WE CAN

END HOMELESSNESS

Update: December 2014

Since April 2014 when the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council's (WPRC) Community Task Force to End Homelessness released the *Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg,* the focus has shifted to securing funding, creating an organizational structure, and now, beginning to implement some important early actions of the *Plan,* with the WPRC and United Way providing administrative support until a new organization is firmly in place.

To draft bylaws and advise on the creation of a preliminary business plan, the WPRC established a Homelessness Transition Advisory Group (HTAG) that includes Charles Loewen, Susan Lewis and I from the WPRC, and a range of others including Cindy Coker (Co-Chair of Task Force), Connie Walker, Lucille Bruce, Réal Cloutier, Ian Rabb, Michael Robertson and Sharon Redsky. HTAG then established a Nominating Committee to identify the perspectives that will be required on a founding board of directors. Among other things, the bylaws will require a minimum of 25% of board members to be Indigenous and for the board to include representatives from all three levels of government, the WRHA, and the community and private sectors. Much of that work is complete for now, pending final confirmation of funding.

On the funding front, in its 2014/15 budget, United Way committed to be the first contributing annual funder to the proposed community organization to end homelessness, pending commitments from other funders including the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the Government of Manitoba, and the private sector. Those discussions are all well underway.

I am so pleased to report that the City of Winnipeg has now joined United Way as a funder and partner. On December 10th, City Council voted to include in its 2015/16 budget an annual grant of $150,000 for five years commencing in 2015 to be "utilized by the Poverty Reduction Council to develop the Long Term Strategy to End Homelessness" and that the City of Winnipeg be an "active partner with the new organization in facilitating opportunities to create housing for people who are homeless." With this commitment from the City of Winnipeg, we are confident that other supporters will commit to the *Plan* and the organization needed to fully implement it in 2015. In the meantime, the WPRC with United Way support will begin to implement some of the important early coordinating and development aspects of the *Plan*.

This *Update,* the first in a series, reviews the priorities of the *Plan to End Homelessness*, reports on some promising developments in the community, and describes what has been accomplished so far. We hope that funders and stakeholders from all sectors will share our vision, support the plan, and join with us in taking action to end homelessness in our city.

C. Foreman

Cynthia Foreman
Chair, Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council
& Homelessness Transition Advisory Group

The Plan: Four Priorities to End Homelessness

The *Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg* identifies four areas for action: prevent homelessness, create a person-centred system of care, increase housing supply, and measure progress to better understand what we do.

- **Preventing homelessness** has both a systems and an individual perspective. Systems prevention requires change in large organizations that play a role in peoples' lives at critical transition points when they may be particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless.

  Individual-level prevention includes services to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place such as a rent bank to provide one-time support to pay rent arrears, income assistance to make rent affordable, and help resolving tenant-landlord conflicts to prevent an eviction.

- **Creating a person-centred system of care** involves community agencies, hospitals, landlords, and other organizations that interact with, and provide services for, people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. A person-centred system ensures that everyone receives the services he or she needs to end their homelessness.

- **Increasing housing supply** focusses on reducing the need for emergency shelter by creating permanent alternatives as quickly as possible. Providing permanent alternatives means increasing housing supply and providing more housing with supports (housing first).

- **Measuring progress** to better understand what we do requires two separate yet complementary data systems: one to record and track the progress of every homeless person engaged with the system of care and the other to count the number of homeless people everywhere in the city at particular points in time (point-in-time counts). The data that these systems will provide will serve as a baseline for monitoring progress, evaluating the effectiveness of individual strategies and programs, informing decisions on funding priorities, and guiding the development of new or revised plans.

A "backbone" organization will lead implementation of the plan

In conversations with end homelessness initiatives in other cities, the Task Force repeatedly heard the same advice: a plan requires leadership. Establish a community-based organization with a clear governance framework to drive the plan. The Task Force considered this and concluded that to end homelessness in Winnipeg there is a need for a single-purpose organization. This organization must reflect the same multi-sectoral and community-based principles as those embraced by the Task Force, have a strong commitment to Indigenous representation, engage individuals and organizations from all sectors, and embrace the principles of "Collective Impact" that guided the Task Force (*Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2012, p.2):

- Funders and implementers understand that social problems, and their solutions, arise from the interaction of many organizations within a larger system.
- Progress depends on working toward the same goal and measuring the same things.
- Large-scale impact depends on increasing cross-sector alignment and learning among many organizations.
- Corporate and government sectors are essential partners.
- Organizations actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned.

The term "backbone" organization refers to an organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

To lead and coordinate an end to homelessness in our city, the community-based organization's (CBO) functions will include convening stakeholders to create strategic plans, collaboratively setting priorities and guiding implementation of plans, brokering stakeholder relationships and coordinating collaborative efforts, monitoring progress, and adjusting plans and strategies, all in a manner consistent with the *Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg* and the vision, values and principles of the Task Force.

