

7 STORIES OF WEST BROADWAY

A REPORT BY THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH HUB

FOR

WEST BROADWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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INTRODUCTION:

The main recommendations of this report are the three pages immediately following – **Insights and Priorities From the Sharing Circle.**

But the most important part of the report is Appendix 4, containing the full text of the stories which seven low-income people in West Broadway shared with us. These stories are placed in an Appendix because, unfortunately, they can only be shared with the staff and directors of the West Broadway Development Corporation and not with the broad range of people to whom this report might be circulated. Thus, in most copies of this report, Appendix 4 is not attached. This is to protect the seven people who shared their stories with us.

People with a low income are often marginalized and disenfranchised in the research process. It is the vision of the Community Research Hub to try to make sure the wisdom of their stories is included as part of research. But if people are honest – as the seven people who shared their stories were – they rightfully have fears that they may be identified when their story is spread, especially in a small geographic area like West Broadway.

The main objective of the Community Research Hub is to present to the decision makers these actual stories of people who are going to be impacted by the decisions being made. We believe that when decision makers can actually hear the voices of those who are often disenfranchised and marginalized, they will form their own analysis.

To guide decision-makers in this role, a secondary objective of our research method is to provide a preliminary analysis of the data. We don't like the term "data" because it implies interpreting the story. In Aboriginal culture, the story is the teaching, it doesn't need to be explained. However it is helpful to make a first attempt at analysis, especially if the people doing the analyzing are those whose stories were told. That is the purpose of the sharing circle.

After people have shared their stories, we invite them to join in a sharing circle to look at ways we think their stories might be classified into categories and ideas. In this circle, analysis is up to the participants. In this step, they become co-researchers. On January 26, four participants came to the sharing circle. One had to leave early, but the remaining three completed a rich interpretation of the data presented. Their interpretation provided several priorities and insights.

INSIGHTS AND PRIORITIES FROM THE SHARING CIRCLE

Main Insight: LOW-INCOME PEOPLE IN WEST BROADWAY FEEL DISCONNECTED

The three people who assembled for the sharing circle represented a great diversity: residential school survivor and grandfather; single Mom on welfare; a Sudanese man who's been in Canada for 13 years. Researchers posted flip-chart sheets containing the nine categories of conclusions they'd drawn from reading the stories (see Appendix 1). After supper and an initial session of sharing, each participant walked around the room studying the nine categories, adding their own written comments and then coming up with several suggestions and insights as they shared opinions and stories in the circle. Finally, each participant cast five votes (15 total) in an attempt to prioritize their issues of greatest concern.

The major insight on which they agreed was how the problems facing people are connected (eg emotional health and safety) and how there's a need that services wishing to help people should be more personally and emotionally connected to the people they're trying to help. A statement endorsed by the sharing circle was:

“In general, facets of society are grossly disconnected. We think it would be good to keep this in mind when considering the action plan and how to help heal the community.”

Priority # 1: EMOTIONAL, CULTURAL SPIRITUAL SUPPORT CELEBRATION, HEALING, CONNECTIONS

A major area of disconnection is spiritual / emotional health. Out of the nine categories, this was the one chosen by the three participants as being the most important (7 out of 15 votes).

The residential school survivor shared stories of how Aboriginal people face discrimination every day in West Broadway, and thus every day adds to the heavy wounds they already carry. The single Mom told how dealing with welfare sapped her spirit and how housing isolated her. “Isolation is a systematic outcome. Many people are miserable and unhappy.” The man from Sudan explained how Welcome Place and churches had provided not just the physical services his family had needed when they arrived from a refugee camp, but emotional, spiritual and cultural support, and healing.

The celebration of West Broadway's cultural diversity and the corresponding need for cultural inclusiveness was also a high priority (2 out of 15 votes).

Emotional, cultural and spiritual support, celebration and healing should be part of how services are delivered in West Broadway. Welcome Place was praised as an example of a service that does this. Several concepts of Welcome Place could be adapted: the use of community volunteers, hiring people of different cultures to deliver services, a centre that celebrates different cultures and different cultural events, a centre that could provide anti-discriminatory education to the community. Each organization should hire staff according to the demographics of their clientele.

In general, West Broadway needs to make conscious efforts towards Aboriginal hiring and providing opportunities for emotional, cultural and spiritual healing and well-being for all people. There was also strong feeling that this didn't have to be heavy and depressing – there will be many opportunities in this kind of programming for celebration, singing, dancing and joy.

