Toronto Neighbourhood Centres – TNC

Observations on the State of Community Planning in Toronto

TNC Report prepared by Rob Howarth for the City of Toronto, Social Development and Administration Division

February 14, 2004

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I) Research Objectives and Methodology

The City of Toronto has begun a review of community-based planning activities. As part of the review the City contracted with the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC) and other community-based organizations to carry out research and consultation within their sectors. The City identified that these consultations should include the following activities:

- to review the planning capacity of the sector your organization serves;
- to review the community-based planning needs of the sector;
- to identify the role and relationship of your organization to other planning groups and institutions; and
- to recommend ways to improve the co-ordination and effectiveness of the sector.

In this regard the TNC has consulted with a sample of its member organizations and documented their observations on the state of community planning in Toronto. Member agency Executive Directors participated in two focus group sessions (held on January 14 and February 11, 2004) and individual phone interviews. Members responded to the following questions:

- What are the ways in which your organization participates in social planning functions? (Social planning functions were primarily defined by the respondents. Some examples were provided as a prompt if necessary e.g. community research, education and policy development, service planning and networking).
- What organizations/ groups do you depend upon for support in areas of social planning and public policy analysis?
- In your opinion, what are the critical gaps or needs with regard to effective supports for social planning in your community?
- What are your suggested strategies to improve social planning in Toronto?

A draft report of the research findings and recommendations emerging from the key informant and first focus group session was circulated to the entire TNC membership electronically for their feedback. In this way five agencies that had not been interviewed or attended the first focus group session were afforded an opportunity to contribute additional information that has been integrated into this final report. All of these agency representatives also ended up attending the second focus group session.

A total of twenty-one member organizations, representing 75% of the current twenty-eight TNC members contributed to the findings presented in this report. This includes

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member representation from Etobicoke (2 of 2 members), Scarborough (4 of 5 members), North York (3 of 5 members), East York (1 of 1) and downtown Toronto (10 of 15).

The following report summarizes these key informant and focus group responses. As well, the report integrates reflections on the TNC experience as an association participating actively in sectoral-level community planning initiatives in Toronto over the past four years.

II) Context and Challenges for Community Planning in Toronto

The current challenges of community planning in Toronto to a great degree stem from social and economic inadequacies and inequalities in our City. Some significant community "fault lines" in this regard have been well documented by recent research, including:

- The racialization of poverty involving entrenched and persistent economic and social inequalities among racialized communities. This is indicated by poverty rates two to three times higher than the rate for European families, and consistent patterns of higher employment and low wage under-employment among racialized groups (Ornstein "Ethno-Racial Inequality in Toronto: Analysis of the 1996 Census", 2000; Galabuzi "Canada's Creeping Economic Apartheid", 2001).

- A widening divide between richer and poorer members of our communities (Canadian Council on Social Development "Does a Rising Tide Lift All Boats", 2002), and an increase in geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities, cut off by the confluence of physical/built and social-economic barriers. (United Way of Greater Toronto "Decade of Decline", 2002)

- Increasing isolation and disadvantage for vulnerable and marginalized populations across the city, including immigrants and refugees, single parents, isolated seniors, women of colour, low income individuals and families, psychiatric survivors, and disabled community members (agency staff anecdotal observations).

Toronto's community agency infrastructure in turn mirrors these fault lines – with fewer supports for agencies serving new and emerging communities and a lack of organizational infrastructure in inner suburb communities relative to downtown communities. Pre-amalgamation municipal inequities in policy and resources allocated to support community infrastructure have resulted in a patchwork of not-for-profit

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community agencies across the City of Toronto. These historical inequities have now been entrenched as a result of a freeze to funds available to support organizational and community capacity building. Many neighbourhoods and ethno-racial communities are completely under-resourced in terms of organizational infrastructure, community building and service delivery capacity. (TNC, "Shaken Foundations" research report, 2003).

Residents' capacity to engage and be supported in social planning is related to community infrastructure being in place (e.g. community meeting space, programs to support discussion, and community development staff to support networks and assist community groups to act). At the present time these resources are completely inadequate across most areas of the City, and are lacking altogether in a number of communities.

These inequalities and an overall scarcity of community infrastructure resources (at both the local and sectoral levels) are in turn challenging the effectiveness of community planning in a number of ways:

- There is a dichotomy within TNC and across the City as a whole, between older long-standing organizations and newer and emerging organizations. Within the current climate of lack of funding for core infrastructure support, this division is widening. Larger and older agencies are having more success in taking advantage of funding opportunities. Smaller TNC organizations cannot sustain the same scale of grant-writing, reporting, and new program development initiatives. We are aware that this dynamic is even more pronounced for agencies in the City that rely on a few project or service contracts (e.g. a LINC program), or have only time-limited admin support (e.g. Trillium grant). Currently most TNC agencies are afforded some core stability by being either United Way member organizations or AOCC centres (Association of City Funded Community Centres) which receive core administrative funding from the City.

- There are not enough resources being allocated to support the infrastructure needs of emerging organizations. As well, the core infrastructure needs of agencies with settlement services as their main activity have been historically under-resourced in Toronto. This in turn fuels fractures and tensions between ethno-specific organizations and multi-ethnic/ multi-service organizations.

- Inadequate supports for city-wide planning agencies are fueling fractures in planning discourse and activity, as evidenced by the parallel efforts of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC-T), and the Alternative Planning Group (APG) – comprised of representatives from Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC), Hispanic Development Council, and African Canadian Social

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Development Council.

- Promising initiatives such as the recent Listening to Toronto sessions still tend to favour access for those who are most capable of participating. Resources are not available to support poorer and marginalized groups (i.e. the majority of program participants that TNC member agencies work with) to participate in any sustained way in civic engagement and decision making. For example, it is striking that among the twenty-eight current TNC member agencies, only four organizations reported have the capacity to maintain a full-time staff position to support community development. Even these community development staff resources are not secure, but must be augmented by a continual series of project grant activities year after year. Three of the four TNC member organizations that are managing to sustain these positions have all been in existence for more that 40 years and are located in the old City of Toronto. The fourth (LAMP) is a newer organization, but is integrated with a community health centre that provides some stability for the community development staffing. Three other members reported that they have part-time community development staff resources, but these are all typically supported by time limited one or two-year project grants, typically SCPI (Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative) grant funds at this time.

