Build Harmony
the will to build harmony instead of allowing safety and civility to decline

Generate Choices
the will to generate choices instead of perpetuating poverty

Embrace Belonging
the will to embrace belonging instead of marginalization

Create Sanctuary
the will to provide sanctuary rather than stress for families, children, and youth

Stimulate Dialogue
the will to stimulate dialogue rather than systems that hinder

declining feeling of safety and social civility
poverty
marginalization
stressed families, children and youth
systems that hamper self-sufficiency and independence

The foundation for The Willing Community was laid by 3200 Winnipeggers who participated in Journey Forward, identifying five priority issues and articulating what our community would be like if we could address them.
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On November 20 and 21, 2000 at the Winnipeg Convention Centre our city demonstrated that Winnipeg is in fact a willing community. Finding out about solutions that make a difference, the opportunity for discussion among different sectors and providing the spark for new ideas and ways of doing things were some of the benefits of the event according to forum participants. The focus on arts and culture, for example, proved to be a fascinating look at bringing community strengths together in different ways.

Through the forum, we acknowledged that we won’t always agree on all topics and that we may sometimes be uncertain about the ways we can work together. What we can do is work on a common agenda developed by Winnipeggers because of our collective commitment to the well-being of our city. We can do so by respecting the unique qualities each one of us brings to the table. We can focus our strengths, commitment and determination on ourselves, and the common commitment we have to the well-being of our community. We can put Winnipeg’s legendary community spirit to work to address the social issues Winnipeggers have identified as a priority.

That common agenda is defined by Winnipeggers who want to move from:

- Marginalization, where people feel left out and left behind, to a community that embraces belonging, offering opportunities for people to feel connected;
- Declining feelings of safety and social civility, to a community that builds harmony towards becoming a more civil society;
- Poverty, where people are unable to meet their basic needs, to a community that generates choices for all of its citizens;
- Systems that hamper self-sufficiency and independence, to a community that stimulates dialogue, focusing systems on serving people, not processes; and
- Stressed families, children and youth, to a community that creates sanctuary offering support and nurturing environments, even in our most stressful situations.

Forum participants called on United Way to continue the journey forward. In turn, United Way pledged to continue broad support of the journey while clearly acknowledging that United Way would require ongoing community commitment, support and involvement.
Three community hosts ably guided the day-and-a-half forum on its journey to creating the place we want. Dion Knol of Andrews Street Family Centre, Curt Vossen of James Richardson International and Sister Bernadette O’Reilly of Rossbrook House each brought their own unique experiences as members of Winnipeg's community. Each one demonstrates a deep commitment to our city and helped forum participants focus on the information and inspiration that flowed for a day and a half. United Way expresses its gratitude and offers special thanks to the co-hosts for their commitment of time and talent as part of The Willing Community.

THE WILLING COMMUNITY’S VISUAL FEAST

Faculty of Architecture students, University of Manitoba, Graffiti Art Programming and Art City provided a visual feast that portrayed The Willing Community through art.

Students of architecture at the University of Manitoba were invited to depict the five theme areas Winnipeggers have identified as priorities. A juried process selected the photographs of Jon Sawatzky, Ryan Wakshinski, Rob Abi-Abdallah and Ken Borton.

The Graffiti Art Program produced an impressive, eye-catching banner. Various works of art from Art City and Graffiti Art Program further supported the theme of The Willing Community. In addition, selected works of Jacques St. Goddard, president of the Canadian Plains Gallery and Wanda Koop, founder and co-chair of the board of Art City were on display.

Sincere thanks to these groups and individuals for lending their time and exceptional talents to highlight through their work the many facets of The Willing Community.

Special thanks are also extended to AVista Creative Communications, Red River Exhibition Park, Clark Communications, The Bowering Group and the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The following provides an Executive Summary and a detailed report of the proceedings of the day-and-a-half forum. It attempts to capture the knowledge, enthusiasm and ideas that emerged from The Willing Community, with the goal of inspiring further action. Individual reports summarize
the keynote speakers’ presentations and provide overviews of the five breakout sessions. The breakout sessions were repeated in the morning and afternoon of day one of the forum. Each summary covers the highlights of both sessions. The report is presented in chronological order—that is in order of appearance at the forum.

A team of volunteer reporters attended each session and filed accounts of the proceedings. The reporters were: Lee Crawford, Investors Group; Roger Matas, Matas PR; Brenda Hasiuk, Manitoba Government Employees Union; Eileen O’Donnell, Province of Manitoba; Andrea Geary, Canadian Wheat Board, Jim Johnson, MPI; Heather Johnson, Canadian International Grains Institute; and Kevin Lightfoot. United Way extends special thanks to each of the reporters who volunteered their time and offers its genuine appreciation to their respective companies and organizations.

Any part of this report can be used or reproduced provided the source is acknowledged.

**Videotapes and Audiotapes**

Video and audio tapes may be useful tools for sharing the input from an interesting and dynamic group of speakers from The Willing Community. The main plenary speakers were videotaped and most of the breakout sessions were audiotaped. Please contact United Way at 477-5360 to obtain a copy of one or more portions of the forum. There is a nominal fee to cover tape costs.

*Award winning photos produced by the students of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba depicting the five theme areas of The Willing Community Forum. Top Left to Right: Choices by Rob Abi-Abdallah, Sanctuary by Rob Abi-Abdallah. Above Left to Right: Belonging by John Sawatzky, Dialogue by Ken Borton, Harmony by Ryan Wakshinski.*
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Way's The Willing Community Forum provided an opportunity to learn, share knowledge and celebrate solutions already occurring in our city. The following summarizes presentations by the forum’s keynote speakers and provides an overview of breakout sessions, which addressed five vision statements developed by Winnipeggers: creating sanctuary, embracing belonging, building harmony, generating choices and stimulating dialogue.

JOURNEY FORWARD – Janice Lederman

Jan Lederman, Chair of The Willing Community Forum issued a call to action in her opening remarks “The walls separating the sectors are coming down. Partnerships and collaboration based on mission will be the model for moving forward. And in an environment where we all are struggling to do more with fewer resources, the need to maximize the resources we do have is imperative.

“The health of our community is at stake. We cannot afford to compete with one another. We can no longer afford to work in silos. We must find new models for working together if we’re going to make an impact.

“Can we say that by the year 2003 we will have found new partnerships and collaborations, new ways of working together to tackle these issues and become the city we are not now? We are a Willing Community. I believe we can.”

HOW BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS CREATE THE PLACE WE WANT – David Grayson

The community that works together thrives together according to David Grayson, who heads an alliance of 400 businesses in the United Kingdom working in partnership with community groups to solve social problems.

Grayson, in a keynote address to The Willing Community Forum, said his group impresses upon firms “what happens to business is important to society and what happens to society is important
THE WILLING COMMUNITY

to business.” He said despite the fact business and social action groups may regard each other with suspicion, they have a great deal to learn from each other, and a partnership between the two often leads to great success in the community.

One of Grayson’s comments is especially important to Winnipeg, where the corporate community is committed to attract new businesses to our community. “We can do anything from here,” said Grayson, noting that with the economy becoming more and more global, the centres best able to attract new businesses are the ones which have connected and work together on a joint social vision.

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES – Judith Maxwell

Now that Canada’s economy is on the upswing, it is time for governments, businesses and individuals to repair social safety nets damaged during the hard times of the 1980s and 90s, said Judith Maxwell from Canadian Policy Research Networks.

In the past, Canadians depended on governments to provide social programs. Today's reality is that everyone must work together to help ensure a decent quality of life for all. People sometimes think that poverty happens to those who are weak or irresponsible. Maxwell said it is not that far a fall from being a full-time worker to living on social assistance as a result of circumstances beyond their control such as ill health, job loss and withdrawal of family support.

