



community stories

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Regina Inner City Community Partnership (RICCP) Welcomes ANC

The Action for Neighbourhood Change project (ANC) may be complex but its purpose is clear. The initiative is about real people helping one another to make their neighbourhoods better places to live. Since the project began in February 2005, it has generated optimism and hope among community members. The partners are excited that the program is having the desired results: Citizens are becoming involved in changing their neighbourhoods and government is hearing the feedback it needs to support them effectively. This series of stories presents each of the five ANC neighbourhoods as they existed at the start of the initiative. A second series will be published at the end of the ANC's 14-month run to document the changes and learnings that have resulted from the effort. For more information about ANC, visit: www.anccommunity.ca

Action for Neighbourhood Change in Regina is a companion piece to the community revitalization effort known as the Regina Inner City Community Partnership (RICCP). Operational since 2003, RICCP owes some of its success to earlier work initiated by the federal government on the problem of homelessness. The lessons it has to offer may provide valuable direction to other ANC projects.

History – the legacy of SCPI

Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) – a program operated by the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) – was launched in 1999 in an attempt to create a more integrated and inclusive approach to homelessness in Canada. Along with providing financial support to communities, SCPI encourages them to work together with provincial, territorial and municipal governments and the private and voluntary sectors to strengthen existing capacity and develop



new responses to homelessness. Regina's SCPI response provided an excellent opportunity for members of the government and community sector to work together. Vic Huard, CEO of the United Way of Regina, was the local SCPI chair for three-and-a-half years.

Says Vic: "SCPI provided Regina with one of its first opportunities to forge grassroots relationships which were founded on action, not dialogue. Everyone involved got a chance to practise building relationships around a specific issue. As the project neared the end of its first round of funding in 2002, members began to talk about how we could use the SCPI process to address other issues."

Building on relationships

In January 2002, one community person and a collection of federal people working on homelessness and other poverty-related issues became concerned about the service gaps and overlaps that existed in Regina. They agreed that they needed a common basis for action that would give space for them to hear the voices of communities and would allow the various players to coordinate and collaborate their efforts. Ultimately, they wished to find ways to better communicate their various messages, end service duplication and respect individual accountabilities. This was one of many such conversations taking place among government and community stakeholders in Regina.

Evelyne Power Reid was one of the original group which met to discuss forging a unified approach. At the time, she had responsibility for (former) Human Resources and Development Canada's homelessness initiative in Saskatchewan. Now Director of Corporate Affairs and Community

Initiatives with Service Canada, Evelyne also acts as the bridge between her department and local MP Ralph Goodale's office. Says Evelyne: "What got most of the group excited about working collaboratively was the fact that we would be able to get government and community people working together to resolve program and policy issues. By developing strong relationships, we would be able to identify how orders of government might be creating barriers to change at the local level and then work together to find the best possible resolution."

At about the same time, Regina's Mayor, Pat Fiacco, and Finance Minister Ralph Goodale began a public discussion about the city's need to articulate an inner city vision for change. When Evelyne met with Minister Goodale and described the idea of designing a common platform, it was clear that several groups in Regina had simultaneously arrived at the same conclusion: getting government and communities to coordinate their efforts and resources was the best avenue for change. The Mayor, the Minister and Glenn Hagel – the (then) provincial Minister of Social Services with responsibility for housing, career and employment programs – announced the intention to address collaboratively the social and quality of life issues in Regina's inner city. North Central Regina was chosen on the basis of a number of quality of life indicators as the most troubled of the City's five inner city neighbourhoods, so the group would begin its work there.

North Central has a population of 10,350 and is the largest of Regina's inner-city neighbourhoods. More than one third of its residents are of Aboriginal ancestry. The area was established as a residential neighbourhood for labourers of European descent who worked on the Canadian Pacific Rail line in the 1880s. Those who settled in North Central were attracted by its reasonable rents and available services, which

today include five elementary schools, one high school, a community police service centre, a fire hall, library, hospital, public health community centre and numerous recreational facilities.

Despite its assets, North Central also has an abundance of substandard housing, rental properties and high levels of transience. Like Regina's other inner-city neighbourhoods, education, income and employment levels are low and high rates of addiction have contributed to a poor quality of life marked by crime. Many residents fear the activities of gangs, and children are exposed to drugs, addictive lifestyles and the sex trade at younger and younger ages.

To begin the process of addressing these social problems, a community partnership with membership from North Central residents, service delivery agencies and government worked with the community to articulate a vision for North Central. In the first round of discussions with the SCPI working group members, the Mayor and Minister's staffs presented a plan for how the initiative should proceed. The experience of working more collaboratively with the community, however, lent weight to the SCPI assertion that the first order of business should be to learn more about how the community saw itself and its future.