When fully established, the CBO will also build public support for ending homelessness, develop new funding sources, and receive and disburse funding for system supports and services. Those functions will evolve over time. For now, the emphasis will be on enhancing the effectiveness of the services and funding we already have in

Winnipeg through improved coordination. Particularly important will be Government of Canada Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding with an annual infusion of over $5.2 million. The focus of the work over the first few years will be to work cooperatively with the City of Winnipeg, which administers HPS funding, and the Community Advisory Board (CAB) to help align HPS funding with other funders .

Advisory Councils will play a key role

The CBO's success leading implementation of the *Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg* depends on its ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders to benefit from their knowledge, insights, experience, and expertise. For this reason, the preliminary business plan calls for the formation of four advisory councils during the organization's first few years of operation which will be phased in as funding allows and circumstances require.

- The **Lived Experience Council** will engage people with lived experience of homelessness in providing their perspectives on the CBO's policies and practices. They will be a voice for people who are homeless.
- The **Elders Council** will engage people who are recognized within their communities as Elders. They will advise the CBO on how to provide services for people who are homeless in a manner that is culturally proficient.
- The **Homelessness Coordinating Council** will engage representatives from agencies that provide services to people who are chronically or episodically at risk of homelessness. This council will provide a forum to promote coordination and collaboration between and among providers of services for people who are homeless in Winnipeg and advise the CBO on issues, opportunities, and objectives.
- The **Funders Advisory Council** will engage representatives from government and other funding bodies that fund organizations that deliver services to homeless people. This council will promote coordination and collaboration between and among funders of services for people who are homeless and provide advice regarding the CBO's funding practices, criteria for assessing funding requests, and the terms of service purchase agreements (SPAs).

Working Groups will engage stakeholders

In addition to the advisory councils, which will have an ongoing role, the CBO will establish working groups to perform specific tasks. These working groups will engage representatives from government, agencies providing services for people who are homeless, as well as other organizations that engage regularly with homeless people such as police and emergency health care providers.

The CBO will provide staff support for each working group. Staff will prepare background and other reports, provide administrative and technical assistance, and ensure that groups align with each other and receive the advice coming from the various councils.

The preliminary business plan assigns deliverables to six working groups:

- Coordinated Assessment, Triage and Intake
- Housing Supply
- Housing Supports
- Policies and Practices
- Eviction Prevention
- Discharge/Release

Maintaining momentum in 2015

It is crucial to maintain momentum on the vision of ending homelessness in our city. Accordingly, in collaboration with a number of groups, work has started on some of the critical Year One actions in the business plan. For example:

- Hosted by the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre and with funding support from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the "Doorways" pilot project is leading the development of a coordinated intake and assessment and data system. The Doorways project includes the following organizations: Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, Mount Carmel Clinic, Canadian Mental Health Association, Eagle Urban Transition Centre, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Main Street Project, Salvation Army, Siloam Mission, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Rental Network. The Project is advised by a committee and administered by the WPRC which includes all of the project partners as well as Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Manitoba Health, Manitoba Housing and Community Development, and Manitoba Jobs and the Economy as well as people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Funded by United Way, the Winnipeg Rental Network is developing a specialized housing registry that will be available to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless as well as to agencies that provide housing-related services to them.

In addition, the WPRC will convene and provide support to three working groups. When the CBO is established, these groups will be supported by the new organization. The following working groups will begin work early in 2015:

- The **Coordinated Assessment, Triage and Intake Working Group** will include representatives from funders, providers of services to people who are homeless, and eventually police, hospital and corrections discharge planners. In the short term, this Working Group will be focussed almost entirely on supporting the Doorways pilot project as an advisory committee, but the Working Group will continue after the pilot project is completed.

- The **Housing Supply Working Group** will involve private and non-profit developers and government to consider creative approaches to increasing housing inventory for people who are currently homeless.

- The **Housing Supports Working Group** will include social and health service providers, community advocates, building owners, property developers, and planning agencies and will work toward securing multi-sector buy-in for a plan to add housing supports to 300 new and existing units. One of the early deliverables for this group will be a report that identifies gaps in the system's capacity to provide housing with supports for new and existing housing units and the role of portable housing subsidies or enhanced EIA benefits.

Finally, one of the year one actions in the *Plan* was a call for a Homeless Count or "Census." The Government of Canada recently announced plans for homeless counts in all major cities some time in the next year and the WPRC will support collaborative efforts to ensure that the homeless count in Winnipeg sets a good baseline to measure our collective efforts.

To end homelessness in our city, all levels of government, many organizations and all sectors will need to work together. It is clear there is interest and commitment to do just that. A new community-based organization will help to ensure our city capitalizes on the will and talent of all.

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