

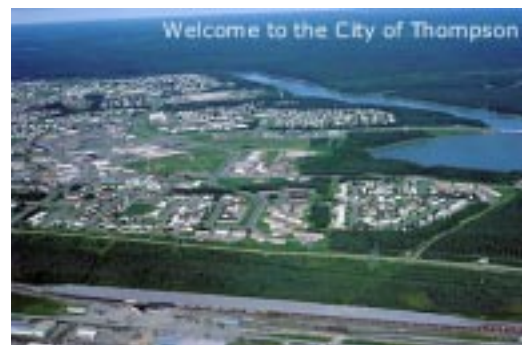


Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice:

Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

Context

Located 739 kilometres north of Winnipeg in the ruggedly beautiful Canadian Shield is the City of Thompson, Manitoba's 3rd largest city. Uniquely, Thompson does not share the usual gradual urban evolution of most cities; it was an intentionally created community after the Second World War when a massive nickel deposit was discovered there in 1956. Although the first home was built in 1958, by 1965 the population had grown to 8,500 and the town had a shopping centre, library, theatre, and recreation complex.



www.thompson.ca

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were prepared as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

Almost 50 years later, Inco Mining is still the main employer and continues to be a key reason for the city's existence, but Thompson is also growing beyond its resource base. Emerging as the "Hub of the North," this city of nearly 15,000 residents now acts as a service centre for an additional 45,000 people that live in northern Manitoba. For this reason, many government (health, education, social services, etc) and Aboriginal and Metis political organizations are located in Thompson. The labour force is employed primarily by Inco (42%), followed by the three levels of government (25%), and the School District of Mystery Lake (14%).

Despite Thompson's modern roots and regional importance, several factors

Thompson, Manitoba

History – Thompson was created in the early 1960s as a mining town.

Economy – Mining-related employment is declining, but Thompson is emerging as a central service delivery and administrative location for northern government services such as health, education, etc.

Social Need – Declining infrastructure, particularly the 40-year old housing stock. Many of the 45,000 in the Thompson service area come from reserves where unemployment is as high as 90%.

Claim to Fame – In 1961, western Canada's first enclosed shopping centre was completed in the downtown core, the Thompson Plaza.

combine to create significant barriers to social inclusion in the city. Inco is no longer employing the same number of workers as they did during their peak years and, as in many mining communities, concerns are always present that the mine will one day shut down with little or no warning. Much of the city's infrastructure is several decades old and the housing stock is in dire need of improvement. But investors are hesitant to build housing with an ever-present risk that the mine could close, which would cut available jobs in Thompson nearly in half.

Poverty in Thompson is real and stark. The gap between high- and low-income earners is higher than Canadian averages, and residents living in poverty tend to be very poor and very disempowered. Though it can be hard to even know who those residents are, as it is estimated that there are several thousand people 'couch-surfing' in the city at any one time. Many of the population of 45,000 in the region around Thompson are from Aboriginal communities where unemployment ranges from 60-90%. Looking for better opportunities and services, this population tends to be fairly transient between their home community and Thompson. But Thompson doesn't have a level of services comparable to a city like Winnipeg, and struggles to adequately

support those with various barriers to secure housing and jobs. The need for a new response to these problems was clear.

History

In 2000, the NDP provincial government in Manitoba created Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!), a program to support community-led initiatives in Winnipeg and Brandon. A key component of Neighbourhoods Alive! was core funding for Community Renewal Corporations in these two urban centres. Excluded, community activists from Thompson were quick to speak up against Manitoba's northern urban centre being left out of the program, especially since Thompson was dealing with challenges similar to the other two regions. They were successful, and one year later the Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (TNRC) was formed with the mission to coordinate and support programs and services that assist community efforts to rebuild and revitalize neighbourhoods experiencing significant social, economic and physical decline within the city.

Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

Year Incorporated – 2001

Activities – Facilitating collaborations, funding community initiatives, housing, recreation facilities, and community planning.

Impact – "The Pinks" are now beautifully painted homes with murals, the "Dark Park" is now an open and well-used tennis, basketball and picnic green space, and millions of dollars have been invested into community renewal.