- There exists an overall lack of community resources and services (e.g. service agencies, recreation centres, public meeting and program spaces) in many communities. In some inner suburb neighbourhoods TNC member agencies have no network of service providers to work with in strengthening communities.

- Local community networks of agencies, where they do exist (e.g. Network of Community Based Organizations in Jane/Finch community, Rexdale Community Partners, Scarborough Homelessness Coalition) have no ongoing facilitation or dedicated staff capacity to follow up on collaborative activities. Exceptions are occasional project grant work, and one-time community events or consultations, but these initiatives are not being sustained or built upon.

- Local community partnerships for service planning and information sharing are continually challenged by the fact that smaller and newer organizations do not have the capacity to actively participate in network meetings or follow up on shared initiatives.

- Some funders, including the City of Toronto, appear to be siphoning off program dollars from downtown communities as a method of re-distributing scarce resources to neighbourhoods in the inner suburbs. In the context of flat-lined grant programs year after year this is presenting significant challenges, and is bringing the legitimate needs of vulnerable communities across the City into conflict.

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- Larger city-wide mandated organizations are beginning to shift their operations into the inner suburbs to respond to significant needs and take advantage of new funding opportunities. Unfortunately some funders are then beginning to play off agencies that have been serving inner suburb communities for years against these newly located city-wide mandated service agencies.

Significant investment in community agency infrastructure and city-wide community planning resources will be needed to overcome these inequities, and create an adequate and diverse network of well-supported and stable agencies that can collaborate together and partner with the City and other levels of government to effectively advance social development goals in our City.

III) Components of Effective Community Planning

There is an incredible range of vital, imaginative and effective social planning initiatives being practiced in local communities in Toronto. Examples provided by TNC member respondents are summarized in Section V) Local Planning Initiatives. While these initiatives are encouraging in their own terms, it is also clear that the overall level of social planning resources and capacities are woefully inadequate for achieving any comprehensive and sustained social development objectives in our City.

In TNC's opinion, effective social development outcomes can only be achieved if community planning work is focused on action and integrated with community education, mobilization and civic engagement practices that lead to increased local control over policies and services affecting the well-being of individuals and communities.

Community planning should work to achieve social development goals, such as:
- increased civic engagement, awareness and capacity for community members to influence policy decisions that affect their lives, and work with others to promote more inclusive, equitable and healthy conditions in society
- promoting increased quality, scope and effectiveness of social supports and services in all communities (e.g. increased housing, child care, income support and training programs, education and health services, settlement services and other non-profit community support services)
- increased coordination of services, and access to services (both public and non-profit) especially for marginalized groups and vulnerable community members

To further these objectives, TNC organizations consulted for this research described a range of community planning functions or capacities that would be important to have in

place at both the local and broader sector levels. Generalizing from member agency observations, these comprise three main components.

1) Stable and well resourced local non-profit organizations that are funded and mandated to integrate community development practice with service delivery, and that are:

- Accountable to and inclusive of diverse and marginalized interests in a community;
- Resourced and supported to carry out local community education, mobilization and planning processes (including community and program participant consultations, education campaigns, participating in research, and promoting civic engagement in elections and policy development processes).

2) Community-level forums to support on-going service planning, issue identification, capacity mapping, needs assessments, and new program and agency infrastructure development (both within geographic neighbourhoods and across communities of interest/ affinity).

- These would be permanent local planning forums that include representation from non-profit community services, resident groups, and local public service resources (e.g. recreation centres, schools, public health, libraries, planning department regarding local developments, police departments, Children's Aid Society).

- These forums need to include direct accountability to government departments and agency boards responsible for services, so that local planning decisions inform change at a departmental/agency level, are reinforced by changes in resource/budget allocations, and so that desired program-level practices end up being entrenched at a policy level.

- These community planning forums need to be resourced to sustain on-going facilitation, communication, and capacity to follow-up on local planning decisions.

3) Sector-level network of non-profit community agencies (Toronto and perhaps GTA-wide) with capacity for information-sharing, collaboration and collective action.

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- Central communication and information-sharing systems are required for the non-profit social service sector in Toronto that are inclusive of the sector's diverse agencies (i.e. drawing together settlement services, ethno-specific community agencies, multi-service agencies, emerging organizations and community groups trying to establish their capacity for community service delivery and civic engagement).

- This network should be resourced to support a clearinghouse function that will allow for the dissemination of local social planning initiatives (e.g. sharing of agency and community-level research, promoting promising interventions more widely, and cataloguing research that can help with funding proposals and policy briefs where agencies need to document the context of broader socio-economic trends and impacts/ and the importance of community-based interventions).

- This network should be used as a forum to identify shared "sector-level" priorities for community research, action and intervention regarding supports needed for the sector (e.g. organizational capacity building, core funding), and building a pro-active analysis that could inform and advance progressive policy development.

- This network should ideally have the capacity to exercise a shared voice that would be empowered to represent the interests of the sector in coalitions (e.g. with environment, social justice, childcare, housing, community health sectors), and be able to enter into discussions with funders and policy makers to advance the overall objectives of strengthening the community agency non-profit sector's ability to achieve social development goals.

IV) Recommendations for Enhancing Current Community Planning Capacity

TNC would support any initiatives designed to strengthen or establish the three essential components of community planning outlined above. In the TNC's opinion, none of these components are fully in place or are being effectively resourced in Toronto at this time. Some modest "next step" recommendations to improve these inadequacies are outlined below.

A) Supporting Local Hubs for Community Building and Expanding Non-Profit Infrastructure

1. Ensure we are including community development and civic engagement as critical "core functions" that are not currently being supported as a result of a lack of infrastructure and core funding.

