

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



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What is an ideal community?

FOUR PERSPECTIVES

What does an ideal community look like? Does it have enough adequate housing? Does it have a lot of support services? Do people feel respected, heard and understood? It turns out an “ideal” community needs all those things and quite a few more. A plenary session at the recent AMM annual convention offered the opinions of a number of people representing a variety of demographic groups to help us answer this question. The perspectives given were those of:

- New Manitobans
- Older Manitobans
- Young Manitobans
- Manitobans with Disabilities

The moderator of the session was AMM Past-President **Ron Bell**, Mayor of the Town of Birtle.

YOUNG MANITOBAN PERSPECTIVE

Wayne Kelly is a student and practitioner of community development and a champion for youth leadership at local, provincial, and national levels.

Kelly noted that the first step in defining what youth want is defining who youth *are*. Youth today are made up of 15-30 or 35 year olds, not the 15-20 year olds of days gone by. These youth represent 20-25% of Manitoba’s population, or 230,000 people across the province.

Youth are the future of communities and it is important to remember they are future community members, so the community of the future has to be better for the people that are young today. Youth are our future taxpayers, our future business owners, our future mayors, reeves and councilors – and you don’t want them leaving your community tomorrow.

As a youth growing up in rural Manitoba, Kelly drew from his own experience in describing why youth leave communities. Understanding what youth think about the community BEFORE they leave is very important and very instrumental in getting them back. “If youth feel the community was a positive place, one in which they were welcomed, they will want to return. If it was a place where they felt excluded, not heard, not respected, or

treated as a “problem” they will not want to return,” he explained.

Kelly stressed that generally youth want the same thing everyone else wants – economic opportunities, employment opportunities, vacation opportunities, recreation opportunities. But the million dollar question is what *type* of opportunities? And the easiest way to find this out is to ask them. He suggested using surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, invitations to council meetings, or simply asking your sons and daughters and their friends what they would like in their community and to identify what things will make their community a place they would like to live in long term.

THE 10 ELEMENTS

There are 10 interrelated elements that make up livable and inclusive communities.

- Health & well-being
- Support services
- Leisure/recreation
- Spiritual/cultural
- Education/training
- Employment/jobs
- Outdoor environment
- Housing
- Transportation
- Volunteerism

*Canadian Centre
for Disability Studies*

Kelly also pointed out that when trying to engage youth, having one youth council member or representative is a great start – but it is not enough. Remember that youth represent one quarter of the population, and that is a good target to shoot for. Kelly asked the audience, “wouldn’t it be great in a few years to see 25% of the people in the AMM delegate body represented by people under 30?”

Finally, Kelly mentioned youth complain a great deal about “tokenism” – being allowed to say their piece and then sitting down and nothing further happens. Stressing development, planning, and commun-

ity-building are skills that take time to build, Kelly explained youth sometimes put forth ideas that may not be realistic. However, it is up to community leaders and those trying to engage youth to take the time to explain the planning process, how decisions are made, how projects are chosen. Not all ideas will be appropriate for the community, but helping youth figure out which ones ARE will go a long way to engaging youth now and into the future. As Kelly stressed, working together and including their ideas and opinions – “not on behalf of them, not for them...but with them” – is the key.

MANITOBANS WITH DISABILITIES PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Olga Krassioukova-Enns and **Laura Rempel** are with the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. Their focus is on livable and inclusive communities, visitable housing and aging with disabilities.

Dr. Krassioukova-Enns began by pointing out that every age group in every generation has the same desire – to have a high quality of life; access to environmental, cultural, and human resources; a broad range of opportunities; be involved in planning; and to feel safe. They want to live in a place that fosters good schools, housing, public transit, and jobs.

These desires are not only for people with disabilities, not only for people who are aging, and not only for young people. But at some point in our lives it becomes more important to us as we lose the capacity to be included.

Dr. Krassioukova-Enns stressed we will all experience at least temporary or partial disability at some point in our life. In fact, by 2010, Baby Boomers will spark 1.4 million increase in the number of working age Canadians with some form of disability. Currently, 4.4 million (14%) of people have disabilities. The incidence of disability increases with age, and 1.75 million (43%) of persons with disabilities in Canada are 65 yrs or older. Because the percentage of the 65+ age group is growing (estimated to be 23% by 2041), the percentage of persons with disabilities is growing, too.

Persons with disabilities face a number of issues, including social isolation, income and housing issues, transportation issues,



inadequate design of products and services, and attitudinal issues, among others.

Dr. Krassioukova-Enns and Ms. Rempel stressed the importance of livable communities and how visitable housing fits into this concept, explaining the concept of “livability” as inclusion, diversity and social and environmental sustainability for all generations. Some of the things that make a community livable are access to appropriate housing, housing, transportation and support services; connection to family and friends; public spaces; and recreation and cultural services.

Dr. Krassioukova-Enns pointed out that, when you visit a neighbour’s house, you need to be able to do several things to consider the home “visitable.” You need to get in the door, first of all. You need to be able to visit your friends or family and share a meal. And finally – “you have to pee!” Zero step entrances, wider doors at entrances and bathrooms, and a bathroom on the main floor are all things that make a home “visitable” by all persons.