Upcoming Priorities – Housing fix-up program, tool-lending library, completion of the external review of NA! including the TNRC impact in Thompson, and development of their second 5-year plan.

Neighbourhoods Alive! is a long-term, community-based, social and economic development program that supports and encourages community-driven revitalization efforts focusing on key areas such as housing and physical improvements, employment and training, education and recreation, safety, and crime prevention.

While TNRC is accountable to the provincial NA! program, they are governed by a board of directors that is made up of a diverse group of local people. And, as TNRC manager Jim Stewart comments, “You are very accountable to everyone in the community because you’ll see them on the weekend at the grocery store, playing tennis, or walking down the street; you can’t hide from them or pretend it’s just a job when you live in a smaller community like ours.”

In 2005, the community received great news that NA! funding for TNRC had been approved for another 5 years. TNRC will be able to continue building on its projects, relationships, and community vision without having to worry about its very existence for at least the next half decade. Of course, additional resources to do the work and have a greater impact are necessary, but this model of long-term core funding for community-led, multifaceted initiatives is a huge advantage that is the envy of many other communities in Canada.

Activities

One of TNRC’s roles is acting as a conduit for NA! funding to flow into the Thompson community through two different programs. First, TNRC administers a Small Grants Fund that provides \$50,000 annually in small grants of up to \$5,000 each for community building initiatives. Secondly, when larger projects are imagined, TNRC works with local community

groups to develop their visions and ideas into a proposal and then recommends the proposal to NA! for funding. Initiatives supported through both of these channels in Thompson have included community action plans, school playgrounds, mural initiatives, housing fix-up programs, graffiti removal, recreational opportunities for youth, day care renovations, renovating and expanding a homeless shelter, community events, and a Youth Builders Program that develops the construction skills of Thompson youth who are unemployed, out of school, and considered at risk.

TNRC became directly involved in housing initiatives after community consultations identified housing as a priority issue. Some of the initiatives have involved working with landlords and homeowners to improve the condition and aesthetics of the existing housing stock, exploring construction of new housing units, and facilitating the relocation of surplus housing from nearby mining towns. Building on its success as a key player in developing and accessing financing for a 36-unit housing rehabilitation project, TNRC is now working with the YWCA to explore whether an unused community space could be converted into low-income family housing. Ongoing efforts to educate tenants, landlords, and homeowners on their rights and



A Neighbourhoods Alive! Mural initiative

responsibilities is also important, so TNRC acts as a resource and offers tips regarding housing and tenancy.

TNRC is not directly involved in employment or business development since the community prioritized housing and recreation as a focus for their limited resources and since there are other, experienced organizations already working on these strategies.

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

What is unique about the TNRC and the other NA! Community Renewal Corporations (CRCs) is that while many other community economic development (CED) organizations gradually evolved into a comprehensive approach to development, the CRCs were created for the express purpose of being comprehensive, multifaceted, and community-led. The actions, values, and methods of the CRCs and other grant applicants are guided by the CED principles that NA! has adopted, which are largely based on the "Neechi 11" CED principles developed in the early 1990s by Neechi Foods, an Aboriginal worker-owned cooperative located in Winnipeg's North End.

So how does the TNRC put these CED principles into action? They started by building a Board of Directors consisting of a diverse group of local individuals. This builds local capacity and strengthens local leadership, bringing a diverse range of skills, assets, relationships, and connections to the table. The Board is responsible for guiding and resourcing local initiatives.

The next step for TNRC was to conduct an in-depth community consultation regarding

Comprehensive Analysis: Community Economic Development

Community Economic Development (CED) is a community-led process that combines social and economic development to foster the economic, social, environmental and cultural well being of communities. A "community" can be a group of people who share common experiences, goals, language, heritage and culture. Community can also refer to the inhabitants of a specific geographic area, such as a rural village, an urban neighbourhood or an entire city.

A CED approach is driven by the community, which (in the case of "geographic communities") includes local residents, businesses, institutions and organizations. Through CED, local economies are strengthened by local skill, employment and (for-profit and not-for-profit) business development, all of which contribute to community well-being.

