

How to Evaluate a Third-Sector Approach to Place-Based Poverty Reduction:  
A Case Study of Pathways to Education

by

Megan Conway

A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfilment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Planning

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2012

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines how to evaluate a place-based poverty reduction program across different sites and scales. Unpacking urban planning's dominant, normative construction of poverty, neighbourhoods, youth, and evaluation, this thesis presents an alternative view of evaluation, which recognizes the complexity and diversity of qualitative narratives describing the impacts of targeted human service programs on the places and peoples they serve. To answer this question, I crafted a theoretical framework linking the concept of the *right to the city* as presented by Lefebvre (1996), to Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979), 1995) understanding of the micro, macro, and meso systems in which children and youth operate. I then conducted a small-scale, qualitative case study of Pathways to Education Canada as it replicated and expanded, to examine and explore different ways of evaluating the success of a place-based poverty human service program. Using a participatory methodology, I listened to different stakeholders' voices, particularly those of youth and staff, to examine and explore tensions in the construction of success.

*Key words:* neighbourhood effects, evaluation, youth, place-based poverty reduction

## **Acknowledgements**

To the staff at Pathways to Education Canada and my peers and colleagues at Pathways sites across the country: thank you for supporting me on this journey. A special thanks to members of the Research Advisory Group, who provided frank and direct feedback, asked helpful and honest questions, and made this process more enjoyable, and definitely more real.

To the youth involved in Pathways, and specifically those who participated in this process: thank you for being an inspiration and more importantly, for critically challenging my understanding of what it means to be a youth living in a low-income neighbourhood.

To members of my committee and Mary Anne: thank you for keeping me on track! I am truly grateful for the editorial eyes you've offered.

To my family and friends: thank you for your encouragement, support, and belief in my ability to finish this thing!

And lastly to Cam: thank you for making sure I ate, washed, and had clean clothes to wear. I'm not sure what life would be like if you weren't in it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*What would it mean to live  
in a city whose people were changing  
each other's despair into hope?  
You yourself must change it.  
What would it feel like to know  
your country was changing?  
You yourself must change it.  
Though your life felt arduous new  
and unmapped and strange  
what would it mean to stand on the first  
page of the end of despair?*

—Adrienne Rich, 1986

Within the last 20 years, income polarization in Canadian cities has grown in a spatial pattern, as have organizational responses to plan and to address/redress resulting inequities. The intensity of these developments now demands greater theoretical and empirical attention in both research and practice.

In Canada in this period, the state has clawed back and denied support for a robust and comprehensive social infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Cities—and neighbourhoods within them—compete to secure various forms of capital to maintain hegemonic control. A concomitant economic restructuring has produced political, economic, and social conflict. Within the postindustrial and post-Fordist city, structural forces threaten to further ghettoize specific neighbourhoods by increasingly segregating them vis-a-vis market forces and government social policy (Hulchanski, 2007). A series of corresponding risks have resulted, disproportionately affecting lower-income neighbourhoods and their residents in profound

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<sup>1</sup> There are numerous Canadian examples of all levels of government retreating from providing public services. The ideal level of state involvement continues to be debated and contested.

and unjust ways (Friedmann & Wolff, 2006; Zukin, 2006). Certain populations (e.g., females, newcomers, children, youth, and visible minorities) are at particular risk.

A spatial concentration of poverty in identifiable neighbourhoods has now emerged clearly as a thorny, complex issue for consideration by planners and policy makers (Carter & Polevychok, 2006; Hulchanski, 2007). In this postmodern landscape of material and symbolic difference, the challenge and burden for contemporary planners and planning theorists remains how—through practices and programs, philosophies and principles—to shift the balance of power towards a more inclusive, equitable, and just vision of the good society and the good city (Campbell & Fainstein, 2003).

State involvement in neighbourhood improvement projects in Canada has largely been one of investing in the *physical* infrastructure of neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>—focusing on urban form, design, and revitalization. Place-based responses and interventions to address poverty led by third-sector organizations largely focus on investing and strengthening the *social* infrastructure.

In this research project, I have investigated effective implementation and evaluation frameworks for place-based approaches to addressing poverty. My intention is for this study to support research in three main areas: neighbourhood effects, place-based approaches and interventions targeting children and youth, and place-based evaluation. In the following introduction, I propose the rationale for this research and then outline briefly the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding the research.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of this type of investment are found in recent revitalization projects such as that in Regent Park, Toronto, or others planned for Lawrence Heights, also in Toronto.

## **Rationale**

Many sound theoretical and empirical reasons exist for why this research is important and necessary. An array of solutions to poverty in Canada have been offered, including revitalization, economic development projects, new funding agreements that target resources and dollars to specific neighbourhoods and places, and place-based approaches to address neighbourhood effects. In principle, these interventions are designed to support low-income people on an ongoing basis, providing basic supports such as shelter or economic opportunities; however, the challenge of many of such solutions is that too often they are concrete or absolute—Regent Park and other similar physical infrastructure projects are current examples. Much of their focus is on rebuilding actual bricks and mortar, rather than on effectively addressing the broad range of social, emotional, and health needs that exist in these places. Similarly, public investments are often limited to political tenure; when new politicians come into office, resources and systems of support dry up, leaving the neighbourhood's residents uncertain of the longevity and trustworthiness of promised supports. The number of projects that target social infrastructure is on the rise, but very little study has been made of the third sector's capacity to plan, mobilize, and target place-based resources, supports, and programs. Nor have evaluation frameworks been developed that examine how poverty interventions can be made more participatory and inclusive of the clients/participants.

A clear picture of spatial polarization along income lines emerges from examining the growth of Canadian cities over the last 20 years. Hatfield's (1997) study identified increasing distress and disparity in specific census tracts in Canadian cities. According to Chen, Myles and Picot (2011), "Between 1980 and 2005, neighbourhood income inequality (measure by

the Gini coefficient) grew only slightly in Ottawa-Gatineau (10 percent) and Quebec City (12 percent), somewhat more in Montreal (22 percent) and in the remaining five large metropolitan regions from 36 percent (Vancouver) to a high of 81 percent (Calgary)” (p. 2).<sup>3</sup>

The challenge is not simply the rise of this spatial concentration of poverty, but the complexity of its causes. As Bradford (2004) has noted in his review of Canadian urban policy,

characterized by critical information gaps about what precisely is required to help and by large coordination failures in terms of channeling the appropriate resources to the right target, city problems are resistant to traditional monosectoral interventions designed from above by insulated distant bureaucracies. Instead, they demand *place sensitive holistic* approaches. (p. 41)

In distressed neighbourhoods, the majority of residents experience myriad social, health, educational, and financial challenges, and their daily lived experience is often marked by struggle and conflict. Paradoxically, one of the greatest challenges of these neighbourhoods can also be their greatest strength; a plethora of creative, innovative, place-based responses to emergent needs<sup>4</sup> provides major opportunities.

Examples of place-based approaches targeting the social infrastructure can be seen in recent initiatives like the Action for Neighbourhood Change project, the Greater Toronto United Way’s Building Strong Neighbourhood’s Strategy, or the expansion and implementation of Pathways to Education in distressed neighbourhoods in Canada. Each of these programs is geared to specific neighbourhoods and provide increased funding, unique

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<sup>3</sup> Critiques challenge rising levels of neighbourhood poverty, citing lack of corresponding impacts, like little measurable increase to crime levels, in metropolitan centres over the last decade. How you measure poverty and its effects as well as the granular detail in which poverty is examined, both chronologically as well as spatially in one explanation for this discrepancy.

<sup>4</sup> Currently, there are no per capita studies of health or social service provision by neighbourhood in Canada. Similarly, there are no benchmarks of what appropriate levels or concentrations of service should look like.

service delivery models, and programs that target various neighbourhood dimensions or selected populations. Each in its own way is designed to improve neighbourhood quality of life, or to contribute to a range of other outcomes or determinants. Broadly speaking, these programs may be thought of as models of community development that are planned, implemented, and led by third-sector organizations—yet very little research has been done on what makes such projects successful or effective. How do we know that these types of place-based approaches work, or that the desired outcomes have been achieved?

Although sampling and evaluating different place-based interventions would be interesting, the project at hand focuses instead on a single place-based initiative. In it, I examine how the project was implemented in different neighbourhood sites, and how such a project could be evaluated across a scale ranging from individuals to the broader neighbourhood.

The initiative I chose to evaluate was the implementation of the nationally funded Pathways to Education program. Pathways is a targeted, place-based initiative that aims to help youth in selected neighbourhoods graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education. Pathways was launched as a pilot project in Regent Park, Toronto. Deemed a success there, it was subsequently established in 10 additional low-income, highly distressed, largely inner-city neighbourhoods with some of the highest dropout rates in Canada. The program is grounded in the belief that if given a range of financial, social, academic, and advocacy supports, all youth in these neighbourhoods can succeed and thereby break the cycle of poverty.

## **Central Problem for Research**

In response to the growing spatial concentration of poverty in Canada, new third-sector initiatives designed to address neighbourhood effects through place-based approaches have emerged; however, little is known about what makes these interventions effective, or how to implement or scale them for different neighbourhoods or populations such as children and youth.

## **Research Questions**

In considering the central problems of my research, I addressed the following questions:

- What is meant by the terms *place*, *place-based approach*, and *third sector*?
- What does a review of the literature on neighbourhood effects tell us about this problem?
- What measures can be used effectively to evaluate a place-based approach?
- Given the focus on youth in this particular model, what types of evaluation frameworks can incorporate diverse youth perspectives as part of the process of examining impacts?
- What are the challenges of measurement and evaluation across different contexts, sites, and scales?
- What can planners and policy makers learn from evaluation of a third-sector place-based approach?

The study is structured as follows: Chapter 2 offers an overview of the diverse literatures that touch on neighbourhood effects, poverty, youth, and evaluation. Chapter 3 examines some of the theories that influence both the design of this research problem and associated findings. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework applied to answer this

question. Chapter 5—largely a macro case study of Pathways to Education Canada, a comparative case study between two program sites, Kitchener and Ottawa—outlines the findings in three parts, and also offers a summary of approaches to place-based poverty evaluation as identified by a number of national experts. Chapter 6 provides further analysis of these findings, specifically from the perspective of members of the community-based research group who guided this study. Lastly, Chapter 7 offers a review of key findings and conclusions, and makes recommendations for policy makers, social service workers, and urban planners to consider.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The two main objectives of study were to examine poverty and neighbourhood effects, and to establish an evaluative framework to determine effectiveness for youth of programs targeting poverty and its spatial effects. These topics will be examined in depth in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### **Poverty and Neighbourhood Effects**

One of the challenges in measuring neighbourhood poverty is the absence of universal indicators consistent between or even within cities. As well, data on this topic are often outdated and aggregated at a scale too large or individuated to be useful. Complicating the issue further, researchers almost universally impose White, middle-class assumptions on what a good neighbourhood should look, sound, and function like. Neighbourhoods that are “violent,” “working-class,” “economically challenged,” and “run-down” become problems for researchers to study and to fix. A striking majority of researchers seem concerned with examining the societal blight of neighbourhoods that have been labelled “at-risk,” “socially disengaged,” “marginalized,” “distressed,” and “poor.” From my perspective, this bias runs

deeper than language, so as to influence constructions of research questions, posing real challenges in the form of who is an insider, who can conduct research, what knowledge should be considered valuable, and most importantly, how a good society should behave. My research problematizes the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of poverty and distressed neighbourhoods, and reviews the literature on neighbourhood effects. This will help to create the context against which to evaluate and measure the impact of place-based approaches.

### **Place-Based Evaluation**

The focus of my research was to establish an evaluative framework<sup>5</sup> that examines the effectiveness and value, for individuals and neighbourhoods, of programs aiming to ameliorate the effects of poverty. In this I built on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1995), who suggested that children operate within many systems. The microsystem is their immediate world. The mesosystem comprises the networks they are immersed in at a particular point in time, specifically their family and peer groups. Lastly, the exosystem is the neighbourhood in which individual children live in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These various scales present a helpful starting point from which to examine how a neighbourhood intervention affects each of these planes or spheres.

Currently, very few evaluative frameworks exist to examine the impact of place-based interventions across different sites and scales. Although there have been evaluations of neighbourhoods using various White class norms or theoretical lenses, including evaluations centred on concepts like resilience, healthy communities, or social cohesion, there have been few that evaluate the impacts of specific services, supports, or programs (such as how to improve an outcome like the dropout rate) that target an entire neighbourhood. The majority

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<sup>5</sup> For definitions of *evaluation*, please see Chapter 2, Defining Evaluation.

of research on neighbourhoods investigates the neighbourhood from a static point in time. These snapshots do not evaluate change chronologically or look at the nuances of how a place-based approach affects different sites in unique ways.

Established reviews of evaluation approaches and techniques can be found in the works of theorists like Alkin (2004), as well as Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman's (2004) seminal text. Patton's (2010) more recent framing of developmental evaluation through a complexity lens provides helpful insights into how evaluation might be used to support social innovation. Like Patton (1991), others within the realist paradigm have provided some useful parameters from which to begin to think about the concrete challenge of developing an evaluation framework. Pawson and Tilley's (1997) conceptualizations of a utilization-focused approach are particularly salient given the size, scope, and limitations of this project.

The current research pays particular attention to emergent themes like youth-engaged or participatory-evaluation research, as well as other emergent studies that create evaluation frameworks to examine the interconnectedness between place and poverty (Bradford & Chouinard, 2010; Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2004). However, when looking broadly at the evaluation literature within the field of planning, what emerges is nothing short of a dense malaise of concepts, terms, approaches, and paradigms, with very few examples of actual evaluation. Apparent in this cursory review of the field is that very few works have critically examined the role of values like equity, participation, or social justice in evaluation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Chapter 3 is devoted to an examination of the theories that connect a right to urban space with theories acknowledging youth as competent, creative, and capable meaning makers. Theoretically speaking, this research began from three central observations.

First, neighbourhoods have increasingly become important foci around which preventative strategies and interventions are planned, and outcomes and impacts of programs and supports are measured. Secondly, the responsibility for addressing the challenges of neighbourhoods' poverty and at-risk populations remains diffuse, situated in the hands of many organizations and stakeholders. These include nonprofit organizations, public and private planners, a panoply of government services and departments, neighbourhood interest groups, residents themselves, and businesses. Thirdly, traditional approaches to examining these types of problems ignore the diversity of lived, grounded experiences and continue to silence marginal/peripheral voices.

I sought to incorporate two specific theoretical frames in my research. The first is a sociogeography of youth that positions youth as capable, competent, and able to create knowledge and meaning in their environments. The second is the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991, 1996, 2001) whose articulation of "the right to the city" supports not only a right of place for a variety of urban dwellers, but also a right to participation and engagement. Meaningful youth engagement and participation in urban spaces is a problematic and complex means as well as an end, especially when those youth are low income, face multiple other barriers such as racial or cultural segregation, and lack meaningful, diverse adult role models. I examine these tensions and the problematic relationships between youth engagement and urban spaces in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **Methodological and Ethical Framework**

In Chapter 4, I present a methodological and ethical framework, the associated methods used for data collection, and the analytic framework applied to code and interpret data. This research was to be largely qualitative in nature, although some quantitative data were to be

gathered. I chose to use a qualitative approach, rather than the field's more common quantitative approach, in order to hear a diverse, complex array of perspectives and narratives. Grounded theory as developed by Charmaz (2006) served as the methodological approach, along with narrative inquiry. Recognizing that research always requires a careful balance between making decisions to support the scope and scale of a project while simultaneously respecting and honouring the voices of participants, my bias, as researcher, was to let a diversity of narratives emerge, and whenever possible, to let these narratives stand for themselves. This is not to say that I have not played a role in weaving them together; however, beyond digging perhaps too deeply for themes or meanings that might not be present, I have tried to allow participants' voices and perspectives, particularly those of the youth, to stand for themselves.

To aid me in this process, I assembled a highly talented and committed group of Pathways alumni and program staff from Regent Park to serve on a Community Research Advisory. I am grateful for their honesty, their guidance, and most importantly their motivation and encouragement for me to honour the complexity of the low-income neighbourhoods and youth, the shadow narratives and dim voices, that when attended to provide a much richer, more holistic picture of where and how the program supports low-income youth in specific places. Their voices, as much as my own, have helped shape this research and the interpretation of findings. In particular, many of the youth alumni have played critical roles as research advisors and research assistants throughout the process.

Throughout this chapter, I also highlight and attempt to resolve many ethical questions that required consideration during this course of research. Doing research with youth raises questions about who holds power in the research process, how to work with the

multiple and diverse ways of meaning making and interpreting voice, and what constitutes knowledge between researcher and researched. While I endeavoured to challenge the traditional boundaries between subject and object in my work with youth, I feel I wanted to try harder to make this ideal more of an enacted reality. I examine these questions in greater detail in this chapter and also explore what it means to be an insider.

One of the reasons this research and course of study maintained my interest and proved to be a serious dissertation topic is that it appealed not only academically, but, more importantly, personally. I have worked for four years as the Program Director of the Kitchener Pathways to Education program. The challenges I have faced as director of this place-based approach—the tensions I experienced in understanding what works and why, and the struggle to hear youth more intently—permeate this study in more than purely a cerebral way. This experience of working in the field has shaped my perspectives on the value of a place-based approach to reducing poverty and has also given me tremendous insider's knowledge into some of the ways that the program operates—into the youth involved, and the neighbourhoods that the program works in and with. That being said, I also wanted to look at these questions, as much as possible, with fresh eyes and, to use, as best as possible, personal reflection as a tool to help guide the process rather than as a limiting bias.

Chapter 4 is also a more thorough review of the research design. Briefly, I employed three stages of data collection throughout the research. As indicated earlier, a case study was developed to highlight how Pathways to Education Canada had approached evaluation. A more finely detailed secondary case study is also presented from two specific sites (Ottawa's Pinecrest Queensway and Kitchener's Chandler Mowat and Kingsdale Pathways programs). During this attempt at focusing more intently on place, I listened, as intentionally as possible,

to youth voices about neighbourhood, support, and success. The following outlines the research design that I implemented to explore the research problem empirically.

**Stage 1: Listen to “Expert” Voices**

- Establish a research committee that includes three to six program participants/alumni, two front-line program staff, and a national office staff member. Develop more fully a plan of research with this group.
- Interview 15 to 20 national experts on youth, evaluation, or place-based poverty reduction to understand better their insights on how to evaluate what works across different sites and scales.

**Stage 2: “Scaling Up”: A Case Study of Pathways to Education Canada**

- Review and summarize the Pathways to Education Canada’s evaluation framework as well as associated organizational documents. In particular, review existing reports submitted to donors such as the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities as well as the Trillium Foundation. In addition, review the Boston Consulting Group’s external evaluation of the Pathways program and its return on investment (ROI).
- Develop and implement a survey of staff across program sites.

**Stage 3: “Finding Detail”: Youth Voices from Ottawa and Kitchener**

- Conduct four to six focus groups with youth in Ottawa and Kitchener. Use an arts-based methodology to frame this portion of research, with exercises creating murals as a focal point of the focus groups.
- Conduct focus group with select staff in each site.
- Develop neighbourhood profiles.

- Review site documentation and evaluation frameworks.
- Interview five local stakeholders (e.g., school officials, neighbourhood representatives, housing outreach workers) in each site on program impact.

### **Findings and Analysis**

Chapters 5 and 6 respectively present findings from the case study of Pathways Canada, comparative case studies of youth and local voices from Ottawa and Kitchener, as well as what national experts offered on place-based poverty reduction and associated evaluation and implementation frameworks. In particular, the following findings emerged most clearly and resoundingly.

- Evaluation of place-based poverty reduction approaches need to be representative of the program or approach being examined. Quantitative metrics or measurements alone do not tell a sufficient story. Diverse narratives, although complex when attended to, provide a richer, more complete picture.
- Youth voices as well as youth-led research and evaluation may offer new insights into complex problems such as place-based poverty. The ways in which programs targeting such issues affect youth are interpreted in varied ways, offering powerful insights on youth perspectives on neighbourhood, change, and success. Youth's dreams and individual visions of success are influenced and shaped by external constructs of family, society, and culture as well as by their own dreams for themselves.
- Youth, regardless of where they live, desire belonging and acceptance—both in terms of the places they navigate and also in terms of the services they access.

Advocating for this is a challenge but it is imperative for their voices to be heard and their rights to be acknowledged.

- Participatory research with youth remains challenging and problematic. Most current participatory frameworks for youth remain limited, and consistently impose hierarchical structures of researcher/researched. Arts-based methodologies, on the other hand, allow for alternative narratives to be shared in a more inclusive manner—in this project, multiple hands created murals depicting visions of who the youth were, what their perspectives on place were, and what helped.
- For place-based approaches to be effective they must be responsive to the local context, long-lasting, collaborative in nature, and surrounded by innovative risk-takers who have a vision and are willing to do what it takes to make it happen. No one sector in isolation, or without participation from residents or local actors, can hold solutions.

The analysis section was written largely by members of the research advisory group. The intention was to let these voices and their narratives stand alone, to contrast with the findings and also to add complexity to existing narratives.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 7 reviews research findings, and suggests further recommendations for evaluating place-based poverty reduction approaches. The recommendations are geared towards policy makers, urban planners, social service workers, and low-income youth. With the current trend towards greater place-based policies, and targeted third-sector funds, identifying possible evaluative frameworks that are collaboratively created and meaningful to the third

sector as well as its funders—and, more importantly, the communities in which these programs operate—is a critical question that demands greater investigation and consideration. Currently, evaluative frameworks on such place-based approaches remain fuzzy and often become difficult to apply in different neighbourhoods, different cities, and across different cultural contexts. Similarly, the ability to evaluate such targeted approaches to understand better what are achievable benchmarks and outcomes within a neighbourhood would allow for greater clarity about what works, not only for those from the third sector, but also for practitioners, urban planners, and policy makers from across the public and private sectors. More importantly, this research, in its collaborative design, and with a third-sector focus, presents an alternative theoretical and methodological model that values social justice while empowering and listening to a variety of voices, particular youth voices. It paints a holistic, comprehensive picture of how to evaluate what works when seeking to make change in low-income settings.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Section 1: Setting the Context—Defining Terms and Delineating the Approach

*... the importance of space lies in understanding it as an object of political struggle, a constitutive component of human agency, and a facilitator as well as constraint upon action.*

—Kevin Fox Gotham, 2003, p. 723

My goal in this chapter is to examine the operationalization and definition of the constructs of neighbourhood and place, poverty, and evaluation across divergent bodies of literature, in order to uncover their methodological and theoretical assumptions and their emergent strengths and weaknesses. I highlight current empirical and theoretical analyses linking the spatialization of poverty and neighbourhood effects (specifically as they influence and affect children and youth). I also seek to integrate and generalize findings (Randolph, 2009).

Two concepts underlie much of the discussion in the chapter. *Spatialization* refers to the way the effects of poverty are experienced by individuals and groups across specific spaces and places. Discourses on neighbourhoods, poverty, and evaluation depend on different assumptions and understandings of this term. *Place-based poverty reduction strategies* are policies and programs that target specific places (not people's experience of them, as in spatialization). In the chapter I explore the dominant, traditional approaches to evaluating such strategies.

A disturbing picture of urban material inequity has emerged from the collapse of the manufacturing sector and the erosion of the welfare state under subsequent neoliberal governments in the West from the 1980s onwards. This inequity has been reinforced by several factors: rising poverty levels, growing rates of homelessness, widespread crime, and growing numbers of unskilled, underemployed workers (Mingione, 2002). Canadian

statistical evidence demonstrates that “there are now more households paying greater than 30 per cent of their income on shelter (2,224,085 in 2001) than at any time in the past, up from 1,877,240 in 1991 and 2,223,480 in 1996” (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as quoted in Walks, 2006). Hulchanski (2007), speaking about the Toronto experience, has identified an emerging pattern of ghettoization—based on socioeconomic status, housing tenure, and skin colour—that is reinforced or unchallenged by government and social policy. Economic instability and changing family dynamics combined with increased competition for affordable, accessible housing accounts for shifting patterns such as economic decline, destruction of the social safety net, globalization, and patterns of immigration (Walks, 2006).

A wide range of new, unpredictable risks (such as illness, limited job and income prospects, and environmental damage) accompanying these economic changes disproportionately affects individuals who are already traditionally marginalized. Historically, different social institutions, such as the church and the charitable sector, have attempted to mediate and mitigate such risks. Increasingly, certain locations have become sites of diverse public/private and third-sector interventions. Public and private sectors each hold unique sets of accountabilities and different conceptualizations of what is of value (and for whom) in making, perceiving and evaluating change, with the result that these stakeholders—and in many instances, landlords—compete to define the narratives of these sites.

In the following sections, I review a cross-section of literatures in which concepts of neighbourhood, poverty, and evaluation intersect. In order to do this, I first identify and clarify my bias as a researcher and also situate my analysis within an urban planning paradigm. I devote considerable attention to identifying dominant methodological and

thematic biases. Finally, I review some practical human service programs utilizing a place-based approach that attempt to improve educational outcomes as a way of increasing socioeconomic outcomes and mitigating neighbourhood effects.

## **Section 2:**

### **Resolving Tensions**

*It is now widely argued that the location—the standpoint—  
of the theorist makes a difference to what is being claimed.*  
—Linda MacDowell, 1996, p. 28

To begin, I acknowledge my own orientation, biases, and challenges faced in crafting a review of this nature. Several tensions and obstacles, of both scope and scale, emerged from the review and require careful resolution. I encountered three specific challenges: how to choose what to read, in order to determine what qualified as value, and for whom; how to situate my scan of existing research in the field of urban planning; and how to deal with the challenge of measurement within the complex terrain of place-based poverty reduction.

### **Orienting Myself**

In the process of selecting articles I became aware of a tension between perspective and value: as someone who periodically changes hats between researcher and practitioner,<sup>6</sup> and most frequently enjoys wearing both, identifying appropriate articles represented an authentic challenge as it forced me to decide what qualified as value. What meets a test for significance and worth—for each audience—is remarkably different. The concept of *value* is an interesting one to problematize, especially when thinking about evaluation and what works in different neighbourhood contexts. Value is at the root of evaluation—it is an ascription of

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<sup>6</sup> By *researcher*, I mean a traditional academic and by *practitioner* I mean an individual—perhaps a nurse, social planner, youth worker, social service worker, teacher, or other—who works directly in low-income places, providing services to low-income persons.

worth, and is largely defined by what matters and to which individual or audience—as such, it is highly subjective and individualized. Researchers and practitioners, while not entirely different from each other, often consider these problems differently, approach the constructs and themes with nuanced lenses, and use a different language replete with a unique terminology and even constructs when describing or discussing the processes at play. While researchers and practitioners may each attend to the challenges of evaluating what works to support low-income people across different sites, the path each takes towards finding solutions, and what represents relevant knowledge for each, can be dramatically different. As various academics have indicated, what might meet a criterion for utility does not always meet criteria for rigour, bias, or validity, and this is particularly challenging when considering multivocal literatures—those that are comprised of all accessible writings on a common and often contemporary topic (Elmore, 1991; Ogawa & Malen, 1991; Patton, 1991; Yin, 1991).

I decided to review research in scholarly journals primarily from the last 10 years. I used a combination of representative and purposive sampling to select literature. I sought to identify literature that met the following criteria: (a) it provided insight into the quantitative or qualitative dimension of neighbourhood effects or evaluation; (b) it illuminated, when possible, the Canadian context; (c) it included youth, when possible, as a methodological or operational focal point; and (d) it articulated or engaged in critical discourse to examine the construction of neighbourhoods, youth, and evaluation. While the review was by no means exhaustive, it did identify dominant patterns and themes to consider further. I intentionally selected a very small sample from the most salient examples of practical evaluation research to review. The review demonstrated a unique evaluation approach to a human service

program across different sites, or evaluated a more comprehensive place-based program targeting children and youth.

### **The Challenge of Integrating This Research Into an Urban Planning Paradigm**

Secondly, I faced the challenge of situating my review within the field of urban planning.

This was problematic for two reasons—one, the dominant discourse of rationality within the field, and two, the fuzzy ways in which spatialized poverty is constructed, understood, and addressed. The challenge to resolve this tension was significant, since it required me to situate my inclination for critical theory, difference, and postmodernism within a discursive frame that privileges hard knowledge, bricks-and-mortar solutions, and a rational-comprehensive model of planning (Alexander, 2000; Dalton, 1986; Friedmann, 1993; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Rohe, 2009). Beauregard (2005) has noted that the belief intrinsic in a rational model of planning is a “claim to a scientific and objective logic that transcend[s] the interests of capital, labour and the state. This logic [has] allowed modernist planners to disengage themselves from the interests of any particular group” (p. 28). An approach based on rationality is supported by problem-solving through the built environment—like Lego blocks that can be put together and taken apart, many urban planners and scholars of urban planning focus on the solutions that emerge through design, the challenges of gentrification, mixed-income housing, and concrete urban revitalization projects (Glass, 1964; Halpern, 1995; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008; Slater, 2006; Tach, 2009).

Addressing the rationale behind the dominant focus on this attention on the built environment raises a long list of powerful questions. Do residents in Western urban environments prefer to see pristine grandeur blanketing their landscape rather than sites of decay or deterioration? Does investing in physical infrastructure make it easier for those with

power to distance themselves, metaphorically and physically, from engaging in solutions and resolving the real challenges of poverty in any intimate or engaged way (Halpern, 1995)? Does the hierarchy of needs that become considered when thinking about poverty and housing, like the immense need for affordable rental options, shelters, and basic roofs, as Walks (2006) suggests, become more pressing than examining root causes and alternate solutions? Such questions are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Select discourse(s) and practices within the subfield of neighbourhood planning offer potential mechanisms or approaches through which to resolve some of the tensions and limitations presented by this dominant bricks-and-mortar perspective in urban planning. Research and practice in neighbourhood planning and community action suggest an applicable literature and practical examples from which to consider the varied dimensions of local practicalities, while offering corresponding metaphoric space to consider radical visions of the future. Rohe (2009), in his recent review of 100 years of neighbourhood planning, has provided a context for thinking about the variety of models of neighbourhood planning. He identified six broad types: the neighbourhood planning unit, urban renewal, community action, municipal neighbourhood planning, community economic development, and traditional neighbourhood design. Five of his examples situate power outside the neighbourhood; only in his analysis of community action does he see power residing within local neighbourhood actors, and those who support them, to make systemic changes to neighbourhood institutions necessary for improving quality of life and associated outcomes.

Research on community action (Alinksy, 1989; Diers, 2006; Richardson, 2008; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2008) has included everything from community development models to the devolution of decision-making to local neighbourhoods and radical organizing. The

theoretical roots of community action remain diverse and divergent, encompassing contested concepts such as the “composition of struggle” (Kinsman, 2006), agency (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006), responses to repression (Castells, 1972), and contestation of public space (Mitchell, 1996, 2003). Similarly, poststructuralists and postmodernists have supported drastically different ideological positions in their efforts to theorize and conceptualize the existence and persistence of social conflict localized through community action. The absence of a cohesive theoretical framework concurrently has produced conceptual and methodological challenges; however, these deficiencies do present the possibility for emergent exploration and examination.

One final point about the literature on community action: most of it is based on the American experience. Although the trends and themes discussed in it may also be common in Canada, the context is different. This presented me, as researcher, with challenges in uncovering salient Canadian examples (Halpern, 1995; Wolfe, 1994).

### **Challenges of Measurement**

The landscapes of place-based poverty reduction are complicated and contested. A complex construct like spatialized poverty presents challenges of measurement. Literatures from management and social innovation—including social geography, the geography of children and youth, adolescent development, psychology, health and wellness, and development studies—each have unique perspectives on how to evaluate place-based approaches to poverty. Each defines what qualifies as success differently, and each uses different metrics and measures to quantify and qualify poverty and associated change. Identifying what works and how to measure it requires clarifying the problematic constructs of *reasonable*, *outcome*, and *measure*, because while grant-makers, governments, and program providers might

determine a change to have occurred, or be able to demonstrate results, the youth who live in a specific neighbourhood might not perceive or feel any such change. Noticing or perceiving change depends significantly on the perspective or position from which change is being measured.

Very few measures track poverty reduction from the perspective of what matters to the urban poor. Providing a less traditional analysis, urban sociologist Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) has suggested that the 10 aspects of life most significant to the urban poor are: finances, spirituality, sex, support/assistance, desires, self-expression, love, children, dreams, and fear (p. 23). Tracing well-being—or tracking increases or decreases in love or fear for that matter—is often not of consequence to those providing services and supports.

Increasingly, academics have come to understand the need to frame poverty as a complex issue. Poverty is seen as multidimensional, with effects that can be observed and quantified through dimensions such as material well-being, employment, psychological well-being, power and voice, cultural and social norms, physical capital, human capital, social capital, environmental assets, and others (Narayan, 2000). According to Mark Cabaj and Liz Weaver (Cabaj & Weaver, n.d.) of the Tamarack Institute, for instance, poverty is not a simple problem with an easy solution, but rather a complex problem with many (often competing) solutions. This degree of complexity creates ambiguity and challenges when considering effective and inclusive ways of measurement and evaluation. The authors have provided the following helpful seven guidelines for considering poverty:

1. Poverty is difficult to frame.
2. The cause-and-effect relationships are unclear.
3. There are diverse stakeholders.

4. Each experience of poverty is unique.
5. The nature of poverty evolves.
6. There is no obvious right or wrong set of solutions.
7. There is no objective measure of success.

No two individuals living in poverty are the same—each has a unique experience of poverty, which is also influenced by that individual's race, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. There are few clear indicators that work universally from city to city, or from neighbourhood to neighbourhood: data on this topic are often outdated and limited to being aggregated at a scale that is too large or individuated to be relevant. Researchers Lars Osberg and Kuan Xu (2007) have highlighted the variety of measures that can be used to measure poverty more generally, including low-income cut-offs (LICO), low-income measures (LMI), or the market basket measure. Challenging the issue further is that data from Statistics Canada are frequently outdated; often, they are published years after being collected. Recent work in political geography (such as poverty mapping) helps to plot the different dimensions of poverty and/or its determinants on maps, providing a helpful visualization of the issue. However, this work is being done mostly at the scale of regions and countries only. Such an approach is just one way of understanding the complexity of the problem. As Kazemipur and Halli (2000) articulated, the spatial dimension of poverty has largely been ignored by researchers in Canada.

### Section 3:

#### Definitional Challenges—Neighbourhoods, Places, and Evaluation

*I am filled with questions about landscapes,  
particularly how they influence us psychologically,  
and how they carry different meanings,  
both personally and cross culturally.*

—M. Elaine Davis, 2005, p. x

In this section, I address some of the definitional challenges I faced in articulating the meanings of the terms *neighbourhoods*, *place*, and *evaluation*. These are contestable constructs, each holding different meanings and different understandings depending on who is defining them and the purpose or use they are being put to. The essential contestability of concepts, an approach widely used in political theory (Gallie, 1956; Hart, 1961), requires an unpacking of the three terms, as they hold multiple meanings, are internally complex, and are variously describable.

Given this contestability, I will undertake here to examine the scholarly ways in which these terms have been defined. I begin by defining *neighbourhoods* and *places*, and will then attend to defining evaluation. I also acknowledge why I have chosen to use the term *place-based approach*.

#### Neighbourhoods and Places

Neighbourhoods, like places, can be perceived as both heterogeneous and homogenous—simultaneously poor and limited, strong and liberated. There is no easy way to categorize or examine the diversity of experiences and perspectives that are contained within these sites. How is it possible, for example, to understand a neighbourhood as a heterogeneous, diverse, even vibrant site, while at the same time constructing it, at least perceptually, as a deviant, low-income, crime-ridden place? It is very easy, for terms and definitions about neighbourhood and place become muddled and diffuse.

Although *neighbourhood* is a common term in the vernacular, less often is reference made to places or to place-based approaches. I will outline definitions associated with both places and neighbourhoods.

**Examining contested meanings of *neighbourhood*.** References to *neighbourhood* can be found throughout popular culture, with terms like *block*, *ghetto*, and *'hood* holding myriad meanings amidst certain subcultures. *Webster's Dictionary* (Braham, 1996) has provided an accessible starting point, defining neighbourhood as “a district or locality, often with reference to its character”; and it also makes reference to “a number of persons living in a particular locality” (p. 442). This definition presents two characteristics consistent with most conceptualizations—in particular, neighbourhoods refer to a specific locality (spatial dimension) and to the people living there (social dimension).

**A disciplinary analysis: Towards a spectrum of neighbourhoods.** A cursory analysis of varied academic disciplines reveals different conceptualizations of the term *neighbourhood*. Varied understandings of the term privilege certain knowledge and dominant perceptions of the concept and its associated conditions. I examined the corresponding implicit assumptions about such constructions, and have developed a tentative continuum: a spectrum of neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Statisticians, epidemiologists, and demographers discursively construct neighbourhoods as large spatial areas such as census tracts (CTs; Government of Canada, 2006; Rees & Phillips, 1996); that is, small, relatively stable geographic areas that usually have a population of between 2,500 to 8,000 inhabitants. CTs are defined so as to be as socioeconomically homogenous and geographically compact as possible. The drive to

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<sup>7</sup> A brief caveat: no academic discipline is homogenous—however, dominant discursive trends can be found and deserve further elucidation.

identify trends or patterns such as rates of violence, occurrence of teenage pregnancies, or numbers of newcomers to a census tract are examples of the types of questions associated with this understanding of neighbourhood. While many governments interested in rationales for area-targeted programs claim that such approaches remain valid, these approaches often fail to tell a more nuanced story of what neighbourhoods are and what might be happening within them.

A scan of planning literature reveals that although more complex and dynamic understandings of the concept of neighbourhood exist, they remain relatively marginal and disputed (Keating & Krumholz, 2000). As planning theorists Keating and Krumholz (2000) have noted, throughout the last century the idea of a spatially bound neighbourhood unit and a corresponding rational-comprehensive approach have prevailed, despite calls for more heterogeneous and complex conceptualizations. The concept of the neighbourhood unit retains relevancy for planners and planning theorists who intend to impose rational order and structure onto the world. This drive for rationality and order stems from the idea of neighbourhoods as concrete building blocks.

Recent scholarly work (Johnson, 2002) cites William E. Drummond, from Chicago's reformist and Progressive milieu, as the originator of the concept of the neighbourhood unit.<sup>8</sup> Drummond's neighbourhood unit, like Clarence Perry's (1924), included schools and other intellectual, recreational, and civic elements. That neighbourhood units could be adjusted, reformed, and made from the planner's ideological mould dominates much of modern urban planning's history. However, in practice, the world does not exist in units, and life—both spatially and socially—frequently resists such forms of control.

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<sup>8</sup> Until recently, Clarence Perry (1924) has most often been thought of as its originator.

A related discursive construction of neighbourhood in the planning literature focuses on the complexity of market forces and their implications for neighbourhood units. The role of businesses, the flow of capital, and the housing market amidst localities have been studied and explored in great detail (Bates, 2006).

More contemporary understandings of neighbourhoods emerge from planning theorists like Jane Jacobs (1992), Herbert Gans (1961), Paul Davidoff (1965), and Sharon Zukin (2006). These theorists constructed neighbourhoods as complex, dynamic, heterogeneous, and multivocal. Jacobs (1992) provided a thought-provoking depiction of neighbourhoods as capable of self-governing, contesting that

. . . successful street neighbourhoods, in short, are not discrete units. They are physical, social and economic continuities—small scale to be sure, but small scale in the sense that the lengths of fibers making up a rope are small scale. (p. 121)

Despite the picture of complexity painted in the literature, critical planning theorist Emily Talen (2006) argued:

While the concepts of “place,” “neighbourhood structure,” and “spatial pattern” have made their way into the prescriptive debate over what to do about residential segregation and lack of place diversity, the planner’s unique contribution to this debate seems to be missing. (p. 233)

Conversely, planning theorist Robert Beauregard (2001) contended that such tensions serve the discipline well:

Planners need to accept the fuzzy boundaries of planning, the endemic incompleteness of professional control, and the healthy and relentless internal criticism. Basic ideas about how neighbourhoods . . . function are shared by many, but not all, planners. (p. 439)

Although there might be value such “internal criticism,” I contend that planning theorists’ conceptualizations of neighbourhood remain limited amidst propensities to conform and

impose order on places rather than to shift towards more emancipatory understandings of neighbourhood, understandings that would privilege diversity, difference, and heterogeneity.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, I reviewed how sociologists, geographers, and urban theorists constructed the term. Generally speaking, these theorists conceive of neighbourhoods as complex, nuanced, and dynamic local sites, and frequently connect the study of neighbourhood to other abstractions such as space, place, and power (Augé, 1995; Denton & Massey, 1991; Massey, 1995, 2005; Pacione, 2001; Sibley, 1995; Soja, 1989; Staeheli, 2003; Wallerstein, 2001). In this vein, through examinations of ghettos, enclaves, and citadels, neighbourhoods become seen as sites of racialized, gendered, and socioeconomic difference (Jargowsky, 1998; Marcuse, 1997; Wacquant, 1997; Wilson, 1987). Urban theorist Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) understanding of neighbourhood demonstrates the fuzzy, often more qualitatively dense, examination of neighbourhoods and their metaphysical importance:

The street where one lives is part of one's intimate experience. The larger unit, neighbourhood, is a concept. . . . The larger unit acquires visibility through an effort of the mind. The entire neighbourhood then becomes a place. (p. 170)

Here, Tuan poignantly refers to the interrelationship between experiencing and knowing about one's neighbourhood and about the means through which such knowledge contributes to identity construction, through the dialogic interface of self and place. Other empirical studies see the situated knowledge of neighbourhood inhabitants as constructing the boundaries, meanings, and locations of neighbourhoods (Lebel, Pampalon, & Villeneuve, 2007).

