

**Communities 4 Families  
(Downtown Parent-Child Coalition)**

# **Family**

## **Challenges:**

**Understanding the challenges  
of families in downtown  
Winnipeg**

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## **Table of Contents:**

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>  | <b>Page 2</b>  |
| <b>Executive Summary</b>                                       | <b>Page 4</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>Page 8</b>  |
| <b>Key Findings</b>  | <b>Page 14</b> |
| <b>Immigration/Integration</b>                                 | <b>Page 14</b> |
| <b>Housing</b>   | <b>Page 15</b> |
| <b>Child Care</b>  | <b>Page 17</b> |
| <b>Recreation</b>  | <b>Page 18</b> |
| <b>Education</b>   | <b>Page 19</b> |
| <b>Food Security/Nutrition</b>                                 | <b>Page 19</b> |
| <b>Safety</b>  | <b>Page 20</b> |
| <b>Other Issues</b>  | <b>Page 21</b> |
| <b>Responses and Recommendations</b>                           | <b>Page 21</b> |
| <b>Appendix A: Project information</b>                         | <b>Page 29</b> |
| <b>Appendix B: Demographic information</b>                     | <b>Page 30</b> |
| <b>Appendix C: Personal information form and questionnaire</b> | <b>Page 39</b> |



This research project was commissioned on behalf of the Communities 4 Families (Downtown Parent-Child Coalition) to examine the barriers and challenges facing families living in Winnipeg's downtown residential communities. The goal of this project is to find ways to improve the lives of downtown families.

### ***Acknowledgements:***

The research committee would like to thank all the people who contributed their time, experience, and opinions to help make this report happen. First of all, we would like to thank all the parents who contributed their voices to this report. The stories and ideas they shared with us during our consultations guided this report. It was written for them.

We also thank all the community groups and organizations that invited us to come and speak to their members. They include:

- Taking Charge!
- Winnipeg Central Park Women's Resource Centre
- Dufferin School parent room
- Mulvey School parent room
- Breast Feeding Buddies (Klinic Community Health Services)
- Stay and Play at Isaac Brock Community Centre
- Healthy Baby at Isaac Brock Community Centre
- Isaac Brock School parent room
- Greenway School parent room
- Stay and Play at Clifton Community Centre
- Family Community Centre
- Neah Kee Papa (Manitoba Métis Federation)
- Pinkham School parent room
- St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry women's drop-in program
- John M. King School parent room
- Healthy Baby at Crossways-in-Common

This report has benefitted from the assistance of community development workers, civil servants, educators, academics, and professionals who work with children and families in the downtown. Some provided valuable background information in the weeks leading up to our consultations with the parents. Others reviewed the challenges and themes coming out of our consultations and offered their own feedback and ideas. Many of their comments are included in the body of this report.

- Strini Reddy, community advocate
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- Molly McCracken, West Broadway Development Corporation
- Mark Titheridge, West Central Community Program
- Bob Gingras, Valour Community Centre
- Darrall Kotchon, Winnipeg Police Services
- Joanna Quail, Winnipeg Police Services
- Pat Wege, Manitoba Child Care Association
- Grace Eidse, ENTRY Program
- Shauna MacKinnon, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Wendy Church, Healthy Child Manitoba Office
- Marty Dolin, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council
- Alan Wise, Central Neighbourhood Development Corporation
- Marlene Amell, General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres
- Katherine Mundy, General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres
- Karen Glugosh, City of Winnipeg
- Noelle DePape, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba
- Diana Turner, Manitoba Department of Education

Thank you to Manitoba Housing community relations for their help clarifying some of the agency's policies and procedures. We also thank Sara Stephens, who was kind enough to review our questions before we held our consultations, and who set up and operated our online survey.

It should be noted that the contents of this report are not meant as a reflection of the views of the individuals and organizations that contributed to it.

I would like to personally thank the members of the C4F research committee for their patient guidance through this project. Our wide-ranging conversations during meetings opened new avenues to explore and kept this local research project connected to the larger issues. The true value of these discussions cannot be captured in meeting minutes.

# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction:**

This project grew out of an earlier study by Communities 4 Families (Downtown Parent-Child Coalition) called “Stress, Coping and the Impact on Parenting in the Downtown Residential Communities of Winnipeg”. In that study, the researcher held consultations with parent groups around the downtown to discuss the causes of stress for downtown parents and their methods of coping. This project returns to some of those original groups, as well as new ones, to gather more information about the challenges downtown families are facing. To get a broader perspective on the challenges of downtown families, the researcher consulted community workers and government officials in a variety of fields. This report also draws together the most recent recommendations taken from local reports and studies that address the challenges.

The many challenges of downtown families have been well-studied. We already know much of what is wrong. The challenge becomes how we use that knowledge to affect change. Numerous studies have been released with recommendations that address many of the challenges parents face. There is also a wealth of unpublished knowledge and ideas in the many frontline government and community workers who deal with these challenges on a daily basis. In addition to presenting a snapshot of the challenges currently facing parents living in downtown Winnipeg, this report attempts to compile the best and most recent ideas for solving these challenges. We hope that this report will be a source of ideas and direction for people hoping to understand and solve the problems facing downtown families.

## **A note on C4F and Healthy Child Manitoba:**

C4F is a loose coalition of organizations working with families and children in downtown Winnipeg, established and funded by the Healthy Child Department of Manitoba (HCMO). HCMO funds 26 such coalitions throughout the province. The Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet brings together the ministers of multiple provincial departments, including: Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; Culture, Heritage and Tourism; Education; Family Services and Consumer Affairs; Health; Housing and Community Development; Justice; and Status of Women.

## **Methodology:**

After reviewing past literature about downtown families and neighbourhoods, the research committee designed a questionnaire with five open-ended questions to guide the consultations. Consultation participants were also asked to fill out a personal demographic information form. That same questionnaire and form were used as the template for an online survey. Three paper versions of the survey were also sent out.

From July to November 2009, C4F held consultations with 16 parent groups and organizations around downtown Winnipeg. Along with survey respondents, a total of 126 parents lent their voices to this report. Once all consultations were complete it was clear that the challenges parents are facing today are largely the same they have been facing for years. The causes and effects of these challenges (ex. housing, child care, recreation) have been well-studied, and many recommendations have been made around them. We then sought out as much pertinent literature as we could gather, looking for recommendations that addressed the challenges parents raised in our consultations. In order to ensure recommendations were as relevant as possible, we focused only on local reports that were published within the last two years, unless more recent research wasn't available. The themes, challenges and recommendations were compiled into a list and sent to community development workers, civil servants, educators, academics, and other professionals who work with children and families in the downtown to

get their responses and suggestions. The full report includes all the themes and past recommendations, as well as responses from professionals.

## **Key Findings:**

This summary gives the major issues or gaps that were identified during our consultations with parents and professionals in the community. At the end we have listed reports and studies that have identified similar problems and contain recommendations.

## **Immigration/Integration**

Family relations, particularly parent-child relations, were a dominant theme during our consultations. Common problems include confusion around child discipline, Canadian family law, and fear of child welfare services. Placing newcomer children in school according to their age creates many problems because newcomer children may not be at the same level as their peers. These children are placed at greater risk of recruitment by gangs. Finding affordable child care for newcomers is difficult, due to a lack of spaces downtown. Some of these parents are used to relying on their communities to help raise their children. The culture change comes as a major shock to some parents. Often one parent must stay home, forcing the family onto social assistance. Literacy challenges contribute to many of these problems.

## **Housing**

Families in both the public and private housing markets face problems accessing affordable housing. Low vacancy rates and high rents force poorer families to live in unsafe areas. Several parents complained of poor maintenance and long waits for repairs, as well as illegal activity in their buildings. Wait times to get into Manitoba Housing units are very long. Families are forced to move out of their neighbourhoods in search of affordable housing. Some women complain of being questioned by Manitoba Housing officials who suspect them of hiding other people in their units.

## **Child care**

Waitlists for daycare are very long and some parents in this study said they will not be able to return to work without child care. Parents have trouble finding information about space availability and services without a centralized source. A shortage of space has been identified for infants, evenings and the summer. Parents often have to travel long distances to find child care. Parents who choose to stay home with their children face serious financial obstacles. Employment Insurance is often not enough.

## **Recreation**

Lack of awareness was the most common barrier parents identified when trying to access recreation. Particularly, they need more free drop-in style programs for children aged 9 to 13. Parents also raised concerns about the safety of parks and recreation centres. As programs have closed in the downtown, parents have had to travel further to access programming.

## Education

The structure of classroom learning is a barrier for children who are more hands-on learners. Some families cannot afford to send their children out of the catchment area if they are being bullied. Children with FASD and other learning disabilities present additional challenges and need specialized help. Adult learners need support to help them succeed.

## Food Security/Nutrition

Lack of time and money make preparing nutritious meals for their children difficult for some parents. Downtown grocery store closures have made it harder for parents, especially those without vehicles, to get food. Employment and Income Assistance shelter benefits often do not cover rent, forcing families to dip into food budgets to make up the difference. Some African families deal with health problems that were not common in their home countries because their bodies are not used to a North American diet.

## Safety

Parents in almost all areas reported feeling unsafe walking around their neighbourhood. Several parents said they had either witnessed violence or been the victims of violence themselves. Families don't take advantage of recreation opportunities in their neighbourhoods because parents don't feel safe taking their children to parks or recreation centres. Homeless people and panhandlers make some parents feel unsafe. Intoxicated people in parks make parents afraid to take their children out. Some parents are uncomfortable with sex trade workers standing near their homes and talking to their children. Some parents complained that police presence in their neighbourhoods is not enough to make them feel safe. Some Aboriginal parents are distrustful of police and warn their children not to trust them. Property theft and vandalism were major stresses for some parents.

### Further research and recommendations:

- Carter, Tom, et al. "Housing for Manitobans: A Long-Term Plan." Manitoba Department of Family Services and Housing. February, 2009.
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. "The View From Here: Manitobans Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan." June, 2009.
- Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. "Time for Action: An Economic and Social Analysis of Child Care in Manitoba." 2004.
- City of Winnipeg. "Call to Action for OurWinnipeg (First draft)". Speak Up Winnipeg, November, 2009.
- Cooper, Sarah. "Housing: Policy, People, and Winnipeg's Inner City" in "Putting Our Housing in Order: State of the Inner City Report 2008". Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December, 2008.
- Department of Family Services and Housing. "Changes for Children: Strengthening the Commitment to Child Welfare." Government of Manitoba, Oct. 13, 2006. Available at [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/pubs/external\\_review\\_response.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/pubs/external_review_response.pdf).
- MacKinnon, Shauna and Stephens, Sara. "Inner-City Refugee Women: Stories of Hope and Survival, Lessons for Public Policy". Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December, 2006.
- Manitoba Food Charter. "Food Security and Our Winnipeg: response to Call to Action". Date unknown.
- Manitoba CED Network. "Comments Submitted to the City of Winnipeg Regarding the Speak Up Winnipeg Call to Action. From the Manitoba CED Network." Dec. 7, 2009.
- Millar, Ali and Rappaport, Lissie. "Winnipeg's Best-Kept Secret: a Community Development Vision for Sherbrook Pool". Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. December, 2009.

- Safe Communities Winnipeg. “Leadership Table Meeting: Minutes”. Oct. 13, 2009.
- Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. “Poverty Barometer: Child Poverty Rates of Recent Immigrants Rising”. Oct. 22, 2009.
- Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. “20 Years Lost: the Poverty Generation – Child and Family Poverty Report Card”. Nov. 24, 2009.
- Spence Neighbourhood Association. “Barriers Interfering with Youth and Education: Information Gathered at Spence Neighbourhood Association’s Youth Staff Meeting on August 5, 2009.”
- Spence Neighbourhood Association. “Spence Neighbourhood Five Year Plan 2006-2011.”
- United Way Safety Policy Group. “Relationship Based Policing: Examples from other cities and priorities for Winnipeg’s inner-city neighbourhoods”. Date unknown.
- West Broadway Development Corporation a. “Call to Action for Our Winnipeg: Comments from West Broadway Development Corporation”. 2009.
- West Broadway Development Corporation b. “Work in Progress: West Broadway Housing Plan 2008-2012.” Nov. 14, 2008.



# **Family Challenges: Understanding the challenges of families in downtown Winnipeg**

## **Introduction:**

This project grew out of an earlier study by Communities 4 Families (Downtown Parent-Child Coalition) called “Stress, Coping and the Impact on Parenting in the Downtown Residential Communities of Winnipeg”. In that study, the researcher held consultations with parent groups around the downtown to discuss the causes of stress for downtown parents and their methods of coping. This project returns to some of those original groups, as well as new ones, to gather more information about the challenges downtown families are facing. To get a broader perspective on the challenges of downtown families, the researcher consulted community workers and government officials in a variety of fields. This report also pulls together the most recent recommendations taken from local reports and studies that address the challenges.

The many challenges of downtown families have been well-studied. We already know much of what is wrong. The challenge becomes how we use that knowledge to affect change. Numerous studies have been released with recommendations that address many of the challenges parents face. There is also a wealth of unpublished knowledge and ideas in the many frontline government and community workers who deal with these challenges on a daily basis. In addition to presenting a snapshot of the challenges currently facing parents living in downtown Winnipeg, this report attempts to compile the best and most recent ideas for solving these challenges. We hope that this report will be a source of ideas and direction for people hoping to understand and solve the problems facing downtown families.

## **Background:**

### **Winnipeg’s Downtown Families**

The section dealing with the results of the focus groups and survey will go into greater detail about the challenges facing parents in our study. Here is a synopsis of what past research can tell us about downtown families and their challenges.

Financially, families living downtown are generally poorer than families living in other parts of the city. According to 2006 Census figures, the median family income across the downtown is \$41,401 compared to \$62,959 for all of Winnipeg.<sup>1</sup> Families in downtown Winnipeg have higher incidences of low income than families in the rest of the city, at 32.7 per cent before taxes across all downtown neighbourhoods, compared to 14.9 per cent for Winnipeg.<sup>2</sup> This number increases to 58.3 per cent among female lone-parent families.

Downtown families receive an almost equal percentage of their income from a job as those in the rest of the city (77.6 per cent compared to 78.9 per cent), but a greater percentage of their income comes through government transfer payments such as the Employment and Income Assistance Program (15.9 per cent to 9.7 per cent). They also generally have fewer other sources of income such as investments or savings. The labour force participation rate is slightly less than the rest of Winnipeg (65.7 per cent to 68 per cent), and the unemployment rate is higher than the rest of Winnipeg (8.4 per cent to 5.2 per cent).

