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

This research brief is one in a series of research and best/promising practice summaries commissioned by FCSS Calgary to assist the organizations it funds to provide high-quality, evidence-based, prevention programs that contribute to the achievement of specific outcomes that will align with the social sustainability framework, strengthen neighbourhoods, and increase social inclusion among vulnerable Calgarians.

**The issue**

Research shows that people are affected by the neighbourhoods in which they live. Neighbourhood “effects,” defined as the “net change in life chances associated with living in one neighbourhood rather than another,” can be either positive or negative, although much more is known about negative than positive neighbourhood effects. There is considerable evidence that living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty can diminish the life chances of both children and adults. It is clear that neighbourhood is not as important as individual attributes, family features, socio-economic status, or macro-economic conditions, however, most researchers now agree that spatially concentrated poverty can actually cause or exacerbate social problems.

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

**highlights**

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   - fostering cohesion & inclusion
   - improving amenities, environments & economic development
Strong neighbourhoods feature:

1. high levels of social cohesion and inclusion
2. good quality built and natural environments, including housing access, affordability and quality
3. accessible, affordable, and high quality amenities, programs, and services
4. positive community economic development

While most Canadian cities have yet to experience the depth of urban decay encountered in other countries, even relatively well-off municipalities such as Calgary include low-income neighbourhoods, many of which are at risk of further decline. Data from the 2006 federal census reveal that, in 24 Calgary neighbourhoods, over one-quarter of households are living below Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO), with household poverty rates exceeding 40% in six neighbourhoods and over 50% in three of these six neighbourhoods. A trend toward increasing economic spatial segregation and isolation—that is, larger congregations and concentrations of low-income people in certain neighbourhoods, leading to greater disparity between neighbourhoods and, some contend, shrinking social capital in low-income areas—in Calgary and other major Canadian cities over the past two decades is an additional cause for concern.

While there is no single definition of a “strong” or “good” neighbourhood, it is generally agreed that strong neighbourhoods feature (i) high levels of social cohesion and inclusion; (ii) good quality built and natural environments, including housing access, affordability and quality; (iii) accessible, affordable, and high quality amenities, programs, and services; and (iv) positive community economic development. Likewise, there is no agreed-upon definition of a “poor” or “poor quality” neighbourhood. In the literature, indicators of poor neighbourhood quality include rate of concentrated poverty, unemployment rate, residential mobility rate, density of single-parent households, and crime rate. It is clear that Calgary’s lowest-income neighbourhoods lack many of the attributes of strong neighbourhoods and feature those which contribute to social exclusion, higher crime rates, and fewer job opportunities, undermining the health and well-being of both child and adult residents.

In Canada, neighbourhoods in which household poverty levels fall between 26% and 39% are often defined as “high poverty” areas. These neighbourhoods are considered to be at a threshold or “tipping point,” where neighbourhoods that are at risk of decline begin to tip downward: social and economic problems accumulate and intensify, and residents begin to move away or to be negatively affected by the place in which they live. On the other hand, tipping point neighbourhoods that are in the process of revitalization begin to tip upward, problems diminish, property values increase, and so on. The tipping point for Canadian (and European) neighbourhoods is much higher than it is for American neighbourhoods. Some American research indicates that, once the proportion of low-income residents in an American neighbourhood reaches 15%, the neighbourhood begins to discourage positive

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1 A person in low income is someone whose income falls below Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO) and this threshold is adjusted for every federal census. LICOs reflect an income level at which an individual or a family is likely to spend significantly more of its income on food, clothing and shelter than the average family. While no formal measure of poverty exists, LICO is commonly used as an acceptable measure of poverty for individuals and households, although it is not defined as such by Statistics Canada.
behaviours (such as working); when the poverty level reaches 20%, the
neighbourhood actually begins to encourage negative behaviours and problems
(such as school drop-out, crime, and increased duration of household poverty). It has
been suggested that these differences among countries may be attributable to more
extensive social, health, and other support programs in European countries and in
Canada, as compared with the United States, which are believed to mute negative
neighbourhood effects.

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

**Neighbourhood effects**

Theories about and models of neighbourhood effects, along with potential mediators
and moderators of those effects, have abounded over the past several decades.
Recent and ongoing research is beginning to identify which factors influence which
outcomes and why, although many complexities have yet to be sorted out. Very
briefly, the nature and size of neighbourhood effects vary according to what sort
of outcome is being considered, the age and other attributes of the person being
affected, and how neighbourhood is measured. The degree to which
neighbourhood “matters” largely depends on who you are and where you are. It
matters most for children, parents, seniors and other people who spend more time in
their neighbourhoods and for people whose community is primarily situated in the
neighbourhood. The main areas in which research shows that neighbourhood exerts
independent effects are adult income and employment, child and adult health, and
child and adolescent development, all of which contribute to quality of life and
overall life course. The pathways by which they appear to exert these effects are
briefly summarized below.

**Adult income and employment**

Obviously, low-income neighbourhoods are defined by the percentage of low-income
residents, but there appears to be an “additionality” about aggregations of poor
people that further entrenches their poverty and social exclusion. Research from
around the world indicates that neighbourhood poverty has genuine contextual
effects, such that a person living in a low-income neighbourhood is likely to have
worse life chances than an identical person in a better-off neighbourhood. Clearly,
neighbourhood alone cannot explain an adult’s income level or employment status,
but research shows that living in a low-income neighbourhood can create or
Residents of both high- and low-income neighbourhoods report poorer quality of life if they think that their situation compares poorly to others, or if people who are not residents of their neighbourhood perceive their neighbourhood as a bad place to live.  

Several inter-related neighbourhood-based mechanisms both fuel social exclusion and serve as barriers to escaping poverty:

**Neighbourhood isolation and stigmatization**  
Low-income neighbourhoods are often isolated from the larger community, and a neighbourhood’s poor reputation is sometimes projected on to individual residents, limiting their social mobility and chances of securing well-paid employment.  

It is speculated that the problems associated with neighbourhood stigmatization may be more prevalent and intense in American and some European cities than they are in Canada and, particularly, in Calgary. However, the issue of neighbourhood isolation in terms of a spatial mismatch between residential location and the peripheral locations of suitable jobs for unskilled workers certainly applies in Calgary. Economic geographical studies show that social conditions in low-income areas are aggravated when such jobs are difficult to access on a daily basis due to distance, which is true for some low-income neighbourhoods in this city.

People’s perceptions of individual quality of life and neighbourhood quality of life are also sensitive to how other people perceive them and their neighbourhoods. Residents of both high- and low-income neighbourhoods report poorer quality of life if they think that their situation compares poorly to others, or if people who are not residents of their neighbourhood perceive their neighbourhood as a bad place to live.

**Poor quality of and lack of access to amenities, resources, and services**  
The links between poor resources and poverty and other negative adult outcomes are usually explained in terms of an instrumental model, where the absence of institutional resources in poor neighbourhoods limits individual agency. Residents’ social exclusion is fostered by poor quality of and lack of access to neighbourhood resources including public transportation; neighbourhood maintenance; retail services; schools; health care; recreational opportunities (including natural settings); child care and other key social services; informal organizations; and employment.  