Social programs must be designed to help people become resilient and able to bounce back from serious setbacks. Such resiliency comes from inner strength and supportive families and communities. To start forming resilient individuals and communities, we must begin to talk together to identify problems, establish a common vision and set ambitious but realistic goals. She commended The Willing Community Forum for starting a process which could result in Winnipeg becoming a more resilient and stronger community.

WHAT’S HAPPENED TO MAIN STREET? – Wayne Helgason, Dr. Judith Bartlett & Paula Mitchell

Wayne Helgason and Dr. Judy Bartlett spoke of the exciting new Aboriginal Centre and Thunderbird House as more than just buildings. They see them as examples of a community intent on re-establishing dignity, health and affluence on Main Street. “If you want to change the face of a community, first start with the people,” said Helgason, President of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg.

From a dream first voiced in 1989, the historic CP Station is now a bustling hub, housing small businesses, classrooms and a full-service restaurant. Nearly 600 adult students are currently finishing their Grade 12 education through the Centre’s Aboriginal Community Campus.

Paula Mitchell, owner of Mitchell Fabrics and member of the North Main Task Force, echoed the sense of excitement about the future as a unique opportunity to empower and rejuvenate not simply a place, but a people.

Dr. Bartlett, Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre (AHWC) said, “We all live the same elements every day of our lives, but we all live them uniquely.” Dr. Barlett talked on the Medicine Wheel Life Promotion Framework that incorporates the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and economic elements of life that can foster both personal growth and inter-sectoral, collaborative action. The Framework takes a holistic approach to assist all people to achieve optimum health in their lives.
VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Building Harmony

Participants looked inside the three structures critical to building harmony in our lives—our workplaces, neighbourhoods and families. “We’re a work in progress,” Manitoba Hydro’s Dana Beljanic said of her employer’s recently revised respectful workplace guidelines.

Block by block, residents of West Broadway are working towards making the area a community people will choose to call home. “The more opportunities people have to get together and talk about their similarities rather than their differences, the more energy it creates to do what we need to in our communities,” said Carole Basarab, Chair of the West Broadway Development Corporation.

Sue Hemphill, Mediation Services, said pursuing harmony in our families is one of the greatest challenges we face. “Unlike our workplaces and communities, our homes and families don’t come with a set of written rules to follow.”

Despite the differences in the three areas, some common themes emerged. The need to listen and to give voice to problems, the need for a co-operative approach to problem solving, and the sometimes accidental and untidy process of reaching success. “That’s what harmony is all about,” said Hemphill. “Many voices and different notes, all blending together to make something that is more than its individual parts.”

Generating Choices

Exploring various options to combat poverty in Winnipeg, Mark Cabaj of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network in Kitchener/Waterloo, Tamsen Matheson of Winnipeg’s Urban Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Project and Andrew Douglas of the local Alternative Financial Services committee each drew on the experience of their own initiatives to reverse the chronic cycle of poverty. Demonstrating leadership by first thinking of yourself as a community member rather than your current job description; accomplishing tangible results by creating sustainable job opportunities and learning from your mistakes to focus on results-oriented change were three consistent themes in this session.

Embracing Belonging

The informative and, at times, moving session on marginalization was approached from several different angles by people who have experienced or seen the damage that results from keeping people on the outside.

These individuals also commented on the immeasurable benefits accorded to those who are embraced by their community and provided opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways.

Janet Forbes and Scott Klassen represented the Association for Community Living which supports people reentering the community after living in institutional environments. Through the organization’s Circles of Support program, individuals like Scott have accessed new friends and associates to provide a base of comfort and safety in new and often challenging life situations.

Sahina Saddiqui, an Islamic writer/presenter/teacher and social activist, shared her observations on the critical importance of understanding and respecting the unique religious practices of Islam and offered insights into the needs and expectations of this growing community.
Through his work as coordinator of the Choices Youth program, Adrian Challis has seen dramatic improvement in the self-esteem and willingness of at-risk youth to make positive choices for their lives and avoid the lure of gang recruitment and street life.

Each speaker acknowledged that much work still needs to be done for Winnipeggers to further embrace belonging and move towards a society that no longer tolerates marginalization—but there are successes we can be proud of today and good ideas to be built on for tomorrow.

Creating Sanctuary

Supporting families makes good economic, community and plain common sense, according to Diane Redsky, Acting Executive Director of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. By valuing individual skills and gifts, we can empower people who will then add strength to their family and community.

Building self-confidence and giving people opportunities to put their unique gifts and skills to good use is one of the goals of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. Melvina Boulanger, a single mother of five who speaks on behalf of the Centre, spoke about the strength she has gained from being part of the Centre’s volunteer program. Boulanger said that by being able to contribute to her community, she has made personal gains not possible otherwise, including pursuing her dream of earning a Grade 12 diploma.

Marcel Baril, Executive Director of the Family Centre of Winnipeg spoke of the success of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) Canada program now running in 14 Manitoba schools.

Pat Stefanchuck, Margaret Park Elementary School principal said by sharing meals, songs and playtime with their children, FAST parents have formed friendships and strengthened their community bond. Parent Darleen Funk said FAST helped her family develop neighbourhood friendships and relationships with those from different cultural backgrounds. Learning new parenting skills and taking an active role in their children’s education allows parents to take a more important part in their children’s lives and builds stronger families.

Stimulating Dialogue

The Seven Oaks Neighbourhood Resource Network is a living example of David Grayson’s vision of a community working and thriving together. By working together in partnership, this year-old group has developed new ways to deal with community issues, made people within the community feel they belong and have a strong voice on behalf of the community.

The Network has developed relationships which include schools, health care providers, business and individuals sharing the common goal of “Making it Better Together.” The business partners echo Grayson’s assertions that by supporting the Network’s efforts and therefore the community’s, they reap rewards as well. By working together to solve common problems new relationships and greater bonds are formed that unites the community.

DAY TWO: THE CHALLENGE NOW IS TAKING ACTION

Host Curt Vossen kicked off the morning’s proceedings by referencing the knowledge that had been gained during the previous day and celebrating the leaps of faith that different organizations made to establish the successes discussed during the breakout sessions. The previous day’s proceedings demonstrated a collective commitment to the well-being of the community, even if at times we may not always agree on all matters or be entirely certain of how to work together effectively. “Today we begin by declaring that our common agenda is how we move ahead
together. We need to respect the unique qualities each one of us brings to the table. We also need to focus our strengths, commitment and determination on ourselves, and the common commitment we have to the well-being of our community,” noted Vossen.

Winnipeg Mayor Glen Murray addressed delegates by acknowledging that Winnipeg has the talents and tools needed to plan and build its future. “The challenge is how to put those resources to work.”

The Mayor noted the importance of taking the commitment and sense of community among the forum delegates into the broader community and tapping into the spirit of Winnipeggers.

That spirit has served the city well for decades said the Mayor. “In many ways our challenge is much less than the one faced by those who first came here to build our community. We have so much more to work with.”

INGREDIENTS FOR RENEWAL – Robert McNulty

Armed with many examples of cities that have redefined themselves in the face of huge challenges, urban visionary Robert McNulty is confident that Winnipeg is poised to chart its own course to success.

“I’m not here to tell you what the answer is. You’ve already taken some key steps in that direction. Now the final step is needed to build on the equity invested throughout the Journey Forward Initiative and point the way to what needs to be done tomorrow,” McNulty told forum delegates.

“I can tell you from experience that people become fiercely loyal and energized about making their communities better places,” said McNulty, who is President of Partners for Livable Communities in Washington, D.C.

To move successfully from vision to reality, the key for any city is to identify what McNulty calls a “flagship idea”. The idea must be so powerful that people are inspired to take action and has the capacity to reconcile the strengths of a great community with corrosive issues such as child poverty that need to be addressed in order for the process of renewal to proceed.

“Might Winnipeg become the centre of excellence in North America for demonstrating how Aboriginal communities can blossom and contribute to a pluralistic society?” asked McNulty.