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<sup>9</sup> Although planning theory has evolved to encompass more nuanced understandings of identity and difference, the way urban planning is structured practically—at municipal and regional levels of government indicates challenges to implement more nuanced and sophisticated approaches. Similarly, Statistics Canada remains somewhat deficient in sharing the more complex picture of urban spatial inequity.

These more nuanced conceptualizations offer the potential for the situated knowledge of neighbourhood inhabitants to play a more central role in neighbourhood research. Figure 1 provides a helpful visual to accompany this discussion and further illustrates some differences amongst academic disciplines.

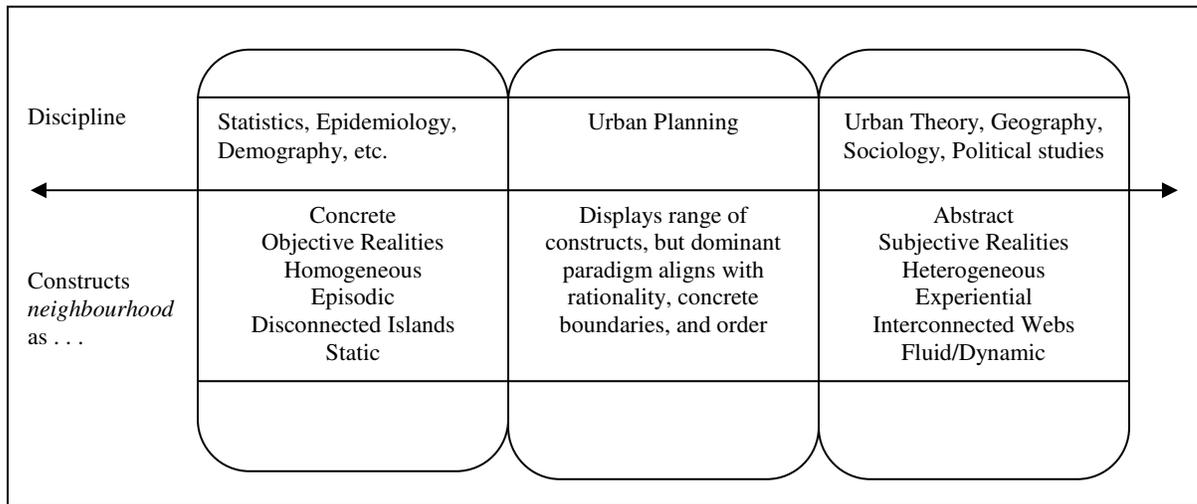


Figure 1. A spectrum of conceptualizations of *neighbourhood*.

This diagram, while not exhaustive, especially in light of the polyphony of voices emerging from disciplines, provides a helpful mechanism to summarize the varied ways through which academic disciplines dominantly construct the notion of neighbourhood. Furthermore, while interdisciplinary work may assist in challenging and bridging theoretical and paradigmatic islands of knowledge and inquiry, such work remains marginalized and subversive.

**Neighbourhoods and places: Is there a difference?** If neighbourhoods are messy constructs, places may be even more problematic. Political geographer Lynn A. Staeheli (2003) suggested: “Place could easily be one of the most contested terms in political geography. Perhaps this is because of the feelings and emotions evoked by the terms—home,

rootedness, order, setting, context” (p. 158). Large anthologies have been written, describing space, place, and their interconnections; the ways in which places become socially produced; the meanings associated with them; and the inequities produced by them (Castells, 1983; Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991). Place has become the building block of an entire intellectual and disciplinary enterprise (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004).

Staeheli (2003) fleshed out a helpful, succinct definition of place through a series of metaphors, suggesting that it can be seen as location or site, as cultural location, as social process, and as context. Integral to the definition of place is the concept of *context*. Echoing Staeheli, Entrikin (1991) focused on the importance of *context* in understanding place, claiming, “The geographical concept of place refers to the areal contexts of events, objects, and actions” (p. 6). Place includes physical sites—places on a map or specific locations, like the corner of two streets or an intersection of rivers—and it also operates on the level of particular characteristics, economic realities, social-political qualities, and emotions and feelings that become associated with a specific locale.

My interest in place and my usage of it stems largely from my interest in marginality and in the sociospatial meanings that certain spaces and places have. Associated conceptualizations of central/peripheral, as well as dominant/marginal, infuse how we think about the concept of place (Cloeke & Little, 1997; Massey, 1995). This association with the meanings and activities that certain sites promote and others deny, or the dominant activity and set of assumptions and beliefs about acceptable behaviour—a place’s norms and codes—underlies Cresswell’s (1996) examination of the moral landscapes of places, of the ways that certain activities and behaviours simply belong. Similarly, countless studies within the field of sociogeography, such as the geography of children and youth, examine how youth, like

other marginalized subgroups, transgress and challenge dominant assumptions about specific places and specific norms of conduct and behaviour (Matthews & Limb, 1999).

Discourses on neighbourhoods can be found throughout the literature, whereas references to place are less obvious; however, the two concepts are interconnected.

Individuals may not identify with a defined neighbourhood's political or geographical boundaries, but individuals do undeniably live in specific locations. These have dimensions and realities that matter, not only in terms of socioeconomic qualities and experiences, but also in terms of life chances, outcomes, and futures. In a foreword to urban geographer Neil Bradford (2005), Canadian social policy leader Judith Maxwell encouraged the use of a place-based approach. She suggested that place-based frameworks involve four key attributes:

1. they tap into local knowledge;
2. they balance a mix of economic and social policies, combining place-based programs with broad income security and neighbourhood services such as health and education;
3. they govern through collaboration with civil society and each other; and
4. they recognize the emerging role of municipal and local forms of government.

The notion of place connotes a specific local context. In many place-based approaches, the nuances of the place are recognized in the production of political, policy, or social responses.

According to Bradford (2005):

An urban perspective concentrates on physical infrastructures and the powers available to municipalities. A community perspective focuses on social infrastructures and the networks for democratic participation. The place-based framework recognizes the importance of both perspectives and seeks their integration. (p. v)

**Operationalizing the concept: Challenging the relevance of neighbourhoods and places.** Do the constructs of neighbourhood and place hold any validity, in light of all the definitional challenges? In a post–Henry Fordist, knowledge-based, globalized society, where production flows and economic capital shifts around the world at the touch of a button, and when, as postmodernists suggest, the impacts of place remain convoluted and ambiguous—it becomes difficult to appreciate the significance of neighbourhoods. With public institutions crumbling and our trust in them vanishing, how neighbourhoods influence our sense of individual or collective identity, agency, or life chances remains dubious (Sennett, 1996).

Consider critical geographer Doreen Massey (1991):

Individuals' identities are not aligned with either place or class; they are probably constructed out of both, as well as a whole complex of other things, most especially race and gender. . . . Places do not have single pregiven identities. . . . They are constructed out of the juxtaposition, the intersection, the articulation, of multiple social realities. (p. 267)

Under such a postmodern gaze, surely an outdated concept such as neighbourhood holds little, if any, relevance. Forrest (2004), in examining the paradox of the rise in neighbourhood studies, has suggested:

We live in a world where *place* is seen to be increasingly fluid and permeable and where our social identities and trajectories are apparently being increasingly shaped by the virtual and remote as opposed to the real and proximate. (p. 1)

And yet, as he went on to articulate, there has been a resurgence of study in the topic, particularly in examinations of inner-city neighbourhoods, in policy literature and government discourse.

Governments have begun to rely more heavily on neighbourhoods, particularly in regeneration and renewal schemes. Within the last decade, government programs in Western democracies—such as HOPE VI, in the United States and A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, in the United Kingdom (Levy, 2006)—have increasingly targeted

neighbourhoods defined as old, out-dated, needing repair, at risk, or vulnerable with mechanisms, rhetoric, and financial capital for their revitalization, renewal, and regeneration. While each government approaches this pursuit using different discursive tools, neighbourhoods deemed as problematic—and their inhabitants—become targets of this dis/investment and scrutiny (Levy, 2006; Schuller & thomas-houston, 2006). Although it is not possible within the confines of this inquiry to delve further into the ways in which governments discursively construct notions of neighbourhood—note the clever distinctions in the language between HOPE VI in the United States and the neighbourhood action schemes<sup>10</sup> in the UK—their capacity to structure, order, and influence activity and behaviour in neighbourhoods and with their inhabitants has grown steadily in the last 10 years.

As neighbourhoods have ascended in priority on governments' lists, they have continued to hold a wide-ranging symbolic and functional value. Functionally, a historical neighbourhood boundary determined which church or school one attended and also which private or public services were accessible. Traditionally, these functional boundaries influenced the symbolic value residents attached to neighbourhoods. And from a more contemporary perspective, despite the rapidity and ease of transfer of financial capital across neighbourhoods, it remained startling to me that certain neighbourhoods received inequitable treatment through processes like redlining, or through embedded everyday practices like the challenge of finding a taxi in a certain postal code, or the relative absence of supermarkets in many low-income neighbourhoods. While further study would be needed to examine more fully the quantitative effects a neighbourhood has on one's life chances, employability, and social mobility, emergent qualitative research from the UK points to meaningful ways in

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<sup>10</sup> The neighbourhood action scheme is a policy term referring to programs, services, and approaches to improve neighbourhoods. There are multiple examples of these across the UK.

which neighbourhoods and the families living within them influence one another (Galster, Hayes, & Johnson, 2005; Mumford & Power, 2003; Musterd & Andersson, 2006). Despite the challenges associated with operationalizing and conceptualizing neighbourhoods, they demand inquiry and further analysis, particularly in the ways through which the implicit material, social, and political conditions influence and shape those within.

Neighbourhoods matter in myriad ways. For instance, they affect the life chances of those who grow up in them. Although contested, the significance of neighbourhood effects, and the outcomes and behaviour patterns that neighbourhood residents experience because of where they live, require further examination, especially in light of the impacts such effects might have on children and youth.

### **Defining *Evaluation***

The concept of evaluation is as challenging to define as that of neighbourhoods and places. Concrete, clear, and uniform definitions become highly problematic considering the extensive nature of the field as well as the variety of ways in which the term is applied. At its core, the concept of evaluation suggests the determination of value of an object, program, or process. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Merriam-Webster.com, 2011) has defined *evaluate* in two related ways: first, “to determine or fix the value of,” and secondly, “to determine the significance, worth, or condition by careful appraisal of study.”

Most evaluation literature avoids providing a succinct and clear definition altogether. Evaluation theorist Michael Scriven (1996) articulated the lack of a clearly demarcated evaluation theory thus:

One perspective on this situation is to say that evaluation is a very young discipline—although it is a very old practice—and that in the early years of developing a discipline that refers to an ancient practice, the gaps between theory and practice are large. (p. 395)

Those who write for more popular audiences often attempt to provide a cursory definition. For instance, Mark K. Smith (2006), writing for a popular audience of informal educators, suggested that evaluation holds four key dimensions: it is a research process, through and by which judgements are made, involving meaningful standards that honour the work and those involved while operating at a number of levels. However, the vast amount of more scholarly research and writing on evaluation fails to define the term in any great detail.

Examples of evaluation research that provide a more thorough examination of the term do so through ancillary efforts. For example, Ernest House (1978) provided a helpful overview of different evaluation models and the corresponding assumptions to liberal democracy; his taxonomy of evaluation models helps elucidate what is involved in the actual act of evaluation. Similarly, Marvin Alkin's (2004) lengthy exploration of evaluation theory examined the methodological, epistemological, and ontological frames guiding diverse evaluation points of view. His analysis delved into the roots of evaluation theory, to provide a helpful overview of the different branches or associated paradigms that emerge through the development of evaluation theory. (For a more detailed review of Alkin's analysis of the theoretical frames underpinning evaluation see Appendix A.) From his perspective, there are three distinct theoretical approaches to doing evaluation, each with roots in social inquiry and accountability and control: valuing or placement of value on data; evaluation guided by research methods; and evaluation for the purpose of use and decision making (Alkin, 2004, pp. 12–13).

Some basic and helpful explanations of the distilled essence of evaluation emerge from the various essays in Alkin's (2004) book. The contributors often articulated most succinctly what they understood by the term. For example, Peter Rossi (2004), renowned

evaluation scholar writing from the methods approach, articulated his own view of evaluation, suggesting that, at its core, it is applied social research. From his perspective, it consists

. . . essentially in the application of the repertory of social research methods to provide credible information that can aid the formation of public policy, in the design of programs, and in the assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of social policies and social programs. (p. 127)

While social research might have provided its early roots, evaluation is now being used for a variety of ends and purposes, including a multiplicity of approved approaches. Of all the reviews attempting to describe evaluation, I found Carol Hirschon Weiss's (2004) to be the most encompassing and useful. Weiss (2004) proposed a broad and inclusive view of evaluation, in articulating her

. . . basic belief . . . that evaluation goes out into the world daily (with its bag of tools and its lunch) to work for the improvement of social programs and the people they serve. . . . Evaluation is a big tent, and there is room within it for evaluators with diverse perspectives. Evaluation takes many forms, from talking to program staff about their problems and satisfactions, to postmeeting questionnaires asking attendees whether they liked the session, to quantitative randomized-assignment studies. There are a generative variety of approaches out there. (pp. 153–154)

Beyond this definitional overview, it may also be useful to acknowledge how the concept and practice of evaluation has developed and shifted throughout the better part of the last century. While it is not possible within the scope of this review to provide a thorough historical examination of evaluation practice, contextualizing the concept amidst shifting political and social contexts illuminates the ways in which the act of evaluation has been operationalized (Karlsson, 1996). As Rossi et al. (2004) have acknowledged, it should be apparent that

. . . social programs, and consequently the evaluation enterprise, are powerfully shaped by changing times. . . . The evaluation field has thus been thrust into the middle of contentious debates about the very concept of social intervention and faced

with new challenges to demonstrate [that] any major program initiative can be effective. (p. 15)

This suggests the need for a careful unpacking of the uses of evaluation from the context in which the evaluation is performed as well as the context in which a social intervention is set. Mark K. Smith (2006) has suggested that the interest in evaluation theory can be directly linked to the expansion of government programs during the 1930s in the United States, the introduction of the New Deal, and the implementation of various social initiatives during the 1960s. From the 1970s onwards, evaluation emerged as a more distinct research field, marked by a boom in scholarly writing and more critiques about the methodological approaches of evaluation (Rossi et al., 2004). Evaluation use has surged, primarily within human and social services, and, for the most part, the development of the field of evaluation remains focused on how to improve evaluation in those domains.

Despite the increase in monitoring and evaluation within the fields of social service, health, and education, the dominant thinking in urban planning remains ambivalent about where evaluation fits (Oliveira & Pinho, 2010). Evaluation receives limited attention in urban planning, in spite of the rational comprehensive model's encouragement for its use (Seasons, 2000). The absence of coherent and meaningful evaluation frameworks for programs and policies affecting low-income neighbourhoods is particularly salient: what gets evaluated, to what end, and for what audience remain problematic and challenging. Organizations attempting to make social and physical changes in low-income neighbourhoods rarely interact or have any collaborative discussion or communication about what is desired, what is working, and for whom. Social service providers evaluate their programs' effectiveness, and set targets and goals for themselves, their donors, and clients against which they measure improvements. Simultaneously, urban planners, often fuelled by development requests from

corporations and business, create plans to gentrify and revitalize these same places without evaluating what is happening at different scales in the landscape.<sup>11</sup>

I now move to identifying and illuminating some of the challenges and tensions in the literature where neighbourhoods, poverty, youth, and evaluation intersect. In particular, I highlight some of the dominant themes in the literature on neighbourhoods and places and their effects on youth. Then, I examine the dominant themes in the literature on evaluation and place-based poverty reduction with a specific focus on programs and services targeting youth.

#### **Section 4:**

#### **Identifying and Examining Themes**

*While child and youth adaptation is impacted by broad environmental and social influences such as social norms and laws, neighbourhood represents the spatial context of interaction, with various meanings for different young people.*

—Anthony & Nicotera, 2008, p. 1247

In this section I seek to shed light on the dominant methodological and epistemological themes criss-crossing the literature on neighbourhoods, poverty, youth, and evaluation. Two main themes (and corresponding subthemes) have emerged: How or if neighbourhoods matter for children and youth, and policies and services for place-based poverty reduction. I discuss these themes, attending in particular to how services targeting youth are evaluated.

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there are solid examples of evaluation within transportation planning and housing studies—however, few examples of comprehensive neighbourhood evaluations. The profession would benefit from developing an integrated evaluation framework for neighbourhoods that also overlays social infrastructure costs and benefits into urban plans.

## **Do Neighbourhoods Matter for Children and Youth?**

The question of whether neighbourhoods matter for children and youth is hotly contested.

Two discourses provide critical insights into this question: neighbourhood effects and child and youth resilience. While not necessarily distinct or separate in nature, each offers insights into the scope, scale, and effect of the neighbourhood.

Three major themes cut across much of the research on how neighbourhoods impact child and youth development: social capital, resources and networks, and methodological and evaluation approaches. Research on neighbourhood effects typically suggests a correlation between the socioeconomic context of the neighbourhood and the predicted life chances, outcomes, and behaviours of the children and youth who live there.<sup>12</sup> The strength of this connection has been demonstrated most clearly in regards to educational outcomes and attainment statistics (Levin, 1995; Wen, Browning, & Cagney, 2003). A recent research project by Hayward and Rootman (2001) that investigated the health outcomes of people living in poverty identified a series of debilitating possible outcomes for children living in low-income families, including greater probability of vision, hearing, speech, and mobility impairments (Ross, Roberts, & Scott, 2000, as quoted in Hayward & Rootman, 2001). Such negative effects are not limited to children; adults in these low-income households are more likely to report their health as poor or fair than adults in middle- or high-income families. They are more likely to have vision, hearing, speech, mobility, and cognition problems or to suffer from chronic conditions (e.g., asthma, high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, and the effects of stroke) than adults earning higher incomes.

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<sup>12</sup> One of the challenges of research in this area is that income is not the only predictor of future outcome and the strength of its impact is difficult to determine. For instance, research indicates that a plethora of other forces affect success, including family structure, drug use, and mental health challenges. These experiences cut across all income levels.

Applying a slightly nuanced frame, resilience researchers have examined how specific children and youth possess intrinsic adaptive qualities that support them to overcome adversity.<sup>13</sup>

### **Problematizing Neighbourhood Effects**

Over time, significant academic focus has been placed on the *neighbourhood effect*: that is, whether where a child or youth lives predicts certain types of behaviours, outcomes, or attributes. Historically, the tendency in this research has been to examine quantitatively how socioeconomic data affects characteristics such as level of educational attainment achieved, test scores and long-term health outcomes, and employment security. One of the most comprehensive reviews of research on the topic came from Tama Leventhal and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (2000), who examined key methodological issues, the causal links between socioeconomic status (SES) and outcomes, and potential approaches or pathways to influencing development. Building on the theoretical work of Wilson (1987), Massey and Denton (Denton & Massey, 1993; Massey, 1991, 1995), and Bronfenbrenner (1979), Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn provided one of the most intriguing explorations into the question of whether neighbourhoods matter to children and youth. The following are some of the key themes highlighted in their review:

- Research consistently indicates that high-SES neighbours positively influence school readiness and achievement outcomes.

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<sup>13</sup> The literatures on neighbourhood effect and resilience are not entirely disparate—each conceptualizes and rationalizes how some children and youth transition out of poverty differently and places a different theoretical emphasis on the importance of structure or agency in determining life outcomes.

- Research, although not as strong, indicates an adverse effect of low-SES neighbours on children's and adolescents' mental health and behavioural problems.
- Research indicates a relationship between neighbourhood SES and fertility outcomes. For example, unemployment rates can be associated with teenage sexuality and childbearing.
- Quality and type of resource in the neighbourhood can influence child and adolescent outcomes.

Another seminal book in the field (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997) examined issues such as the influence of neighbourhood on children's development, through their testing of mediational models of neighbourhood effects, adolescent achievement, deviance, and policy implications. Most helpfully, in the introduction, Gephart and Brooks-Gunn (1997) provided a conceptual model that

. . . considers as exogenous the macro structures and processes that produce neighbourhoods of disadvantage, including housing discrimination, racism, migration, and contingent preferences, and institutional practices and policies. At the neighbourhood and community levels, our framework specifies structural and sociodemographic characteristics, including formal opportunities and constraints, dangers, ethnicity, and persistent poverty, as the attributes of neighbourhoods that may vary with the concentration of poverty and resource deprivation that may affect developmental outcomes. (p. xvi)

**Role of resilience.** When do neighbourhoods matter, in determining the life outcomes of children and youth? Are there internal or external factors or forces that mediate the effects of neighbourhood on child and youth development? While not entirely distinct from research on neighbourhood effects, resilience research has become increasingly popular as a way of rationalizing why some children and youth from poor, at-risk, or challenged neighbourhoods or homes succeed, while others do not. Although contested as a fad research area (akin to

research on social capital and social innovation), resilience research may provide unique insights into how to build capacities and promote strengths and positive attributes in youth and the caring systems that surround them in low-income neighbourhoods.

Simply defined, resilience is the capacity of an individual to cope with stress, trauma, and adversity. It is a positive behavioural adaptation. Resilience scholar Michael Ungar (2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007) has suggested that resilience can be understood in two ways: one, as the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being; and two, their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways. Most helpful in Ungar's conceptualization of resilience is his demonstration of the variety of at-risk youth's multiple realities and their varied concomitant approaches to coping with adversity.

Scholars debate whether resilience applies to individuals only or also to neighbourhoods and communities, and whether it should be conceptualized from a biomedical or a constructionist framework. Pertinent examples of resilience research focus on whether resilience can be built through program or process (Brown, 2004), and how planning paradigms might contribute to building resilience in neighbourhoods or communities (Goldstein, 2009; Holling, 1986). Research in this field is growing. While resilience is not the focus of this review, it offers an interesting way of exploring questions of neighbourhood effects and place-based poverty reduction models that target children and youth. (See Appendix B for a sample of scholarly articles that investigate the concept of resilience as it relates to child development or neighbourhoods.)

## **Problematizing Social Capital**

Fostering social capital in low-income neighbourhoods is said to have positive effects. Lupton's (2003) analysis of 12 disadvantaged areas in the UK typifies elements of this academic discourse. Her focus included transferring power to citizens, addressing worklessness, and creating more collaborative relationships between residents and professionals. Bridge (2001, 2006), reinterpreting Bourdieu (2001), contributed to this debate by examining the role of institutions (such as schools) in reproducing cultural capital in gentrified neighbourhoods. In particular, he investigated the relevance of habitus as it affects class reproduction, particularly the reproduction of a new middle class. Unfortunately, much of this discourse fails to engage in competing or divergent explanations of participation, social capital, or social cohesion (Cohen, 1999; Portes, 2000; Putnam, 2000). The concept of social capital is situated amidst a broader discourse of the role of the state only in theoretical texts, as are patterns of civic engagement across different spatially bound areas (Maloney, Smith, & Stoker, 2001; Portney & Berry, 2001; Warren, 2001). However, some researchers note, government discourse is transitioning towards partnership or processes of local governance and accountability (Diamond, Liddle, Southern, & Townsend, 2007).

A dominant, hegemonic assumption in this discourse is that networks would be stronger, reciprocities of trust more evident, and a more vibrant social fabric would result, if all the supposed problems of the 'hood—crime, drugs, and unemployment—dissipated. Research is needed to challenge this assumption; social capital needs to be more broadly conceptualized (and researched) than this—for example, existing networks need to be examined before, during, and after gentrification. (Please see Appendix C for a further definition of this concept).

Throughout much of this research runs the implicit hypothesis that more social capital and greater social inclusion exist in mixed-income neighbourhoods, and that the existence of social capital bridges different forms of civic engagement (Wakefield, Elliott, & Cole, 2007); but little concrete knowledge demonstrates this. The dominant assumption is that in low-income neighbourhoods a torn and deteriorating social fabric persists, and that these neighbourhoods have lacked the networks, skills, and knowledge to make the necessary local-level repairs.

A challenge associated with this analytic approach is its inextricable intertwining of dualisms and binary ways of thinking, such as included/excluded or insider/outsider (Eberle & Serge, 2007). Binary thinking creates both methodological and epistemological obstacles, limiting the ways through which the stereotypically excluded might find sources of power and connection. Although I do not want to deny the significance of economic or material exclusion, in some instances inhabitants might not perceive themselves as excluded or marginalized, and, as hooks (2003) has suggested, may even take strength and power from that marginalization. Some definitions of social inclusion conceptualize broad conceptions of full participation, but these approaches typically ignore the possibility of low-income neighbourhood inhabitants making conscious choices not to participate—to remain silent, or to participate through subversion or acts of incivility.

Challenging the formulaic binary of insider/outsider, Kohn (2003) has suggested that in certain radical spaces, new encounters can be forged between insider and outsider. These sites, as she contends, can foster “oppositional practices by sheltering hegemonic ideas and identities. . . . Certain sites hold the promise of mediating individuals’ identification with an oppositional political project” ( p. 129). The “Occupy Wall Street” demonstrations of fall

2011 are a case in point: people who feel excluded may gain a sense of inclusion through protest and demonstration. Kohn's commentary forces me to consider where such sites practically exist in neighbourhood contexts, but also how these sites need to be sought out and cultivated, methodologically speaking.

An interesting critique of the traditional dualistic approach to insider/outsider and included/excluded was offered by Fraser, Kick, and William (2002), who challenged dominant constructions of *local* and *expert* and in so doing offered the possibility of a new epistemological paradigm, allowing people who have traditionally been marginalized to feel more empowered and included.

The dominant discursive attention to the positive norms of generating social capital, and the literature's propensity to describe rather than critique, produce ambivalence and ambiguity. The dominant discourse focuses on socially beneficial forms and norms of participation while concurrently ignoring the role of social conflict—and often perceives such conflict as incivility, lawlessness, criminal behaviour, or immorality.<sup>14</sup> Social conflict, broadly, refers to actions of struggle through contestation, resistance, and nonconformity. These forms of civic participation demand further inquiry and analysis that would contextualize them as political actions and offer a different means to recognize the dialectical ways through which such conflict becomes embedded in individual and neighbourhood identities. Robinson (2001) articulated this view, asking: “What is the connection between space and collective action and to what extent do notions of space and location couple with other concepts, such as agency and identity, to facilitate and mobilize grass-roots collective action?” (p. 81).

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<sup>14</sup> The link between these descriptors and youth is well documented under the topic of “moral panic” (Adorjan, 2011; Cohen, 2002; Kraack & Kenway, 2001; Ungar, 2002; Welch et al., 2002).

Watt (2006) identified many discursive strands in narratives of neighbourhood decline, but what are the narratives of neighbourhood change and youth involvement and participation? How do they either subvert dominant behaviours and patterns, or participate in more socially accepted ways, and how are these expressed both literally and symbolically?

**Resources and networks.** Internally existing social ties and the ways through which they become accessed inform child and youth development and availability to resources and supports. As many authors have articulated, one of the critical factors affecting the well-being of low-income urban youth is the ability to access resources more commonly accessible by the middle class. Such resources include employment and educational supports, health care, and appropriate legal and personal advocates. Wilson's (1996) collective socialization model and Coleman's (1988) social capital theory—as Pebley and Sastry (2003) have suggested—offer insights into how neighbourhood social interaction may be important for children and youth. Research that investigates the role of resources and networks in low-income neighbourhoods is theoretically connected to research focusing on social capital. As such, it focuses on resources and networks as potential mediators to persistent poverty; however, how resources and networks have been conceptualized and operationalized is ambiguous and results have been inconclusive.

Typically, research in this area focuses on how institutional supports such as social programs, caring adults, and other diverse interpersonal networks matter and influence child outcomes. In a recent article, Calvó-Armengol, Patacchini, and Zenou (2009) developed a conceptual framework that correlates educational success not only with income but also with parental supports and peer network influences. Also typifying this kind of research, a recent qualitative study by Melissa S. Abelev (2009) highlighted how a combination of internal and

external factors and supports contributed to the success and upward social mobility of 48 African-American adults who as children had been considered at risk. Her study examined how the environments of family, school, and community could serve as supports to disadvantaged children and youth. She suggested that internal resources such as social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose also contributed to a child's or young person's capacity to navigate risk and disadvantage. Helpfully, she catalogued previous research examining the positive characteristics of family, school, and home. She identified certain characteristics that she saw as enabling social mobility and positive development in at-risk children and youth. These included strong parent-child relationships, positive parental expectations of a child's future, high expectations from schools, an appropriately challenging curriculum, a school that is interconnected with the community, and a variety of community services and extracurricular activities. Three types of material resources—the presence of an adult mentor, financial assistance, and a customized education plan—could impact youth in positive ways (Abelev, 2009).

Research investigating how the concept of habitus might mitigate transitioning out of poverty through educational supports, has challenged traditional assumptions about networks and resources. Paul Willis' 1981 study of Hammertown boys is a formative example, as is much of Dianne Reay's (1998, 2001, 2004) research exploring familial and institutional habitus in the accessing of postsecondary education.

More broadly, other research focusing on resources and networks investigates the type, duration, and quality of networks and resources found in low-income neighbourhoods. Is access to resources really affected? In an innovative qualitative study, Small, Jacobs, and Massengill (2008) applied social isolation theory and deinstitutionalization theory to

determine whether poverty affected the organizational ties and access to resources provided by child care centres. Their research indicated that poverty did not prevent such access, suggesting that organizational ties might be one reason for inconclusive results in the literature on neighbourhood effects.

Other examples of more ethnographic research, like that from Sanchez-Jankowski (2008), has suggested that neighbourhood type produces different forms of social organization. For example, informally organized and counterhegemonic structures and institutions can mitigate danger and produce different types and forms of neighbourhood change. Examining neighbourhood institutions such as hair salons, neighbourhood gangs, mom-and-pop stores, and housing projects, Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) suggested:

All neighbourhood institutions embody, teach, and differentially reinforce local value orientations and social identities, their concomitant activity scripts, and social engagement etiquette. Thus, institutions in certain social contexts, including poor neighbourhoods, are not necessarily institutions in others. (p. 19)

As Harwood (2007) contended, government efforts to support capacity often serve to regulate and limit certain neighbourhood actors, and may jeopardize the geography of opportunity. Ethnographic research allows questions of which resources matter most to residents to surface, and opens the door to investigating other forms of social organization.

**Educational attainment.** In recent years, the issue of poverty's effects on children's and youth's educational outcomes and success has received increased public attention (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2008; Gaskell & Levin, 2010; Levin, Gaskell, & Pollock, 2007). Public health researchers have contributed to this discussion, providing a rationale for education as a critical social lever, one that determines long-term health and well-being (Ferguson, Boviard, & Mueller, 2007; Zorn & Noga, 2004).

As Flessa (2007) has suggested, the question is not whether people living in poverty experience reduced educational outcomes, but rather to what extent they experience reduced educational outcomes as a result of the barriers they encounter:

The literature on poverty and schooling is expansive yet can reasonably be understood as an attempt to grapple with the same core questions from different perspectives. Where does the inequality in educational outcomes (however measured) associated with children affected by poverty originate and, correspondingly, what can be done about it? . . . The weight of the literature in this area examines how large those difference are, what influences best explain the gap between poor students and other students, and what reforms shrink the gap. (p. 2)

Traditionally, schools in Canada have not acknowledged the income differences of students entering public classrooms (Ferguson, 2011). Professional bodies and researchers in Canada have begun to identify the need to support low-income students differently, recognizing that school might not be a great equalizer and that these students face a plethora of unique barriers and challenges. However, the fallacy of schools as great equalizers has prevailed longer and more consistently in Canada than in the United States: parents and educators in the United States began experimenting much earlier with innovations in educational success through efforts such as charter schools and other unique philanthropic ventures (Fine, 1991; Gatto, 2005).<sup>15</sup>

A brief review of the literature identifies several challenges to educational attainment, including the way the field of education has conceptualized poverty; a reliance on deficit frameworks by researchers describing the challenges (Flessa, 2007); and the construction and framing of poor students as at-risk or struggling (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007).

Numerous researchers have applied a Bourdieusian frame in an effort to suggest why schools

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<sup>15</sup> There are countless examples of attempts at educational reforms in the United States. The charter school movement is a good example, although highly controversial. Its supporters identify charter schools as responding more effectively to community needs. For a more critical view on their role in promoting equity, see Wells, 2002.

and systems of education do not allow for low-income students to achieve in the same ways as their middle-income peers (Biddle, 2001; Bridge, 2001; Raffo et al., 2006). Another strand of literature in this field (Brooks-Gunn, Sidle Fuligni, & Berlin, 2003; Halpern, 1999; Love et al., 2005; Raphael, 2003, 2007) has identified effective actions and interventions to improve the educational outcomes of the poor. There is evidence, although contested, to suggest that the time of intervention as well as the intensity and duration of the support makes a difference in how well a child or youth performs at school.

### **Methodological Challenges**

One of the challenges in this research is how methodology informs findings: research often investigates neighbourhood effects through ethnography, identity, and social processes, or through complicated mathematical measures. However, each performed in isolation limits a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay of neighbourhoods. According to Korbin and Coulton (2000), “neighbourhood influences on children and families have been approached through aggregate statistical analyses, multilevel regression models, and ethnographic studies. All of the approaches have strengths and weaknesses. Only occasionally have these approaches been combined” (p. 66). According to epidemiology researcher J. Michael Oakes (2004),

The resurgence of interest in the effect of neighbourhood contexts on health outcomes, motivated by advances in social epidemiology, multilevel theories, and sophisticated models, too often fails to confront the enormous methodological problems associated with causal inference. (p. 1929)

Most interesting in the study by Oakes is the distinction he makes: social scientists focus entirely on context effects due solely to social interactions, whereas social epidemiologists like himself also attend to the effects of socially mediated integral variables.

George Galster (2003) provided potential new approaches for statistical researchers interested in neighbourhood impacts on individual behaviours. He pointed out several challenges in his review of the literature, including challenges of operationalizing neighbourhood processes; that is, nonlinear relationships between behaviour and outcomes and the selection bias problem. According to Galster (2003), “The issues of how neighbourhood social processes should be measured remains a complex, unresolved one” (p. 909). From his research, neighbourhood effects may not be linear, as previously considered; however, few extant empirical studies exist to test nonlinear relationships between conditions and outcomes for children and youth.

Although a promising approach, absent from much of the traditional research into neighbourhood effects on children and youth are examples of how youth perceive the neighbourhood and its effects. A frame of geography of children and youth could provide innovative examples of how to incorporate youth perspectives and experiences into traditional knowledge and understandings of the neighbourhood. The children’s perspective is increasingly important:

Changes in the social representations of children [and youth] as empowered and competent and the increase in recognizing children’s rights have generated an upsurge in policy and practice initiatives in education, health and other services that place children’s views to the fore. (Sime, 2008, p. 64)

Although ethical and methodological challenges exist in working with youth in poverty (Sime, 2008), their insights into how they conceptualize poverty, its effects and the language they use to describe socioeconomic differences and define their neighbourhood (Sutton, 2009; Weinger, 1998, 2000) offer a potentially radical lens from which to incorporate youth voice and enact more systematic social change.

**Bad 'hood: Dirty/sick/poor kids.** One of the most problematic currents throughout the literature is the tendency to explore low-income neighbourhoods and their residents from a needs perspective rather than a strengths-based one. The strengths-based approach views the assets in a neighbourhood instead of its inadequate infrastructure, resources, and supports; its deficits, problems.<sup>16</sup> A strengths-based approach views children as competent, capable, and whole. This alternative framing, with roots in appreciative inquiry, has been adopted in community development circles and by counsellors and psychologists working with individuals and groups who frequently experience persistent stigmatization, feelings of powerlessness, and systematic exclusion from mainstream supports (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; McKnight & Block, 2010).

Needs-based practitioners and academics construct children, youth, and the neighbourhoods they live in as the sum of many negative attributes and behaviours, and subsequently conceptualize them as dirty, sick, and poor. These uniform, homogeneous descriptions limit more comprehensive understandings of what really happens in these places (Conner, 2008). Concomitant with this tendency to construct neighbourhoods from a deficit framework is the related tendency to pathologize the young urban poor. This argument is most clearly articulated by critical scholar Henry Giroux (2003, 2006), writing about an “abandoned generation” whose civic rights as citizens have become ignored and suppressed, replaced by a fear-based state where consumerism and the adulation of individualism reign supreme.

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that there are no challenges or complex social problems to be addressed in these neighbourhoods; literacy rates may be lower, health outcomes poorer, and crime rates higher (Mather & Rivers, 2006).

**Role of race and gender.** Absent from much of the research on neighbourhood effects is any detailed analysis of the complex and myriad ways in which race and gender comingle with spatialized poverty and its effects. Traditionally, assumptions are made that those who experience poverty or affluence experience similar educational outcomes. However, more recent research suggests the need to attend to the nuanced ways through which race and gender may differentially inform both outcome and identity. For example, neighbourhoods that are stigmatized or segregated because of income may also, although not always, be stigmatized or segregated by race or gender. This is to say that what might be a source of marginalization for some may also be a source of strength and opportunity for others, and that traditionally, researchers did not pay enough attention to the unique ways these identity markers influence outcome—particularly educational outcomes. The following are select examples of studies that investigated the roles of race and gender on the educational outcomes of those living in income-segregated neighbourhoods.

In his recent meta-analysis of concentrated capital, schooling, race, and outcomes, Odis Johnson Jr. (2008) indicated that “Conceptualizations of endogenous capital are complicated by race in both racially segregated and integrated environments” (p. 87). His research demonstrated that the presence of high-SES neighbours was positively related to education outcomes, even when controlling for variation in the study quality. However, when examining these effects according to race and gender, there were clear benefit gaps (Johnson, 2008). Focusing on the narratives of youth from different minority groups, Davidson (1996) shone a light onto the way that youth perceived race and gender and indicated that there were unique differences in the educational achievement across minority groups.

Kling, Liebman, and Katz (2007) examined the life trajectories and outcomes of female-headed families who accepted the Moving to Opportunity<sup>17</sup> program's housing voucher and those who chose to remain in high-poverty public housing projects. Their analysis found no significant outcome on adult self-sufficiency or physical health, but found substantial mental health benefits for those who accepted the voucher. Providing empirical evidence for this question has been problematic:

It is hard to judge from theory alone whether the externalities from having neighbors of higher socioeconomic status are predominantly beneficial (from social connections, positive role models, reduced exposure to violence, and more community resources), inconsequential (only family influences, genetic endowments, individual human capital investments and the broader non-neighbourhood social environment matter), or adverse (from competition with advantaged peers and discrimination). (Kling et al., 2007, p. 84)

What makes this study particularly interesting was the straight-line connection it drew between housing stock and neighbourhood poverty, life outcomes, and success. Also of interest were the ways in which estimates differed for male and female youth. The research indicated major positive effects on mental health and risky behaviour for female youth, and major negative effects on physical health and risky behaviour for male youth. Examining anxiety and depression symptoms and behaviour such as marijuana, alcohol, and drug use, this highly quantitative research shed interesting light onto how different genders experienced and were impacted by the neighbourhood environment.

Another interesting analysis can be found in a recent study by Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle, & Williams (2008), who advocated for a consideration of a policy-relevant analysis of geographic and racial/ethnic disparities in child health. Using an advocacy lens, this research suggested the need to “move beyond conventional health care

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<sup>17</sup> This is an American program.

approaches to consider policies to improve access to opportunity-rich neighbourhoods through enhanced housing mobility, and to increase the opportunities for healthy living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods” (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2008, p. 321). Most helpful in this analysis was the definition it provided of “opportunity neighbourhoods” as sites that would support healthy development. These authors suggested people- and place-based policy solutions for correcting limited access to opportunity neighbourhoods faced by Black, Latino, and other racial minorities.