As just one example, as neighbourhoods decline, so does positive economic development: Important retail services such as banks and grocery stores are gradually replaced by payday loan companies and high-cost convenience stores and, sometimes, bars, liquor outlets, and “adult entertainment” stores, along with other less desirable services. This contributes to lower levels of neighbourhood affiliation and middle-income residents begin to leave the neighbourhood, leading to lower property values, higher concentrations of poverty, and further neighbourhood decline, at which point crime and social disorder (e.g., the sex trade, drug trafficking) can set in.
When a neighbourhood declines to this point, intensive and expensive, even Herculean, initiatives can be required to turn things around.

Canadian research shows that, nationally, residents in poor quality neighbourhoods express growing dissatisfaction in their personal life satisfaction over time, and consistently identify employment, improved finances, housing, and enhancement of services (e.g. policing, health and social services, recreation) as factors that need to be addressed to achieve improved quality of life. Problems in each of these areas undermine social cohesion, preventing residents from fully participating in social, cultural, civic and economic aspects of their communities, and improving neighbourhoods from within.

**Low levels of personal capital, social capital, and social cohesion**

In life, personal (or human) capital (education, skills, and other personal attributes) and social capital (connections and support) enable personal and economic success and social mobility. (See Research Brief 4, Positive social ties and vulnerable populations.) Residents of low-income neighbourhoods typically include high proportions of people with no or low market income, a high share of income from transfer payments made by governments, low educational attainment, and low school enrolment among adolescents and young adults. The effects of these variables are more profound when they exist in combination. In addition, many of these neighbourhoods feature high concentrations of population groups who face many social and economic barriers and are at high risk of living in poverty, including recent immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, unattached adults, and lone-parent families. Poor neighbourhoods often lack positive role models due to the absence of a successful middle class, and may feature social ties and subcultures that stress short-term goals over, for example, education. Also, because of higher levels of unemployment and lone parenthood and, sometimes, a high number of seniors, residents of low-income neighbourhoods tend to spend more time in their local areas than do residents of wealthier neighbourhoods “[and] … contacts tend to be between people with networks which do not extend into the world of work.” On the one hand, both families and individuals may be very isolated, with little connection at all to the neighbourhood in which they live. On the other hand, even if they have high levels of within-community or bonding social capital, depending on role models and peer associations, this may constrain, rather than enable, routes out of poverty.

Residents’ social exclusion is fostered by poor quality of and lack of access to neighbourhood resources including:

- public transportation
- neighbourhood maintenance
- retail services
- schools
- health care
- recreational opportunities (including natural settings)
- child care and other key social services
- informal organizations
- employment
At the neighbourhood level, social cohesion generally refers to a sense of social unity and cooperation among neighbours, and the desire and willingness to work together for the collective good of community members. Like social cohesion in general, neighbourhood cohesion has been conceptualized in many ways, but most approaches include sense of community, neighbourhood affiliation or attachment (e.g., neighbourhood pride, residential mobility rates), and neighbouring (or neighbourliness). Measures of neighbourhood cohesion generally include such things as neighbouring practices (e.g., exchanging favours), within-neighbourhood participation and volunteerism, and social networks and social support.31
“Neighbourhood capacity” refers to the ability of residents to work together to find local solutions to particular problems and to collectively influence local and higher-level change.

Without sufficient levels of neighbourhood capacity, residents are unable to mobilize around issues, to exercise the political clout required to attract public or private resources, and to forge vital connections beyond the neighbourhood.

Finally, neighbourhood cohesion is also influenced by the services and resources in the neighbourhood, as discussed above, and by the neighbourhood’s built and natural environments and economic development, discussed in the following section of this brief. As just one example, households on streets with higher traffic volume interact less with their neighbours relative to those residing on less congested streets.  

**Low neighbourhood capacity**

In general terms, “capacity” is the power or ability to use one’s own resources to achieve goals. “Capacity building” is the strengthening of the ability of people, communities and systems to plan, develop, implement and maintain effective approaches, and “community capacity” (including communities of affiliation) refers to the community’s social capital and cohesion, ability to develop or secure resources, and collective skills to bring about desired changes.

Likewise, “neighbourhood capacity” refers to the ability of residents to work together to find local solutions to particular problems and to collectively influence local and higher-level change. At risk of oversimplification, the key, overarching components of neighbourhood capacity are:

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

In low-income neighbourhoods, low levels of personal and social capital and social cohesion often mean that, individually or collectively, residents do not have the ability, skills, or resources to respond creatively and effectively to local problems and challenges. Without sufficient levels of neighbourhood capacity, residents are unable to mobilize around issues, to exercise the political clout required to attract public or private resources, and to forge vital connections beyond the neighbourhood (“bridging” social capital). As noted above, there is a bi-directional or, more likely, a multi-relational, association between low neighbourhood capacity and low sense of community and low neighbourhood affiliation, often leading to residents leaving the neighbourhood as soon as they are able.
There is considerable evidence that neighbourhood income levels have an independent influence on residents' health, and recent Canadian research indicates that this is partly due to neighbourhood contextual effects. Summarizing the literature, Hou and Chen delineate the following connections between low-income neighbourhoods and health:

- Few community resources, such as schools, recreational facilities, grocery stores, churches, public transportation, law enforcement, sanitation, and health and family services;
- Poor quality of the built and natural environment, including pollution, crowding and inferior housing;
- Stressful social conditions, including social isolation and high crime rates; and
- A high prevalence of unhealthy behaviours, including smoking, heavy drinking and lack of physical activity, as well as passive attitudes toward health and health care.

Variations in adult health based on neighbourhood residence have been documented on a wide range of outcomes, including physical health, overall mortality, health-related behavior, and mental health. As just one example among many, research revealed a high concentration of health and social problems among Montreal residents living in the city’s lowest-income areas. These residents had significantly lower life expectancies, higher rates of adolescent pregnancy, asthma, and other serious health issues, and higher rates of avoidable hospitalization and mortality rates than other neighbourhoods in Montreal and than many other Canadian cities.

Children’s health is even more likely to be compromised by neighbourhood conditions. Low-income neighbourhoods are often located near industrial areas and sites previously used for waste disposal or close to major traffic arteries, where children risk higher exposure to benzene from vehicular exhaust fumes. Contaminated soil due to industrial waste or lead is a major health hazard. Lead in soil comes from many sources including the flaking and weathering of leaded paint on houses, lead-based paint removal by sanding, leaded gasoline emissions, industrial emissions, and other emissions that have accumulated in the environment. In addition, some features of neighbourhood design can place children at risk of health problems. For example, elevated noise levels, typically from transportation, other people, and music, have been associated with children’s reading problems and intellectual deficiencies, long-term memory problems, elevated blood pressure, and motivation. Close proximity to street traffic, in addition to raising the risk of pediatric injuries, is correlated with restrictions in outdoor play among five-year-olds, smaller social networks for these children, and diminished social and motor skills.
Researchers stress that “failure to acknowledge [neighbourhood] influences may mean overlooking key factors that differentiate successful and unsuccessful low-income urban children.”

