



## community stories

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### *ANC's Second Year in Regina: The Core Neighbourhood*

*Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) was a two-year action research project which ran from February 2005 to March 2007. It operated in five cities – Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Halifax.<sup>1</sup>*

*This paper is the third in a series of community stories which chronicle the path of ANC in the five sites. Series one introduced each neighbourhood and the process by which it was selected for participation. The second provided a mid-process snapshot of involvement and activity. The third summarizes the work accomplished over two years, including project staff and resident perceptions of ANC and its impact on the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup>*

#### *Starting off in North Central*

Regina's ANC trajectory has been markedly different from those operating in Halifax, Toronto, Thunder Bay and Surrey. Alone of the five cities, Regina's ANC neighbourhood was pre-selected for participation. It was chosen by members of the Regina Inner City Community Partnership (RICCP), a cross-sectoral working group that has been active in the neighbourhood of North Central since 2003. Composed of senior municipal, provincial and federal representatives, RICCP used community consultations conducted in 2002 as the basis for work in three priority areas: crime and safety, housing and employment. Members believed that ANC and RICCP would complement one another. ANC could benefit from the experience of RICCP's relationships and project work and RICCP would receive an infusion of grassroots participation.



Despite the advantage of being able to bypass a selection process and get straight to the work of engaging residents in revitalization efforts, the relationships and lines of authority among United Way of Regina, ANC and RICCP were not clearly spelled out to residents. It took a while for ANC to distinguish its identity and initiate action.

Regina has five inner-city neighbourhoods, but the RICCP had focused a great deal of attention on North Central because of its low ranking on a number of quality-of-life indicators. Indeed, more than 80 community-supportive agencies are active in North Central, far more than in Regina's other four inner-city neighbourhoods – the Core, Cathedral, Al Ritchie and Eastview.

ANC's work in North Central was channelled through relationships that United Way of Regina had developed with members of the North Central Community Association (NCCA). The City of Regina created 28 such community associations in the 1980s as a way of delivering recreational, cultural and social programming to its neighbourhoods. ANC site manager Marg Friesen worked with members of NCCA and other North Central residents to identify neighbourhood assets and challenges, ultimately using community pride as a focus for projects which could be launched with the \$80,000 in Action Grants provided to each ANC site by the federal government partners.

A community arts organization got 900 elementary students at six schools to use paint, sculpture, dance and words to express their hopes and dreams for North Central. That project culminated in March 2006 with a gala event at the Regina Performing Arts Centre, a North Central landmark. A second arts project focused on the development of a dramatic performance that incorporated audience participation. The perfor-

mance evolved with each presentation and its purpose was to distil key messages about social issues in North Central. Called "legislative theatre" and designed by Headlines Theatre for Living (a Vancouver-based organization), the ultimate goal of the exercise was to have residents engage various levels of policy-makers and politicians, and to initiate dialogue on core messages developed through the performances. Though many city employees and North Central's City councillor and MLA attended performances, follow-up discussions were not pursued. Action Grants funds were also used to hire two young film-makers to document the two arts projects.

In January 2007, two articles in *Maclean's* magazine portrayed North Central as Canada's worst neighbourhood. The stories missed the work done by NCCA, RICCP, ANC, the 80 community-supportive organizations and residents themselves to address the neighbourhood's challenges. All five ANC neighbourhoods have had to work against negative media portrayals, but there is a sense among North Central residents that the *Maclean's* articles may yet yield positive results.

### *Lessons learned*

Behind-the-scenes conflict over how ANC's resident-focused process had affected the neighbourhood's perception of RICCP's work led to an abrupt change of direction in year two. Though a serious effort was made in January 2006 to correct misunderstandings, find common ground and move ahead on projects that were acceptable to all parties, plans remained in the discussion phase. When ANC's first year drew to a close in March, United Way of Regina staff and members of RICCP and NCCA agreed that expanding ANC's activities into the adjacent Core neighbourhood would be more productive.