As these examples indicate, only within the last 20 years are scholars beginning to explore how elements of identity such as race, ethnocultural background, and gender may affect education outcomes and attributes (Bennett, 2006; Lopez Turley, 2003). More research is needed to understand better the complex interplay and dynamic between neighbourhood, income, race, gender, and education outcomes.

I now move from this discussion of neighbourhood effects to consider evaluation frameworks and approaches for place-based poverty reductions programs, attending in particular to those that target youth.

### **Place-Based Poverty Reduction: Shifting Context**

The following section discusses two specific themes: the role and place of human service provision within spatialized poverty; and the types of existing evaluation frameworks and models, who they serve, and what roles youth might play as evaluators and learners, also within the context of spatialized poverty.

### **What Is Place-Based Poverty Reduction?**

Examples of place-based poverty reduction models and programs can be found in multiple Canadian contexts (both rural and urban). Scholarship is provided from organizational

leaders like the Caledon Institute for Social Policy (Torjman, 2007; Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003a, 2003b, 2004); Tamarack Foundation for Community Engagement (Action for Neighbourhood Change, n.d.); and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (The Canadian CED Network, n.d.), mobilizing partners and providing insights into how to develop and implement place-based poverty reduction strategies (Chamberlain, 2008; Gamble, 2010). Articulating an emergence of place-based approaches, Neil Bradford (2004, 2005, 2007) identified two distinct policy frameworks supporting place-based poverty reduction efforts including localism and structuralism. In his analysis he provided two unique Canadian case studies—Scarborough Village and Regent Park—that highlighted the challenges and barriers to effective place-based poverty reduction. Bradford identified the risk of targeted policy interventions that leave a patchwork of partially revitalized places or sectoral programs that disregard local needs and narratives. His example suggested that much can be learned from local experiments (although they are challenging), and encouraged scaling and mainstreaming models of place-based programs, services, and planning over time.

Some of the design characteristics of effective place-based responses for poverty reduction have been captured by Chopra (2005), who stated that responses need to do various things, as follows:

- *Recognize complexity.* Responses must serve multiple objectives and/or sectors, and must be integrated within national poverty reduction strategies.
- *Be implemented at the appropriate scale.* The scale of the response must match the scale of the process; often, a multiscale response will be most effective.

- *Acknowledge uncertainty.* In choosing responses, we must understand the limits to our knowledge, and we must expect the unexpected.
- *Be made through an inclusive and participatory process.* Information needs to be available and understandable to a wide range of affected stakeholders; responses need to be designed in an open and transparent fashion.
- *Enhance adaptive capacity.* Resilience is increased if we put in place institutional frameworks that allow and promote the capacity to learn from past responses and adapt accordingly.
- *Establish supporting instrumental freedoms.* Establish legal frameworks.
- *Have mechanisms for implementation.* Where financial resources are not forthcoming, the design of market mechanisms may increase the potential for implementation.
- *Establish implementing and monitoring agencies.* It is vital to establish subsidiary bodies with authority and resources to undertake specific activities, to enhance the implementation of the agreements and ensure continuity, preparation, and follow-up to complex issues.
- *Be coordinated with other responses.* The literature indicates that it is further vital that responses designed for one regime do not necessarily create problems in other regimes.
- *Integrate traditional and scientific knowledge.* Identify opportunities for incorporating traditional and local knowledge in designing responses. (p. 523)

## Placing Services

As policy frameworks target places to reduce poverty, a variety of people-based programs and services need simultaneously to target low-income inhabitants. Distressed neighbourhoods need to become sites of concentrated services that address barriers to access or issues of equity, including services that address basic needs like shelter and food; support the development of income-generating opportunities; and provide employment supports that build assets and capacities.<sup>18</sup> Research into human service provision in low-income neighbourhoods remains somewhat inconclusive. Results are often contradictory—some services may meet actual needs or address the root causes of poverty, while others merely offer grant-making opportunities or tokenistic involvement for those wishing to do good (Allard, 2002, 2004; Dear & Taylor, 1982; Dear & Wolch, 1992; Wolch, 1990).

The terrain of service provision within spatialized poverty is a domain requiring much further empirical study to understand how and why some residents access services and why others do not. As early as 1980, urban geographer Michael J. Dear (1977, 1981) identified a pattern of concentration of service providers in the poorest, most distressed urban neighbourhoods. Many questions remain unanswered as to whether such supports meet the needs of those most vulnerable or marginalized. Residents who live in low-income communities experience different challenges and barriers in accessing services and supports, and also demonstrate varying levels of need for service. For instance, in a study of 130 Albertan families, the working poor demonstrated better health outcomes and ability to access services than those living solely off social assistance (Williamson & Fast, 1998). This reinforces the importance of remembering that the target audience of services is not uniform.

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<sup>18</sup> By *human services* I mean the services, programs, or activities provided to meet the health, welfare, social, education, employment, and housing needs of a group of people.

Similarly, in a recent review of services provided to low-income residents in Toronto, the authors (Hayward & Rootman, 2001) identified several challenges and potential areas requiring further planning and attention, including:

- Most participants reported accessing health, health-related, and community-based services. In fact, many participants used a variety of different services. At the Regent Park and South Riverdale sites, many of the respondents indicated that they needed the social or community-based services to survive.
- An apparently disproportionate number of people reported that they were required to see a doctor on a fairly frequent basis for various health reasons (e.g., diabetes, asthma, chronic pain, heart condition).
- In all of the sites, respondents talked about how the services they used were important in helping them cope with day-to-day life.
- Some respondents at all sites felt that they were treated poorly because of their income status, the way they looked, their race, or the neighbourhoods in which they lived.
- Accessibility was also an important issue for participants when seeking services. Many commented on the problem of waiting. A lack of transportation, or inadequate money to cover transportation costs, was also reported as an inhibiting factor in accessing services.
- Recommendations could be grouped into two categories: systemic change versus Band-Aid improvements. (pp. 2–4)

Hayward and Rootman's (2001) study, focusing on the perspective of low-income service users or clients, challenged traditional, dominant assumptions about the capacities of

human services to address the needs of low-income residents in a supportive and meaningful way. For example, people living in such contexts are often questioned about their rationale for staying; and service providers doubt or lack information on the potential barriers that prevent such individuals from getting a job or getting an education and moving on. Such assumptions fail to acknowledge the complexities sometimes associated with living below the poverty line, especially amidst concentrated poverty. As the study demonstrated, barriers can sometimes be significantly entrenched and the attitudes of service provider can do more harm to residents/clients than good.

Economic restructuring in the late 1990s affected not only the strength and breadth of a social safety net but also when the net was to appear, who it was meant to support, and how long it was to be around for. There are no guarantees that the state will support low-income habitants in the same ways as it did in the postwar era, and this is especially apparent in urban contexts (Sassen, 1990). Geographers like Dan Trudeau (2008a, 2008b) have begun to examine the scope of influence exercised by nonprofits amidst welfare restructuring in certain urban neighbourhoods. Writing from an American perspective, Partridge and Rickman (2006) acknowledged that welfare restructuring and economic growth happened simultaneously:

The near-synchronicity of the two events makes it difficult to disentangle their relative effects on welfare caseloads or poverty reduction using national data. Government funding streams and targeted programs to those service providers serving residents living in spatialized poverty are inconsistent and lack integration: this raises questions as to how to support these neighbourhoods in a more holistic, sustained way. In the absence of an overarching place-based policy framework, nonprofits and the voluntary sector have had to get creative about how to support the needs of the poorest citizens in the poorest places and this can often cause tensions and challenges with other demographic groups and stakeholders. (p. 69)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Currently, there are no per capita studies of health or social services provision by neighbourhood in Canada. Similarly, there are no benchmarks of what appropriate levels or concentrations of service should look

The distinctiveness and capacity of services and programs to influence or alter the urban landscape so as to alleviate poverty in particular places remains contentious, contested, and largely unknown—and more poignantly, questions remain as to whether the services provided really reach those who need them most (Joassart-Marcelli & Wolch, 2003).

### **From the State to Social Innovation**

Another dynamic at play in low-income neighbourhoods is the shift from standardized state- or church-sanctioned services to various other types of place-based supports, including nonprofit collaborations, entrepreneurial or evangelist visionaries, grass-root activists, and socially innovative entities (Crampton, Dowell, & Woodward, 2001). Torjman (2007) provided a slightly different typography of potential actors and roles in place-based poverty reduction efforts. From Torjman's social innovation perspective, power is not the sole dominion of government; other actors also have meaningful roles to play. Municipal governments (what Torjman calls Exemplars) can guide regional action; individuals, governments, and grant-makers (Investors, for Torjman) can support a strong social economy; and organizations such as neighbourhood groups and community organizations can support and facilitate local change. According to Torjman and Leviten-Reid (2003b),

Voluntary action by citizens and organizations was alive and well long before government programs. What *is* new is the methodology that appears to be emerging at the local level—which is far more strategic than before. Funders, policy makers, and program designers have been exploring a range of approaches to revitalizing distressed neighbourhoods and to tackling other complex problems, such as unemployment and poverty. This new generation of efforts is known in the field as *comprehensive community initiatives*. (p. 1)

Torjman and Leviten-Reid (2003b) articulated ways that the innovation process can be managed in such initiatives, including: creating a vision, identifying assets, framing

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like. There have recently been studies that look at limits to new social service development in specific neighbourhoods. See Stanley, Filion, & Neeley (2005).

opportunities and challenges, developing an action plan, mobilizing for implementation, taking action, and monitoring and assessing performance. For them, as Canadian social policy researchers, new directions exist for poverty reduction along a more localized and community-oriented front, including: the benefit of the triple bottom line (people, profit, and planet), community-based regionalism, workforce intermediaries, opportunities to access capital, and how to build an entrepreneurial social infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

Power and knowledge in these contexts become highly diffuse and fragmented, leaving current planning frameworks to struggle with how to capture a sense of who needs what and how best to deliver services. These analyses of how social innovation might support change differently from governments or government services in isolation challenges planners to think about what their role might be, what qualifies as knowledge, and how to prioritize needs.

### **Child and Youth Development and Place-Based Poverty Reduction**

Several human service programs target children and youth<sup>21</sup> living in poverty, illustrating the increasingly apparent need to support low-income children and youth to gain supports and develop their capacity to attain goals, including their desired education. The type and range of interventions vary, including biomedical interventions for mothers and newborns and academic and social interventions that target entire populations of neighbourhood children and youth.

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<sup>20</sup> Torjman and Leviten-Reid (2003b) provided examples of these new opportunities and an enabling culture that promotes a different approach to place-based poverty reduction. They cited examples such as the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition, the Community Economic Technical Assistance Program, Toronto's Learning Enrichment Foundation, Community Learning Networks, and the emergence of an "innovation" economy.

<sup>21</sup> Children and youth are categorized by age. For children, the current policy focus in Ontario is minus 9 months to 5 years of age; youth are typically high-school-aged.

Many current program models and designs are informed by theories of prevention, health promotion, healthy brain and cognitive development, and the social determinants of health. Two distinct examples of programs and supports for child and youth development have emerged: government-sponsored services and nonprofit or third-sector-driven supports. These supports and services emphasize mitigating risk, strengthening resources and networks, and providing information.

In Ontario, government-sponsored services include early learning supports such as the Best Start program, Early Years Centres, and all-day kindergarten programs that target lower socioeconomic populations. Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion is partnering with various service providers to offer after-school programs in a variety of priority neighbourhoods. Municipally, inner-city school models and urban priority schools programs exist, such as projects like the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Inner-City Model School Initiative, which evaluates and identifies best practices and education trends in seven of the city's most challenged inner-city neighbourhoods. These programs represent only a small fraction of the ways governments have intervened through policies and targeted funding in distressed urban neighbourhoods or those with lower than average socioeconomic status.

Examples of third-sector programs targeting child and youth development are also growing in number. The Big Picture, an American charter school, is a Bill Gates-funded initiative that aims to increase educational outcomes of America's poorest students in specific neighbourhoods. Teach for America, a nonprofit program, is heralded by some as a best practice (Crutchfield & McLeod Grant, 2008) that aims to end educational inequity. Other examples of American comprehensive community initiatives include the Harlem

Children's Zone, which has received critical acclaim for improving the life outcomes of Harlem's children and youth, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections program. In the Canadian context, fewer third-sector programs exist; the Pathways to Education program may be the only example. Given this lack of programs, more research and study are needed to examine what makes child and youth development programs successful in Canadian low-income neighbourhoods.

Promising practices for meeting the multiple needs of low-income families living in poverty in the United States have been identified by Austin and Lemon (2006). In identifying important dimensions of family-strengthening programs (programs that aim to improve health and educational outcomes), the authors identified four key themes:

- Low-income families living in high-poverty neighbourhoods face multifaceted challenges.
- These multifaceted issues can be addressed by innovative strategies such as integrated family and neighbourhood strengthening practices.
- Organizational structures, challenges, and the success of different initiatives (e.g., the Harlem Children's Zone) all provide insights into the nature of integrated family and neighbourhood approaches.
- A framework for the design of an integrated family and neighbourhood program includes the following features:
  - *internal processes* that reformulate service models, organizational strategies, and responsive organizational structures;
  - *neighbourhood processes* that target the neighbourhood and the scope of the service, and assess neighbourhood characteristics; and

- *external processes* that track structured and strategic partnerships, community buy-in, community leadership development, and outputs and outcomes.

Austin and Lemon's (2006) research is one of few examples identifying how to develop and strengthen child and youth programs or whole family programs that might leverage broader neighbourhood development. As they suggest, for truly effective place-based poverty reduction, family-strengthening programs must operate in an integrated fashion with earnings and asset development programs as well as neighbourhood-strengthening programs, so that all actors in a neighbourhood—individuals, families, and the neighbourhood as a whole—are simultaneously supported, attended to, and cared for. Building child and youth development does not necessarily enhance and strengthen neighbourhoods. Programs such as the ones listed aim to increase low-income youth's educational attainment, increase their ability to develop networks, and provide them with sufficient financial supports to attain goals. However, the programs also raise questions about effective and inclusive evaluation and measurement strategies, at both scales: individual and neighbourhood.

## **Section 5:**

### **Gaps, Future Directions, and Empirical Opportunities**

*Good things start with a conversation. So do good communities . . . Stories provide an opportunity to share learning in creative and interesting ways. We remember them more vividly than we do theories or philosophies.*

—Born, 2008, pp. 1, 112

As the third sector attempts to establish the impact of place-based poverty reduction programs, it must demonstrate these programs' effectiveness to multiple audiences including governments, grant-makers, and the citizens the programs serve. Appropriate evaluation approaches are innumerable—theory-of-change evaluation is but one popular example of

many. Other evaluation approaches to comprehensive community initiatives have included Vibrant Communities (n.d.) and Action for Neighbourhood Change (n.d.). Inadequate attention has been paid to how to evaluate comprehensive child and youth development programs in low-income neighbourhoods. One of the few academics exploring this question is Lisbeth B. Schorr (2010), the Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy at Harvard University. Schorr has written extensively on what works; for example:

To do better for these populations and reduce disparities, we cannot simply rely on spreading what has been shown to work in the past. Rather we must analyze past successes—and failures—so that we might innovate, combine formerly separate interventions, and generate new hypotheses that will generate improved outcomes and reduced disparities in the future. (Schorr, 2010, p. 1)

Schorr (2010) has critiqued traditional evaluation paradigms. She has suggested that if government agencies and grant-makers support only those interventions that are shown to be effective by experimental methods, good programs not based on this approach may be lost. Evaluating what works with youth in neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty remains problematic for several reasons. Four main challenges to effectively evaluating place-based poverty reduction programs targeting children and youth are:

1. Data and knowledge are not synonymous.
2. Outcomes and impacts are dependent on context and mechanism; this is problematic for place-based interventions.
3. Value is contested.
4. Youth voice, experience, and expertise traditionally become marginalized.

### **Data and Knowledge Are Not Synonymous**

Alana Conner Snibbe (2006) presented a compelling case outlining why nonprofits are drowning in data: nonprofits, she said, feel compelled to make data-driven decisions and to collect reams of data that are not only useless but also misleading. They are driven by

questions about accountability, inhibited by grantees' jargonistic language, and hampered by lack of consistency in evaluation frameworks: "Boards and funders don't misuse evaluation because they are dumb or lazy, or even because they are ornery. Instead, their misuses and abuses reflect the fact that good evaluation is extremely difficult" (Snibbe, 2006, p. 40). Similarly, nonprofits show a tendency towards formative evaluation whereas funders want to know what their support caused.

Snibbe's (2006) compelling narrative challenges traditional assumptions of how to evaluate. It raises important questions about the relevancy of data collection, and the potential to share evaluation responsibilities among all involved. This potential is an appealing one, as it would require different stakeholders and groups to interpret and understand the program model and forms of data from each individual's perspective—which might in turn build greater, more diverse, knowledge about the program itself. Such a shift might allow organizations to move from thinking about data to thinking about knowledge sharing, and, more broadly, learning.

### **Outcomes and Impacts Are Dependent on Context and Mechanism**

I find Pawson and Tilley's (1997) *realistic evaluation* the most cogent and applicable of the frameworks and approaches I have researched. Realistic evaluation relies on the formula that context plus mechanism equals outcome. This formula seems easy to understand and highly useable for social service programs. However, I remain uncertain about the applicability of the model when evaluating the effectiveness of a program across different contexts or neighbourhoods. What qualifies as context and what qualifies as mechanism require further consideration, when evaluating what works across neighbourhoods in place-based poverty reduction programs.

## **Value Is Contested**

The question of value has not been sufficiently understood within current evaluation literatures. Some authors approach the question of value from a perspective of wanting to provide lessons to help people develop and improve more impactful and valuable nonprofits. However, philosophical questions as to the nature of value and how it is socially and culturally constructed depending on one's class, race, and status are challenges that have not been sufficiently dealt with in evaluation literatures.

## **Youth's Voice, Experience, and Expertise Are Traditionally Marginalized**

Very few evaluations support youth to become researchers or position them with the capacity to interpret and analyze the effectiveness and impacts of their programs. However, programs and services that do aim to develop the capacity to include and involve youth in this way can build different skills and capacities and also empower youth's voice as meaningful and relevant in the process of evaluation and research. This alternative framework has the potential for further consideration; however, as is often the case, donors and philanthropists need to be willing and open to the implicit value in such approaches, rather than the more traditional reports that focus on the quantitative outcome or return on investment (ROI).

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has highlighted the dominant trends in research about neighbourhood effects specifically as they affect children and youth. The review also summarized some gaps in the current evaluation practices and research for place-based services. Ultimately, where youth fit into evaluation remains ambiguous and contested. As recipients of service, they are primary; however, including them in planning, research, or evaluation has traditionally been overlooked. For programs targeting youth to hold real value and meaning for youth, they

must include a diversity of stakeholder perspectives and must be responsive to the audiences served.

In the following chapter, I propose and discuss the theoretical framework for this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Section 1

*Children organizing for political rights will probably be treated initially with ridicule and derision, and then with misunderstanding and perhaps eventually violence if the experience of the struggle for women's suffrage is any precedent. Undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to be overcome is the adult refusal to acknowledge that children suffer political discrimination and exclusion. Adults do not perceive children as a minority group but as helpless, inexperienced, defenseless young people who need protection. Adult paternalism seeks to protect and if in this process it curtails freedom, truncates potential and destroys civil liberties this is taken to be incidental. The belief in the legitimacy of paternalism justifies and cements the existing power relationships between adults and young people. This attitude must be confronted, challenged, and refuted if young people are to secure their political rights.*

—Bob Franklin, 1986

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding my research. I first outline the central assumptions that inform how I have framed the research and identify my own perspective and thinking about neighbourhoods and care. I then elaborate on three more formalized theories and approaches that underpin the construction of this research problem and proposed methodology: Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1995) situation of youth in complex systems; Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1996, 2001) concept of the right to the city; and the sociogeographical approach typified by Hallway and Valentine (2000).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1995) theoretical approach has provided insight on the structural forces underpinning a youth's life, and has supported more complex understandings of neighbourhood interventions and their potential impacts across different scales. Similarly, Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1996, 2001) right to the city provides theoretical support for an awareness of how low-income people become excluded and marginalized. If low-income adults face exclusion from urban spaces and exclusion from participation in mainstream services and supports, the exclusion faced by a low-income youth who might be

from a minority status or who might identify as queer or transgendered becomes that much more extreme. To reconcile this perceived exclusion, I consider the sociogeography of children and youth as a potential theoretical and methodological approach that challenges traditional hierarchical geographies of disempowerment and exclusion.

### **My Theory of Social Justice: What About Caring?**

Unlike many urban planners, my interest in the field does not stem from an interest in the spatial form of neighbourhoods or cities. On the contrary, my interest is primarily in finding and figuring out how to create, build, and plan caring, hope-filled sites, streets, and neighbourhoods. This is the language of an idealist, I recognize, but it is also how I conceptualize pressing, complex social problems around specific norms—albeit White and middle-class. I care for and about neighbourhoods and social justice. Broadly speaking, as a teacher, social justice activist, and social service program director, I have been most intrigued by what contributes to the creation of equitable, socially just spaces, places, and societies.

Urban theorist Leonie Sandercock (2006) has supported this perspective, boldly claiming:

The work of urban, social, community, environmental, and even land-use planning is fundamentally a work of hope, the work of organizing hope (Baum, 1997). And this work often takes place in the face of despair. . . . Hence I must ask myself, and my profession: are we not missing something important by not talking about this thing at the heart of planning that marks us all as at least closet utopians? (p. 65)

In spite of Sandercock's (2006) call to action and her acknowledgement of the utopian in each planner and planning theorist, investigating concepts of caring and hope is not typical in academic circles. Yet I believe that it is possible to incorporate these concepts into urban planning's dominant paradigm, for example through providing inclusive, youth-focused social services in our most distressed neighbourhoods.

Little planning research incorporates social justice into planning practices or models. In fact, theoretical and methodological frameworks for considering and evaluating the

dominant discursive construction of neighbourhoods, evaluation strategies for place-based poverty reduction programs, and youth are clearly deficient. The “good society” (arguably utopian, given market constraints) demands theoretical reconsideration and empirical testing, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods where youth face barriers to traditional opportunities and different conceptualizations of success. Democracy’s paradox remains its capacity to “deprive minorities of their livelihood, freedom, or self-expression” (Fainstein, 2003, p. 186) while implementing progressive reforms to benefit large members of society. The challenge for planners remains how to shift the balance of power towards enacting real substantive change—from tokenistic talk and empty vessels of participation to transformative, possibly radical, forms of inclusive, socially just change.

### **Articulating Assumptions**

This research begins from three central assumptions. To begin with, neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly important constructs about which to plan preventative strategies and interventions as well as to measure outcomes and impacts of programs and supports. Secondly, the responsibility for addressing the challenges of neighbourhood poverty and at-risk populations remains problematically diffuse, situated throughout the hands of many organizations and stakeholders: nonprofit organizations, public and private planners, a panoply of government services and departments, neighbourhood interest groups, residents themselves, and businesses. Lastly, traditional approaches to examining these types of problems ignore the diversity of lived, grounded experiences and continue to silence marginal and peripheral voices.

Three relevant concepts underpin the theoretical framework for this research:

- Bronfenbrenner’s influence on youth and neighbourhoods

- The right to the city: Considering social justice
- Geography of children and youth

## Section 2:

### Bronfenbrenner's Influence on Youth and Neighbourhoods

A central theoretical pillar of this research comes from the writings, research, and theorizing of the American psychologist and cofounder of the Head Start program, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1995). In his writings over the last 40 years, Bronfenbrenner has suggested that individuals—children, specifically, in his research—operate within many systems. In this bioecological frame, microsystems are children's immediate world; mesosystems (such as family and peer groups) are the networks in which they are immersed in at a particular point in time; and exosystems are the neighbourhoods in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). In a seminal text, Bronfenbrenner (1977) encouraged

. . . a broader approach to research in human development . . . that focuses on the progressive accommodation, throughout the life span, between the growing human organism and the changing environments in which it actually lives and grows. The latter include not only the immediate settings containing the developing person but also the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which these settings are embedded. (p. 513)

This perspective presents a helpful starting point from which to examine how a neighbourhood intervention affects these planes or spheres.

Also helpful in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) analysis are two definitions: the *ecology of human environment*, and the *ecological environment*. He defined the ecology of human environment as the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life span between humans and the changing immediate environment in which they live. He defined the ecological environment topologically, as a nested arrangement of structures in which each is contained within the next.

In his later writings, Bronfenbrenner (1995) went on to explain in greater detail his understanding of how children and youth become embedded in the complex social relationships that evolve between active human organisms and the persons, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment. His examples include description of relevant proximal processes such as parent-child and child-child activities—group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, studying, and athletic activities.

Bronfenbrenner clearly identified how the context in which a child or youth develops affects dramatically the outcomes that the child or youth will experience. His approach has been tested empirically and has helped to produce examples of effective child and youth interventions. Although traditionally applied to early childhood development programs and supports, such as Head Start and other preschool interventions, his research has also been applied to home-based tutoring programs, parent-child interventions, and other models for early intervention. In a Canadian context, Bronfenbrenner's views on the embeddedness of children and youth in a social-ecological context informs much of the recent research by Tilleczek et al. (Tilleczek, Ferguson, Boydell, & Rummens, in press; Tilleczek, Ferguson, Roth Edney, Rummens, & Boydell, 2008; Tilleczek, Ferguson, Roth Edney, Rummens, Boydell, & Mueller, 2008) into early school leavers from Ontario secondary schools.

### **The Right to the City: Considering Social Justice**

With an understanding of the interconnectedness of youth and social systems, I want now to consider the ways youth face multiple barriers and challenges of inclusion in urban environments. For example, youth who are low income or of colour are excluded from urban spaces and become constructed as other and alien. In developing my argument, I highlight French theorist Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1996, 2001) theory of urban justice, which links

right to place and right to participation. Such a framework holds the promise of acknowledging and recognizing the diverse ways through which youth contest, shape, and influence urban landscapes as well as the multiple systems and programs that (dis)service them. I first establish some shifting urban realities affecting all urban dwellers and then articulate my interpretation of Lefebvre.

### **Shifting Urban Realities**

Global trends like postindustrialism, post-Fordism, globalization, and economic restructuring have transformed the material, social, and political landscape of Western urban centres, resulting in disproportionate consequences for the poorest people and places. In this section I view the changing urban landscape through three unique lenses that develop a sound justification for a further consideration of the right to the city: emergent patterns of material inequity; distribution of “bads”<sup>1</sup> that remains unimpeded by traditional institutions; and disenfranchisement of the public, which impacts not only democracy but also the urban sphere.

German theorist Ulrich Beck (1999) has provided a salient theoretical explanation of the ways in which global economic and political restructuring create increased risks for individuals:

The collective patterns of life, progress and controllability, full employment and exploitation of nature that were typical of first modernity have now been undermined by five interlinked processes: globalization, individualization, gender revolution, underemployment and global risks (as ecological crisis and the crash of global financial markets). (p. 2)

This shift towards reflexive modernity, as Beck (1999) called it, can be evidenced through the growing distribution of “bads” that remain unmediated by social safety nets or

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<sup>1</sup> Essentially, “bads” are risks, such as environmental degradation or inadequate nutrition.

political institutions. An unforeseen intensity of risks (such as disinvestment) produced by transnational bodies and corporations now extends beyond previously meaningful national boundaries (Beck, 1999; Hallway, 2006). When one's experience of risk is dislocated from its place of production, the result is causal complexity and the diminished legitimacy or accountability of governments to intervene. Nation states become irrelevant and illegitimate and, as critical geographer Neil Brenner (2000) has identified in reference to Lefebvre, "geographical scales become continuously rearranged and reterritorialized," leaving traditional national organizations impotent to respond to "subnational and supranational scalar hierarchies" (p. 361).

But does this distribution of risk affect those in certain cities or certain neighbourhoods disproportionately? Do neighbourhoods or municipal governments play any structural role, through land use, housing, and social policies, in influencing or reordering social classes, and in equalizing or mediating social conflicts within the core and the city at large (Hutton, 2007)? Arguably, these "bads" extend beyond growing rates of unemployment, unaffordable housing, and homelessness. They also can be experienced vis-à-vis other neighbourhood effects, barriers to success at school, stigmatization of neighbourhoods, and material inequities. This emerging urban reality, particularly the disproportionate and relational experience of "bads" by specific populations in specific urban places, forces questions about mechanisms and processes to affect a new form of urban social justice.

Complicating this emergent picture of urban transformation, public disenfranchisement has grown, broadly across democratic institutions and also deeply amidst planning practices and processes. From an American perspective, Robert Putnam (2000)

presented a salient overview of the generalized withdrawal of individuals from various forms of public life, such as recreational, political, and social groups. His broad hypothesis is that this decline in public involvement presents a cogent threat for public institutions that aspire to reach democratic ideals. Attempts at addressing the so-called democratic deficit seem to have had little, if any, effect. According to American political theorist Benjamin Barber (2003), the current state of affairs can be considered nothing short of a crisis—“the crisis of liberal institutions, the crisis of leadership, the crisis of party government, the crisis of democracy” (p. xxxii). Closely connected to (and arguably in part responsible for) the wide-scale crisis of democracy, governments continue to off-load services to the market, perpetuating patterns of inequity and injustice.

Although writing before the contemporary discourse on the democratic deficit, Lefebvre (2001) saw the role of the market and the state as deeply entrenched: “Once constituted, this State functions as a system. It reproduces itself in reproducing the relations of domination; it has at its disposal an unlimited power to constrain its citizens; it can therefore paralyze all their initiatives” (p. 777). More contemporary neo-Marxist critiques, like those from Colin Crouch (2003), have identified the role of consumerism and the market, through practices like privatization and public-private partnerships, in degrading the basket of accessible, equitable, no-cost, public services: “Once public services are treated in most respects as commodities just like any other, how much longer will it be possible to defend their being subsidized and not bought and sold in the market like other commodities too?” (Crouch, 2003, p. 25). Such examples help to confirm how there is not only a diminished quality but also a diminished quantity of public service provision and opportunities for effective public engagement in the design and delivery of such services.

This crisis of democracy, as Purcell (2002) has identified, increasingly leaves urban dwellers removed and detached from decision-making practices: the shift from government to governance, through the provision of quasistate institutions or privatized regulators, increases the speed at which decisions are made but decreases valuable forms of deliberative democracy. In particular, in order to attract business and maintain an aggressive edge amidst economic restructuring, cities, regions, and local areas need to compete. In the masterful game of global competition, Beck (1998) articulated how urban mayors need to become innovative magicians; they need to reinvent the public image and identity of their cities through urban projects, cutting-edge architecture, and grand displays of wealth and innovation. However, throughout these restructuring processes, such competition often leaves cities struggling to hide their blemishes and their marginal spaces; and people are often silenced. These become the hidden costs of development, prosperity, and growth.

This is particularly true in the planning context, where the dominant planning paradigm arguably remains the rational-comprehensive model, in which the planner knows best and seeks public input through sometimes challenging public consultation frameworks. A variety of mechanisms and tools comprise this approach, including public hearings, written comments, review boards, environment assessment practices, zoning commissions, quasilegislativ commissions, and so-called public consultation practices. In each of these examples the public is requested to respond to certain questions, planned changes, or possible ways ahead. Each of these practices puts the onus on individual members of the public to competently understand their role in the process; to be willing and able to construct and (more importantly) communicate their message through an appropriate voice, in an appropriate medium, and within a valid timeframe; to identify the complexity of actors at

play and understand the costs and benefits of participating; to take full financial, legal, and personal responsibility for participating; and to absorb the full costs, often unknown at first, associated with participating. Such processes leave no room for exploring radical space, or for more inclusive visions of the good society. The rules of engagement remain vested in the hands of the planners and the bureaucracy they represent.

When operating in this context, members of the public frequently feel alienated, isolated, distrustful, and dissatisfied. Given this imbalance of power, and given the state's withdrawal from ensuring that the needs of all citizens are met equitably and justly, what should the role of the planner be? How can a rights discourse become embedded in such contexts, and what role should planners and social service providers play vis-à-vis acknowledging the power and authenticity of youth's voice and knowledge?

The shifting urban landscape, the growing inequity, the turn to reflexive modernization, and the democratic deficit all raise pertinent questions. We need to find means and mechanisms to challenge these emergent urban trends and to provide support and services to those living in the poorest neighbourhoods. These issues demand a reorientation to the concept of social justice. Lefebvre offered a place from which to expand in such a manner. Not only do we need more socially just and inclusive research, but we also need to create opportunities to embed social justice in urban practices and policies. We need to carve paths to more radical and transformative possibilities, and Lefebvre provides the theoretical backbone to examine more critically the ways youth become marginalized and excluded from participation in an urban space.

## **Situating Lefebvre: Interpretations and Critiques**

Lefebvre (1968/1996) offered a potential philosophical antidote to some of these growing urban ills. Writing from a neo-Marxist perspective, he proposed the concept of the *right to the city* as an alternative to the consumer/capitalist colonization of urban space. Neo-Marxists like Lefebvre and Harvey (2004) positioned themselves as opposing the production, by liberals and neoliberals, of ever-greater levels of social inequality, and the “serious and growing instabilities culminating in chronic crises of overaccumulation (of the sort we are now witnessing)” (Harvey, 2004, p. 547). In this section I provide an analysis of Lefebvre’s contribution, particularly as it relates to more contemporary urban change, and I also evaluate others’ interpretations and critiques.

Theoretically dense, somewhat inaccessible, and “tantalizingly vague” (Merrifield, 1995, p. 295), Lefebvre (1968/1996) argued that the right to the city was the right to “urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of . . . moments and places” (p. 179). It is a right of access to the fullness of urban life. In other words, if the city is a site of social centrality, then all of the city’s inhabitants should have a quality of access and participation in this urban milieu. Geographer Rob Shields (2006) interpreted Lefebvre’s use of *urban* to mean

. . . not a certain population, a geographic size, or a collection of buildings. Nor is it a node, a transshipment point, or a centre of production. It is all of these together. . . . Lefebvre understands the urban from this phenomenological basis as a Hegelian *form*. The urban *is* social centrality, where the many elements and aspects of capitalism intersect in space despite often merely being part of the place for a short time. (p. 209)

Implicit in conceptualizations of urban spatial configurations amidst capitalism are competing understandings of how space is organized and controlled. Does space stand outside of other more fundamental roles of production, as Soja (1989, p. 76) contended,

querying Castells (1972) and Harvey (2004)? While it is not possible within the confines of this examination to delve deeper into varied rethinkings on the sociospatial dialectic (Castells, 1972; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989), deeply contested conceptualizations on space underlie Lefebvre's (1991, 1996, 2001) views on how to achieve radical social transformation.

Lefebvre analyzed the accessibility of the city from a class-based perspective. To clarify who should be able to access the urban sphere more fully, Purcell (2002) drew a distinction between *citoyens* (citizens) and *citadins* (urban inhabitants). In terms of this distinction, urban inhabitants include a broad range of other stakeholders, regardless of legal (or class) status. Operationally, engaging a broader totality of urban voices becomes a challenge for government structures and social or civil institutions. Further complicating this notion of urban inhabitants are alien populations, who fuel, through their work and labour, the onward march of multinational corporations and capitalism. As Soja (1989) demanded, in reference to reconfigurations in California and Los Angeles, "All that was local becomes increasingly globalized, all that is global becomes increasingly localized. What has been the political response to this extraordinary restructuring?" ( p. 17). Soja's commentary raises questions about how rights should be distributed, how tensions between rights should be resolved, and what structures could feasibly increase traditionally disenfranchised groups' access to acquiring property. Increasing rates of urbanization, shifting workforces and dislocations of people from economic centres of power and cultural homelands—the mobilization of urban inhabitants (particularly from the grassroots) towards socially just ends becomes highly problematic. Critiquing Lefebvre's right to the city, Purcell (2002)

challenged the creation of scalar structures of participation and a scalar definition of political membership:

Therefore, whether new scalar arrangements are progressive or regressive cannot be predicted *a priori*. . . . A contingent politics of scale will help determine who is empowered (and who is not), and it will shape what those powers will be. The right to the city is not inherently liberatory, despite Lefebvre's clear intentions. (p. 103)

One unique distinction offered by Marxist geographer David Harvey (1973) to Lefebvre's (1968/1996) conceptualization of the right to the city is that although accessing the city in its fullest is a formidable aim, the right to change the city becomes arguably more transformative, and possibly emancipatory. This slight distinction invokes more radical connotations of resistance and struggle towards the just end. In other words, accessing urban diversity might represent concepts of social justice framed through equality of access, but changing the urban so that it becomes more inclusive, just, and responsive to the needs of the multiplicity of urban inhabitants represents a different configuration of distributive and transformative social justice. Although cities have changed considerably since Lefebvre's writing, as a UNESCO (2005) discussion paper recently highlighted, new interpretations and a further validity to Lefebvre's right to the city can be found by exploring how global restructuring affects urban governance, how social movements manifest themselves in cities, and how urban policies, global coalitions, and municipal statutes can embody notions of citizenship implicit in Lefebvre's words.

Others have interpreted Lefebvre's (1968/1996) right to the city from a variety of other perspectives, most notably through the lenses of participation, rights of access, and social conflict. How to resolve rights tensions in pluralistic cities (Staeheli, Mitchell, & Gibson, 2002) and how to engage the grassroots in resisting neoliberalism (Elwood, 2002) represent some of these discursive trends. In theory, it might appear as though ideas such as

increasing social capital by building and enhancing inclusion through trust networks and bonds of reciprocity might reflect some of Lefebvre's underlying message of access.

However, Mayer (2003) contended that social capital discourse and its associated schemes remain ineffective in explaining social and political conflicts at local levels. Furthermore, citing an American example, she critiqued the discourse's simplification and the ways it tended to naturalize the effects of global trends:

We need to examine contemporary territorially oriented development programs and employment pacts for their unintended effects. . . . The fact that certain communities, e.g. those of so-called "problematic" groups, are frequently destroyed in the course of the implementation of such programs, is generally made a taboo, while the furthering of participation and articulation options for desired groups is widely discussed and celebrated. (Mayer, 2003, p. 126)

Other reinterpretations surround contestations of hierarchical, normative public spaces. Don Mitchell's (2003) investigation of specific geographies of exclusion—that is, sites, spaces, and places that systematically exclude certain genders, ages, races, or sexual orientations—and the ways through which individuals contest, challenge, or resist these spaces offers a further interesting reinterpretation of Lefebvre. Nicholas Dines (2002) investigated the relationship between immigration and urban renewal through conflicting representations and uses of a large public piazza in Naples.

Similarly, Eugene J. McCann (1999) used Lefebvre's (1968/1996) conceptual triad of space in interpreting the racialized conflict in Lexington, Kentucky, to demonstrate the possibilities and character of marginalized (in this instance Black) populations' counterattacks against the dominant class. While largely rooted in ethnographic methodological approaches, further exploratory research is needed to create methodological frameworks that adopt some of Lefebvre's rights-centred philosophy. By examining the

metaphor of place-based descriptions, through place-based narrative analysis, Merrifield (1997) tentatively offered such an exploratory methodological framework:

Such literary effusions tell us much more about the individual psyche, its inner dramas and torments, which are simultaneously exacerbated by, and released in, the everyday city street. The streets are real enough, to be sure, but the participants in them are invariably battling with themselves as much as they are with the streets and its inhabitants. (p. 425)

Lefebvre's (1968/1996) right to the city and Harvey's (1973) subsequent reinterpretation have provided a philosophical underpinning to investigate place-based poverty reduction programs that target child and youth development. If youth have a right to place and a right to access, then programs that support or enable them to do this are a means of providing a right to the city to poor youth. Such programs and supports demand examination of the ways through which they broaden access and participation to the urban sphere, and how they offer real and metaphorical emancipatory paths forward towards the creation of more just urban realities.

### **Geography of Youth**

Teasing out a more complex understanding of the construction of place (low-income neighbourhoods) and self (youth) necessitates understanding the relationship between the two, for place and self are intertwined and interconnected. Notions of identity, like notions of place, are increasingly being perceived as dynamic and fluid as opposed to static and immobile. In her conceptualisation of *hybridized and globalized youth*, Tina Besley (2003), drawing on Jean-François Lyotard, examined how listening to the range of narratives and the nuances between dichotomous poles could challenge metanarratives and destabilize their “function as a unified single story that cultures tell themselves in order to legitimate their practices, cultural self-image, discourses and institutions” (p. 160).