IS IT ARTS? SOCIAL SERVICES? BUSINESS? – Laura Smyth, Steve Wilson, Brandi Williams, Monique Lysak

This compelling presentation made the case that arts and culture are not mere indulgences, but powerful tools that can help build on the strengths of youth in a willing community. The Carnegie Foundation spent a decade studying positive ways teens were choosing to fill the time gap between the end of the school day and the point when the adults in their lives arrived home. The study asked where kids were seeking opportunities to learn.

The U.S.-based study found that youth, in partnership with community-based arts organizations, were tapping their own creativity, and the benefits flowed to the artists and beyond into their communities.

“These were high-risk, at-risk kids—the very kids headlines were screaming about. Here they were creating and contributing members of society,” said Laura Smyth, co-author of the study’s resource guide.

Panelists Steve Wilson, Brandi Williams and Monique Lysak from Winnipeg say it’s an experience that has held true here as well.
Graffiti Art Programming and Art City are two Winnipeg successes that are learning and applying the same concepts found in the Carnegie study. Their early successes are already making a positive impact on Winnipeg youth.

The study measured enormous improvements in the development of youth regularly participating in arts programming. These young people are twice as likely to enjoy academic achievement, 22 times as likely to read for pleasure, and more than 30 times as likely to plan to continue their education beyond high school.

“Participating in the arts takes youth beyond the now to what might happen in the future. They are people who can dream and maybe imagine a tomorrow,” said Smyth.

COMMUNITY PANEL – FROM WILL TO ACTION – James Carr, The Right Reverend Stanley McKay, Paul Moist, Gail Asper, Dr. Arthur Mauro

A panel of four community leaders shared their thoughts about future directions for our community. Moderated by Jim Carr, President and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba, the panel included The Right Reverend Stanley McKay; Paul Moist, President of C.U.P.E. 500; Gail Asper, Corporate Secretary of CanWest Global Communications and Dr. Arthur Mauro, Chancellor of the University of Manitoba.

The Right Reverend Stanley McKay stated, “If our vision is not for seven generations, then we don’t have a vision.” Rev. McKay shared this Anishinaabe saying with forum participants, expressing the need for our community to view its work together as a long-term and often challenging process. Rev. McKay stressed the need for informed public policy formation that is based on humanizing principles.

Paul Moist said, “we must act with local purpose, with a view to our wider world and responsibilities.” Each of us have what could be called “micro” experiences at the personal, family and civic level as well as experiences at a larger “macro” level. If we are to enact change, we must consider local, national, and global realities.

Gail Asper said, “the future calls for coordinating our civic actions and ensuring business is engaged.” With so many resources currently in our community—especially in the areas of social services and business—we simply have to start doing things smarter, Asper said. She added that our greatest challenge now is to find ways to truly engage the local business sector, who have a vital role to play. Asper pointed to United Way as a vehicle to achieve many of these goals.

Dr. Arthur Mauro said, “our goals must be clear and measurable” and notes that Winnipeg has a proud history of action and the leadership to achieve these clear and measurable goals. Specifically, Mauro pointed to the unique strengths of Winnipeg’s cultural and artistic communities as a potential focus for our efforts. He also suggested that organizations such as the Business Council of Manitoba, United Way and The Winnipeg Foundation along with social service agencies, government, health, and the arts and cultural groups could be leadership units within the community.

“Together, we must build on our strengths, but perhaps most importantly, our efforts must have a moral dimension. They must be based on a true love for our fellow citizens,” said Mauro.

Jim Carr closed the session noting that the need for collective action does not diminish the power of individuals to make a difference. “Within our own hearts and our own minds, we have the capacity to make a difference.”
COMMITMENT FROM UNITED WAY

United Way’s Chair of the Board of Trustees, Irene Hamilton, pledged the commitment and stewardship of the organization to act initially as a secretariat to the continuation of Winnipeg’s journey forward as The Willing Community.

Representing the thousands of volunteers who support United Way’s mission to promote the organized capacity of people to care for one another, Hamilton identified a number of other ways the organization would help continue the Journey Forward.

• Distribute a post forum report summarizing the proceedings of The Willing Community Forum.

• Apply the vision and learnings from the initiative to inform its resource development and community investment activities, and to secure and distribute new resources to build harmony, embrace belonging, generate choices, stimulate dialogue and create sanctuary.

• Develop, maintain and broadly circulate, in partnership with others, a social indicators and outcomes monitor that would track and communicate progress towards the achievement of the five visions.

• Coordinate discussion towards a collaborative development initiative to blend arts/cultural, human, economic and social development to achieve the five visions.

• Secure expertise, for example the input of Bob McNulty, to assist a group of interested citizens and groups to create a business plan to implement the visions.

AN INVITATION FROM WINNIPEG’S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Dr. Judith Bartlett, a leader in our city’s Aboriginal community, invited individuals and groups to be part of a collaborative process to create in Winnipeg a North American Institute of Urban Aboriginal Affairs. This would build on the strengths of urban Aboriginal leadership in the city. Its launch is anticipated to coincide with the 2003 Indigenous Games to be held in Winnipeg.

BECOMING THE WILLING COMMUNITY

The forum closed with the observations and conclusions of the three community co-hosts who guided participants through the day-and-a-half forum. Sister Bernadette O’Reilly of Rossbrook House spoke of the energy created by the forum and the need to direct that energy into action by looking within our community, particularly the Aboriginal community. “I think when we do that, we need to want to do what we do. There needs to be an energy and excitement around it. We need to build on people’s strengths.”

Curt Vossen of James Richardson and Sons laid out a critical path that included setting a benchmark vision, working from within, setting high standards, achievable targets and measuring and truly celebrating our successes on an ongoing basis. “We need to embrace beauty, creativity and accomplishment, and root out mediocrity, neglect and indifference.”

Dion Knol of the Andrews Street Family Centre spoke of dreams such as having more resources for families, coming together as a community to build and restore homes and that the feeling of Folkorama would be an everyday occurrence. “Some may call them dreams. Others call them wishes. During my experience in life I’ve come to realize that dreams and wishes can come true if you believe in yourself and your community.”
Willing Community Forum Sets Tone for Future

The Willing Community Forum of November 21 and 22 brought community leaders and activists together at the Winnipeg Convention Centre in a hopeful, energetic atmosphere to discuss some realistic solutions to major challenges facing the city in the next millennium.

Winnipeggers are desperately aware of the issues we face as a city, and many have attempted to find lasting and equitable solutions over the years. The challenge today is to maintain hope and energy in the face of what often seems like overwhelming odds.

A high-energy, state-of-the-art audio/video presentation set a tone of excitement for the day-and-a-half event. Irene Hamilton, chair of United Way’s board of trustees welcomed participants and thanked the sponsors who made The Willing Community Forum a possibility. "Now we turn to Winnipeggers, beginning with all of you, to adopt this process and take action at home, in your workplace, your neighbourhood, throughout our community. Now is the time. The energy is here. The commitment is here. The determination is here. The solutions do exist," said Hamilton.

Jan Lederman, chair of The Willing Community, said the forum issued a call to action. She pointed out the clear and pressing need for Winnipeg community leaders and activists to pool resources and work together more effectively.

"Partnerships and collaboration based on mission will be the model for moving forward. And in an environment where we all are struggling to do more with fewer resources, the need to maximize the resources we do have is imperative."

Lederman also noted the urgency required in finding new models for working together that eliminate silos and competition so that the needs of the whole community can be addressed.

“We have many strong leaders in the community," she said. “Our commitment to bettering our community is the tie that binds us."

An excellent example of how strong leaders can work together toward a common goal was evident in the community hosts asked to guide the day-and-a-half forum: Dion Knol of Andrews Street Family Centre, Sister Bernadette O’Reilly of Rossbrook House and Curt Vossen of James Richardson and Sons. All three have strong ties to their individual communities and are committed to finding concrete ways to build a stronger, healthier, more harmonious city.