Priority # 2: IMPROVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND AGENCIES

The sense of people's disconnectedness was a main theme in many of the stories people had shared in interviews and was reiterated in stories told by participants during the sharing circle. They told about being treated with a lack of understanding and disrespect by agencies which, supposedly, were trying to help them. Stories included being constantly shamed by welfare workers, mistreatment by landlords, supervisors in programs who are disrespectful.

In one case, the disconnection was as simple as the corporate atmosphere of the agency – “They're representing a low-income neighbourhood. But when you go in the office, everyone is dressed nice, straight teeth, and that creates a distance. It shouldn't be like the welfare office, or that middle-class mentality of bureaucrats – they have to figure ways to lessen that distance.”

Being treated disrespectfully was singled out by one voter. (1 vote out of 15)

But one participant summed up the deeper level of helplessness that many low-income people feel in the face of bureaucracies like welfare, landlords, RTB, etc.: “Many people won't go to ask for help. They need a supportive helper, especially if they feel helpless.”

People's sense of helplessness and disconnection was so great that the best solution we could contemplate in the sharing circle was creating positions for staff as middlemen between consumers and the services they are using. (3 votes out of 15)

For instance, people on welfare could use a supportive helper at West Broadway Development Corporation, or some other agency, to help them deal with welfare. There is a need for a support worker for elders and tenant advocates or tenant support workers. (There was praise for the “Tenant Relations Social Worker” position at Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation.)

Researchers described the mentoring program run by Marianne Cerelli in the West End in which community people are trained to be mentors for others having trouble with welfare, RTB (Residential Tenancies Branch) and the legal system. Participants felt that many similar positions could be developed in West Broadway with community people. They felt that many agencies in West Broadway would benefit by having a welfare support worker connected to them.

These kind of mentorship positions could go a long way towards healing the disconnectedness of West Broadway agencies and services.

Priority # 3: INCREASE PROGRAMMING BY AGENCIES WORKING WITH LOW-INCOME PEOPLE

Although there were complaints about many agencies and the way they dealt with low-income people, there was a lot of support for the work being done in many programs. The main complaint was that these programs didn't have enough funding or staff to be able to be open evenings, weekends or other extended hours. (2 votes out of 15)

Suggestions included: RaY open at night; West Broadway Community Ministry Drop-In open evenings; more staff for AGAPE Table; more programs at Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. There was praise for the “Supper & Bingo Nights” at Maryland and St. Matthews, on Wednesday and Thursday nights sponsored by Urban Lutheran Ministry.

Suggestions to fill gaps in programming included: more computer access; more phone access; more multi-generational programs and programs for families in evenings.

In all of these programs it would be good to hire Aboriginal people and community people.

Other Priorities and Insights:

Beyond the three priorities listed above which received the 15 votes of participants in the sharing circle, there were several comments which they added to the flip-chart sheets posted around the room, and several points already on the sheets which they underlined or emphasized with check marks. These are listed below (those with several check marks are listed first):

- Free access to phones: "I think phones are now a basic need, like food. People on low-income should receive free phone service."
- Help change the tenant imbalance of power in dealing with bureaucracies like RTB (Residential Tenancies Branch).
- Support landlords in providing tenant support workers.
- More housing available to low-income people/families – West Broadway is being taken over by increased rent and condo these past years – gentrification
- Need more 3 bedroom apartment in West Broadway.
- Information sessions so people know what they're entitled to in welfare and RTB. (See Marianne Cerelli mentoring program in West End.)
- Heated bus shacks – "With seats made of material that doesn't freeze your ass off or burn it in the summer."
- Increase welfare rates.
- Create a police substation in West Broadway so 911 calls for this area can be routed directly through the substation and get prompter attention.
- Safety is tied into poverty and personal/emotional well-being. It's an investment to work on these 2 areas.
- Under safety, participants emphasized: Remove sexual exploitation
Community foot patrol; Elder abuse
Close drug houses.
- Organize Community Walks for socializing.
- "I wish West Broadway could organize soccer, baseball and basketball games to bring all walks of society in the community together. When we play games, there are no boundaries."

Appendix 1
CATEGORIES FROM SACRED STORIES (Not prioritized)
Organized By Researchers Based On Reading Sacred Stories
(Including selected quotes)

1. WELFARE

- Change the disrespectful way people are treated:
eg. Respect, politeness, long-term relationships with workers
- Increase amounts paid.

“I wish my welfare office was in the West Broadway area, so I don’t have to go to 896 Main Street, which is a horrible place. The reception area has plate glass windows that have a little slit at the bottom to talk through.”