Supporting this interpretation, critical theorist Henry Giroux (1994) acknowledged how the very nature of what it means to be a youth runs in opposition to modern ways of knowing:

While the circumstances of youth vary across and within terrains marked by class and racial differences, the modernist world of certainty and order that has traditionally policed, contained, and insulated such difference has given way to a shared postmodern culture in which representational borders collapse into new hybridized forms of cultural performance, identity, and political agency. . . . Communities have been reconfigured as space and time mutate into multiple and overlapping cyberspace networks. (“Framing Youth,” paras. 1–2)

A researcher must assume a nuanced approach and investigate dynamic shifts and transitions; she must not ignore or avoid the importance or the complexity of places and of beings.

To challenge boundaries is to expose how patterns of determinism and hierarchy limit understanding not only of identity and place, but also of agency. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1991) helpfully articulated the ways in which knowledge becomes subjectively tied to places (as well as to dichotomies of power and powerlessness) in her theoretical analysis of the relationship between woman, technology, and nature:

A map of tensions and resonances between the fixed ends of a charged dichotomy better represents the potent politics and epistemologies of embodied, therefore accountable, objectivity. For example, local knowledges have also to be in tension with the productive structurings that force unequal translations and exchanges—material and semiotic—within webs of knowledge and power. (p. 165)

Table 1 exemplifies how distinctions between youth and adult, and youth and citizen, contribute to the construction of a corresponding series of equally false, and problematic binaries.

Table 1  
*Examples of Boundaries/Binaries*

Youth	Adult	Youth	Citizen
Passive	Active	Marginal	Empowered
Becoming	Being	Disengaged	Engaged
Irrational	Rational	Apathetic	Concerned
Developing	Developed	Voiceless	Voice

Deconstructing and destabilizing binaries such as these can create theoretical as well as real space for a wider and more diverse array of narratives and understandings. Typically, when analyzing and deconstructing such oppositions, some of the driving questions are: who tells his or her narrative, in what setting, and why.

### **Sociogeography of Youth: Geographies of Aspiration and Success**

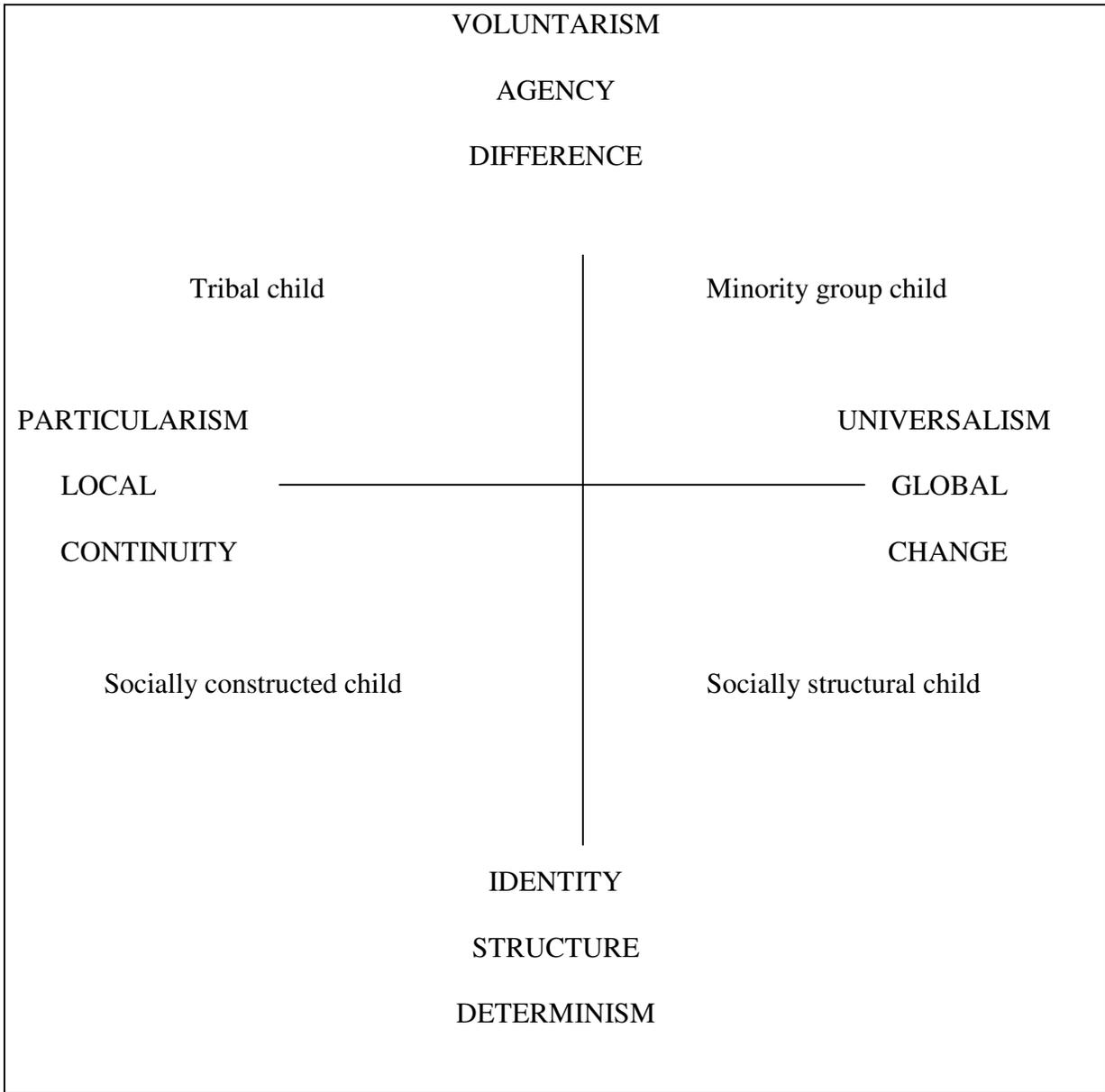
Academic awareness of youth as knowledgeable and capable of creating meaning about their localities (including spaces, places, and sites within them) gained increasing attention in the 1970s. In particular, a UNESCO-funded project (Lynch, 1977) that researched how youth interact and explore their place in cities drew much critical attention to this burgeoning academic field. Explorations since the 1970s have explored children’s and youth’s sense of belonging; their access and range of free roaming, as compared to adults; their acknowledgement of boundaries, differentiating inclusion and exclusion in specific places; the unique ways that youth and children sense environmental danger and fear; the contested ways through which youth relate, navigate, or resist certain spaces; as well the different ways they use places in comparison to adults.

One immediate challenge arises when considering the geographies of children and youth: there is no clear acknowledgment in the literature of the different ways through which youth—as opposed to children—relate to places and spaces. However, as some youth-

focused academics have contended, youth (more than adults or children) use their neighbourhood and local area as resources through which they learn—through play and socialization, and, especially in the rural context, through various forms of work and employment (Malone, 1999, p. 18). Their perspectives, perceptions, and experiences continue to remain a relatively untapped academic (and also communal) resource from which to draw upon and learn.

One of the most helpful sociogeographical frameworks demanding further critical attention, especially in its appropriately postmodern conception, comes from British geographers Sarah Halloway and Gill Valentine (2000). They have encouraged a progressive sense of place, proposing that concepts of global and local remain embedded within one another, as opposed to within a dichotomous relationship. Similarly, they have encouraged a reconceptualization of traditionally finite, discrete spaces such as home and school, and instead encouraged considering such sites as porous—produced through webs of wider connections informing practices within those spaces (Halloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 779). Their theoretical sociogeographical approach remains poignant and powerful in its capacity to challenge traditional understandings of the discrete and limited relationship between people and places. Their visual framework (Table 2) locates a spectrum against which children can be analyzed and constructed, and, equally, a spectrum against which the global/local can be explored.

Table 2  
*Theoretical Field for the Social Study of Childhood*



*Note.* Source: Halloway & Valentine, 2000

Paying particular attention to the ways in which youth experience and navigate spaces and places—how they create identities for themselves in specific locations, and how they draw on variable and even discordant resources and collectivities to create a sense of meaning—

remains a laudable and encouraging objective offered by a sociogeographical approach to understanding youth.

More recently, social geographers have begun to examine the sociogeography of educational attainment and success. How youth internalize and understand the role of education in attaining success, and the ways in which they understand, conform, and follow standard rules for what success looks like vis-à-vis education attainment and postsecondary status, are areas requiring further research. To explore how groupings of others—such as youth, women, different ethnicities, gays and lesbians, and different classes—interpret, identify with, and interact in different spaces and places challenges not only traditional understandings of the category of “othered” but also of the places in question. Understanding how groupings of others make meanings, and in some instances resist certain spaces and places, remains a driving aim for sociocultural geographers as well as others who aim to create more inclusive communities built around open and responsive institutional and public spaces.

### **Section 3:**

#### **Conclusion**

So what do Bronfenbrenner, Lefebvre, and the geography of children and youth have to do with one another, and with how to evaluate place-based services? On the surface, they are disparate literatures and theories that do not intersect; however, from my perspective they offer insights into how, metaphorically and literally, to position this research in a more participatory, youth-centred perspective. In particular, these theories indicate that youth live in systems—multiple, complex, and at times, patchy, systems that require navigation and mediation. Youth who live in low-income contexts may acquire strength or support from

multiple sources—from themselves or their peer group, from schools or family systems, or from their community. Each of these systems can also pose risks or stressors that may require careful intervention from other actors such as the state or nonprofit agencies. In evaluating a program or support (such as Pathways to Education) that attempts to mediate the effects of the neighbourhood, I am most intrigued by the ways the program encourages greater participation in a realm of urban life and how youth, when asked or listened to, have a significant amount to offer in terms of their own dreams, aspirations, and needs.

I will now turn my attention to a discussion of the methodological and ethical framework that guides this research, keeping in mind my desire to frame this research as participatory and centred on youth's voices and youth's narratives.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### Section 1:

#### Methodological Framework

To examine effective implementation and evaluation frameworks for a place-based poverty reduction program while acknowledging different sites and scales requires stepping into the field—out of theory and books, and into the literal places where programs targeting poverty, its root causes, and its effects, operate. The following outlines the methodological and ethical frameworks that structured this research and attends, in particular, to the questions, considerations, and decision points reached throughout. I describe, in broad brushstrokes, the predominantly qualitative methodology used and outline the rationale for this choice. I also examine the ethical challenges that arose. I then describe the research design, paying particular attention to the specific choice of methods.

Many methodological frames could have been considered in this examination; however, three main principles guided most of my inquiry. First, through the use of a community-based research advisory group, youth would be seen as active participants in this research, not only conceptually, but also methodologically. Secondly, a grounded theory approach would be used to illuminate the program's diversity of voices, potential evaluation frameworks, impacts at different scales, and specific dynamics present in each neighbourhood. Lastly, my own narrative as a practitioner—my relationships, experiences, reflections, and subsequent interpretations—would inform my research process and my perspective as researcher.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Several plausible methodological approaches could have been chosen—in effect, part of this inquiry involved a theoretical and reflexive review of the epistemological roots of potential evaluation

My interest in conducting this particular course of research stemmed largely from my desire to conduct research that was both conceptually and methodologically coherent. I could expound in great detail on the creative tensions I encountered when attempting to operationalize such an approach within the context of a program targeting educational interventions for youth in poverty. However, conceptualizing youth as competent, capable actors and as active participants in this research allowed me, as researcher, to value more fully the complexity of youth's voice, instead of constructing or imposing my own understandings upon it.<sup>2</sup> The use of arts-based methods, including murals and collages, also aided my efforts to focus on youth's voices and narratives. By applying a grounded theory approach, I was able to collect rich data and to then, as Kathy Charmaz (2006, p. 11) suggested, place this data in its relevant situational and social contexts.

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frameworks and a decision, based on key informant interviews and the program's needs about the best approach for further investigation. For instance, after conducting the literature review on evaluation approaches, I could have developed different types of evaluation frameworks (e.g., developmental evaluations or realistic evaluations).

<sup>2</sup> Several implicit tensions emerged throughout the course of this research. This was partly due to the nature of the program model. In particular, many staff, because of the nature of their work in complex urban neighbourhoods, utilized antioppressive theories in advocating for youth, and presented several very relevant questions and concerns throughout various stages of the process. This type of dialogue about methods, approach, and framing of questions became a rich source of discussion and insight for me as a researcher, but also required more of my time. Secondly, the program advocated and wanted to support youth, yet at times program staff played the role of parent or adult who knew best, so that youth were not treated as capable and competent. This dynamic created some staff/youth tension.

## Section 2:

### Research Design and Data Collection

#### Stepping Into and Out of Research: Acknowledging Self and Choice of Case Study

*The intersubjective nature of social life means that the researcher  
and the people being researched have shared meanings  
and we should seek methods that develop this advantage.*

—Kim V. L. England, 1994

I am not neutral, nor am I unbiased. I come, as others do, veiled and wrapped in experiences and understandings that simultaneously shape and liberate my efforts. Although the majority of social science research acknowledges the relevance and benefit of adopting a reflexive stance, there are few examples within the field of urban planning where such intentional reflexivity is applied to research efforts (Howe & Langdon, 2002). However, I believe that in acknowledging my own perspective and connection to the research, I support a more comprehensive understanding of the origination of the research questions and design. I am very connected to the challenges that arise in trying to examine potential evaluation frameworks for complex, geographically based issues such as poverty. Therefore, in the design, implementation, and analysis of this research, I wish to account for the personal purposes that drove and informed it (Maxwell, 1998). In his analysis of social research, Michael Crotty (1998) expounded on this, claiming that researchers' personal views and beliefs do guide the topic of their research, their purposive intentions, and their choices between paradigms and methods.

In the following section I describe the case study selected for this research and acknowledge the rationale behind this choice. To begin, I establish my own positionality by documenting relevant pieces of my own background that connect me to the research and to the selected case study, and in doing so I attempt to highlight my broader motivations and

general approach to this study. In so doing I attempt to write myself more clearly into the research, following other feminist scholars who support the acknowledgement of the self and its validity as a tool throughout research. This is a way of articulating not only *what* I know, but *how* I have come to know it. In support of this approach, feminist scholar Henrietta Moore (1994) suggested:

The powerful symbolism of notions of place, location and positionality in contemporary feminist theory demonstrates how much we come to know through our bodies, and how our theorizing is dependent on that knowledge. The multiple nature of subjectivity is experienced physically, through practices which can be simultaneously physical and discursive. (p. 81)

So what is useful to include in this analysis and what does this self-disclosure reveal? Who am I in relation to this research?

I am a teacher. I am White, middle class, and female. Beyond these biographical shreds, a few other critical details support a more comprehensive awareness of the winding path taken towards this analysis. Just over four years ago I began my doctoral studies at the University of Waterloo, with a sincere interest in neighbourhoods and in youth. I wanted to explore how youth understood, interpreted, and used their physical environment to make meaning or to transgress dominant assumptions about what it meant to be youth. I believed, as some youth-focused academics did, that youth, more than adults or children, used their neighbourhood and local area as resources through which they learned, through play, socialization, and various forms of work and employment (Hart, 1978; Malone, 1999).

Despite this interest in researching the sociospatial geography of youth, I felt very irrelevant, lost, and alone within this purely academic setting. In response, I found an eight-month contract that became a job that consumed my life for several years. At first, I worked for a community-based organization that wanted someone to conduct a needs assessment to determine the barriers that low-income neighbourhood youth faced in graduating from high

school. I subsequently became the director of Pathways to Education Canada, a place-based poverty reduction program that was in the very early stages of replicating in select neighbourhoods across Canada. I had previously volunteered as a mentor for this program in Regent Park, Toronto, and the opportunity to start a similar program from the ground up in Kitchener was wholly tantalizing. In many ways, this was an opportunity to develop and implement a program that brought together all of my interests. I could develop, in a participatory way, a social-service program that would target and meet the needs of low-income neighbourhood youth, and that would allow me to learn more experientially. It would also represent one of the few ways of writing myself into the text, as intentionally and honestly as I know possible. Ahh . . . the mindset of an idealist! And so, over four years, I continued my academic experience in bits and pieces, focusing intently on developing the program. The experience has left me frustrated, challenged—and in awe.

### **Doing a Case Study, Selecting the Cases**

Given these broader learnings and their influence on my experience and knowledge, I chose to investigate how to implement and evaluate a place-based program by developing two distinct case studies: a macro view of Pathways to Education Canada, in which I investigated existing evaluation frameworks and staff insights into the youth served, the neighbourhoods, and why evaluation matters. Secondly, I chose to hear youth narratives from two specific locations where Pathways operated—the Pinecrest Queensway neighbourhood in Ottawa, Ontario and the Chandler Mowat and Kingsdale neighbourhoods in Kitchener, Ontario.

Although the use of case studies have been criticized as being overly descriptive and narrative in nature, I have chosen to present the data in this format as it is more accessible to a variety of audiences. In addition, the stories of Pathways, the youth it has served, and the

program's development naturally lent itself to this format. As Noor (2008) has said, "Although case studies have been criticized by some authors as lacking scientific rigour and do not address generalizability" (p. 1602), they are particularly appropriate when dealing with a process or a complex, real-life activity in great depth. According to Yin (1984), three different types of case study research need to be considered: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. The case studies here are descriptive in parts and also exploratory.

Pathways to Education met the self-established criteria for a place-based poverty reduction program, for the following reasons:

- It used a geographic catchment area as the basis of eligibility.
- During the program's establishment, the catchment area was qualified through educational data, socioeconomic data, and qualitative data that outlined barriers facing youth's educational success.
- The program aimed to work with youth and families in a comprehensive way and desired to work with a minimum of 80 percent of all youth who lived in the catchment area.
- The program held, as part of its mission, the desire to break the cycle of poverty through education.

Pathways also served as a suitable case study because I knew the program intimately, and had considerable access to it.

I chose to focus on the development of the Ottawa and Kitchener programs for three reasons. First, Pathways began in Ottawa and Kitchener at the same time; each was now five years old and each now had four cohorts of youth. Secondly, youth in these sites would be older than 16 years of age, which meant that parental consent would not be needed as a

prerequisite of participation. Lastly, the program developed out of Regent Park, Canada's oldest social housing project. I chose to focus on neighbourhoods that were not Toronto-based and had not received as much attention by researchers or the press. I also imagined that the realities of being a low-income youth in Ottawa and Kitchener—the barriers they faced regarding education, neighbourhood design, and the issues affecting them generally—would be radically different from Regent Park's.

### **Methods Used**

In this section, I explain the methods used at various stages in the research, and elaborate on the coding structure for the data I obtained. I used multiple research methods: interviews, a survey, document review and analysis, and focus groups.

**Key informant interviews.** I conducted semistructured interviews with key informants who had demonstrated knowledge and understanding in at least one of the following areas: poverty reduction, place-based programs, evaluation and implementation approaches, and the Pathways to Education program model. My aim was to gather qualitative data that would provide perspectives on place-based approaches to poverty reduction, as well as corresponding implementation and evaluation frameworks. Potential key informants were identified by purposive sampling through an Internet search, discussions with contacts at Pathways to Education Canada, and discussions with academic colleagues who reviewed the list and suggested possible alternative names. Every effort was made to ensure that the sample of key informants was as diverse as possible. Informants came from a wide range of disciplines, including community development, government, public housing, advocacy, and philanthropy.

The interview guide contained a total of 15 questions (see Appendix D). Some questions were omitted in the interviews, depending on the participant's level of knowledge of the Pathways program model and their specific areas of research. The questions were piloted with staff from Pathways to Education Canada as well as with the research advisory group, and some of the wording was edited to reflect more truly the intent of the question. This process of reflection and input proved useful in ensuring that the questions were as specific and focused as possible.

To initiate the contact, I mailed key informants an information package containing background materials, the research questions, information about the research process, and conditions for maintaining confidentiality of data. The packages were emailed in mid-January 2011. Interviews, scheduled at a convenient time for the participant, were arranged over email or by telephone. Fifteen key informant interviews were conducted in the first two weeks of this process, and an additional seven took place over the next several weeks. The initial 15 interviews were very easy to obtain, as all participants had responded rapidly to the request. Interviewing the last seven participants posed some difficulties, as several scheduling challenges arose. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes; some took as long as two hours. All interviews were recorded using either a handheld recorder or Skype's call-recording device. Once all interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and then coded using NVivo computer software to identify themes and patterns in the data. Data were coded using themes of place, evaluation, youth, and successes. Attention was paid to where overlaps occurred between interviewees and also where dissonances could be heard. In total, 17 interviews were conducted.

The interviews provided a wealth of very helpful insights and perspectives on different evaluation frameworks and paradigms, as well as understandings of the third sector's role and the potential for evaluating across different sites and scales. There were limitations to this approach, however. A challenge arose in the design of the survey instrument, for example. Every attempt was made to keep the questions as unbiased as possible, but at times the wording remained too neutral and did not challenge the dominant paradigm about specific approaches to implementing or evaluating place-based poverty reduction. In particular, very few respondents really engaged in a detailed description of the concept of place, and assumed a one-size-fits-all approach in many of their answers about programs or services targeting poverty. This could in part have been due to the nature of the program at the centre of this study, and it might also have been because of the lack of documented ideas or frameworks about how to engage differently with such program models. The pervasive stance from which most responded was that of community development; very few respondents used other theoretical paradigms in their responses.

Another challenge with this approach was that although the interviews provided rich data from the participants' experience, they were very time-consuming; in addition, considerable repetition and duplication often resulted. Too, in this methodological approach the key informants were experts, who provided insights into best practices for place-based approaches or potential evaluation and implementation frameworks. As such, the approach left inadequate room for the experience of staff and program participants, and in this way, it reinforced existing assumptions about the place of youth and staff in evaluating their own work or experience. To be more participatory and inclusive, I could have allowed for greater

time and training for staff and program participants to analyze, evaluate, and interpret their own responses.

Despite the challenges and the limitations of this method, the results still provided a range of interesting best practices to consider and reflect on, as well as rich data about the potential role of the third sector and organizations in building different or more comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

**Document analysis and review.** To better understand the current evaluation paradigm, I reviewed and analyzed Pathways Canada literature, including a series of evaluation reports and organizational documents. I wanted to see what measures and metrics were considered valuable to them and their audiences. I also reviewed these materials to better understand the philosophy underpinning the program and the ways in which its organization and design attended to neighbourhood and youth, and also to determine what opportunities might exist for enhancements or alternative approaches. Several of these, identified throughout the course of review, are outlined in the findings section. The reports provided helpful background information and context for establishing and documenting the macro case study of Pathways to Education Canada.

I also reviewed and analyzed evaluation reports and documentation from the Kitchener and Ottawa sites.

**Survey instrument.** In order to generate feedback and perspectives from the 150 staff across the program's different sites, I created a survey instrument. As the program was new<sup>3</sup> in many locations and not more than 10 years old in Regent Park, the program staff held the bulk of information and perspectives about the program's development in each

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<sup>3</sup> The term *new* is relative in a start-up, but in other time scales of organizational history, under 10 years of age is an example of a very young organization or program.

neighbourhood. They had first-hand knowledge of their neighbourhood's unique characteristics, including the dimensions of its social and economic realities; of the youth involved in the program; and of the challenges in meeting the needs of the youth in the program. The survey was designed to collect a series of mostly quantitative data. It was also designed to collect qualitative data that illuminated descriptions and grounded examples of staff experiences in their own words. The survey's questions focused on four different areas: staff background and sociodemographic profile, including previous educational level, languages spoken, and understanding of their role; issues, challenges, and strengths experienced by youth served by their program; neighbourhood context and their experiences in it; and, lastly, their understanding and experience of evaluation within the frame of the work they did in Pathways.

Importantly, given the program's history and its development into other neighbourhoods in other communities, it was important for staff from these communities to begin to contribute to the broader knowledge generation efforts of the Pathways program, rather than relying heavily on the Regent Park experience. Thus, beyond gaining their insights into these areas, the survey was designed to act as a mechanism to generate staff knowledge and awareness of the research process, and to provide all staff with the opportunity to participate in the research study.

In total the survey asked 39 questions. (Appendix E is a copy of the survey instrument.) We used SurveyMonkey (n.d.) to host the electronic survey and also to collect results. The survey was developed and tested in partnership with the participatory research advisory and much of the language, focus of the questions, and overall design of the tool was adapted in response to the advisory's concerns. This was a highly effective and informative

process and the feedback was useful in helping to see alternative ways that the tool might be interpreted. After this process, I emailed the survey to each of the program site directors so that they could also provide any feedback on it. I informed them about the broader research study and process, to ensure that they were aware that staff would be sent this electronic survey. On February 3, 2011 I emailed the link to the survey to all 150 staff in the program, and also gave them an outline of the research process and what their participation options were. I gave them three weeks in the month of February in which to complete the survey online. February was selected as an optimal time for distributing the survey, as it was in between semesters in school and the staff had more time to focus on clerical work. Staff participation was encouraged through an incentive: the first three sites that completed the survey with at least an 80 percent participation rate would receive a pizza lunch for all program staff. At the midway point, I reviewed the participation rate across each of the program sites and followed up by email with site directors to problem-solve low rates of participation.

Challenges arose in this process. Some sites had specific policies about not using SurveyMonkey, and some staff had concerns about the heavily quantitative nature of the survey. To address these concerns, I encouraged the use of a paper survey instead of the online format, and I spent time with staff to understand their concerns in more detail, and to examine alternative meanings and interpretations. In one particularly useful example, a staff member expressed concerns about quantifying how often he supported students who experienced homophobic bullying. According to this respondent, he supported students dealing with this issue only infrequently, but when he did a significant amount of time was often required to address the issue and do any follow-up or intervention. This respondent's

comments helped me to better understand the nature of advocacy work that many staff were engaged in. After discussing the intent of the question with me, and examining the issue in greater detail, the staff member decided to complete the survey.

**Focus groups with youth and staff.** Youth in the Ottawa Pathways and Kitchener Pathways programs were purposely selected for participation in focus groups, with the help of the site researcher in each location. All the focus groups were audio-recorded; a copy of the focus group questions can be found in Appendix F. The youth were in Grades 11 or 12 and were both academically successful and unsuccessful.<sup>4</sup> They were offered a pizza lunch as part of their participation in the process. These groups were designed to focus on youth narratives and perspectives and were crafted in such a way as to provide youth the chance to analyze and interpret their own data through a variety of arts-based, participatory methodologies.

Traditional focus groups are often not conducive to youth participation. However, two arts-based, interactive activities were included in my focus group design, and youth engagement during these activities was extremely high. These arts-based approaches allowed youth to interpret their own data in meaningful ways. In total five focus groups were conducted. Table 3 outlines the number, gender, and cultural background of participants.

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<sup>4</sup> Using Ontario Ministry of Education definitions of success involving the number of credits attained.

Table 3  
*Participants' Number, Gender, and Cultural Background*

Location	Number	Gender	Cultural Background
Ottawa: Britannia Park (Ritchie)	9	4 female 5 male	Black Canadian Black Caribbean
Ottawa: Foster Farm	5	2 female 3 male	1 White Canadian, 1 Middle Eastern White Canadian
Kitchener: Chandler Mowat and Kingsdale (combined)	9	5 female 4 male	2 South American, 1 South Asian, 1 East African, 1 Middle Eastern 2 Middle Eastern, 1 South American, 1 African-Canadian
Kingsdale	9	9 female	6 South American, 3 Middle Eastern
Chandler Mowat	6	2 female 4 male	South American 2 West African, 1 South American, 1 Middle Eastern

**Local informant interviews.** Lastly, five local stakeholders, identified in coordination with Pathways staff in Ottawa and Kitchener, were interviewed. They were either social housing workers, social services providers, teachers, school officials, or host agency representatives. Staff identified informants who had knowledge of the program's development and impact over time and who came from a variety of different backgrounds, and the site director in each location then emailed the prospective informants.

### **Coding Structure**

All forms of qualitative data—interviews, surveys, and focus groups—were coded according to a grounded theory framework, allowing themes to emerge from the text. Coding structures and guiding questions were developed to help guide the process (see Tables 4 and 5).

Particular attention was paid to descriptions and narratives of youth, evaluation, neighbourhood, and success.

Table 4  
*Coding Structures and Guiding Questions: Youth*

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Third-sector approaches to place-based poverty reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Descriptions of best practices to place-based poverty reduction</li> <li>Descriptions of third-sector roles to place-based poverty reduction</li> </ul>
Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of program model</li> <li>Descriptions of outcomes that should reasonably be achieved by program</li> <li>Descriptions of different stakeholders/audiences and different needs of both</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Best practices of evaluation related to place-based poverty-reduction programs</li> <li>Capacity to evaluate across different sites and scales/recognition of how different sites are different</li> <li>Description of how to measure/recognize change or impact on youth and neighbourhoods</li> <li>Alternative frameworks</li> <li>Tensions in implementing broader evaluation framework</li> </ul>
Narratives/understandings of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is <i>neighbourhood</i> defined?</li> <li>How is <i>succeed</i> defined?</li> </ul>
Narratives/understandings of youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is <i>youth</i> described/defined?</li> <li>Specific impacts affecting youth in low-income neighbourhoods</li> </ul>

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For the survey of staff, a different coding structure was used. Table 5 highlights that structure.

Table 5  
*Coding Structure: Staff*

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Staff self-perceptions	Support Gather resources Build relationships
Narratives on youth	Face barriers Internalize stress Diverse Energetic/positive Place-based
Narratives on neighbourhood	Diverse/segregated Problems/challenges Strengths Social/physical infrastructure Spatial qualities
Narratives on evaluation	Success Empowerment Happiness Individually dependent Certification Impacts on youth Engagement Skill development Reduction of barriers Improvement of educational outcomes Impacts on neighbourhood Access to space Youth participation Perception of neighbourhood changes Cohesion

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Data collected from the key informants were analyzed to understand qualities of effective place-based poverty reduction strategies and potential evaluation frameworks. The data were used to counterbalance the applied case study of the expansion of the program from Regent Park and the case study to develop and begin to test the evaluation framework for Pathways to Education. Throughout, I attempted to focus on the narratives of youth and

staff to help tell a more complex story of neighbourhood change and how to measure it. In the following section, I elaborate on the ethical framework that guided this research.

### **Section 3:**

#### **Ethical Framework—Community-Based Participatory Research**

In this section, I highlight the ethical framework that guided this research. In particular, I define community-based participatory research (CBPR), and outline the ways I worked to ensure this research was community-based and how I tried to work with youth in a participatory way. I also discuss some of the tensions involved in doing research in place, and the resolutions I came to for helping to solve them.

#### **Situating CBPR**

*If we want more evidence-based practice,  
we need more practice-based evidence.*

—Lawrence W. Green, 2007

Here I outline and theoretically assess the use of community-based participatory research (CBPR) as a methodological approach. I then provide a comprehensive description and analysis of its use throughout this study. To begin, I articulate a definition for CBPR and highlight some examples of its application within planning and community and neighbourhood development research. I then identify the challenges and opportunities for the use of CBPR and speak to its application (and the emergent lessons from its application) in this research study.

#### **Defining CBPR**

Recognition of the inequities in health status associated with, for example, poverty, inadequate housing, lack of employment opportunities, racism, and powerlessness has led to calls for a focus on an ecological approach that recognizes that individuals are embedded within social, political, and economic systems that shape behaviors and access to resources necessary to maintain health. (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998, p. 174)

Within the last 20 years, CBPR has emerged as a distinct, alternative methodological approach. Rather than relying on traditional positivist approaches to knowing, CBPR attempts to bridge the troubling gap between research and practice, and between “researchers” and “researched” (Glasgow & Emmons, 2007; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Proponents of CBPR have identified a broad range of ways in which this approach fills potential gaps of traditional research. It bridges the potential distrust of community members, develops more sustained relationships with those involved in the research process, and offers an ethical framework for including communities as equitable partners throughout the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of research (Plumb, Price, & Kavanaugh-Lynch, 2004).

Basically, CBPR requires the collaboration of a trained researcher or academic and members of a specifically identified community, to co-conduct research geared towards resolving issues of interest for both the researcher and the community members. The intent is to create knowledge, take action, or make change (Green, O’Neill, Westphal, & Morisky, 1996). Wallerstein and Duran (2006) have identified the uniqueness of this approach in addressing health disparities, and provided this helpful definition: “CBPR is an orientation to research that focuses on relationships between academic and community partners with principles of co-learning, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment and incorporates community theories, participation, and practices into the research efforts” (p. 312). CBPR researcher Meredith Minkler (2004) has provided a succinct definition of the approach: at the core of CBPR, she claims, are three interconnected components—research, participation, and action.

Originally used in public health and epidemiology research, CBPR is now being applied to solve multiple, complex, social problems (Satcher, 2005), primarily in urban contexts that pose unique challenges for residents. Sustained initiatives like the Detroit Urban Research Centre or the Seattle Partners of Healthy Communities offer well-documented, empirical lessons (Eisinger & Senturia, 2001; Flicker, Travers, Guta, McDonald, & Meagher, 2007; Satcher, 2005).

CBPR offers a platform to test and adapt best practices for a community's needs, in that it supports research that utilizes community development as a frame while valuing the strengths and situated knowledge of the community (Schulz et al., 2006). With this commitment to valuing multiple ways of knowing and including those with direct experiences and perspectives, CBPR is uniquely oriented towards promoting equity and including a diversity of voices and experiences. It asks who is the knower, and who or what is known; and it provides a framework for discerning what it is that can be known (Israel et al., 1998).

### **Identifying Tensions: The Paradox of CBPR**

While the potential of CBPR has been well documented, the literature also documents the challenges and real tensions associated with the use of CBPR. Concerns about the establishment of meaningful partnerships, ethical challenges of who represents the community, and imbalances of power need careful consideration by researchers. Who speaks for the community and the true level of involvement by community members—that is, how engaged they are—demand further consideration. Yet these tensions can be overcome. For example, in their analysis of how to resolve the conflict and the creative and ethical tensions posed by CBPR, Seifer and Sisco (2006) listed challenges like “ethnic discrimination, power

and privilege, community definition and consent” as examples of recognizable tensions that can, with appropriate strategies, be overcome.

### **How I Employed CBPR: Challenges and Lessons**

In this section, I review how and why CBPR was chosen for this research. For several reasons, I felt that CBPR would be an appropriate model for constructing my research. In particular, I believed that the subject matter of my research demanded the co-construction of an evaluation framework with youth playing a leading role as experts, because I felt that my knowledge was relatively limited and superficial when considering complex issues such as urban poverty and barriers to education.

I came to understand CBPR and examine its applicability for this research primarily out of my own feelings of inadequacy and frustrations as well as my feeling of limitations as a White, female, middle-class PhD student. These limitations spoke to my lack of lived experiences in poverty as well as limitations of age and cultural perspective. Although I had first-hand experience working in the Pathways program from my four years managing and overseeing the program’s implementation in a specific neighbourhood, I felt that this knowledge did not encompass the thoughts and experiences of program participants or of front-line staff. Similarly, I also felt I did not have adequate knowledge of the experience and perspective of working at the national office. Lastly, I also felt that my understanding of the effects and processes of poverty and what it meant to experience being a youth in a low-income neighbourhood like Regent Park had been narrowly defined and confined by popular representations and social constructs of poverty and what it meant to be a poor youth living in a social housing project.

Recognizing these limitations, I reached out to staff at the national office of Pathways to Education Canada to help me create comprehensive research questions that would begin to address some of the organization's needs. I conceived of and drafted research questions in partnership with national office staff, and I established a research advisory group that consisted largely of front-line staff from Regent Park as well as from program alumni. Alumni and staff were identified largely through two individuals who helped me to recruit potential advisory committee members.

The advisory group consisted of four adults and four youth. Over the course of eight months, the group came together to help frame, develop, and implement the research process. Roles and responsibilities were clarified and discussed upfront. The group represented diverse research abilities, experiences, and aptitudes and as such, part of my responsibility as researcher became to understand their interests in the process and to respond to their needs. This meant creating a space for them to shape the research process more concretely. At the beginning, as meeting facilitator, I would arrive for each meeting with a lengthy and detailed agenda for our discussion. Often, I had created the agenda with little consultation and frequently, therefore, it felt meaningless. As relationships emerged, the agenda became more about the group's interests and perspectives rather than about my needs as a researcher.

My experience with Pathways was largely as an administrator, which I felt limited my capacity to truly understand the experience and perspectives of those individuals who had either participated in the program or worked in different neighbourhood contexts. I needed to include the nuanced voices and perspectives of the participants, and therefore chose to CBPR.

### **The Challenges of Naming Place(s): Seeking Consent**

Another ethical dilemma which I encountered was the challenge of locating the research—namely, the organization involved in the case study as well as the locations or neighbourhoods where the program operated. This kind of challenge is often faced by geographers, who must weigh decisions about naming places and being authentic about details against protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of those locations. This becomes even more challenging when the neighbourhoods involved are designated as low income, because who speaks for the neighbourhood, who protects their interests in a research process, and what rights they have to refuse inclusion are not clear. Seeking the informed consent of all neighbourhood members would be overly taxing, and yet not seeking approval to disclose the name of neighbourhoods felt somehow dishonest.

All individuals involved in the research provided consent, as did the national organization, Pathways to Education Canada, as well as host organizations and their staff. Approval to disclose Pathways to Education Canada was done through an agreement outlining access to information and a process for sharing and disclosing information. The question of who would provide consent for neighbourhoods was not as easily resolved. At its core, research is a process of sharing information, and sometimes that process may reveal vulnerabilities. I decided that because this research was focused on place-based services, to not name the locations where these programs existed would sanitize the data, participants' experiences, and the richness and uniqueness of their narratives. In addition, the organization named the neighbourhoods where the program was running on much of their marketing material—its location was not confidential. I therefore intentionally chose to name the

locations involved in the case study as I felt it was more authentic to the type of research I wished to conduct.

### **Working With Youth**

I want to acknowledge my awareness of the tensions in working with and researching youth. Multiple challenges emerged. To help myself navigate this delicate area, I asked myself the following questions:

- How do I challenge traditional binaries that position me as a researcher with power and youth as subject and powerless?
- Where can I conduct this research so that it feels authentic to youth experience?
- How can I structure the research with youth so that they might be active participants in the research rather than as constructed as inadequate or incapable?
- How might the design, implementation, and analysis of the research be as participatory as possible?
- How might I present myself as researcher so as to be more youth-aware?

At the core, I am concerned, methodologically and epistemologically, that youth not be considered as Other. Throughout this study, in a series of ways I have therefore striven to incorporate youth's voice in the design and implementation of the research. Members of the research advisory group, as older youth and alumni of the program, helped shape questions and provided insights into design. Similarly, by training two members of this group as research assistants and supporting them to play a more hands-on role in the research, different insights and perspectives were brought to the process. In particular, Selim Bertabovci assisted me in doing focus groups with youth in Ottawa and Kitchener. He asked questions, helped facilitate the process, and assisted throughout this phase of research.

Similarly, Moureen Khan assisted in doing document review and also provided different insights into the process through thoughtful questions.

I also made a conscious effort to conduct my research in informal settings. As educational theorist Kathleen Berry (1998) suggested, schools may be problematic sites for doing research with youth:

School appears to be the last place that encourages self-expression and cultural/critical imaginations. . . . [School] confirms the statement that knowledge is to be consumed by young adults as areas of specialization or disciplined knowledge, e.g., science, math, arts, and humanities. This places young adult students in a position where they are mainly, if not consistently, consumers of knowledge instead of creators of knowledge. (p. 43)

Because I wanted to recognize the knowledge and creative potential of youth, I conducted all focus groups at spaces and places where youth hung out. Frequently this was the Pathways office or a community centre. Classroom spaces were avoided at all costs. However, in choosing these sites in which to conduct research, I acknowledge that these spaces were not uniformly accessed by all youth in the neighbourhood. Young men, more than young women, dominated outdoor spaces like basketball courts and playing fields, whereas young women could more frequently be found in indoor spaces.

My interest in having a diverse sample of youth challenged me to think creatively about where youth hang out, and to invite them into spaces that might not otherwise be comfortable, by offering them pizza and through the use of other peers who felt more at ease. Selim's presence, in particular, aided this process since he was more easily able to draw young males into conversation and relate to them more directly than I could.

