TORONTO NEIGHBOURHOODS RESEARCH NETWORK

November 26, 2007

Sixth Meeting, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

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NEXT MEETINGS

January 14, 2008, Family Service Association of Toronto Wellesley Room, 355 Church Street

Theme: Affordable housing, and contributions to the City's proposed 10-year strategy

Remaining 2008 dates:

March 10, June 9, September 22, November 24

MEMBER UPDATES

Community University Research Alliance

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/cura

- The CURA project has produced research on the "three cities" within the City of Toronto. Maps depicting this finding are available on the Greater Toronto Urban Observatory website (www.gtuo.ca). The research will also be available in the St. Christopher House newsletter, *House to House*, and in the form of a research bulletin through the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto.

United Way of Canada

www.unitedwaytoronto.com

- The United Way today released a report on the extent of poverty in Toronto, and how Toronto's poverty rate for families with children is higher than that of other Canadian cities. See: *Losing Ground: The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City*.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

www.mah.gov.on.ca

- The Ministry has contributed to a submission to OECD as part of its Territorial Reviews program. An OECD study team will visit the city in December, with a second visit in late spring. The submission was prepared with contributions from the city (Harvey Low and Alan Meisner were involved) and the federal government; the provincial contribution was coordinated by the Ministry for Economic Development and Trade. It includes statistical data and links to key documents, including *Poverty by Postal Code*. The

submission is not available to the public. Opportunities for contributions by NGOs may be possible later in the process.

▪ Peter Viducis mentioned additional research into the paradox that although Toronto has a well educated labour force, participation rates and employment levels are not as high as would otherwise be expected.

Community Social Planning Council

www.socialplanningtoronto.org

▪ The CSPC is contributing to a community profile of the city, as part of a project with other social planning councils across Ontario. The profile will use census data. Eventually, a province-wide profile will be created

▪ As part of Action for Neighbourhood Change, a door-to-door survey of four of the priority neighbourhoods was carried out, which reached about 300 households in each area.

▪ A revitalization project is under way in Alexandra Park; about 400 residents have been surveyed for their input.

▪ A project on community engagement and needs assessment is under way in West Hill.

▪ CSPC is carrying out an assessment of after-school programs for children aged 6 to 12.

▪ CSPC released a study in October called *Lost in the Shuffle*, about children living in shelters and the effects on their schooling.

Centre for Urban Health Initiatives

www.cuhi.utoronto.ca

▪ CUHI has received a grant from the Canadian Institute of Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a longitudinal study of mental health in Toronto, involving 3,000 people.

▪ An intern has completed a needs assessment for youth in Parkdale.

▪ Three new research interest groups have been formed on (1) ethnicity and health, (2) determinants of youth sexual health and (3) social strategies for chronic disease prevention.

▪ Ten seed grants have been awarded, and CUHI will spotlight the projects involved over the next few months.

▪ The next policy forum will focus on health inequities.

Inner City Health Research Unit (ICHRU), St. Michael's Hospital

www.stmikes.ca/content/research/ichru/about_ichru.asp

- Jim Dunn succeeded in his application for a chair in applied public health; the focus will be on population-based interventions that may affect health.
- The unit is also carrying out research on Regent Park, with the object of following up on those who are displaced by the redevelopment project.
- IRONhI is conducting research on links between neighbourhoods and health outcomes. This research includes systematic observations on block faces of evidence of disorder, concept mapping by residents, and a Rapid Small Area Health Needs Assessment survey tool.

Wellesley Institute

http://wellesleyinstitute.com

- A symposium on poverty reduction was held earlier this year.
- The institute is hoping to contribute to the City's 10-year housing strategy, which currently exists only in skeleton form.
- Research on health in St. Jamestown involves community mapping and a survey of residents' perspectives.

Family Service Association of Toronto

www.fsatoronto.com

- The association has submitted a proposal for work on the O'Connor−Teasdale neighbourhood that will involve community mapping.
- Campaign 2000 was launched today in Ottawa, with the 2007 report card on child poverty (www.campaign2000.ca).