Says Tracey Mann, Director, Community Impact and Investments at United Way of Regina: “Our experience in North Central affirmed for us the critical role of relationship building in community revitalization. Despite everyone’s best intentions and our belief that we were in accord over the work and mutual responsibilities, things did not progress as smoothly as we had hoped.”

NCCA President Brenda Mercer agrees that her neighbourhood receives a great deal of money and attention and that March 2006 was the right moment for ANC to move to another inner-city neighbourhood. Says Brenda: “Shifting ANC’s focus to the Core meant that RICCP could accelerate its planned expansion to that neighbourhood. RICCP has a good relationship with the Core Community Association, the City of Regina was in agreement that the Core could benefit from ANC’s resources, and we were all in agreement that we would continue to work collaboratively.”

### *ANC moves to the Core*

Proponents of neighbourhood and community revitalization generally agree that five years is an appropriate amount of time to devote to establishing resident-led structures which are capable of supporting sustained action. ANC’s national partners were aware that a two-year project was uncomfortably short, but all had agreed that a two-year process was better than none. By the time ANC site manager Layne Schmidt was hired in July 2006, the project had only nine months left. Core Community Association (CCA) Coordinator Leila Francis was informed that ANC was moving into the Core by former United Way of Regina CEO Vic Huard.

Hired in 2001, Leila is CCA’s only full-time, salaried employee. With an annual budget

of \$50,000 provided by the City and the support of a five-member board of directors, she has worked hard to meet community needs and find partners who can help fill programming gaps.

Says Leila: “I was uncertain of what ANC was offering, and it took a while to agree on the best use of the project’s resources. Our community association was created in 1976 and we have a broad mandate to provide programs and services which are deemed relevant by residents. My focus has been on building our reputation as an organization that can get the job done. We have put a lot of things in place, always with a focus on ensuring they could be sustained, but this has meant that we have spent more energy on partnership building and less on community consultation. ANC offered us financial resources that made that work possible.”

In November 2005, CCA completed a database of every property in the Core. Part of the Core Housing Strategy, this resource stores information on every property in the Core, including a photograph and site description. It is now being expanded to support ongoing community engagement work, including the development of a ‘community switchboard’ tool which will track the presence of substandard housing conditions. The database made it easier to develop a plan for conducting resident consultation.

Leila recommended that ANC hire Core resident Brady Burnett to hear the input of as many residents as possible. Hired on July 1, he spent the next three months criss-crossing the 142-hectare neighbourhood and speaking with 436 of the Core’s 4,430 residents. After each conversation, he jotted down key points and used them as the basis of a report which he completed in September 2006. Says Leila: “Brady had the people and research skills for the job. He has a way of putting people at ease and he was very

accommodating – he met with people during the day, in the evenings and on weekends.”

Brady’s community engagement interviews centred on four issues: what people thought of the neighbourhood, what they liked, what they wanted changed and issues that had affected them personally. Says Brady: “Though I’d lived in the Core since 2002, I didn’t really feel I knew my neighbours or their concerns. Tying my work to the community association and United Way of Regina was a very good way to begin. It lent me the legitimacy I needed to engage people’s trust and interest.”

Small and large group input sessions conducted by facilitators hired by ANC increased the number of residents involved in identifying neighbourhood assets and challenges to nearly 1,000. Eighteen local business owners were also surveyed, despite a strong desire on the part of the CCA to speak with representatives from the Core’s 182 businesses – most of which are small operations which employ less than ten people. Says Leila: “Though we did not arrive at a process for canvassing the business community, the association is determined to find a way to hear these voices at some future point.”

In a weekend in October, the City of Regina held a community event to launch its Core Neighbourhood Sustainability Action Plan. Organizers decided to collaborate with ANC to make use of the community engagement work then under way. Focusing on the theme of safety and security, City staff – in conjunction with a Vancouver-based urban planning company – used large aerial maps to identify the Core’s community heart and places of work, worship, play and danger. Says Layne: “Thomson Community School principal Brent Bachiu was so supportive and welcoming of the event. The school’s community designation means that programming is

tailored to the needs of the local population. The 60 residents who attended will likely feel more comfortable coming to any future events that are held at the school, which is important given the fact that the Core possesses few meeting spaces.”