Ultimately, the objective of the new partnership became to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive, inclusive plan which would change living conditions and help the community to achieve its goals. All future development would be based on the goals and values of community members. To ensure a balanced, action-oriented plan, a consultant and a team of assistants who were representative of the community's backgrounds went door-to-door to hear people's input. Because many of the neighbourhood residents had no history of civic participation, one-on-one relationships built on

the doorstep allowed people to voice comfortably their views on the neighbourhood's vision for change.

In September 2003, the community vision and action plan were released by the newly named Regina Inner City Community Partnership (RICCP). Says Evelyne: "Our intention was to bring together the key government and community people who had the ability to fill gaps or change the system. We had to work through community misperceptions that we were a funding approval body. Over time, people have come to see that our strength comes from having the necessary relationships to influence appropriate investment and effect change in policy design and implementation."

Membership and operation

RICCP's Steering Committee was established to support the implementation of the North Central vision. It includes senior representatives from 14 agencies and community members, including the North Central Community Association, the Catholic and public school boards, police services, the City, the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, the Chamber of Commerce, HRSDC (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada), Regina Treaty Status Indian Services, Regina Métis Sport and Culture Inc. and the Southwest Region of the province's Department of Community Resources and Employment. The United Way of Regina was added to the Steering Committee in 2005 as a result of Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC).

Says Vic Huard: "The United Way has been working in the community using an approach which is very similar to RICCP. Our expanding role as a community convenor, facilitator, collaborator and capacity builder – a role which we fully articulated in 2003 as a result of community-wide consultations – aligns well with the RICCP's

working principles. The financial and human resources now available to us through ANC will help increase everyone's understanding of what community development is all about and will enhance our respective abilities to undertake the work."

The position of North Central Community Developer was created as a bridge between the RICCP's mandate and the lived experience of neighbourhood residents. The position reports to the City of Regina Community Services, and is now funded by ANC. Community Developer Maureen Lerat is a First Nations person and she has been successful in establishing and maintaining strong relationships with many North Central residents.

Meeting monthly, RICCP members worked at figuring out the best ways to engage with North Central residents and to identify the root causes of the neighbourhood's many concerns. Of the seven areas highlighted by the community, crime and safety, housing and employment were selected as the three issues for focused work by the partnership.

Housing impacts crime and safety

Crime and safety in North Central Regina were identified as significant concerns by area residents. Calls for service, not only to police, but also to other agencies, were significantly greater in North Central than in other parts of the city, and the crime rate in this neighbourhood was among the highest in the country. Many factors – including socioeconomic disadvantage, unemployment, poor education, transience, substandard housing and substance abuse – created intense pressures on people that were manifested as crime and disorder. Since these factors were essentially social issues, and because his officers had to provide a police response, Police Chief Cal Johnston championed the RICCP's crime and safety component. Says Cal:

Leading by serving

Maureen Lerat's position as the RICCP North Central Community Developer has provided the vital link between government and the North Central community. She is able to manage the complex relationships that exist among the neighbourhood's many cultural groups. Says Maureen: "A project like this must constantly monitor how it communicates its messages. Busy people get caught up in doing their piece of the work and it's easy for them to lose sight of their connection to the project as a whole. Part of my job is to make sure that the messages continue to be exchanged loudly and clearly."

One of the reasons Maureen Lerat was the perfect choice for Community Developer was her association with the Chili for Children program. Started in 1979 by Maureen's aunt, Theresa Stevenson, the project serves a hot lunch three times a week to more than 400 children at three elementary schools and the Albert Scott Community Centre in North Central. An annual Chili for Children gala dinner and silent auction raise community funds to support the program and promotes awareness of the issue of child hunger. In the summer months, Chili for Children operates at the Albert Scott Community Centre, allowing children and their parents continued access to a nourishing meal.

"We did an analysis of the frequency and location of calls we received and concluded that most of our resources were being used to respond to issues related to poverty, poor housing and domestic and substance abuse in North Central."

Cal turned to the RICCP and his numerous community partners to develop a process for addressing the factors that were undermining safety in North Central. One of the most pressing issues was the condition of housing – primarily

rental properties – in the area. It was apparent that many dwellings were in desperate need of repair or demolition: mould, crumbling foundations, no electricity, no running water, missing windows, exposed electrical wires, raw sewage in basements and rodent infestations were just some of the identified problems. Joined by senior staff from agencies with responsibilities for housing, Cal established a group that worked collaboratively to identify substandard residences in North Central and develop an effective response. Group members came from the Regina Police Service, the Regina Fire Department, the City of Regina, the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, the Department of Community Resources and Employment and the North Central Community Association.