In the next chapter, I present some of my findings of the two case studies I conducted—the macro case study and the one that focused more on youth's voice. Lastly, I

highlight the reflections offered by diverse experts on implementing and evaluating place-based poverty reduction programs.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

#### Background and Context

##### Review of Methods and Approach

*To change a culture of defeatism to a school-going culture among at-risk youth borders on the miraculous. Pathways to Education, a nonprofit agency, has achieved just this kind of near-miracle in Toronto's Regent Park, and is being replicated across the country.*

—“Pathways to Education,” *The Globe and Mail*, 2011

*“They’re providing us with better guidance than the schools,” said Mahi Choudhury, 18, who saw his grades jump from the low 70s to the high 80s when he enrolled in the program five years ago. “In low-income neighbourhoods, there are a lot of immigrant parents and you’re being constantly told to go to school, but they don’t understand what we’re going through because they didn’t grow up in the same society. Pathways talked to my parents to get that across because I wasn’t able to talk to them properly.”*

—Jenny Yuen, *Toronto Sun*, 2010

Pathways to Education Canada is a program that works with youth in low-income neighbourhoods to break the cycle of poverty by reducing the barriers to education. Heralded by donors and government and public officials across the country for its successes, it has achieved nothing short of a miracle. From its beginnings in Regent Park, Toronto 10 years ago, it has now expanded to operate in 11 low-income neighbourhoods in four other Canadian provinces.<sup>1</sup> (The program refers to its different stages of replication as *generations*. See Appendix G.)

In this chapter I present findings from a small-scale exploratory study addressing the question of how to implement and evaluate a place-based poverty reduction program across different sites and scales. I employed a qualitative methodology for the design, implementation, and analysis of this research. My aim throughout was to allow metaphorical and real space for a variety of perspectives and narratives; I therefore utilized grounded

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<sup>1</sup> This number was current as of June 1, 2011.

theory and narrative inquiry as my overarching methodological frameworks. Guiding all of this research was a small, community-based research advisory group composed of youth program alumni and program staff from Regent Park. Their insights and advice were central to this process and helped shape my interpretations and my choices. The methods used throughout this research included:

*Document analysis.* I read and assessed Pathways Canada's evaluation reports and organizational materials for their representations of neighbourhoods and youth, their dominant evaluation approach, and potential gaps and limitations.

*Staff surveys.* I surveyed 150 program staff to gather staff narratives on the Pathways neighbourhoods and staff perceptions of youth and evaluation.

*Focus groups.* I conducted focus groups with youth participants in Kitchener and Ottawa to access and hear how youth understood the neighbourhoods they lived in and what success looked like for them, and to understand better the ways success is culturally and geographically constructed.

*Key informant interviews.* I interviewed experts in fields of community development, evaluation, and poverty reduction, to understand and identify promising evaluation practices in ways that were inclusive of marginalized populations, such as youth living in poverty.

Place-based poverty reduction programs can be evaluated in many ways, for example through theoretical discussion or case studies of different human service interventions across different sites. I chose the latter approach and selected Pathways to Education as an example of a place-based poverty reduction model because it met the following criteria:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Few Canadian models work systematically with a whole population in a specific geographic area to improve life chances. Pathways to Education is one example of how to reduce poverty systematically within a particular, geographically bound location.

- It targeted specific geographic neighbourhoods or places, based on an eligibility criterion of youths' postal code.
- It worked comprehensively with a whole population, based on an eligibility criterion of age.
- It worked to address the barriers facing those living in poverty, by targeting a specific socioeconomic lever.

I chose to position this research by investigating how a third-sector initiative, with aims of reducing poverty by increasing education rates, might offer lessons on place-based planning, child and youth planning, and place-based, neighbourhood-responsive evaluations of human services programs and interventions. I took a close look at Pathways to Education's operation and aims to explore a range of questions, including:

- What are the implicit tensions associated with program expansion?
- How does a program that developed out of a particular neighbourhood context work in different neighbourhoods?
- How do different stakeholders interpret and understand change and success at different scales; specifically, at the scales of neighbourhood and of individual youth?
- What are ways of evaluating and measuring success?
- How might alternative evaluation frameworks reveal different narratives of place, success, and youth?

### **Outline of Presentation of Findings**

I present the findings in three sections. Section 1 is a case study of Pathways to Education's expansion, documenting its growth from Regent Park to Bay Street. In Section 2, I present

findings on narratives of evaluation, success, and the neighbourhood as communicated by youth in the Pathways program in Kitchener and Ottawa. These narratives offer insights into how places become defined differentially by youth, how success becomes manifest through dominant narratives of happiness, and how a program like Pathways offers concrete resources. Section 3 comprises national experts' insights into how to implement and evaluate place-based poverty reduction strategies and programs. Their comments consistently point to the need for such approaches to be connected to the lived realities of residents, to be long-term in nature, and to utilize a variety of evaluation approaches.

### **Articulating Bias: Unpacking Constructs**

I wish to share two caveats before delving further into the findings. First, I have chosen to present the findings in an informal style, so that they may be accessible to a variety of audiences. For example, I have chosen to insert my own narrative at various points in the story. Pathways has been a personal endeavour for me; I have been program director at the Kitchener program for five years, so I do not pretend to be an outsider. (For the details of my journey in developing the program in Kitchener, see Appendix H.) I have crafted and conducted the study in ways that reflect my own interests, my own experience, and my own knowledge; as storyteller, I have woven together a narrative of my own choosing. Owning my partiality in this way I hope will allow the reader to understand the interpretation and analysis more comprehensively and transparently.

Secondly, as is frequently the case when a nonprofit program or project is touted as “highly successful” or “a miracle,” the story of success often omits critical challenges, failures, and lessons learnt along the way. The myth of success does not always reveal the detailed nuances or complexities of the journey taken to reach specific outcomes or

measurable goals. Documenting what works in the nonprofit sector, for example in tackling a complex problem like place-based poverty, presents many dilemmas and challenges. As Sawhill and Williamson (2001) have pointed out, to measure what works in nonprofits means setting measurable goals, keeping the measures simple, and marketing them. Naysayers attempt to critique and challenge results perceived to be successful, so that those who were not part of the process become cynical and doubtful of accomplishments and raise questions about validity. Simultaneously, and perhaps in response to the perceived fragility of results or outcomes, those directly involved in leading such initiatives craft narratives that boldly highlight the breadth and depth of the success. Such narratives provide a mechanism to bolster financial (and other) support, and also to demonstrate the worthiness of a project or idea. The challenge for nonprofits is to share what works while not being afraid of also sharing failures, flops, and missteps.

I am fully aware that much of the narrative of the success of the Pathways program glosses over the challenges and the struggles faced; however, my role as researcher is to look at alternative narratives of success and alternative descriptions of place and change. I have therefore made a conscious decision not to attend in great detail to challenging the notion that the program does good work. Indeed it does, and positive results have been achieved.

### **Section 1:**

#### **The Broad View—A Place-Based Poverty Reduction Program Scales Up**

In this first section, I present a descriptive case study of Pathways to Education Canada (n.d.), based on a summary of published documents, evaluation reports, and promotional material. It captures Pathways to Education's own sense of the places where it works, how to evaluate, and what success means. Three main themes emerged through a review of these

documents: the construction of success—both in place and through results; challenges of being community based; and the perils of evaluation, both definitional and numeric.

Pathways to Education is a work in progress, and the story is, as such, unfinished. The case study is, thus, a snapshot of a moment in time. It was taken during the months between July 2010 and June 2011, 10 years after the program began in Regent Park and only five years after the program expanded into other Canadian neighbourhoods. (See Appendix I for details of the program's expansion.)

Particular attention has been paid, by the media and by the organization itself, to quantitative successes it has achieved. First, within four years of its existence, and with its first cohort of students, the program demonstrated that it could reduce the school dropout rate in Regent Park, from 56 percent to 10 percent. Secondly, private philanthropists and other communities demonstrated their interest in the program; its original budget of \$2,000 and 20 bus tickets rapidly grew into a multimillion dollar budget. Thirdly, the program succeeded in working with 95 percent of the community's eligible youth.

Responding to these successes, and with the help of several external experts and donors, in 2005/2006 the Regent Park founders created a national foundation, Pathways to Education Canada (PEC). Leaving their humble offices in Regent Park, they took up residency in donated space in the Toronto Stock Exchange building through the generosity of a key donor, who would become chair of PEC's board. PEC's goal was twofold; to take responsibility for sharing the knowledge and for replicating the program in other communities, and to take primary responsibility for fundraising. In 2006, the national

foundation made a decision to replicate the program in six communities, four in Ontario and two in Quebec. Of the six programs, five were approved.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Questions and Challenges of Scaling Up**

The speed, processes, and challenges associated with fundraising and branding the program became intense. Several questions became apparent :

- What mechanisms would the leadership use to ensure that the neighbourhoods in which they chose to operate would be the right neighbourhoods?
- How would knowledge be translated and built between the national office and the new neighbourhoods and host organizations developing the program?
- How would they find the balance between supporting new programs in how to do things and allowing them to figure out what would work best in their local context?
- What guidelines would be necessary for new programs in new organizations?
- What metrics would determine whether a new neighbourhood and host organization would be a good fit with the vision and mission of the program?
- Where would the money come from?

In reviewing how these questions were addressed, perspectives on the meaning of success emerged. I elaborate on these below.

### **The Construction of Success**

**Where success flourishes.** As in many entrepreneurial nonprofits, the pressure for success was omnipresent. The challenge to not fail seemed extreme, especially in second-generation locations where the risk of not generating effective results or outcomes

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<sup>3</sup> The national organization decided not to pursue running the program in Little Burgundy, part of the city of Montreal, Quebec. Educational data from that community did not support a decision to proceed.

comparable to those achieved in Regent Park loomed large. Significant attention was focused whether the lessons learned in one neighbourhood could be replicated in others, and on whether the program could successfully be demonstrated nationally.

The efforts, resources, and skills needed to replicate a program compared to those required to innovate a program are not the same. As time has gone by, the national organization's focus has shifted intentionally, from replication to innovation. The shift stemmed from challenges inherent in a program that was truly based in a local community as opposed to a program that was developed in a specific context (i.e., Regent Park), and then transplanted into different neighbourhood contexts. The shift is particularly noticeable in the program model's commonalities and differences throughout the different generations of replication.

**Measuring, quantifying, and placing success.** Challenges surrounding how to measure success seemed particularly pressing, in terms of the need to demonstrate results in order to support an organization's fundraising, and also all the other stakeholders—staff, host organizations, and the families and youth involved in the program. Further research was needed on how success has been constructed, and what might be potential alternative versions of success. Another challenge requiring further consideration was the tension between a specific place-based program and the ways *place* can become interpreted, understood, and responded to in different contexts and by different perspectives.

### **Community Engagement and Community Based: Multiple Interpretations**

From the beginning, the national organization established a growth strategy for itself, with the significant challenge of tempering growth with locally responsive, high-quality programs. To do this, it has consistently focused on resource development, to ensure that sufficient

funds would be raised to match the growth of programs while simultaneously maintaining program success through licensing the brand, knowledge, and program supports associated with Pathways to Education. The organization's stated mission was to "help youth in low-income communities graduate from high school and successfully transition into postsecondary education or training. We remove systemic barriers to education by providing leadership, expertise and a community-based program to lower dropout rates" ("About Pathways," 2011). PEC has put two informal principles in place to accomplish these goals. First, it committed to working in neighbourhoods over the long term. Secondly, programs needed to be community-based and responsive to the needs of local residents and local neighbourhoods.

In this section, I examine how the principle of *community-based* became challenged in early days as well as how program implementation and development became manifest in new, different neighbourhoods. I am particularly interested in the program's rapid development and expansion in the period between 2005 and 2008. Interspersed through the narrative that follows are complex problems about how to replicate a place-based poverty reduction model. Questions emerged as to neighbourhood issues, challenges and capacity, and to the balance between control and organic development and organizational capacity and leadership.

PEC spent their first few years learning what was needed for the program to succeed in low-income neighbourhoods, what checks and balances would ensure quality assurance, and how results would be tracked or measured. Many questions were asked, including:

- Who makes the decision about whether a neighbourhood and host agency form the right fit for a new program?

- Through what process is this decision made?
- What should the relationship between host agency and neighbourhood look like?
- How would the need for a program such as Pathways be articulated in the neighbourhood?
- Historically, Pathways envisioned itself as a program for inner-city, low-income neighbourhoods. Would other neighbourhood or community contexts be workable? What about rural or Aboriginal communities? What were these communities' expectations and historical experiences of education?

**Approvals for second-generation Pathways sites.** A second generation of program sites was approved in 2006: Ottawa, Kitchener, Verdun, Lawrence Heights, Little Burgundy, and Rexdale. Identifying the sites was based largely on the national organization's perception of the capacity of the host agency to take a leadership role, be innovative, and work deeply in communities where issues of poverty and barriers to education had been established. The process was as follows.

PEC first gave the host agencies community engagement and program development grants, to determine whether barriers to education in their neighbourhoods warranted Pathways' support. The host agencies agreed to a series of expectations in accepting these initial grants, which were provided for a nine-month period. Staff in the local agencies then began to collect data and assemble community engagement interim reports. Data were collected and reported to Pathways Canada between January and June 2006. Two types of evidence were tracked during this phase: educational data and barriers, and organizational capacity information. Based on this information, Pathways Canada program staff made recommendations to the national board on whether the program would be approved.

In determining whether there were sufficient educational challenges and barriers, the following metrics were reviewed:

- the proposed geographic boundaries or catchment areas for the new program;
- qualitative evidence of significant barriers to youth's educational success as obtained from high school–age youth, or older youth who had been unsuccessful in school;
- data outlining a historical dropout rate of greater than 40 percent;
- data outlining the number of eligible youth: specifically, a population of youth making up annual cohorts of between 50 and 100; and
- commitment of neighbourhood capacity and interest in a program such as Pathways.

To determine whether the host organization and the neighbourhood could implement the program, Pathways Canada also reviewed these broad organizational-capacity indicators:<sup>4</sup>

- Demonstration of need/desire, including local ownership
  - Dropout rate or surrogate measure
  - Definition of neighbourhood
  - Parent/youth identified issues/challenges
- Agency capacity
  - Board support
  - Reporting deadlines
  - History of program development
  - Organizational capacity
- Community engagement
  - Local ownership
  - Resource networks

Based on this information, Pathways Canada decided which programs would proceed.

They would begin operations in September 2007. Five program sites were approved and a

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<sup>4</sup> Material is summarized here from Pathways Canada's summary criteria document on the community engagement phase.

pilot phase commenced. Annual funding for four years for these new programs was approved.

Between 2005 and 2008, Pathways Canada operated under the mantra of learning as things developed—“We’re building the plane as we’re flying it,” as one participant said. The national organization was establishing its procedures and policies while simultaneously creating programs in new communities. Boundaries were unclear, procedures and policies nonexistent, and knowledge about how to develop programs in new communities was being created on the fly by a small network of committed social innovators who had the passion, capacity, and drive to make it all happen.

**Tensions and challenges.** As Pathways Canada began supporting programs in new communities during this second generation of program expansion/program replication, several challenges arose, as follows.

*Community engagement and program replication differed.* Neighbourhoods needed to establish their issues and determine what was of primary importance to them, without knowing what a solution might be. On the other hand, program replication privileged growth over a more organic community-development process. The tension between these two perspectives became a recurring challenge for the national organization.

*Not all neighbourhoods experienced poverty in the same way as Regent Park.* Different neighbourhoods had different geographic boundaries and different time- and place-based issues. Capturing where youth experienced barriers to education in neighbourhoods that were not as uniformly low-income as Regent Park became a challenge. Consequently, in order for the program to be responsive to neighbourhoods, definitions of “neighbourhood” needed to be adapted.

*No two youth living in low-income neighbourhoods were the same.* Although all might experience or articulate challenges regarding educational success, not all were willing to access education supports once the barriers had been addressed. Even with supports, students with prior learning gaps might not fare well. For example, refugees who have little prior education face multiple challenges when they arrive at school in Canada. Known as “English language learners,” these youth often have low levels of literacy or numeracy even in their maternal language.<sup>5</sup> Ethnographic studies have indicated that interest or trust in systems of education varies dramatically across socioethnic background. Youth who live in families of multigenerational poverty often distrust systems of education, whereas youth from other ethnocultural communities who experience greater parental support and encouragement tend to do well in school. By analogy, different populations might be expected to respond to an intervention such as Pathways very differently, from one youth to another, and from one subgroup or category of youth to another.

*Governance and accountability issues emerged.* Host agencies hired and took responsibility for staffing local programs. They paid the salaries, monitored individual staff performance, and were accountable to the national office for deliverables connected to quality assurance and program design. Neighbourhoods had high expectations for potential programs to address educational barriers, as did the national organization. Both organizations were invested in ensuring the success of the start-up phases of programs and early results; however, success was defined differently by the two organizations. Roles needed to be clarified and reviewed.

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<sup>5</sup> Some communities, because of supports available to refugee groups, have larger numbers of refugee families; this is true of Chandler Mowat and Kingsdale in Kitchener.

**Community engagement lessons learned.** Several learnings developed in response to these concerns:

- Potential host organizations needed a longer time to do community engagement than originally anticipated.
- In the community engagement phase, the focus needed to be on problems without a mindset of immediately seeking solutions. Learning about neighbourhood issues with a solution-focused mindset did not necessarily allow for authentic learning, and when resources and supports were available or known to residents, sometimes needs become manufactured rather than genuine.
- Host organizations needed to demonstrate the historical dropout rate in advance of proceeding to do community engagement. Obtaining this information from boards of education proved problematic and as such, Pathways Canada has considered making this a prerequisite of community engagement.
- A prospecting phase would be introduced whereby potential host organizations could openly dialogue and learn more from Pathways Canada about the program model and the fit.
- The program model needed to adapt to meet the local context; the degree of change needed required constant evaluation and oversight.
- Different provinces had different educational contexts so each required a culturally responsive approach to implementing the program. This was most evident in Quebec.

- Original estimations for program expansion, in terms of the number of neighbourhoods and communities served, would need to be tempered significantly, given the amount of resources and time available to ensure quality.

Broadly, the challenge was how to implement a locally developed program in different neighbourhood contexts. PEC had to reconcile the demand for the program while ensuring that commitments to new sites and new communities happened slowly, strategically, and in a controlled way.

### **Evaluation Frameworks: Metrics, Outcomes and All That Jazz**

In this next section, I detail PEC's dominant approaches to evaluate and measure success. As well as highlighting some of the implicit challenges in current evaluation frameworks, I use the discussion as way of thinking through alternative definitions of success. I also identify some dominant discourses on the youth Pathways serves, the places where it works, and how staff from the 11 program sites evaluate the program. I briefly summarize the main components of PEC's utilization-focused evaluation framework and identify four dominant trends requiring further consideration.

**An emphasis on evaluation.** PEC has placed a heavy emphasis on evaluation, monitoring, research, and assessment as critical components of the program. Indications of this emphasis can be found in many places. For example, the legal agreements between PEC and host organizations require that before Pathways Canada approves a new program site, the host organization must demonstrate the historical dropout rate by neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> Obtaining this information has proved challenging in some neighbourhoods, since boards of education

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, it must be able to define a geographical neighbourhood and identify the barriers to being successful in school faced by youth in that neighbourhood. More attention will be paid to this element of replication in the next section.

have often claimed difficulty in locating this data, and have demonstrated a reluctance to reveal this information publicly.<sup>7</sup>

PEC's focus on outcomes has been an embedded element of the program's design from its earliest moments in Regent Park, and has demonstrated considerable success; as mentioned previously, the school dropout rate decreased dramatically, from 56 percent to 10 percent over four years. Two interrelated metrics were seen as early indicators of whether a student or group of students would graduate: credit accumulation and attendance. By the end of the first year of high school, a student with fewer than five out of a possible eight credits was deemed by the program to be at risk. Patterns of absenteeism have been seen as possible indicators of socioeconomic barriers that might in turn limit a student's educational achievement.

However, when the concept of *dropout* becomes reflected purely through a quantitative number, challenges emerge. Different perspectives are used to capture and report this information. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education only collects an early-leaver rate. This is the annual number of students who leave school, which is not necessarily the same as a dropout rate which is instead the combined percentage of students who leave school over four years. Pathways' heavy emphasis on its ability to reduce dropout rates has become increasingly problematic, given both the Ministry of Education's interest in student success as well as definitional and operational challenges associated with who and what are dropouts.

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<sup>7</sup> Obtaining this information from boards of education can be difficult for a number of reasons. Specifically, it can be perceived to highlight the system's inability to address systemic poverty and a related "failure of the system." More concretely, though, boards cite freedom of information as a reason not to reveal the data, as well as internal data collection challenges such as inadequate technical or human resources.

Program sites are required to report on a series of outcomes and program improvements. Each site must produce a minimum of three annual reports on a standard series of questions (a September report on registration numbers by cohorts, a March report on program improvement, and a July report on program outcomes on a number of themes), and an annual student survey and data report from the local board of education. (Appendix J presents the main metrics that Pathways uses to measure success.) Each site employs a researcher who works with the program staff and the national office to collect and track these data.

Educational achievement data can be very misleading, since different systems collect and calculate that rate in varied ways. For Pathways, school and nonschool factors both contribute to students dropping out or leaving school. The program has recognized social and systemic aspects in its construction of dropping out. School factors include ineffective discipline; lack of counselling, support, or outreach; and the system's failure to respect differentiated learning. Nonschool factors include low social class, minority status, school-home link, and lack of community support as risks that need to be mediated.

The program's internal documentation and reports to donors also highlight a heavy evaluation and research focus. Regent Park has collected annual data from stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and program staff) in a cycle of problem identification, data collection, and designed program improvement or intervention that has become a hallmark in how the program operates. Other indications of this emphasis can be found in the legal agreements between PEC and host organizations. Before Pathways Canada approves a new program site, the host organization must demonstrate the historical dropout rate by neighbourhood. Similarly, it must be able to define a geographical neighbourhood and

identify the barriers to being successful in school faced by youth in that neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup> Obtaining this information has proved challenging in some neighbourhoods as boards of education often articulate the challenges associated with finding this data as well as a reluctance to reveal this information publicly.

**Evaluation trends requiring further consideration.** In reviewing the evaluation approach four dominant trends can be seen to require further consideration.

*Focus on quantitative metrics.* A dominant focus has been placed on quantitative outcomes; in particular, the reduction in the dropout rate, an increase in credit accumulation, and an emphasis on the number of youth participating in the program. Numbers do not tell the full story of the complexity of what is happening in programs or how interventions affect different populations. The emphasis on a reduction in the dropout rate, combined with the program's evaluation of the return on investment, has disproportionately slanted outcome measurement away from a more comprehensive, complex picture of the ways in which the program makes a difference on various scales. Shifting the narrative of success to incorporate a diversity of qualitative or student narratives as well as quantitative outcomes would enhance the program.

*An absence of youth voice and youth-led research.* One of the tensions implicit in a program such as Pathways is that it works to improve the life chances of youth—it builds their human capital through a variety of different, interrelated, and defined supports. However, no attention whatsoever has been placed on training youth as researchers or allowing them to play a more significant, participatory role in research. Youth need to be

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<sup>8</sup> More attention will be paid to this element of replication in the next section.

acknowledged as competent and capable actors who have knowledge and who can contribute in a meaningful way to an evaluation-and-research dialogue.

*Drowning in data.* Being new, PEC has requested an abundance of data from each of the program sites. The rationale for why they have requested as much narrative and outcome data is unclear. Developing a set of common outcomes and tracking these outcomes in a year-over-year way would give them more comprehensive data on each of the program sites and a better mechanism to understand how success is contextually relevant.

*A lack of defining detail.* Currently, the program has defined neighbourhoods solely through geographical boundaries. Toronto, in particular, lends itself to concrete, spatially defined neighbourhoods; but place-based poverty may not be as easily defined in such a way in other Canadian neighbourhoods, particularly in Western Canada. What makes the north end of Winnipeg different from the north end of Hamilton? What characterizes low-income youth in these contexts and are there ways of differentiating them?

## **Section 2:**

### **Narratives From the Field—Staff Perspectives on Neighbourhoods, Youth, and Success**

Staff narratives on the neighbourhoods they work in, the youth they serve, and the meaning of evaluation shed much light. The narratives were gathered in a survey that was distributed in early February 2011 to each staff person in each of the 11 Pathways sites. The survey was administered over the Internet using SurveyMonkey (n.d.) with email reminders, and staff were encouraged to participate through incentives such as a pizza lunch for the highest return rate by site. Out of a possible 150 surveys, 119 were submitted. Of these, 95 were complete. The 80 percent response rate and 80 percent completion rate were both high.

The survey captured both quantitative and qualitative data. It provided salient background information, creating a picture of the Pathways program workers in each of the different neighbourhood sites and their reflections on youth, neighbourhood, and evaluation narratives. The data could have been interpreted in many ways; I have chosen to report on the data here in agglomerate form. That is, I have not explored the nuances or variations in themes or patterns within specific sites.

### **Background Information on the Staff**

To contextualize the narratives, I chose to investigate basic demographic and educational information on the staff involved in the program. The following graphs and charts provide a snapshot on who worked for Pathways to Education—how they saw their role, the levels of education they held, and the amount of time working in the program.

**Length of time working at Pathways.** There were 117 responses to the question, “How long have you worked at Pathways to Education?” Table 6 summarizes the results.

Table 6  
*Length of Time Working for Pathways*

Length of Time	Response Rate	Number of Respondents
Less than six months	23.1%	27
Between six months and a year	17.1%	20
Between a year and three years	41.9%	49
More than three years	17.9%	21

Almost half of the staff working in the program had been involved less than a year. This is a very short amount of time in which to understand a neighbourhood, its issues, and its strengths.

**Staff descriptions of their role.** Respondents, asked to describe in their own words what they did at Pathways, saw their role as providing support, gathering resources, liaising, and building relationships. Table 7 lists phrases they consistently associated with each.

Table 7  
*Phrases Used by Staff to Describe Role*

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<p>Support</p> <hr/> <p>Provide support.          Help students to be successful in school.          Provide social and academic support to students.          Support high school students in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to do well in school.          Empower and encourage youth to be successful in school and in life.          Support students to have a positive relationship.          Assist parents/students in navigating the school system.          Give necessary support to student and family when needed.</p> <hr/> <p>Gather Resources</p> <hr/> <p>Develop tutoring and academic resources for youth.          Engage with and encourage youth to use the resources we provide to let them know what opportunities are available.          Develop resources to help youth make better-informed life decisions.          Support an effective and joyful work environment for all.          Provide incentives for students to get to and from school.          Develop community partnerships to enhance the program by acquiring necessary resources.          Provide opportunities for registered students to gain academic and life skills to improve their chances of achieving more in life for themselves, their families, and communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Build Relationships, Liaise</p> <hr/> <p>Be a friend.          Link appropriate tutors with student needs.          Help students secure placements in community.          Build positive/supportive relationships with students, parents, and school by keeping the student's best interests at the centre of my conversation.          Contact school administration and teachers when needed to advocate for and with students. . . . Contact parents to provide positive feedback on students' school achievements and participation in the program.</p> <hr/>
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**Respondents by location.** Of 119 staff members who submitted the survey, 106 answered the question, “Which location do you work in?” Figure 2 indicates their responses. The chart presents the number of responses per location, not the rate as a percent of the total

staff in each location that could respond. Some locations were smaller, had only been in existence for one or two years, and had smaller numbers of staff.

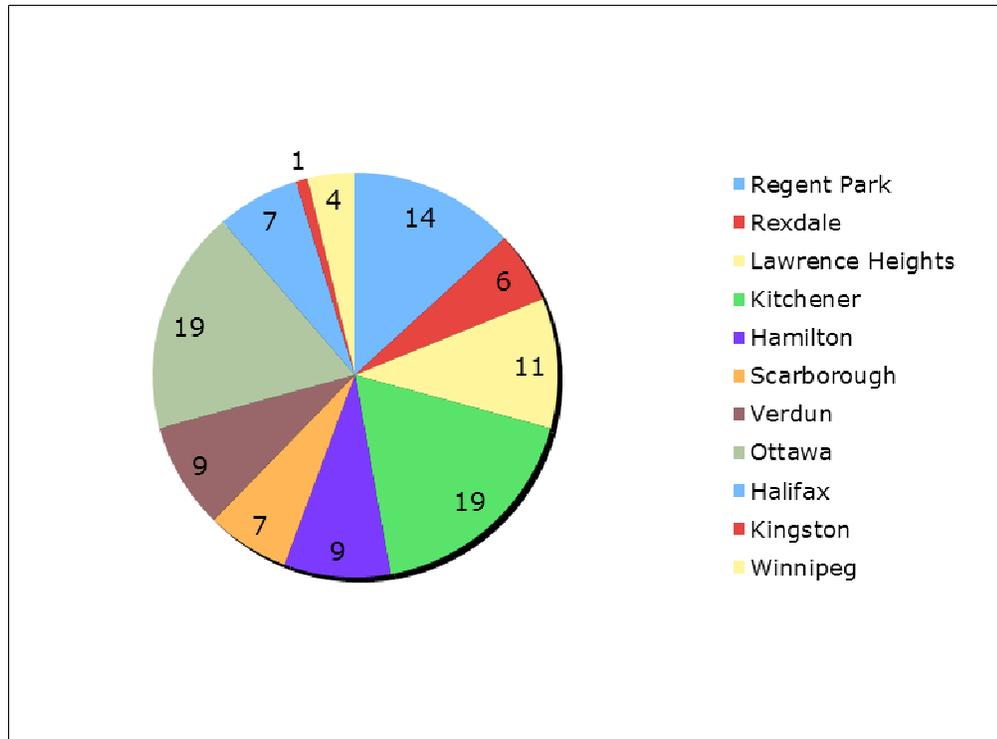


Figure 2. Respondents by location.

### **Narratives on Youth**

In this section, I discuss staff’s narratives about the youth they worked with. I asked open-ended questions to capture the language, discourse, and frames that staff used to describe the youth enrolled in the program. I noted a general consistency in these descriptions. I also asked more closed-ended questions, to reveal quantitative patterns and trends across the sites. I developed the closed-ended questions based on a strengths-based approach or on the 40

developmental assets for building youth. I do not subscribe entirely to these frames, but they served as good tools to help in the development and phrasing of the questions.<sup>9</sup>

**Working with youth.** The survey asked, “Do you work directly with youth?” Seventy-six percent of participants (115 out of 119) responded Yes, 14 percent No, and 14 percent Other. The majority of those who replied No or Other indicated that they worked in a coordinator role or in an administrative capacity; however, many who replied Other indicated they attempted to find opportunities to connect with youth.

**Descriptions of youth.** Participants were asked to describe the youth they worked with. Of the 119 surveys submitted, 116 answered this open-ended question. Several patterns emerged in these descriptions: staff said youth faced barriers, internalized stress, and were energetic/positive and diverse. Staff also mentioned where the youth lived. Table 8 identifies the dominant themes and commentary provided in the descriptions.

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<sup>9</sup> Not all youth participated in the program to the same degree. Participation rates varied dramatically from site to site; few reasons emerged for this. It was therefore difficult to understand who were the youth that staff spoke of—did they come to the program regularly, or not? Did the staff have defined, consistent relationships with them, or not? These questions deserve greater consideration and cannot be answered within the scope of this dissertation.

Table 8

*Dominant Themes Describing Youth*

Theme	Characteristics	
Face barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face racism, especially Islamophobia</li> <li>Treading water</li> <li>Face challenges bridging cultures</li> <li>Loss of trust with school system</li> <li>Parents not engaged in child's education</li> <li>Lack information</li> <li>Learning or social barriers</li> <li>High burden of illness</li> <li>Single parent family structure</li> <li>Insufficient housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflicted about decision making</li> <li>Vast majority have social issues</li> <li>Experience homophobia</li> <li>Insufficient ELD support at school</li> <li>Few role models</li> <li>Juggling multiple priorities</li> <li>Families don't consider education to be important value</li> <li>Few role models</li> <li>Juggling multiple priorities</li> </ul>
Internalize stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low self-esteem</li> <li>Pressure from parents to be successful</li> <li>Parents expectations of religion, culture, job, future</li> <li>Experience ADD/ADHD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problems at home</li> <li>Problems in relationships</li> <li>Battle image or social stigma</li> <li>Struggle with motivation</li> <li>Experience anxiety or depression</li> </ul>
Diverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many speak more than one language (6 respondents)</li> <li>Take pride in cultural background</li> <li>High number of Somali and Congolese Youth</li> <li>Come from diverse backgrounds</li> <li>Many New Canadians</li> <li>Second Generation Immigrants (3 respondents)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily Black</li> <li>East and West Africa</li> <li>Come from Caribbean and Afghanistan</li> <li>Approximately 35 percent of population is from immigrant/refugee populations</li> <li>Mostly First Nations youth</li> <li>Primarily South Asian</li> </ul>
Energetic and positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally respectful</li> <li>Good-natured</li> <li>Quite happy</li> <li>Wonderful</li> <li>Friendly</li> <li>Exciting</li> <li>Interest in improving their marks</li> <li>Motivated</li> <li>Resilient (4 respondents)</li> <li>Ambitious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong</li> <li>Performers</li> <li>Energetic</li> <li>Unique (5 respondents)</li> <li>Straight-talking</li> <li>Charismatic</li> <li>Sincere</li> <li>High school students who are amazing. They try do their best despite the few resources available</li> </ul>
Geographically located or place-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Come from low-income families (4 respondents)</li> <li>Come from low-income neighbourhoods (9 respondents)</li> <li>From specific subsidized housing neighbourhoods within catchment</li> <li>From an area of the city with a high rate of low-income earners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular teens from an area with low-income issues</li> <li>Come from disadvantaged communities</li> <li>Inner-city (3 respondents)</li> </ul>

**Strengths and challenges.** The survey asked staff’s opinions on the issues youth consistently faced and the strengths they consistently demonstrated. Staff responded that some of the most consistent strengths demonstrated by the youth were their positive peer relations, involvement, and motivation to do well. Other staff did not see youth as holding meaningful roles in society or seeking support from parents and teachers. However, in combination, these two snapshots provide a balanced perspective of youth as holding strengths and skills that would help them to overcome the challenges they faced. Figures 3 and 4 chart these patterns of response across each of the sites.

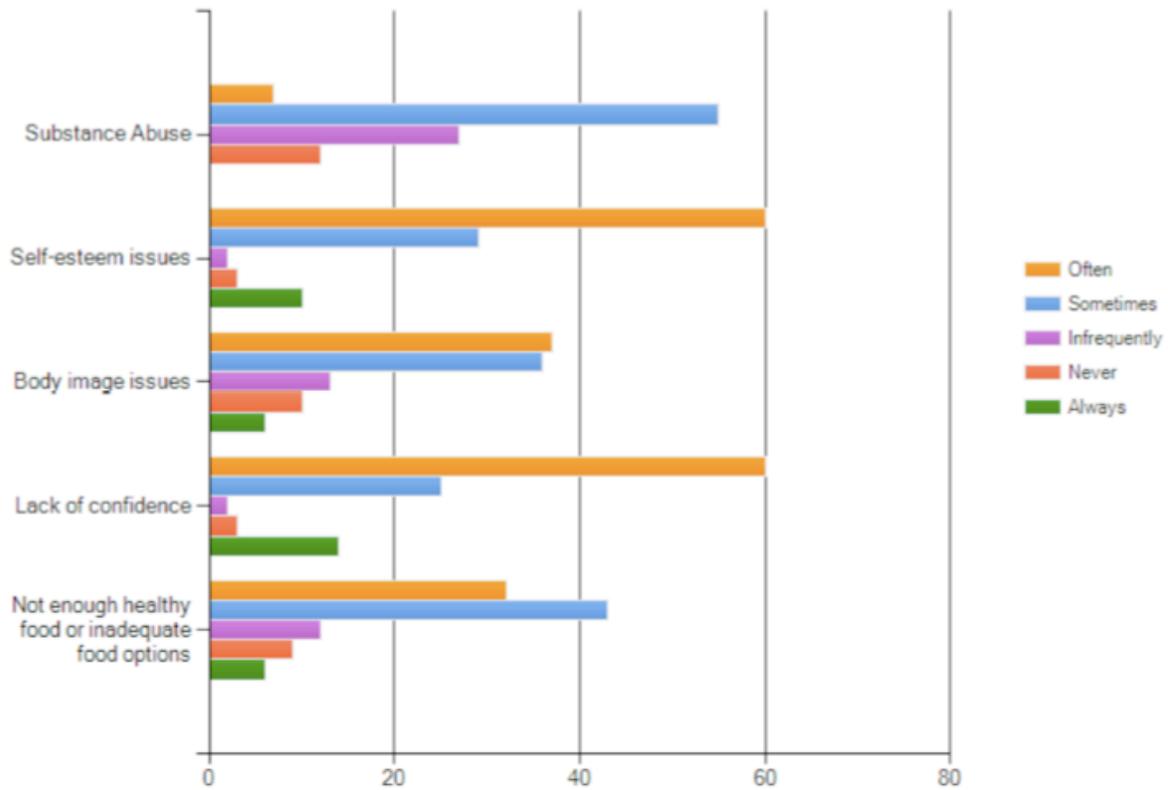


Figure 3. Challenges.

Figure 3 shows that, for the 104 staff who responded, self-esteem and body image issues were often seen in the youth they worked with, as was a lack of confidence. Substance abuse and depression were sometimes seen.

Figure 4 represents patterns that emerged in responses to the question, “What are the five most consistent strengths you seen in the youth?”

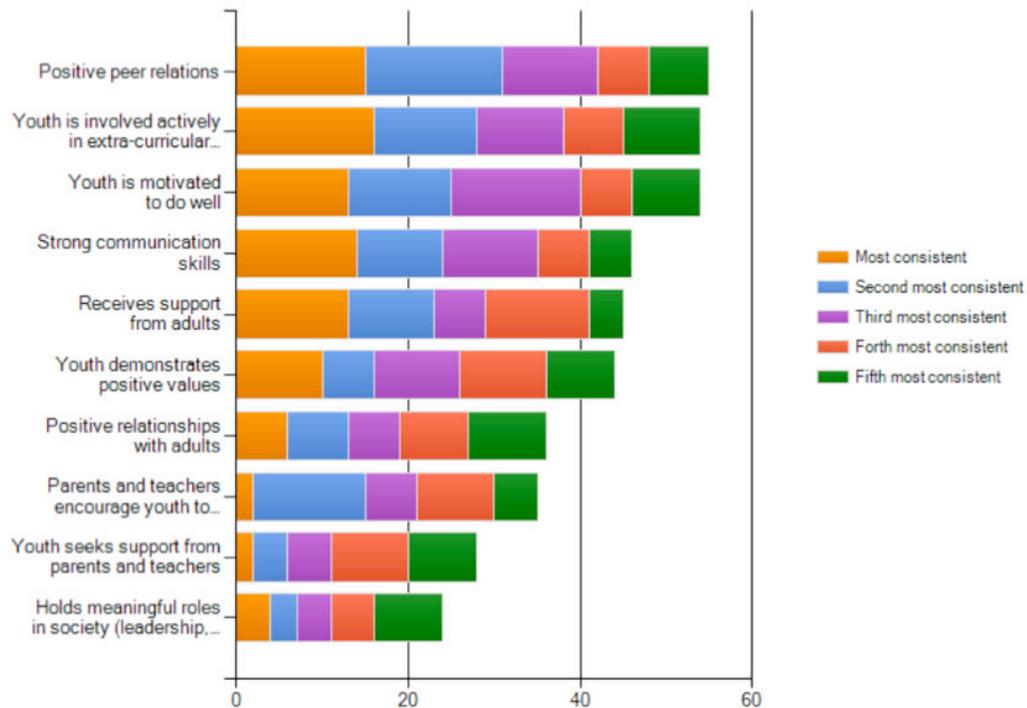


Figure 4. Strengths.

### Narratives on Neighbourhood

In this section, I detail how staff across the program sites perceived and characterized the neighbourhoods in which they worked. Survey participants were asked a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Of the 94 who responded, 45 participants listed “low-income” in their response. When asked to describe the neighbourhoods in which they worked and the program operated, staff described social elements (diverse or segregated, facing

problems or having strengths) and physical qualities (e.g., infrastructure, spatial qualities). I have grouped some of their responses by themes (see Table 9).

