development Team, Saskatoon District Health

(Anti-Poverty Coalition Representative)

## **Appendix F. Community Forum on Poverty: Root Issues and Solutions Forum Presenters**

*9 November 2001:*

1. Carrie Ashton, Sisters in Spirit Housing Incorporated, “Life Skills and Supportive Housing”
2. Brian Zimmer, Director of Missions (St. Paul’s Hospital), “Poverty, Community and Healing”
3. Melissa Christopherson, “Suddenly Poor Women”
4. Bonnie Smith, “Street Involved Women, HIV, and Poverty”

*16 November 2001:*

1. Marta Juorio, YWCA Childcare Centre, “Childcare”
2. Deneen Gudjonson, Riversdale Business Improvement District, “Economic Development”
3. Evelyn Reisner, Planned Parenthood Saskatoon Centre, “Reproductive and Sexual Health”
4. Jan Dawson, “Disabilities and Discrimination”
5. Len Usiskin, Quint Development Corporation, “Community Economic Development”
6. Ruth Kidley, Werner Zech, and Kevin Norlin, Equal Justice for All, “Social Assistance Rates”

*23 November 2001:*

1. Don Kossick and Flo Woods, Saskatchewan Child Nutrition Network, “Food Security, Food Democracy, and Public Policy”
2. Julie Bergan, “Women and Poverty”
3. Edyta Dudzic, “Childcare—A Parent’s Voice”
4. Sr. Germaine Roussel and Helen Rushton, “Experiences on SAP”
5. Karen Archibald, Child Hunger Education Program, “Food Security”
6. Cindy Rublee, Saskatchewan Intercultural Association
7. Lisa Gibb and Judy Smith-Jones, “Childcare”
8. West Flats Parents Group, “Mothers and Grandmothers on Poverty”
9. Carolyn Rogers, Public Awareness Committee for Communities for Children, “Re-



port Card on Child Poverty”

10. Carmel Dodd, Co-Chair of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, “Next Steps”

*30 November 2001:*

1. Cecile Smith, St Mary’s Community School, “Poverty in the Inner City”
2. Gayle Mast, Canadian Mental Health Association, “Mental Health”
3. Emmanuelle Morin, AIDS Saskatoon, “HIV and Poverty”
4. Michelle Rowe and Laura Nurse, “Special Needs Childcare”
5. Brenda Longman, Elizabeth Fry Society, “Parenting in Poverty”
6. Sarah Polkinghorne and Kelly Balon, Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op, “Youth at Risk”
7. Maggie Beacon and Kathy Grier, Working Group to Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children by Pimps and Johns, Communities for Children.
8. Sue Delanoy and Wendy MacDermott, Communities for Children, “Children and Poverty”
9. Dennis Morrison, Political Action Group on Poverty, “School Fees”
10. Dorothy Daoust, “A Report on the DSS Call Centre”
11. Nancy George, Saskatoon Housing Coalition, “Mental Illness and Supportive Housing”
12. Barb Adams and Barb Bateman, Alternative Budget of Choice Strategy *Project*
13. Bob Fink, “Trying to Survive on Assistance”
14. Klaus Gruber, Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers

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118 Science Place  
Saskatoon SK S7N 5E2 Canada  
Phone: 306-966-2121  
Facsimile: 306-966-2122  
E-mail: [cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca](mailto:cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca)



CUISR Web site:  
<http://www.usask.ca/cuisr/>

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St. Paul's Hospital Residence  
230 Avenue R South  
Saskatoon SK S7M 2Z1 Canada  
Phone: 306-978-8320  
Facsimile: 306-655-4956  
E-mail: [cuisr.liaison@usask.ca](mailto:cuisr.liaison@usask.ca)