The remediation process required a carefully constructed plan. It was developed over an eight-month period and incorporated input from managers, practitioners and legal counsel. Once the plan was completed, Cal's group created the Housing Standards Enforcement Team, which was made up of property standards inspectors, building inspectors, fire inspectors, public health inspectors, social workers, police officers and a community member of First Nations origin.

Problem locations now are identified to the team by front-line service providers in North Central. Using a framework in which the partner agencies use existing legislation to remediate substandard dwellings, team members meet weekly, assess the identified locations and determine which locations will be inspected.

Whenever the team must contact a resident, the community team member makes the initial contact to explain the process and secure consent for an inspection. Team members inspect the location and address deficiencies using the agreed-upon processes, which can include serving public notice that specific houses are not fit for habita-

tion (a practice known as placarding). In most cases, landlords are required to perform extensive repairs to bring the properties up to minimum standards; in the case of placarded houses, the team works with the occupants to secure better housing in the same area.

Houses without windows, electricity, heat or running water, combined with the lifestyle of drug addiction, make for a miserable existence, especially for children. Despite their awareness of such conditions, residents in North Central were unwilling, unable or uninterested in contacting City authorities about poorly maintained or drug houses. Even when complaints were made, residents feared repercussions from landlords and regularly denied entry to Property Standards and Public Health inspectors.

Since 2004, however, the work of the RICCP has effected a change in attitude. The team has inspected more than 100 houses with the consent of and, at times, at the request of, the tenants. Many homes have been renovated and some have been demolished. The number of substandard houses is decreasing and the quality of life for people who had to live in them – including families and children – is improving. The impact of this work on crime rates and perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood is beginning to be felt by residents and will be formally evaluated.

A second sub-committee on housing, led by Peggy Clark, Director of Community Services at the City of Regina, has undertaken two "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design" (CPED) audits. Recommendations from the audit reports have led to tree plantings, and lighting and road improvements in a 17-block area of North Central. The North Central Community Association is developing a rental registry to help residents locate affordable dwellings. An active home renovation program and infill housing for vacant lots currently

owned by the City and the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation will help improve the appearance and condition of the neighbourhood's housing stock. These projects got under way in the summer of 2005 and have helped create excitement and pride in North Central. Plans for the installation of a community garden are advancing, and the Community Association is encouraging residents to get involved in a neighbourhood cleanup.

Says Evelyne Power Reid: "Everyone is very proud and hopeful about what we've been able to accomplish to date. These issues take a lot of time to address, and despite that, we're seeing real progress on the safety and housing issues."

Employment

New approaches for reducing barriers to labour market attachment are the focus of a third RICCP sub-committee – the Regina Inner City Employment Development Strategy (EDS) Steering Committee – chaired by Lynn Allen. Lynn is Regional Director for the Southwest Region of the province's Department of Community Resources and Employment. The Steering Committee's mandate is to support the creation of a sustainable employment strategy and partnership structure in North Central, which initially will focus on youth employment. The Steering Committee contracted management consultants Garvin and Associates to perform a literature and program review, formulate the strategy and conduct employer interviews to help assess the community's commitment to employment equity and overall interest in employment training.

Lynn's department tendered requests for proposals from community-based organizations that would establish programs to help inner city residents attach to the job market. Departmental staff members invited an employment training program expert from

the US to speak with local employers about how to successfully move people into the labour market, and they initiated discussions with community organizations about employment strategies.

Several site-specific barriers to employment were identified by North Central residents. These included: personal issues, human capital, social capital, self-esteem, labour market fit, opportunity costs, child care, public transportation, private transportation, housing, program information and culture. In its efforts to overcome these barriers, the Employment Development Strategy, released in the spring of 2005, focuses on three areas: strengthening partnerships, building infrastructure and supporting human capacity.

The EDS working group will seek to strengthen its partnerships with employers by establishing an employer roundtable, providing employer training and information sessions, developing targeted job opportunities with specific companies and involving employers in employee training initiatives. It will work with schools and educational institutions to establish satellite employment development programs and services in the North Central, encourage the establishment of targeted training through education-based partnerships and promote the use of a community schools model to involve community members. Funding, leadership and planning roles will be determined for Aboriginal, federal, provincial and municipal level representatives.

Infrastructure work will focus on establishing a community and employment centre in North Central. It will explore flexible, culturally appropriate and affordable child care options. The working group also is considering a community village approach to services – a 'one stop' facility which would house employment, child care and other needed services, such as a health clinic, financial services, recreational facilities and a grocery store.