Knol’s commitment to the community came out of a troubled youth. His story of the alienation, limitation and desperation that led to drug abuse and attempted suicide is not an isolated one in our city. He was more fortunate than some.

“The community reached out to me,” he said. “People offered me shelter and support and I started to take my life back.”
Once he was back on his feet, Knol wanted to give something back to his community and has been working with individuals and families through the Andrews Street Family Centre for the past six years. He has experienced for himself, and seen first hand for others, how significantly people’s lives can be changed for the good with support from friends, neighbours and community groups.

“I believe in our community. I believe in our city,” he said. “Together we can meet the five goals: harmony, choice, belonging, sanctuary and dialogue and build a safe, healthy, strong tomorrow.”

Sister O’Reilly’s experiences working with disadvantaged families, especially children, has clearly illuminated the divisive lines that exist between our city’s neighbourhoods. Her story of a child who asked if she would still be invited to visit if O’Reilly lived in an affluent neighbourhood strongly illustrates how early psychological barriers are established in some of our city’s children.

The goal as O’Reilly sees it, is to stop trying to force old approaches on recurring problems and “allow our imaginations to create something new together.”

“We must believe these lines can be crossed,” she said. “And to do so, we need to invite each other in.”

O’Reilly is extremely hopeful for the city’s future and sees the challenges of finding solutions not as an overwhelming burden, but as “a magical adventure” instead.

For Vossen, who was presented with other opportunities, staying in Winnipeg to raise a family was a conscious choice. He sees one of the city’s major obstacles is our struggle to believe in our ability to meet current challenges.

“Winnipeg is unpretentious, a city of quiet pride,” he said. “We foster a climate that brings volunteerism to new levels.”

Vossen pointed out the 1997 flood and the Pan Am Games as two excellent examples of how Winnipeg’s citizens come together voluntarily to make things happen. Winnipeggers exhibited their capacity for courage, selflessness, tenacity and hope during these events. They are traits we need to draw upon now.

“Perhaps we can again draw people together to build,” he said. “We need faith in our abilities, in possibilities. This is the stuff of a good and worthwhile beginning on the journey to the place we want to be…and that place is called home.”

While the three hosts approach the concept of community from different perspectives, their intentions are the same. All are working toward a cohesive, co-operative, effective set of solutions to our city’s most pressing problems.

The challenge remains to turn the good intentions and suggested remedies discussed during the forum into concrete solutions.

“We are a willing community,” Lederman said. “I believe we can.”

If the sense of immediacy, co-operation and possibility exhibited during the day-and-a-half event are any indication of the future, Lederman’s belief is well founded.

Reported by C. Lee Crawford, Investors Group
The way to solve social issues in the community is to develop partnerships and collaborations between the community, government and business.

David Grayson made a journey from the United Kingdom and delivered that message, and more. Grayson is the head of Business In The Community, an alliance of 400 socially responsible companies in Great Britain working to solve the social issues in their communities. From lessons learned through his organization in Britain as well as from other organizations around the world, he has learned a few things which he passed on to The Willing Community Forum.

Grayson said it is not only important to understand the need to develop partnerships to solve social problems, but to understand the economic health of a community is influenced by its ability to solve those problems.

He says it’s no accident the most prosperous communities in the world are those which have the strategy, vision and mechanism to build those partnerships and enable them to achieve the established goals. And he says one of the most critical success factors is to get business into that partnership.

“What happens to business is important to the community and what happens to the community is important to business.”

Grayson acknowledges it’s sometimes difficult to get business to the table on these issues because businesses view social action groups with suspicion and the feeling is mutual. “They look at it like putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank” However, he says “What happens to business is important to the community and what happens to the community is important to business.”

You can have the best business in the world and the best product, but if you’re offering that product in a community where there are social problems and high unemployment, you have less of a chance of selling your product. And, he said,

“The most socially irresponsible business is the one which goes under.”

That’s why he says it’s important to make sure business understands it’s a two-way street. Businesses must understand the advantages they can gain from the partnership. Sometimes that comes in the way of more disposable income in the community, but it can also take the form of better intelligence about the community, better promotion and better development of a product.
“It’s also more than just getting the company to cut a cheque”, Grayson says. You must find creative ways for businesses to contribute. That might include some unused space in a store or factory for a community office, some space in a building after hours for a meeting place, the time of a company’s executives to assist in planning a project or mentoring small and new businesses. “It’s not always about money, but about valuable contributions.”

However, he cautions about intentions and attitudes. “Don’t do things for and to the community, but with.” Everyone must have ownership and bring their own expertise to the table, including the community group which might help build trust in the community for the business or government involvement in a project.

Grayson’s words seemed to galvanize many in the audience, especially when he said “today’s generation has the ability to design the next civilization,” because of the way the world around us is changing and the impact we are having on it. He also said we may not know the impact we will make, but we must believe in our ability to make an impact. “We have to get better at getting people out of their silos and believe in their ability to make a difference.”

There are no shortcuts he told the forum, but there are rewards. With businesses now able to compete on a global scale no matter where they are located, there is a high level of competition between communities for those businesses. But, he said, the community best able to win that competition and attract that business with its jobs and investment is the community which has been able to connect on a social vision and deal with its social problems.

Grayson warned the participants not to get too bogged down in planning, but to take action, no matter how small to start.

“There is a story told of a peasant farmer in the Auvergne region of France at the turn of the century. Every day he would go from his farmhouse after breakfast, after lunch and after dinner to tend his fields and check on his animals. And every time he passed by, he would scatter some acorns. The years went by and eventually he died. A few years later the provincial newspapers reported on the largest, natural, spontaneous appearance of a forest of oak trees ever to be recorded.

“We may never see the full impact of our work—but that does not mean that we should not start”

Reported by Roger Matas, Matas PR
BUILDING HARMONY

Moving from declining feelings of safety and social civility, to a community that builds harmony towards becoming a more civil society.

The session on building harmony took participants inside three structures that are critical places to build harmony in our lives—our workplaces, neighbourhoods and families.

“We’re a work in progress,” Manitoba Hydro’s Dana Beljanic said of her employer’s recently revised respectful workplace guidelines. “It requires constant tending, and hasn’t fully been achieved, but we have a vision and we continue to strive for it.” Hydro’s policy builds on the idea that employers need to provide their staff with a workplace that is safe, respectful, free from harassment and builds a sense of dignity and self-worth. Informal resolutions are the preferred method of dealing with problems. Acceptance of the program and its successes have meant that employees now have a growing sense that it’s safe to bring problems forward, and that the effect on the workplace will be positive.

Diversity is seen as one of the key strengths and biggest challenges in building harmony in one of Winnipeg’s oldest neighbourhoods. Block by block, residents of West Broadway are working towards making the area a community people will choose to call home.

As the chair of the West Broadway Development Corporation, Basarab has been involved in many of the programs, projects and activities that are bringing the people living in the area together. Relationships and friendships are being forged through involvement in community gardens and barbecues, and by strolling the streets to meet the neighbours. People who once feared each other now work side by side to make their homes safer and more desirable places to be.

Mediator Sue Hemphill identified pursuing harmony in our families as one of the greatest challenges we face. “We tend to be the most comfortable showing those we love our best and worst sides—our shadow selves—because we believe that they will know that we are more than that,” said Hemphill. Unlike our workplaces and communities, our homes and families don’t come with a set of written rules to follow.

Despite the differences in the three areas, some common themes emerged. The need to listen and to give voice to problems, the need for a co-operative approach to problem solving, and the sometimes accidental and untidy process of reaching success. “That’s what harmony is all about,” said Hemphill. “Many voices and different notes, all blending together to make something that is more than its individual parts.”

Reported by Eileen O’Donnell, Province of Manitoba
GENERATING CHOICES

Moving from poverty, where people are unable to meet their basic needs, to a community that generates choices for all its citizens.