Research using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) revealed that small children were at greater risk of physical injury in low socio-economic status neighbourhoods, partly due to higher levels of family dysfunction, but also to parental perceptions about neighbourhood cohesion and neighbourhood problems. Notably, the researchers concluded that strategies to increase families’ socio-economic status, without improving parenting skills, would not lead to significant reductions in childhood injuries.

Poor quality housing, most often found in low-income neighbourhoods, can also expose children to a number of health risks. Children are placed at acute risk of respiratory problems and brain damage by contaminants such as mould, lead, asbestos, and other toxic chemicals, which are often present in older housing, furnishing, and carpets. In addition, there is an association between accidents and a greater number of hazards present in substandard housing. For example, faulty heating systems have been associated with carbon monoxide poisoning; floor furnaces, unprotected radiators and pipes, smoking materials, and tap water temperatures, which cannot always be controlled by apartment tenants. Attempts to heat substandard dwellings with kerosene and electric heaters or wood burning stoves have been associated with child burn injuries and house fires.

**Child and youth development**

For children, neighbourhood is less important than family and individual factors, but neighbourhood conditions can interact with family and individual functioning to the detriment of children’s development. Researchers stress that “failure to acknowledge [neighbourhood] influences may mean overlooking key factors that differentiate successful and unsuccessful low-income urban children.”

It should be noted from the outset that Oreopoulos, a Canadian economist, disagrees that children’s life course is influenced by living in a poor neighbourhood. Oreopoulos retrospectively analyzed the economic outcomes of adults who had grown up in Toronto. He concluded that “youths in low-income families gain no advantages from living in middle-income neighborhoods in the suburbs and no disadvantages from living in the poorest neighborhoods in downtown Toronto.” However, myriad studies from Canada and around the world have documented links between neighbourhood quality and child and youth development. A full discussion of the research is beyond the scope of this document. Briefly, repeated studies conducted in the 1990s, controlling for individual and family characteristics, revealed associations between low neighbourhood socio-economic status and young and early school-age children’s IQ, verbal ability, and reading achievement; various indicators of adolescents’ achievement (math achievement, basic skills tests, and grade point average) are
Like most risk factors, neighbourhood factors rarely, if ever, have direct effects on children. Instead, neighbourhood factors are expected to influence children primarily by triggering one or more events or processes, or a chain reaction of processes, that are more proximal to the child; it is these more proximal influences that influence child development.

Associated with educational risk, particularly for male adolescents, and higher rates of criminal and delinquent behaviours among adolescents. In addition, studies found that, controlling for individual and family factors, living among a high-concentration of low-income neighbours is associated with behavioural problems, and living among more affluent families and two-parent families has a positive effect on school readiness and the achievement outcomes of both children and adolescents.

Canadian research using data from the NLS CY has produced similar findings. One study found that school readiness was influenced by neighbourhood affluence, employment rates, and safety and cohesion, along with family characteristics including income level and parental education. For preschool children, neighbourhood effects were found to be significant, even after controlling for family SES. For toddlers, neighbourhood effects were mediated more strongly by family characteristics, suggesting an association between neighbourhood effects and child age. Other research using NLS CY data found that the strongest predictors of conduct, emotional, or hyperactivity problems among young children were a one-parent family structure and family SES, however, neighbourhood independently accounted for a small and significant part of differences. Wills' large study using data from both the NLS CY and the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) surveys concluded that "[t]he four most important family and community factors related to children's early vocabulary skills, aside from SES and number of children, were the amount that parents read to their child, the extent to which the family functioned as a cohesive unit, the degree of social support in the neighbourhood, and the stability of the neighbourhood."

Likewise, research by Hertzman and colleagues on Vancouver neighbourhoods and children's development revealed strong associations between children's development and the socio-economic status and other features of the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Low neighbourhood income was clearly paralleled by developmental vulnerabilities among children. Consistent with previous research cited above showing that children in low socio-economic status families can benefit from the presence of more affluent neighbours, Hertzman found that Vancouver children from families with socio-demographic risks (e.g., low-income, single-parent, low-education, etc.) who lived in mixed-income or more affluent neighborhoods did not appear to be at as high a developmental risk as their counterparts in low SES neighbourhoods.

Although all of the pathways by which neighbourhoods influence child and youth development have yet to be sorted out, it is generally agreed that they are multi-directional and they are mediated and moderated by a variety of other variables.
As summarized by Roosa and colleagues, “[l]ike most risk factors, neighbourhood factors rarely, if ever, have direct effects on children. Instead, neighbourhood factors are expected to influence children primarily by triggering one or more events or processes, or a chain reaction of processes, that are more proximal to the child; it is these more proximal influences that influence child development.”

Brooks-Gunn and others suggest that the mechanisms through which neighborhoods may influence children and youth include:

- **Institutional resources**: availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of learning, social, and recreational activities, child care, after-school programs, schools, health care, and employment opportunities present in the community;

- **Relationships**: parental characteristics (mental health, irritability, coping skills, efficacy, and physical health), support networks available to parents, parental behaviour (responsivity/warmth, harshness/control, and supervision/monitoring), and the quality and structure of the home environment; and

- **Norms/collective efficacy**: the extent to which community-level formal and informal institutions exist to supervise and monitor the behavior of residents, particularly youths’ activities (e.g., willingness to intervene), along with the presence of physical risk to residents, especially children and youth (e.g., violence and victimization, harmful substances).

These mechanisms can interact in various ways to the benefit or detriment of healthy child development. Studies exploring such interactions number in the hundreds; just a few examples are offered here. First, low-income parents sometimes use more harsh and punitive parenting practices than middle- and upper-income parents (see Research Brief 2, Positive parenting and family functioning) and good parenting, including strong discipline, may be even more important in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where concerns about negative social influences, lower willingness among neighbours to intervene, and concerns about safety can be higher than in a middle-income neighbourhood.

Second, the degree to which long-term poverty influences child outcomes varies according to the characteristics of neighbourhoods, including the degree to which neighbourhoods are socially organized, cohesive, and supportive of families raising children. Some research has shown that improving neighbourhood conditions can “facilitate the transmission of family resources into positive youth outcomes, suggesting that efforts focused on improving neighborhood conditions could have far-reaching, positive implications.”

As a final example, a large and recent American study found that alcohol use among 8th grade students was correlated with the number of stores selling alcohol and exposure to alcohol advertisements in the neighbourhood, but that the students’ use of alcohol was also mediated, both positively and negatively, by family management practices and access to alcohol at home.
Summary of neighbourhood effects

The research shows evidence of neighbourhood effects, although they are not always direct, on adult and child health, child and youth development, and employment and income, all of which influence overall life course and quality of life. It would be wrong to conclude that neighbourhood effects fully determine life course; other factors, particularly personal and family characteristics, are more important in shaping outcomes for children, families, and individuals. In addition, caution must be exercised in making inferences to Canadian neighbourhoods from research completed in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, it is reasonable to conclude that, in Canada, neighbourhood makes incremental contributions to human and social capital over the whole life span that influence one’s chances in life. Although there remain unanswered questions about precisely how the pathways between neighbourhood and life course work, we do know that outcomes in all of these areas can be compromised by living in a poor neighbourhood, and we do have enough information to inform the development of programs and policies to strengthen neighbourhoods.