Promoting visitable housing also keeps people in their homes longer. This has many benefits including an increase

in social inclusion, economic stability through aging in place (not needing to move to institutions), better health, and added value to homes. In other words, it benefits everyone: friends and family, seniors, and youth.

For more information on visitable housing, see the article *Visitable Housing towards Livable and Inclusive Communities* in this issue.

NEW MANITOBAN PERSPECTIVE

Mamadou Ka is the Vice-Chair of the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council and Vice-President of the AFMM, the organization representing new Manitobans from a francophone background.

Mr. Ka described immigration as “something in Canada which nobody can deny.” Over the past three years, Manitoba has welcomed almost 10,000 immigrants and it is projected that we will see 20,000 immigrants per year by 2015 or 2020. “So we can’t close our eyes right now,” Ka explained.

Using Winkler, Morden, and Steinbach as examples of communities with high numbers of immigrants settling

and trying to find jobs, Ka explained there are five important factors that need to be understood to assist new immigrants in a community. One of the first factors, not surprisingly, is finding employment. The second factor is offering an EAL (English as an Additional Language) program, and the third is affordable housing for new immigrants.

While jobs, housing, and language barriers may be three initial difficulties that municipalities can assist new immigrants with, the situation is far from simple, according to Ka.

Pointing out that immigrants generally live below the poverty line, he also explained that when refugees come to Canada, they are required to pay back the funds for their plane tickets. So many people find themselves working at a minimum wage job, taking care of their families, and trying to pay back the government for their plane ticket, which all add up to a very difficult financial situation. “What this means is that immigrants that come to Canada are generally going to be poor for the first 5-10 years,” said Ka.

This factor creates another problem in immigrant families. Ka noted that the fourth factor for new Manitobans is employment, training and programs for 12-16 year olds. This demographic is the age group most vulnerable to gang recruitments. Young people coming from African countries like Somalia and Sudan have parents who are working night and day to support their families and pay their bills, and their children are being recruited into gangs. Ka described this as one of downtown Winnipeg’s biggest problems.

“One of the things any municipality should think about is programs for 12-16 year olds, and developing social sup-

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port for these children,” said Ka, noting that jobs are not enough. There are many immigrants that come to Canada from war afflicted areas, and often these refugees are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

“You can’t just accept people to Canada and give them housing and food. Those people, most of the time, have seen unimaginable things. One of the things nobody should expect is to see those kids integrate easily. We need to help them. They need those supports.”

OLDER MANITOBAN PERSPECTIVE

Connie Newman is Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of Multi-Purpose Senior Centres. She also proudly told the audience, “I’m involved with skateboarding, and I’m 61 years old and loving it!”

Newman began by stating, “What do we want as we age? We want independence. Independence, independence, and independence!”

Quoting an advocate for seniors, Newman explained some of the things each of us can expect as we age. “Aging is a journey that awaits each of us. We will age and our senses may fail us – a hearing loss, a puzzling change in our taste buds, a need for reading glasses, a sensitivity to textures and to temperatures. We will age and our senses will still delight in the sounds, colours and textures in the world around us.”

According to Newman, by 2015 there will be more seniors 65 years and older than there will be 9-14 year olds. “For the first time in history, we as seniors are going to dominate the population.” She then asked:



Plenary session participants included (L-R) Connie Newman, Wayne Kelly, Mamadou Ka, Moderator Ron Bell, Dr. Olga Krassioukova-Enns, and Laura Rempel.

“What will that do to your community, city, town, village or RM? Are you ready for the changing demographic in your area?”

Because transportation is very important for seniors, Newman stressed the importance of Handivans and told the audience: “This is something municipalities have to think about.” As well, wheelchairs, walkers and scooters are common forms of transportation for not only seniors but others and are being used on busy streets, causing safety issues. “I’ve been in contact with at least five communities in Manitoba where this has become an issue,” she noted.

Access to public buildings is also important. Doors must be wide enough for walkers and wheelchairs. Staying physically active is also important. In cold weather, seniors need access to indoor programs. They need to know how to get there. They need access to medical services, and may need transportation to doctor appoint-

ments. As Newman put it, “As seniors, we want to continue to do it all, for ourselves, for as long as we can”.

Aging in place is important, as most people feel the same way – “I want to stay in my own home as long as possible.” They need to be able to hire local businesses for repairs and yard work at a reasonable cost. On the other hand, if their families are not nearby, some seniors experience isolation. They need access to assisted living units. Older Adults/seniors want safe, affordable housing with additional supports.

These are just some of the issues seniors have, and that we will ALL have as we age. Newman suggested a good starting point for councils is to look at the priorities of local age-friendly groups and commit to work together. After all, most seniors want the same thing: “They want to stay in their own community”. ■

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Manitobans with disabilities

VISITABLE HOUSING TOWARDS LIVABLE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

The aging of the Canadian population is a popular topic with policy experts, city planners, academics and the media. The Federal report: Canada's Aging Population (2002) estimates by 2026 nearly 20% of Canada's population will be 65+. This aging population has important implications in terms of health care, community planning, community attractions and spending patterns.