CED is a key component of the Province of Manitoba's economic strategy and an approach central to Neighbourhoods Alive!'s efforts to support community driven neighbourhood renewal. The basic principles of CED for Neighbourhoods Alive! Project funding are:

- **Local Employment** – support long-term employment opportunities for local residents including hiring locally, create opportunities for greater personal and community self-sufficiency, and enable spending of wages within the local economy.
- **Local Ownership and Decision-Making** – promote local ownership and control of community-based businesses, cooperatives and other resources, and encourage grassroots involvement and democratic decision-making.
- **Local Economic Linkages** – purchase locally produced goods and services.
- **Re-invest Profits Back into the Community** – reinvest profits to expand the local economy and strengthen community self-reliance.
- **Local Knowledge and Skill Development** – provide education and training opportunities that are accessible to local residents.
- **Positive Environmental Impact** – promote environmental sustainability by building green, clean and safe communities.
- **Health and Well-being** – promote the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of community members at home, in the workplace and in the community at large.
- **Neighbourhood Stability and Community Cohesion** – increase community members' commitment to remain and participate in the community.
- **Human Dignity** – foster relationships that build individual self-respect and community pride.

the community's vision and priorities, regarding the challenges and opportunities in Thompson. Out of this process, TNRC developed an incredibly detailed 5-year strategic plan. Each of the strategic areas identified by the consultation process (recreation, neighbourhood empowerment, crime and public safety, cleanliness / beautification, economic development, and housing) includes a listing of first year objectives, activities, available resources, and indicators for how the success of each strategy will be measured. The plan also includes five-year goals as well as targeted first- and second-year achievements.

Not only is the approach of TNRC multifaceted, the initiatives that they plan contain interrelated goals and outcomes, something that is almost a natural result of the approach they take in designing initiatives and also of the limited resources that they are working with. TNRC's approach emphasizes being inclusive and participatory, building partnerships and facilitating buy-in from as many stakeholders as possible, and using all available assets to leverage more resources in support of the initiative.

In keeping with the community's housing priority, TNRC set up the Front and Paint Program that offers people living on a low income up to \$1,000 for materials to fix up their home if they do the work. A local hardware store got excited about the program and has offered a discount for all supplies purchased there. In concert with this initiative, the TNRC also worked with the local public library who used the small grants fund to purchase tools (again discounted by the local hardware store) and set up a tool lending library. The library already has a whole lending infrastructure (computers, etc) set up as well as books and internet access, so tool borrowers are encouraged to access the full resources for tips on fix-up. As a result, the library and the hardware store are exploring the development of joint educational workshops

for people in the community wanting to improve their properties.

This is one example of how TNRC has managed to leverage the limited resources in their small-grant fund into something much greater that will benefit the City of Thompson for years to come. They have levered many existing local assets and resources to nurture new partnerships, improve the quality of housing stock, and foster skill development. Importantly, the dollars used and the expertise developed stay in the community. TNRC Manager Stewart describes the process as "lots of talking, an even greater deal of listening and connecting with people, and then using a bit of money to glue things together."

Outcomes and Evaluation

As is common with comprehensive initiatives, evaluating TNRC's impact is complex. Can you claim credit for the things that went well in the community? Then do you also have to take responsibility for the things that got worse? And when partnerships are the way you do things, how much credit can you take for your own organization? If things have improved, would they have improved even without you? If no gains have been made, might things actually have been even worse without the work you have done? These are all difficult questions to answer, but TNRC has several approaches that attempt to get as accurate a picture of their impact as possible: the value of investments, the success of projects, and the improvement of community indicators set in the strategic plan.

In the first approach, measuring the financial scale of their activities, through TNRC, NA! has funded 34 projects for a total of \$841,849, \$1.275 million has been committed to rehabilitating or constructing 153 housing units, \$105,274 has been invested in park, playground, and green-space enhancements, and \$266,840 over three years has been directed to the Youth

Builders project. This demonstrates a real and tangible financial contribution to Thompson that the TNRC has been able to attract either through its very existence (NA! program dollars) or by negotiating and leveraging funding for various projects.