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<sup>1</sup> City of Winnipeg. “City of Winnipeg Neighbourhood Profiles.” Available at <http://winnipeg.ca/census/2006>. Accessed on Sept. 7, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Education levels downtown are almost on par with the rest of the city: 27.8 per cent have no high school or university certificate (23.1 per cent rest-of-Winnipeg); 28.2 have a high school diploma (28.3 per cent ROW); and 34.6 per cent have a college, university, or vocational certificate (38.5 per cent ROW).

Culturally, downtown Winnipeg is a much more diverse place than the rest of Winnipeg. Aboriginal identification is higher downtown than in the rest of the city (17.4 per cent to 10.2 per cent ROW). There is also a higher concentration of visible minorities (31.9 per cent to 16.3 per cent ROW). Some of the most common groups include Filipino (15 per cent), Black (5.4 per cent), Chinese (3.2 per cent), and Southeast Asian (2.6 per cent). A greater number of newcomers live in downtown Winnipeg (29.4 per cent to 18.7 per cent ROW). Common countries include the Philippines (10.9 per cent), Portugal (2.1 per cent), Viet Nam (1.6 per cent), and China (1.2 per cent).

Downtown Winnipeg is home to many newcomers, and the number of immigrants living the area grows every year. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, one in 12 families in Winnipeg is a recent immigrant family, meaning one or both parents immigrated to Canada within the past 15 years (based on figures from the 2001 Census).<sup>3</sup> When immigrants first arrive in the city they often settle in a few neighbourhoods where significant immigrant communities already exist. For example, according to the 2006 Census in Central Park neighbourhood, 43 per cent of residents are immigrants, 56 per cent of whom arrived within the last five years.<sup>4</sup>

Newcomers face many challenges after settling here. New immigrants are more likely to live in extended families than Canadian-born residents, often with multiple generations sharing the same residence.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the size of the housing that immigrants can afford is often too small to meet their needs. As many as 21 per cent of recent immigrants live in crowded housing arrangements, meaning that there are more people living in a home than there are rooms.<sup>6</sup> Recent immigrant families also experience lower incomes than the rest of Canadians.<sup>7</sup> Recent immigrants are two to three times more likely to experience low income than their Canadian counterparts.<sup>8</sup> The unemployment rate for immigrants, especially those who arrived in the past five years, has gone up in the past few years, while the rate has gone down for the Canadian-born.<sup>9</sup> Linguistic and cultural barriers affect immigrants not only when they are searching for work, but also in their home, as children integrate into the new society, often faster than their parents.

Household compositions and structures are significantly different than the rest of Winnipeg. There are fewer family households downtown than in the rest of the city (47.3 per cent to 62.6 per cent ROW). Of these, 37.7 per cent are married couples with children at home (39.7 per cent ROW) and 25.1 per cent are female lone-parent households (16.2 per cent ROW). Average family sizes are the same as the rest of the city (2.9 people).

More people rent than own their homes downtown: 63.8 per cent rent compared to 34.9 per cent ROW. Homes downtown are generally smaller and have fewer bedrooms than the rest of the city: 4.8 rooms to 6 ROW, and 1.9 bedrooms to 2.5 ROW. More downtown homes are in need of major repairs (13.7 per cent to 8.5 per cent ROW), and fewer are in need of only regular maintenance (53.5 per cent to 62.4 per cent ROW).

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<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas: Winnipeg—A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census – Part C: Families and Households." Available at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/research/census2001/winnipeg/partc.asp>. Accessed Sept. 8, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> City of Winnipeg. Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Citizenship and Immigration. Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas: Winnipeg—A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census – Part F: Housing." Available at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/research/census2001/winnipeg/partf.asp>. Accessed on Sept. 8, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas: Winnipeg—A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census – Part E: Income." Available at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/research/census2001/winnipeg/parte.asp>. Accessed on Sept. 8, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. "Immigrant Poverty Barometer 2008." Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2009; p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Manitoba's Early Development Instrument uses five indicators – physical health, social competency, emotional maturity, language and thinking skills, and communication and general knowledge - to measure the readiness of Kindergarten students to enter school. Few neighbourhoods in the downtown had a high percentage of children who were “very ready” in any of the five areas. Many neighbourhoods showed a high percentage of children who were deemed “not ready” in all or almost all of the five areas. Central neighbourhoods like Daniel McIntyre, Centennial, Spence, Central Park, and West Alexander had particularly poor scores. This means that many children living downtown are often at a disadvantage when they enter school. This can have consequences for their future mental and emotional development, limiting their chances of success at school and beyond.

This project grew out of a previous study by C4F study, “Stress, Coping and the Impact on Parenting in the Downtown Residential Communities of Winnipeg” by Marlyn Bennett. In that study, downtown parents were asked to describe what stresses they experience in their daily lives and how that stress impacts them and their families. Parents reported feeling stressed in several areas of their lives, including concerns about safety, financial and time stresses, housing issues, health problems, transportation difficulties, lack of child care, and problems with schools.

### **Communities 4 Families (Downtown Parent-Child Coalition):**

Communities 4 Families (C4F) is a network of organizations and residents working together to support families in the downtown residential communities. C4F is funded by Healthy Child Manitoba. The coalition is a fluid and flexible group of people and organizations.

Presently, the organizations involved in C4F include:

- Bookmates Family Literacy Centre
- City of Winnipeg Community Services Department
- Community Education Development Association (CEDA)
- Greenway School
- Klinik Community Health Centre
- Manitoba Adult Learning and Literacy
- Manitoba Family Services and Housing
- Mulvey School
- NEEDS Centre
- Pregnancy and Family Support Services Inc.
- Robert A. Steen Memorial Community Centre
- St. Matthews Kids Korner
- The Family Centre of Winnipeg
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Winnipeg (IRCOM)
- Valour Community Centre
- Wellington School
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- Winnipeg School Division #1
- Wolseley Family Place

C4F's vision is to promote programs and services that support the four pillars of success set out by Healthy Child Manitoba. They include:

- Parenting – supporting parents' ability to nurture the healthy development of their children.
- Healthy Lifestyle – promoting good nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

- Literacy – improving family literacy.
- Capacity Building – promoting leadership opportunities, community service, community economic development, and civic engagement.

***Research Committee:***

The project was overseen by the research committee of C4F. The committee members are:

- Sharon Taylor, chairperson (Wolseley Family Place)
- Genny Funk-Unrau (Klinik Community Health Centre)
- Frank Liebzeit (community member)
- Kathy Mallett (Community Education Development Association)
- Claire Meiklejohn (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority)
- Ingrid Peters Derry (Communities 4 Families)

**Systemic Barriers Pilot Project:**

***Project Rationale:***

The goal of this project is to better understand the challenges facing downtown families, particularly as they relate the four pillars outlined above. Ultimately the goal is to find ways that government, service providers and community members can make real improvements in the lives of downtown parents and children. We hope the information and recommendations in this report will serve as a roadmap for coalition members, service providers and community leaders to meet the needs of downtown families.

**Key Objectives:**

- To consult parents in the downtown about the challenges they face in their daily lives
- To examine the ways policies and practices can be changed or created to ease the impact of these challenges
- To produce a report with recommendations of short and long-term strategies to meet the needs of downtown parents and families

***Methodology***

After reviewing past literature about downtown families and neighbourhoods, the research committee, with the help of a research specialist, designed a questionnaire with five open-ended questions to guide the consultations. Consultation participants were also asked to fill out a personal demographic information form. That same questionnaire and form were used as the template for an online survey. A few paper versions of the survey were also sent out.

From July to November 2009, C4F held consultations with 16 parent groups and organizations around downtown Winnipeg. Including survey respondents, a total of 126 parents contributed their voices to this report.

Consultations were held at the following locations:

- Taking Charge! (319 Elgin Ave.)
- Winnipeg Central Park Women’s Resource Centre (420 Edmonton St.)
- Dufferin School parent room (545 Alexander Ave.)
- Mulvey School parent room (750 Wolseley Ave.)

- Breast Feeding Buddies (870 Portage Ave.)
- Stay and Play at Isaac Brock Community Centre (715 Telfer St. North)
- Healthy Baby at Isaac Brock Community Centre (715 Telfer St. North)
- Isaac Brock School parent room (1265 Barratt Ave.)
- Greenway School parent room (390 Burnell St.)
- Stay and Play at Clifton Community Centre (1315 Strathcona St.)
- Family Community Centre (475 Sargent Ave.)
- Neah Kee Papa (3-150 Henry Ave.)
- Pinkham School parent room (765 Pacific Ave.)
- St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry women's drop-in (641 St. Matthews Ave.)
- John M. King School parent room (525 Agnes St.)
- Healthy Baby at Crossways-in-Common (101-222 Furby St.)

Staff at the following organizations also administered paper versions of the survey to their clients:

- IRCOM
- RESPECT program at West Central Women's Resource Centre (583 Ellice Ave.)
- Wolseley Family Place (691 Wolseley Ave.)

### **Data Analysis:**

Most of the parent consultations were recorded and transcribed. Where it wasn't possible to record, the researcher took detailed notes. The researcher compared the transcripts, looking for common themes in the challenges parents identified. Once all themes and subthemes had been identified, the research committee narrowed the focus down to those themes that it considered most important. A number of factors were considered when determining the importance of a theme or specific challenge, including the number of individuals that mentioned it, the number of consultations where it came up, whether other research had identified it as a challenge, and to what degree an issue could benefit by attention from C4F or its partners.

Once all consultation and survey results were compiled it was clear that the challenges of parents in our study (ex. housing, child care, recreation) are largely the same ones other researchers and organizations have identified over the years. We then sought out as much pertinent literature as we could gather, looking for recommendations that addressed any of the challenges parents raised during the consultations. The list of challenges and past recommendations were then compiled into a chart and sent to individuals with knowledge of these challenges and related structures and policy areas. These people - including community development workers, civil servants, academics, and educators - offered comments and suggested solutions to the parents' challenges, pointing out errors, explaining policies, and pointing out plans and strategies in place that address some of the issues. The following individuals responded to our request for comment, and many of their comments are included in the final section of this report.

- Molly McCracken, West Broadway Development Corporation
- Mark Titheridge, West Central Community Program
- Bob Gingras, Valour Community Centre
- Darrall Kotchon, Winnipeg Police Services
- Joanna Quail, Winnipeg Police Services
- Pat Wege, Manitoba Child Care Association
- Grace Eidse, ENTRY Program
- Nadine Delisle, Manitoba Housing
- Shauna MacKinnon, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

- Wendy Church, Healthy Child Manitoba Office
- Marty Dolin, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council
- Alan Wise, Central Neighbourhood Development Corporation
- Marlene Amell, General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres
- Katherine Mundy, General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres
- Diana Turner, Manitoba Department of Education

### ***Demographic Information***

A total of 126 parents participated in this project. The vast majority of these were women (90 per cent).

One third of the participants were Caucasian. First Nations and Métis parents made up the second and third largest groups (19 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively). African parents collectively made up 7 per cent of the participants. Filipinos were also heavily represented, at 5 per cent. The personal information form did not ask if these were refugees, landed immigrants or citizens.

Ages were fairly evenly distributed, with parents between the ages of 31 and 40 making up the largest age group (37 per cent). The majority of parents (79 per cent) fell between the ages of 26 and 50.

Almost all of the parents (92 per cent) listed English as their primary language. Some of the other common languages included various Aboriginal languages (5 per cent), Spanish (3 per cent), French (2 per cent), Tagalog (2 per cent), Karen (2 per cent), German (2 per cent), and Mende (2 per cent).

Married parents made up the largest group among participants (42 per cent), but single parents also made up a significant percentage (36 per cent).

Almost an equal number of participants owned their homes as rented (35 per cent and 34 per cent respectively). 20 per cent of the parents lived in Manitoba Housing.

Participants' employment status varied greatly. Over one fifth of the participants in this study were unemployed. Another fifth listed their employment status as student, 17 per cent were listed as part-time, and 13 per cent said they worked full-time.

Almost all participants (88 per cent) had dependent children at home. Several parents had children in CFS care. Most of these children (94 per cent) were biological. Over half of the families we spoke to (65 per cent) had at least one child under the age of six, half had at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12, and 15 per cent had at least one between the ages of 13 and 18.

About forty per cent of participants received income from a job. An almost equal number (38 per cent) received social assistance. Around one quarter received income from their partner, and 36 per cent received child tax credits. The income levels of participants were generally low, with 45 per cent earning less than \$14,000 in the previous year.

To see a full break down of the demographic information of participants, see Appendix B.

## Key Findings:

This section gives the key findings of the parent consultations, along with past recommendations and the responses of community and systems workers. The challenges are divided according to theme. This is not to suggest that these challenges can be easily separated. Challenges that relate to one theme often have effects on challenges relating to another theme. These themes are based on the responses parents gave during our consultations and surveys. They are the product of the experiences of each individual parent and are not meant to reflect the experience of all downtown families. The views and opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of C4F or its members.

## Immigration/Integration

Challenges related to newcomers cut across all the themes in this report, therefore we have included a section focusing specifically on the challenges raised by immigrant and refugee parents. Most of the newcomer parents that participated in this study are African, and the challenges in this section reflect that.

A common complaint newcomer parents raised during our consultations was the stress that the integration process placed on family relations. A lack of understanding of Canadian family law causes many newcomer parents to live in near-constant fear of child welfare services. It starts as early as the orientation process, when officials tell newcomer families that certain traditional parenting practices, like corporal punishment, could result in the children being taken away. In some cases, this fear makes adults afraid to discipline children, and undermines parents' authority. Several parents said children use this fear to take advantage of their parents by threatening to call the police or child welfare agents if their parents try to discipline them. Stories circulate about children being taken away after emergency services are called, fear of child welfare services spreads, and parents become reluctant to ask for help. Parents don't think that emergency and child welfare services understand or appreciate their traditional parenting practices. One parent expressed the consequences of this fear, thus:

“Bringing up children in Canada also brings fear in parents. An accident can happen in someone's life, so when something wrong happens to the child, when the police come, they won't care to see that you are bring him up for five years. He will look only for that little error or accident that happened that day. When we try to talk with the child, they say 'Ok, I'm going to call the police' ... So Canada is training our women not to take care of their children because they are afraid.”

The stress that this fear causes has serious consequences for the physical and mental health of newcomer parents. As one parent from Sudan said, problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke were not as common back in Africa.