Poverty can spread at an alarming rate despite being cradled in one of the strongest local economies in Canada and fuelled by a robust and rapidly expanding hi-tech industry.

Mark Cabaj, co-ordinator for the anti-poverty initiative Opportunities 2000 in Kitchener, Ontario, told participants that he has seen the number of people living on or at the poverty level increase 28 per cent in the past five years.

“This is happening despite a region that boasts over 350 hi-tech firms and a strong industrial base,” said Cabaj. “In a time of plenty, a lot of people are not sharing in that growing economic pie.”

To reverse this trend, the local community economic development committee created Opportunities 2000 several years ago with the aim of “removing 2000 families from the poverty ranks by the year 2000.” While the goal hasn’t been met, the program’s 84 funding partners want to continue their support and the program’s objectives.

Cabaj explained that Opportunities 2000 is financed using a multi-sectoral approach with major backers coming from local businesses and philanthropists.

“That was done because we didn’t want to look to government for help but wanted to look to ourselves for solutions,” he said.

The initiative spawned several programs to help local people who are unemployed or underemployed. These programs include:

- The Cultural Interpreter Program: designed to link human services to economic development by treating social services as a business. This program focuses on providing income and training to language interpreters who serve local businesses, government and social agencies in their language needs. This program has helped 52 people find jobs.
- New Services for the Working Poor: a local non-profit provides job searching and matching services for working poor immigrants. The program helps in matching local firms with the ranks of local immigrants. So far, 36 people have found work.
- Customized Training: this program works with local employers and non-profit training agencies to develop training for the long-term unemployed. This initiative identified a gap in the demand for long-haul truck drivers in the Kitchener-Waterloo region and began training 30 unemployed youth. Every one of the 30 found a job.

Cabaj said poverty exists in a time of plenty when the community as a whole is mis-performing. He cited an Ontario example where shift employees at a manufacturing plant voted to work double overtime instead of allowing management to add another shift that would have employed hundreds or thousands of people.

“It is the inadvertent actions that cause barriers to create a more equitable community,” he said.
To avoid this trap, anti-poverty advocates must do three things: 1) think of yourselves as citizens of your community first and not as a banker, or government employee or by your day-to-day job description; 2) simply do something to create job opportunities without worrying about the root causes; and 3) focus on change. If your approach doesn’t work the first time, don’t be afraid to alter your course of action.

While Opportunities 2000 is working in his community, Cabaj cautions that it may not work in Winnipeg. He said local solutions must be tailored to meet local demands and challenges.

This session also featured two local advocates working to break the poverty cycle in Winnipeg. Tamsen Matheson runs Winnipeg’s Urban Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Project and Andrew Douglas works with the local Alternative Financial Services committee in arranging financing for those living in poverty to remove the barriers to accumulating assets.

Matheson co-ordinates a pool of $400,000 provided by the federal government that can be loaned to budding entrepreneurs who want to start their own business. She said the maximum loan can be $75,000 for three years set at an interest rate of prime plus two per cent and the loan pool is self-perpetuating.

“We have everything from a retail operation such as a balloon gift shop to a gentleman who expanded his disability consultant business from his home to a retail operation,” said Matheson.

Douglas’ Alternative Financial Services initiative is adapting a successful U.S. model for use in Winnipeg and is attempting to overcome some initial barriers, such as recruiting eligible candidates, overcoming the restrictions of government-run assistance programs and teaching financial literacy to clients who occasionally have limited literacy skills.

“Our example is still in the test stages to see if it can work,” said Douglas. “But there are encouraging signs. We’ve had between 30 and 40 people involved in a program that has workshops on everything from money management to specific projects, like buying and maintaining a home.”

In Winnipeg, 47,000 people are living in poverty which means 18 per cent of the city’s families exist at the poverty level, said Derek Pachal, executive director of Seed Winnipeg Inc., an agency that helps develop job opportunities. Living in poverty doesn’t apply only to the unemployed, but also to the underemployed and includes anyone who earns less than $16,000 a year or a family of seven living on $42,000 or less.

Reported by Kevin Lightfoot, (Ghostwriter) Communications

EMBRACING BELONGING

Moving from marginalization, where people feel left out and left behind, to a community that embraces belonging, offering opportunities for people to feel connected.

Embracing belonging may sound like a sentimental platitude, but it has very real applications in today’s burgeoning society.

“This is not just a ‘feel good’ issue, it’s a practical issue,” said moderator Tom Denton.

Denton was moderating a panel discussion which explored the theme of embracing belonging as a way of reducing marginalization.
This theme was just one of five priority social issues that Winnipeggers identified and it has been described as a situation where people “feel left out and left behind”, rather than one that embraces belonging and offers opportunities “for people to feel connected.”

Speaking to this issue were people who know, and in some cases experience first-hand, the debilitating effects of being pushed to the outside of society’s boundaries.

One of them is Scott Klassen, a director of the Association for Community Living and a leading advocate for involvement of the developmentally challenged in society.

Klassen, who is physically challenged, remembers what it was like coming out of an institution into the big, wide and frightening world. “I had fears. Fears of not being accepted for who I am as a person, fears of being taken advantage of, of not being safe.”

What helped alleviate those fears was a “circle of friends” who included him in their lives. “It’s a great thing living in a community and having people you can count on and share your life with,” he said.

People can help spread that great feeling by looking around and inviting others into their circle of friends. “You would be amazed at the friendships that can form out of this. One door opens, then another door and another.”

If those doors aren’t opened, the results can be ugly and dangerous said Shahina Siddiqui, an academic, pastoral and media consultant who speaks on Islamic and social/political issues.

“Remember, for every stereotype, there’s a human cost,” Siddiqui said.

“My fear is marginalization (of Islamic people) may go to the extent that it has in the Aboriginal community.” Broad generalizations cut across minority groups and hurt everyone in the process. As an example, she points to the result of extensive TV news coverage of the ongoing Mid-East crisis, and the confusion a lack of information can cause.

“Some people think all Arabs are Muslims and vice versa” and as a result, there’s a tendency by some to label all Muslims as terrorists, she said. The name-calling that results creates fear in the Muslim communities of being misunderstood if they speak out.

Followers of Islam adhere to a strict code of dress, diet and social codes of conduct that often prevent Muslims from participating in many activities. One way to eliminate fear and ignorance is to bring both sides closer together through the accommodation of Muslim needs when it comes to social programs.

By doing this, Siddiqui said Muslims would have the opportunity to share more about their faith and culture with other Canadians, helping to eliminate ignorance.

Adrian Challis, the program co-ordinator for the Choices Youth Program, sees another negative side to marginalization.

Challis says an important goal is to help at-risk youth make positive choices when faced with the issues of substance use and abuse, and gang involvement. The latter has an especially strong pull for those who don’t feel connected to their community, he adds.

“The need to belong for 12 to 14-year-olds is very powerful!”

Besides giving Choices’ youth a chance to belong to a group, they’re also taught how to avoid negative peer pressure and other paths leading to social isolation. That’s done by building up a youth’s “resiliency”, or the ability to “bounce back from traumatic experience,” says Challis. Most youth in the program are lacking that quality he says.
By exposing the youths to progressively more challenging wilderness trips, which demand an increasing level of team problem solving, Challis says that quality is restored to a large degree. On a practical level, that translates into Choices’ youth being three times less likely to be charged with an offence, than those who haven’t been involved with Choices, according to Winnipeg Police Services statistics.

This informative and, at times, moving session approached marginalization from several different angles by people who have experienced or seen the damage that results from keeping people on the outside. Besides describing the negative effects, each speaker also offered their solutions, which all had a common thread running through them—to always include, never exclude—where one can.