“One time recently, this worker was telling me I hadn’t done what I was supposed to. But I had- she was the one who hadn’t done her job. But she was so superior, so *right* in her own mind. After taking all that shit from her, I had to hang up the phone and turn around and be a good parent to my kids. But I just felt like crying. Too often workers treat you like you’re a disgusting annoyance, insensitive and uninterested in your personal circumstances.”

2. INCREASE PROGRAMMING BY AGENCIES WORKING WITH LOW-INCOME PEOPLE

- More programs open in evening:
RaY open at night
West Broadway Community Ministry Drop-In open in evenings
- More “Supper & Bingo Nights” like at Maryland and St. Matthews (West End)
(now Wed. & Thurs. nights / Urban Lutheran Ministry)
- More staffing for AGAPE Table
- More computer access
- West Broadway Neighbourhood Centre

“RAY should have extended hours and more volunteers to keep kids from going down the wrong path. There should be more adult education for people who want to go back to school. I go to West Broadway Neighbourhood Center for Bingo every Wednesday. They need more entertainment there. I go to West Broadway Community Ministry for coffee, to use the phones and the computer lab during the day. There needs to be a drop in center open in the evenings.”

“It would be good to have family support for women with kids in the evenings. Also to have access to computers. And more information centres. This community centre (Crossways) is good.”

3. SPIRITUAL / EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Provide more opportunities to meet people's spiritual needs.
- Help people work on emotional health, healing and well-being.

"I have spiritual help too. No one is perfect. I do the best I can each day. Tomorrow will be a better day. Don't carry your baggage forward into the new day."

"Church in Africa was singing and dancing and a lot of joy. In Winnipeg it was different. People here are more material and so they drift away from God. God's spirit was really what helped me make it through all the changes."

"I hope the government opens up all closed adoption files so I can find out who my birth parents were and any medical information from their families."

4. CONCENTRATE ON RECOGNIZING CULTURAL / CROSS-CULTURAL NEEDS

- A West Broadway version of Welcome Place – helping people of different cultures learn the culture, help with housing, etc.
- Need for Aboriginal workers in existing agencies
- Cultural centre that celebrates different cultures, cultural events
- Need for anti-discriminatory education

"Too often, they just judge us on ethnic lines. A lot of people here don't take the time to get to know people from different backgrounds... You come from a completely different background and you have to learn everything. And then, on top of that, there's getting called down because of your culture."

"At (one agency) someone swore at me just because I was using the phone. They said "You Indians. Why don't you go over to 222 Furby". The staff heard this and they just smiled, as there was no Aboriginal staff employed there at the time. Since then the receptionist is Aboriginal. They make you feel like it isn't your community."

"One agency's director that I approached about a challenge said he had no concerns about it, so that was it. Then I get discouraged. These incidents will be repeated until something bad happens. Who can you tell in these cases, so that these issues are heard and addressed? Even with the police they don't want to deal with discrimination; they say "That's not my job. That's not my problem".

5. IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND AGENCIES

- Some agencies treat community members disrespectfully.
- Agencies representing low income people should involve more low income people.
eg. Have offices with more casual drop-in atmosphere.

“(At one program), the children were being fed. My grandson was not well, and was not supposed to eat hard food, but the supervisor forced him to eat everything on his plate. I witnessed this, and when I talked to the supervisor, he said “No. Get out of here. I am the supervisor”. These supervisors should be educated and respectful. The whole community needs awareness.”

“The staff, at (one agency) have their hearts in the right place but they don’t understand the realities that face low income people... They (the agency) are representing a low-income neighbourhood. But when you go into the office, everyone is dressed nice, straight teeth, and that creates a distance. It shouldn’t be like the welfare office, or that middle class mentality of bureaucrats. They have to figure ways to lessen the distance.”

6. HOUSING

- Help change the tenant imbalance of power in dealing with bureaucracies like RTB. (Residential Tenancies Branch)
- Support agencies that help us find housing.
eg. West Broadway Community Ministry
- Need for emergency housing if evicted
- Help dealing with bed bugs and mice
- Support landlords in providing tenant support workers.

“I was homeless for almost a month. Sally Ann won’t take you in unless you have an open file. The projects are smelly... West Broadway Community Ministry helps people to look for a place to stay. I live in a rooming house now... At the Fredericton Apartment block on Broadway Ave., the rent went from \$400/month to \$600/month. There’s no housing around here. I think they are trying to set up a shelter for temporary needs. There are a lot of homeless people. I go to the Dollar Store to buy candles because they keep you warm even if you have to sleep in the hallways. And it’s always good to have a can opener and candy.”

“I moved into an apartment owned by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation. WHRC has been very helpful, especially Rob Peters, who is like my brother and Fio Pasquerelli who is like my sister. She was a ‘tenant-relations social worker’.”