There is also recognition of a significant contribution of the older generation to our families, and to social and economic spheres in our communities and our societal responsibility to ensure meaningful participation in the community. Participation includes affordable accessible housing, accessible (and universal) community design, caregiver relationships, disability supports, leisure and volunteering opportunities, access to assistive devices and to public transportation among others. Overall, we all want to be included in planning and participate in all aspects of social and economic life of our communities. In many cases we have done well with making changes to our public spaces, however, some areas are sadly lacking attention in Canada.

One of the key areas is housing. Most people desire to remain in their own homes and communities as they age, however current housing stock and community design often prohibit this. We all want to continue to be included and include other people in our lives, but quite often we cannot even 'visit' each other in our own homes. In many private homes in Canada, we have front steps, narrow doors and bathrooms that are difficult to use – all this makes full participation difficult not only for those with disabilities but for people of all ages and abilities.

'Visitable' homes (no step entry, wider entry door and access to the bathroom on main floor) contribute to the health and well-being of not only individuals who reside in those homes. Visitable homes can open their doors to neighbours, family members and the whole community. Such homes allow people with all levels of abilities, to stay connected, interact, and expand their social networks. Visitable



Visitable house in the summer

homes also allow people with disabilities and seniors stay in their homes longer as they don't need to move out of the community to institutions, specialized housing or larger centres. This contributes significantly to economic and social stability, promotes safety and injury prevention, decreases costs on the health and home care systems and increases overall quality of life.

Visitability is a policy and technical strategy to change the way we think about social inclusion, interactions in our own homes, and participation in our communities. To make visitability a norm, inclusive, sustainable community leadership and approaches to community planning and the design and construction of single and multi-family homes are required. There is no standard template for development of socially and environmentally sustainable communities, but there are important elements and principles, such as:

- Environmentally sensitive development;
- Well-designed and well-constructed buildings that take into account the lifecycle of structure and occupants;
- Interconnected residential and community services; and
- A built environment that addresses equality.


It is important to engage and respond to the diversity of each community's needs and encourage personal and community action to increase inclusion and well-being of your community. These principles are not specific to retirement-age communities, but are examples of good design practices that can be applied to downtown, suburban and rural areas - benefiting everyone. Visitability encourages all sectors



Visitable house in the winter

(local government, builders, developers and individual citizens) to focus on low-cost, low-tech, easily-adopted measures to improve the housing industry, accessibility and strengthen communities.

Implementing livable, sustainable and visitable housing principles at the design and planning phase of new housing and community developments provides better integration into the natural and built environments, and results in time, cost and material savings as fewer modifications are required later on. Existing housing stock and neighbourhoods that require modifications to make them more inclusive also need to be addressed.

CCDS has developed a model for livable and inclusive communities that identifies inclusive community assessment and planning processes, as well as practices and policy principles that were recently piloted in six communities across Canada (including Rossburn and Selkirk in Manitoba). The model assists urban and rural centres to evaluate, plan and take action towards ensuring our communities can offer an improved quality of life to its residents now and in the future. There is evidence to show that visitable housing is one promising practice that will bring a community together and improve quality of life in all its members. 

For more information and to learn how your community can participate in building more livable and inclusive communities (and specifically on visitable housing), visit our website at www.disabilitystudies.ca or contact CCDS at Tel: 204 287-8411, TTY: 204 475-6223, email: ccds@disabilitystudies.ca.

New Manitobans

MULTICULTURALISM IN MANITOBA

Manitoba has a unique and vibrant blend of many heritages. As one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Canada, Manitoba continues to be a destination for new immigrants, who enrich our multicultural fabric. Today, more than 100 languages are spoken across the province, as Manitobans proudly maintain the traditions of their ancestors. This diverse resource assists Manitoba's entry into new global markets and helps to promote the province as a preferred immigration destination around the world.

MANITOBA PROVINCIAL NOMINEE PROGRAM (PNP)

- People from all over the world immigrate to Manitoba, Canada by applying directly to the government of Manitoba through the Provincial Nominee Program.
- The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program is for skilled workers who want to move and settle here. The program (known as the Manitoba PNP) is the way most people immigrate to Manitoba. Each year the province welcomes more than 10,000 people from all over the world.
- The first step in finding out more about the Provincial Nominee Program is to visit the Province of Manitoba's comprehensive immigration website at www2.immigratemanitoba.com. The website provides information for potential immigrants, new immigrants, Manitoba employers, regional communities, and others.
- Divided into four main categories – Choose Manitoba, How to Immigrate, Prepare to Move, and Arrive and Settle – the website offers step-by-step instructions for immigration related services.

Immigration and multiculturalism are recognized as vital to our continuing growth and development. Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism actively supports these through programs, services, policies and legislation. The most essential piece of legislation is the *The Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council Act*. The Act, passed in 2001, created a 21-member body with 16 members nominated by ethnocultural organizations and community groups, and five members appointed by the minister. This body, the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council (MEAAC), provides information, advice and recommendations to the minister on behalf of the multicultural community on ethnocultural matters.