St. Christopher House

www.stchrishouse.org

- Metcalf Innovation Fellow John Stapleton will be launching a new report on December 5, called *Why is it so tough to get ahead? How our tangled social programs pathologize the transition to self-reliance*.
- Laura Cleghorn's research on gentrification will also be available shortly.

Toronto Public Health

www.toronto.ca/health

- Toronto Public health is preparing three discussion papers related to health status in Toronto: (1) Aboriginal Health Status in Toronto; (2) Immigrant and Refugee Health Status in Toronto; and (3) Racism as a Determinant of Health.

York University City Institute

www.yorku.ca/city

- Ute Lehrer is conducting research on the condo boom and gentrification in Toronto.

Roots of Youth Violence

www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca

- Research on the causes of youth violence in Ontario communities and potential interventions to ensure safer communities will be conducted with a view to reporting to the province in 2008.

Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

www.neighbourhoodcentres.ca

- TNC is conducting research into building the community development capacity of neighbourhood centres to help strengthen communities.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Armine Yalnizyan of the Community Social Planning Council & Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives talked about her research into the measurement of socioeconomic inequalities. She noted that poverty reduction is a hot topic these days, with strategies launched in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario; pronouncements by leaders of the federal NDP and Liberal parties; and requirements for all CIDA projects to meet poverty reduction requirements. Inequality, however, is not the same thing as poverty reduction.

Despite economic prosperity, the rising tide has not lifted all boats, and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. In earlier periods of prosperity, such as the 1950s and 1960s, money was allocated to public benefits – libraries, arenas, community centres, and so forth – but in the current period, money for these public goods is being withdrawn.

Although the *Globe and Mail* publishes research purporting to show that Canada is prospering, the report by the United Way released today and Campaign 2000 indicate that not all is well for all Canadians. The message depends on what is being measured. Overall per-capita income levels mask inequalities. Different kinds of households (families with children, seniors, singles) show different trends: the United Way report focuses particularly on families.

Paradoxically, people seldom think of themselves as poor, but rather as lacking stable housing, or as lacking access to education, transportation, recreation opportunities, and other things they need. Poor people are clustered into neighbourhoods that lack the amenities that most people want, because more affluent households can outbid them for housing in better-served neighbourhoods.

There are five main ways to measure inequality:

1. Gini coefficients: these are hard to understand and communicate to the public, and they don't provide any insight into why inequalities exist.

2. Average incomes of the top and the bottom deciles: the CSPC uses these measurements to indicate polarities.

3. Relationships of different percentile groups: top to bottom, top to middle, middle to bottom.

4. Relationship to the median: used by the CURA researchers, and related to the Canadian desire to be near the middle.

5. Long-term distributional trends of different income groups: this approach acknowledges that people move between groups, and that opportunities for mobility are themselves changing.

Along with these different measures, there are different ways of determining income levels (before tax, after tax, purchasing power, etc.). These differences make it difficult for researchers to present a unified message about disparities.

The UN's eight Millennium Development Goals include the eradication of extreme poverty; Canada has signed on, but has not only done nothing to move towards the goals but taken steps that increase inequalities. Most efforts to draw attention to poverty and inequalities (Campaign 2000, Make Poverty History, etc.) are undertaken by NGOs.

Discussion: Jim Dunn introduced the idea of "effective income" – this is not just the money that one earns, but includes access to resources such as education, health care, and services that in some countries must be paid for, but in Canada, are supposed to be provided by the government. Inequities in service provision amplify the effects of inequities in income. Moreover, where services are provided universally, affluent families can exercise more effective demand for these services, crowding out poorer families.

Maureen Fair questioned the value of segmenting the population by age, household composition, Aboriginal status, etc. to better target programs and services. One drawback is that sometimes groups such as singles are overlooked. A comprehensive strategy can ensure that everyone in need is included.