2. Need to continue mounting pressure on governments to reinvest in core agency functions. For TNC this work will include:
    o   Participating in developing final report and recommendations of the Community City Working Group on Stable Core Funding.
    o   Participating in completing the CSPC-T Core Funding research, dissemination and next steps.
    o   Participating in new Ontario-wide union/agency Building Strong Communities Campaign aimed at pressuring provincial reinvestment in non-profit community service infrastructure.
    o   Maintaining momentum regarding recent motion at Community Services Committee to utilize the Community Services Grant Program (CSGP) to support core agency functions more effectively.
    o   Working with the United Way to further their strategic planning commitments for convening and advocating around core funding issues.

3. Need to develop more significant non-profit agency representation and involvement in the City-United Way "Strong Communities Task Force" initiative.

4. Mobilize additional supports (e.g. from City staff and departments, United Way, Foundations, Unions and others) to assist in maintaining and developing the sector's effectiveness with ongoing funder education regarding the need for infrastructure investment – e.g. convening funders, facilitating discussions and action plans to address these challenges.

5. Seek funding for additional facilitation supports for city-wide civic mobilizations and campaigns that are stressing the importance of non-profit community infrastructure as a critical component of building inclusive communities and increasing civic engagement. These likely need to be shaped and directed by a sector-level network of non-profit community based organizations (explored below).

B) Regarding Local Planning Forums

1. Need some organization or city department to take the lead in examining current local service planning models that are being used in Toronto (e.g. early years; Regent Park redevelopment stewarded by Toronto Community Housing Corporation; St. Jamestown/ Wellesley community centre planning process stewarded by parks and recreation and City community development officers) and also recovering lessons from the five-year Laidlaw "Community Systems" initiative that linked community visioning with coordination of local and city-wide mandated services to achieve local program and departmental policy level changes aimed at improving life chances/ transitions of children and youth (see appendix B).

2. These learnings could then be used to build upon the City of Toronto's Listening to Toronto process, and also integrated with the work of the "Strong Neighbourhoods" City-United Way task force. One option would be to establish "**social infrastructure planning tables**" in pilot communities. These could be staffed and resourced in order to assist local agencies, community groups, public service departments, and institutions (e.g. schools, CAS) to identify infrastructure gaps, collaborate to maximize existing community resources, and advocate for local infrastructure investment. Existing community groups and agencies involved in the process would have to be supported financially in order to commit to ongoing participation in the planning, following up with resulting action plans, and ensuring effective engagement with their community constituencies (program participants, board volunteers, community residents).

C) Regarding Sector-Level Networking

1. **Establishing Network Communications and Sector-Level Policy Platforms:**
    - Need project to be developed and funded (TNC proposes that the joint management of this initiative by the CSPC-T and the Alternative Planning Group should be explored by those organizations) that will establish effective communication tools to link Toronto's non-profit community services that are comprehensive and inclusive of the diversity of the sector, drawing together

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settlement services, ethno-specific community agencies, multi-service agencies, emerging organizations and community groups trying to establish their capacity for community service delivery and civic engagement. This could start from agency contact lists that were developed by City of Toronto for the 2003 Community Agency Survey (i.e. all blue book entries related to non-profit social services) and be augmented with data from community networks.
- Proposals regarding the need for investment in Toronto's social service infrastructure, such as those articulated by the Community City Working Group on Core Funding, and the new Union/Agency provincial campaign "Building Strong Communities", should be circulated to the network, discussed and built upon to see if sector-wide positions could be adopted.

2. **Mobilizing Current Capacity for Community Development in Toronto**
Need to convene meeting of existing community development workers (part time and full time) in all areas of the city to begin discussions about increasing collaboration and ways to maximize effectiveness of current CD capacity. This would include any part or full-time community development staff working in non-profit agencies, staff at CSPC-T and APG involved in community planning, City Community Development Officers, and CAS community workers. Again, TNC proposes that the joint management of this initiative by the CSPC-T and the Alternative Planning Group – APG – should be considered.

3. **Mobilizing Current Capacity for Ontario-wide non-profit Sector Organizing**
Need (perhaps CSPC-T and APG again) to convene meetings of provincial network organizations that are currently supporting non-profit agencies in Toronto. This would include OCSA, OCASI, ONPHA, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, and other provincial networks directly supporting non-profit community based services. Need facilitation of discussions to figure out how these networks might collaborate for the shared objective of increasing supports for an expanded non-profit social service infrastructure in Toronto (and Ontario).

V) Local Community Planning Activities

A) Summary Observations:

Key areas of current engagement in "community planning" activities reported by the TNC agencies are:

- Networking with other service providers and groups (extensive and ongoing activity at the program and agency levels).
- Some service coordination (when facilitated and supported by other organizations, such as Early Years tables, SEPT initiative with settlement workers and schools, Regent Park redevelopment, and Wellesley Community Centre planning).
- Assessing community trends, capacities, service gaps and needs. This process in ongoing for agencies at the level of program evaluation and client satisfaction. Broader community-wide study and reporting is more sporadic, and usually occurs when agencies get project funds to support specific research or needs assessment.
- Community education with program participants. Usually this work draws upon externally generated campaigns, analysis and materials. Members reported limited capacity to develop their own materials and analysis.
- Participation in community planning discussions initiated by others (both via agency staff participating, and facilitating the engagement of program participants). Includes processes such as United Way's community research for their "Torontonians Speak Out" report, and City processes such as the Social Development Strategy focus groups or recent Listening to Toronto sessions.
- Some community issues identification, problem solving and action planning (e.g. town hall meetings, Network of Community Based Organizations community forum on policing; Dixon Hall work with Regent Park Residents Council; St. Christopher House community scans and health policy forums).
- Organizing local civic engagement opportunities, including all candidates meetings, and opportunities to meeting with elected representatives.
- Some social action and advocacy work (e.g. via community action Board committees at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre and St. Stephens Community House; collective social action via TNC activities).
- Participating in externally generated community research activities (i.e. being conduit between community members and research projects that are usually initiated by academic and policy institutions).