According to **Denise M. Viardo Koh**, MEAAC chairperson, "*Our mission is to promote cultural retention, social harmony and equality.*"

MEAAC's four standing committees examine issues raised by the government or the ethnocultural communities to recommend action. Each committee looks at issues, policies, programs, and priorities relevant to its area of interest: outreach and communications; youth; settlement and integration, and inclusive and sustainable communities.

Our success as a council requires the support and cooperation of all ethnocultural communities. We sincerely invite you to meet and dialogue with us. Together, we can overcome many of the challenges of cultural diversity and work toward attaining societal harmony where every citizen in our province will experience the benefits of equal opportunity, freedoms and mutual understanding. We can contribute to making our community more inclusive and welcoming to new immigrants.

This is our vision, and we hope you can help us attain this -- a thriving, multicultural, ethnically diverse, well-integrated, self-sustaining cultural community that connects to all its peoples, preserves our various heritages and cultures and makes Manitoba stronger as a whole."

For more information about the MEAAC, visit www2.immigratemanitoba.com/browse/multi/meaac/.

STATS AND FACTS

- According to the 2006 Census of Canada there were 151,230 foreign-born people, which represents 13.3% of Manitoba's population and 3.6% of the foreign-born in Canada.
- From 1998 to 2007, 63,531 immigrants came to Manitoba.
- In 2006 there were 71,225 foreign-born people age 25 to 54. Of those, 60.4% had post-secondary certificate, diploma or degrees.
- In 2006, of the 611,280 people in the labour force, foreign-born people accounted for 14.7% (89,750).
- Manitoba immigrants had a higher full-time employment rate (73.4%) than the national rate (69.8%).
- In 2007, Manitoba welcomed 334 French-speaking immigrants, a 27% increase over 2006. The percentage of immigrants with English language ability has been 53% in recent years.
- According to the 2006 census the top immigrant-receiving communities were Winnipeg (79.1%), Brandon (1.8%), Winkler (1.3%) and Steinbach (1.1%).
- Between 2001 and 2006, the communities that experienced the largest absolute growth of their foreign-born population were Winnipeg (11,015), Brandon (665) and Steinbach (580).
- In 2007, 10,955 immigrants landed in Manitoba. The total number represents a 9% increase from 2006 (10,051) and a 35.3% increase from 2005.
- Of the 10,955 immigrants, 70% were accepted under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program for Skilled Workers, 12.3% were family class, 11% were refugees, and 6% were federal economic immigrants.
- By country of last permanent residence, 30% came from Philippines, 13% from Germany, 9% from India and 6% from China.
- In 2006, 76.7% of the Manitoba's foreign-born population age 18 and over were Canadian citizens. **L**

Data sources:

Statistics Canada: Census 2006, Labour Force Survey
 Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Canada Landed Immigrant Data System
 Prepared by Manitoba Labour and Immigration

Older Manitobans AGE-FRIENDLY MANITOBA UPDATE

Design for the young, and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young. – BERNARD ISAACS

Manitoba is indeed on its way to becoming the most age-friendly province in Canada. On November 16, 2009, the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat hosted the fourth round of the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative (AFMI), with the joining of 16 new communities. This round brought the total number of communities to 66.

All the participating communities from across Manitoba, from as far north as Gillam to the most southern tip of the province (Gretna and Franklin), the municipal government, private citizens, and the business community are engaging in age-friendly dialogue, projects and activities. All of these activities are in an effort to shape communities to further enable

older adults to lead independent lives, and be able to fully engage and be active, contributing members of their community.

The Age-Friendly Manitoba will address the current and the future needs of a growing seniors' population. The end results will benefit everyone. For example, implementing Age-Friendly Manitoba will create an environment of social cohesion, respect and enhanced opportunities for healthy, active living for all citizens—young and mature.

Below are just a few of the great activities that are taking place across Manitoba.

Gimli has developed an Annual Business Award for businesses with the most age-friendly features. For more information please contact the Gimli Age-Friendly Advisory committee.

Gladstone was featured at the 2009 Canadian Association of Gerontology for their efforts to better meet the housing

needs of their older population. For more information please contact the mayor of Gladstone, **Eileen Clarke**.

The Pas Age-Friendly Advisory Committee is embarking on an inter-generational project piloted at The Pas elementary Schools. The project involves age appropriate activity pages and games that enhance and promote positive images of older adults.

Pinawa is currently working on a grocery/pharmacy delivery system; making public buildings more accessible, and extending sidewalks.

Roblin & Cartwright have helped provide the Cartwright-Mather Merry Makers Drop In Centre with a wheel chair accessible washroom. 

Next: See which Manitoba municipalities are becoming more age-friendly



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AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The following Manitoba communities are currently in the process of becoming more age-friendly.