Table 9  
*Neighbourhood Narratives*

Diverse/segregated	
Linguistically and culturally diverse	Two communities do not get along
Large Somali population	Caribbean families
Multicultural and multiethnic	Large South Asian population
Newcomers struggling to adapt to life in Canada	Growing population from Haiti
25 percent are French and use different institutions	Large Spanish population
51 percent are under the age of 19	Transient population
Predominantly East and West African families	50 percent Aboriginal
Problems/challenges	
Food security	High unemployment (6 respondents)
Language barriers	Tough neighbourhood
Financial barriers	High rate of disease
Some issues with gang activity (4 respondents)	Underserviced neighbourhood
Reputation for crime (6 respondents)	Stigmatized by media and public (7 respondents)
Reputed to be dangerous	Multigenerational poverty and newcomer poverty
History of gun violence	
Strengths	
Nonprofit supports are well connected	Positive engagement with community
Various opportunities for youth to participate	Community Health Centre has a strong presence
Strong nonprofits	Neighbourhood has demonstrated creativity
Strong community centres	Strong connections, close knit, lots of social capital
Community centres offer a bridge	
Youth live in close proximity to one another and can easily build friendships	
Many youth engage and participate in their communities	

*(table continues)*

Table 9 (continued)

Infrastructure (social and physical)	
Large number of programs offering support	Lack of government support or development
Light industrial areas	No post office, no library, no community centre, no school within walking distance
Commercial areas	Tim Hortons is a meeting place
Semi-industrial	Lacks access to rest of the city
Ugly and abandoned buildings and industrial facilities	Combination of gentrified and dilapidated buildings
Parks and recreation facilities	Lack of green space
Poor quality housing	Beautiful harbour and park nearby
Train tracks dominate	Close proximity to psychiatric institutions
Jail is close by	Industry litters the landscape
Well-developed commercial areas close by	Dreary and barren
Heavily industrial	Uninteresting architecture
Proximity to churches and community supports	Dilapidated
Abandoned/vacant stores	Houses in need of repair
Front porch neighbourhood	
Few amenities	
Spatial qualities	
High density	Segregated from the rest of the community
Six social housing neighbourhoods in close proximity (Ottawa respondent)	Mixed buildings
Six social housing neighbourhoods that are fairly spread out (Ottawa respondent)	Not straight grid
Nine social housing neighbourhoods in west end (Ottawa respondent)	Separate from other services
Mixed and subsidized housing	High concentration of high-rises
Close to expensive White neighbourhoods	Market-rent apartments
Buildings isolated from one another	City within a city
One large neighbourhood with many resources, another smaller, geographically isolated neighbourhood with fewer resources	Subsidized housing
Very isolated area associated with crime	Low-income housing a magnet for crime
	Undergoing revitalization, redevelopment, gentrification (6 respondents)
	Undergoing change

Figure 5 charts staff's responses to the question, "What are the most important neighbourhood issues?" Ninety-nine responded.

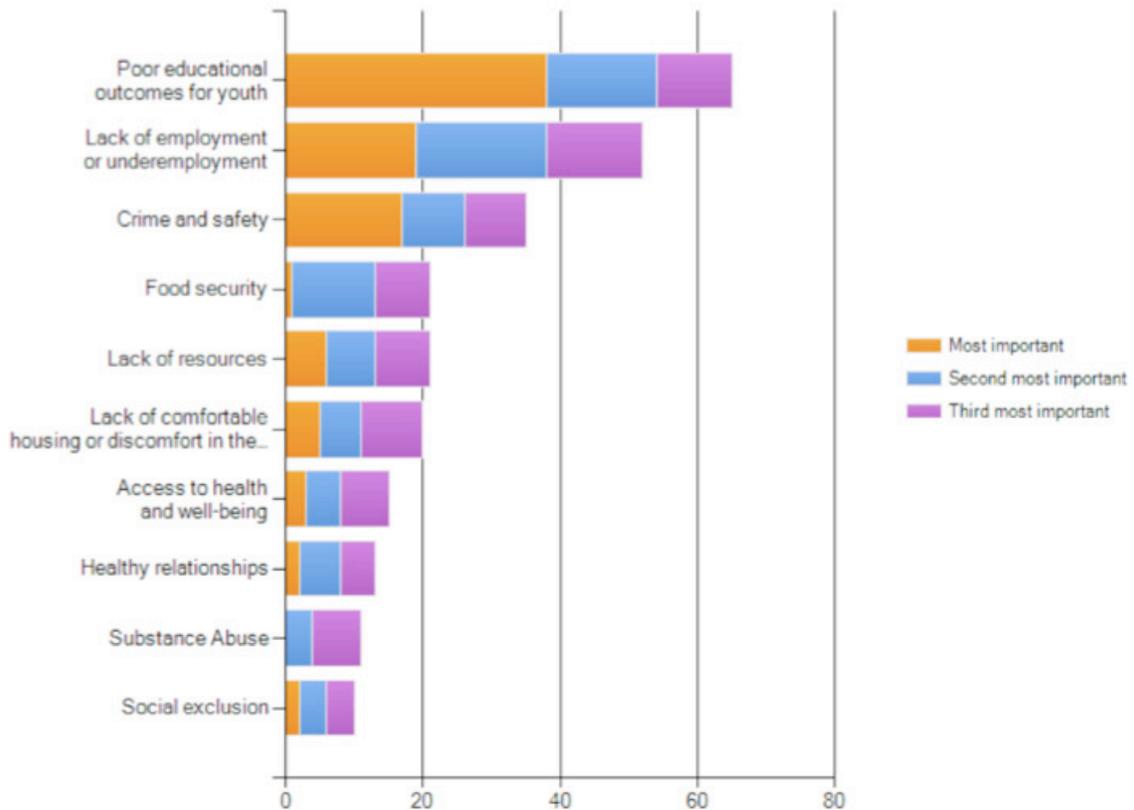


Figure 5. Most important neighbourhood issues.

Lastly, staff were asked to identify whether they believed the neighbourhood was changing. While the difference between Yes (65/77) and No (12/77) was compelling, many staff (26/77) chose to provide some commentary or rationale for their response. These commentaries were most intriguing; they offered unique insights into how the staff perceived or defined change, and also into the indicators they used to determine whether change was happening. Table 10 shows themes that emerged. I have grouped the themes in loose categories.

Table 10  
*Themes on Neighbourhood Change*

Theme	Comment or Rationale
Unable to Answer or Can't Tell	[none provided]
Yes or No because of changes in physical infrastructure of buildings	Businesses closing Redevelopment Revitalization happening New faces, new buildings Residents being displaced Gentrification of buildings (12 respondents) Restoration of Hamilton Harbour Condos under construction
Yes or No because of improvements in quality of life, perceived sense of hope in residents, increased opportunities for youth	Community pride increased (3 respondents) Hope Increased access to resources Increased youth engagement Parents attending workshops/supporting youth Youth visible in community and attending community centres Neighbourhood is open to support Residents organized festival to improve quality of life and address infrastructure challenges Sense that youth can succeed Service providers understand importance of translation for events to be successful Zest for education Positive relations between communities Increase in police presence Growing outsider stigma More youth know one another More engagement (5 respondents) Sense of entitlement
Yes because of changes in demographics—different newcomer groups entering neighbourhood	Haitians moving in Influx of newcomers Different cultures moving in Aging adult presence Immigration is increasing (12 respondents)

## **Narratives on Evaluation**

In this final section, I highlight staff's perspectives and narratives about evaluation—how they defined the term, its relevancy as a function of the work, and how evaluation approaches might be changed or adapted to better suit changing needs.

**The importance of evaluation.** Out of a possible 95 respondents, 93 indicated that evaluation was necessary and important for their work and the program's effective functioning. However, when staff clarified their responses, deeper insights and potential insights for improving existing evaluation frameworks and approaches emerged:

- Community needs are always changing and we need to know what works and what does not.
- There's always room for improvement.
- Evaluation helps us understand where we are having an impact and where we need to improve.
- At the end of the day, the students are the ones receiving the program, and it is important to make sure it is as effective as possible and meeting their needs.
- . . . in reflect[ing] upon practices and assessing effectiveness.
- It's dangerous to become complacent!
- Times change, neighbourhoods change.
- There is a lot of evaluation and it often feels like there is very little that changes.
- As we grow, I worry that the differences of the site will get lost in the shuffle.
- Evaluations need to be reflective of individual programs and diversity.
- How else can we get the funding?
- How does Pathways Canada currently evaluate? By attendance? That is a poor indicator in my opinion.
- Our goals are all befuddled, and we're putting tons of energy into things that don't seem important (like some paperwork and maintaining ties with our host organization) which have zero impact on the kids. We need to move to be more student centred, and there is currently no plan in place for our growth.

**Definitions of success.** When asked to define success, survey respondents provided divergent answers. I have identified the following broad themes from the 84 answers out of a possible 119 (Table 11). Each is potentially at odds or in tension with others—being empowered and following one's dream or one's goals may not always mean getting an

education and getting a job. Implicit in each theme are differing versions on the good life and different interpretations about how it might be achieved.

Table 11  
*Themes in a Definition of Success*

Empowerment/reaching potential	
Youth attain their full potential	Believe in self and ability to reach goals (10 respondents)
Express gratitude and appreciation	Have dreams and reach goals (8 respondents)
Self-respect	Feel valued, listened to
Feel confident and proud of accomplishments	
Confident to face challenges	
Have choices	
Develop positive relationships and positive skills	
Happiness	
Lead a happy life	
Content with choices	
Use skills to find happiness	
Depends on the individual	
Success depends on the successor	
It comes in many forms	
Differs from youth to youth	
Certification, following steps	
Graduate and get a job	
Go to class, study, be engaged	
Improve academic and economic opportunities	
Find a career direction that gives satisfaction	
At risk of not getting credits	
Improve grades	
Productive in society	

### **Impact on the Youth and on the Neighbourhood**

Staff provided a variety of insights on how the program impacted youth, from building capacity to addressing barriers. I have grouped the responses into themes (see Table 12).

Table 12  
*Impact of Program on Youth*

Promotes engagement/participation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holds them accountable to attending school</li> <li>Engages them in education</li> <li>Supports youth to identify interests and practise them</li> <li>Gives youth a voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps youth feel heard and valued</li> <li>People come to programming, ask for help</li> <li>Youth keep coming</li> <li>Trust is built, families ask for program</li> </ul>
Skill development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds capacity</li> <li>Students learn new skills</li> <li>Builds self-esteem, self-confidence</li> <li>Supports youth to practise self-advocacy (4 respondents)</li> <li>Provides tools</li> <li>Youth ask for help</li> <li>Youth communicate challenges, needs, issues</li> </ul>	
Reduces barriers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimizes barriers to education</li> <li>Financial supports help youth do better in school</li> <li>Opens doors for youth</li> </ul>	
Educational outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved grades</li> <li>Improved attendance</li> <li>Improved academic success</li> <li>Improved feelings at school</li> <li>Students have postsecondary choices and options</li> <li>Teachers and educators see difference in youth/appreciate realities of youth living in poverty</li> <li>Better relationships with teachers</li> </ul>	

Staff overwhelmingly responded Yes (83/91) to questions about whether the program impacts the neighbourhood. I have grouped their responses in the categories (see Table 13).

Table 13  
*Impact of Program on Neighbourhood*

<p>Space</p> <p>Provides a safe space for youth to go and hang out          Increases the visibility and acceptability of youth in the neighbourhood          Program is accommodating, welcoming, youth friendly          Keeps youth off streets and out of crime</p>
<p>Enrollment/youth participation</p> <p>Almost all eligible youth participated          Gives youth and parents opportunities to participate and give back          Youth participate and don't worry about being judged</p>
<p>Feedback/perception in neighbourhood</p> <p>Positive buzz about the program          People want to be a part of it          Word is spreading          Perception of neighbourhood is changing—both internally and externally          Reduces stigma</p>
<p>Cohesion</p> <p>Brings youth together from different backgrounds; helps them to understand one another          Sense of community is growing in youth</p>

Pathways staff—critical stakeholders in the program—had critical and diverse knowledge of what mattered to youth and to neighbourhoods. They understood, perhaps better than others, the challenges and strengths of the neighbourhoods and the youth, and were directly invested in helping youth to succeed. Although their narratives were diverse and came from very different neighbourhoods, the similarities in responses were startling. Staff provided responses offering unique, insightful narratives on youth, change, success, and evaluation. While often normative, their perspectives on the barriers and issues faced by youth, and the skills and supports available to help them overcome these barriers, suggested ways that Pathways has mediated between neighbourhood risk and educational success and

choices. They worked with the youth's best interests and did what they could to help make a difference.

### **Section 3:**

#### **A More Detailed Perspective of the Ottawa and Kitchener Programs**

From this snapshot of the program as a whole, I now turn my attention to two particular programs in greater detail: Ottawa and Kitchener. I examine the differences in these neighbourhoods, and importantly, I detail youth narratives on success, challenges, and life futures. Ottawa and Kitchener have programs that are comparable in size; however, the youth and neighbourhoods that the program served in each were unique. The youth had highly individualized perspectives on who they were, where they lived, and the ways that Pathways has supported them.

Pathways Canada's current evaluation framework places a heavy emphasis on quantitative metrics and does not fully capture youth voice or neighbourhood realities. In order to challenge some of the assumptions implicit in PEC's evaluation framework, I created an alternative evaluation framework that would be more responsive to different neighbourhood contexts while also incorporating youth voice (see Appendix K). I wanted to hear youth's experiences and narratives, so I held focus groups with youth in Ottawa and Kitchener. I asked them about growing up in a low-income neighbourhood, their experiences of Pathways, the ways they needed support, and their dreams for the future. All the youth were in Grade 11 or Grade 12. In what follows, I have highlighted youth narratives about their neighbourhood and their narratives about success.

## Narratives About Being a Youth in a Low-Income Neighbourhood

To begin, students were asked to evaluate their neighbourhood and Pathways. I gave them 30 seconds to write their descriptions of their neighbourhood on Post-it notes, and then to write their descriptions of Pathways. I then invited them to put the Post-it notes on a piece of Bristol board that was divided in two sections, with a positive sign on one side and a negative on the other. This activity supported youth to begin coding their own data—to be interpreters of their own process. Table 14 shows how students in each location interpreted the data.

Table 14

*How Students Interpreted Data About the Neighbourhood and the Program*

<b>Chandler</b>		
<b>Chandler Neighbourhood</b>		
<b>Positive</b>		
Friendly	Good looking	Organized
Warm	Nice	Reception
Pretty	Safe	School
Clean	Community	Events
Hood	Like it	Calm
Taken care of	Quiet	Crime free
Family put together	Pathways	
<b>Negative</b>		
Alcohol	Talkative	Bottom
Drugs	Welfare	Strange
Sad	Dangerous	Gross
Darkness	Ugly	Lost
Lonely	Cheap!	Weird
Confusing	Messy	Crowdy
Complicated	Sad	

*(table continues)*

Table 14 (continued)

<b>Chandler Pathways</b>		
Positive		
Adventurous	Awesome	Events
Beautiful	Unforgettable	Bus tickets
Small	Good moments	Kind
Helpful	Good	Support workers
Cool	Games	Great atmosphere
Money	Goes by fast	Fun
Help	Good environment	Colourful
Safe	Supportive	
Friendly	Tries	
Negative		
Talkative		
<b>Kingsdale</b>		
<b>Kingsdale Neighbourhood</b>		
Positive		
Big	Funny	Quiet in the winter
Wonderful	Fairview Mall	Multicultural
Funny	Very common	A lot of kids
Clean	Lots of people	Spanish ppl
Friendly	Outgoing	Friendly to everyone
Clean	Funny	Lots of friends
Lovely	Nice	Friendship builder
Clean	Fun	
Loud	Gangster	
Negative		
Sketchy	Ghetto	Crime
Odd	Lots of dogs and cats	Noisy
Lots of Kids	Scary	Busy
Loud	Odd	

(table continues)

Table 14 (continued)

<b>Kingsdale Pathways</b>		
Positive		
Nice	Encouraging	Know places
Always there when you need it	Loving	Meet new people
Fun-active	School	Making friends
Meet people	Make better choices	Helpful
Grade improvements	Career/jobs	Friendly atmosphere
Social	Test/projects	Helping with homework
Entertainment	Careers	Willing to help students
Mentoring	Jobs	Meet new people
Supportive	Problems with teachers/parents	Friendly staff
Study	Volunteer	Tuition money
Caring	Future	Scholarships
Care		
Homework		
Negative		
[none]		
<b>Combined Chandler Mowat/Kingsdale</b>		
<b>Chandler/Mowat/Kingsdale Neighbourhood</b>		
Positive		
Supportive	Quiet	Tidy
New	Townhouses	Kids
Caring	Teens	Cultural
Community	Park	Respect
Friendly	Outstanding	Spacious
Caring	Cool	Latin
Religious	Isolated	
Negative		
Sad	Bullies	Crime
Darkness	Bad	Drugs

(table continues)

Table 14 (continued)

<b>Chandler/Mowat/Kingsdale Pathways</b>		
Positive		
Friendly	Study	Incentives
Helpful	Extreme support	Interesting
Welcoming	Love	Useful
Helpful	New friends	Exciting
Fun	Activities	Fun
Welcoming	Networks	Calm
Activities	Mentoring	Exciting
Collaborate	Helpful	Love
Big	Outgoing	Useful
Snacks	Multicultural	Help
Work	College	Enthusiastic
Tutors	University	Excellent
Caring	High school	Volunteers
Opportunities	Friendly staff	Friendly
Opportunity	Opportunities	Postsecondary
Passing	Volunteers	
Negative		
Talkative		
<b>Foster's Farm</b>		
<b>Foster's Farm Neighbourhood</b>		
Positive		
Excellent	Quiet	Interesting
Perfect	Perfect	Happy
Good	Okay	Involved
Great	Cool	Ghetto
Well	Fun	Kind
Playful	Helpful	
Negative		
Poor	Prostitution	Ghetto
Sad	Low income	Loud
Police	Lots of smoking	Poor
Weed	Ugly	Disenfranchised
Drugs		

(table continues)

Table 14 (continued)

<b>Ritchie</b>			
<b>Ritchie Neighbourhood</b>			
<b>Positive</b>			
Cooperative		Fun	
Respectful		Basketball	
Quiet		Polite	
Love each other		Together	
Easygoing		Fun	
Friendly			
<b>Negative</b>			
Empty	Drugs	Dirty	Racism
Crackheads	Not clean	A trap	Violence
Crack	No extracurriculars	Dull	Drugs
Money	No entertainment	Boring	Police
Power	Welcome to my 'hood	Fights	Boring
Guns	Dogs	Silent	Robbery
Gangs	Drugs	Police	Sex
Drugs	Weird	Ballin'	Smugglin'
Red	Silent	Murders	Hookers

Three dominant themes emerged in the youth's narratives: the individuality of spaces and places, neighbourhood as Other, and the challenge and desire of belonging.

**Individuality of spaces and places.** Youth commonly stated that how you see your neighbourhood depends on who you are and what your perspective is. This is clearly reflected in the following interaction from the Kitchener combined focus group. When asked to discuss their descriptors, the following discussion emerged:<sup>10</sup>

- I: What does this tell you?  
 M2: Mine was all negative.  
 I: (*referring to F2*) What about you? You didn't list any negatives, only positives. What does that mean for you?  
 F3: I think it just depends on the way you see the world, and what type of environment you like. Because I mean like somebody like an isolated

<sup>10</sup> In these dialogues, M stands for male, F stands for female, and I stands for Interviewer.

environment, some people won't. Some people like it quiet, some people don't. Yes, I think it depends on who you are and what environment you like.

Youth in the Foster's Farm focus group in Ottawa made this interpretation when reviewing the list of positive and negative comments:

- I: What does this mean?  
M2: They are all pretty similar.  
M3: I'm surprised that there's evil.  
I: What do you think that means?  
M2: We live in different places?  
I: We live in different places?  
M1: We have different feelings about where we live. . . . I don't find nothing helps in my neighbourhood.

Similarly, the conversation in Kingsdale focused on how different individuals appreciated different environments:

- I: What do you think this means?  
F2: Well, for myself, I am an extremely loud person and so I love to have fun and be surrounded by my neighbours, and my neighbourhood and everyone here is surrounded by kids, so it's really loud. It's a happy vibe. . . . But some people don't see it as positive.

**Neighbourhood as Other.** Some of the youth's narratives reflected the sense that their neighbourhood was different. This sense of Otherness emerged through the way specific activities were encouraged in certain neighbourhoods, while others were not, and also through the perceptions associated with where they lived. In one discussion, a girl said she felt that youth in other neighbourhoods had fun and how that wasn't an activity that was promoted by her family. Not only did this commentary indicate a perceived stigma, it also indicated varying levels of perceived parental control:

- F4: Well, at school, I hear everybody talking about what they do in one day. One day they went to the party, they did this, they did that. Well I don't even know how they have time to do it all. And I guess it depends on their neighbourhood because if they have a lot of friends there and if they like partying that way they do, I don't know.  
I: What do you mean?

- F3: I see the parents let them go out whenever they want. When you have strict parents, it's just different.
- I: (*To F4 and F3*) It sounds like you can relate to one another.
- F3: Well, it's just that my parents don't like me to go around—I don't know, during the week you have school, you have studies, right? And they're going to keep getting hard and we can't just have fun all the time.
- I: So you think other people in other neighbourhoods have more fun?
- F3: Well, at school, they talk about all the things they do. . . . Like they party during the week while they have stuff to do and then they say that their parents let them do it. And their reasoning is like, "Everybody else does it, why wouldn't I do it?" I don't know, I guess they see what the other kids are doing and they want the same thing.

Similarly, this discussion from Ritchie highlighted how certain neighbourhoods were perceived as different from the mainstream:

- M1: Oh, like the first impression when I came here was like this neighbourhood—when I came it was like everyone—was ghetto—people do bad stuff. But actually, what I've seen and noticed is not that bad. . . . It's not good, but it's not bad either.
- F1: Some people they're into gang stuff, like you see on TV. Like into the just dealing and everything and their doing crack and stuff.

In this conversation, a young woman from Kingsdale articulated her recognition of being different from based on where she lived:

- F3: I don't know, but my brother complains that his history teacher is biased on certain people or certain races. He doesn't like Eastern Europeans or something. Like my teacher has stereotyped me big time because I am black and Spanish. I am loud but one time I was very quiet but she was like, why are you so loud?

**Belonging.** Another discourse that emerged was the desire youth felt to belong and find spaces and places where they felt accepted. In the following, a young male from Chandler Mowat communicated how he felt challenged by not fitting in because of his race and cultural background:

- M2: Like well because you know normally you get to a new country, and you're looking forward to your new start, you don't expect to be discriminated against. You know, like you are not from this country, or that country. Who cares if you are from here or from away.
- I: Sometimes you feel discriminated against? And mostly with kids from other countries. They, you know, don't like Colombians or whatever.

At another point in conversation, he expressed concerns about where he lived:

M2: Sometimes you're fine and you're going out to walk but there are so many problems and things you don't like. And you don't feel like you are safe in there and you would like to but you can't.

I: You're saying you don't feel safe?

M5: There is like drugs. I don't know my neighbours.

M2: My neighbours too.

M5: Oh there is drug dealing too.

M2: One day, I woke up early to go to school, and I normally take the elevator but it was broken. And I had to walk down six flights of stairs and I see all the other people smoking and doing whatever. And I pretend like I don't see nothing. But like sometimes maybe you want to walk downstairs without hiding out, and they are thinking you're like the police or something, like you're going to snitch.

In another focus group, youth discussed their desire for belonging. One girl shared this:

F2: Mostly, I grew up with all the same people—you know, went to the same elementary school and everything, and I've known them for a long time. And now, it's like everyone's gone and it's just young kids everywhere or really old people.

F3: Really—where do you live? You know like in my building, there is like a lot of older people and basically they like if they ever see me come back and I have had like a stressful day and it is obviously on my face and you know they would ask me, give me advice, because they've obviously all gone through like stuff like that and they just give me advice like do this or do that or you know what, I have taken this course. So I actually get a lot of advice from strangers.

Navigating their desire for belonging and also for integration proved challenging for these youth, in the face of parental control and parental expectations.

### **Articulating Dreams and a Vision of Success**

Youth were asked to articulate a dream for themselves. This turned out to be a difficult question. Some respondents, particularly the boys, seemed hesitant to share such dreams. The dreams they did share articulated the need for financial security, and the need to navigate between happiness and the expectations of others. Another theme that emerged was a tension between concrete, short-term goals, and longer-term, more abstract ones.

**Being happy or meeting expectations.** The theme was expressed in this conversation from Foster's:

- I: So what would you say your dream for yourself might be?  
M1: A job.  
I: A job?  
M2: Like a legit job, like a career.  
I: A career?  
M2: Not like a job in retail. But an actual career, where it's like 9-to-5. You know, that whole scenario.  
M1: Like a good job, where you can be happy. And basically, where you can do something that you like to do, not because you have to do it. You know—not just because you need to earn money, but it is because it is actually something you want to do.

The following conversation between a young man and young woman illustrated how the time frame for achieving success depended on the goal and when that goal held value:

- M3: I guess what I want to do the most is gain 30 pounds.  
F2: 30 pounds, why?  
M3: Football next year?  
F2: I just want to do something no one else is done. Like get into the Guinness Book of World Records. You know, be special for something.

### **The Future and How Pathways Helps**

The final data are presented here in the form of collages assembled by the students illustrating how Pathways helps. (See Figures 6–15.) I have chosen to let the collages stand largely on their own since, from my perspective, they represent and hold within them their own interpretations of how youth see themselves, and the ways that Pathways supports them, their neighbourhood, and their experience of education. The images raise critical questions that demand further consideration: Do they authentically represent the experience and perspective of all youth? What is the dominant discourse of the chosen images? In what ways might this process, as a method, be challenged or flawed? A deeper analysis of the images and the methods used to facilitate their creation will be developed in the next chapter.



Figure 6. Kitchener/Chandler 1.





Figure 8. Kitchener/Kingsdale 1.



Figure 9. Kitchener/Kingsdale 2.



Figure 10. Ottawa/Foster's 1.



Figure 11. Ottawa/Foster's 2.



Figure 12. Ottawa/Ritchie 1.

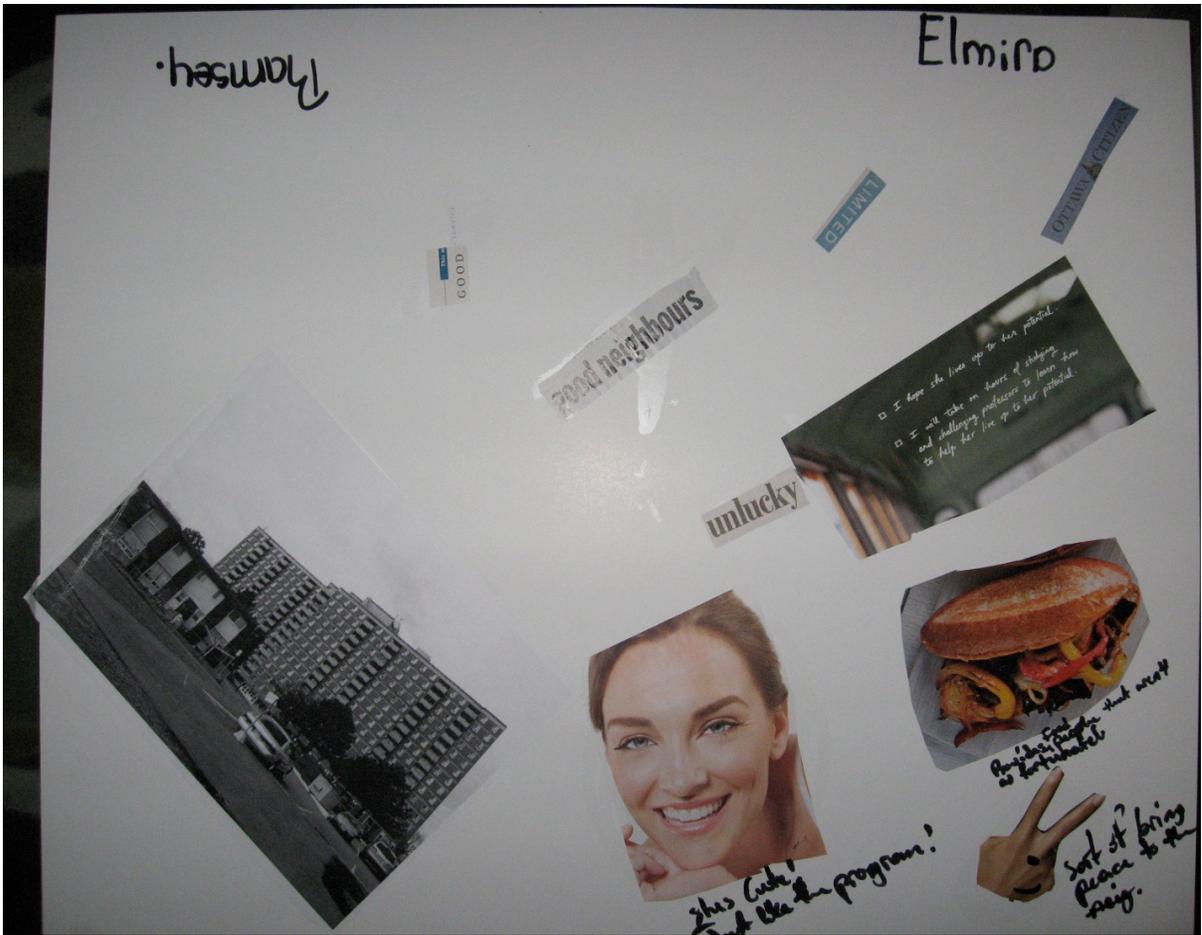


Figure 13. Ottawa/Ritchie 2.



Figure 14. Kitchener/Combined 1.



*Figure 15. Kitchener/Combined 2.*

#### **Section 4:**

#### **National Experts—Emergent Themes**

In this last section of the chapter, I share national key informants' insights on how to evaluate place-based poverty reduction efforts, and on alternative, broader frameworks. Generally speaking, the key informants viewed Pathways and programs like it as a unique kind of glue in low-income neighbourhood contexts, and saw the need to track this cohesion and connection across participant groups and types of youth.

Twenty-five national experts in a variety of fields—including community development, evaluation, youth development, architecture, planning, and government—were

identified and invited to participate as key informants in this research. Of these, 17 (mainly from the fields of community development, youth development, and evaluation) chose to participate. A semistructured interview guide was developed (see Appendix L). For the purposes of this research, I chose individuals who were nationally recognized thought leaders, advocates, or academics. For the most part I therefore omitted individuals with lived experiences in low-income neighbourhoods or those who had worked in a front-line capacity to reduce poverty. Even with these methodological limitations, several interesting and complex themes emerged from the narratives of key informants. The themes illuminate practices and principles of making effective change in low-income neighbourhoods through community-based interventions, and evaluating what works across different sites and scales.

I coded the data using four main categories: qualities of effective place-based poverty reduction strategies; evaluation frameworks for place-based reduction efforts; narratives on youth; and narratives on success. Within each of these categories several subthemes emerged that speak to a particular role for the third sector in making change in low-income communities, including conditions necessary for such change and implicit tensions in evaluating it. Subthemes that emerged consistently throughout were cohesion, collaboration, and participation. I elaborate on each of these themes and subthemes in greater detail below.

### **Qualities of Effective Place-Based Poverty Reduction Strategies**

**Growing and ground: Consistency and significance of ground metaphors.** The key informants recognized many characteristics of successful place-based poverty reduction efforts; many framed such comments using growth metaphors. They described effective approaches as being deeply rooted, close to the ground, or of rich density. Growth metaphors connect strongly with the notion that neighbourhoods, like ecosystems, require certain

components to grow and thrive. Some characteristics of effective place-based poverty reduction shared by key informants follow.

*Change happens in low-income communities* when agencies, government, or other partners make a long-term commitment. Change, according to these experts, requires not just short-term dollars but a willingness to invest for the long term.

Many community development experts identified the need to *pay attention to the context of the neighbourhood*—not just to the individuals who live there.

*For interventions or approaches to be successful*, paying attention to the interconnectedness of people and systems will make for more durable change.

*The concept of who knows what, who pays attention, and where knowledge is held* was another theme that ran throughout discussions of how to make change. This meant the need to pay attention to the voices and perspectives of those living in poverty—to be close to the ground.

*The need to mix direct services to residents with a broader community development framework* was another interesting concept many mentioned. According to Key Informant #7, “Ideally, changes aren’t only at the level of the individual but are also at the systemic level in terms of advocacy, policy work, and public education.”

*Place-based poverty reduction strategy needs to be comprehensive in nature.* One or two supports would not be sufficient; a complementary array of supports would best enable change.

*The third sector can play a unique and distinct role in addressing spatialized poverty.* For me, this often-repeated concept connected to how effective strategies or approaches should be organic in nature. The third sector was seen to have these characteristics:

- Can easily innovate and find solutions amidst spatialized poverty: “cradle of innovation” (Key Informant #2).
- Facilitate diverse interests that act to bring people together.
- Facilitate knowledge translation: “Sector knows what it is to be poor . . . the government doesn’t have an understanding of inner-city life . . . and the private sector has abandoned the inner city” (Key Informant #6); “they understand better what the community needs” (Key Informant #1).
- Can mobilize populations, as an invisible actor: “[third-sector organizations are] more responsive to the larger issues in the neighbourhood or in the community, and they also have the capacity of being invisible in these places . . . they can empower, engage and get people to a place of civic responsibility and control” (Key Informant #7)
- Are locally embedded actors, who are more responsive and more trusted.
- Tensions between ability to provide immediate services and responding to needs in a transactional way and those that build capacity and enable broader transformational change.

Not all key informants perceived the third sector to be uniquely collaborative or innovative. Some informants found it more competitive than the public or private sector. Many key informants noted the sector’s reliance on government, private donors, and others for funding, approvals, and support. However, no respondents identified the difficulties, challenges, or struggles faced by the third sector in enacting or working to create change. For example, they all omitted the sector’s funding challenges or other resource limitations.

## **Evaluation Frameworks for Place-Based Poverty Reduction Efforts**

Key informants consistently articulated the need for a comprehensive evaluation framework to measure, understand, and reflect back changes in low-income neighbourhood contexts. A few common patterns and themes follow about how and what to evaluate.

*Evaluation requires a balance of both quantitative and qualitative information.*

Numbers alone do not tell the whole story or how an intervention is affecting a population. Stories are also needed; they are as powerful and are potentially more meaningful to participants and to the broader community.

*A thorough understanding of the neighbourhood's multiple histories* must ground any evaluation framework for neighbourhood change.

*A balance between rigid measures and outcome metrics and a more open-ended learning focus is necessary* for capturing data and lessons about emergent patterns, themes, and deeper understandings of how an intervention may be contributing to impacts.

*Data collection for evaluation purposes* should be systematic, rigorous, and standardized.

*Common outcomes* should be established and measured against, for organizations working to make change in low-income neighbourhoods.

*Evaluation should allow for organizations to celebrate* “all kinds of minor victories” (Key Informant #9).

When key informants were asked if it was possible to evaluate an intervention across different sites and different scales, most provided indirect or ambiguous responses. While many felt it must be possible to do this, few could articulate any concrete approaches or methods to accomplish such a goal. Similarly, many emphasized the unique nature of any

neighbourhood context; it would need to be understood fully in order to measure an intervention's outcomes. One key informant, an urban community development scholar, acknowledged that in the case of Winnipeg, it was too early to understand what impacts Pathways would have or how to evaluate it there. This informant felt that cultural distinctions would impact what the program looked like, how it was delivered, and how its effectiveness could be measured from site to site:

So presumably the quantitative aspect of the evaluation mechanism can be pretty standardized across all of the sites. But there is probably another layer of evaluation that is a more qualitative kind of evaluation that would be a little bit different in each site and that, you know, requires a clear understanding of the methods that each site is going to use to achieve their goals. . . .For Aboriginal people, school for a hundred years has been an unmitigated disaster. School has been one of the means by which Canada has tried to destroy Aboriginal people. So their relationship to school right from the get-go is quite different, you know. Kids are part of families in many of which there are still residential school survivors; there's a great fear of school. And so, because of that cultural difference, I think Pathways in Winnipeg faces a different kind of a challenge and they're going to have to figure out how to solve that problem, and I don't know exactly what they're going to do. (Key Informant #6)

Another key informant articulated something similar: "I think it's important to come up with a framework that recognizes communities are different and the starting point is different and what success is going to look like is going to be different. But I honestly am not sure exactly how you do that" (Key Informant #4).

### **Measures and Outcomes: Understanding Youth and Pathways**

Most key informants had a reasonable understanding of the program and could articulate the program's main supports and components. They consistently described the youth Pathways worked with as follows:

- Marginalized
- "Lost and in need of a safe place"
- Unsuccessful at school, drop-outs
- Faced with literacy and numeracy barriers
- Lacking ability to work within structure

- Faced with challenges different from those from affluent or middle-income families
- Often, predominantly newcomers or from multiple generations of poverty

For most of the key informants, education was a key socioeconomic lever.

Addressing barriers to education was thus seen as supporting a young person to have improved life chances. Many assumed that a program such as Pathways would work in every low-income context. Many also believed that comprehensive supports targeting children and youth would contribute to the overall health and well-being of the neighbourhood. However, one key informant warned: “a community has turned its back on making sure education actually works for its kids . . . many communities need palliative care when it comes to addressing the systematic challenges they face” (Key Informant #2).

Key informants consistently identified potential outcomes that could be associated with a program like Pathways (see Table 15).

Table 15  
*Potential Outcomes of Pathways-Type Programs*

Potential Outcomes	
Associated with youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased high school graduation rates</li> <li>• Increased postsecondary options</li> <li>• Improved experience at school: improved relationships with teachers, better marks</li> <li>• Improved sense of potential in youth</li> <li>• Increased capacity to build; begin to make a plan a reality</li> <li>• Successful in what they want to do (e.g., job, postsecondary)</li> <li>• Increased ability to develop and cultivate new networks</li> <li>• Improvement in civic awareness</li> <li>• More relationships formed between youth</li> <li>• More relationships established between youth and adults</li> </ul>
Associated with neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in community cohesion</li> <li>• Improvement in civic awareness in youth</li> <li>• Reduced crime rate</li> <li>• Volunteers’ awareness of poverty and its impacts on youth</li> <li>• Younger siblings aware and interested in education’s potential</li> <li>• Culture changes—education becomes expectation</li> <li>• System (e.g., government, schools) understands challenges facing low-income neighbourhoods/youth</li> <li>• Improved parenting strategies and parental knowledge of school system</li> </ul>

Participants were very clear about potential outcomes that could reasonably be expected in youth; however, clarity around potential outcomes for neighbourhoods was less evident and often required more probing. In addressing the program’s ability to change neighbourhoods, one key informant who had substantial knowledge of the program model said:

It’s not that education has failed. . . . it’s just that the factors that affect whether people can be successful in those ways need to be mediated. . . . Pathways on its own might alleviate poverty for those kids and those families that participate, but it won’t necessarily change the community. (Key Informant #10)

Can a program that works with significant numbers of youth truly make a difference in the neighbourhood as a whole? Although it might change those involved in the specific program, the effect of the program on peripheral audiences or areas is less clear.

### **Future Directions: A Broader Evaluation Framework and Implicit Tensions**

Lastly, key informants were asked to identify goals that might be considered in the creation of a broader evaluation framework, for programs (like Pathways) that address place-based poverty. The following potential directions were identified:

- Evaluation should be linked to the framework or theory of change
- Explore impact on households
- Examine assets being built
- Instead of focusing on numbers only, attempt to utilize a learning frame to understand what's happening and focus on the constant adaptations
- Utilize a participatory process with youth, staff, and parents to train them as researchers and build their knowledge and capacity
- Evaluate student engagement in deeper ways
- Examine changes to family literacy
- Track student participation in extracurriculars
- Track neighbourhood change in a meaningful way—this might include a systematic survey of parents and neighbourhood
- Integrate evaluation into program design

One participant had knowledge of a unique, participatory evaluation process that worked with youth-serving agencies in a major Canadian metropolitan centre. In the example, agencies were funded to establish common outcomes, train youth as researchers, and employ an exploratory, arts-based evaluation. The following was the informant's interpretation of the impact of this alternative evaluation approach:

We said, okay, we need to find other ways to ask those questions and probably to ask the agency that question rather than the youth. So we brought in some of the youth evaluators that were involved in 2008 and asked them to be mentors, and hired a bunch more youth, and took an arts-based approach, which was really, really interesting, and had them start to think about evaluation from the perspective of learning. And instead of calling them focus groups, calling them learning circles. And youth started by saying they thought this was going to be most boring thing in the world, and they ended by saying, "We had no idea, we love evaluation," and "This is what I want to do in my career." (Key Informant #15)

This example represents an innovative community donor/funder and third sector organization collaboration that took risks to generate different learning and knowledge. It provided a unique perspective on how to move away from commonly used quantitative measures towards an alternative evaluation framework that focuses on learning, engaging youth, and valuing the knowledge they hold. The process built organizational and youth capacity along the way.

The same respondent articulated that a common measurement and evaluation problem was that organizations working in the same neighbourhood or context felt pressured to deliver results—common or community outcomes were only infrequently established: “We’re very interested in community impact and community outcomes, and it’s been hard for agencies to see themselves in that. . . . We don’t do community impact, we don’t do community outcomes. We do program outcomes” (Key Informant #15).