- Some examples of initiation and direction of local research and trends analysis (e.g. St. Christopher House research on impacts of gentrification in the community)
- Some training and propagation of "best practices" (e.g. St. Stephens/ Dixon Hall program to train drop-in workers)
- Some initiatives to have policy shaped or informed by the experience and input of local community members or recipients of government services (e.g. St Christopher House's Community Undertaking Social Policy – CUSP project).

Larger TNC member organizations have an ability to undertake more initiatives regarding social planning. In particular, St. Christopher House, St. Stephens Community House and WoodGreen Community Centre identified an extensive range of research and planning initiatives they were leading or participating in.

Yet even these larger organizations have substantial limitations in this regard. The coordination and leadership time they spend on issues is rarely funded. Some members expressed the concern that they may be getting involved in certain planning activities (e.g. policy and legislative analysis, research on broad social-economic trends, or committing to be the lead and help facilitate local service planning initiatives), by default rather than by design, as no other groups are able to take on such initiatives. Agencies noted that they might not always be the best suited for carrying out all these planning functions, but they are trying to fill gaps in the absence of other organizations or government departments working on these issues.

Many of the current community planning activities are one-time initiatives supported by project grant dollars. In particular, a number of the TNC members' current initiatives in networking, training and community education are being supported by project grants via the SCPI program. Other initiatives are being supported by project grants via foundations (e.g. Trillium, Maytree, Laidlaw and Atkinson), and some United Way special projects (e.g. MAPP - Multi-Agency Partnership Program, and BAC – Building Agency Capacity with selected united way members).

B) Key gaps / challenges identified at local level were:

- Lack of progressive pro-active policy analysis (i.e. not just reactive to problems and policy changes) that is action based and supported by popular education materials.
- Overall lack of community resources and services (e.g. service agencies, recreation centres, libraries, public meeting space) in many communities. In a number of inner suburb neighbourhoods TNC member agencies have no network of service providers to work with in strengthening communities.

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- For those neighbourhoods that do have a network of service providers that have been able to meet, there is no staffing support to facilitate these local networking activities and then follow up on shared initiatives.
- No resources available to lead and maintain community service planning (beyond a few specific service areas such as Early Years Centres).
- No community development support to build on program level discussions and engage broader community in issues identification and actions in a sustained manner. Also have inadequate translation and clear language/design resources to ensure these processes are accessible across numerous languages and literacy levels.
- Inadequate core funding for agency infrastructure (including resources needed to sustain community development, participating in networks and partnerships, and local service planning initiatives).
- Need for some central process to engage and leverage academic resources in support of locally defined and directed research objectives.
- Inadequate supports for recruitment of volunteer board members who have an understanding of the complexity of non-profit sector context, and can bring expertise to address key challenges.
- No organizational capacity building (and core funding) systems and resources in place to assist newer and emerging community organizations to become stable and enable them to contribute effectively in discussions and collaborations.

C) Examples of Local Community Planning Activities Being Conducted by TNC members:

NOTE: this is not an exhaustive survey of current local planning activities that are being carried out by TNC agencies surveyed. Respondents were asked to provide a few key examples of their work in these areas, rather than a complete summary.

Please also note that these categories are not completely discrete and many planning initiatives include a range of components (e.g. service planning, community education, policy analysis and participatory research may be combined in one initiative).

Facilitation of Resident Engagement in Community Planning Activities:
- Regent Park redevelopment work facilitated by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (includes local TNC member of Dixon Hall and Central Neighbourhood House, who have held focus groups and administered questionnaires to residents and program participants; provided supports for creating and sustaining the resident council; assisted resident council in grant-writing, program development and implementation)
- Riverdale Community Development Institute (RCDI) is an initiative led by Ralph Thornton Centre which seeks to promote the cohesiveness, harmony, and strength

of the South Riverdale community by undertaking sustainable actions and projects, which will enhance the capacity of local residents, groups and organizations for social development. The focus of the work is on processes that promote people engagement, capacity building, leadership creation, strengthening community linkages and maximizing the access to local resources.

- St. Jamestown / Wellesley Community Centre planning facilitated by Parks and Recreation and City CDO staff (includes promoting resident engagement to call for expanded services and infrastructure, and service planning to identify needs)
- CICS (Community Information Services of Ontario) and Agincourt Community Services Association have carried out community education sessions related to housing and homelessness with support of SCPI grant
- Fred Victor Centre is actively engaged in tenant education and mobilization.
- WoodGreen linked with Cosburn- Donlands community planning work, lining resident survey (use of Ryerson students), community scan, key informants, survey of service users.
- Ralph Thornton Centre assisted in facilitating community consultations, forums and focus groups (200 participants) to identify the priorities for the South Riverdale Community. This series of consultations led to the creation of the South Riverdale Revitalization Project to act on the 11 priorities identify by the community.

Agency Networking Activities and Service Planning:
- Youth Development work across East End Downtown Toronto network of Agencies – goal of increasing youth engagement in planning and advocating for youth services.
- Rexdale Community Partners is a network of agencies and community resources (churches, business) that formed two and-a-half years ago. This partnership has recently developed a "North Etobicoke Regeneration Project", as a proposal to HRDC that would provide 3 year funding support for community safety, environment, arts and culture and housing initiatives across Rexdale. Some of the support needed to steward this proposal process has been provided by the local Councillor's office.
- SEPT – Settlement Education Partnership Toronto (coordination of 48 School Settlement Workers who are placed in 74 schools. To work with students and families to improve access to settlement services.
- North York Community House, Delta Family Resource Centre, Jane Finch Community and Family Centre, LAMP, Warden Woods, and Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre are all involved in various sites of the United Way's three-year Multi Agency Partnership Program (MAPP), where partnerships of agencies work together to develop and deliver services in communities that had no previous programs in place.