- Alexander, RM
- Brokenhead, RM
- De Salaberry, RM
- Erickson, Town
- Glenboro, Village
- Hamiota, RM
- Minitonas, Town
- Shoal Lake, Town
- Snow Lake, Town
- St. Laurent, RM
- Steinbach, City
- Swan River, RM
- Thompson, City
- Treherne, Town
- Coldwell, RM
- Louise, RM
- Roblin, RM
- Cartwright, Village
- Morris, Town
- Pinawa, LGD
- Macdonald, RM
- Gladstone, Town
- Arborg, Town
- Gilbert Plains, Town
- The Pas, Town
- Elkhorn, Village
- Gimli, RM
- Portage la Prairie, City
- Dauphin, City
- Brandon, City
- Armstrong, RM
- Dufferin, RM
- Franklin, RM
- Ritchot, RM
- Springfield, RM
- Shoal Lake, RM
- Carman, Town
- Gillam, Town
- Gretna, Town
- Morden, Town

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- Dunnottar, Village
- Edward, RM
- Eriksdale, RM
- Flin Flon, City
- Hamiota, Town
- Morris, RM
- North Cypress, RM
- Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes
- Pilot Mound, Town
- Riverton, Village
- Roblin, Town
- Selkirk, City
- Siglunes, RM
- St. Francois Xavier, RM
- Victoria, RM
- Wawanesa, Village
- West St. Paul, RM
- Westbourne, RM (Plumas)
- Winkler, City

For more information regarding the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative, contact:

Seniors & Healthy Aging Secretariat
 822-155 Carlton Street,
 Winnipeg, MB R3C 3H8
 Phone: 204-945-6565
 Email: seniors@gov.mb.ca
 Website: www.gov.mb.ca/shas

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Older Manitobans TRANSPORTATION IN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The complexity of providing adequate transportation in rural areas of Manitoba is becoming increasingly recognized as a priority issue to ensure a sustained quality of life for rural seniors. The Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) Rural Subcommittee was formed in December 2008 to address rural transportation options for older adults in Manitoba. The mandate of TONS is to inform and educate Manitobans on transportation options that enhance quality of life and promote age friendly communities.

Recent activities of the Rural Subcommittee include research on the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP) and the development of the Community Transportation Toolkit. The Tool Kit and MDTP guidelines are available on the TONS website: www.tonsmb.org.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION TOOLKIT

The aim of this research was to examine the opportunities and barriers of operating and accessing a successful handi-van program in rural areas of the province.



Many communities in Manitoba have established and operate a handi-van service to improve accessibility for mobility disadvantaged persons living in rural Manitoba, allowing them to participate fully in community life. Many communities throughout rural Manitoba receive funding provided by the Department of Local Government (formerly Intergovernmental Affairs) through the MDTP to support the provision of handi-van services. In 2009, the Province will provide annual funding support to 66 municipalities in Manitoba.

Handi-van services are an important resource for older adults in rural Manitoba where fewer and fewer transportation options are available. Services provide an effective and efficient travel option that connects older adults to medical needs as well as to life enhancing activities

that may otherwise be neglected. In communities with few transportation resources, handi-van programs also lend support to families and care givers that currently help meet the essential needs of Manitoba's aging populations.

This Toolkit is meant to inform various groups on how the MDTP guidelines may be implemented in a way that meets the unique and diverse needs of each community, while maintaining the integrity and intention of the MDTP program.

These groups include stakeholders such as:

- handi-van service providers
- handi-van users
- Senior service providers
- Municipal governments

The Tool Kit consists of three modules to inform communities as to how best make the guidelines work to the advantage of their locality. These modules include:

MODULE 1

Interpreting the MDTP Guidelines: A User-friendly Reader for Communities

This is a guide to the foundations of MDTP funding and will be useful for community members who:

- Are considering establishing a handi-van service and need to know the basics or;
- Would like to become more informed about, or become involved with an existing handi-van service

MODULE 2

Planning For and Improving Handi-van Service: A Discussion Guide and Checklist

This section will be useful for community members who:

- Would like to make informed decisions as they consider establishing a handi-van service;
- Are seeking solutions to current challenges in order to enhance an existing handi-van service;
- Are addressing community changes by preparing for future handi-van service needs.

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MODULE 3

A Guide to Community and Regional Engagement: For Stakeholders of Handi-van Services

This section will help engage others in conversations about transportation for mobility disadvantaged community members and will be useful for those who:

- Are considering establishing a handi-van service and want to ensure it is responsive to community and regional needs;
- Would like to see an existing handi-van service work with other communities to improve the affordability and accessibility of the service or;
- Are seeking financially viable alternatives to handi-van where the community is too small or isolated to support its own service.

WHAT DOES THE HANDI-VAN PROGRAM MEAN TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

Communities are shrinking and essential services like grocery stores and hospitals are continually being relocated to larger centres. Family members and younger people are moving to larger towns and cities, and volunteer involvement is decreasing. This is a growing issue, but also an opportunity to predict and plan for changes in your community.

A community handi-van service must make decisions with vision, thoughtfulness and purpose for both the present and the future. Whether a community is looking to enhance, to establish or to explore a handi-van service, life in rural Manitoba is changing, and all services to citizens, including handi-van service must reflect these changes.