The connection between neighbourhood and poverty appears to be social exclusion, which is fuelled by neighbourhood isolation and stigmatization; poor quality and lack of access to community resources and services; low personal and positive social capital; and low neighbourhood capacity. As discussed earlier, the pathways by which deprived neighbourhoods influence health include poor quality of and lack of access to community resources and services; poor quality of the built and natural environment; stressful social conditions; and a high prevalence of unhealthy behaviours. The pathways by which neighborhoods influence child and youth development include resources and services; relationships, particularly family strength, parenting, and the quality and structure of the home environment; and community norms and collective efficacy.

There is considerable overlap among these pathways, which is helpful in identifying the best means of intervening to build strong neighbourhoods for the benefit of all residents and the city as whole. The pathways may be grouped under the four components or dimensions of strong neighbourhoods. Taking action to improve outcomes in any one of these four areas also improves outcomes in the other areas. As discussed below, building neighbourhood capacity—the capacity of residents themselves—to mobilize and respond more effectively to neighbourhood issues and challenges is a prerequisite to other neighbourhood strengthening initiatives.
Efforts to revitalize neighbourhoods are rarely guided by a strictly-defined model; rather, the emphasis is on involving residents in a process to build social and human capital and foster collaboration among residents, community organizations, and sources of support, expertise, and power beyond the neighbourhood to improve neighbourhood conditions and, ultimately, improve the quality of life and life course of those who live there. What works in one place may not necessarily work in another.

Strengthening neighbourhoods

Overview

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

Efforts to revitalize neighbourhoods are rarely guided by a strictly-defined model; rather, the emphasis is on involving residents in a process to build social and human capital and foster collaboration among residents, community organizations, and sources of support, expertise, and power beyond the neighbourhood to improve neighbourhood conditions and, ultimately, improve the quality of life and life course of those who live there. What works in one place may not necessarily work in another.

Strengthening neighbourhoods is not a “magic bullet” that will prevent or redress all social ills. It is recognized that the primary source of poverty generally lies outside poor neighbourhoods, and sustained governmental intervention is needed to ensure a basic quality of life for Canadians via adequate health care, education, income, and social services which, concurrently, foster social and residential mobility and reduce and prevent spatially-concentrated poverty and to ensure that low-income families and individuals can obtain supports and services wherever they live. For the most part, such programs are the responsibility of federal, provincial and, sometimes, to a lesser extent, municipal governments, but there is also a compelling need for local action to raise public awareness, influence the national and provincial policy agenda, and ensure the coordination of these structural measures with urban and other place-based initiatives, both within and among municipalities.

That being said, the place-based approach to building and sustaining strong neighbourhoods by creating lasting changes in community conditions is a vital component of a broader social inclusion strategy and a means of directly improving residents’ lives. This approach may be particularly important in cities like Calgary where, as noted earlier, economic spatial segregation, and its attendant problems, is on the rise.
Neighbourhood projects must be initiated by residents in response to the issues they identify. External organizations must refrain from driving the community.

Key learnings from neighbourhood strengthening initiatives:

- **Strengthening neighbourhoods takes a long time, though there can be some “quick fixes” that have a significant short-term impact.**
  
  Depending on neighbourhood conditions and pre-existing capacity, efforts to strengthen social capital and social cohesion, and mobilize communities to address even simple issues can take between three and 10 years. Simply completing a community assessment and planning activities usually takes at least two years. Some social capital projects can have a profound impact in a much shorter time period. Again depending on neighbourhood capacity, comprehensive community economic development initiatives can take more than 10 years.

- **There is no single best approach to strengthening neighbourhoods.**
  
  Determining how to proceed requires that the neighbourhood be assessed in terms of its social and demographic profile, current capacities, neighbourhood conditions and, most important, the needs and desires of residents. Funders or other external players must not draw a specific blueprint for neighbourhood building.

- **It is vital that neighbourhood building is driven and led by residents, rather than people from external organizations.**
  
  Resident “ownership” is essential to the success of any initiative, regardless of its scope. Neighbourhood projects must be initiated by residents in response to the issues they identify. External organizations must refrain from driving the community. Project leaders must be perceived by other residents as being legitimate community representatives. Leaders should include people from multiple sectors and should represent the diversity of the local community (for example, Aboriginal people, members of non-dominant ethno-cultural groups, youth). It is often essential to invest in initiatives that focus on fostering and nurturing new leaders from within the neighbourhood.

- **Neighbourhood strengthening initiatives should be spearheaded and managed by existing or ad-hoc neighbourhood organizations, or multiple residents’ organizations working in collaboration as a steering committee. However, many supports may be required to assist such entities in moving forward. All initiatives should include a capacity-building component.**
  
  It can’t be assumed that existing community associations in low-income neighbourhoods have the capacity to take on issues or projects, or that they are viable mechanisms for promoting resident participation in neighbourhood affairs. Community associations or other neighbourhood bodies that represent residents may require assistance to carry out their own neighbourhood planning efforts, help them to find partners to help implement the plans, and assist in brokering workable partnership and funding agreements.
Key learnings from neighbourhood strengthening initiatives

- There is no single best approach.
- It can take a long time, e.g., 3-10 years.
- It must be driven by residents.
- It requires strong neighbourhood-based leaders.
- It must be comprehensive, not addressing one single, specific problem.
- It should build capacity and structures so that changes last.
- It must be linked to broader, city-wide policies and initiatives.
- Additional, external resources are generally required to initiate change—the lower the initial capacity, the more resources required.

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

The following three learnings have been reproduced from Comprehensive Community Initiatives by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.  

- Neighbourhood initiatives must be holistic.
  “There is a need to try to identify the links among various issues. It is then critical to engage diverse sectors to tackle the complexities involved in the social, economic and environmental challenges the community seeks to address.”

- Neighbourhood initiatives are developmental.
  Efforts are “not simply remedial interventions which seek to reduce or compensate for identified problems. Rather, these efforts aim to build the capacity of the community in a positive way from the perspective of decision-making and resilience. Decision-making capacity is important in that it can apply to a wide range of issues and not just the one area that has been identified as the focus of the work. Resilience is crucial because it helps the community withstand the stresses and strains that inevitably arise from economic, social, environmental or political pressures.”

  “Another important feature of comprehensive community initiatives is that they focus on the assets and resources embedded in communities. These approaches tend not to view a community from the lens of its weaknesses. Instead, they affirm its strengths and build on these to expand local capacity and opportunities. Moreover, these initiatives seek to help low-income households, in particular, build assets so that they can make choices about their future. Following the approach popularized by John McKnight, comprehensive community initiatives often use asset-mapping techniques as a way to surface the embedded strengths of communities—their natural assets as well as their citizens and institutions.”