These insights suggest the opportunities that can present themselves through alternative evaluation frameworks. Generally, they said that the paradigm needs to shift, to include more voices, to have evaluation frameworks that focus on community outcomes, and to understand what and who that community is. In addition, participants were encouraged to explore or articulate tensions associated with a broader or alternative evaluation framework. The following themes emerged (Table 16).

Table 16  
*Themes for Alternative Frameworks*

Theme	Supporting Reasons
Evaluation is tough work	<p>Collecting data takes time</p> <p>It isn't always apparent what the right indicators are and space is needed to ensure that these can be found—sometimes identifying the right indicators is a process and donors or others do not always provide time to reconcile this challenge.</p> <p>Disseminating findings and reporting back to participants and neighbourhood as well as funders is a critical step that is often overlooked</p> <p>Evaluation can be a burden</p>
Poverty reduction is hard enough as it is	<p>The work of making change in low-income neighbourhood—whether that be through capacity building, front-line service or mobilizing of another kind is hard enough—it is challenging to step-out of the day-to-day operations and attend to evaluation in a meaningful way</p>
Tensions associated with scalability	<p>For a program to be replicated in different contexts there is a tension between developing it sufficiently and having the minimum specs well understood so that it can be expanded and reexplored to meet the needs of different neighbourhoods</p> <p>Systems are different in different jurisdictions—take for example education—the policies governing education look different and must be understood before attempting to make change</p> <p>Replication has different types of costs than operating a program</p>
Pathways-specific tensions	<p>Because of the newness of the intervention, it feels at times like those running it are constantly evaluating it and trying to understand it without a deeper understanding of what is important</p> <p>It is challenging to get feedback from those students who aren't engaged or who are absent—yet these are the students who need to be attended to</p> <p>Relationships with major stakeholders needs to be managed—boards of education have certain responsibilities that don't always align with those of Pathways</p>
Tensions implicit in success	<p>In the third sector's drive for demonstrable results, other important details or insights might be missed</p> <p>Success often comes at all costs—in terms of reporting data, human fatigue to deliver results and pressure to perform</p> <p>Not looking good, although it might be more authentic or honest is not as easy as controlling a message for stakeholders</p>

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined and documented the findings collected in a case study of Pathways to Education Canada as it scaled up from Regent Park to 11 neighbourhoods across Canada. I summarized reports documenting the program's growth and history in Regent Park, and also third-party documentation of current evaluation and outcome measures. I also did a more thorough case study of the program in Kitchener and Ottawa, to explore dimensions of these neighbourhoods, focusing specifically on staff and youth perspectives on youth, the neighbourhood, and making change. Lastly, I presented findings assembled through interviews with 17 national key informants who provided feedback and insights into how to evaluate place-based poverty reduction efforts, including tensions implicit in shifting evaluation frameworks towards broader or different goals. In the next chapter, I present further discussion and analysis of these findings from the perspective of the community research advisory group.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Section 1:**

##### **Overview of Discussion and Analysis**

In Chapter 5, I presented a series of findings that emerged from a small-scale exploratory study that I designed to examine the question of how to evaluate place-based poverty reduction strategies across sites and scales. As indicated, I chose to do a case study of the Pathways to Education program as it replicated and expanded into different low-income neighbourhoods across Canada. I discussed evaluation, neighbourhoods, and poverty reduction with national key informants and participants and staff from the Pathways program. What emerged was a complex picture of what mattered to youth and families in these neighbourhoods, and the diverse ways that staff understood and conceptualized these individuals and geographic sites. The focus of the study was on hearing various narratives on neighbourhoods, youth, and change in relationship to this human services program. The layered, complex data presented a nuanced picture of what was happening to the youth and in the places where the program operated.

At times, how youth saw themselves and the impacts of the program on their development and their neighbourhood were in opposition to the narratives that staff shared about them and their neighbourhoods. I found that the competing narratives were equally valid, because, for an evaluation framework to be inclusive and representative of the people and places it addresses, competing narratives can be true simultaneously. For instance, where one member of staff might perceive the neighbourhood as unsafe or crime-ridden, another might perceive it as safe and full of green spaces. Both interpretations can be true. Therefore,

to understand the complexities of change, the challenge was then to identify the dominant narratives about the places and the people living there, and also to attend carefully to any silenced, latent voices.

In many ways, Chapter 5 presents more questions than answers. This chapter will be an attempt to interpret the findings in greater detail, to make sense of them from my (and others') perspective and with the assistance of others. I have organized the discussion into two sections. The first comprises four main themes articulated in discussion with the members of the research advisory:

- Participation and exclusion
- Success as a culturally constructed concept
- Community engagement and scaling up
- Methodological insights

In the second section, I review the findings in close detail, comparing them with existing literature. In particular, I examine some of the methodological and epistemological challenges that arise when challenging traditional evaluation frameworks or approaches.

In the conclusion to this chapter, I provide further analysis and discussion about the implications of this research using a social justice frame and raise questions about how to continue to shift the paradigm towards more inclusive evaluation frameworks.

## **Section 2:**

### **Insights and Analysis From Members of the Research Advisory Group**

To analyze the data in further detail, incorporating different perspectives, I asked members of the research advisory group to identify broad themes and interpretations after reading the findings and reviewing the data. To guide this process, I provided three general questions:

- On reading the findings, what feedback do you have as staff/alumni/individuals?
- What implications does your feedback have for policy makers/low income youth/low-income neighbourhoods?
- Would you make any further recommendations to the leaders of the Pathways to Education program?

Four main themes emerged from conversations with the members of the group: participation and exclusion; success as a culturally constructed concept; community engagement and scaling up; and methodological insights.

### **Who Is At the Table? Who Is Missing? And . . . Did Everyone Receive an Invitation?**

I chose to use the metaphor of a dinner table and a party invitation to support the discussion of this theme. After reading the findings chapter, one of the strongest interpretations provided by members of the research advisory group was not so much about what was present in the findings but about what was not present. They found many students' voices absent: students who were marginalized further, who did not participate in the program, whom the program excluded, and who were extremely at risk for a multitude of reasons.

**Who is at the table?** At the table were youth who participated in the focus groups, participants in the program itself, and members of the research advisory group.

The research advisory group raised serious questions about the background of the participants, their perspectives, whether they felt comfortable to critique the Pathways program and their neighbourhood, and how they perceived their future. Those who had worked as student/ parent support workers in particular carried unique knowledge about the challenges, insights, and perspectives of the program's most at-risk or hard-to-engage youth. They felt that any evaluation framework must both theoretically and metaphorically fill the

gap created by youth who were disengaged—nonparticipants in the program. From the staff's perspective, the voices of these youth were silent throughout this research.

Engaging youth in research is a process that can be complicated to explain, highly technocratic, and often meaningless to participants. It is not a simple task. For example, in one of my focus groups in Ottawa, half the participants walked out within five minutes of the focus group commencing. As they did not share their intentions with me during the focus group, I could only speculate as to why. Later, I discovered that many of them had met at Pathways to then travel together to a movie. This event led me to question how meaningful any research process was for youth, and what power imbalances perpetuated even research that aimed to be egalitarian in design and implementation.

How to engage hard-to-reach youth in the research process in ways that recognize and respect the diversity of their experience and perspective needs to be considered further. The youth who participated in this research study were participants in the program and, as such, saw some value or worth in its existence. Had I conducted this research with a random sample of youth from these neighbourhoods, I would have heard very different narratives about the program and about the neighbourhood itself. These voices were not included sufficiently. More time and effort would result in a more comprehensive understanding of a diversity of youth voices.

**Who is missing?** Members of the research advisory group articulated the need to understand, examine, and hear from students for whom the Pathways program did not work. Anecdotally, at this stage in Pathways' development, the program has worked well with about 85 percent of low-income youth. The degree and quality of their participation has varied depending on time and their needs. For instance, some students would come to

tutoring to socialize with friends, not for academic support. Others would have only periodic visits with their SPSWs and were still counted as participants, whereas others came all the time, were consistent in their attendance, and genuinely seemed to appreciate and acknowledge the support.

Between 10 and 15 percent of eligible students were excluded annually from participating in the program; many excluded themselves, claiming that they did not want the program's support. They communicated this message through ignoring efforts at reaching out.

**Did everyone receive the invitation?** The reasons for students' nonparticipation were complex and convoluted. Nonparticipation raised a series of questions about respecting the rights of students to not participate and also the necessity to build more inclusive options and supports for students who had more complex experiences and needs. Ten to 15 percent of students stopped participating, and ignored phone calls and other attempts staff made to reach out to them. These were often the youth who seemed to need some form of support most of all. Often, they were boys who experienced multiple layers of exclusion because of cultural or ethnic status, mental health issues, complex family situations, or gang affiliation. The challenge was compounded in that low-income families tend move frequently, and changes in address or phone number limited the program's ability to stay connected to some youth.

How to effectively engage these students remained somewhat of a mystery. After all, if a student chose not to participate, at what point would continuing to engage that youth infringe on his or her right to make that choice? Fleshing out the characteristics of this group of students is difficult not only because identifying and engaging these students in a meaningful conversation is time consuming; it is also fraught with ethical dilemmas. Simply

put, the program has not done a solid job of tracking some students, understanding their needs, or designing a more purposeful solution to meet them where they are, figuratively and literally.

### **Success as a Culturally Constructed Concept**

Another theme that emerged, although not as loudly or as clearly in the conversations, was the need to more deeply understand the viability of multiple paths and routes forward for low-income youth. Members of the research advisory group raised serious and thoughtful questions about how to support youth who accessed a variety of postsecondary paths and routes. Dominant discourses about success typically construct it as something that comes with a well-paying job, an education, and significant status. However, for this research and for a program like Pathways to be more inclusive and potentially emancipatory, it must attend to a multitude of paths and definitions of success.

Where we live, how we are raised, the cultural values we buy into, and those we tacitly follow can be difficult to unpack and critically deconstruct. To do this effectively means respecting, acknowledging, and honouring narratives of success that might be problematic, and even antithetical to our own values or belief systems. We might think of success as a deeper understanding of self and others. We might define it as being drug free for a few weeks, as not self-harming; or as being a good caretaker, good wife, or good daughter. But if cultural norms and values clash, the definitions become challenging and problematic. For instance, what would it mean to be a good daughter in an Afghani home? What if it meant being sent to Afghanistan at age 16 to marry? How might program staff support that narrative of success? Where would the line get drawn?

Generally, the research advisory group felt that the program needed to work to support youth to articulate their own definition of success while supporting the cultivation of deep self-awareness and individual acknowledgement of the broader implications and associations of such definitions.

### **Community Engagement and Scaling Up**

We need to further understand and evaluate the impacts of scaling up (vertical scaling) and scaling across (horizontal scaling). Poverty-reduction efforts, when scaled up and across different neighbourhood contexts, must continually be assessed and evaluated from the perspective of who is the neighbourhood or community, what are its needs, and who or what needs are not being met. Are there patterns to be discerned in those students who are struggling? If so, what are potential remedies or interventions? Conscious evaluation efforts need to continue to attend to the experiences of those being served at multiple scales; in the instance of Pathways, these were youth, family, and the neighbourhood system.

Pathways grew out of a specific neighbourhood context at a specific point in time—Regent Park, in 2001. The larger Pathways has become—both as numbers of students grew at individual sites, and as the number of sites expanded—the more complex the program operations have become, and the more important it has become to pay even closer attention to what is happening on the ground. In a process of vertical scaling, the program began with one cohort and grew to five cohorts within five years. The program, staff, and students had a tight-knit family feel in early years, and then as growth occurred, structures and systems were implemented to manage the growth and complexity.

Another way of thinking about this is that as program interventions work in different contexts, what needs to be paid attention to is not always apparent. For example, as the

research findings from this study indicate, how the program will operate in Winnipeg's North End, with its largely Aboriginal community, is not yet known. The availability of youth-friendly spaces in the neighbourhood might not be an important program component in neighbourhoods like Regent Park or other Toronto neighbourhoods where a variety of such spaces are available; but it is a pressing issue in the Kitchener neighbourhoods, where such spaces are limited and where negotiating for them has become a primary objective of the program team. One key informant felt that minimum specs for place-based poverty reduction strategies need to be thought through. One such minimum would be to consider investing heavily in evaluation and learning, especially in new contexts at the initial stages of program development.

### **Methodological Insights**

Members of the research advisory group felt that the methods used for this study needed greater reflection. They posed questions about the type of instructions provided to youth for developing their narratives; the availability of supplies; and the groupings and types of students, and their understanding of process. Their questions and concerns about method were helpful and provided relevant, thought-provoking insights.

Much discussion focused on the visual narratives in particular: their development, significance, and the manner in which the youth created them. Some members of the research advisory group constructively challenged the type of pictures chosen and the type of narratives shared by the youth. I understood the group's members to mean that when they saw the narratives, they interpreted the images as a particularly glossy and positive image of how the program supported them as youth. Methodologically speaking, this raised questions about how comfortable the youth felt in sharing complex narratives, and the degree to which

they simply provided types of responses they believed to be desired by program staff or researchers.

As mentioned previously, how to engage youth in an authentic conversation about what they desire for themselves and their future requires careful consideration. Researchers need to be willing to provide youth with the training and language they might need to tell their story in a different way, so that trust can develop between researcher and youth, and also between youth and other youth. Without this training and support, youth participation in research becomes superficial and meaningless.

### **Section 3:**

#### **The Findings Compared to the Literature**

In this section, I identify some of the themes that emerged in reviewing the literature on neighbourhood effects and compare those with the findings that emerged from the research. I also probe more deeply into an analysis of the findings regarding evaluation and how this research begins, in a small way, to fill some of the identified gaps. A handful of dominant discursive themes prevailed in the literature, including:

- *Problematization of neighbourhood effects*
- *The impact of social capital on educational attainment*; the role of resources and networks
- *Methodological challenges*; dominant assumptions about low-income neighbourhoods being dirty, sick, poor, and bad, and the concomitant exclusion of narratives from racialized or gendered perspectives
- *Place-based poverty reduction: State or social innovation?* The alignment of place-based poverty reduction with child and youth services, and a reliance on

social innovation instead of on the state or single actors to solve complex problems

A series of gaps also emerged in the literature review, particularly regarding how evaluation is conceptualized and operationalized to measure place-based changes and the reduction of spatialized poverty and its effects. I identified the following gaps in the literature:

- *Data and knowledge are not synonymous.* Typically, funders and experts perceive data as what matters, whereas what people understand, internalize, and constitute as knowledge might be dramatically different or incongruent. Outcome measures and quantitative assessments might indicate a certain reality or experience, but this reality or truth is often not collectively agreed upon.
- *Outcomes and impact are dependent on the context as well as the mechanism.* If the neighbourhood represents the context, how might this be incorporated into any evaluation framework?
- *Value is contested.* Current evaluation literature does not deconstruct what is valuable, to whom, and under what circumstances. Value depends on one's individual perspective at a given point in time.
- *Youth voice is absent.* Their experience and expertise often become marginalized.

I took these themes and gaps into account in my attempts to understand how to evaluate effective place-based poverty reduction strategies across sites and scales, by listening to a diversity of stakeholders and perceptions. I actively attempted to incorporate youth voice in the design and data-collection phases of my research. Efforts to address one gap, my awareness that value has multiple and contested meanings, were complicated in that

I recognized that the language used to describe value was dissimilar across audiences; each of these audiences held different interpretations of what was most important in a place-based poverty reduction program. Future research might address this gap by having a focus group with multiple stakeholders and by spending time defining terms together. Lastly, the gaps identified regarding outcomes, impacts, data, and knowledge as not synonymous emerged throughout the research; what funders and program staff identified as data was not necessarily what participants perceived about themselves or the impacts of the program. Creating an evaluation framework that incorporates a diversity of impacts, and clarifying those that can be measured and those that matter for actual participants, might be a fruitful next stage of research. However, impacts that matter for participants are not always impacts that will attract financial or capital investments. For example, would funders be interested in providing a space for youth to come together and feel safe with their peers, or would they be more motivated to support financially a program that demonstrates a reduction in absenteeism at school?

I will now outline how my research aligns or contradicts the four dominant themes identified in the literature.

### **Problematizing Neighbourhood Effects**

My research findings suggested that neighbourhoods were defined and understood differently by program participants, staff, and national experts. The ways each understood the influence of neighbourhood depended on their individual experience with it. Similarly, how a program like Pathways could impact a neighbourhood was not clearly understood. Many program staff described how the program did so by creating a safe space for youth, encouraging greater participation in public spaces, and encouraging a sense of social cohesion for program

participants. These, from the perspective of staff, appear to be positive impacts on the quality of life in the neighbourhood; however by no means were these universally true or concretely measureable.

### **The Impact of Social Capital: The Role of Resources and Networks**

The findings make considerable reference to the significance of networks and relationships in what Pathways has helped to support and build. At Pathways, student/parent support workers act as bridges, connecting students to resources, whether these be financial or educational supports or the relationship that forms between student and staff or volunteer. These important relationships are not measured quantitatively, but they play a significant role in helping youth to feel supported and an integral part of a larger system—whether that be the neighbourhood system or the school system. Many youth identified feeling outside or disconnected from relationships where financial capital might present a barrier. One youth's commentary in a focus group was, "We're all different, but when we come to Pathways we're equal," suggesting one way that Pathways helped youth to feel connected and part of something transcending financial capital or social class. The literature suggests that social capital—depending on its kind, source and intensity—plays an ambiguous, nonlinear role in mediating neighbourhood effects.

What the research therefore suggests is that place-based poverty reduction programs that are holistic and all-inclusive of the youth being served provide a consistent relationship and access to resources that might not always be available or within reach. A place-based poverty reduction program like Pathways supports youth to acquire resources and to build social capital in ways that the dominant middle class defines as normative and acceptable. This raises further questions about the program's capacity to respect holistically the

knowledge and resources associated with living in poverty and the ways these less acceptable forms of social capital become omitted or erased.

### **Methodological Challenges**

Another theme in the literature was the dominant construction of poor neighbourhoods and poor kids as underachieving, dirty, sick, and uniformly bad. My findings did not support or contradict this traditional, stereotyped construction of poor kids and poor neighbourhoods. However, on further reflection, the design and processes of the research study did present methodological challenges requiring further and more diligent consideration. To begin with, youth, while their voices were listened to, were not active participants in all stages of the research process. Members of the advisory group were youth, but they were older, and had succeeded through the traditional measures—they had graduated from high school and from the program. I did not actively reach out and work with youth who were disengaged or who were stereotypically problematic—the so-called bad kids.

In the focus groups, the youth very often parroted back dominant stereotypes of their neighbourhoods—as gang-ridden and as sites of gun violence. I attempted to challenge these statements whenever I heard them, but the youth persisted in saying that these stereotypes were their identities. I believed the youth needed to develop the language to share their experiences more comprehensively, and not just provide narratives that they believed a young, female, White researcher wanted or expected to hear. Helping them to develop such a language—and thereby encouraging more inclusive youth participation—would require a different methodological and epistemological frame. This view correlates with the analysis provided by members of the research advisory group; it was a weakness of this study. More

time, and trusted youth translators being part of the process, would assist the authenticity of the results and shared narratives.

### **Place-Based Poverty Reduction: State or Social Innovation?**

This theme in the literature became animated concretely by the national experts' commentaries on the role of the third sector in place-based poverty reduction efforts. Consistently, these experts articulated that place-based poverty reduction needed to be comprehensive in nature, that it worked between and across various systems, was long term in nature, and had to reflect the neighbourhood context. Many of the experts believed that the third sector was uniquely positioned to innovate, facilitate diverse interests, drive social innovation, and facilitate more meaningful knowledge translation.

## **Section 4:**

### **Next Steps for Evaluation Research and Conclusion**

*While a rational approach has tended to analytically separate planning actions from their institutional and social context . . . some key realities need to be taken into account.*

*These social realities include citizens' sensitivity on planning impacts, attitudes, perceived equality, mutual understanding, trust, and accepted norms. Another set of principles that has come to the fore includes a multi-dimensional understanding of planning, emphasizing in evaluation new coherences between social, economic and environmental issues.*

—Khakee, Hull, Miller, & Woltjer, 2008, p. 13

The literature on neighbourhood effects, evaluation, and place-based poverty reduction suggests that the impact of neighbourhood effects on child and youth outcomes is not clear or linear; individual and familial factors, social interventions, and other supports can mediate. To develop and explore potential evaluation frameworks for place-based poverty reduction programs requires an awareness and understanding of the strengths and deficiencies both in traditional human service program evaluations and also in urban planning evaluation frameworks. Place-based poverty reduction efforts link people and places, and an evaluation

framework needs to capture perceptible change across multiple dimensions and levels. As Khakee et al. (2008) have suggested, urban planning evaluation paradigms are increasingly being challenged to incorporate social and civic norms such as equality, trust, and mutual understanding. Economic, environmental, and social challenges and problems cannot be extracted and understood in isolation. Their impacts on people and places become intertwined and complex, and urban planning, evaluation, and neighbourhood development solutions need to reflect each of these dimensions. In the same way, for evaluation purposes, they need to be integrated and understood in connection to one another, not in isolation.

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide some real space to the voices and perspectives of the research advisory, to have their voices play a central role in the analysis and interpretation of the findings. They identified a series of themes requiring further consideration, including different insights into participation and exclusion, tensions between being community based and scaling up, methodological considerations, and the culturally constructed nature of success.

In the next chapter, I provide some final recommendations for urban planners, policy makers, and those working to enact place-based poverty reduction. I also summarize the findings and identify areas for future research.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

*Here is a map of our country:  
here is the Sea of Indifference, glazed with salt  
This is the haunted river flowing from brow to groin  
we dare not taste its water  
This is the desert where missiles are planted like corms  
This is the breadbasket of farms  
This is the birthplace of the rockabilly boy  
This is the cemetery of the poor  
who died for democracy  
—Adrienne Rich, *An Atlas of the Difficult World*  
(quoted in Harvey, 1996, p. vii)*

Harvey (1996) turned to the poet Adrienne Rich to set the stage for his seminal discussion of justice and the geography of difference. In my conclusion to this investigation, I feel it fitting to turn to Harvey and to his reflections on justice and injustices—his very sombre analysis of the ways that spatial inequalities affect individual outcomes and create geographies of difference.

I began this inquiry with Sandercock's (2006) optimistic call to action to imagine a world beyond despair. In spite of our desire to create more equitable and inclusive neighbourhoods, real, measurable inequity and social exclusion exist. Human service programs such as Pathways, which work to provide supports to the poorest youth in urban communities in Canada, represent valiant efforts to change and shift landscapes' inequalities and to move beyond landscapes of despair.

The challenge for urban geographers and planners is to create frameworks that monitor and evaluate changes that occur across a number of dimensions—social, environmental, and civic. Although written more than 15 years ago, in the wake of growing awareness of the impacts of globalization, Harvey's (1996) analysis and request resonate strongly today with my concluding reflections and comments:

We need critical ways to think about how differences in ecological, cultural, economic, political, and social conditions get produced (particularly through those human activities that are in a position in principle to modify or control) and we also need ways to evaluate the justice/injustice of the differences so produced. (p. 5)

When communities or neighbourhoods are marginalized because of poverty or because of material difference, clear shifts away from simplistic, quantitative description to deeper, more complex narratives and analysis are needed. Only with such narratives and analysis will we be able to respond to, stem, counter, or lessen such injustice and measure and evaluate efforts to reduce or lessen it. In this final chapter, I present three main conclusions. After briefly summarizing the research process and findings, I present my own analysis of the data using a social justice frame; I reflect more concretely on the methodological challenges associated with this research process, and with dilemmas associated with analysis and interpretation; and lastly, I raise questions about areas requiring more consideration, especially in the cross-section between fields of urban planning, education, and social work.

This research began with a simple question about how to evaluate a place-based poverty reduction effort across different sites and in consideration of different scales, individual and neighbourhood. Although I could have approached this question in a variety of ways, I chose to do a case study of Pathways to Education, in order to examine more concretely how a human service intervention affected youth and the neighbourhoods they lived in. I examined the role of neighbourhood effects and the impacts of spatialized poverty. I utilized a rights and participation approach in both the theoretical and methodological framing of this examination. I then designed a three-stage research process to understand how youth, program staff, and national experts constructed narratives of success, neighbourhoods, youth, and change.

What emerged from the research was a complex picture of how to evaluate a place-based poverty reduction strategy. This nuanced picture (what matters most to different stakeholders, in different places) suggests that programs attempting to make change in low-income locations need to build more responsive mechanisms so as to understand the diverse sociocultural perspectives in each site. An authentic picture of neighbourhoods (and change that can occur in them because of interventions) requires an evaluation frame that incorporates diverse perspectives and assessment over a longer period of time, not the static snapshots that funders or governments typically rely on to determine the effectiveness of their interventions.

One of the limitations of this research is its failure to situate itself more centrally within a political economy or structuralist framework. For example, political economists and many structuralists might contend that a program such as Pathways merely addresses one marginalized population in a specific marginalized context, and that by addressing these individuals and neighbourhoods, it shifts marginalization to other spaces and places—to other communities of difference. Indeed, real transformation would require chipping away at the entire capitalist system that produces such inequity. To address this limitation is to be aware that programs such as Pathways emerge from a certain socio-political context that increasingly rewards programs that build the economic capacity of those most vulnerable—this program does not address root causes of material difference but rather develops the capacity of those from poor neighbourhoods to pay taxes, be productive members of society and be gainfully employed. In the meantime, new populations and communities of marginalization emerge to maintain a hegemonic system of power and control—one that privileges certain types of knowledge and ability while suppressing others.

## **My Analysis of the Findings**

I use a social justice frame to provide my own interpretation and analysis of the findings here. I particularly want to provide insights on two themes. I will then conclude with some recommendations for specific audiences.

### **On Social Justice**

In creating an evaluation framework for a place-based poverty reduction program or intervention, I believe it is critical to understand the program's theory of change, and what paradigms or systems the intervention is trying to change. Importantly, framing this understanding from a perspective of who such interventions might continue to exclude—or who might continue to be marginalized or misunderstood through such interventions—could produce more inclusive and more durable change.

Programs like Pathways work effectively because they are able to garner the support they need from business and the private sector while simultaneously working hard to enact change for some of Canada's lowest-income youth, often within confines and restrictions. (For example, they need to respect policies and frameworks of school boards that might be exclusionary of difference, or with program partners that emphasize corporate routes to success because they support the development of a certain type of workforce or outreach opportunity.) Thus, Pathways connects two different worlds. In building linkages between low-income youth and the corporate sector, risks and tensions arise. Sometimes the opportunities provided promote certain youth and further marginalize others. Where to draw the line on where, how, and when to build bridges between these two realities and when to cut them off (because they might further marginalize certain youth) is problematic. That said,

at its core, Pathways works comprehensively, rigorously, and respectfully in neighbourhoods to make change for as many youth as it can, and this is significant and laudable.

Interventions, to be successful in making place-based change, require resources, long-term commitment, the ability to demonstrate results, and a capacity to build strategic alliances and partnerships with a broad array of organizations. Such interventions could be evaluated by including some of the following:

- *Involve participants as knowledge creators.* Training participants as researchers develops insights and skills in both the organization and the participant, and produces interesting and insightful evaluation reports.
- *Be learning focused and allow room for failure.* Too frequently, organizations become focused on success at all costs. Being open to learning from the process, seeing different angles and perspectives, and reporting on mistakes might enable more authenticity in the evaluation process.
- *Use stories as culturally constructed vessels of deep meaning.* They provide rich insights into what change looks like, its qualities and its processes.
- *Pay attention.* Pay attention to those who are not included, and to those who continue to be marginalized.
- *Attend deeply.* Pay particular attention to the unique nature of the neighbourhoods and the qualities, strengths, and issues of their residents.

### **On Change**

Lastly, the act of evaluation and of noticing change seems most relevant to the individual, group, or entity paying attention to it. As third-sector organizations drive to demonstrate their ability to generate results in low-income neighbourhoods or amidst spatial poverty, I remain

unconvinced about whether change as it is commonly defined in such organizations is as meaningful to the residents who live there. Surely it matters to participants, but I cannot ever think of a time when, as a middle-class woman, for instance, I cared that deeply about the ways in which social programs changed my experience. I have been insulated by my middle-class-ness and as such I have believed in my own agency and my ability to navigate my own future. The potentially limiting effects of neighbourhood are not as dramatic for me and if they are, I believe in my own capacity to will myself out of whatever context I must. Change might not be understood or internalized the same way for those who grow up in lower-income contexts and as such, the entire notion of the evaluation—theory and practice—seems increasingly problematic and normative. What would it look like if low-income residents were given real tools to design their own futures, instead of having third-sector organizations assuming those roles and responsibilities? The tension between support and limitation, freedom and constriction, seems especially apparent in many neighbourhoods where patterns of control and dominance have been well established by certain government, private sector, and nonprofit organizations for decades. Breaking out of these ways of doing business and allowing for a more open dialogue on what change might need to look and feel like in an authentic way for residents would be a huge risk but it is one that cannot continue to be avoided.

### **Conclusion and Further Questions**

In many ways, my research has raised more questions than answers. It has suggested that dominant, traditional evaluation frameworks remain insufficient and that more nuanced evaluation frameworks are needed to incorporate youth perspectives and youth voice, especially in measuring place-based poverty. This research also raises further questions and

considerations for the planning profession as well as the development of planning theory, especially in light of the need for more comprehensive frameworks and mechanisms to measure and evaluate place-based poverty initiatives, across sites and scales. Planning theory presents many helpful frameworks from which to examine and explore how to evaluate comprehensive change in neighbourhoods—communicative planning theory, and advocacy planning paradigms offer useful insights into ways of integrating different perspectives and a rights discourse across the scale of neighbourhoods that are experiencing change—yet when these frameworks become operationalized, planning practitioners often face challenges to mitigate immense financial resources or politically-driven development plans. Thinking through how planners become educated within schools of planning, specifically how to build their language competencies and a more robust framework for caring about neighbourhoods to work more effectively across professional groups in situations of spatialized poverty would allow for a more collaborative framework for planners to incorporate and advocate on behalf of residents and populations that might be silenced. Different professions (social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, planners, etc.) conceptualize the issues of spatialized poverty in varied ways, depending on the constructs of care and the role they see themselves playing within these landscapes—considering a more holistic training for planners in particular to integrate different perspectives and to see the complex relationships and dynamism within neighbourhood sites might allow for a different pace and different process to enable longer-term change.

Evaluation frameworks would benefit from further practical experimentation and critical reflection. Narrative and quantitative assessments could provide a more holistic picture of what is happening because of a human service intervention, but how to create these

frameworks and what to pay attention to in designing and delivering them, especially when the context is shifting and in many instances, unknown, remains problematic. A more robust research agenda addressing the impacts of the program in different neighbourhood types and with different population groups could be crafted. Next steps in this research might be to examine how different ethnocultural communities across different sites perceive the benefits of the Pathways program in supporting academic success. Such an investigation might include the ways Aboriginal youth in the North End of Winnipeg might benefit from Pathways, and how they might perceive and understand its worth. Similarly, the different impacts of the program on different gender groups could be examined, or on youth from families of multigenerational poverty.

These concerns aside, my research has raised broad theoretical and methodological questions about how to build inclusive frameworks for evaluation that measure meaningful change in poverty reduction across different neighbourhood sites. These include:

- What are effective measures and standards against which to measure poverty reduction?
- What are differences between the ways that research measures poverty reduction and the ways that residents who experience poverty observe and notice change?
- To discern and create new forms of understanding and knowledge, what is an appropriate balance between experimenting with unconventional evaluation approaches, on the one hand, and relying on traditional approaches that satisfy dominant/existing power structures, on the other?
- How might supporting youth to comprehensively articulate their experience allow for different interpretations of their narratives?

- How might funding bodies support more experimentation in place-based poverty reduction, so that a diversity of citizens' groups that face barriers to social inclusion could be enabled to engage and participate in a full range of civic life?
- What structures or formats would enable effective knowledge exchange between diverse professionals in the field of urban planning, education, social work, and health care?

Place-based poverty reduction programs such as Pathways are effective only to the extent to which they recognize and respect the differences and nuances of the neighbourhoods in which they operate, including the youth. Such programs will only succeed, in the truest sense of the word, if they acknowledge a diversity of acceptable futures for youth. Including youth in building, evaluating, and shaping program improvements and respecting their knowledge will allow for the development of more emancipatory urban environments for all citizens.

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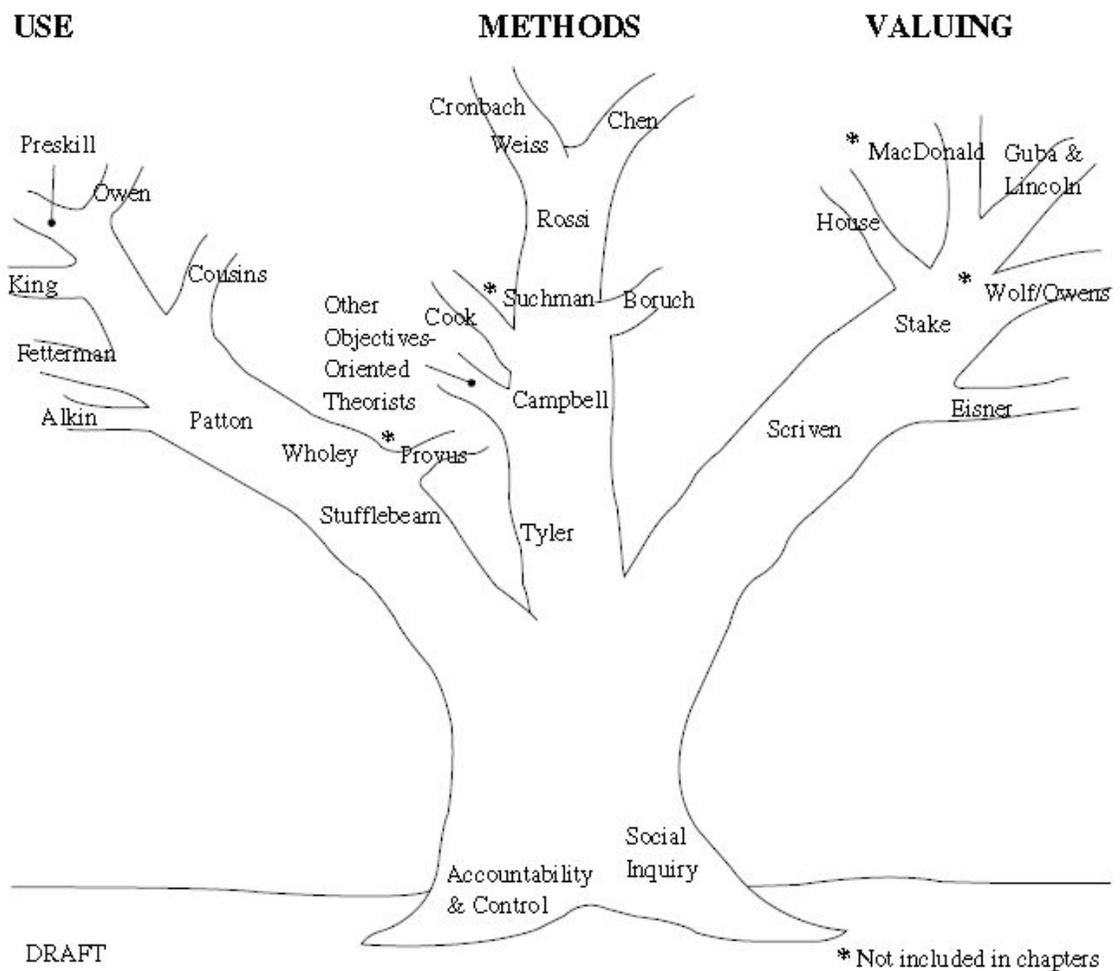
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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A:

### ROOTS OF EVALUATION

In Chapter 2 of Marvin C. Alkin's (2004) edited book, *Evaluation Roots*, Alkin and Christina C. Christie present a diagram that outlines various theoretical roots of evaluation and the ways these have developed and evolved (p. 13). Their diagram, represented below, suggests that there are two main roots to evaluation: accountability and control, and social inquiry. They identify theorists who have contributed to evaluation theory in each of the various branches which they identify as use, methods, and valuing.



## APPENDIX B:

### A SAMPLE OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON RESILIENCE

The concept of resilience is making an academic surge within the last decade. Researchers, looking for an understanding of why certain groups of people, communities, or areas overcome adversity, have developed a series of conceptualizations that begin to both define and describe the processes underpinning the characteristic of resilience. I have randomly chosen a series of articles that look at the concept within a biomedical frame as well as how resilience affects communities and neighbourhoods and also child development.

Writing for *Child Development*, Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) defined the concept of resilience and look at the challenges and concerns that emerge from increased research in this area over the last four years. After tracing the historical development of the construct of resilience, they identified challenges associated with ambiguities in definition, variations in interdomain functioning, instability in the phenomenon of resilience, and questions about the utility of resilience as a scientific construct. They tracked the term's origins to describing adaptive outcomes in the presence of adversity with the empirical literature on schizophrenia serving as the founding base and then track the term's application to children of mothers experiencing a mental illness and its more current application to include multiple adverse conditions such as socioeconomic conditions, disadvantage and associated risks.

Buckner, Mezzacappa and Beardslee (2003), writing from a biomedical approach, investigated the characteristics of resilient youths living in poverty. Citing a series of risks that low-income youth encounter including witnessing violence, vandalism, drugs, and illegal substance youth, their analysis began from the belief that youth in low-income settings experience a broad range of greater social and domestic risks that stem from economic hardship. For example, they cited homelessness as “only experienced by children living in poverty” (Buckner et al., 2003, p. 139). Although these beliefs require further unpacking, their rationale for the study is sound—specifically, there is a need to study resilience in the context of poverty and that by studying resilience in extremely poor children, some learnings can be transferable. In their study of 155 youth, they used five measures to operationally define and then test resilience including behaviour problems, mental health symptoms, level of functioning adaptation, and competence. Using a hierarchical regression analysis, they then examined whether self-regulation and resilience varied as a function of age or gender. Based on the research, the authors indicated that findings from the research study strongly supported the main hypothesis that, “self-regulation skills would emerge as a predictor of resilience

(being more of a characteristic of resilient children), even when accounting for other explanatory variables” (Buckner et al., 2003, p. 155).

Mykota and Muhajarine (2005) examined the concept of community resilience as it applies to well-defined, geographically bounded neighbourhoods, and the factors that mediate, either positively or negatively, child and youth health outcomes. Identifying a dearth of literature on the concept of community resilience, they focused on researching a geographically bound neighbourhood to develop an understanding of “community resilience as a mediating construct on child and youth health outcomes in three contrasting neighbourhoods (Mykota & Muhajarine, 2005, p. 7).” The authors (Mykota & Muhajarine, 2005) have provided a helpful overview of their conceptualization of resilience as it applies to a neighbourhood (Fig. 1, p. 9). Michael Ungar (2004) presented a unique constructionist exploration to resilience as it applies to children and youth. Aiming to challenge the dominant ecological view underpinning the bulk of resilience research done to date, Ungar (2004) noted that within the ecological paradigm, resilience has been defined as health despite adversity and, “in contrast, a constructionist approach to resilience reflects a postmodern interpretation of the construct and defines resilience as the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse” (p. 342).

Writing for a public health audience and approaching adolescent development with a specific interest in how to make effective interventions, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) examined three different models of resilience—compensatory, protective, and challenge—and described the unique characteristics of each in comparison to other similar concepts. Like other resilience researchers studying the life outcomes and experiences of youth living in poverty, Fergus and Zimmerman acknowledged that not all adolescents experience and cope with risk and disadvantage in the same way. From their analysis of research on models of resilience, as well as their research on specific behaviours such as substance abuse, sexual behaviour and violent behaviour and potential resilience-based interventions, they identify the relevancy of parental support, monitoring and communication as well as youth skills such as community and social skills as examples of resources often associated with youth who overcome adversity.

A helpful (although slightly dated) meta-analysis of resilience in the literature can be found in VanBreda (2001) who examined the development of the concept from its application to communities to encompass a wider array of applications including to families and military families. In this analysis, VanBreda described, in great detail, the forms of social support which families can rely on as well as forms of family stress. Although the author failed to make a direct causal link, he did suggest that social support has a potentially stress buffering effect on families as well as a direct

effect on family adaptation. VanBreda then examined how community resilience might be constructed. He referenced a series of authors in this construction, including Gary Bowen who was writing from an American military perspective; Sonn and Fisher, who examined dysfunctionality and community competence; John McKnight, who explored how policy and social service delivery systems might be re-envisioned to support the most vulnerable in society; and Kim Blankenship, a race scholar, who suggested that resilience emerges only in the face of adversity. Each of these serve as examples that acknowledge the community to be a whole system which may or may not present resilience.