Secondly, there are the visible, day-to-day impacts of the projects. Seeing kids playing on one of the several new, safe play structures in the Thompson community or watching the parent council of the local school (which serves the most in-need residents of Thompson) developing educational support programs is an easy way to see the difference that the TNRC makes. As well, it is possible to measure the use of those structures, get feedback from the parents, measure student attendance and track problem behaviour. With their new ventures, TNRC will measure the number of fix-up grants approved, the number of houses renovated, the dollars spent and leveraged at the local hardware store, the level of library tool use, and the number of attendees benefiting from workshops.

Knowing and seeing the story of a project is another way to evaluate the impact of TNRC. A walk past previously deteriorating

apartment buildings known as “The Pinks” demonstrates what a small investment in paint and artists is able to accomplish. Beautiful murals now adorn the exterior walls of buildings that had not been painted in more than 25 years, and the murals have enticed the landlords to re-paint the rest of the buildings as well. Artists earn an income, the city looks more beautiful, tenants are proud of where they live, and a small investment leveraged a greater investment by the landlord.

Perhaps no project is more profound in its impact than the Cliff Park initiative. Located in the most in-need neighbourhood in the community, the brush around Cliff Park had grown in thickly, the tennis courts were in disrepair, the lighting was poor, the basketball hoops had been wrecked, and the place was primarily a hangout for violent and partying substance abusers. Stewart recalls, “When I went to play tennis, we had to bring a push broom and sweep up the broken glass just so we could play – and that was if the net, which was not a net but a piece of chain link fence, had not been wrecked.”

TNRC's intervention was to organize the community in order to reclaim the park. They marked certain trees for removal to thin out the brush, allowing community members to take the wood home for heating. They worked with the City of Thompson to access the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund of NA! to add lights, picnic tables and garbage cans, put down new sod and tidy up the area. In winter, a small skating oval is created there as well. A nearby landlord got into the action by re-painting the housing complex. Now, says Stewart, the only thing



Murals helped spark re-investment in The Pinks

between him and a game of tennis is all the other people using the courts. Although not all dynamics of this project are easily quantifiable and measurable, living through the effort and seeing the difference clearly shows the impact of TNRC.



impact of the TNRC on the City of Thompson, but also the CED approach that guides the TNRC. At the time of writing this case study, the methodology and indicators used to conduct the evaluation were not publicly available, however, the full report should be available in the early fall of 2005.



The Cliff Park revitalization project reclaimed the park for residents

The third way that TNRC evaluates the work that they do is by measuring their outcomes against their 5-year strategic plan. Carefully chosen indicators have been identified for each of their strategies (see the full list of outcomes and evaluation measures in appendix). However, one challenge of laying out detailed goals and indicators so far in advance, admits Stewart, is that by the time you get toward the end of the timeline, community priorities and needs may have changed. Or, you may have realized that the resources for a given strategy are simply not available. Even though community priorities may have shifted (sometimes due simply to a lack of resources), you may still be expected to measure outcomes against a plan that was laid out in a different context.

Finally, given that the CRCs funded through NA! are all at the end of their first 5 years of operations, the Province of Manitoba has contracted the Institute for Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg to conduct an external review of the program. This review will measure and evaluate not only the

Policy Lessons

Clearly, the NA! program is an essential component of what makes TNRC work. Multi-year core funding, a small grants fund to empower local initiatives, a direct link to more sources of funding (such as Manitoba Housing), and the peer-learning available through the network of five such CRCs in the province all contribute to the success of TNRC.

One particular challenge for TNRC has been the refusal of the Thompson municipal government to get involved in housing initiatives, even though municipal governments in Winnipeg and Brandon are significant partners. City investment is important not only in its own right, but also for the additional monies that it is able to leverage through deals such as the municipal - provincial - federal funding agreements common in larger urban centres.

Another challenge Stewart points to is the heavy reporting procedures required by all levels of government that are debilitating to the work of TNRC, particularly when multiple reports are required for the same initiative simply because funding for that

effort came from multiple sources. Accountability is important, but funders must realize that their onerous requirements impact the amount of time that TNRC has to do its work in the community.