Armine Yalnizyan suggested that if access to affordable housing, postsecondary education, and child care were assured as basic citizens' rights, many of the inequalities might begin to disappear. These initiatives would likely have widespread support from the public.

Michael Shapcott spoke about the need for new solutions. The government is generally proposing "more of the same" – market-based solutions that have not worked in the past. The public is unsure who should do what. Leaders such as Stéphane Dion are promising both poverty reduction and corporate tax cuts, which makes it sound as if both are possible at the same time.

Larry Bourne noted that affordable housing is really only a problem in certain large urban regions; in smaller places, housing is more affordable. Low income and unemployment/underemployment are more widespread problems. What is needed is more analysis on why the gaps exist, and why some people remain in persistent poverty, while others are able eventually to improve their situation. It was traditionally assumed that over time only about 10 to 20 percent of the poor would remain mired in poverty, but this figure may have gone up.

Armine Yalnizyan argued that the gap exists because of the structure of the labour market, which is dominated by precarious forms of employment – short-term, part-time work, mostly filled by immigrants and young people. This situation is sanctioned by three main cultural assumptions:

1. The minimum wage should remain stable.

2. Unionized workers should not ask for pay raises that are larger than inflationary increases.

3. White-collar workers are entitled to pay increases that exceed the rate of inflation.

Larry Bourne questioned this view, suggesting that other factors are also at work, such as the fact that immigration is a national strategy that imposes local costs, and the burden falls on just a few jurisdictions. Household composition and the trend to decreasing household size also affects consumption patterns, and consumption units have as much effect as labour market units. The provision of government services and their inequitable geographical distribution also plays a role. What we don't know is how much each of these factors contributes to the overall situation. Raising the minimum wage may not help, but the redistribution of income is still needed. Providing better education and better access to educational opportunities might also help.

Alan Walks agreed that effective income is important, and a child tax credit would probably be less effective in reducing poverty than a good affordable housing strategy. What is also needed is better public awareness on the importance of taxes in supporting public goods; people have lost any sense that the government can actually improve their lives or provide goods that have more than monetary value.

Maureen Fair felt that raising taxes overall would be unpopular, but many people see the value of targeted taxes. She noted that people do not have a sense of how their taxes are really spent. For example, increased spending on security means less money available for other services. It is also important to avoid appearing to boost the "poverty industry" by increasing spending on those who provide and promote services to the poor.

Armine Yalnizyan pointed out that it may not be necessary to raise taxes; simply stopping further tax cuts would be a start.

Larry Bourne said that academics have not done a good job of helping people understand what value they receive from government services; that their property taxes, for example, represent a bargain, not an imposition. The focus should be on general well-being, rather than merely income.

David Hulchanski summarized the discussion, noting that although poverty is an income problem, it is not *just* a matter of income; access to resources is essential. More money means more access to neighbourhoods with better resources and more choice, so people are geographically sorted by income and wealth, leading to ghettoes of the rich and of the poor.

Armine Yalnizyan agreed that the definition of prosperity is too individualized, and that we should talk in terms of whole neighbourhoods that are either poor or affluent.

Brenda Ross suggested looking at neighbourhood indicators that measure social well-being as part of community profiles. David Hulchanski pointed out that the problem is that these indicators operate after the fact: trends emerge only after they are well entrenched.

Members of the group mentioned other indicator projects, such as Vital Signs and Atkinson Foundation work on quality of life. National research has also been spearheaded by local Statistics Canada researchers.

Alan Walks pointed out that even though different research groups use different indicators and different language, the trends that emerge are generally shown to be the same.

Rick Eagan felt that the real challenge is crafting a political strategy that people can readily grasp. The multidimensional nature of inequalities is too complex for most people to understand. Most government programs do not get at the root of the problems, but address only symptoms.

Next meeting: January 14, 2008

Location: Family Service Association

Wellesley Room, 355 Church Street

www.fsatoronto.com

Topic: Toronto's Ten-year Housing Strategy