- Neighbourhood initiatives are concerned with process and outcome.
  “Comprehensive community initiatives must have a sense of what they are seeking to achieve. They must set clear goals, carefully track their work and try to the best of their ability to reach their designated targets. But the process by which these goals are reached is equally important. The real value-added of comprehensive community initiatives is to establish effective structures that can enable the community to reduce poverty, change policy and introduce innovation. They help build the capacity of the community to solve problems and take concrete steps toward improving its economic, social and environmental well-being. In fact, improved process may be a major outcome of the community effort.”
Neighbourhood can be “an important component of a competitive social and economic world; a reservoir of resources into which we can ‘dip’ in pursuing our lives; an influence upon our lifestyle and life-outcome; a ‘shaper’ of who we are, both as defined by ourselves and by others; and an important arena for public policy intervention.”

Strengthening Neighbourhoods: Theory of Change used by The City of Calgary, Community and Neighbourhood Services

The lives of Calgarians can be improved by changing community conditions to sustain and strengthen tipping point neighbourhoods. An extensive body of research shows evidence of neighbourhood effects, although they are not always direct, on adult and child health, child and youth development, and adult employment and individual and family income, all of which influence overall life course and quality of life. In other words, a neighbourhood can contribute to, perhaps even cause, the social exclusion of those who live in it. On the other hand, as eloquently summarized by Kearns and Parkinson, neighbourhood can be “an important component of a competitive social and economic world; a reservoir of resources into which we can ‘dip’ in pursuing our lives; an influence upon our lifestyle and life-outcome; a ‘shaper’ of who we are, both as defined by ourselves and by others; and an important arena for public policy intervention.”

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

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

- **The neighbourhood has sufficient, accessible, and quality services, amenities, and infrastructure.**
  
  This includes social, health, education, employment, childcare, and other services, along with amenities, such as public transit, libraries, schools, community centres, parks, and recreational facilities and programs.

- **The neighbourhood has healthy and safe natural and built environments.**
  
  This includes land uses to enable appropriate development; adequate housing for a range of household types and income levels; environmental considerations such as parks and open spaces, along with air, soil and water quality; infrastructure such as police, fire, and EMS hubs; and community design that promotes safety, health, and active living.

- **The neighbourhood fosters, attracts, and sustains appropriate business and economic development.**
  
  Community economic development is the process by which neighbourhoods can initiate and generate their own solutions to economic problems. This includes (i) residents’ individual capacities to be self-sufficient and (ii) the neighbourhood’s economic climate, which encourages “appropriate” businesses, such as banks, grocery stores, and theatres, and discourages a high concentration of businesses such as adult entertainment stores, liquor stores, and so on. In the longer run, CED may also include (iii) enterprises developed by and run in the neighbourhood that employ residents.

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

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

The research is clear that neighbourhood strengthening initiatives must be led by residents. This means that residents must have the collective capacity to identify and address problems in their neighbourhood. Low-income neighbourhoods often lack the capacity to even begin this process. Assisting residents to build neighbourhood capacity is one of the areas in which CNS will play a vital role and is the first priority for action in the focus neighbourhoods. CNS will also encourage the development of neighbourhood-based initiatives as identified by residents and stakeholders to increase positive social ties, increase adults’ personal capacity and economic self-sufficiency, improve family cohesion and parenting skills, and improve child and youth developmental outcomes.
Building neighbourhood capacity

Academic research and myriad practical examples from other cities in Canada and around the world reveal that successful neighbourhood-based community development must be driven by residents, who work together to identify and address problems and to ensure that the four components of strong neighbourhoods are in place. Residents’ participation “is a major method for improving the quality of physical environment, enhancing services, preventing crime, and improving social conditions.” However, many neighbourhoods lack the capacity to even begin the community development process.

Although there is no single model for neighbourhood development or capacity building, it generally involves equipping people with skills and competencies that they would not otherwise have, realizing existing skills and developing potential, promoting increased self-confidence, promoting people’s ability to take responsibility for identifying and meeting their own and other people’s needs, and encouraging people to become more involved in their neighbourhood and in the broader society. In other words, neighbourhood capacity building involves skill development, but it is also intertwined with neighbourhood cohesion and inclusion: Capacity and cohesion are mutually reinforcing.

Getting to the point where capacity building can actually occur requires many residents to be interested and engaged in what is happening in their neighbourhood, and this, in turn, requires vehicles and opportunities for engagement. Common early engagement strategies include involving residents in a community mapping or self-assessment process, surveying residents about their needs and ideas, and organizing residents to engage in small, achievable neighbourhood improvements, at least to begin with (e.g., a crosswalk, improved lighting, BlockWatch). Residents who may not be long-standing neighbourhood leaders are encouraged to take responsibility for aspects of the projects to help to increase their leadership skills.

Challenges to engaging residents in issues that affect them can include:

- the process of learning about civil society, such as how boards of directors operate, the importance of volunteerism in building social networks, how school councils work and the procedures of local government;
- understanding the dynamics of how to work together to solve a local problem or develop a strategy to meet their own needs;
- the process of developing neighbourhood leadership;
- sustaining long-term commitment; and
- providing outreach and support, such as child care and transportation to community members.

• Level 1 Community Capacity: Neighbourhood residents have access to some quality resources and services and external support, and within-neighbourhood social capital and social cohesion is sufficient that relationships exist among some residents, leaders are beginning to emerge from within the neighbourhood, and basic processes are in place for residents to come together to identify and discuss issues.

• Level 2 Community Capacity: Residents are able to acquire and manage funding from grants, contracts, loans and other sources; work with other institutions both within and outside the community; design and deliver programs; operate a fully functional board of directors which manages finances responsibly; and represent the neighbourhood credibly and advocate effectively in larger political arenas.
Strengthening neighbourhood initiatives are generally spearheaded by a group of neighbourhood leaders. As explained by Torjman, “[t]his governing body assumes responsibility for acting as champion of the identified issue[s], convening key players, setting out a vision for the effort and associated strategic plan, and acting as the liaison between the broader community (including the media) and the local initiative. At the very least, the coordinating mechanism is multi-organizational in nature; at best, it is multi-sectoral in that it engages representatives of diverse sectors including citizens and citizens’ organizations, governments, business and the voluntary sector.”

It should be recognized from the outset that existing community associations may not represent all community members, in which case efforts should be made to engage leaders from groups who are not part of the community association (e.g., faith, seniors, and ethnocultural groups). In addition, “a successful steering committee needs a sufficiently large critical mass to adapt to changing needs of neighbourhoods and to survive through changes in funding and service patterns.”

Case studies of comprehensive community initiatives in the U.S. have shown that it easier to build associational networks among residents by targeting specific neighbourhood issues, rather than by direct efforts to create intimate ties among individuals. As pointed out by the U.S. Local Initiatives Support Corporation, “[t]he semantics of ‘community building’ can sometimes give the impression that the task is mostly personal, involving discussions and social gatherings in which people supposedly get to know and trust one another. In reality, comprehensive community initiatives generally ‘build community’ by pursuing concrete projects — anti-crime projects, graffiti removal, policy advocacy, retail promotion, and so on. People’s time and trust aren’t long engaged by mere talk, no matter how friendly. The activities produce the social network, not the other way around.”