7. PROVIDE MORE SOCIAL / RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRIENDSHIP AND COMPANIONSHIP

- More programs for families and children in buildings where they live
- Pick-up games and leagues – Basketball, Soccer
- Groups of neighbours – pot lucks, activities together

“I wish West Broadway could organize soccer, baseball and basketball games to bring all walks of society in the community together. When we play games there are no boundaries.”

“It is an important need for me, to connect with other adults. Sometimes I’d like to go out and meet other people, but with raising two kids, I just end up resting. It’s not about going to Wolseley Family Place or some other resource place, ‘cause you can’t live there. It’s about having friends, family, a partner where you live, support, people who build you up.”

8. INFRASTRUCTURE

- More crosswalks on Broadway
- Heated bus shacks
- More functioning pay phones

“There are no pay phones anymore, in the area.”

“I wish there was money for a phone in your welfare budget. I don’t have a phone to phone Winnipeg Harvest to be put on the list, but I still get some foods as a walk-in. Making appointments could be so much easier having your own phone. It is so cold standing on Broadway at a pay phone.”

“I would like to see more crosswalks along Broadway Avenue, because it’s a very busy street and it’s difficult to cross, and we need more heated bus shacks, because it is horrible to wait in the cold for a bus.”

9. SAFETY

- Remove sexual exploitation
- Community foot patrol
- Restorative justice
- Elder abuse
- Close drug houses
- Police

“For West Broadway, I would like to see the removal of sexual exploitation. No johns cruising the streets looking for thirteen year old girls to bang. At 2 A.M. if a lady wants to go to 7-11, she should feel safe.”

Appendix 2

“SACRED STORIES” METHODOLOGY

**“Know that no one is silent, though many are not heard.
Work to change this.”**

-- Syracuse Cultural Workers Union

The Community Research Hub is a co-operative enterprise made up of diverse inner-city residents – from university professors to Kokums caring for grandchildren on severely limited budgets. Most of us are low-income. The Hub was created because there was so much research happening in the inner-city of Winnipeg, but that research was often flawed because it did not truly include the people who lived in the inner city, often the very ones who were being researched.

By creating the Research Hub, we developed two strengths:

1. People in the inner-city could learn different research models, carry out research contracts, run the Research Hub as a co-op and thus learn new skills and earn an income.
2. By learning research skills that were particularly appropriate to the situations of inner city people, and because our members are low-income inner city resident themselves, higher levels of trust and honesty could be built, resulting in better research.

As a Research Hub, we use many different methods of research: surveys, interviews, focus groups and more. But borrowing from the methodologies taught by Shawn Wilson, in his book, *Research is Ceremony – Indigenous Research Methods*¹, we are gradually developing a model of research we call “Sacred Stories.”

When we were approached by the West Broadway Development Corporation to conduct research to assist in the development of their neighbourhood’s five-year plan, we proposed using this “Sacred Stories” method. Essentially, the method is to record the stories of a small number of people from the population from which the Development Corporation wants input, and then let their stories speak for themselves. In this case, Molly McCracken of WBDC felt the “Sacred Stories” method would be a good way to reach some of those in the neighbourhood who are marginalized and may not participate in methods of research such as Community Forums, filling in surveys or other methods. The Development Corporation wanted to make sure their research included low-income people, particularly Aboriginal people and immigrants. When we help the most vulnerable in our society, we are helping all of society.

Three researchers – each with a number of personal contacts in West Broadway – undertook the research. Virginia Hunter, Lynne Somerville and Mike Maunder. Each of these researchers had a

¹ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony – Indigenous Research Methods*, Fernwood Publishing, Winnipeg, 2008

web of connections in West Broadway which they used to find seven people who were willing to share their stories. A permission form was prepared; participants were offered a small honorarium for their time commitment, and the three researchers conducted the seven interviews. After writing up each “Sacred Story”, researchers returned to verify the accuracy of each story, and invited participants to a sharing circle

“The researcher must make sure that the three R’s, Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality, are guiding the research.”

-- Cora Weber-Pillwax

Canadian Journal of Native Education (2001)

Shawn Wilson, in his Indigenous research method, stresses the three traditional values of respect, reciprocity and relationality.

Respect is central to the way Sacred Stories research is conducted. We are not “researchers” with a list of questions or assumptions which we take to “research subjects”, then taking away “data” which we interpret. Those with whom we are doing research are our co-researchers. When they look at the same pieces of data that we do, they see entirely different priorities.