Layne produced a final report in February 2007 which synthesized Brady’s work and the input gathered through large and small group meetings. The document has helped Leila to review the Core Community Association’s programs through the lens of resident needs and opinions. Says Leila: “ANC gave us the opportunity to hear the combined voices of close to 1,000 residents that we hadn’t heard before. Their input is what will ground the City and RICCP plans for the Core and will also determine what our focus and actions will be. We can now speak more confidently of the neighbourhood’s needs and wishes.”

### *Action Grants*

ANC’s 2006 Action Grants funded several projects in the Core. Members of the CCA board of directors, Leila Francis and ANC site manager Layne Schmidt agreed that projects should be sustainable, develop participant skills and be completed by March 31, 2007. Following is a brief summary of the selected projects.

### *Communications Strategy*

The ANC engagement process showed that residents wanted more information about CCA programs and activities, as well as events in the community. In response, the CCA produced several communications tools:

- Community Switchboard – magnets with the CCA phone number were distributed to the community. The purpose was to encourage the community to report and

access information. It is hoped that these lines of communication will connect residents with the programs and services they need.

- neighbourhood signs – these were placed in the community to help publicize events, programs and involvement opportunities.
- community calendar – this was printed and distributed to the entire community.

#### *Back Alley Numbering*

Address numbers were affixed on the back of houses along Core alleyways to make it easier for emergency service workers to identify dwellings.

#### *Volunteer Recruitment Strategy*

This project linked volunteer opportunities and job descriptions to the CCA website. The goal was to match community members with opportunities that made the best use of their time and skills. The first volunteer project launched the “Community Switchboard” through a pilot project back alley garbage monitoring campaign.

#### *Leadership Development*

One of ANC’s national partners, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, conducted a workshop operated in March 2007 to give existing and potential community leaders from four of Regina’s five inner-city neighbourhoods an opportunity to envision the direction their communities.

#### *Community Beautification*

In partnership with the Inner City Youth Employment Project, this project will provide at-risk youth from the community with employment skills training. CCA will make lawnmowers available so that youth can give residents help with their yard work.

#### *Food Security*

Funds were released to purchase a new large-capacity refrigerator that will be used by both

Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger (REACH) and the CCA, which currently serves children, teens, new Canadians and adults.

#### *Star Quilt Project*

This project taught women in the Core the art of Star Quilt making, a skill that will provide them with many opportunities for economic development to help enhance their financial security.

#### *Continued North Central involvement: Tenant Survey and Communications Strategy*

In order to continue providing a level of support to issues identified in North Central by ANC in year one, Action Grant funds were released for a door-to-door survey in that neighbourhood. Tenants of rental properties were contacted and informed them of their rights and responsibilities, as well as the expectations and obligations of landlords. The survey created an opportunity for connection and a means of finding out what other needs and services might be required by community members.

#### *New understandings*

Two important lessons were confirmed in ANC’s second year in Regina. First, neighbourhood revitalization initiatives stand a better chance of success if residents or established associations are well informed of the project in advance of its arrival. It may yet prove that the best outcomes are achieved when neighbourhoods are invited to participate – rather than selected – as was the case in ANC Halifax. Regina’s Core Community Association had little option but to agree to receiving the project. Despite some initial uncertainty over the benefits of participation in ANC, however, the neighbourhood consultation project progressed. The CCA now possesses critical information about Core residents, and products and programs have been delivered courtesy of the ANC Action Grants.



“Community work rests on the foundation of relationships,” affirms Tracey Mann of United Way of Regina. “There were bumps that surprised us when we moved ANC into the Core, but in retrospect we recognize that both community associations felt that our presence was perhaps a judgment on their efforts. Keeping everyone’s mission and values aligned is ongoing, painstaking work. Conflict is unavoidable, but it also provides opportunities for getting past resistance and clearing misperceptions. All of that can lead to growth and learning.”