Several parents highlighted the importance of culture and community, and expressed frustration that they and their children could not enjoy the benefits of their traditions. As one parent explained, the communal values of many African cultures are not reflected by the dominant white culture in Canada:

“Canada is more of an individualistic culture. It won't allow community. Everybody's just me, me...We have to share. We share ideas. We share values ... And that's why there are all these cries for community centres, community this, community that.”

Practices like community parenting are not practiced by the majority in Canada. Parents could often rely on others in their communities back home to look after their children if they needed to go out somewhere. The lack of affordable child care makes matters worse. The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg points out, in its 2008 Child Poverty Barometer, newcomer families are often younger and larger than Canadian families. The lack of available child care, as one parent mentioned, can make finding work all but impossible, forcing at least one parent to stay home. This hurts newcomer families financially, forcing some on to social assistance, which,

one parent said, reinforces negative stereotypes of newcomers. Going on social assistance brings its own stresses and challenges. One single parent said she feels pressured by social assistance workers to find work, when her focus is on taking care of her children. This feeling of being pressured to work, and the insensitivity of social assistance workers, was also highlighted by refugee mothers in a 2006 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Education and literacy challenges were raised by several newcomer participants. One challenge highlighted in both the literature and our consultations is the placement of newcomer children in schools according to age.<sup>10</sup> As one parent explained, this can seriously hurt children's chances of success:

“Some [children] have been in the refugee camps for over 5, 6, 10 years, and these children don't go to school while in refugee camps ... So the children have lost 5, 6, 10 years from their community life. So when they come here, because they are in that age group, the system puts them in that class. So as a result, they become drop outs, or push outs, because you don't want to be the laughing stock. Your self-esteem is at stake. So as a result you end up on the street. There are people there who are going to give you money, who are going to lure you, and you want to be identified. You want to identify yourself.”

Not all newcomer children, however, are behind children their own age. One parent from Nigeria said her two-year-old son was already enrolled in the public school system before they moved to Canada, where he is too young to enrol. This, combined the lack of nearby daycare, prevented this mother finding work.

Literacy challenges are related to many of the other challenges newcomers face. Several parents said they could not read transit information, and this made accomplishing many essential tasks exceedingly more difficult. The fear and confusion many newcomer parents feel towards child welfare services seems to stem largely from what they hear and read upon arriving in Canada. In the chaos many newcomers experience immediately after landing, one parent explained, misunderstandings happen.

“You are here for a whole week. They start telling you what to do, like the Canadian orientation. Your mind is not here, you are just in a new culture. You don't have that time even to really think and study culture. These people who cannot read and write ... right now all they see is paper. They say ‘oh yeah, this is Canada.’” (holds up a piece of paper)

Manitoba has taken in record numbers of immigrants and refugees in recent years, a trend that looks set to increase in the next few years. Manitoba Labour and Immigration set a target 20,000 arrivals per year for ten years in 2008. Government and service providers must ensure the services and supports exist for these newcomers.

Other challenges related to newcomers are discussed in the childcare, education and child welfare services sections.

## Housing

The provision of proper housing is known to improve many of the challenges families face by providing security and stability. Many parents in this study, however, had trouble finding safe, affordable housing. Most of the participants who raised housing as a challenge lived in either the public or private rental market. Parents in the private and public rental markets described many similar challenges, as well as challenges specific to their housing type. Some common challenges included poor maintenance, safety concerns, and lack of access due to low vacancy rates and affordability. Parents in private and public apartments said they were concerned about violence and illegal activity in their buildings. One parent said the high cost of housing forced low income

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<sup>10</sup> MacKinnon and Stephens. CCPA (2006); pg. 4.



people to live in unsafe areas of the city. A newcomer parent from the Philippines said she was looking for new housing because her children are afraid to live in their building.

Figures from the 2006 Census show more houses downtown are in need of major or minor repairs (46.6 per cent compared to 37.6 per cent ROW). Several parents said their buildings were poorly maintained, and repairs took a long time, if they happened at all. One parent living in West Broadway said her landlord refused to fix a broken fridge and got mad when the family complained. When this parent referred the matter to Residential Tenancies Branch, she said she was told there was nothing they could do. Another parent living in Manitoba Housing said she has called repeatedly about a cockroach problem, but nothing has been done about it. Another parent said it took a month for Manitoba Housing to fix a broken window in her apartment. One parent said she was unfairly charged for damages after Manitoba Housing failed to do an exit survey of her apartment when she moved out. Manitoba Housing has recently committed \$87 million to repair 1,366 units, but one parent who lives in the Centennial neighbourhood said the money is being spread too thin to make enough of a difference.

A director of an elementary school parent room described the conditions she hears about from her parents:

“They don't have safe housing. Even the apartment that they do have, there's usually crime in the actual building. There's hooking going on in the building. There's drug dealing going on in the actual building. It's unsanitary, there's feces on the wall, and urine. That's not being taken care of because they're a slum lord ... So they can't find anything.”

Downtown residents interviewed for the CCPA 2008 State of the Inner City Report, which focused on housing, also identified poor maintenance as a major challenge. Community development organizations such as the Spence Neighbourhood Association, West Broadway Development Corporation and Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation and the City of Winnipeg have identified housing repair as a priority and devised plans and policies in attempts to address maintenance issues.

Record low vacancy rates and rising rents in some neighbourhoods are forcing families to move out of their neighbourhoods. One parent in West Broadway said her family could no longer afford to stay in their building, and many other families had already moved out. The process of gentrification in West Broadway is not a new phenomenon: between 1996 and 2001 rents increased almost 30 per cent compared to 6 per cent for the rest of the city, and requests by landlords to raise rents beyond the city's rent guidelines far exceeded those in other neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup>

Another parent in Centennial explained that many families, including his own, are moving out of the neighbourhood because of lack of housing, despite the fact that there are dozens of boarded up houses in the area. This father said he has been on a waiting list for Manitoba Housing for months. He said many other families have been forced out of the area in search of housing.

Simply applying for housing is a challenge for many parents. One parent who said he had been on a waiting list for Manitoba Housing for nine months complained that he had to call every three days to see if there was a place available. A newcomer parent said she wants to move to a unit in a safer neighbourhood, but the hours she works makes it impossible to get down to a housing agency before it closes to get an application. Another parent who applied to a housing co-op couldn't find the application information on the co-op's website.

Several women living in Manitoba Housing said they have been harassed by officials who suspect them of hiding other people in their units. One mother said she was questioned after her ex was seen walking past her building. Another parent described her experience after she let a male friend stay overnight at her apartment:

“Just because he was working and was making money they thought that we were cheating the system ... They came and looked through our apartment. Like they looked through everything, they went through our closet,

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<sup>11</sup> Silver, CCPA (2006); p. 20-21

they went through everything. They check your shoes ... You're going to have roommates. You're going to have male friends over.”

Several parents complained that Manitoba Housing doesn't reassess or reassign families according to their financial and housing needs. In fact,

“[a] tenant's circumstances are reviewed each year at an annual lease renewal meeting with the Manitoba Housing property manager. If the family size has changed and an appropriately sized unit in the same area or a mutually agreed upon area is available the tenant will be relocated.”

Nevertheless, during one consultation parents related anecdotal cases of families staying in public housing units when they no longer need it.

## Child care

The Immigration/Integration section of this report discussed the child care challenges newcomers face. However, quality affordable child care is difficult for many downtown parents to find. Waiting lists for daycare spaces are very long. Some parents we spoke to had been on waiting lists for two years. The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba heard similar concerns from parents in their 2006 study “Time for Action: An economic and social analysis of child care in Winnipeg”. Without child care, many parents said they will not be able to return to work.

Adding to the difficulty of finding child care in general is a lack of seasonal and off-hours daycare. Several parents said they work shift work and often can't find child care during evenings. One parent said that when her husband works during the summers, they have to drive their daughter an hour and a half to her grandmother's house. This mother's story highlights another obstacle to child care faced by many downtown parents – the distance they have to travel to access daycare. A newcomer parent said the lack of child care nearby prevented her attending some of her orientation classes. Another mother said she took eight busses every day in the course of taking her son to daycare, getting to work, and getting back home. The CCCM discovered that, while there is a chronic lack of child care spaces across the entire city (spaces exist for only one in every six children in Winnipeg who might require care<sup>12</sup>), low-income neighbourhoods face the greatest space shortages. For example, in Daniel McIntyre, where 27.6 per cent of families are low-income, there are only enough spaces for 18 per cent of the neighbourhood's children. In River Heights-Fort Garry, where only 8.6 per cent of families are low-income, there are spaces for 24 per cent of the neighbourhood's children.<sup>13</sup> This study did not say how many spaces in low-income areas were actually filled by children from those areas. This space shortage forces parents to look for child care outside of the neighbourhoods where they live.

Finding information about individual daycare centres and child care spaces is a challenge for parents. Although the location of licensed daycares and the number of spaces is posted online, information about wait times and about the actual services provided is hard to find. One parent who recently moved to Winnipeg with her family said it is very difficult for her to find available child care spaces because she has no social network. Other parents said because they have no extended family here, finding child care on short notice and at odd hours is a challenge.

Not all parents who need help with child care, however, want to send their children to daycare. As one parent put it: “I don't want other people raising my children ... I want them to learn from me. I want those eight

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<sup>12</sup> Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. “Time for Action: an economic and social analysis of child care in Manitoba.” Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, 2007; p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> CCCM. Ibid.

hours a day to be spent with me.” However, several parents said they did not receive enough support from their employers or from employment insurance to allow them to stay home and care for their children.

## Recreation

Along with safety, recreation was the only theme to come up at every consultation. Parents in every group we talked to reported difficulties finding and accessing recreation opportunities for themselves and their children. One of the most common complaints was that parents simply don’t know what activities are available, especially free programs, which often do not have enough funding for advertising.

Several parents mentioned that it is difficult for them to find programming for children in their early adolescence, between the ages of nine and thirteen. Parents with children in this age range said most of the program options came with a fee, which effectively puts the program out of their reach. Other parents said the programs offered were too structured to work for their children. Parents also said they can’t find programming for them to do with their children.

The cost of programming is an obstacle for many families. Not every child that needs a recreation subsidy program can access one. One mother of four said although her money is spread thin over her family, her income level still puts many subsidy programs out of reach.

Downtown parents have to look for affordable recreational opportunities for their children outside the neighbourhoods where they live. One parent who lives in Minto said the lack of subsidized programs in her neighbourhood forces her to drive her children out to Transcona and the YMCA by Unicity to find programming.

Another parent who lives in the West End said her family has been poorly served by the concentration of recreation facilities in mega-complexes:

“I understand that ... what sport or activity is being offered depends on what school or community club has the apparatus or can house it, but there's not a lot in this area other than Cindy Klassen (Community Centre).”

As Ali Millar and Lissie Rappaport detail in their study “Winnipeg’s Best-Kept Secret: a Community Development Vision for Sherbrook Pool”, there has been a steady disinvestment in recreational programs in the downtown for the past few decades. This has increased the distance many children have to travel to access programming. As several program leaders explained, in certain neighbourhoods, a few blocks or having to cross a major street can make the difference between children feeling safe enough to go to programs and not.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, one parent said her daughter’s gymnastics program lost its evening spot in an elementary school gym. To her knowledge, no other program was brought in to replace it. Several parents said it is difficult for their families to find activities to do together.

The safety of parks and play structures were also a concern for parents. Several parents in neighbourhoods like Central Park and Centennial said they were afraid to take their children to wading pools because of broken glass and needles lying on the ground. Other parents complained about drunk and high people hanging out in parks. Some recreation centres are seen by parents as gang hang outs, and children are afraid to go.

One mother who lives in Minto said that in her neighbourhood north of Portage Avenue there are not many play structures except for school playgrounds, which are often being used by the school children. She said she has to drive her children south of Portage to find a structure.

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<sup>14</sup> Millar and Rappaport, CCPA (2009); p. 16.

## Education

Downtown parents are looking for opportunities to educate themselves and their children, but face many challenges trying to do so. One of the most distressing challenges for parents and children is bullying. One parent said she wanted to send her son to a different school because he was being bullied, but couldn't afford the fee to send him out of the catchment area. A director of an elementary school parent room said students are sometimes harassed by older gang members that are either trying to recruit them or are themselves trying to earn acceptance into a gang.

Learning disabilities and behavioural problems present further challenges to children succeeding in the school system. Two parents said their children suffer from Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. A parent who had undiagnosed ADHD said her daughter began mimicking her behaviour in school. Another parent said undeveloped language skills contributed to her son's behavioural problems. In all these cases, however, the parents said special counsellors and mentors in the schools helped their children succeed.

The structure of classroom learning was another theme during our consultations. One parent said teachers focus too much on reading and writing. She prefers the style of another teacher at her daughter's school who teaches Social Studies. One parent said she can't help her children with their homework because the curriculum is unfamiliar to her.

Parents also need positive, supportive environments in order for them to learn. One parent attending a downtown educational program described her experience going back to get her high school equivalency.

"I started taking mine but it just got overwhelming. That's when I learned that the highest grade of reading out there is Grade 12 ... Well they start you at Grade 12, but some people out there to get their GED, they're starting at a Grade 9 level. And it's during the day or hours I'm working. The resource centre is only open twice a week, three times, past 8 (o'clock). That's a barrier for a lot of people."

Basic life skills are an important prerequisite for parents to succeed at furthering their education, as one parent who is now considering going to university explained.

"It was in my academic class (at a downtown adult education program) that they did study skills and they showed us how to time manage, and it was kind of like I can use that in everyday life, not just in school ... So if they just had (time management) workshops for people, even if they didn't go to school ... It taught me skills I didn't know. I was one of those people who just did things on the spur of the moment, and I didn't plan things. That's why I've succeeded in the past two years, like I've succeeded to the point of finishing Grade 12. Disciplining myself, it taught me how to discipline myself."

See the Immigration/Integration section for a discussion of education challenges related to newcomers.

## Food Security/Nutrition

Purchasing and preparing healthy, affordable food was a common challenge for parents in our consultations. This was true for both low and middle-income parents. In some cases, the problem was a lack of time to prepare meals, but in many cases, the cost of food was the obstacle. When parents are on tight budgets, they are sometimes forced to cut spending in areas to make ends meet. As one parent explained, when EIA housing supports don't cover rent, food budgets often get cut.