Some of the ways in which paid staff can assist in capacity-building efforts include convening and covering the cost of meetings; providing research; teaching and helping with resident engagement strategies, leadership development, project management, and policy development and strategies; technical assistance (e.g., social issues, funding); and managing information and information flow.
"The semantics of ‘community building’ can sometimes give the impression that the task is mostly personal, involving discussions and social gatherings in which people supposedly get to know and trust one another. In reality, comprehensive community initiatives generally ‘build community’ by pursuing concrete projects—anti-crime projects, graffiti removal, policy advocacy, retail promotion, and so on. People’s time and trust aren’t long engaged by mere talk, no matter how friendly. The activities produce the social network, not the other way around."

**Capacity building 1-2-3**

1. **Increase basic community capacity by:**
   - providing resources and support,
   - developing and diffusing neighbourhood leadership, and
   - building processes for resident participation.

2. **Take the first steps toward increasing social cohesion and social capital by engaging residents and building connections among neighbours via:**
   - sense of community projects (e.g., neighbourhood spring clean-up, block parties),
   - neighbouring projects (e.g., snow shovelling for seniors), and
   - empowerment projects (e.g., small neighbourhood improvement projects that are likely to be successful and involve influencing an external player, such as changing parking zoning or having stop signs installed).

3. **Increase residents’ capacity to mobilize for change via:**
   - building organizational capacity,
   - building networks outside the neighbourhood, and
   - developing policy capacity.

**Fostering neighbourhood cohesion and inclusion**

As noted earlier, increasing neighbourhood cohesion is the flip side of capacity building. Neighbourhood cohesion leads to decreased social problems, such as crime and social disorder. For example, as noted by Savoie, “high neighbourhood crime rates appear to reflect the absence, disruption or ineffectiveness of social networks that enable people to participate in the community and exert social control. Crime would appear to be a symptom of social exclusion, with social exclusion in turn blocking neighbourhood residents from exerting social control.”90 As discussed earlier, social control and the monitoring of residents’ (and especially, children and youth’s) activities and the willingness to intervene supports positive child and youth outcomes, both directly, by helping to keep kids safe and out of trouble, and indirectly, when neighbourhoods are cohesive and supportive of families raising children.

High neighbourhood cohesion also increases collective efficacy and allows residents to begin to draw on resources and relationships, grow their own leaders, and build processes for people to participate in broader community development, from raising funds and building playgrounds to challenging or enforcing municipal bylaws and other legislation.

Increasing social cohesion usually occurs through concrete, collective activities, rather than community events and celebrations. For example, Vancouver’s Food Policy and approach to urban agriculture to provide an increased number of community gardens in neighbourhoods is one type of activity that helped to build social cohesion through recreation and non-profit governance of the garden, in addition to providing the opportunity to citizens to grow their own food in an urban environment.91
The Community Toolbox is a website promoting community health and development by connecting people, ideas, and resources. Tools include information about developing a strategic plan, recruiting members, organizing effective advocacy, and promoting institutionalization of the initiative.

The Community Tool Box is available at [http://ctb.ku.edu](http://ctb.ku.edu)

A few ideas for increasing social capital and neighbourhood cohesion from 150 Ways to Build Social Capital:

- organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbour
- attend community meetings
- support local merchants
- volunteer special skills to an organization or a school
- start a community garden
- mentor someone of a different ethnic or religious group
- start a fix-it group: neighbours willing to help each other clean, paint, garden, etc.
- organize a neighbourhood yard sale
- assist with or create a neighbourhood newsletter
- offer to watch a neighbour’s home while they are away
- shovel snow or rake leaves for an elderly neighbour

Improving amenities, programs, and services

Amenities, programs, and services include a range of resources that are required by and are often lacking in low-income neighbourhoods. These include services such as family support, child and youth development programs, social services and health care; amenities such as recreation facilities and programs, and libraries; local employment; and public transit. While some of these resources may be present, they may not be of sufficient quality or may be inaccessible to residents for various reasons.

As mentioned earlier, Calgary's poorest neighbourhoods are far from the peripheral locations where jobs suitable for unskilled workers tend to be found. This can mean that these jobs are not accessible to residents, because transit service may not start early enough in the day to get people to work on time. Lack of accessible, quality childcare available very early in the morning compounds these challenges.

Efforts toward improving service quality and accessibility can be successfully spearheaded by neighbourhood leaders in conjunction with funders external to the community. Help from funders and/or elected officials may be required if improvements require relocating existing services, developing new services, or integrating existing and new services. For example, existing services may include cross-community services, such as food assistance programs, arts and youth development programs; government services such as provincial Seniors and Community Supports, community health centres and long-term care facilities, municipal Community and Neighbourhood Services, and not-for-profit social service agencies.
Success Story: Increasing Neighbourhood Capacity

Scarborough Village, Toronto

In 2005, as recommended in the report of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, Strong Neighbourhoods – A Call To Action, the City of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto launched comprehensive and complementary strategies to strengthen 13 low-income neighbourhoods at risk of further decline in Toronto. The City established Neighbourhood Action Teams in each of the 13 neighbourhoods, comprised of City staff, residents, and representatives from school boards, local institutions, and community agencies, to identify opportunities and coordinate investment in new and enhanced service infrastructure, increase youth opportunities, and build neighbourhood capacity. The United Way, first with federal funding and then, when federal funding expired, with United Way dollars, launched an Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) initiative to build resident structures to lead change and to build community hubs in each priority neighbourhood. The Province of Ontario joined the effort by funding 40 new youth outreach workers and a youth summer employment program in the neighbourhoods.

Scarborough Village, a low-income, transient neighbourhood with a high proportion of new immigrants, was the first ANC pilot neighbourhood in Toronto. ANC staff helped residents to identify community needs and possible solutions, nurtured neighbourhood-based leadership and resident-led change, and connected local residents and businesses to each other and to a range of available programs and services, leading to the creation of a residents’ association, which decides what needs to be done. Between 2005 and 2007, residents built a playground and a perennial garden in a barren park; initiated monthly street cleanups; created a toy-lending library; introduced homework and tutoring programs; developed and offered workshops in several languages on such things as tenant rights; and established a youth leadership program and a youth council, youth basketball camps, a community cricket program, and a summer festival that attracts over 3,000 people. Since 2007, resident-initiated programming has expanded dramatically to include such things as a community garden and self-employment programs.


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

Improving built and natural environments

In addition to health and safety, the quality of a neighbourhood’s built and natural environments affects social cohesion. A neighbourhood’s natural environment includes the quality of the soil, air, and water, each of which can be influenced, for example, by the amount of vehicular traffic in and around the neighbourhood, the age of the neighbourhood and previous uses of the land, and the proportion of green space and volume of trees in the neighbourhood.