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- Many TNC agencies are involved as either lead or satellite agencies in the Early Years Centre networks in their local ridings. In this way a fair bit of coordination in the area of 0-6 children's services is taking place.
- Scarborough Homelessness Committee (information sharing, service planning, and networking between outreach workers).
- Ralph Thornton Centre is part of some steering committees of local agencies such as South Riverdale Revitalization Project (SRRP), Riverdale Community Development Center (RCDC) and Destination Carlaw.
- 519 active in Queer seniors interagency group
- East end and West end drop in networks are merging with continued coordination support (via SCPI)
- Network of Community Based Organizations (includes Jane Finch Community and Family Centre, Doorsteps, Delta Family Resource Centre, Black Creek CHC, Jane Finch Community Ministry) networking, information sharing and some joint community education events (e.g. community forum on policing, election issues)
- Agency network applying for second Community Health Center in Scarborough
- North York-Scarborough Youth Committee coalition to identify and respond to youth services needs
- Very positive Downtown-Scarborough collaboration around SCPI project proposal development process (St. Stephens, Agincourt CSA, Scarborough Homelessness Committee and consultant support)
- S.E.To – South East Toronto Project (Fred Victor Centre, CNH, Dixon Hall, Streethealth, South Riverdale CHC, Toronto Public Health, St. Michaels Hospital). This partnership is committed to the principles of access, equity and action. S.E.To encourages dialogue and debate and coordination of health services and participator (community action) research initiatives with focus on integrating mental health and psychiatric survivors into the community and services.
- ACTT (Action for Children Today and Tomorrow) East York service planning network around children's programs for ages 0-6 (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)
- Chinese Interagency Network, and the Portuguese Interagency Network were mentioned as sources of information sharing and some service planning for TNC members. It was also noted that these networks once had resources for community education and advocacy work that are no longer available.
- North York Community House is attempting to support resource networks in Trethewey and Caledonia Village, but is hampered by a lack of coordinating or facilitating resources.
- Dixon Hall is the lead agency for one of the 15 cross-Canada sites of the Tamarack Foundation's "Vibrant Communities Initiative", a comprehensive community initiative to implement effective poverty reduction strategies.

Community Education, Leadership Development and Civic Engagement
- Most TNC member agencies were able to generate issue discussions at the program level regarding recent municipal and provincial elections. These were supported by popular education materials produced by TNC. Some agencies also organized all-candidates meetings and mayoralty debates.
- Many agencies organize occasional community forums (e.g. Network of Community Based Organizations which includes 3 TNC agencies in North York organized April 2003 community forum on policing in Jane Finch neighbourhood with 200 residents attending)
- TNC supported TorontoCAN (Civic Action Group) and facilitated involvement of local community members in Toronto-wide People's Summits (June 2002 and Oct 2003), and local summit events (e.g. Oct 2003 Scarborough summit with 200 attending)
- LAMP's "More than a Mat" initiative links vulnerable and homeless adults with advocacy opportunities regarding affordable housing. LAMP is also working on a Clean Air initiative, which provides support for community organizing regarding this local concern.
- Many TNC agencies encouraged and supported program participants to sign up for the recent Listening to Toronto sessions.
- TNC agencies played lead role in convening local tables of community leaders and agency staff and program participants for focus group sessions shaping the City's Social Development Strategy
- TNC members who are United Way member agencies played lead role in assisting with local forums for United Way's "Listening to Toronto" community research in June 2003
- Many TNC agencies integrate leadership development work in their program models, and some have specific program designed for this purpose (e.g. St. Christopher House's Health Action Theatre by Seniors (HATS) program is an award-winning project where troupes of multi-cultural seniors (Portuguese, English, Vietnamese) use action theatre techniques to facilitate community identification of health issues facing seniors, participation in debate, and problem-solving.)
- Ralph Thornton Centre has organized community mobilizations to retain community resources such as the Queen/Saulter Public library and the Ralph Thornton Centre building.

Organizational Capacity Building:
(e.g. Dissemination of Program Models, Staff Training, Skills Development)
- Central Neighbourhood House has a community economic development project that supports agencies across the city with the implementation and coordination of voice-mail programs for homeless adults.
- Catholic Cross Cultural Service is linked with SNISO (Scarborough Network of Immigrant Serving Organizations) that has developed partnership and fundraising

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resources to support settlement organizations in Scarborough. SNISO members
will have access to proposal development support, together with long-term access
to a funders' directory. These project activities were conducted in collaboration
with the CSPC-T and City Community Development Officers.

-   Some TNC members assist smaller emerging and ethno-specific agencies via
    provision of financial management and accounting supports.
-   Many TNC members are part of MAPP (Multi-agency Partnership Program)
    United Way project partnerships. In addition to service delivery objectives these
    partnerships have expressed goal of supporting and enabling smaller and less
    established organizations to gain capacity via working with more stable
    organizations. Actual impact is in many cases the opposite, as limited
    infrastructure supports are being taxed further to support time-intensive
    partnership development and program implementation.
-   St. Stephens is providing training for drop in workers
-   Dixon Hall and St. Stephens are providing training of settlement workers in cross-
    cultural conflict resolution techniques
-   Work between 519 Church and FSA regarding program models and best practices
    related to queer parenting programs

Research, Trend Analysis, Needs Assessments:
-   St. Christopher House has Children and Youth reference group that will be doing
    an existing service scan, and reviewing impacts of legislation on youth programs
    in Toronto.
-   Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office just completed community needs assessment
    that integrated extensive outreach and community mobilization process to assess
    local needs and capacities.
-   LAMP is doing a lot of health related and housing study work in south Etobicoke.
    Changing costs of housing - linked with Dennis Raphael and HRDC funded
    research economic inequality and health. Also a lot of occupational health
    research in partnership with McMaster University. Family centre is involved in
    research with Ryerson
-   Delta Family Resource Centre – is involved in "achieving collaboration" project
    with McMaster – related to looking at community capacity and best practices.
-   Ralph Thornton Centre links with a number of Universities to conduct research
    that will support program development. Last year two groups of planning students
    worked on identifying the needs of the newcomers to the area and the
    employment needs of Don Mount Residents. A York University conducted a
    research to explore arts as a mean of dealing with the issue of bullying in local
    schools.
-   St. Stephen's has proposed a prevention research proposal with U of T Urban
    Health Department regarding efficacy of the Youth Arcade drop-in model –
    includes literature review and logic model. Looking at cost outbreak of SARS
    across the City in the homeless population.