Several parents said the closing of supermarkets at Polo Park Shopping Centre and at the corner of Ellice Ave. and Wall St. have made it harder for them to get groceries. This especially disadvantages families that do not have access to a vehicle. Several parents also raised concerns about the safety of themselves and their family members walking around their neighbourhoods. In this sense, the longer walking distances that downtown residents have to travel makes issues of food also an issue of personal safety.

One immigrant parent said, because some Africans are not used to a North American diet, health issues which were rare back home are becoming a major problem among newcomers.

“Back home we never had blood pressure problems, we don’t have that ... But here, blood pressure, sugar, we don’t know where this come from. We were happy people. We weren’t stressed. We go out, we work our job. You never hear a woman say she thinks she’s going to have a heart attack. Because of the stress and the frustration and everything, you don’t know where to go.”

Although the issue of food security did not dominate the discussions during our consultations, it is important to mention considering the relationship between diet and overall physical and mental health.

## **Safety**

In almost all of our consultations, parents raised concerns about the safety of their children, themselves and their property. Some parents or their children had experienced violence first-hand. Others said they felt uneasy about things they saw and heard in the neighbourhood, such as stabbings and people hanging out in back lanes.

One of the most common concerns was the safety of parks and recreation centres. Several parents in areas such as Centennial, Central Park and Daniel McIntyre complained that they don’t feel comfortable taking their children to wading pools and play structures because of broken glass, needles and condoms lying on the ground. A related concern brought up by several parents, including one parent in Daniel McIntyre neighbourhood, is drunk and high people hanging around in public parks.

“One thing I’m worried about in my community is that Jacob Penner Park, you know that Maryland Hotel, they have that (beer) vendor, and there’s the park there and then there’s people drinking there and I can’t send my children there. So I will not send my children to the park, at all.”

Safety at community and recreation centres was also a common concern during our consultations. Some parents were concerned that community centres and drop-in programs served as hangouts for gang members. As one mother at Mulvey School explained, this often prevents parents and children from taking advantage of recreation opportunities.

“All these learning classes, I know a lot of stuff here is free, like Art City, Broadway Community Centre, but sometimes the crowd that’s around the outside intimidates you to go to those places. Like the gang members are always there ... I don’t want that, those things are scary, so we need to clean that up.”

Several parents in neighbourhoods like Daniel McIntyre, Spence and Centennial complained about sex workers hanging around their children near their homes and schools. Some parents said they and their children have been approached by johns in the area.

Parents also raised concerns about police and security patrols in their neighbourhoods. Parents in Centennial complained that they often saw police driving through their neighbourhood, but never saw them get out. Other parents questioned the effectiveness of security patrols at deterring violence and the sex trade in their neighbourhood. One problem, as a mother at Mulvey School explained, is that it’s difficult to identify criminals after the fact.

Property theft and vandalism was also a common concern in all the neighbourhoods where we held consultations. One mother in Daniel McIntyre said people she knows have stopped filing insurance claims because of the increase in premiums.

## **Other issues to follow up:**

There were several issues that parents mentioned during our consultations that we think deserve further attention but that couldn't be included in the main themes sections, either because only one or two parents raised it, or because we couldn't confirm what the parents were saying. These issues are listed here as possible areas for officials, community workers and other researchers to investigate:

- One mother from Trinidad said the glorification of parenthood in her home country meant she was unprepared for post-partum depression after the birth of her first child. This meant she went undiagnosed and without treatment, and only found out when she was preparing for her second child.
- The director of a downtown school parent room said some parents at the centre had been denied housing because they are on social assistance. Attempting to fight this discrimination, however, comes with its own costs. The process of appealing is long and costly, and can sour the relationship between tenants and landlord.
- One parent whose son required a subsidy to participate in a basketball program was told that children who could pay up front would be given first consideration.
- One mother whose husband is in the air force said the culture of the military is toxic to her marriage. In addition to the trauma soldiers experience, she said soldiers often pass around graphic, even violent pornography, and when they come back they behave differently towards their children and spouses. She said the military does not take these marital difficulties seriously.

## **Responses and Recommendations:**

During our consultations, we asked parents what ideas they had for solving the challenges they raised. We have compiled them here, along with recommendations pulled from recent reports and offered by service providers who reviewed our themes list. These workers also drew our attention to plans and programs already in place that address some of the parents' concerns, which we have also included. The recommendations have been organized according to who we think is best suited for dealing with the issue – government, non-governmental service providers, or the community itself.

### **Community members**

#### **Immigration/Integration:**

Community centres are an important resource for newcomer parents and should be supported.

#### **Recreation:**

Recreation needs to be a partnership between programs, parents, funders, schools, community organizations, governments and businesses. In order to be successful, programs need consistent support in the form of participation, funding and promotion. Community organizations could help let clients know about recreation opportunities in the neighbourhood.

#### **Safety:**

Community patrols could help reduce the sex trade in some neighbourhoods, one parent suggested. This parent recalled a successful effort in Kitchener, where a community group organized patrols to stand near the sex workers in an effort to make them uncomfortable and move. One problem with this strategy, according to

diversity relations officer Constable Joanna Quail, is that this often simply moves sex trade workers into another area of the city, without really suppressing the problem. Another common recommendation was security patrols. WBDC, however, has suspended its security patrols due to concerns about their effectiveness and safety.

## **Government**

### **Immigration/Integration**

Efforts should be made to build trust and understanding between African families and child welfare officials. One parent suggested holding meetings between newcomer parents and child welfare officials to share information and explain parenting practices. The CFS Newcomer Unit is one example of how officials are trying to address the needs of newcomer parents. To avoid misunderstandings in the first place, another parent suggested immigration officials hold workshops with newcomer children to explain their rights and responsibilities in Canada. The CCPA has recommended government increase support to community organizations to teach newcomers how to discipline their children in keeping with Canadian customs.

Language barriers are related to many of the challenges newcomers experience. One parent suggested immigration officials should find different ways to present information to newcomers, such as performing a skit. Increasing the number of interpreters and offering services like transit information in more languages were other suggestions.

To help newcomer children succeed in school, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council executive director Marty Dolin suggests that, in addition to standardized assessments upon entering school, “there should be mandatory programs to bring the children up to the level of the grade they are going into.” According to Diana Turner, EAL consultant with the Department of Education, the department is working to convince school divisions “that providing specialized programming for a period of time for new students with significantly interrupted schooling so that they can successfully transition into regular programming is actually not segregation but is preparing them for successful inclusion.” Some schools have “reception centres” for newcomer children. Dolin pointed to Ontario’s Settlement Workers in Schools program as a way to “level the playing field” for newcomer students.

Eliminating the right of permanent residence fee, as the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and others have recommended, would remove some of the pressure to find work newcomers feel immediately upon arriving in Canada. The CCPA has encouraged compassion and understanding from social assistance workers towards newcomers. They also recommended changing the current “work first” policy which guides the Employment and Income Assistance program.

### **Housing:**

The Manitoba government has announced several programs to increase and improve the supply of public housing in the province. One initiative is building 1,500 new units over five years, which essentially matches the 300 units per year target set by the CCPA and others. They are also investing \$197 million for repairs and upgrades including improved energy efficiencies.

Several parents wanted Manitoba Housing to move families out of units that they no longer needed in order to make room for new families. As a Manitoba Housing community relations agent explained, “a tenant's circumstances are reviewed each year at an annual lease renewal meeting with the Manitoba Housing property manager. If the family size has changed and an appropriately sized unit in the same area or a mutually agreed upon area is available the tenant will be relocated.”

University of Manitoba professor Tom Carter has recommended a “transferrable shelter enhancement program” to help families pay for housing in the private market, making room in Manitoba Housing units for more high-needs tenants. Manitoba Housing will invest \$6 million in this program over two years.

The CCPA, SPCW and others have recommended increasing the EIA shelter benefit by as much as 20 per cent and indexing it to increases in the rent control guidelines. As CCPA executive director Shauna MacKinnon points out, however, the problem is that vacancy rates are so low, so affordability solutions can only go so far. The City of Winnipeg's "Our Winnipeg: Call to Action (Draft)" included a proposal to investigate a citywide grant program "that would support the creation of affordable housing units as part of larger developments by providing a property tax incentive to developers." Using policy tools such as Inclusionary Zoning and Density Bonuses, as the Manitoba CED Network suggests, could also encourage the development of affordable housing. The CCPA recommended using legacy savings accrued to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation to repair and build new housing. The WBDC has a plan to develop 15 to 18 units of mixed housing, 50 per cent of which will be rent-geared-to-income.

#### Child care:

Parents would like to see waitlist information posted online. The Manitoba Government's "Family Choices" five-year plan for child care includes a plan to create "a centralized early learning and child care waitlist". This plan also acknowledges that not all families need full-time child care. Several parents said they would like more financial support to stay home with their children, either by increasing EI payments to stay-at-home parents, or by requiring employers to pay a certain percentage of a new parent's wages.

To ensure there are enough child care workers to provide more child care services, the CCPA has recommended creating a research-based, uniform pay scale for child care workers in the province.

#### Recreation:

The CCPA's poverty reduction plan "The View From Here" recommended increasing financial support to school divisions "to encourage after school and summer use of school recreational facilities". This dovetails with a recommendation in another CCPA report looking at Sherbrook Pool – instead of requiring families to fill out forms to waive fees, "more classes could be offered in connection with schools or other community-based recreation programs." One parent suggested school divisions should offer a standard set of recreational activities.

Recreation Opportunities for Children provides \$250 per child for recreation for parents on social assistance. It has been tried in a few communities and is being considered for Winnipeg, according to Wendy Church, program and policy consultant with Healthy Child Manitoba.

#### Education:

One parent said children who are bullied should be able to go to school outside their catchment area without having to pay a fee. Another parent would like to see optional all-day Kindergarten to allow her to work. Finally, one parent said she would like to see more hands-on, "experiential" learning in school.

#### Food Security/Nutrition:

The Manitoba Food Charter recommended in its response to the "Our Winnipeg: Call to Action" that the government should "develop an effective and active education component to increase food security and food skills in schools." The government could also "improve access to food by providing a food bus to the inner city and transportation to agriculture land." In their response to the same document, the Manitoba CED Network recommended that Winnipeg City Council "establish a Food Policy Council to advise and assist the city throughout the development and implementation of a municipal food security strategy that builds upon existing initiatives the City has undertaken to address food security."



## Safety:

Several parents said the city needs to do more to keep parks clean and safe. One parent recommended the city ban beer vendors near parks. Sergeant Darrall Kotchon with the Community Support Unit of the Winnipeg Police Service said his officers patrol regularly and remove any intoxicated people they find. Parents also complained that they do not see enough police getting out of their vehicles and walking around. Kotchon said cars are often on their way to another scene, and these parents may not be seeing undercover officers in the area.

## Service providers

### Immigration/Integration:

Newcomer parents need help to raise their children in accordance with Canadian values. The CCPA has recommended community organizations offer parenting and family relations classes for newcomers. Grace Eidse, executive director of the ENTRY Program, pointed to family and couples training programs offered by the Sexuality Education Resource Centre as an example of an existing program.

### Housing:

The West Broadway Development Corporation helped establish the Greenheart Housing Co-op, “the first multi-family residential apartment building built in the inner city in 20 years ... We could do many more Greenhearts if the government is willing to invest the funding,” WBDC executive director Molly McCracken said.

Many tenants are unaware of their rights. Residential Tenancies Branch offers community consultations and will do case work for individuals there, but community members are often unaware. WBDC can offer help with organizing workshops.

### Child care:

More child care spaces are needed to meet the needs of Manitoba children, particularly for infants. Several parents said they need more child care offered during the evenings and summers. As Manitoba Child Care Association executive director Pat Wege points out, however, early childhood educators must be given the support and compensation to encourage them to enter and stay in the child care field. As part of planning the expansion of child care spaces, the CCPA has recommended service providers consider the larger size of newcomer families. The SPCW also recommend that child care be offered at organizations providing EAL and settlement services to newcomers.

Parents suggested creating a website or call-line where parents can leave recommendations and information about individual child care centres.

### Recreation:

Several parents expressed the need for more free, drop-in style programming, especially for children 9 to 13 years old. They also requested more programming for families to do together. Mark Titheridge of the West Central Community Program (WCCP) suggested recreation centres and programs should explore offering “parallel programming”, where programs for children and parents are offered at the same time at the same location. This would help increase a family’s sense of attachment to a program or a centre.

Parents and previous researchers have recommended safe walk/ride programs as a way of improving safety. Titheridge points out, however, that insurance policies are a serious obstacle. Concerns over worker safety and questions about who has ultimate responsibility for the child if a guardian isn’t home make some

organizations reluctant to implement safe rides, including WCCP. Added to that is the question of how the time between the program and home should be accounted for. “We’re all for the “Safe-Walk” program but this can be expensive if volunteers are not available which in most cases they aren’t for a very wide variety of reasons,” said Valour Community Centres executive director Bob Gingras. “Car pooling is not desirable for a community centre or any city run program due to insurance reasons.” The high cost of maintaining a vehicle, along with recent accidents involving recreation programs operating their own vehicles, make organizations hesitate to invest in these programs.

Financial assistance is available to help families take advantage of recreation in their neighbourhoods. The General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres has a sliding-scale subsidy program that takes family size into account. Executive director Marlene Amell said they “have not been in the position of having to deny any applications.” KidSport is available for children who can’t afford community centre programming, community centre recreation programmer Katherine Mundy adds.

A few parents complained about the state of the Orioles Community Centre playground. According to Valour Community Centres executive director Bob Gingras, that playground will get a \$195,000 repair in 2010.

#### Education:

More resources need to be committed to supporting adult learners, according to CCPA executive director Shauna MacKinnon. She pointed to “onsite” programs such as one being developed at Lord Selkirk Park as “particularly effective.” This model could enable a mentorship program, such as was recommended by a parent, where adults visit other adult learners in their homes, rather than putting them all in a classroom.

#### Food security/Nutrition:

One parent recommended a non-profit food preparation service could allow parents to prepare meals in advance and freeze them. This would allow time-strapped parents to still serve their children nutritious meals.

The Manitoba Food Charter recommended in its response to the City of Winnipeg’s “Our Winnipeg: Call to Action” that organizations “promote community kitchens by bringing existing kitchens up to code, and developing new kitchens.”

The WBDC operates a food security program called “The Good Food Club”, in which members can get food by helping to grow it. Executive director Molly McCracken said the program needs consistent funding in order to operate.