Housing is considered to be a feature of a neighbourhood’s built environment. In addition to the health and other consequences of poor quality housing, research indicates that the type of housing, length of residence in that housing, and residents’ perceptions about their housing appear to influence perceptions about neighbourhoods and the way residents interact with their neighbours. Higher-density housing, with smaller houses on smaller lots mixed closely with low-rise apartments and multi-level buildings and well-landscaped lots, provides both privacy and sense of community, and short building setbacks and front porches and balconies near the street encourage community interaction. For example, residents, visitors, and international studies agree that Vancouver’s densification plan, guided by “complete neighbourhood” and “pedestrian first” policies, has improved quality of life in affected neighbourhoods. However, housing density...
Success Story: Increasing Social Cohesion

Point Douglas, Winnipeg

Tremendous improvements in neighbourhood safety and social cohesion have been realized through a resident-led, neighbourhood development process in Point Douglas, a very low-income and formerly troubled inner-city neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Sparked by a small group of people, residents began meeting in 2007 to discuss high levels of crime in the neighbourhood. Many residents were quickly engaged in a process to “take back” the neighbourhood, which began with a system allowing residents to send emails or make phone calls anonymously to report criminal or suspicious activities and which, in turn, increased police presence in the neighbourhood. Soon, residents also adopted a “zero tolerance attitude” toward derelict properties and social disorder. They pressured City Hall to enforce existing bylaws and slum landlords were forced to repair or close properties and shut down crack houses. Members of the neighbourhood’s safety team started talking to drug dealers as they tried to sell their drugs. As the drug dealers, prostitutes, and addicts began to leave, the neighbourhood became safer and violence declined. People began congregating in parks, walking their dogs, and sitting on their porches, and the increased level of resident activity further discouraged negative elements in the neighbourhood. In addition, new, “family-friendly,” businesses have now begun moving into the neighbourhood.

Community involvement dramatically increased between 2007 and 2009. The Point Douglas Residents Committee (PDRC), established in the 1970s, now has numerous committees actively addressing such concerns as safety, housing, environmental issues, and recreation. New initiatives include an annual survey of residents to identify and meet community needs; a survey of local businesses to meet their needs, address their concerns, and provide opportunities for community involvement; an annual summer fest; community economic development initiatives; a traffic and safety improvement initiative; development of a provincial park in the neighbourhood; youth employment opportunities; and a Welcome Neighbour program to welcome new residents and provide them with the necessary resources and information to make them feel at home.


that is too high can be detrimental: Controlling for socio-economic status, residents of multi-family homes, compared with single-family homes, report greater marital and parent-child conflict, and high-rise housing has been associated with less socially supportive relationships with neighbours.96 In addition, very high-density housing developments are sometimes, although certainly not always, associated with crime.97

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

- Street characteristics that discourage heavy vehicular traffic, such as discontinuous street patterns and narrow roads. These features encourage informal contacts among neighbours “that develop into social networks [and] are at the root of feelings of belonging and security, which are prime factors in resident satisfaction.” 98 In addition, households on streets with higher traffic volume interact less with their neighbours relative to those residing on less congested streets.99
- Pedestrian-oriented design and “wheel-oriented” design, for bicycles, wheelchairs, and strollers, with pathways connecting all neighbourhood uses and with the majority of parking behind buildings, to improve safety, noise levels, and encourage social contact among residents and healthy activity levels.100
- Green space has been found to have social and psychological benefits and “provides visual relief and opportunity for relaxation, becomes a place for casual contacts, and forms a haven for kid’s play.” 101 In addition, research shows that proximity to green space and trees in neighbourhoods serves to buffer both adults and children from stress and adversity.102 However, if poorly designed and supervised, green space can become a locale for crime and drug use.103
- Public art, featured prominently, and arts and cultural activities help to bring people together, draw newcomers into the community, and provide opportunities for learning and communication.104
- The application of environmental design principles that help to prevent crime, which is often called CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles.
- Physically- and visually-accessible public spaces, located along major pedestrian thoroughfares, to serve as focal and gathering places for community events and activities.105
Pathways Mapping Initiative

The Pathways Mapping Initiative (PMI) is a website that provides research, practice, theory, and policy about what it takes to improve the lives of children, youth, and families, particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods. By laying out a comprehensive, coherent array of actions, PMI informs efforts to improve neighborhood conditions within supportive policy and funding contexts.

PMI's work is based on the conviction that neighborhoods, funders, and policymakers will be able to act most effectively when they can combine local wisdom and their understanding of local circumstances with “actionable intelligence”: the accumulated knowledge about what has worked elsewhere, what is working now, and what appears promising.

The PMI framework does not promote a single formula or program. Rather, the emphasis is on acting strategically across disciplines, systems, and jurisdictions to achieve one or more of the following results:

- More children ready for school and succeeding at third grade
- More young people who make a successful transition to young adulthood
- Fewer children abused or neglected

From www.pathwaystooutcomes.org

The social value of public spaces has been of particular interest in the United Kingdom, where research has helped to clarify the ways in which good public spaces can contribute to social inclusion, social capital development, and sense of community and neighborhood attachment. The idea of public space is not limited to traditional outdoor spaces, such as parks; it includes “gatherings at the school gate, activities in community facilities, shopping malls, cafés and car boot [garage] sales... where people meet and create places of exchange. To members of the public, it is not the ownership of places or their appearance that makes them “public,” but their shared use for a diverse range of activities by a range of different people.”

For example, British research has found that street markets which, admittedly, are not common in Canadian neighbourhoods, are crucial social hubs in the daily lives of seniors, “more important than for any other group.”

As summarized by Worpole and Knox, research indicates that “successful” social spaces in England:

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

Improving economic development

In its broadest form, a community economic development (CED) strategy is “a comprehensive, multi-purpose social and economic strategy, conceived and directed locally, aimed at systematic revitalization and renewal.” Very briefly, CED strategies are generally initiated and operated by community economic development organizations (CEDOs) in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments and the private sector. CEDOs work for structural change, seek to attract new businesses to the community, and encourage training and employment for local residents. Depending on neighborhood capacity, CED strategies can take more than 10 years to come to fruition. Each stage of development requires different forms of support to nurture the neighbourhood...
A Work in Progress: Improved Built and Natural Environments

Regent Park, Toronto

Built 50 years ago, Regent Park in Toronto is one of the oldest publicly-funded housing projects in Canada. With 2,100 rent-geared-to-income units, Regent Park is home to 7,500 people, most of whom are low-income, 50% of whom are children under 18 years of age, and more than half of whom are immigrants. Crime rates are high, education levels are low and the neighbourhood has been rapidly deteriorating, physically, socially, and economically.

In recent years, from a neighbourhood development, Regent Park has been best known as the pilot site of the successful Pathways to Education Program, which reduced high school drop-out rates from 56% to 10%, reduced absenteeism by 50% and increased post-secondary enrollment rates from 20% to 80%. However, many other resident-led, community-building initiatives over the past 15 years have resulted in other major successes, including a new community health centre in 1999, followed by a broad range of other programs and initiatives.