- St. Christopher House is doing some research work with U of T to look at how the entire catchment area is becoming extremely gentrified, and assessing implications for community residents and service – will also involve action planning process for all income levels.
- 519 Church linked with research on Transgender and HIV – SSHRC grant in partnership with Carleton University.

Public Policy Development and Analysis

- St Christopher House "Community Undertaking Social Policy" initiative has been extremely effective in linking realities and experience of local community members with Federal and Provincial social policy, in terms of assessing impact of policies, but also as a process of engaging local residents, government service recipients, non-profit agency workers and social policy analysts in collective efforts to shape promising social policy reforms. Includes past achievement of improving OAS entitlements that were formerly not being communicated to many eligible, and most vulnerable recipients. Current project is involved in building consensus and proposals for effective redesign of income security programs.
- St. Stephen's Community House, St Christopher House (and other agencies including Family Services Association) are contributing to the Learn-Save Initiative regarding poverty reduction and matching savings with economic literacy, a national research project with Social and Enterprise Development and Innovations
- 519 Church Street Trans Programming which has established City policy to provide gender orientation training to all shelter workers across the City, and resultant Trans Communities' Shelter Access Project (SCPI supported initiative)
- WoodGreen linked with Infolink and homeless initiative that resulted in rent bank and rooming house policies and protocols for City.

VI) Community Planning Supports and Resources

Respondents noted that they rely on a number of social planning supports and resources to assist them in their work. A central observation, however, was that this relationship is often one of being the passive recipient of information, rather than having the opportunity (or capacity) to set the agenda and define the objectives of various initiatives. For example, agencies often utilize research data and policy critiques that are developed by funders (e.g. United Way's "Decade of Decline") or research institutes (e.g. Canadian Council on Social Development's "Funding Matters"), but they do not have any role in shaping the research agenda itself.

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TNC members were also very clear in reporting they have experienced a significant decline in support for community planning activities in their communities since amalgamation. Agencies in Scarborough, North York, East York and Etobicoke all noted that resources have plummeted, and that the effectiveness of a local planning response has been greatly eroded. This may be a result of an overall reduction of staff in the amalgamated Social Planning Council (e.g. to a current three community planners when once there were many more), but also may be a result of losing the more localized accountability and responsiveness of the pre-amalgamated planning bodies.

[* not listed in any order of importance]

- **Funders** doing work to define issues and determine their priorities based on community trends, e.g. **United Way** (Decade of Decline, Torontonians Speak Out), **Laidlaw** (social inclusion, children's policy, and youth engagement work), and **Maytree** (position papers regarding need for coordination of settlement and labour force policy and programs across three levels of government)
- **City of Toronto departments**, including public health, public libraries, parks and recreation for demographic data, program statistics, and ward profile data (including special analysis and support from Harvey Low).
- **CSPC-T** for current research on stable core funding, participation in Community City Working Group on stable Core Funding, increasing community access to city and provincial policy process as begun by the Doors Open sessions, support with TorontoCAN work, SNISO (Scarborough Network of Immigrant Serving Organizations) and SCPI project activities.
- **Toronto District School Board** (statistics and trends data)
- **Toronto Neighbourhood Centres** (organizational capacity building, agency networking and mobilization, research, popular education materials and some policy analysis)
- **Alternative Planning Group - APG** (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC), Hispanic Development Council, and African Canadian Social Development Council.) some research and community education links with TNC agencies, also some collaboration with TNC and Toronto CAN networks around City budget work, but overall planning capacity of these groups is still seen to be limited
- **Caledon Institute** (policy analysis)
- **District Health Councils** (data)
- **Internet searches** for relevant research and policy analysis (sometimes problematic with regard to the need to sort through a large volume of irrelevant and outdated materials)
- **OCASI** (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants) settlement policy analysis and federal immigration issues
- **OCSA** (Ontario Community Support Association) some organizational capacity tools, and research on seniors support programs and issues

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- **Toronto Association of Family Resource Programs**
- **ONPHA** (Ontario Non Profit Housing Association), organizational capacity building, training, research and policy development
- **Ontario Association of Hostels**
- **Canadian Housing Renewal Association**

VI) TNC & Sectoral-Level Planning Initiatives

TNC has contributed some leadership in the area of sector-wide mobilization and networking. This has included helping to develop and sustain TorontoCAN (Civic Action Network), which organized local community summits (geographic and ethno-specific) and Toronto-wide community planning events (2002 and 2003 Peoples Summits). TNC also facilitated community agency networking and mobilization and during the 2002 and 2003 City grants processes.

In addition, TNC has contributed to recent policy analysis including

- **Toronto's Quiet Crisis: The Case for Social and Community Infrastructure Investment** (Nov. 2002) with Toronto Civic Action Network
- **Shaken Foundations: The Weakening of Community Building Infrastructure in Toronto** and impacts of a five-year core funding freeze on Toronto's community-based social service organizations (June 2003). TNC research report.
- **Building Strong Communities; A Call to Reinvest in Ontario's Non-Profit Social Service** (Feb 2004) CUPE Ontario and community agencies initiative. TNC assisted with developing campaign platform statement.
- **Cracks in The Foundation, 2003 Community Agency Survey** (Feb 2004). City of Toronto report – TNC assisted with developing research design and reporting via Community City Work Group on Stable Core Funding.

Over past three years TNC has devoted an average of one-quarter of its scarce two day per week coordination time to support the building of the Toronto CAN network. This activity began three years ago with a project grant from the Maytree Foundation. The resulting report and popular education materials "Shaping our Civic Future" outlined strategies to mobilize community support for the concept of a "New Financial Deal" for Cities, specifically to support community infrastructure.