## Conclusion:

The challenges discussed in this report are by no means exhaustive. Ongoing research is needed to assess the challenges facing downtown parents, their causes and possible solutions. This report presented an overview of the kinds of issues families are dealing with. The literature collected here shows, however, that these problems are not new or mysterious, and many solutions to specific problems have been proposed. Now is the time to begin exploring ways to put some of these ideas into action.

## **Possible next steps:**

### **Immigration/Integration:**

- Hold meetings between child welfare officials and African parents to share information and address concerns. (parent suggestion)
- “Increase government support for community-based organizations providing essential services to refugees” to provide “parenting courses to teach them how to discipline their children in keeping with Canadian customs.” (Shauna MacKinnon and Sara Stephens. “Inner-City Refugee Women: Stories of Hope and Survival, Lessons for Public Policy.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Dec. 2006.)
- Immigration officials should organize workshops with newcomer children explaining their rights and responsibilities in Canada. (parent suggestion)
- Explore ways of presenting immigration information to newcomers that don’t rely on reading, ex. skit. (parent suggestion)
- Standardized needs assessments and mandatory make-up courses for newcomer children entering school. (Marty Dolin, executive director, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council)
- Eliminate Right of Permanent Residence Fees and repayment of transportation loans. (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. “Poverty Barometer: Child Poverty Rates of Recent Immigrants Rising.” Oct. 22, 2009.)
- “Change the current emphasis on ‘work first’ to allow social assistance recipients to pursue education, including high school equivalency.” (MacKinnon and Stephens, 2006)
- Encourage compassion and understanding from social assistance workers. (MacKinnon and Stephens, 2006)

### **Housing:**

- Increase housing related benefits, including Employment and Income Assistance Shelter Allowances and Manitoba Shelter Benefits by 20 % and index them to annual increases in the Rent Increase Guidelines. (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. “The View From Here: Manitobans Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan.” June, 2009)
- Offer property tax incentives to include affordable housing units as part of larger developments. (City of Winnipeg. “Call to Action for Our Winnipeg: First Draft.” Nov. 2009)
- Use policy tools like Inclusionary Zoning and Density Bonuses to encourage the development of affordable housing. (Manitoba CED Network. “Comments submitted to the City of Winnipeg regarding the Speak Up Winnipeg Call to Action.” Dec. 7, 2009)
- Use legacy savings accrued to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to finance repairs and construction of new housing units. (Sarah Cooper. “Housing: Policy, people and Winnipeg’s inner city.” CCPA, Dec. 2008)

### **Child Care:**

- Increase support to parents staying home to raise their children. (parent suggestion)
- “Fund market competitive compensation for all positions and all levels of experience in accordance with a research based uniform salary scale that can be applied across the province in order to attract and retain the childcare workforce.” (CCPA, 2009)
- Provide child care at organizations offering EAL and settlement services to newcomers. (SPCW, 2009)
- Create a website where parents can place reviews and recommendations of child care centres. (parent suggestion)

## **Recreation:**

- “Increase financial support to school divisions to encourage after school and summer use of school recreational facilities, particularly in rural and northern areas and the inner city.” (CCPA, 2009)
- “Instead of requiring families to fill out forms to have their fees waived, more classes be offered in connection with schools or other community-based recreation programs.” (Ali Millar and Lissie Rappaport. “Winnipeg’s Best-Kept Secret: A Community Development Vision for Sherbrook Pool. CCPA, Dec. 2009)
- Recreation Opportunities for Children provides \$250 per-child for recreation to families on social assistance. It is being considered for Winnipeg. (Wendy Church, program and policy consultant, Healthy Child Manitoba Office)
- Offer more free, drop-in programming for young adolescents. (parent suggestion)
- Offer more programming for families to do together, parallel programming. (parent suggestion)

## **Education:**

- Increase support for adult education programs, and offer programs where participants live. (Shauna MacKinnon, CCPA)
- Have mentors visit the homes of adult learners. (parent suggestion)
- Waive fees for parents sending their kids outside their school catchment area because of bullying. (parent suggestion)
- All school divisions should offer a standard set of recreational activities. (parent suggestion)

## **Food Security:**

- “Develop an effective and active education component to increase food security and food skills in schools.” (Manitoba Food Charter. “Food Security and Our Winnipeg: Response to Call to Action”)
- “Improve access to food by providing a food bus to the inner city and transportation to agriculture land.” (Ibid.)
- “Promote community kitchens by bringing existing kitchens up to code, and developing new kitchens.” (Ibid.)
- Set up a non-profit frozen meal preparation service, modelled after Dashing Dishes franchise. (parent suggestion)

## **Safety:**

- Step up efforts to keep parks clean and safe. (Parent suggestion)
- Ban beer vendors within a certain distance of parks and playgrounds. (Parent suggestion)
- Increase the number of police walking in communities. (Parent suggestion)

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## *Appendix A: Project information*

- Total respondents: 126
- Total consultations: 16
- Total consultation participants: 89
- Total online survey respondents: 14
- Total paper survey respondents: 20
- Total postcards/posters locations: 35

### List of consultation locations:

- Taking Charge! (Sept. 16, 2009 – 13 participants)
- Winnipeg Central Park Women’s Resource Centre (July 31, 2009 – 6 participants)
- Dufferin School parent room (Sept. 24, 2009 – 7 participants)
- Mulvey School parent room (Oct. 26, 2009 – 5 participants)
- Breast Feeding Buddies (Klinik Community Health Centre) (Aug. 5, 2009 – 10 participants)
- Stay and Play at Isaac Brock Community Centre (Sept. 17, 2009 – 3 participants)
- Healthy Baby at Isaac Brock Community Centre (Sept. 8, 2009 – 4 participants)
- Isaac Brock School parent room (Oct. 29, 2009 – 7 participants)
- Greenway School parent room (Sept. 22 and 23 – 4 participants)
- Stay and Play at Clifton Community Centre (Sept. 3, 2009 – 5 participants)
- Family Community Centre (Aug. 12, 2009 – 3 participants)
- Neah Kee Papa (Manitoba Métis Federation) (Oct. 1, 2009 – 2 participants)
- Pinkham School parent room (Oct. 19, 2009 – 4 participants)
- St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry women’s drop-in (Oct. 28, 2009 – 5 participants)
- John M. King School parent room (Oct. 22, 2009 – 10 participants)
- Healthy Baby at Crossways-in-Common (Oct. 29 and Nov. 3, 2009 – 3 participants)

### Paper surveys:

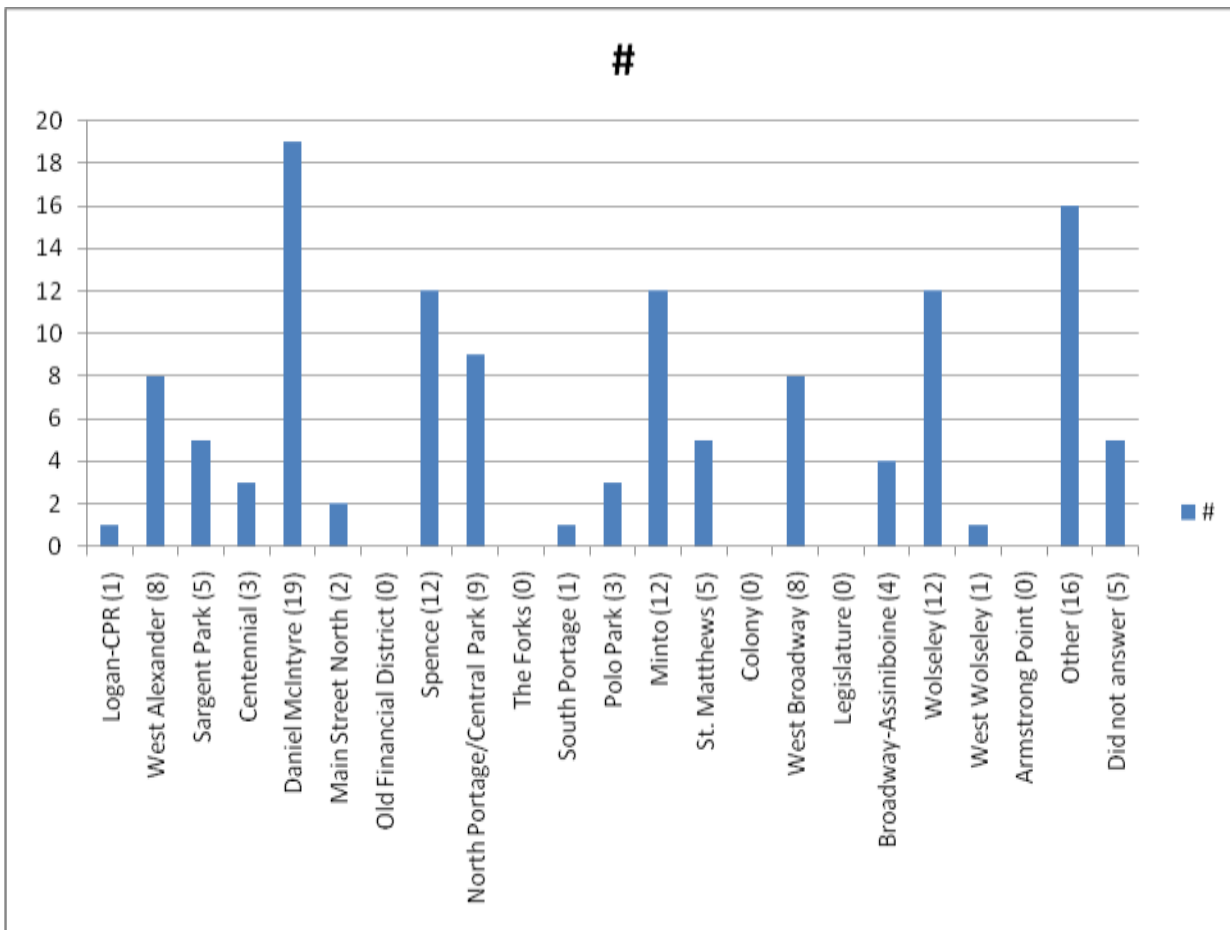
- IRCOM (10 responses)
- RESPECT program at West Central Women’s Resource Centre (6)
- Wolseley Family Place (6)

### Service providers/community workers consulted:

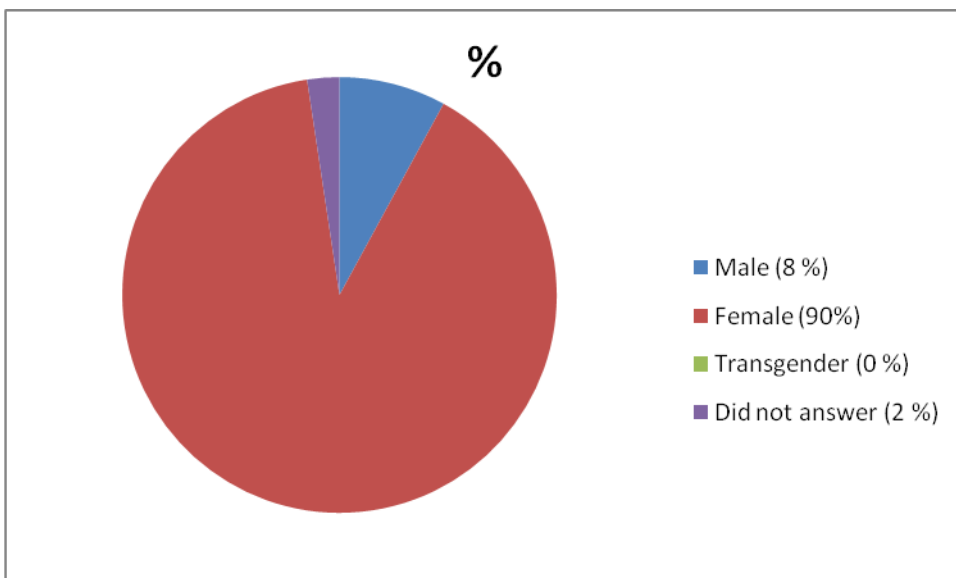
- Strini Reddy, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
- Paula Kierstead, Community Financial Counselling Services
- Melrose Konieh, Winnipeg Central Park Women’s Resource Centre
- Sally Nelson, New Journey Housing
- Jim Silver, University of Winnipeg
- Chris Kolba, Wolseley Family Place
- Vinh Huynh, Hugh John MacDonald School
- Jan Sanderson, Healthy Child Manitoba
- Sara Stephens, Klinik Community Health Center
- Suni Matthews, Dufferin School
- Tom Simms, CEDA
- Rick Boucher, Dufferin School parent room
- Megan Brisco, Dufferin School parent room

# Appendix B: Participant statistical information

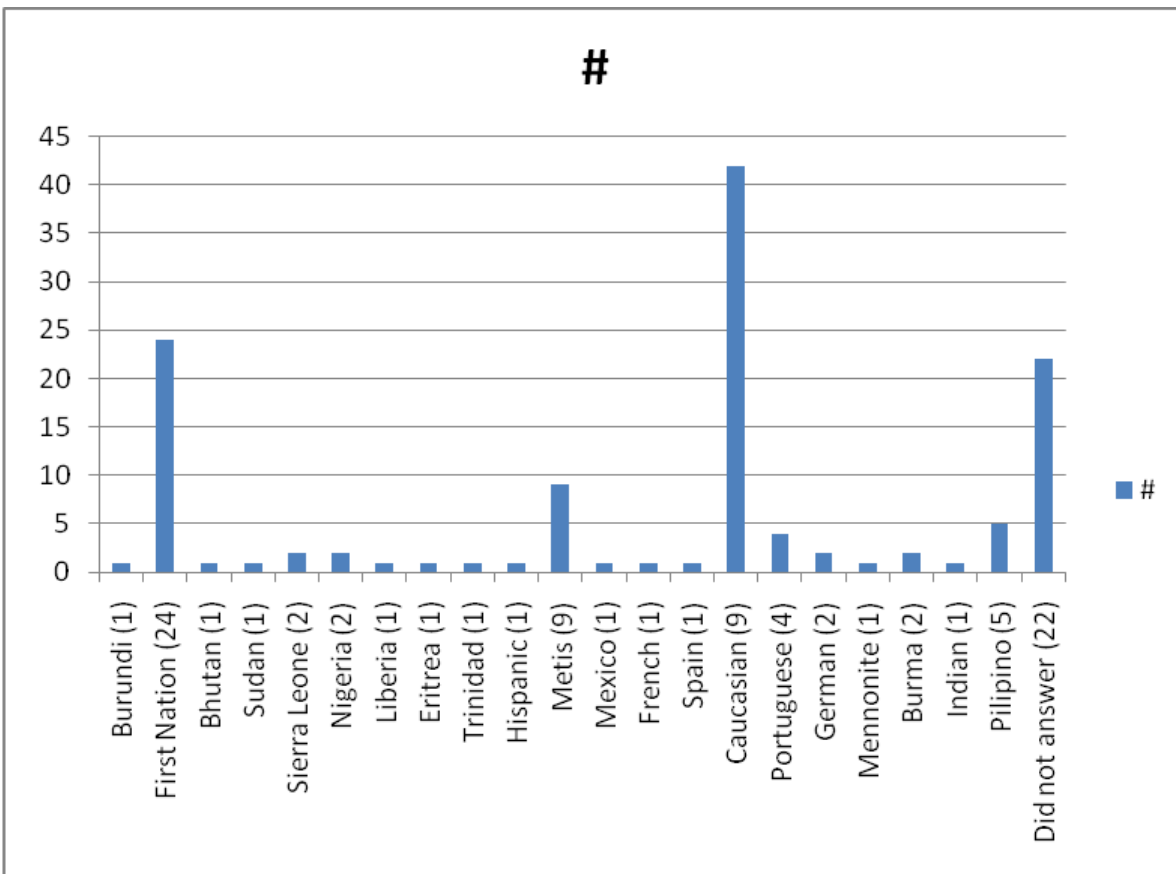
## 1. What downtown residential neighbourhood do you live in?