Now, a revitalization plan first envisioned and sought by residents in 1995 is coming to fruition. In 2004, Ideas that Matter hosted a community meeting to solicit input on the community plan. For the first time in history, virtually the entire community came together and expressed support for the plan to physically and socially revitalize Regent Park. This led to a two-year process led by Toronto Community Housing, in direct consultation with community residents, which culminated in a $1.5 billion social and physical revitalization plan for the community. The plan is based on the principle of creating a healthy community and reintegrating it with the surrounding city, and includes street redesign and park spaces; employment, education, culture and community facilities and programs; and housing. The 2,087 subsidized rental units are being replaced in phases to accommodate 12,500 people in over 5,000 subsidized rental units, affordable purchase units, and market units.

The entire revitalization plan is not scheduled for completion until 2017, but the first buildings, with rent-geared-to-income units, affordable rental units, and units catering to seniors were completed 2009.

See www.torontohousing.ca; www.tamarackcommunity.ca for a point of systematic self-evaluation to the final stage of fostering financial capital through various means such as tax incentive programs and community-based loan funds.112 Very large and comprehensive community economic development strategies are one of the cornerstones of neighbourhood building programs in the U.S., the U.K., and some neighbourhoods in Canada. Such comprehensive CED initiatives require a relatively high level of neighbourhood capacity in several domains:

**Required capacities for comprehensive community economic development**

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

Clearly, comprehensive CED initiatives should not be considered during the early stages of a neighbourhood strengthening initiative.114 That being said, there are other aspects of CED that require only moderate neighbourhood capacity and some support from funders and other stakeholders, including job training and placement, job creation and retention, and self-employment and community-based finance strategies, all of which may be inter-connected.115 Other small, more focused, initiatives include micro-lending programs for businesses or individuals; skill-building opportunities (job training, academic upgrading, accreditation, life skills), and removing direct barriers to working (e.g., child care, transportation. (See Research Brief 3, Adult personal capacity and individual and family economic self-sufficiency.)
Success Story:  
Focused Community Economic Development

Inner City Development (ICD) Inc., Winnipeg

Inner City Development Inc. (ICD) is a social enterprise incorporated in 2002. ICD is a corporation providing construction, janitorial and property management services, primarily but not exclusively, to the non-profit sector in Winnipeg’s inner city. The mission of Inner City Development is to provide quality full time employment for inner city low income residents and quality services to inner city non-profit community organizations. ICD provides better-than-average sector wages and benefits and provides education and training, leading to skills and certification to its workers. It does this through the operation of Inner City Renovation Inc. (ICR). ICR is a general contractor and construction manager. It offers a complete range of services in the commercial and residential markets. Projects have ranged in size from a few thousand dollars to more than half a million dollars.

In 2005 in their sample group of 14 individuals (46% of whom had not finished high school and 50% of whom had criminal records) ICD had the following successes:

In terms of Social Return On Investment (SROI) the average change in societal contribution per participant of the difference between the direct societal ‘cost’ or ‘benefit’ contributed by the employee before versus after hire was $9,700 (Annual Government Financial Assistance Before Hire - Annual Income Tax Paid Before Hire + Annual Income Tax Paid After Hire). Therefore the total cost savings to society of the 14 people participating in the program was $135,800 (the dollars saved that year by employing target group and eliminating or lessening government financial assistance).

Using the Sustainable Livelihoods framework the following outcomes occurred:

- Established multi-stakeholder partnership to deliver Canada’s first company run savings/asset development program
- ICR target employee completed first year apprenticeship and earned one of the highest grades in the class
- Two target employees formally recognized by Aboriginal community at Elders ceremony
- Target employee able to be reunited with his children because of his now stable livelihood


Success Story:  
Comprehensive Community Economic Development

Regroupement Economique et Social du Sud-Ouest de Montréal (RESO)

Regroupement Economique et Social du Sud-Ouest de Montréal (RESO) is a community economic development (CED) corporation in Montréal that seeks to “mobilize the Sud-Ouest community around development strategies and projects so that it takes an active part in creating its economic, social and cultural future in a context that is sustainable, equitable and built on the commitment and consultation of the population and social and economic partners.”

RESO was established in 1989 to revitalize six neighbourhoods within a borough in social and economic decline. The borough includes a high proportion of low-income households, adults with low education levels, two-parent and lone-parent families, and renters. RESO is a non-profit organization run by residents representing a wide range of constituencies. One of RESO’s primary strategies has been engagement of the business sector as CED consultants and in tackling issues such as employability, labour market services, services to businesses, land use, development of infrastructure, and promotion of the area. All initiatives have had a strong social inclusion component. Another has been to support community organizations and social economy enterprises to create and maintain lasting jobs that produce goods and services with social or collective utility; offer development and employability activities to unemployed residents, and support community sector professional development activities. In addition, RESO provides loans up to $25,000 for business start-up and strengthening.

In the 1990s, RESO succeeded in reopening the Lachine Canal, attracting real estate development, launching and sustaining several social economy projects, and bringing new businesses into the community, including construction; retail, services, education, and health services; film, video, music and recording industries; information technology; design; architecture; and management. Between 1996 and 2003, employment rates in the borough increased by 28%, although education levels remain poor. Current priorities for action include, but are not limited to, collective entrepreneurship, including social economy enterprises and community organizations in development; local initiatives in workforce development (including employability and training activities, and training for personnel of community organizations and enterprises); job creation activities; and increases in affordable housing.

From www.resomtl.com
In this document:

- “Evidence-based” means that a program or practice has been tested in a well-designed and methodologically sound (ideally but not necessarily, experimental (RCT) or quasi-experimental) study (ideally, but not necessarily, more than one study and replicated in more than one site), and has been shown to produce significant reductions in poor outcomes or associated risk factors or significant increases in positive outcomes or associated protective factors.

- “Best practices” refer to programs or components of programs or delivery methods that have been identified as effective (i.e., produce significant reductions in poor outcomes or associated risk factors or significant increases in positive outcomes or associated protective factors) by repeated methodologically sound studies using an experimental (RCT) or quasi-experimental design.

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

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

This research brief was written for FCSS by Merrill Cooper, Guyn Cooper Research Associates Ltd.

Layout & design by Katherine Payne, citizen payne inc.

ENDNOTES


2 Statistics Canada. 2006 Census data provided by Derek Cook, Social Policy and Planning, Community and Neighbourhood Services, The City of Calgary.


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


16 Community-University Institute for Social Research. 2002. Building a Caring Community: Quality of Life in Saskatoon. (Saskatoon, SA: Community-University Institute for Social Research, University of Saskatchewan); Williams, A.M.; et al. 2001. “Quality of life in Saskatoon: Achieving a healthy, sustainable community.” Canadian Journal of Urban Research, 10(2).


The NLSCY follows a large, representative sample of Canadian children from birth to 25 years of age, with a view to measuring the well-being and development of Canada's children and youth.


From Bettertogether.org, an initiative of the Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.