Municipal governments are an important part of handi-van service provision. These bodies are responsible for funding, policy support and sometimes for running the program. Other municipalities within the service area of a handi-van service also have a role to play. Because the provision of accessible transportation can be more of a barrier for small or more isolated communities, the ability of these small municipalities to work with other communities is important. The support that these “extra” municipalities may deliver to another community’s handi-van service can allow for service to continue where it might not otherwise be feasible.

At rural round table discussions, it was discovered that many municipal councils

were not very involved in their handi-van programs. Most participants (both government and service providers) saw the value in communicating and connecting with municipal councils.

Connecting with sponsoring municipalities and opening lines of communication may help share the importance of transportation for older adults and begin to address any challenges the handi-van service or wider community may face. **L**

If you are interested in **more information** on TONS or getting involved in the Rural Subcommittee please contact Lisa Tinley, TONS Coordinator, at 668-6299 or ltinley@shaw.ca

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Young Manitobans

CHILD CARE FUNDING IN MANITOBA

Investment in child care stimulates local economies, provides social infrastructure to parents, supports workers, and their employers, and is an investment in human development and education, which leads to a productive environment. Yet finding quality and affordable child care is often an enormous challenge for working parents.

Statistics Canada information from 2006 indicates that two-thirds of Manitoba mothers and 92% of fathers with children under 6 years of age are in the labour force. Finding quality and affordable child care is not just a problem limited to urban centres. Many communities throughout Manitoba are facing severe shortages of child care spaces that are directly related to years of insufficient capital and operating funding for child care facilities.

In April 2008, the Province announced Family Choices, the second Five-Year-Plan for Child Care. Family Choices has committed to fund 6,500 spaces and 35 new child care sites by 2013. It also recognizes the development of a centralized, early learning and child care availability waiting list is necessary to provide parents with current, reliable information about the availability of child care in their communities. Further, there are also plans to increase the number of child care workers by 1,900.

While the government has made an effort to increase the number of ECEs through wage increases, recruitment campaigns, scholarships, and increased training opportunities, more can be done. According to PeopleFirst HR Services, the wages of ECEs are 19-23% below market. In 2009, Manitoba

ECEs received a 3% funding increase to support their salaries. Currently at the wage employers are willing or able to pay, not enough ECEs are interested in filling the many vacancies that exist across the province. Unfortunately, compensation remains a barrier in pursuing child care as a long-term career.

Manitoba municipalities recognize the importance of having quality child care services and are particularly concerned with the sufficient availability of child care since these services are part of a thriving economy. In fact, every \$1 spent on childcare in Manitoba generates \$1.58 worth of economic activity (*Municipal Leader, Spring*

2008). Since 2007, the AMM has been working with the Province of Manitoba to establish more rural childcare services to strengthen the rural economy.

More recently, at the AMM 11th Annual Convention this past November, Convention Resolution #18/09 became official AMM policy. This policy will see AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to meet with stakeholders to determine the needs of adequate daycare, and then initiate the programs necessary to ensure those needs are met.

The AMM appreciates the Province of Manitoba's recognition of the need to improve child care through the announcement of the five-year Family Choices agenda. In the meantime, the AMM will continue to lobby the Provincial Government for immediate and long-term action to address the needs of families and child care facilities across the province. ■



Licensed childcare facilities are also struggling to recruit and retain Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). According to Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) President **Michele Henderson**, the gap between the supply of and demand for ECEs continues to be the most significant problem for licensed child care centres suffering a decade-old workforce shortage. In a recent letter to Manitoba MLAs, she describes directors of licensed child care centres as “terrified” with each resignation and each time they hear government announce new spaces, because the shortage of ECEs grows with each new facility licensed or each existing program expanded.

The Manitoba government made a commitment to improve and strengthen child care with the launch of the first Five-Year Plan for Child Care in 2002. This program funded over 5,000 additional child care spaces, implemented new child care subsidy levels, and increased wages for Early Childhood Educators in its first five years.

Young Manitobans MAKING WAY FOR YOUTH AT YOUR COUNCIL TABLE



“There is a simple way to find out what the youth in your community want. Ask them.”

— WAYNE KELLY, AMM ANNUAL CONVENTION, NOVEMBER 23, 2009

Most communities want one thing above all else, and that is growth. Growth represents vitality, wealth, health, diversity, and of course, income in the form of tax dollars. Especially at the municipal level, where we rely so heavily on property taxes, a growing community is considered a thriving community. Growth represents many challenges too, mainly in the form of strain on infrastructure and services, but overall, growth is seen as a positive, essential thing for community quality of life.

Given that, the out-migration of youth is a huge issue in many rural communities. A loss of our younger citizens represents a loss of some of that vitality, that freshness, and indeed, loss of growth. Our seniors are so important to our communities, but our youth are the future. They are future business owners, future home owners, and yes, future taxpayers. By finding out what youth want, municipalities can both encourage their young people to remain in the community or to return after they have spent time away doing other things.