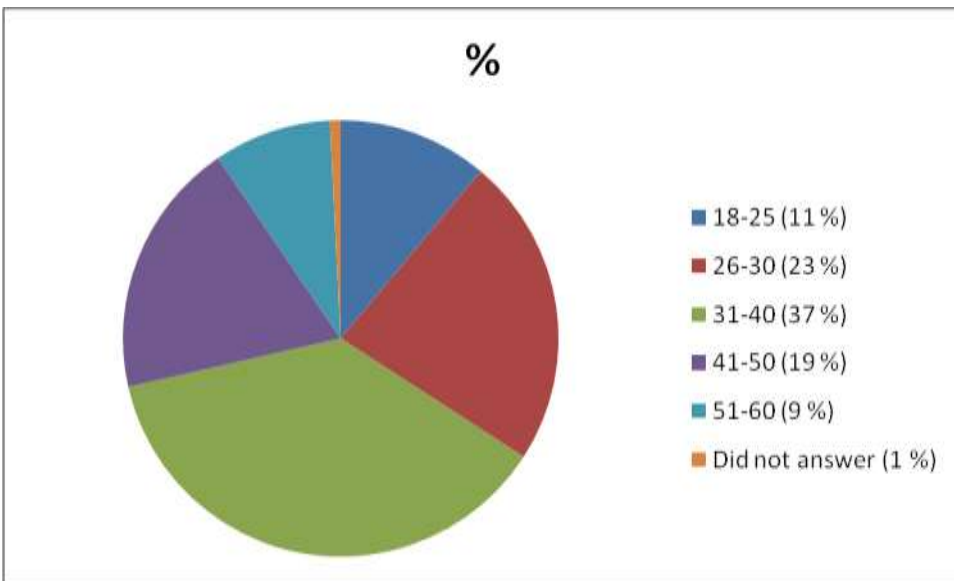
## 2. What is your gender?



### 3. What is your cultural background?

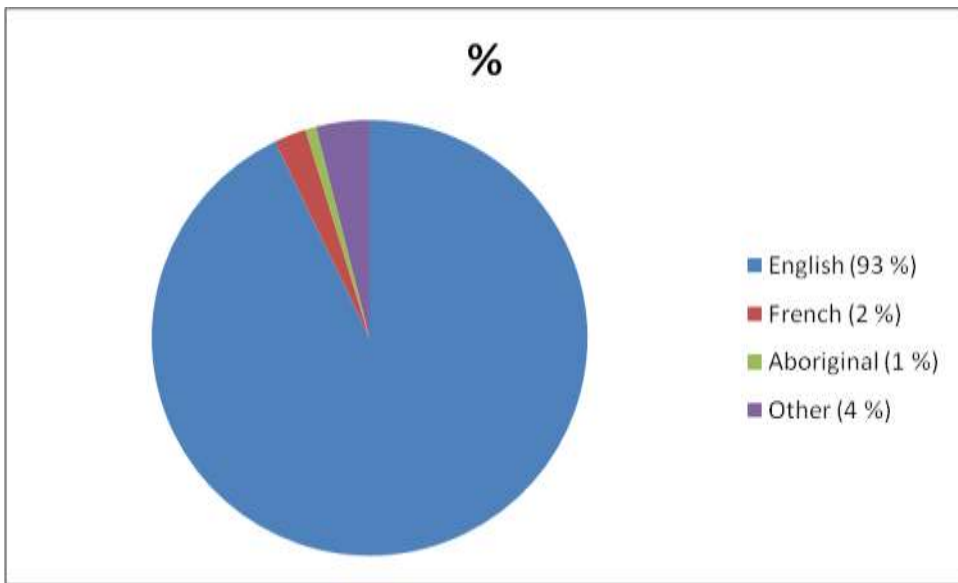


### 4. What age group do you belong to?

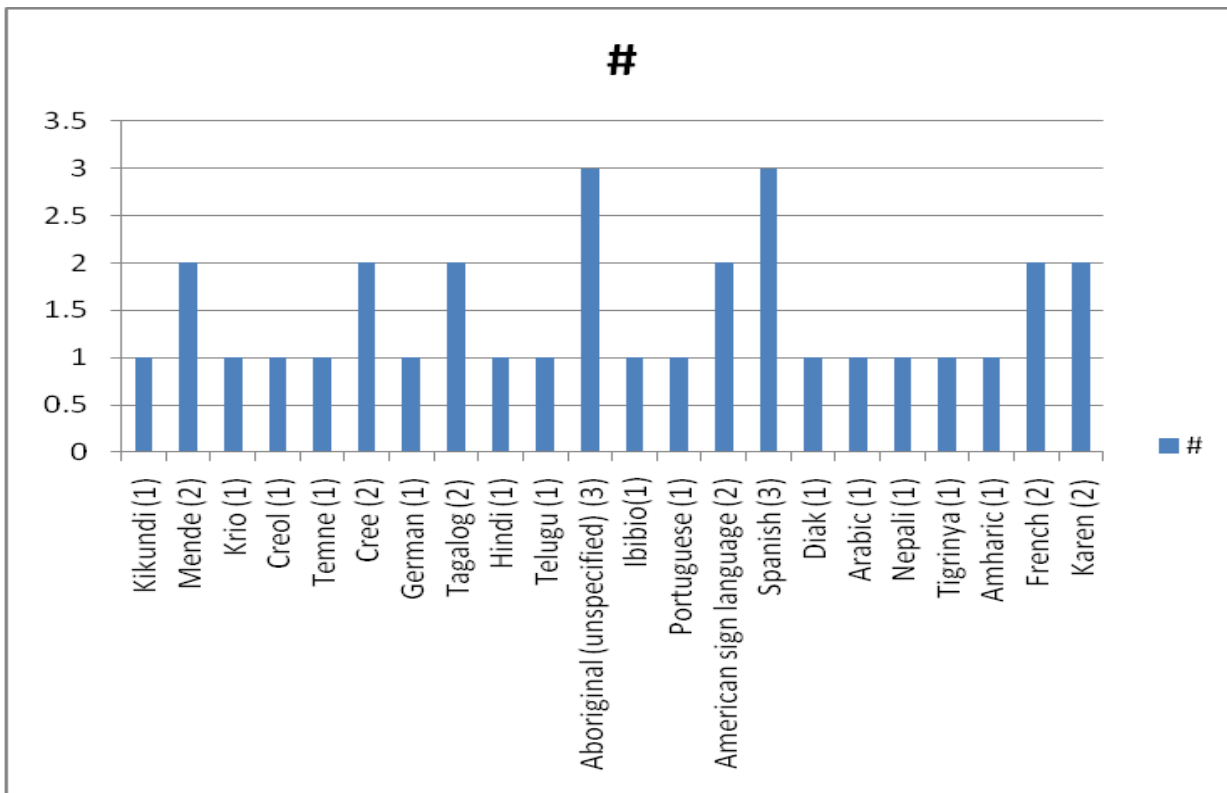




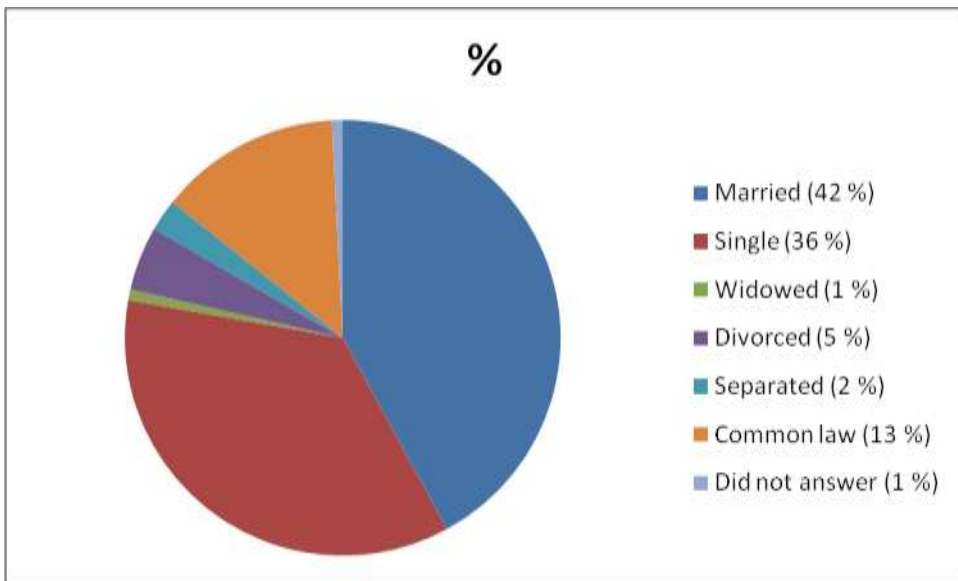
**5. What is your primary language?**



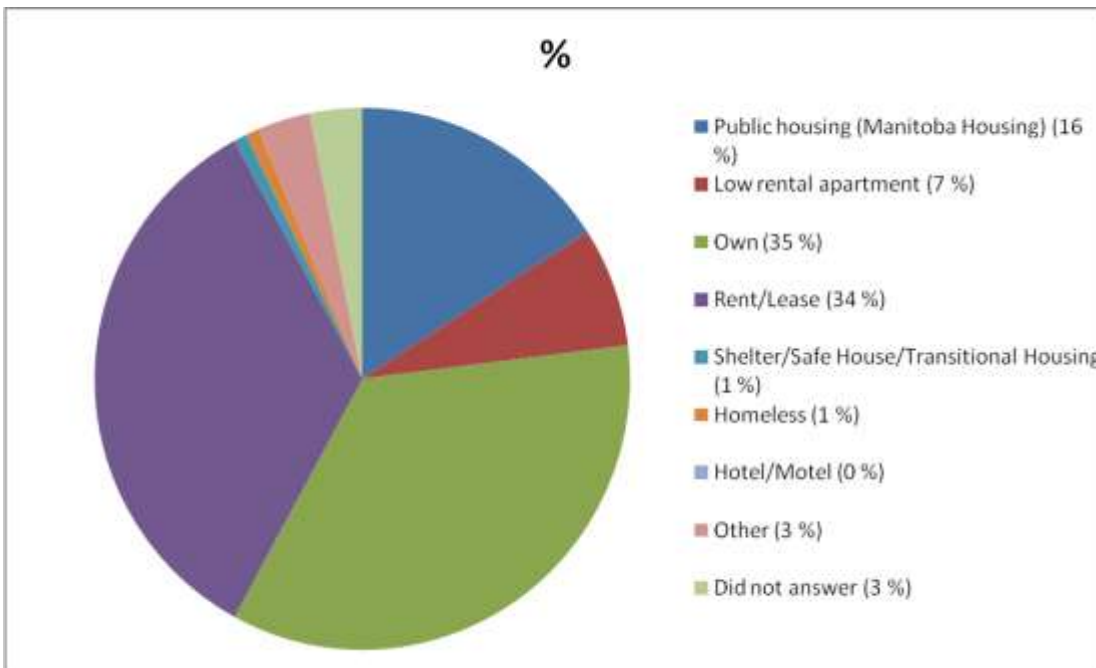
**Other languages spoken:**



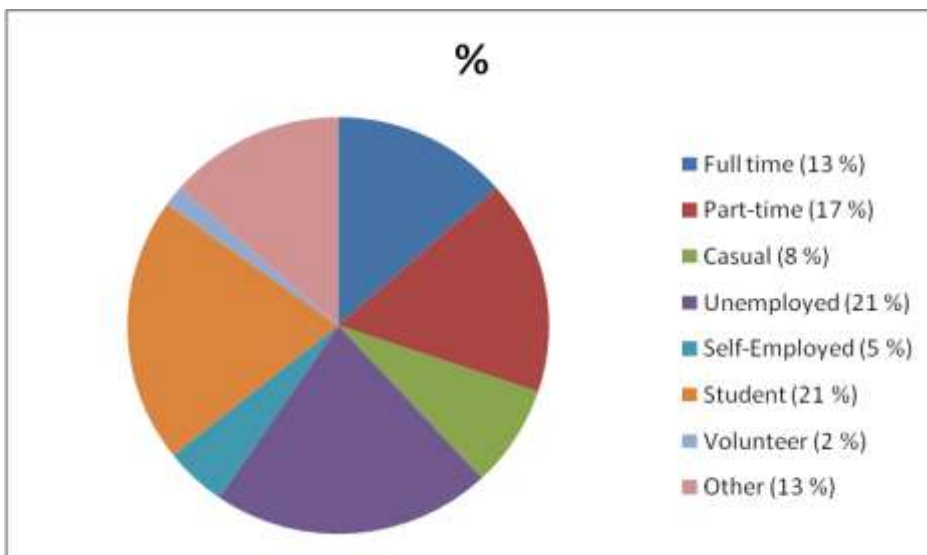
**6. What is your marital status?**



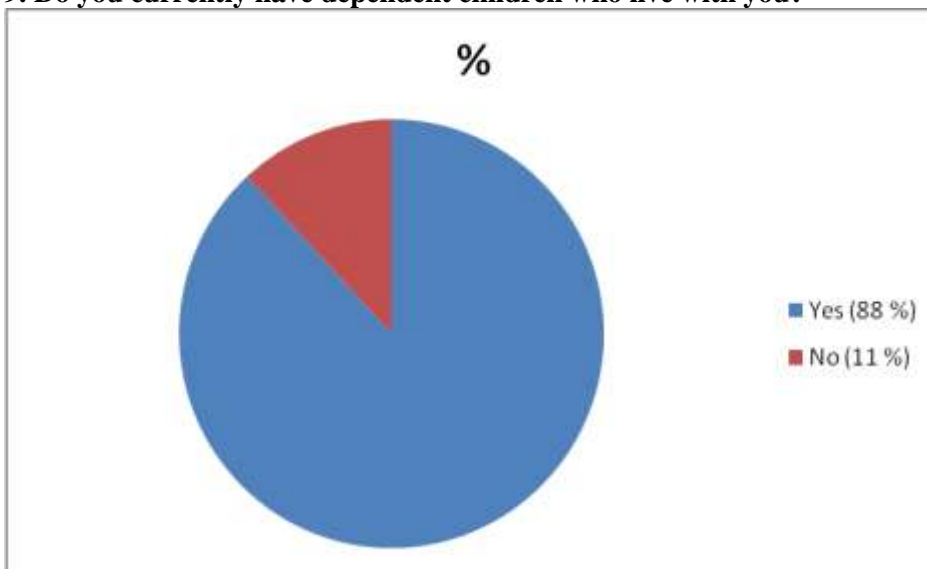
**7. What type of dwelling do you live in?**