Supporting human capacity refers to the many ways in which employers and prospective employees can be assisted to better understand and meet one another's needs. For example, 'soft skills' like communications, work ethic and people skills need to be taught. Existing leadership programs need to be expanded. Employers have expressed interest in human resource skill development and cultural awareness training. Establishing partnerships with Regina companies that are interested in providing learning placements which could potentially end in full-time work will support inner city employment. Involving the community in the evolution of the Employment Development Strategy will ensure that it follows accepted community development principles.

Says Lynn Allen: "The Steering Committee and working groups will keep focused on our indicators of success: increased employment, improved safety, higher education, better health, pride in community, community involvement and improved housing. By developing the tools for sustaining the EDS alongside North Central residents, we look forward to the community ultimately assuming ownership of the strategy and its successes."

Lessons learned

RICCP committee members strongly believe that having the right people at the table – including directors general, senior municipal officials and the executive directors of the Chamber of Commerce and, more recently, the United Way – has been the key ingredient in maintaining the RICCP's momentum. Senior management of HRSDC, the provincial Department of Community Resources and Employment, Regina's police services and City of Regina Community Services are accountable to their respective leadership for progress on the inner-city vision and collaboration. Everyone has made a commitment to meet regularly,

helping to create an *esprit de corps* which maintains the committee's focus and energy.

The group now meets every three months and an executive – made up of one representative from each of the three levels of government and a North Central Community Association member – meets monthly. The RICCP was very open to the United Way's request to join the Steering Committee as part of the ANC initiative.

Staff shifts within RICCP partner organizations now reflect priorities for action. The province and City have staff members in offices in North Central. The federal government gave its staff a mandate to be proactive about going into the community, listening to dialogue and looking for ways to assist. In August, a Service Canada partnership site opened in North Central with participation by the federal government, the City and Aboriginal Family Services.

Also critical to effecting positive change in North Central is the RICCP's many interconnections with the wide assortment of community development initiatives active in Regina. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), for example, has established a "Circle of Aboriginal Community Voices" steering committee which provides advice on government investment and service decisions in Regina. The RICCP will act as a reference group to this committee, providing advice on investment decisions and linking new initiatives to other available resources and supports.

Keeping it real

Ongoing challenges exist for RICCP, UAS and other community-focused initiatives. Ensuring community participation without tokenism is not solely an Aboriginal issue. Assuming that people from similar backgrounds all want and need the

same things, or missing the subgroups that exist within different cultural groups, does not make a strong basis for issues resolution. Political interests must not overtake the community basis of the work. Community members need to see tangible results to remain engaged in long-term processes, but this requirement must be balanced against the slower timetable of policy and program change.

Says Evelyne Power Reid: “We’re trying to expand the way we’re working in North Central to include every possible issue we can influence. At the national level, we continue to pound away to ensure that if a new policy piece is implemented, it must fit with what’s happening in the community. If it isn’t appropriate, we push it back. When Action for Neighbourhood Change was announced, organizers thought that perhaps another neighbourhood should be selected for participation, but this choice would have had the effect of splitting the energy and focus we have worked so hard to achieve through RICCP. We intend to take what we’re doing in North Central and apply it appropriately to other areas of Regina. Already, the housing standards enforcement work is expanding outward.”

Ensuring that programs grow beyond North Central is also a concern of neighbourhood residents. They feel that programs should not happen all at once or all in one place, otherwise their neighbourhood will not escape the perception of North Central as a ghetto. Ultimately, the goal of ANC and RICCP is the same: to apply the learning and experience in poverty reduction and community revitalization of one neighbourhood to as many as possible.

Marg Friesen, a community developer with many years’ experience, has been hired as the ANC coordinator for United Way. She and Maureen Lerat will work to link RICCP with ANC and extend efforts into the areas of early childhood develop-

ment, staying in school, getting connected to employment, and safe and stable neighbourhoods. Marg will manage ANC reporting and financial duties and will support the planning and delivery of citizen engagement events. One of her goals is to help people in North Central better understand ANC and RICCP and how they can become involved. She will help to convene United Way’s working groups to set priorities and outcomes, and decide on courses of action in four key areas listed above. Her work will be coordinated by United Way in collaboration with RICCP.

Says United Way of Regina CEO Vic Huard: “We are committed to continuing the work we’ve begun in North Central, whether ANC continues past its 14-month mandate or not. The United Way has built Marg’s position and our goals into its long-term plan. Along with RICCP, we are committed to supporting neighbourhood improvement through the continued engagement and input of residents. ANC will help to reinforce the RICCP’s original goal of keeping the community’s needs and wishes at the forefront while working to remove or rework policy elements which stand in the way of change.”

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