TNRC's Unique Success Factors & Lessons Learned

- The wisdom of a volunteer board that is truly representative of the community becomes evident every time. An inclusive, participatory process is very time consuming and can be frustrating, but what comes out more often than not leads to the most appropriate solutions. "The easiest thing for the organization is not always the best thing for the community."
- Building partnerships makes the resources go a lot further. It is more labour intensive, but it brings people together and makes so much more possible.
- Small projects can have huge impacts; measuring outcomes in a variety of ways makes it more possible to capture the full extent of the impact made.
- Long-term core funding and a CED mandate are about as good as it gets for CED organizations.

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*For more information on the Government of Manitoba's Neighbourhoods Alive program, see:
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/ia/programs/neighbourhoods/>*

*For more Profiles of Effective Practice and other resources on social inclusion, go to:
<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>*

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An electronic copy of this document is available on our website.

Appendix: TNRC Outcomes and Evaluation Measures

Recreation *Outcomes:* Available and accessible recreational opportunities for neighbourhood residents regardless of income, age, gender, culture, etc. Understanding and priority related to recreation through healthier life choices and positive social interactions. *Evaluation Measures:* Data gathered via funded projects, numbers of volunteers and participants, neighbourhood satisfaction surveys. Measurement and evaluation tools developed as needs are identified and action plans created.

Neighbourhood Empowerment *Outcomes:* Decentralized interdepartmental services including outreach activities to in-need neighbourhoods. Increase in neighbourhood self-determination and proactive city planning. Active neighbourhood groups, associations, cooperatives, etc. with the capacity to address neighbourhood concerns. *Evaluation Measures:* Development of evaluation / measurement tools in conjunction with University of Manitoba and Neighbourhoods Alive. Data gathered through community meetings including narrative feedback.

Crime and Public Safety *Outcomes:* Strengthen bonds among neighbourhood residents through opportunities for participation and involvement. *Evaluation Measures:* Types and numbers of projects with safety as priority such as lighting, brush clearing, etc. Statistics associated with criminal activities including types of crime, age of perpetrator, location, etc. Community feedback over time. Level of neighbourhood involvement and participation.

Cleanliness and Beautification *Outcomes:* Decrease in Thompson resident concerns regarding their neighbourhood's cleanliness. Increase in community pride shown through neat and tidy parks, public areas, private properties, etc. Ability for City of Thompson and Norman Tourism to market the community as a clean and beautiful destination. *Evaluation Measures:* Park use, number of employees involved in green teams, clean up crews. Quantitative measures associated with various beautification initiatives. Data gathered via community meetings including narrative reports.

Economic Development *Outcomes:* Documented CED examples of a variety of successful Thompson projects. Active neighbourhood groups involved in advocating, lobbying, planning, and action. Entrepreneurial spirit within neighbourhoods and the community as a whole supported. 'Buy local' promotions and local capacity building opportunities carried out. *Evaluation Measures:* Number of participants involved in capacity building opportunities run in conjunction with the TNRC. Needs and data gathered through community meetings. Number and types of projects involving both social and private partnerships.

Housing *Outcomes:* Development of systems and mechanisms that support the recommendations identified in the Housing Study. Community's adoption of Community Housing Plan as developed by the Housing Researcher Project and progress being made to implement the recommendations identified in the study. *Evaluation Measures:* Measurement of data as determined by Manitoba Family Services and Housing, use of Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program for Homeowners, Power Smart, etc. Evaluation outcomes identified through results and community feedback generated by the Housing Study.

Organizational *Outcomes:* Thompson viewed as an entrepreneurial community with active and supportive community groups and residents. Thompson residents optimistic about their future and the range of opportunities and possibilities, from training and employment to quality housing and safe/supportive neighbourhoods. Public aware of the TNRC and community economic development. *Evaluation Measures:* Audited financial statements, amount of funds flowing into in-need neighbourhoods, levels of participation, community and Board feedback, qualitative and quantitative goals as identified in the contribution agreements.