CREATING SANCTUARY

Moving from stressed families, children and youth, to a community that creates sanctuary offering support and nurturing environments, even in our most stressful situations

Supporting families makes good economic, community and just plain common sense, according to Diane Redsky, acting Executive Director of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg. By valuing each individual’s skills and gifts, we can empower that person, who will then add strength to their family and community. If, instead, we focus on a person’s weaknesses, they will begin to feel needy and unable to contribute to their community.

Redsky said linking people and allowing them to share their gifts could strengthen a community. Building people’s confidence and giving them the opportunity to put their unique gifts and skills to good use is one of the goals of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. Once people become more confident and proud of themselves, they can start to look outside themselves and discover how they can help others and improve their community.

Melvina Boulanger is one of the people whose experience at the Centre has allowed her to develop skills and gifts that she didn’t know she possessed. Boulanger spoke to forum participants about the strength she has gained from being part of the Centre’s volunteer program for the past two years. A single mother of five, Boulanger left family and friends on a northern Manitoba reserve to move to Winnipeg so she could make a better life for her children and herself. Shortly after she arrived in Winnipeg, a relative introduced her to the Centre and she started volunteering first at the Centre, then at her children’s school. She said she didn’t think that she had much to offer anyone because she lacks formal training, but her volunteer work has helped her overcome her shyness and encouraged her to share her gifts.

“Sometimes people just need to know that there are people out there who care,” she said.

Boulanger believes that by being able to contribute to her community, she has made personal gains that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise. She’s now pursuing her dream of earning a Grade 12 diploma.
Marcel Baril, executive director of the Family Centre of Winnipeg, spoke of the success of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) Canada program now running in 14 Manitoba schools. Baril said the program is rooted in the knowledge that parents love their children and want what's best for them. It allows parents and children to spend quality time together, learn new skills, build stronger family bonds, enjoy and support one another, and participate more fully and comfortably in their schools and community.

The program began in Winnipeg two years ago. Margaret Park Elementary School was one of the first of four schools to participate. Margaret Park principal Pat Stefanchuck said the decision to take part in FAST involved school and divisional staff and parents. FAST sessions are held once a week for eight weeks. Although it's a major commitment of time and resources, she feels that the results are worth the costs. Through sharing meals, songs and playtime with their children, parents who participated in her school's FAST program have formed friendships and strengthened their community bond. Participating teachers are able to really get to know the students and their families. As well, parents who may be uncomfortable in a school setting because of their own school experiences, are able to become more relaxed when interacting with school staff.

Parent Darleen Funk told how being part of the FAST program helped her family develop neighbourhood friendships and relationships with those from different cultural backgrounds. She and her family are part of a FAST alumni group in Winnipeg who hold family outings on a regular basis.

Baril noted that learning new parenting skills and taking an active role in their children's education allows parents to become a more important part of their children's lives and builds stronger families.

Reported by Andrea Geary, Canadian Wheat Board

STIMULATING DIALOGUE

Moving from systems that hamper self-sufficiency and independence, to a community that stimulates dialogue, focusing systems on serving people, not process

In his opening address David Grayson spoke of the need to develop linkages within a community to provide the mechanism for people and groups to come together to solve problems.

Grayson noted one of the keys for communities to succeed in the global economy is to develop the collaborations which will address social issues and make the community stronger.

The Seven Oaks Neighbourhood Resource Network, in Winnipeg's north end, is well on that road. The Network is a loosely formed group of individuals and organizations which has come together to address many of the problems affecting the community. Many of these problems are also unique to the community.

The group says they have worked to build friendships and trust throughout the community. They say their start was to have everyone ask what they can do as individuals to make the community better.

The Seven Oaks community has about 57,000 people spread over 16 neighbourhoods. The Network was formed by individuals who believe a healthy community leads to healthy people within the community. The Network brings together individuals, agencies and businesses who are developing long-term solutions to the problems in the community while addressing emergent issues as they arise.
The initiative has attracted the support and involvement of diverse groups and agencies including the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the Seven Oaks School Division, the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba and the Garden City Shopping Centre.

The Network is already paying dividends and meeting its goals after barely one year in existence. The community is spread over a large geographic area and divided by major traffic arteries but the Network has helped to break down those barriers and bring the community closer. By coming up with innovative programs, many in the community feel a sense of belonging despite the geographic difficulties. They no longer feel their own neighbourhood is the only area of importance. They now feel part of the larger community and the walls have come down.

The Network and its partnerships have worked to channel energies into solutions. The group is also seeing a ripple effect—as they deal with one issue, it seems to bring solutions to other issues into focus as well.

For example, they developed a program to have the area’s young people assist seniors in the parking lot of the local shopping centre. In the past, the seniors have felt the area to be unsafe, partly because of the young people hanging around. The seniors now feel much more comfortable in going to the shopping centre, the young people have something meaningful to do with their spare time and the community is safer overall with a greater sense of trust.

Another benefit of this creative solution is seen by the shopping centre, which has been a major supporter of the Network initiative.

“IT’s not always about money,” says Jackie Schreyer, the centre’s marketing director. “There are many things we’ve done to support the Network which have not required us to write a cheque. We’ve given them space for meetings, provided chairs and tables for groups setting up displays in the mall and contributed our own time. As a result, the mall has become a central meeting place for a number of community groups and our tenant stores and services have seen the benefit. And, we’ve found it’s much more rewarding to work alongside the group to achieve the goal, rather than just writing a cheque.”

By bringing all these different agencies, individuals and organizations together, the community also has developed the relationships and the contacts needed to deal with urgent issues as they arise. This contact list has been brought into use on several occasions, resulting in much speedier resolution of problems. “Also,” says Al Kircher, a psychologist with the Seven Oaks School Division, “finding the solution to issues provides the opportunity to establish new partnerships and bonds and brings more groups and people into the Network.”

The Network feels a great deal of accomplishment for what they’ve done to date, but understands it’s just a start. They say their success is due to the fact they are working with a willing community. The group believes bringing people together with a common vision and stimulating dialogue, has started the journey forward.

Reported by Roger Matas, Matas PR
Now that Canada’s economy is on the upswing, it’s time for governments, businesses and individuals to start repairing the social safety nets that were damaged during the hard times of the 1980s and 90s, said Judith Maxwell from Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Maxwell displayed a graph showing while per capita income growth in Canada was just 0.1 per cent in the 1990s, it has increased to 2.3 per cent from 1997 to June 2000. Better economic times mean that governments can stop concentrating on paying down debt and resume social spending, Maxwell said.

However, she warned delegates against counting on governments to operate all social programs that are needed. The responsibility for running many social programs has fallen to the community level. Today’s reality is that everyone must work together to help ensure a decent quality of life for all Canadians, she said, not depend on government to do the job.

People sometimes think that poverty is something that happens to those who are weak, but, Maxwell said, most people can be seriously affected by ill health, job loss and withdrawal of family support. It’s not that far a fall from being a full-time worker to living on social assistance.

“That kind of downward spiral can happen to anyone,” she said.

Social programs must be designed to help people become resilient and able to bounce back from adversity. Such resiliency comes from inner strength and supportive families and communities. Maxwell said resilient individuals are required to form resilient communities. To make a community resilient, people within that community must begin talking together to identify problems, then establish a common vision and set of goals. She commended the organizers and participants at The Willing Community Forum for starting the process needed to make Winnipeg a more resilient and stronger community.

Reported by Andrea Geary, Canadian Wheat Board
Paula Mitchell, owner of Mitchell Fabrics and a member of the North Main Task Force called the development of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Centre and Thunderbird House at the corner of Main and Higgins “an exciting and unique opportunity to rejuvenate not only a place, but a people.”

“The development is changing the face of the neighbourhood,” she said, “and making a huge difference in terms of the socio-economic activity for Aboriginal people in our city.”

Mitchell spoke in a presentation that showcased what the community has accomplished in this historic area of Winnipeg.

“Today, the CP Station is a bustling hub for Aboriginal people,” said Wayne Helgason, President of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. “Now fully occupied, it houses everything from small businesses, to classrooms, to a full-service restaurant.”