This also ties to Relationality. Much research assumes that there is a distant, objective relationship between researcher and research subject. Some researchers may be able to reach this profound level, but, in general, most researchers, much as we try not to, bring our own world-view, our own understandings, into the research. “Humans—feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans—do research,” explains Eber Hampton (Canadian Journal of Native Education, 1995) “When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to the people around us.”

Reciprocity means several things in Sacred Story research. Where possible, each person gets to read, edit, change and approve the final draft of his or her story. Where possible, they attend a sharing circle in which some preliminary conclusions are discussed and modified according to their interpretations.

All of these steps were followed in collecting the West Broadway sacred stories. Because the researchers came from a similar milieu to the research subjects, because some were connected through their webs of personal acquaintances, a high level of trust and honesty existed in the interviews. This relationality, and the assurance that interviews were anonymous, enabled participants to talk of deep issues in their lives – degrading treatment by welfare, challenging personal relationships, wounds of sexual abuse in childhood. This kind of relationality brings a level of honesty which an “objective” researcher with his clip board is never going to glimpse.

It is because of this level of trust and honesty that the most significant deliverables of Sacred Story research are the seven stories themselves. It is not important to mine their pages for data and patterns. It is important just to hear the story. In Aboriginal culture, the story is the teaching,

it doesn't need to be explained. This is the ultimate objective of this kind of research – that those making decisions will simply read the stories, perhaps hear and understand the reality of the lives of people they normally wouldn't encounter but who are real members of their community with hopes and aspirations too – although their hopes and dreams may be far separated from the normal world of the reader.

The steps of respect and reciprocity were involved in going back to people to verify their stories and make sure they were written in their own voice (in one case three return visits and subsequent changes to the story). Reciprocity is also the key value in the sharing circle process. To prepare for the sharing circle, researchers had done a preliminary analysis and categorization of the stories, but, even with their increased understanding, that analysis still came from THEIR perspective.

In the sharing circle, participants challenged these interpretations, added new insights, emphasized points researchers had not have emphasized and ended up with a short and useful set of priorities and insights.

**“Storytelling is a communal act;
It requires community and it creates community...
In the telling we overcome loneliness.
The sharing of our stories cures us.”**

-- Joseph Campbell

The goal of “Sacred Stories” research is to accurately record people's stories. Some analysis must always happen, even the simplest analysis of the writer interpreting the words of the speaker. We hope that by reciprocity – by having those interviewed re-examine their own stories – some of this bias can be removed. We worked with our co-researchers in a sharing circle, to do a better form of analysis, and one in which they have a voice.

But ultimately, it is their stories themselves that give their voice. Storytelling attempts to address the imbalance of power between researcher and research participant. It shares power between the researcher and the research participant. It is easy to see, when their stories are read and understood, how much we, as researchers, can misunderstand and totally miss out on what's really important to them. It's true that we all analyze. Even if the researcher doesn't analyze it properly, because the story is there, someone else will get new meanings from the same story.

Sharing stories is a community way of doing research.

It opens each one of us the Power of Story.

Stories have the ability to heal us, those who speak and those who listen. “The sharing of our stories cures us.”

Appendix 3 “SACRED STORIES” PERMISSION FORM

West Broadway Development Corporation
Sacred Stories Project

Sacred Story # _____

January 2011

Hi, my name is _____. I work with the Community Research Hub and we are asking residents for their input into the West Broadway Development Corporation’s 5-Year Visioning Plan.

We are asking if you will share your story as part of the input into the plan. This method is called “Sacred Stories” because we believe your story is a sacred trust.

Your story will be anonymous – neither your name nor any identifying information will be made public. We will type up your story as accurately as possible and let you see it and edit it before it is shown to anyone else. Then your story will be shared with a limited number of people – the directors and staff of the West Broadway Development Corporation and the steering committee for the 5-Year Visioning Plan.

We are also asking you to suggest changes you would like to see in the neighbourhood. Based on your story and your suggestions, we will prepare a list of recommended changes. We will present these recommendations to you as part of a sharing circle with others who have shared their stories, asking all of you to confirm the recommendations, change them and add to them. This final set of recommendations will be part of the West Broadway report and may be included in published reports or presented on the WBDC website. The final report may also include selected quotes of one or two sentences from your story.

This process is voluntary and at any time you may refuse to participate in any part of the process. For agreeing to participate, you will receive \$20.00. Would you have time to do the initial interview?

YES _____ NO _____

If you have any concerns or would like more information, please feel free to contact Molly McCracken at West Broadway Development Corporation at 774-7201.

Date: _____ Time: _____

May I get your name please: _____ And your address: _____

Interviewee signature: _____

Researcher’s signature: _____ Researcher’s name: _____