One of the most obvious ways local councils can tap into the ideas and energy of youth – and find out what your community needs to do to encourage them to stay – is to appoint a youth member of council.

One community that has had an active sitting youth member for several years is the Town of Morden – they are on their seventh youth member, in fact! According to CAO **Ernie Epp**, the benefits are both for the individual as well as the organization.

YOUTH MAKING HISTORY

On November 4, 1992, history was made in Manitoba municipal politics as the first student was sworn in as a honorary councillor on the Town of Arborg council. In a ceremony at the Arborg Collegiate, **Christine Hewlco** was sworn in before the Minister of Rural Development at the time, **Len Derkach**, provincial government staff, parents, teachers, the RCMP, media, and the superintendent and trustees of the Evergreen School Division, along with the students.

Over the ensuing months, Hewlco attended all council meetings and presented monthly reports of students’ concerns. She even presented a resolution at the annual meeting of municipalities in April, 1993 in Thompson, addressing the issue of the high and sometimes prohibitive costs of students relocating to Winnipeg or other large centres to pursue post-secondary education. The resolution called for subsidies or grants to enable rural youth to aspire to higher education that many careers require.

Former Mayor **Bert Kindzierski** wanted to ensure the interests of local youth were articulated and represented in the town, and was instrumental in initiating this program. In a presentation at a 2003 Youth and Community Leadership Conference, Kindzierski explained how “having spent 24 years on town council, the last 15 years as mayor, I had given a great deal of thought on how we could get students from our high school involved and make them part of the decision-making process in our community.”

In the same presentation, Kindzierski had some suggestions for the future: “I believe the Province should be more involved if we want to have our youth be more involved. The Province should provide greater leadership in this area. AMM should be more involved and work with the Province to encourage participation. Student councillors could attend AMM regional meetings, seminars; even hold their own workshop...”

Kindzierski’s suggestions remain as timely today as they were in 2003, and his ideas as notable as they were back in 1992. For youth to become involved, council must first open the door.

- 1 | The individual gains experience in local politics, which looks good on a resume.
- 2 | There is a voice representing youth at the table. At times there are topics that are of real interest to youth, so the member can speak with peers and/or monitor what peers think of those topics.
- 3 | The exposure sparks interest in younger people regarding local issues, which helps ensure the entire population is involved.
- 4 | Long-term, it is hoped this program will lead to future local government leaders in politics. As a bonus, youth members are also expressing interest in careers in local government administration.

“It is a fantastic learning and growing opportunity, as it allows a student to enter the world of adults and be treated as an equal.”

– SHELISA KLASSEN, YOUTH COUNCILLOR, TOWN OF MORDEN

The last point is worth pondering for a moment. Have you looked around your council table lately? With a municipal election coming up later this year, some communities may experience a dearth of citizens coming forward to take on the responsibility. And the same holds true for CAOs. With many eligible to retire in the coming years, fostering interest in local government – either at the political or administrative level – can only help to ensure interest remains in these types of careers.

The Town of Morden’s youth member of council, **Shelisa Klassen**, says while she chose to become a youth member to get involved in the community, a budding interest in government was also a contributing factor. “I have always been really interested in how government works. I attended Forum for Young Canadians in March this last year and loved learning about the inner workings of federal government so I thought that I would enjoy learning about local government just as much.”

Klassen adds, “Some of the things I like about it are the fact that I get to be a representative of youth in the community, voicing what I think their opinions would be to council regarding certain issues. It is also interesting to learn about all the things that Town Council must balance in order to try and please as many people as possible.”

The Town of Arborg is currently on their 15th youth member of council, and in fact was the first municipality in Manitoba to include a youth member (see sidebar). CAO **Lorraine Bardarson** says the presence of a youth member is positive. “For most youth, this would be their first exposure to politics and its inner workings. It is an opportunity for students to gain an understanding of local government as well as raise their issues and concerns at the Council table – issues and concerns which council may not otherwise be aware of.”

Some councils may prefer to have a youth advisory committee or group charged with reviewing and bringing forward plans and proposals, rather than just one young person. Other jurisdictions have such groups, such as the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Committee in Burlington, Ontario. In such cases, the mandate of the existing group could be expanded. Another approach is that of the Village of Breton, Alberta (population 550). There, the Council comprising the mayor and four councillors also has not only youth advisors, but two senior advisors as participants in meetings. Now that is an inclusive council!


Gimli’s Youth Community Partnership (YCP), formed in 2006 and including about 30 members, is another good example. With support from Gimli’s Mayor and Council, the YCP appointed one of its members to municipal council as a youth representative. But it didn’t end there as other members of the YCP were named to the municipal recreation and environment committees. YCP has also been involved with the council in discussions around recreation issues, such as the proposed building of a skateboard park and the establishment of a new youth drop-in centre. In other words, council is not simply paying lip service to having youth representation – these youth truly are making their voices heard.

HOW TO INVOLVE YOUTH

Under the *Municipal Act*, a council may appoint a youth member to sit with the council and to participate in its deliberations, for a term and on conditions that the council may decide.