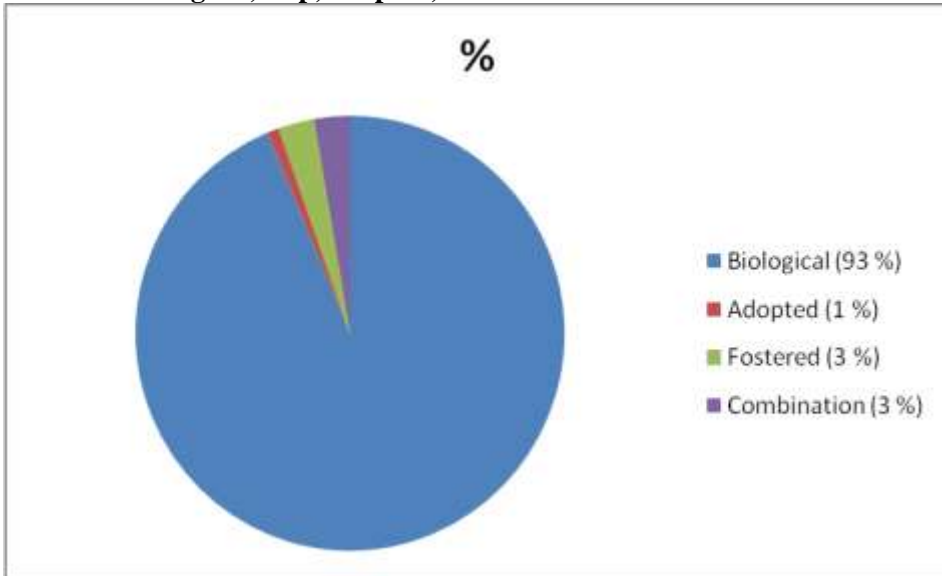
**8. What is your employment status?**



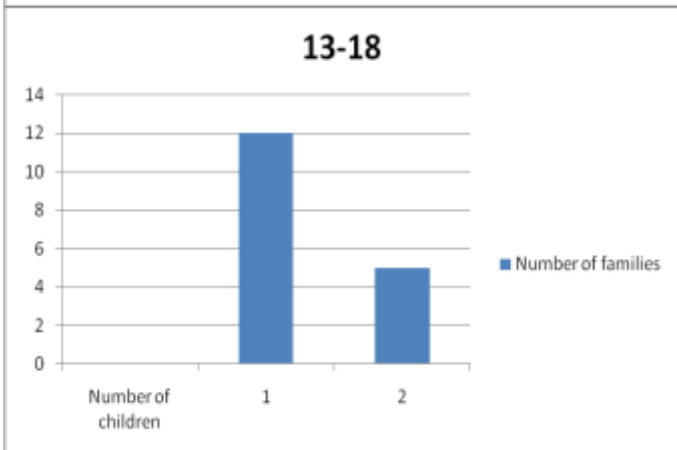
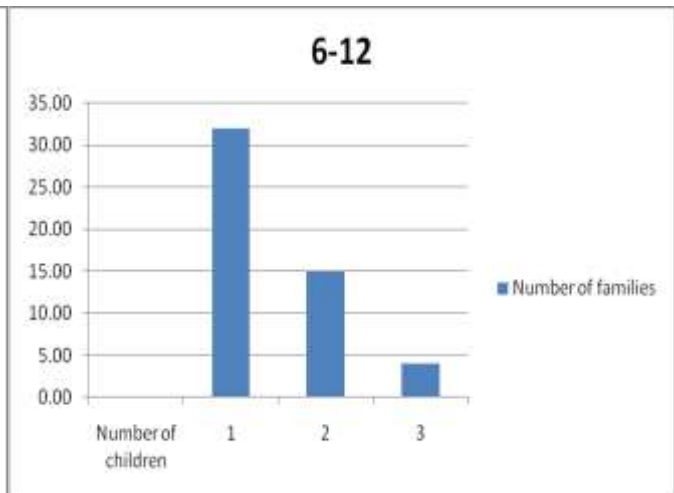
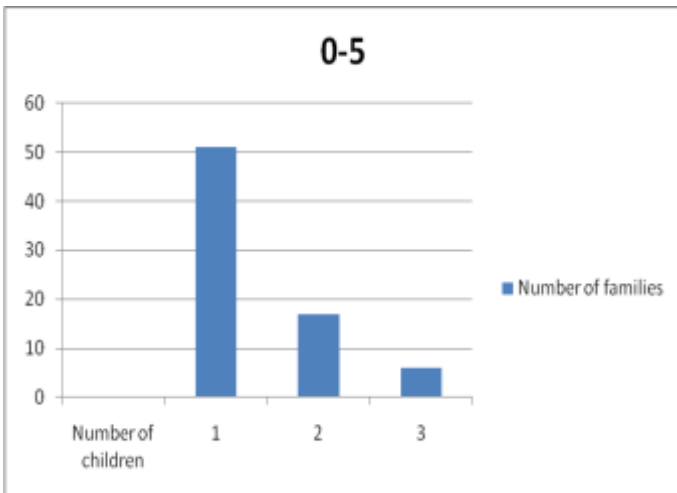
**9. Do you currently have dependent children who live with you?**



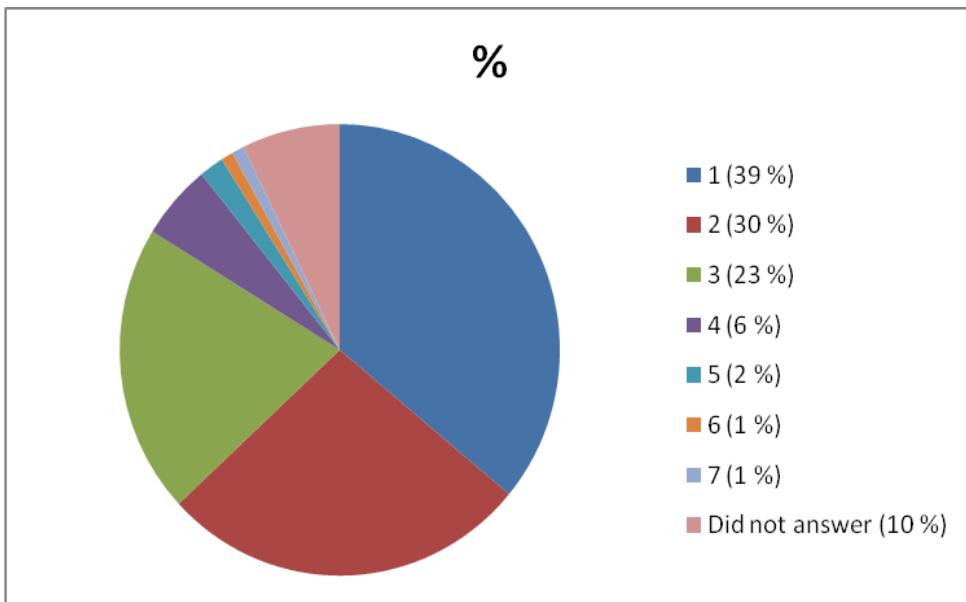
**Are these biological, step, adopted, or combined?**



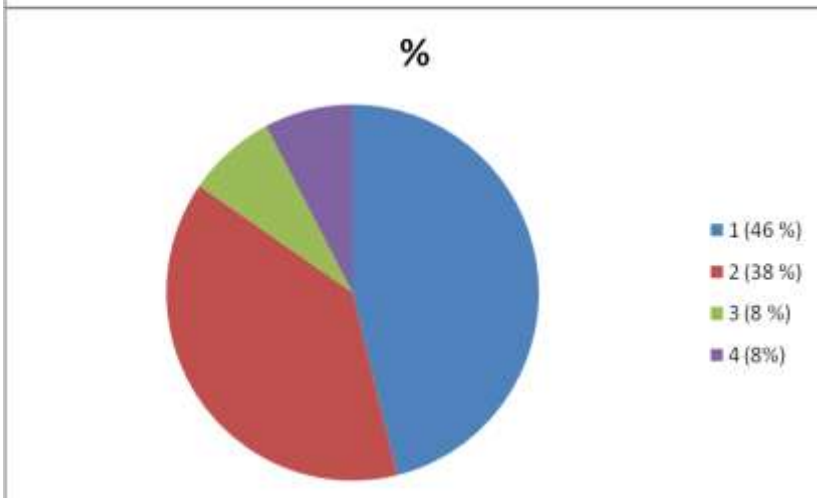
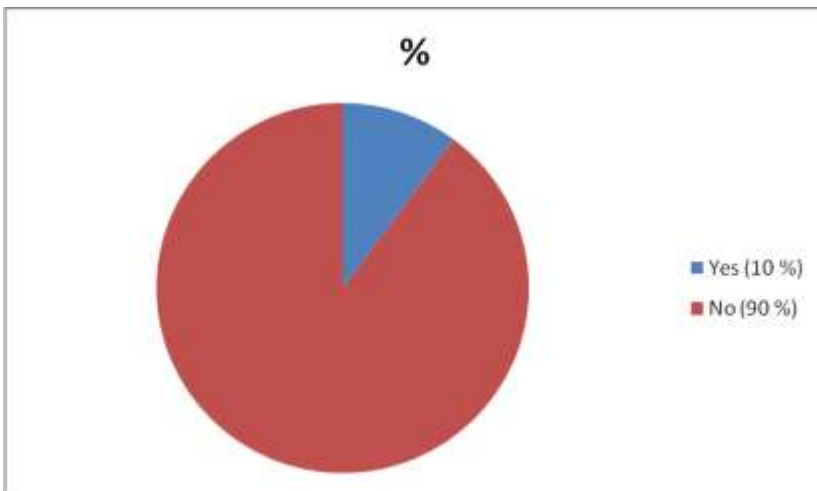
**What age are these children?**



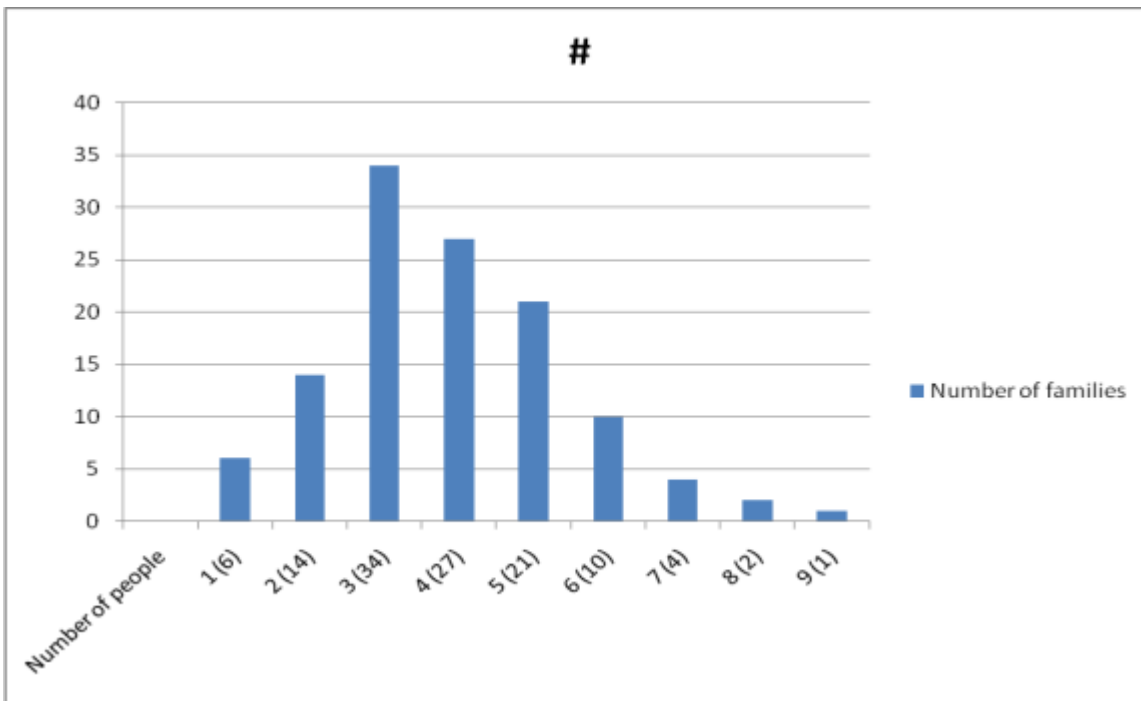
**How many dependent children currently live with you?**