Subsequently Toronto CAN has received some limited project funding from Maytree, Laidlaw and United Way that has enabled:

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- o Part-time staffing for coordination across community and labour groups that carry out issue identification and some community education in various "sectors" (e.g. housing, childcare, environment, non-profit and city-service community infrastructure)
- o New research on the chronic under-funding for social infrastructure in Toronto since amalgamation (Toronto's Quiet Crisis Report)
- o Community mobilizations and education processes designed to argue for a new deal for the City and renewed investment in Toronto's community infrastructure. Activities have included Toronto CAN peoples Summits, Local Summits (with geographic communities and ethno-specific communities), election education materials (province and municipal), and mobilizing community members around the city budget process.

These are good accomplishments. But the capacity of this structure in the city to deliver impacts with regard to social planning is extremely challenged.

For example, though useful popular education materials were produced during the recent municipal and provincial election periods, very few agencies across the city had the staffing to take those materials and help program workers integrate discussions into their work regarding the issues. These community education efforts were very spotty. Many communities of interest and neighbourhoods had no agencies or staff that were able to assist with any "roll out" activity in this regard.

In addition, the facilitation of coalition building and networking across sectors is extremely time consuming, and has in our opinion distracted both TNC and CSPC-T attention from strengthening the non-profit social service sector's organizational links.

One troubling result of the lack of stable coalition-level staffing and resources in Toronto is that the non-profit community services sector as a whole is still not being supported with communication and networking links that could enable sector issue identification and collaborative action (e.g. around the city budget, core funding challenges, or any other issue of importance).

CSPC-T has recently started to re-engage in these areas, participating in the Community City Work Group on Stable Core Funding, and stewarding a United Way-funded research project on Stable Core Funding. However, the CSPC-T is, in TNC's opinion, still somewhat diffuse with regard to its mandate. It may be that funder expectations or obligations are challenging CSPC-T to demonstrate renewed effectiveness in too many areas simultaneously (e.g. networking, research, local planning and community mobilization), which is not allowing for a critical mass of expertise to be focused in key areas.

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VII) Conclusions

There is a wide range of unmet community planning needs in Toronto. There are not enough financial supports to carry out this work effectively at the present time, either in local communities, or at the sector-wide level.

The non profit social service sector in Toronto is an unorganized constituency that is not yet able to shape and carry out collective actions to advocate for adequate social infrastructure and non-profit agency supports required to improve community conditions.

In TNC's opinion social development activities in Toronto will remain fragmented and significantly limited in effectiveness until a coordinated capacity for sector-wide action is established, and the capacity to carry out community education, mobilization and civic engagement activities are present across all of Toronto's local neighbourhoods and communities of interest.

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Appendix A) TNC Key Informants Participating in this Research

Agincourt Community Services Association (K, F2)
Jane Robson, Executive Director

Albion Neighbourhood Services (K)
Terri Noseworthy, Executive Director

Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre (R,F2)
Will Coukell, Executive Director

Catholic Cross Cultural Services (K)
Jehad Aliweiwi, Regional Director

Cecil Street Community Centre (F,F2)
Julia Goldstein, Executive Director

Central Neighbourhood House (K,F2)
Romona Gananathan, Executive Director

Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre (K,F2)
Keith McNair, Executive Director

Delta Family Resource Centre (F)
Rosalyn Miller, Executive Director

Dixon Hall (R,F2)
Barbara Volk, Chair, Board of Directors

The 519 Church St. Community Centre (K)
Alison Kemper, Executive Director

Fred Victor Centre (K)
Mark Aston, Executive Director

Jane Finch Community and Family Centre (K)
Margarita Mendez, Executive Director

Lakeshore Area Multi-Service Project (LAMP) (F,F2)
Russ Ford, Executive Director,
Dot Quiggin, Best Practices/Human Resources Manager

North York Community House (R,F2)
Shelley Zuckerman, Executive Director

Ralph Thornton Centre (R,F2)
Terry Lee, Executive Director

St. Christopher House (F,F2)
Sandy Birnie, Executive Director

St. Stephen's Community House (F,F2)
Liane Regendanz, Executive Director

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (K)
Joan Arruda, Executive Director

University Settlement and Recreation Centre (R,F2)
Cassandra Wong, Executive Director

Warden Woods Community Centre (K,F2)
John Elliott, Executive Director

WoodGreen Community Centre (K,F2)
Brian Smith, President

F = attending January 14 Focus Group Session (5 agencies)
F2 = attending February 11 Focus Group Session (14 agencies)
K = Key Informant telephone interview conducted (11 agencies)
R = reviewed draft report and agreed with key recommendations (21 agencies)

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Appendix B) Laidlaw: Toronto Best Practices Project Overview

[Note: In preparation for this report, some initial discussions were carried out with individuals involved in the Laidlaw Best Practices Initiative, including Paul Zarnke, Peter Clutterbuck, and Keith McNair (who participated at the Syme Woolner Community Site), with regard to their estimation of the success of this model. All three of these individuals underlined the importance of ensuring the capacity of local communities to control these initiatives (i.e. "bottom-up" rather than "top down" direction). As well, all three noted that stable and well supported community agencies were a critical component needed to anchor the local civic engagement and support successful interventions. Finally it was noted that desired system-level changes were achieved very sporadically, varying greatly across different institutions. For example, Children's Aid Society was able to respond institutionally to local directives and objectives, while the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department was not].

The Toronto Best Practices Project (TBP) is an initiative designed originally by the senior leadership of major agencies serving children and families in Metro Toronto convened and facilitated by the Children-at-Risk Project of the Laidlaw Foundation. Toronto Best Practices conceptualized the "community systems" approach for the enhancement of the life chances and outcomes of children and youth.

Community systems represents a major shift from more traditional approaches to community and social development, which tend to stress local level change and specific program development in response to identified community problems.

Community systems promotes more systemic and strategic approaches:

- *Strategic Community Development*. An emphasis on the achievement of states of well-being by identifying and pursuing specific outcomes for defined populations (in the case of this Project, ALL children and youth, including those who are vulnerable or at risk); and

- *Strategic Social Support*. The engagement and mobilization of local assets and community capacities joined with the more flexible and adaptive use of existing resources in the formal service system to realize community-defined missions for children and youth.