Based on the assumption that to change the face of a community you must start with the people, the Centre has focused its efforts on creating a wide variety of opportunities for Aboriginal people, including a chance to learn about and take pride in their culture.

“Right now, nearly 600 adult students are finishing their Grade 12 education through the Centre’s Aboriginal Community Campus,” Helgason said, “and we have pre-schoolers learning the language and traditions of their culture through a nationally-recognized Head Start program.”

After screening a video that outlined the history of this extraordinary development over the last decade, Helgason pointed out that the video was created by the young entrepreneurs at Ice Productions, a successful Aboriginal business.

Dr. Judy Bartlett, Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, said health programming through the Centre aims to recognize the holistic needs of all people.

“Optimum health relies on a wide variety of elements, whether it be intellectual, spiritual, cultural or economic,” she said. “The holistic framework we have developed is an excellent tool to foster personal growth and overall health for individuals, but can even be applied to the community. It’s also a framework for pursuing inter-sectoral, collaborative action.”
In keeping with this holistic philosophy, if the Aboriginal Centre is intended to be a multi-purpose facility, the distinctive Thunderbird House was built as a place of cultural and spiritual significance.

Designed by internationally-renowned architect Douglas Cardinal, the structure is intended to convey a sense of power, open in the four directions so vital to Aboriginal spirituality. "Cardinal created the space as a symbol," Helgason said. "When you look around you in the building, you almost get the sense of an eagle spanning its wings, protecting its young."

Ultimately, for all who spoke, the Aboriginal Centre and Thunderbird House are more than just buildings.

"They are a breath of life to re-establish dignity, health and affluence to Main Street," Bartlett said. For Mitchell, they are a unique opportunity for empowerment. "There is incredible potential there, but if we are to build on this potential, there must be the community and political will to keep the momentum going."

Helgason agreed, saying that when asked exactly what Thunderbird House was, he could only think of one word. "A promise."

Reported by Brenda Hasiuk, Manitoba Government Employees Union
An exploration of the critical role the arts can play in the willing community inspired participants at The Willing Community Forum. The compelling presentation made the case that arts and culture are not mere indulgences, but powerful tools that can help build on the strengths of youth.

The Carnegie Foundation spent a decade studying positive ways teens were choosing to fill the time gap between the end of the school day and the point when the adults in their lives arrived home. The study asked where kids were seeking opportunities to learn.

“Some of the most remarkable and unexpected results came from activities centered around community-based arts organizations,” said Laura Smyth, co-author of the study’s resource guide. The U.S.-based study found that youth, in partnership with these organizations, were tapping their own creativity, and the benefits flowed to the artists and beyond into their communities. The study measured enormous improvements in the development of youth regularly participating in arts programming. They are twice as likely to enjoy academic achievement, 22 times as likely to read for pleasure, and more than 30 times as likely to plan to continue their education past high school.

“These were high-risk, at-risk kids—the very kids headlines were screaming about. Here they were creating and contributing members of society,” said Smyth.

Panelists from Winnipeg say it’s an experience that has held true here as well.

“When our program began, youth were getting a lot of negative media attention,” said Stephen Wilson of Graffiti Gallery. Located in the core of the city, Graffiti Gallery works with young artists on projects they do for themselves, as well as commercial ventures. “They were easy targets with no real political voice. This is a legal outlet with social benefits for what kids love to do.”

The provision of roles, rules and risks were identified as key elements in successful programs. Teens are not only the artists, but also play a role in the business of marketing that art, strategic and organizational planning. Rules are woven into the fabric of the business.

“We like to use the commercial part of the organization to help young people learn to deal with the real world. With our commercial wall murals, artists work with clients and have to meet deadlines,” said Wilson.

Creativity itself involves risk—putting one’s own performance out there for the world to see and judge.
“Something very special happens to young people when they reach down deep into their soul, and put it on a canvas, or on stage. It allows them to reach out, explore, imagine, dream and risk. It's a magical transformation,” said Wilson.

“I lacked direction in my own life, I had no self-confidence,” said Brandi Williams, a young artist from Graffiti Gallery. “I discovered acceptance and myself there.”

Teens who crave real world experience can definitely find it in such programs, and artistic techniques aren't the only valuable skills developed in the process.

“In a recent survey, employers identified the top three qualities they seek in a job applicant as experience, collaborative skills and the ability to solve problems creatively. Community-based arts organizations provide this in spades,” said Smyth.

“These aren't programs that drop into communities like a parachute, they grow from it,” said Smyth.

Monique Lysak of Art City in West Broadway said the program was created in response to what the community silently requested. The brainchild of artist Wanda Koop, Art City is open to all ages and all communities.

“The works created at Art City are reflections of the artists themselves, our world and their world. A strong sense of belonging is being developed. Our presence is how we are stimulating all of these community-moving themes. The key word is exist,” said Lysak.

“We're all looking for ways to connect with each other, to bring the community together to grow and prosper. There's no more immediate way to do so than with public art,” said Wilson.

“If you're talking bottom line, then here it is. It costs $900 to $1000 U.S. per year for a young person to take part in a community-based arts-based program, but more than $40,000 per year to pay for a youth in trouble,” said Smyth.

“Participating in the arts takes youth beyond the now to what might happen in the future.

They are people who can dream and maybe imagine a tomorrow,” said Smyth.

Reported by Eileen O’Donnell, Province of Manitoba
Armed with plenty of examples of cities that have redefined themselves in the face of huge challenges, urban visionary Robert McNulty is confident that Winnipeg is poised to chart its own course to success.

“I’m not here to tell you what the answer is. You’ve already taken some key steps in that direction. Now the final step is needed to build on the equity invested throughout the Journey Forward Initiative and point the way to what needs to be done tomorrow,” McNulty told delegates at The Willing Community Forum.

“I can tell you from experience that people become fiercely loyal and energized about making their communities better places,” said McNulty, who is President of Partners for Livable Communities in Washington, D.C.

A national, non-profit organization, Partners for Livable Communities has 25 years of experience and a proven track record for helping turn communities around in the United States, Canada and overseas.

To move successfully from vision to reality, the key for any city is to identify what McNulty calls a “flagship idea” so powerful that people are inspired to take action. An idea with the capacity to reconcile the strengths of a great community with corrosive issues such as child poverty that need to be addressed in the process of renewal.

“A campaign needs to be designed that has the spirit of the Pan Am Games, the urgency of the 1997 flood and the excitement to galvanize people,” said McNulty.

Throughout North America, communities once facing their own set of challenges are now reaping the benefits of setting their sights on redefining themselves, said McNulty.

Among the list is Chattanooga, Tennessee, once known for being one of the most polluted cities in America, with an outdated industrial base and stagnant community involvement. A call to action brought together new leaders in the community from across the economic, political, social and multicultural spectrum. Two years and 187 ideas later, the group settled on its flagship idea—to become the best mid-sized city in the United States.
“They studied their competition and set out to do it better—from housing and educational assistance to race relations and the arts. They invested $184 million over 10 years and today Chattanooga is a model example.”

North of Chattanooga, in the state of Indiana, the city of Indianapolis, once dubbed “Indi-nowhere” by those familiar with it has become the centre of excellence for amateur sport in the United States, thanks to the efforts of its citizens. Over in Denver, Colorado, suburban residents voluntarily agreed to increase their taxes to support the revitalization of the city’s downtown.

Finding a frame of reference upon which to build a vision is an important step noted McNulty. “Do you want to be the best in the Americas? The Northern Hemisphere? In Canada?”

“Might Winnipeg become the centre of excellence in North America for demonstrating how Aboriginal communities can blossom and contribute to a pluralistic society?,” asked McNulty.

“Is there an opportunity to use culture as a building block, with creativity as the bridge that brings together and motivates young people, the business community, governments, and neighbourhoods to become involved in the process of revitalization?”