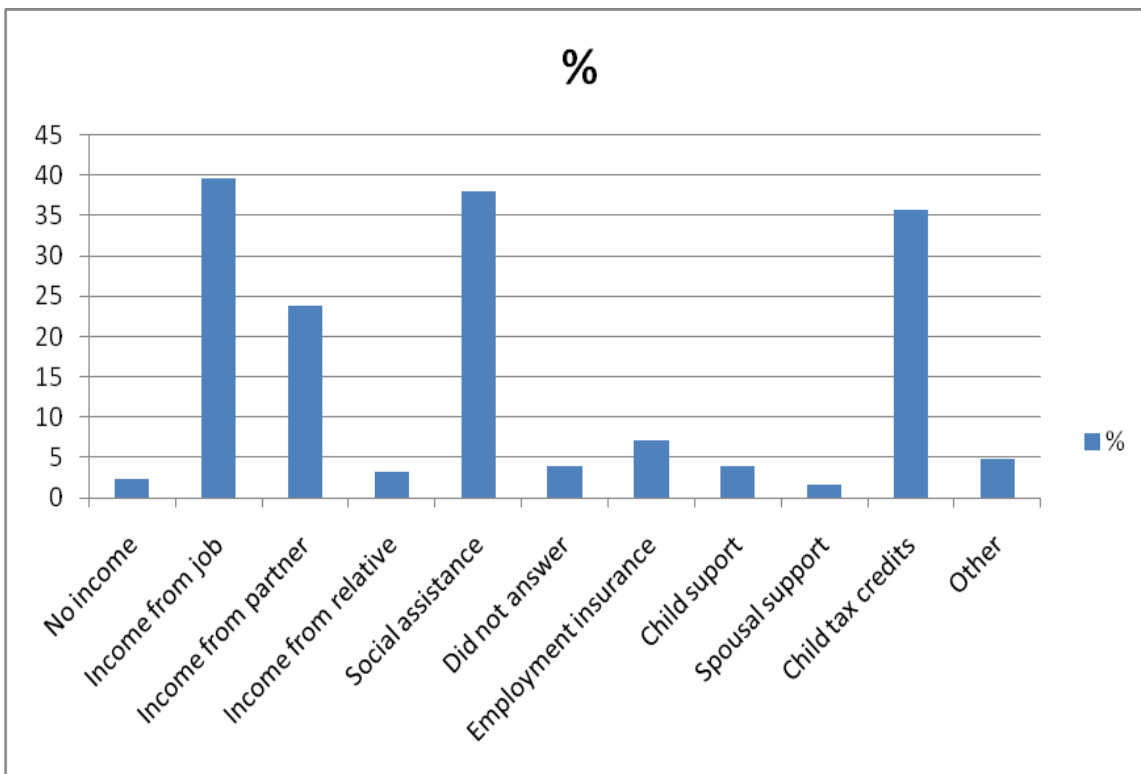
**10. Do you currently have any adult children living with you? How many?**



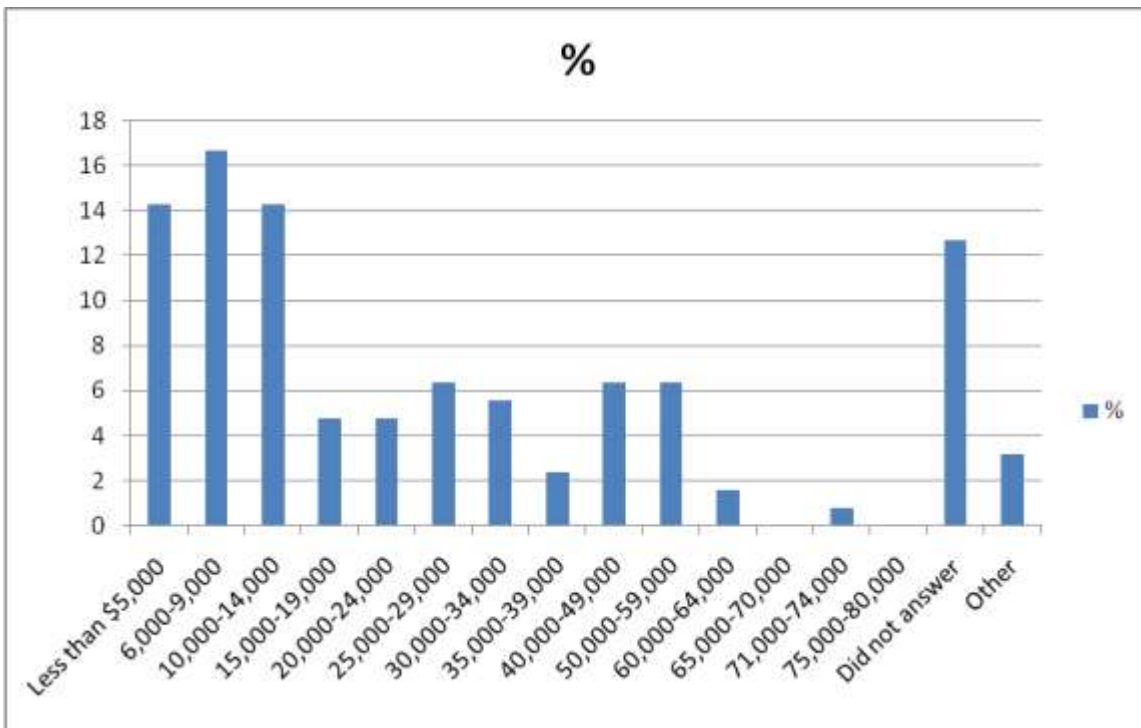
**11. How many people live in your home including adults and children?**



**12. What are your sources of income?**



13. What was your level of income last year?



## Appendix C: Personal Information Form and Questionnaire

Included in this section is a copy of the paper survey that was sent to parent organizations around the downtown. It includes the personal information form, which all consultation participants were given at the start of each consultation. It also includes a copy of the basic questionnaire the researcher used to guide discussions during the consultations. This is the same format used in the online survey.



### To be completed by survey conductor:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location/Organization name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of conductor: \_\_\_\_\_

The questions on this form ask you to share a little bit about yourself. The information collected here is primarily for statistical and demographic background purposes regarding the individuals who agree to participate in this study. The information will be used collectively for the purposes of the final report and you will not be identified in any of your responses.

Your answers are confidential and WILL NOT BE SHARED with anyone outside of the Research Team.

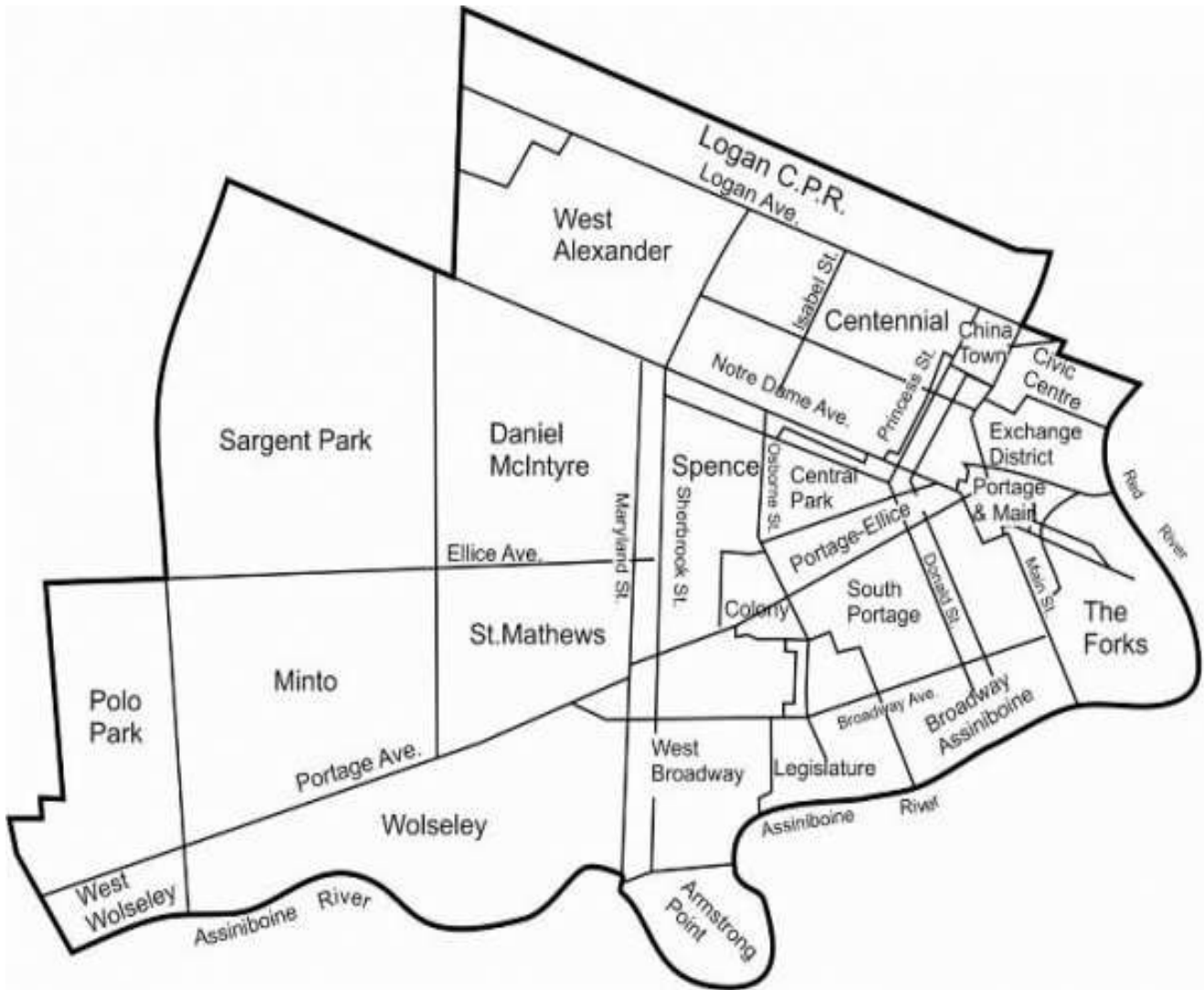
Complete surveys can be mailed to:  
Cameron MacLean, 638 Maryland St., Winnipeg, MB, R3R 1V9.

### PART 1: Community Identification

Which inner city community do you live in? (Check the map below)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Logan – C.P.R.             | <input type="checkbox"/> South Portage          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> West Alexander             | <input type="checkbox"/> Polo Park              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sargent Park               | <input type="checkbox"/> Minto                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Centennial                 | <input type="checkbox"/> St. Matthews           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daniel McIntyre            | <input type="checkbox"/> Colony                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Main Street North          | <input type="checkbox"/> West Broadway          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Old Financial District     | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislature            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spence                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadway – Assiniboine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Portage/Central Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Wolseley               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Forks                  | <input type="checkbox"/> West Wolseley          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                | <input type="checkbox"/> Armstrong Point        |





IF YOU INDICATED THAT YOU DO NOT RESIDE IN THE DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES OF WINNIPEG ...

We're sorry but only responses from those who currently reside in the downtown residential communities of Winnipeg will be accepted at this time! Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in our survey!

If you have any questions about this survey and/or the study, please contact Communities 4 Families Downtown Parent-Child Coalition at 475-5755 or visit [www.communities4families.ca](http://www.communities4families.ca).

**PART 2: General Demographic and Statistical Information about You**

What is your gender?

- Male  Female  Transgender

What is your cultural background?

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**What age group do you belong to?**

18-25  26-30  31-40  41-50  51-60

**What is your primary language? Which other languages can you speak or read?**

English  French  Aboriginal  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the highest level of education that you have completed?**

Grade 8 or less  Less than grade 12  Grade 12  
 University  College  Vocational  Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Schooling outside of Canada (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your marital Status?**

Single  Widowed  Divorced  Separated  Common Law  Married

**What type of dwelling (housing) do you live in?**

Public housing (Manitoba Housing)  Low rental apartment  Own  
 Rent/Lease  Shelter/Safe House/Transitional Housing  Homeless  
 Hotel/Motel  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your employment status?**

Full Time  Part-time  Casual  Unemployed  Self-Employed  
 Student at School  Volunteer  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have dependent children (under 18 years) currently live with you?**  Yes  No

**Are these children are biological, step, adopted, or foster children or a combination of all of these? Check the ones most appropriate:**

Biological  
 Adopted  
 Fostered  
 Combination of biological, adopted and/or fostered children

**Please indicate the age and gender of each child:**

Age (Please circle the appropriate Gender)

|                          |               |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male / Female |

**Do you currently have any adult children living with you? If so, how many?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many people live in your home including children and other adults?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are your sources of income?**

Check all that apply.

- No income    Income from job    Income from partner    Income from relative  
 Social assistance    Employment insurance    Child support    Spousal support  
 Child tax credits    Other (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

**What was your personal income level last year?**

- Less than \$5,000    \$6,000 – 9,000    10,000 – 14,000    15,000 – 19,000  
 20,000 – 24,000    25,000 – 29,000    30,000 – 34,000    35,000 – 39,000  
 40,000 – 49,000    50,000 – 59,000    60,000 – 64,000    65,000 – 70,000  
 71,000 – 74,000    75,000 – 80,000    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 3: Questions regarding parenting challenges and solutions**

The following questions ask about the challenges you may face as a parent in the downtown and the ways you deal with these challenges. Please take a minute to think before answering each question. Provide as many examples as you want and please be as detailed as possible. The more information we have the better we can understand your particular situation. This will help us later when we are coming up with ideas for solutions to the challenges you and other parents face.

1. **What difficulties or problems, if any, do you face in your daily life? For example, do you have trouble getting places or do you have a child with special needs?**
  
2. **How do these difficulties affect your family?**
  
3. **What are some ways you deal with these difficulties? How well do they work?**
  
4. **A) Have you looked for outside help to deal with these problems (ex. Family resource centres, church)? If so, what kind of help did you look for?**  
  
**B) Did you find the help you were looking for? If not, why not?**
  
5. **If you had the power, what would you change so that other parents didn't have to go through the same difficulties as you?**

**PART 4: How can we share the results of this study with you?**

Thank you for your responses! You are almost finished! Please take the time to provide us with information about how you would like to be notified about the findings related to this survey.

**Would you like to receive a copy of the Research Project's findings and results?**

Yes

No

**Are you interested in receiving a comprehensive full copy of the research results or a two page summary of the research results?**

Full comprehensive copy of the research results

Two page summary of the research results

**What is the best method for sharing this information with you?**

By Mail (Canada Post)

By Email

At community presentation (date, time and location to be determined)

Not interested in receiving further information

**If you indicated an interest in receiving a copy of the research results, please provide Communities 4 Families with your email and/or mailing address below so that you can be notified when the report is finalized and/or the date, time and location of the community presentation is determined.**

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your personal information is confidential and WILL NOT BE SHARED with anyone outside of the Research Team.**

Thank you for participating.