Key Principles

Toronto Best Practices is supporting the development of community prototypes to demonstrate the application of the key principles of the community systems approach. These key principles are:

(a) Focusing on population outcomes. This involves employing strategies that will not only produce measurable life enhancements for local children and youth but will also inform

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strategies to improve states of well-being for ALL children and youth in communities throughout the City.

(b) <u>Applying a life-cycle perspective</u>. This consideration recognizes that children and youth pass through several transitional periods in their development from early childhood through to young adulthood and that supportive initiatives should respect the integrity of each stage of the life cycle and the inter-relatedness of all stages (e.g. healthy pre-natal conditions and supports are important both to the newborn infant and to young mothers in their late teens or early twenties).

(c) <u>Cultivating local engagement</u>. The Project is committed to facilitating the mobilization of local assets and capacities in terms of residents and civic networks in non-service areas (e.g. local business, churches, etc.) to formulate and pursue community-defined missions and outcomes for children and youth.

(d) <u>Promoting systems reform</u>. Community prototypes present the opportunity:
➢ for various public authorities responsible for children and youth to test the effectiveness of coordinated policy frameworks on the ground;
➢ for existing service providers to realign their service mandates and to try new operational models in which they make active contributions to the realization of local community missions and outcomes (e.g. common social reporting frameworks, strategic cross-service teams, multiple use of local public facilities, etc.); and
➢ for service practitioners to function more collaboratively within the context of a coordinated policy framework and a community-defined mission.

(e) <u>Commitment to replicability</u>. Community prototypes will be the testing ground for community systems approaches and will generate strategic learnings that will facilitate the extension of community systems to other communities across Toronto.

Building Civic Capacity for Children and Youth at Three Levels

Toronto Best Practices is working at three distinct but inter-related levels in its development of the community systems approach:

▪ *Local Communities*

Toronto Best Practices is directly involved in providing strategic guidance and field support to a community prototype in the Syme-Woolner area. Focus group research with local stakeholders led to a Community Assembly in March 1997 at which the local residents and stakeholders endorsed a set of life-cycle community missions. Four life-cycle work groups of local residents, youth and service practitioners are now pursuing strategies specific to their respective age concerns:
➢ Birth to Three Years Work Group -- developing an early learning audit for administration in four local schools at the school registration for 1999.
➢ Three to Ten Years Work Group -- developing local strategy for increasing parent involvement in their children's learning among families of six major language and culture groups in the area.

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> ➢ Ten to Sixteen Years Work Group -- developing a peer tutoring model in one of the local schools and a strategy for improving social-recreational opportunities for youth in the community.
> ➢ Sixteen to Twenty-four Years Work Group -- developing a prototype Adolescent Resource Unit for at-risk youth who do not fall within the mandate of any system authority once they are not in school.

Toronto Best Practices also has a working relationship with the Community Systems Alliance (CSA) in the former City of North York and to the three community animation sites in Amesbury, Don Mills, and Trethewey connected to the CSA. Toronto Best Practices is providing consultative assistance to these sites as prospective community prototypes and is sharing in an evaluation strategy with these sites to generate additional learnings for community prototype development.

▪ *Policy and Systems Frameworks*

Toronto Best Practices is committed to going beyond limited community level impact to reform at the systems level. The Project seeks to link community prototype work to structural change that will create coordinated policy frameworks among the formally mandated systems with various service and support responsibilities for children and youth. In this regard, the Project is involved in:

> ➢ Establishing a Civic Commission for Children and Youth as an institutional mechanism for cross-system coordination of system supports.
> ➢ Development of common social reporting mechanisms and common local units for planning and development (e.g. "civic districts") that facilitate more integrated support systems for children and youth at the community level.
> ➢ Working with the City's Children and Youth Action Committee to facilitate cross-system ("horizontal") policy coordination with strong, two-way ("vertical") linkages to community prototype sites.

▪ *Service Delivery and Practice*

The community systems approach also demands innovation in service delivery methods and practice. At the service agency level the Toronto Best Practices Project seeks to:

> ➢ Identify service and practice barriers to the achievement of community-defined missions and outcomes.
> ➢ Model innovation in service delivery and practice to overcome identified barriers.

Project Structure and Management

The Toronto Best Practices Group provides direction and strategic leadership to the Project. It is made up of senior management from major public and community agencies and organizations concerned with the well-being of children, youth and families in the City of Toronto. Membership currently includes:

- ▪ Susan Abell, Youthlink
- ▪ Brad Archer (for Marilyn Renwick, Area Manager), MCSS
- ▪ Frances Beard, Toronto Housing Authority

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- Miriam Ben Simon, North York Community Systems Alliance
- Liz Bonanno / Keith McNair, Syme-Woolner Family and Neighbourhood Centre
- Peter Clutterbuck/Karen Liberman, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
- Karen Engel, York Child and Family Services
- Eric Gam, City of Toronto Social Development and Administration
- Susan Makin (for Dr. Sheila Basrur, MOH), Public Health
- Colin Maloney, Catholic Children's Aid Society
- Fiona Nelson, former Toronto School Board Trustee
- Marvyn Novick, Ryerson Social Reporting Network
- David Reddin, Toronto Public Libraries
- Bruce Rivers, Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto
- Claire Tucker-Reid/Lucy Troisi, Toronto Parks and Recreation
- Paul Zarnke, Family Service Association of Metropolitan Toronto

Operationally, Toronto Best Practice partners contribute staff time from their respective organizations to a Best Practices Coordination Unit, convened by the Community Social Planning Council. The Coordination Unit provides overall coordination to community prototype work and links it to the Project's policy level and systems reform strategies. The Coordination Unit also provides field support from partner agencies to community prototype site teams.

In addition to the partner contributions of senior and field staff time to the Toronto Best Practices, funding for Project coordination, research, and community prototype development has been provided by the Laidlaw Foundation since 1995, ending in July, 1999.

Revised November, 1998

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