Whatever the flagship idea might be, getting there from here involves building a plan that looks 20 years down the road, identifies what needs to be achieved in the first three years and paves the way to building the infrastructure to bring it to life.

“Create new organizations to implement the change. These are groups that have a short life span. They are hired to get the job done and fired when it’s complete. They are not part of the existing infrastructure,” says McNulty.

The establishment of a stewardship organization, complete with a .5 staff position, would put in place the measures for accountability, ensuring that the plan stays on track, that problems are brought to the forefront and that key players across the community renew their commitment to the vision.

“All of your efforts to date will be rewarded when you can make something happen with a business plan that will help you go to scale. The challenges are significant but the opportunities for change that will give definition to your values and bring recognition to Winnipeg are amazing.”

Reported by Heather Johnson, Canadian International Grains Institute
Identifying the recipe for successful action was the task of a panel of four community leaders who shared their thoughts about future directions for our community.

The Right Reverend Stanley McKay

“If our vision is not for seven generations, then we don’t have a vision.”

Rev. McKay shared this Anishinaabe saying with forum participants, expressing the need for our community to view its work together as a long-term and often challenging process.

“The social issues identified by the Journey Forward discussions are really about poverty and marginalization,” he said. “Our challenge ahead is to ensure that we can take collective action that respects diversity and empowers all in the process. We are not there yet, and so our next steps are very important.”

Rev. McKay stressed the need for informed public policy formation that is based on humanizing principles.

“The Rev. Martin Luther King gave us a simple definition that can drive our work together,” he said. “Community is that which humanizes and harmonizes.”

Paul Moist

“We must act with local purpose, with a view to our wider world and responsibilities.”

Each of us have what could be called “micro” experiences, at the personal, family and civic level Moist said, as well as experiences at a larger “macro” level. If we are to enact change, we must consider local, national, as well as global realities.

“Today, more than ever, we live in an international community. What happens at the macro level will inevitably serve or impede our efforts locally. Currently, there is no national or international consensus on our Journey Forward.”

Moist stressed the need for each of us to not only play an active role in local initiatives, but to also do our part in creating national and global understanding and support for the Journey Forward values and vision.
Gail Asper

“The future calls for coordinating our civic actions and ensuring business is engaged.”

With so many resources currently in our community—especially in the areas of social services and business—we simply have to start doing things smarter, Gail Asper said.

“Together, we have to find better ways to use the resources we have. We need to find better methods to exchange resources and rally our leadership in all sectors.”

Asper pointed to United Way as a vehicle to achieve many of these goals. “We need to ensure “The Willing Community” stays at the forefront of the public's mind so that joint ideas can emerge.”

She added that our greatest challenge now is to find ways to truly engage the local business sector, who have a vital role to play.

“With all taking part, we can figure out ways to reduce duplication and grow stronger together in our efforts.”

Dr. Arthur Mauro

“Our goals must be clear and measurable.”

Winnipeggers have a proud legacy of coming together to make history, Art Mauro said. The original Community Chest, The Winnipeg Foundation, the New Music Festival all are examples of groundbreaking local initiatives and energy. He suggested that Winnipeg may want to consider being the site of a Festival of the Americas.

“We have ample leadership here to do it again,” he said. “But I think several factors are critical to our success today.”

Mauro said that our collective goals must be clearly defined enough to marshal the city’s leadership and to encourage participation and planning.

Specifically, Mauro pointed to the unique strengths of Winnipeg’s cultural and artistic communities as a potential focus for our efforts. He also suggested that organizations such as the Business Council of Manitoba, United Way and The Winnipeg Foundation along with social service agencies, government, health, and the arts and cultural groups could be leadership units within the community.

“Together, we must build on our strengths,” he said, “but perhaps most importantly, our efforts must have a moral dimension. They must be based on a true love for our fellow citizens.”

James Carr

Panel moderator Jim Carr closed the session noting that the need for collective action does not take away from the power of individuals to make a difference. Noting that racism is as much an individual as collective issue, Carr noted, “Within our own hearts and our own minds, we have the capacity to make a difference.”

Reported by Brenda Hasiuk, Manitoba Government Employees Union
Commitment from United Way

United Way’s Chair of the Board of Trustees, Irene Hamilton, pledged the commitment and stewardship of the organization to act initially as a secretariat to the continuation of Winnipeg’s journey forward as The Willing Community.

Representing the thousands of volunteers who support United Way’s mission to promote the organized capacity of people to care for one another, Hamilton identified a number of other ways the organization would help continue the Journey Forward.

- Distribute a post forum report summarizing the proceedings of The Willing Community Forum.
- Apply the vision and learnings from the initiative to inform its resource development and community investment activities, and to secure and distribute new resources to build harmony, embrace belonging, generate choices, stimulate dialogue and create sanctuary.
- Develop, maintain and broadly circulate, in partnership with others, a social indicators and outcomes monitor that would track and communicate progress towards the achievement of the five visions.
- Coordinate discussion towards a collaborative development initiative to blend arts/cultural, human, economic and social development to achieve the five visions.
- Secure expertise, for example the input of Bob McNulty, to assist a group of interested citizens and groups to create a business plan to implement the visions.

An Invitation from Winnipeg’s Aboriginal Community

Dr. Judith Bartlett, a leader in our city’s Aboriginal community, invited individuals and groups to be part of a collaborative process to create in Winnipeg a North American Institute of Urban Aboriginal Affairs. This would build on the strengths of urban Aboriginal leadership in the city. Its launch is anticipated to coincide with the 2003 Indigenous Games to be held in Winnipeg.

“As a legacy to the Journey Forward, A Willing Community, I propose that a committee, led by Aboriginal people in partnership with other key Winnipeggers, be struck to determine the feasibility and timelines for developing a North American Institute of Urban Aboriginal Affairs. I would propose that this be a knowledge development organization that would provide not only research on the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples, but also provide knowledge on aspects of Aboriginal cultures that might benefit all Winnipeggers and Canadians.

“In 2003 the North American Indigenous Games will be held in Winnipeg. This event is an opportunity for Winnipeg to profile how it has achieved its commitment toward ensuring that all of its citizens are playing an active and vital role in making Winnipeg a better place to live. Our city has a unique opportunity to play a leadership role, one that does not exist anywhere else in Canada, and perhaps not in North America. The North American Institute of Urban Aboriginal Affairs would tentatively be launched at the Indigenous Games.”
The forum closed with the observations of the three community co-hosts who guided forum participants through the day and a half forum. Sister Bernadette O’Reilly of Rossbrook House spoke of the energy created by the forum and the need to direct that energy into action. “I think when we do that, we need to want to do what we do. There needs to be an energy and excitement around it. We need to build on people’s strengths.” Sister Bernadette stressed the need to look within ourselves and to look to the energy and strengths of others. The potential presented by the Aboriginal community is a vital component to building a successful and dynamic community that can act on its desires.

Curt Vossen of James Richardson and Sons laid out a critical path that included:

- setting a benchmark vision that is real, apparent and achievable;
- taking an inventory to ensure available resources are used wisely;
- working from within our communities, neighbourhoods and individuals;
- setting high standards and guarding them jealously;
- looking for incremental progress and measuring progress to ensure responses are effective, not just well meaning;
- setting achievable targets;
- advertising the good news, focusing on and celebrating our successes;
- reducing rhetoric that is not productive or helpful; and
- planning, but taking action.

“We need to embrace beauty, creativity and accomplishment and root out mediocrity, neglect and indifference,” noted Vossen.

Dion Knol of the Andrews Street Family Centre spoke of dreams of resources for families, coming together as a community to build and restore homes and that the feeling of Folkorama would be an everyday occurrence. “Some may call them dreams. Others call them wishes. During my experience in life I’ve come to realize that dreams and wishes can come true if you believe in yourself and your community.”

Knol closed the forum by asking those delegates who felt they were part of The Willing Community to stand. The entire room stood.
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