Second, United Way of Regina has chosen not to pursue ANC-style neighbourhood development work at this time. Instead, it will consider funding community development worker positions, though money must be channelled through neighbourhood-based charitable organizations. Says Tracey: “United Way of Regina now has much greater clarity with respect to its role in this type of project. We feel that it does not fit with our core business and that it requires a unique skill and knowledge set. We can help revitalization initiatives by working from our strengths – facilitating relationships, building community capacity and funding neighbourhood work which is specific to our priority areas. These include keeping children in school and connecting them with youth employment, helping children aged 0 to 6 and their families, and providing support for stable families in safe communities. This last priority is our closest fit to neighbourhood work and ANC has afforded us an excellent opportunity to learn about effective ways of carrying it out.”

### *Sowing seeds of change*

Glen Trafford has lived in the Core for nearly four years and has served on the CCA board for two-and-a-half years. In that time, he has been involved in a successful campaign to overturn the

Regina General Hospital’s 30-year practice of using only street parking for hospital patients and visitors. As of the spring of 2006, the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region is required to remove parking from the street and Core residents will not have to worry that character homes will be demolished in order to make space for parking lots.

Glen’s CCA involvement helped get him invited into a City-led process to review the formula by which it funds Regina’s 28 community associations. Seven years of funding formula experimentation recently concluded with what appears to be a more equitable, predictable model. Older formulas were prone to shifting budget priorities and some favoured neighbourhoods that already possessed facilities. (If a neighbourhood had a hockey rink, for example, it received more funding.) Regina’s Mayor Pat Fiacco has been concerned about improving community association operations. Says Glen: “The new formula will have a chance to prove its worth when we make submissions at the end of March. Response has been positive so far, but we’ll see whether the Core is able to get the \$55,000 we anticipate. It had not seen any funding increases for the last five years, despite obvious need.”

As a direct result of the City paying more attention to the Core – through its neighbourhood planning work, the hospital parking issue and the community association funding efforts – Glen was invited to join the RICCP executive. His progressive, solutions-focused attitude has helped further raise the Core’s profile. The City’s Core Neighbourhood Sustainability Action Plan – released in draft form – has set ambitious revitalization and development targets which draw heavily from the property inventory prepared by CCA in 2005. Glen and Layne Schmidt each made separate presentations about the Core to a design charrette hosted by the City in February. Says Glen: “The

timing of ANC's work in the neighbourhood was perfect. The RICCP and the City's plans for the Core have increased awareness of our demographics and development issues. Our improved understanding of residents' needs puts us in a position of strength when it comes to knowing what to ask for."

Glen's dream for the Core is that it secures the construction of a community centre, located in north end of the neighbourhood where poverty levels are higher and fewer services exist. Says Glen: "People need an opportunity to develop a community identity. A community centre – at its best – can act as collector of ideas and people who can get together to make things happen. It's very important that residents who live here have an opportunity to build something that lasts and that they be proud of the achievement. In 20 years, I hope that Core residents can proclaim their involvement – in whatever form it takes."

*Anne Makhoul*

#### Endnotes

1. The purpose of ANC was to work at a neighbourhood level, providing funds and partnership opportunities to help residents effect positive change. ANC also presented a structure for building collaboration across five key federal government sponsors, United Way of Canada-*Centraide Canada*, five local United Way agencies, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the National Film Board. The lessons learned by the national partners are captured in *Final Reflections from the Action for Neighbourhood Change Research Project* [Gorman 2007].

2. Two previous ANC stories about Regina can be found on the Caledon Institute and ANC websites:

*Regina Inner City Community Partnership Welcomes ANC* (October 2005).

*North Central in Regina: Keeping the Focus Where It Belongs* (April 2006).

#### Reference

Gorman, C. (2007). *Final Reflections from the Action for Neighbourhood Change Research Project*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.

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