## APPENDIX C:

### DEFINING GENTRIFICATION

Two competing theorizations about the process of gentrification dominate the literature. The structural Marxist Neil Smith (1981, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1993, 2002) championed one explanation of the process through his hypothesis that gentrification is caused by the supply of run-down “gentrifiable” property, the workings of the real-estate market, the spatial flows of capital and the rent gap. More recently, he has advanced the notion of “revanchism” as it relates to wealthy professionals who fill the void left by the demise of the welfare state. David Ley (1985, 2004), on the other hand, has explained gentrification by privileging the demand side through his analysis of the role and sense of agency of the middle class who prefer the accessibility and historic nature of the inner-city. This is an oversimplification of a more complicated discourse, but the explanations provided by Ley and Smith remain definitive and representative of the dominant descriptive paradigm. Slater (2006), in his quest to examine the perspectives of the displaced, supported this reading of the dominant paradigm:

The problem with rehashing these old debates is not just epistemological, that it just precludes widespread agreement that gentrification is a multi-faceted process of class transformation that is best explained from a holistic point of departure; it is also political, in that critical perspectives get lost within, or are absent entirely from, the squabbling about whether Smith or Ley has got it right in a certain gentrification context. So much time and ink has been spent in disagreement over what is causing the process that one wonders whether labour could have been better spent. (p. 747)

While both Smith and Ley critiqued the process, there is a failure to engage in retheorizations or reconceptualizations. Instead, the discourse maintains an unfaltering commitment to testing long-standing hypotheses. Many other theorists contribute to this dominant discourse by providing nuanced analysis in different contexts.

Theoretically, much of what has been written about gentrification describes the process rather than critiquing, challenging or contesting it. Similarly, each dominant reconceptualization of the process fashions it in a particularly paradigmatic light—from Glass (1964) and other urban ecologists through Marxists like Smith (date), ideological conceptions silence more complete interpretations. Supporting this claim, and the need for a hybrid approach, Weinstein (n.d.) claimed:

Most theorists on the topic have attempted to compartmentalize gentrification into a theoretical niche—either urban-ecological, neo-Marxian, community studies, cultural, or post-modern—and subsequently limited its scope of understanding. However, those theorists who explore all, or at least a multitude of the varied implications of gentrification are those least likely to place themselves within a particular theoretical framework.

Ideological commitments coupled with mainstream methodological approaches produce descriptive and uncritical explanations. The reliance on the case study as the preferred choice of

method, and the seeming absence of researcher reflexivity or a willingness to engage in more marginalized or radical methodologies demands criticism. Similarly, the tendency to classify gentrification—for instance in waves, or through causes and effects—might explain processes at work; however, organizing, classifying and structuring knowledge about gentrification risks partial or incomplete illuminations of the dynamic, complex and, at times, messy process of change. There is an opportunity and a need to consider a more radical praxis between researcher, gentrifying neighbourhood and neighbourhood inhabitants: such a praxis opens avenues to more critical, exploratory research that commits itself to understanding a plurality of experiences and knowledge(s) in response to gentrification, rather than a glossed-over description of processes and products.

Supporting this claim, many scholars—such as Ley (1985) as well as Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2008)—have critiqued the need to better understand the process of gentrification from the point of view of the displaced. I echo those concerns as well the necessity to investigate the complexities and the heterogeneous nature of the process.

## APPENDIX D:

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

This interview will take about 45 minutes. The purpose is to speak in more detail about place-based approaches that target low-income neighbourhoods or the spatialization of poverty. In particular, this research is concerned with how to evaluate what works across different sites and scales. I'm going to be asking about 20 questions in total that span areas including neighbourhood effects, approaches to addressing neighbourhood poverty, evaluation approaches, the Pathways to Education program, youth and the third sector.

1. Tell me your name and your current role.

#### *Place-Based Poverty Programs/Approaches/Services/Policies*

2. Are you familiar with any programs, policies or services that target neighbourhood poverty? If so, what are they?
3. Do you know of any 'best-practices' where specific programs are making a difference?
4. Do third-sector organizations have a unique role to play in making changes here? If so, what might they be? In what way might their role be different from private/public organizations?

#### *Pathways to Education*

5. What do you know about the Pathways to Education program? What is your understanding of the program model?
6. What types of youth does Pathways work with? In what kinds of neighbourhoods?
7. Describe what Pathways does when it begins working in a neighbourhood? If you thought about implementing a program like Pathways in a new neighbourhood, what strategies and approaches would work, what wouldn't?
8. What is your awareness of any outcomes, impacts or changes associated with the Pathways program? What changes do you observe happening with youth? In the neighbourhood? How do you know change is happening?
9. What types of outcomes should be reasonably achieved by a program like Pathways? Describe them.

#### *Evaluation*

10. What are effective evaluation strategies or approaches when considering a program like Pathways?
11. Is it possible to evaluate across different sites? If so, how?
12. In what ways might an evaluation framework accommodate the different neighbourhoods and the issues or challenges each faces?
13. How might Pathways begin to understand what impact the program has on youth, families and neighbourhood institutions? Please describe what change would look like at the scale of youth, family, neighbourhood. And how it might be measured?
14. In your opinion, what are the broader goals for Pathways as it develops a more comprehensive evaluation framework? What are possible/potential evaluation frameworks to reach these goals?
15. What are the barriers to develop this framework? Are there tensions?
16. What is really important to the work of Pathways? How can staff and the organization more broadly enhance this?

## APPENDIX E:

### SURVEY

This survey is an opportunity for you to participate in a research study to develop a new evaluation framework for Pathways. In particular, these questions ask you to provide your perspectives on the youth you work with, the Pathways program, and the neighbourhood you work in. In particular, your insight into what makes your neighbourhood unique will help provide different perspectives on the different contexts in which the program operates.

#### Section I: General Questions

**1. How long have you been working with Pathways to Education?**

- Less than six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and three years
- More than three years

**2. What is your role or job title within the Pathways program?**

- SPSW
- Director
- Researcher
- Tutor Facilitator
- Mentor Facilitator Coordinator
- Split SPSW/Program Facilitator
- Admin Support
- Other (please specify)

**3. In your own words, describe what you do with Pathways to Education.**

**4. What is your highest level of education?**

- High school
- Some college
- College diploma
- Some university
- University degree
- Some postgraduate certificate/degree
- Postgraduate certificate/degree
- Other (please specify)

**5. Please indicate what best describes your educational background and training. If more than one apply, please check all.**

- Social work
- Child and youth studies

Sociology  
Social services  
Humanities  
Business  
Social sciences  
Cultural studies  
Graduate work  
Other (please specify)

**6. What languages do you speak?**

**Section II: Working With and Understanding Youth**

This section focuses on your understanding of the youth in the Pathways program. In particular, it asks about your knowledge of the similarities and differences of the youth in the program.

**In your role, do you work directly with youth?**

Yes  
No  
Other  
Please describe

**1. Please consider how often you do the following with youth.**

Never   Infrequently   Sometimes   Often   Always  
Listen to youth issues, challenges and strengths  
Support problem-solving with youth  
Directly intervene on behalf of youth in family issues  
Support youth to address family issues  
Directly intervene on behalf of youth in school issues  
Support youth to address school issues  
Support youth attendance at tutoring/mentoring  
Goal-set with youth

**2. Describe the youth you work with?**

**3. Are there youth that require more of your time?**

Yes  
No

**Section III: Engagement and Issues**

**1. Please describe the level of engagement/disengagement that such youth might display and identify the issues or challenges that they face.**

**2. What, in your opinion, are the three most effective actions/interventions you(or other Pathways staff) do with youth that supports success?**

Most Important   Second Most Important   Third Most important

- Provide financial incentives
- Build relationships
- Support parent engagement
- Use para-counselling techniques (solution-focused therapy, brief counseling, active listening, etc.)
- Hang out with youth
- Be consistent in expectations and consequences
- Support attendance at tutoring
- Support attendance at mentoring
- Have fun with youth
- Track academic outcomes
- Support attendance at school

**3. Recognizing that you may not be a trained professional, of the youth you work with, how often do you observe behaviour that may be associated with the following issues:**

- | Always                   | Often                    | Sometimes                | Infrequently             | Never                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
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**4. Indicate the five strengths you most consistently see exhibited by the youth that you work with:**

- | Most consistent          | Second most consistent   | Third most consistent    | Fourth most consistent   | Fifth most consistent    |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
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Experiences parent involvement in school  
Holds meaningful roles in society (leadership, volunteerism, etc.)  
Parents and teachers encourage youth to do well in school  
Youth is involved actively in extra-curricular activity in school or community  
Youth is motivated to do well  
Youth demonstrates positive values  
Youth seeks support from parents and teachers  
Youth acts as a positive role model with peers

#### **Section IV: Neighbourhood**

This section asks about your understandings of the neighbourhood. In particular, it asks questions about what, if anything makes it unique or different.

**1. Please indicate which Pathways site you work in.**

Regent Park  
Rexdale  
Lawrence Heights  
Kitchener  
Hamilton  
Scarborough Village  
Verdun  
Ottawa  
Halifax  
Kingston  
Winnipeg

**2. Describe, in detail, the neighbourhood you work in. What is it like, in your own words?**

**Provide as much information as possible about what makes the neighbourhood in which you work unique.**

**3. Please check all indicators that you believe describe the Pathways neighbourhood in which you work.**

Multiethnic  
Multiracial  
High percentage of newcomers  
Low percentage of newcomers  
High percentage of multi-generational poverty  
Low percentage of multi-generational poverty  
High percentage of lone-parents  
Low percentage of lone-parents  
High rate of crime  
Low rate of crime  
High rate of teen pregnancy

Low rate of teen pregnancy  
 High percentage of lone adult men  
 Low percentage of lone adult men  
 High percentage of First Nations peoples  
 Low percentage of First Nations peoples  
 High percentage of subsidized housing  
 Low percentage of subsidized housing  
 Mixed housing  
 Strong neighbourhood cohesion  
 Neighbourhood cohesion challenged  
 Little evidence of neighbourhood cohesion  
 Most youth are included and feel welcome  
 Some youth do not feel included or welcome  
 A majority of youth feel excluded and not welcome  
 The job opportunities are many  
 There are few job opportunities  
 Many people feel unsafe  
 Many people feel safe  
 Many neighbourhood residents are involved in neighbourhood activities  
 Many neighbourhood residents are not involved in neighbourhood activities  
 Residents believe they have a say in what happens in their neighbourhood  
 Residents do not believe they have a say in what happens in their neighbourhood  
 There is much conflict in the neighbourhood  
 There is little or no conflict in the neighbourhood  
 Residents trust neighbourhood organizations  
 Residents do not trust neighbourhood organizations  
 Other (please specify)

**4. What are the three most important neighbourhood issues?**

Most important	Second most important	Third most important
Poor educational outcomes for youth		
Food security		
Crime and safety		
Access to health and well-being		
Social exclusion		
Lack of employment or underemployment		
Racism		
Homophobia		
Gang violence		
Gang affiliations		
Substance Abuse		
Chronic disease		

- Sexual health
  - Healthy relationships
  - Lack of trust in organizations and officials
  - Feelings of hopelessness and despair
  - Lack of resources
  - Lack of comfortable housing or discomfort in the physical environment
- 5. Given what you know about the neighbourhood, what do you like about it?**
  - 6. Given what you know about the neighbourhood, what do you dislike about it?**
  - 7. Describe other neighbourhood organizations or neighbourhood groups that you work with closely?**
  - 8. Is the neighbourhood changing?**
    - Yes
    - No
    - Other (please specify)

#### **Section V: Changes**

- 1. Please describe the changes you observe in the neighbourhood.**
- 2. Does the Pathways program sufficiently address the neighbourhood's strengths, challenges and needs?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - Other
  - Please explain
- 3. What might the Pathways program do differently to address better the unique characteristics of the neighbourhood?**

#### **Section VI: Impact and Evaluation**

This section focuses on what you believe are important elements to evaluate or shine a light on. It also asks about reflection and ways to begin to learn more broadly about what works and what doesn't within the program model

- 1. Is it important to evaluate the Pathways program?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - Other
  - Please explain
- 2. What does evaluation mean to you?**
- 3. Identify the most important practices that you do in regards to your work in Pathways.**
  - Most Important    Second Most Important
  - evaluation

monitoring outcomes  
learning  
reflection  
developing new practices and models

4. **Describe the impact Pathways has on youth.**
5. **In your own words, define youth success?**
6. **Does your definition of youth success fit within the program's definition? Why or why not?**
7. **How do you know the program has (or does not have) an impact on youth? What are the signs?**
8. **Identify all pieces of information that you pay attention to/or track when thinking about whether or not a student or group of students is doing well or succeeding.**

attending school  
attending programming  
developing healthy peer relationships  
developing a relationship with program staff  
sharing information with teachers, parents or others  
setting goals  
involved in positive/pro-social activities  
developing positive relationships with adults (e.g., teachers)  
passing courses/achieving credits  
speaking to a parent in person or over the phone  
communicating with students  
career planning  
Which of these is most important to the work of Pathways and why?

9. **Are there red flags that indicate to you that a student or group of students are not “on-track”?**

Yes  
No  
If yes, what are these?

10. **Does Pathways have an impact on the neighbourhood?**

Yes  
No  
Other  
Please explain

11. **Are there other supports that make a difference to youth in the neighbourhood?**

Yes  
No  
Other

Please explain

**12. Describe how Pathways might have a greater impact.**

**13. What's your biggest or most profound learning from your work at Pathways?**

**14. What's the biggest success you've made in your work at Pathways and what did you learn from it?**

**APPENDIX F:**  
**YOUTH FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

**Introduction**

- Introduce myself and my research assistant
- Introduce purpose of research
- Introduce how it connects to Pathways and program improvement
- Introduce concept of consent and informed consent
- Review letter and seek involvement for participation

**Icebreaker Sticky Note Activity**

- Take a pile of sticky notes.
- When I say GO, begin writing down words that describe your neighbourhood. You have two minutes. GO.
- Part II: When I say GO, begin writing down words that describe Pathways. GO
- Group these words into positive/negative categories
- Discuss/describe as a group these observations

**Neighbourhood Profile**

- Tell me about where you live. How would you describe it?
- What do you like about it?
- Are there specific places you like more than others? Describe them?
- What, if anything, would you change about your neighbourhood?
- Are there specific places you'd change? What/where are they?
- Is your neighbourhood staying the same, changing? How can you tell?
- Who makes up your neighbourhood?

**Youth/Young People**

- Tell me about the young people who live here. What are they like?
- What are your experiences of living here like?
- What influences or impacts young people's experiences in this area?
- Do you think these experiences are different than young people who live in other neighbourhoods? If so, how so?

**Success**

- What does it mean to succeed?
- Who or what defines success?  
What does success look like for you individually?
- What might it look like your neighbourhood to be successful?
- What are the signs that might tell you you've achieved success? What are the signs that tell you you've personally achieved success? What are the signs that your neighbourhood has achieved success?
- Who/what helps you to be successful?
- What issues, things or influences prevent youth from being successful?
- What is your dream for yourself? What about for your neighbourhood?

**Supports/Pathways**

- Talk about what things support you to do well? Who or what are these supports?
- What influence does Pathways have on you?
- Is Pathways a support? If, so how, if not, why not?
- How could Pathways make more of a difference on you? Your peers?

- Is Pathways making a difference in the neighbourhood? How can you tell? What are the signs?
- What could Pathways do to make more of a difference to you or to the neighbourhood?
- What other organizations make a difference to you, your family or the neighbourhood?

**Collage Activity**

Break participants into small groups of 2 to 4. Instructions:

- Using the magazines and newspapers, tear out images and words that describe how Pathways affects either yourself, your school or your neighbourhood.
- Each group will present their collage to the larger group at the end and will discuss the themes and images that are present

## APPENDIX G:

### PATHWAYS SITES BY GENERATION, HOST AGENCY, AND SIZE

The following chart outlines the Pathways programs currently in existence as of June 2011. The data were obtained through Pathways Canada records on-site registration and staffing.

Generation	Site (City)	Host agency	# of Cohorts	# of Students	# of Staff
First	Regent Park (Toronto)	Regent Park Community Health Centre	10	936	46
Second	Lawrence Heights (Toronto)	New Heights Community Health Centre	4	361	21
Second	Rexdale (Toronto)	Rexdale Community Health Centre	4	404	Not available
Second	Pinecrest Queensway (Ottawa)	Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre	4	324	22
Second	Chandler Mowat/Kingsdale (Kitchener)	Mosaic Counselling and Family Services	4	542	Not available
Second	Verdun (Montreal)	Toujours Ensemble	4	244	Not available
Third	North End (Hamilton)	North Hamilton Community Health Centre	2	167	21
Third	Scarborough Village (Toronto)	Youthlink	2	162	12
Fourth	Spryfield (Halifax)	Chebucto Connections	1	57	9
Fourth	North End and Rideau Heights (Kingston)	Kingston Community Health Centre	1	60	14
Fourth	North End (Winnipeg)	Community Economic Development Association	1	90	10

**APPENDIX H:**  
**WRITING MYSELF INTO AND OUT OF THE STORY—OR, HOW I GAINED 20**  
**POUNDS AND BECAME THE PATHWAYS LADY IN THE PROCESS**

**Getting Enrolled . . .**

In 2003–2005, I had my first job after graduating from university. Although I was a trained teacher, I decided to follow a passion and work at Queen’s Park. This was a fascinating vantage point from which to understand systems—but I missed working with youth and decided I needed to volunteer in some capacity: my life with Pathways was born.

Every Wednesday night, I got in my car, drove from Queen’s Park to Regent Park, changed in my vehicle out of my business suit and into my jeans and walked into the Regent Park Community Health Care Centre (CHC). I enrolled as a volunteer mentor thinking it would be a good volunteer experience, that I’d meet some other mentors, broaden my social network in Toronto, and help some students in Regent Park who were experiencing poverty. I reflect back now on that experience and my attitude and think that I was entirely naive. In reality, when I walked into the CHC, I entered another world. I remember noticing how different the CHC was from the polished veneer of Queen’s Park—there were signs in multiple languages; I, the white woman, was a minority; and as night fell, and I left the building, I’d always feel slightly unsettled walking past men drinking on the street or watching shadowy figures down the sidewalk. I’d grasp my keys firmly, get into my Taurus, and ride off into the distance, where the tree-lined streets of Yonge and Eglinton, and the nearby commercialism of Highbourne Drive, somehow made me feel safe and at ease. I’d spent a lot of time thinking about the difference in parks—from Queen’s Park to Regent Park and how life at the corner of Dundas and Parliament was very, very different. Two parliaments with two very different realities.

I felt completely hopeless mentoring these young people from Regent. Initially, their demeanor and attitude towards me was rough and stand-off-ish. Fourteen young men and women, ages 13–14 in my group from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the boys wearing baggy pants and hats turned to the side, the girls wearing multiple necklaces, hair in braids or long and straight, tank tops on . . . and three mentors all with some level of postsecondary education and all wanting to change the world. A host of activities planned . . . and oh, the teaching and learning we’d inspire.

In reality, we did the activities, struggled immensely with supporting the youth’s development, and felt perpetually challenged by our paternalistic notions as mentors—to use a participatory planning approach, support engagement, or build activities and values that were youth-

centred. The road to relationship building over basketball games and pizza-making was not a smooth or easy one. I eyed them up and down, and they did the same.

Eventually, sometime in the month of February or March, something changed and the whole thing felt easier, less serious and more fun. Some connections did form and conversations became easier and more natural.

June came and the year was done, but that experience had been a particularly formative one for me. I had walked in thinking it was me who would be teaching these young people from Regent Park, and I walked out believing I was the one who had received an education of sorts. I had my stereotypes about poverty and diversity challenged, and I learnt more about what being a mentor means and how I was the one who simultaneously being mentored while mentoring.

### **Getting Started . . .**

Fast forward through time and space, I've left Toronto and am in Waterloo to start a PhD program at the University of Waterloo in urban planning: I wanted to examine and explore how youth understand and navigate their sense of space and place. Very quickly into my new academic life, I became disengaged and felt particularly irrelevant. During these first few months, I ran into the executive director of a community based organization (CBO) who mentioned that they had some dollars to hire a project manager for a brief period of time to do community engagement and program development work—in essence to do a feasibility study about the prospect of bringing the Pathways to Education program to the Kitchener community. I immediately became interested as this represented a dream job for me—the chance to actually work in a neighbourhood setting, developing a youth program that would address the systemic barriers that low-income youth faced towards being successful at school. I took the job and threw myself into the opportunity. The chance to establish a program from the ground up, the chance to train and build a team of staff, the opportunity to build connections in neighbourhoods and work directly with youth and adults from different cultural backgrounds to establish a program that would meet their specific needs. It was an awe-inspiring opportunity for me who had lofty aspirations of creating social change.

And so I started—part guerilla researcher, part pizza-toting youth worker, and part Care Bear-like relationship builder—attempting to reach out to any and all who would support my goals. I was the first coordinator hired on by a CBO (Catholic Family Counseling Centre of Waterloo Region) at the time to do community engagement and program development work. My task seemed somewhat murky as I was responsible to the local CBO and also to this National Organization called Pathways to Education Canada—the primary funder. What were my objectives? Hard to tell. I knew I had about nine months to establish next steps for Pathways program locally. I needed to:

- Determine whether potential neighbourhoods where the program might run had sufficient numbers of youth facing barriers around educational attainment
- Develop an advisory to support the process
- Identify the drop-out rate by postal code
- Speak with older youth from the neighbourhood to hear retrospectively what challenges they faced, what supports existed and how they succeed

Trying to find answers to these questions became a challenge—in particular, finding youth, especially older youth, to speak about their experiences around school was more complex in Kitchener where neighbourhoods don't have the same presence of social service providers and where there aren't as many public neighbourhood areas. I dropped in late one evening to a basketball game at a community centre—I did not ask permission of the staff, but showed up with Timbits—I had heard that many older youth would be there. Not knowing what to expect, I walked into a gymnasium full of young black men playing hoops at 10:00 p.m. at night. I was a living stereotype—a walking missionary exploring and trying-on approaches to community development. In hindsight—what a cliché!

I spoke in depth to about 20 young men that night—I heard amazing stories of resilience through struggle—almost all of them had failed high school the first time round because of a series of challenges in the home, or at school. Many spoke of significant familial turbulence—being removed from the house, living with grandparents, having a brother killed, parents unemployed or underemployed. I also heard about teachers disrespecting them because of their blackness and the desire to fit-in, and the need for cool things like running shoes, by whatever means necessary. Some young men eventually got their GED through perseverance, support from specific family members, or the push from a girlfriend. Often knowing they were going to become dads gave them the impetus to go back to school. Many informed me of their current work—largely factory-based or other forms of manual labor like construction—here the pay could be good, but it was seasonal and sporadic, often requiring them to go onto EI for periods of time. I left around midnight—feeling destabilized and unsure of my practice here—handing out movie certificates and Timbits to young men to hear their experiences—their struggles and triumphs—in the school system—what area of town they grew up in, what their source of support and their source of struggles were.

### **Getting Fired, Being Dumped, and Moving On . . .**

Sometime in the middle of February, I started feeling clueless and lost and uncertain about best next steps. Unlike the establishment of Pathways in Regent, there wasn't a clearly defined neighbourhood in Kitchener where the program would naturally be based. Some neighbourhoods had expectations that they'd be getting the program—already aware of the program's success in Toronto. I had received somewhat of a frosty reception by specific community partners, despite taking multiple jars

of jelly beans over as a peace offering, and more importantly, my attempts were feeling futile and in vein. I was going around town, trying to ascertain dropout rates by postal code, introducing myself to the school board, trying to build relationships here there and everywhere and feeling the burden of knowing that if there was no case demonstrated, then this program wouldn't be coming to this community and that any youth who needed this type of help would, in effect, miss the boat through this program.

Simultaneously, I was attending meetings in Toronto with my colleagues from other replication sites in Lawrence Heights, Rexdale, Verdun, Little Burgundy, and Pinecrest Queensway. These meetings were a huge source of knowledge creation, peer support, and the opportunity to share best practices with peers experiencing similar challenges and success. They also often left me feeling fuzzyheaded and confused. There was a tension between wanting us to figure things out on our own, with the knowledge that this group had already figured it out in Regent Park—what was there to figure out. This was also a time to become educated on the program model. Much learning about the program model and what it looked like in theory, but little on the ground knowledge of what they would mean.

Everything felt compressed, as there were multiple reports, and multiple deadlines. I felt like time had compressed and that the initial data and observation I was making in Mill Courtland would need to be acted upon. I remember convening a meeting of school Principals and leaders from the WRDSB. Immediately preceding his meeting, I received an email from a community advocate. She had sent it to my boss, several other community partners and myself—in it, she smeared my character and effectively fired me from doing any kind of outreach or community engagement in “her” neighbourhood. I was devastated. Although she had no power over me, I felt as though I had been doing an awful job and letting multiple groups of people down simultaneously. What a mess.

This experience of doing community engagement without any real clarity around which neighbourhoods feels, in hindsight, like I was running some form of cheap Internet dating site. Certain neighbourhoods--clearly didn't want me. They dumped me before I could tell them it wasn't working. It was a bad relationship and we both knew it; neither one of us wanted anything to do with the other by the end and that took a long time for me to recover from. I had felt that my character had been smeared and that my reputation was a stake. I felt shaky and as though had been bullied by this neighbourhood or by people in it. I still associate some negative feelings with that particular neighbourhood centre when I drive by.

Eventually, and through a very roundabout process using inputs from the school board to outline educational data, information from public health and other sources outlining socioeconomic data, along with the neighbourhood and youth outreach work I'd been doing, two neighbourhoods in

Kitchener were selected—Chandler Mowat and Kingsdale. Both of these neighbourhoods had low rates of educational achievement comparatively and also demonstrated a keen willingness to receive different educational supports.

Reports were submitted to the funder, and although there were questions about the spatial make-up of these neighbourhoods, and whether there was enough proof—an agreement was struck and Pathways to Education Kitchener became an approved and funded new Pathways program.

### **Growth, Growth and More Growth . . .**

And now, more than five years later and with over 600 students in the program, these early days of setting it up seem like a distant memory. There were multiple hurdles and personal learnings throughout the journey. I led and shaped the program's development with a great team of people from 2006–2011 . . . a good stint. The program grew exponentially and I felt like I was constantly managing growth and change. By the time I left there were over 25 staff, 600 students, and lots of moving pieces in terms of the day-to-day operating of the program. There was also continuous relationship management with the national funder and with school boards, schools, and the police. Advocating for students and also ensuring a high quality program was delivered was never entirely smooth. Throughout the process, the constant outreach and engagement with youth and with families in those two neighbourhoods and the schools that served them, I became known as the Pathways Lady, or as the Big Boss with the youth in the program. A pizza-bearing, principal type who enforced rules and also tried to engage students and families in a new program that was constantly being tested. It was a huge opportunity of growth, self-reflection and deepening self-awareness. It also led me to want to reflect more concretely on the experience by doing my doctoral dissertation on questions of how you develop and build place-based poverty reduction programs such as this one. Having more questions than answers isn't an awful place to be—but it certainly isn't necessarily easy.

**APPENDIX I:**  
**PROGRAM EXPANSION**

Pathways to Education, although not known as such, began quite modestly in 2001 in Regent Park. At that time, the Regent Park Community Health Centre (RPCHC), led by Carolyn Acker, had been deeply troubled by some of what it was witnessing on the streets in that neighbourhood. The summer of 2000 was particularly bad. Shootings and gang related violence had become a regular part of the landscape, police relations were at all-time low, employment opportunities were bleak and residents were restless. In the summer before the program started, there had been nine shootings in the Park. The city's oldest and most notorious public housing neighbourhood had a serious of challenges on its hands that needed to be addressed.

As the story goes, the community through the RPCHC came together through a series of neighbourhood consultations. Of particular concern to the participants in these consultations were neighbourhood youth—residents were concerned by the number of youth on the streets, those who were involved in criminal activity and the lack of things for youth to do.

A few years before this process commenced, some staff at RPCHC became aware of an approach developed by Dr. Jack Geiger known as community succession planning. RPCHC sent staff to an international conference in 1996 where Dr. Geiger was speaking. Here, staff learnt about an innovative approach to transforming community through focusing on its children and youth. Dr. Geiger, founder of the community healthcare movement in the United States, was particularly interested in how to alleviate poverty and create different opportunities for racialized minorities in rural Mississippi. He created an approach, termed community succession planning, where the community would 'reinvent itself' such that the poorest residents would take leadership positions and would have access to opportunities. Like other models of succession planning that looks to create leadership from within, this approach focused on how to build leadership from residents and help them to be the community's doctors, lawyers, nurses, etc.

The philosophy of community succession planning and the challenges and concerns about youth being expressed by residents in Regent underpinned the RPCHC decision to focus in greater detail to how to improve the outcomes and life chances of the neighbourhood's youth. They conducted extensive research and further consultation into what was happening with youth. What they learnt was shocking and also very empowering.

The biggest challenge facing youth in Regent was barriers to educational success. Youth needed help to deal with a challenging curriculum, they lacked a diversity of role models who could introduce them to a breadth of career options, and they didn't know one another very well as the

geography of Regent Park reinforced barriers and contributed to feelings of separation, internal rivalry and fear. Also challenging were relations between the police and youth in Regent Park. The Harris Government had introduced a new curriculum and had reduced the length of high school creating further challenges, especially for those who came from a family whose maternal tongue was not English. Upon further investigation—research revealed that youth in Regent faced a 56 percent dropout rate from secondary school. This was the first time that such education information had been collected by a neighbourhood group through the Toronto District School Board. Similarly, youth complained that the cost of getting to and from school was a disincentive, especially in a neighbourhood where the mean household income was under \$17,000. Even if youth had the money to take the TTC, there was no high school in the local community, which meant that youth often had to spend upwards of two hours on public transportation. In hindsight, it is truly remarkable that as many youth finished high school and graduated: it is a testimony to their resilience, and their desire to succeed in spite of real obstacles.

Written by a young Regent Park student the following poem highlights some of the challenges facing youth in Regent Park (Mohamed, 2004):

***They Say***

*They say I'm less than average  
They say I can't succeed  
Because I live in Regent Park  
They say there's just no need.  
I don't get caught up  
I don't really care  
But it's hard to make it to a place  
When you know no one wants you there.  
They say I'm just the G.H.E.T.T.O.  
They say I have no future  
Because I live in Regent Park  
They say I should not bother.  
But I try to say strong  
And follow directions  
Because you never get a second chance  
To make a first impression.  
They say I'm less than average  
They say I can't succeed  
Because I live in Regent Park  
They say there's just no need.  
But there's someone in the crowd  
And in me they do believe  
That I can be what I want  
And some day I can achieve.*

*But others can say what they want  
They can say what I can't be  
But they are making a mistake  
Because I'm "R.P's destiny."*

—by Zeinab, age 14, Grade 8 student, Nelson  
Mandela Park School, 2003–2004

Given all of this overwhelming feedback from youth, the RPCHC desired to create two linked programs, Pathways to Education and Pathways to Employment.<sup>1</sup> Pathways to Education was designed to help youth in the Regent Park neighbourhood overcome the barriers that prevented their success. In particular, it was designed to address expectation gaps imposed on youth from this low-income neighbourhood. In other words, many of the systems that supported youth failed to set expectations for them and failed to support them to reach these expectations. Pathways, as the following indicates, established an ambitious plan to reconceptualize and reimagine what might be possible for youth from Regent Park. Pathways hoped to do this by challenging (Guidebook, p. 5),

- . . . the expectations of young people so that they no longer see themselves as failures just because they come from a community that is stigmatized for its poverty;
- . . . the expectations of the school system so that it does not assume students from a disadvantaged neighbourhood are going to be low-achievers and troublemakers;
- . . . the expectations of the community so that it sees itself in a new, more positive way and so that parents, neighbours, local agencies and businesses support and encourage the community's children to be successful; and
- . . . the expectations of the public so that there is wide recognition of the value in removing barriers to the success of young people who deserve a decent chance to fulfill their life's potential.

The program aimed to challenge these expectations and help address barriers through a combination of four interconnected supports. The following text summarizing the four supports is an excerpt from the *Pathways to Education Guidebook*, pp. 8–10.

- ❖ *Academic support.* All students in the program are encouraged to attend tutoring, but those whose marks fall below the Pathways standards are required to attend at least twice a week. Tutoring is provided four nights a week in several safe community settings, supervised by staff. Volunteer tutors are matched with students who can benefit from their knowledge and who can relate easily to them in terms of learning style, background or interests. The tutors are a diverse group of people, including university students, professionals and community members.

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<sup>1</sup> A decision was ultimately reached within the first year to discontinue Pathways to Employment. This program was designed for adults to help them find employment. An executive decision was made to focus instead on Pathways to Education. This decision was not an easy one for RPCHC to reach as it meant discontinuing a service that was being utilized by some neighbourhood residents. However, it was felt that there were existing neighbourhood supports and programs who were already doing this work and that by focusing all of the resources on youth—the program would be more successful.

- ❖ *Social support.* Mentoring provides group social experiences, led by adults who are interested in young people, for the Grade 9s and 10s. Young people at this age need to feel part of a group. Their mentor group provides a positive, safe and supportive experience in their own community. Mentors are volunteers who come from diverse backgrounds and cultural communities. Specialty or career mentoring is provided to students in the upper grades, based on their interests. Particularly in Grade 12, the emphasis is on helping students take the steps they need to take to realize their educational and career goals.
- ❖ *Financial support.* Financial support aims to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged because their families can't afford the things they need for school. In Regent Park, Pathways provides transit tickets to get to and from school because there is no local high school in the community. The tickets are a real and practical incentive to participate in the program and attend school. Students also receive some school supplies. Pathways raises funds for a bursary for post-secondary education (\$1,000 a year per student for every year of participation in the program up to a maximum of \$4,000) to be paid directly to the post-secondary institution that the student attends. (Pathways' first graduates completed high school in the 2004/2005 school year.)
- ❖ *Advocacy support.* The role of the Student/Parent Support Worker (SPSW) was created to be the student's advocate at school, a person who knows the curriculum and the system, and who can help students feel more connected to school. The SPSWs also keep parents informed about school and about Pathways and encourage them to be involved in their child's education. They provide a bridge between the schools, families and Pathways staff and volunteer tutors and mentors. All staff, through their various roles, whether they are coordinating volunteers or raising funds for Pathways, work to support the young people who are in the program.

Every effort was made at in the beginning stages of the program's development to be highly responsive to the challenges articulated by youth and families. And from the beginning, the program sought to be results oriented, both in its annual tracking of education outcomes and in its commitment to researching the form and intensity of what works.

Given the successes achieved and also the interest in the program model from private philanthropists and other communities, the founders from Regent Park decided to create a national foundation—Pathways to Education Canada. Over the course of a year, between 2005 and 2006, the leaders of Pathways Regent Park slowly and with the help of several external experts and donors, created a national foundation. Leaving their humble offices in Regent Park, the founders took up residency in donated space in the TSX building under the auspices of a key donor, who would become Chair of the Board of the national foundation. The goal of Pathways to Education Canada (PEC) was largely twofold. The Foundation would take responsibility for sharing the knowledge and for replicating the program in other communities and it would also take primary responsibility for fund development. In 2006, the national foundation made a decision to replicate the program in six communities—four in Ontario and two in Quebec.

## **APPENDIX J:**

### **ANNUAL RESULTS 2009–2010 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Examples of traditional measures that Pathways to Education uses to evaluate its success can be found in its self-reported annual results as well as in third-party evaluations from organizations like the Boston Consulting Group or the Monitor Group. Typically, these evaluations focus on quantitative metrics to determine success and lack much qualitative detail of analysis. For example, in its Annual Results 2009-2010 Executive Summary, it identifies the following key metrics:

Pathways continues to rely on two main metrics to predict student success:

- Credit accumulation in the early years of high school (Grades 9 and 10) (very strong predictor)
- Strong attendance in those same grades (strong predictor)

A recent refresh of the value assessment of the Pathways program carried out by the Boston Consulting Group has confirmed the strength of those predictors, through an analysis of the long-term effects of the program on the first three cohorts, and preliminary results across all the new sites. The relationship between the rates of program participation and graduation are less straightforward than they were initially.

#### **Key Findings**

- The program continues to reduce the number of struggling students, in comparison with each site's historical counterparts.
- The program is seeing variations in graduation rates across cohorts at the Regent Park site:
  - Across the last nine cohorts, there have been fluctuations in the four and five year grad rates.
  - However, drop-out rates remain low, suggesting students are staying in the program longer
  - Precise impact on staying in the program longer and its effect on graduation is an area for future research.

## **APPENDIX K:**

### **DRAFT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR PATHWAYS CANADA—**

#### **EVALUATING THE PROGRAM'S IMPACT ACROSS**

##### **DIFFERENT SITES AND SCALES**

This outlines a preliminary framework to incorporate how the neighbourhood impacts the program's development and in what way the program's development impacts the neighbourhood. Given research with staff and key informants, as well as a comprehensive review of the literature, three interconnected approaches, are being recommended.

Based on my preliminary review of staff input through the survey, as well as key informant interviews, and meetings with the advisory group, the following is a brief explanatory rationale for the framework:

- One of initial aims of the program was to respond to the neighbourhood's needs, strengths and assets—the degree to which this has happened in “replication” sites is questionable, specifically considering how knowledge about the neighbourhoods has been constructed and shared within second, third and fourth generation sites. For example, Regent Park has a unique story as the program became a production of a neighbourhood process. The staff survey revealed that staff at program sites do not feel they understand sufficiently what is happening in the neighbourhood or what the assets and strengths are in each site. (A possible future recommendation to Pathways Canada might be to document the neighbourhood stories and reflections of how Pathways began in each neighbourhood site.)
- Historically, the program grew out of a context where there was a defined and geographically-bound nature to the neighbourhood. Increasingly, as the program begins to operate in different neighbourhood contexts, the physical and social spaces and places in which the program runs is nuanced and unique. Specifically, the neighbourhoods now have unique: sociodemographic backgrounds, ethnocultural communities, housing types, identified needs and assets, relationships with schools and school systems as well as other program partners.
- Most importantly, students in these neighbourhoods experience different barriers, challenges and opportunities that become informed by their unique sociospatial position. What qualifies as a support for one student in Regent might not qualify as a support for another student in Winnipeg's North End or Verdun.

This draft evaluation framework has three principles at its core:

- **Holistic-information:** The information gathered about the neighbourhood is intended to be holistic in nature—as such it builds on information provided by raw data and layers in perspectives by community members and program partners.
- **Collaborative in nature**—incorporates perspectives and narratives from youth as well as staff and program partners. In particular, the goal-setting exercise with youth is a way for youth to become responsible for their individualized outcomes in the program.

- Iterative: The purpose of this is that data be collected at regular intervals, programming developed to meet changes in neighbourhood, cohorts, etc. and that this knowledge be identified, evaluated, and communicated back to key participants—neighbourhood, partners, youth, etc.

#### **Approach A: Getting Numbers**

1. Collect a sociodemographic picture of the neighbourhood every four years, using statistics and school board data, as well as follow-up phone calls with service providers, etc. to provide the following neighbourhood profile:
  - a. Rates of unemployment
  - b. Historic rates of drop-out
  - c. Levels and types of crime
  - d. Level of income
  - e. Numbers and types of newcomers
  - f. Household Family type
2. Collect socioeconomic information on each student at registration that includes. And update this information periodically if changes occur:
  - a. Household family composition
  - b. Household level of income
  - c. Languages spoken at home
  - d. Ethnocultural identity
3. Collect educational data including by individual and compare by cohort, gender, etc.:
  - a. Academic stream: Applied, Academic, Lifeskills, etc.
  - b. Academic Designation: IEP, ELL/ESL, Spec Ed
  - c. Credit Summary data which includes absences, courses passed, failed and final marks attained.

#### **Approach B: Getting Perspective**

1. Identify staff and program knowledge of neighbourhood, family and student context, paying particular attention to patterns in:
  - a. Assets
  - b. Challenges
  - c. Values
  - d. Programming Opportunities
2. Collect individual narratives annually from students on their perceptions of neighbourhood, family and individual:
  - a. Strengths/Assets/Supports
  - b. Perceived changes to themselves, family, neighbourhood
3. Development of an individual goal setting process
  - a. Students to articulate annual goals to be evaluated by staff in coordination with student three times a year.
4. Evaluate work with program partners:
  - a. Identify program partners annually
  - b. Tabulate annual referrals
  - c. Track patterns in referrals
  - d. Speak with select program partners to identify program's impact annually.

#### **Approach C: Document and Share**

1. Document knowledge collected on neighbourhood, student and cohort needs, strengths, differences annually.
2. Share with neighbourhood stakeholders and get routine feedback.