The only qualification is that the youth member must be less than 18 years of age or enrolled as a full-time student in a school. The youth member is not counted for the purpose of determining a quorum and is not a voting member; rather they are there to gain experience and to provide a different perspective to council.

Naturally, there must be positive spin-offs for the students involved, and Klassen sums those up by saying, “I definitely would recommend it to other students, especially those who are interested in government or helping their community, because it is a great way to feel like you are making a difference. It is also a fantastic learning and growing opportunity, as it allows a student to enter the world of adults and be treated as an equal. I have really enjoyed my experience so far as the youth member for Morden Town Council.”

Isn’t it time you invited a youth – or group of youth – to sit at YOUR council table? 

Sources:

Child- and Youth-Friendly Land-use and

Transport Planning Guidelines for Manitoba

Richard Gilbert and Catherine O’Brien January 15, 2009

www.gimliyouth.com/aboutus.htm

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Young Manitobans

GIMLI YOUTH PRACTICE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

For the past four years, high school and university aged students in the RM of Gimli have stepped up their involvement in community affairs through a program they named “Youth Community Partnership” (YCP). The aim of the program has not been to increase volunteer hours of youth, although that happens naturally in this initiative, but rather to engage youth as leaders and decision-makers on a variety of issues important to them and their community.

Local “adult” community leaders and activists met back in 2005 to consider how to mobilize the energy and passion of youth. It was decided that the most effective project would recruit youth “on their own terms.” With the strong support of Gimli High School, focus groups and questionnaires solicited student opinion on their town. What did they like or dislike? What were they involved in or not? What would they keep the same or change? From this process, a report was written and students were invited to form a group that would work with the results and contribute to the betterment of their community.

The issues identified by youth, and still true today, included recreation, transportation, environment, education, employment and the role of youth. The local recreation centre was in disrepair, there were students living outside Gimli who were unable to participate in local activities, there was concern about rural education measuring up to what was provided in urban centres (although students saw the school as a very positive place), there was frustration with the menial and minimum wage nature of jobs, and students were concerned that adults and seniors saw and treated them as loiterers, shoplifters and troublemakers.

The aim of Gimli YCP has been to support and train youth to tackle these issues as active citizens. With strong acceptance from the RM Council, YCP has sent a youth representative to Council the past four years, as well as naming members to the local environment and recreation committees. YCP members have participated in a “My Ideal Gimli” visioning session and then attended local strategic planning sessions. They have also had a bearpit session with local MLA **Peter Bjornson**, met with the weekly Interlake Spectator newspaper, and sought the opinion of the Mayor and local businesspeople on a number of issues. YCP has held two well-



Global Connections - YCP members and author of this article Zack Gross pose lakeside with three Tanzanian visitors who've come to solicit support for a youth environmental education project related to Lake Victoria.



A cheque presentation by Manitoba Government MLAs and Cabinet Ministers to Evergreen School Division, Gimli High School personnel and a YCP and Enviro Club representative for the preparation of a course on Lake Winnipeg Environmental Issues.

attended Community Consultations to report on its activities.

Taking positive, concrete action on the issues of importance to them, YCP members have applied for funding and implemented a number of small projects related to teen health and environmental issues. Funds from Green Manitoba and from the Environmental Youth Corps allowed them to take on two summer projects, one to educate the public about Lake Winnipeg pollution issues and another to retrofit showers, toilets and faucets in 40 Gimli homes



Peter, Cody, Zev and Luke discuss a community issue at a YCP high school workshop.

YCP members take seriously their role of making a difference in their community and this program has proven to be a training ground for tomorrow's leaders.

with water conservation kits. YCP also received a small grant from the Interlake Regional Health Authority to survey students on their eating habits and then distribute healthy snacks around the school at lunch time.

In the area of recreation, to fill a gap that many students felt led to teen alcohol and drug problems, YCP has held three band concerts, highlighting local young musicians while raising money for environmental causes. YCP has also built a relationship with the Gimli Recreation Centre and hopes to have youth events, or just opportunities to hang out in the lounge there, on a regular basis. YCP members have also made presentations to local schools and visiting groups on their organization and on the issues that concern them.

On global issues, Youth Community Partnership has worked with the RM, teachers, business owners and local congregations to form a Gimli Fair Trade Committee and achieve "Fair Trade Town" status on July 1, 2009, a status that only seven communities in Canada currently hold. Fair Trade products ensure that producers are paid a living wage, that the environment is not harmed by production, and that a premium goes back into Third World communities to provide education, health care and other benefits. Fair trade products include many foods (coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, etc.), as well as clothing, sports balls and handicrafts. The RM's resolution includes green and fair trade purchasing and a future twinning and development assistance relationship with a community overseas. YCP members have been fundraising and grant seeking toward this.

These efforts have earned YCP recognition in recent years, including the Premier's Voluntary Service Award and the Excellence in Sustainable Development Award. More important, however, has been the experience and satisfaction of being involved in one's community as an active citizen. YCP members take seriously their role of making a difference in their community and this program has proven to be a training ground for tomorrow's leaders.

Zack Gross is an "adult" mentor of Youth Community Partnership.

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