



## community stories

May 2007

ISBN #1-55382- 224-2

### *ANC in Thunder Bay: Simpson-Ogden Comes Alive*

*Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) was a two-year action research project which ran from February 2005 to March 2007. It operated in five cities – Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Halifax.<sup>1</sup>*

*This paper is the third in a series of community stories which chronicle the path of ANC in the five sites. Series one introduced each neighbourhood and the process by which it was selected for participation. The second provided a mid-process snapshot of involvement and activity. The third summarizes the work accomplished over two years, including project staff and resident perceptions of ANC and its impact on the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup>*

#### *Place-based revitalization*

Funding and organizational expertise and support are essential ingredients in community or neighbourhood revitalization work. Now at the end of its first two years of operation, ANC in Thunder Bay has secured a number of financial backers for continuing its revitalization efforts in the Simpson-Ogden neighbourhood.

United Way of Thunder Bay (UWTB) has come a long way toward understanding and supporting neighbourhood revitalization work. Says Executive Director Joanne Kembel: “When ANC began in February 2005, we were uncertain whether the organization had the capacity or commitment to continue funding such work beyond the project’s end.” The federal government’s commitment to the initiative was also shaky. In the early days of the project, it was unclear whether ANC would last past an initial 14-month period, and its second year began with several months of



uncertainty over whether the five federal partners would commit to a second year of funding.

Despite organizational misgivings and government contract hiccups, UWTB has made a commitment to continue funding work in its ANC neighbourhood of Simpson-Ogden now that federal government financial support has come to an end. It will donate two percent (\$39,000) of its annual fundraising campaign in 2007 to efforts in Simpson-Ogden. By December 2007, UWTB will have had the opportunity to decide whether neighbourhood renewal will become part of its community support efforts. In the meantime, ANC staff in Simpson-Ogden are pleased that their efforts to secure municipal funding were successful. The recently ratified 2007 City budget will release \$75,500 to the project to help pay salary and activity costs. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is contributing \$74,000 to continue the neighbourhood work and investigate the potential of expanding the ANC model to other Thunder Bay neighbourhoods.

ANC Site Manager Sandra Albertson continues to build the case for the work ANC has initiated in Simpson-Ogden since it was first launched in May 2005. Says Sandra: “We are in a position of being ahead of the curve in terms of describing the project and making it accessible to funding and support organizations. We are encouraging the adaptation of frameworks to a neighbourhood- or place-based focus which responds to the needs and issues of residents rather than a continuation of the traditional funder-to-organization structure, and that type of shift takes time. As the results of our efforts become clearer, we expect that other Thunder Bay neighbourhoods will benefit from our approach.”

ANC and United Way Thunder Bay are also considering involvement in Vibrant Communities – a pan-Canadian poverty reduction and com-

munity revitalization project now active in 15 municipalities.<sup>3</sup> Meetings in the spring of 2007 will help determine whether there is sufficient community, municipal and organizational support in Thunder Bay to establish a Vibrant Communities leadership roundtable.

### *Year two accomplishments*

Building on the relationships forged with residents, municipal government and organizational representatives in the project’s first year, ANC staff have supported the development of a 15-member Simpson-Ogden Neighbourhood Advisory Committee (NAC). Care was taken to allow residents the time they needed to establish the committee at their own pace and with as much or as little input from ANC staff as residents wished. Over the year, committee members came to realize that incorporation would allow their organization to be financially autonomous, and they have begun the application process. (The committee’s incorporated name will be Evergreen: A United Neighbourhood.) Sub-committees have been struck to manage neighbourhood cleanups, bylaw enforcement, the installation of neighbourhood lighting and the establishment of newsletters that deal with children’s and wellness issues.

Funding organizations often underestimate the time required to build relationships and structures which are capable of sustaining short- and long-term change initiatives. ANC in Simpson-Ogden offers a good example of a committee-building process that respected and nurtured individual skills and capacities. Whether the time spent in forging a solid governance structure will ultimately result in a larger capacity for project management remains to be seen. In the meantime, NAC members feel energized about their neighbourhood, confident about their team’s capacity to handle future challenges and committed to the work that lies ahead.

ANC staff continue to produce a bimonthly community newsletter and manage a project website ([www.simpsonogden.ca](http://www.simpsonogden.ca)). In addition, they have brought in experts in the field of community work, engaged municipal staff and elected officials in dialogue, strengthened the efforts of an ANC Policy Working Group, liaised with United Way staff and deepened relationships with community and Aboriginal organizations – in short, built a wider system of understanding and support for neighbourhood work.

Some 40 Simpson-Ogden residents, Neighbourhood Action Committee members, service providers, and ANC and United Way of Thunder Bay staff met in January 2007 to review and update strategic plans made a year earlier. The 2006 plan had focused on six priority areas: recreation/social, safety, housing, infrastructure, income/poverty and health. Actions undertaken over the year – either by ANC-related groups or others – were reviewed in order to draft a plan for 2007-08.

Says ANC staff member Erin Beagle: “The group focused on each priority area and identified both quick win opportunities and longer-term goals. We then reframed each priority as a long-term goal with its own actions and strategies. We were then able to review which areas could be combined or were being addressed by other community organizations. For example, because health and safety issues had not received a great deal of attention in 2006-07, they were merged into one priority area. Also, we discovered that mental health services issues are now being addressed by a local care organization, so rather than initiate action in this area, we will continue to support and collaborate with this new partner.”

Originally seen as an opportunity to set three-year goals for the neighbourhood, planning day participants realized that they will need an

opportunity each year to revisit and update the previous year’s plan, all the while keeping longer-term goals in focus. The 2007 plan is now being shared with the wider community for input and approval. The Neighbourhood Advisory Committee is focusing more specifically on what it needs to do to move plans into concrete action.

### *A stronger youth focus*

A core concern that emerged over the two years in Simpson-Ogden centred around the needs of youth, particularly those at risk of becoming involved in the drug and sex trade activities which swirl through the neighbourhood. Though several youth-oriented organizations are located in Simpson-Ogden, staff are often too occupied with operational duties to coordinate a comprehensive strategy that would include the many agencies operating in the neighbourhood and the community of Thunder Bay.

In March 2006, ANC staff submitted an application to the McConnell Foundation to develop a Youth Strategy. They secured funds which were used to develop a work and communications plan and they hired three facilitators who spent the fall engaging young people and connecting with other youth-oriented initiatives. An Action for Neighbourhood Change Youth Group now participates in NAC activities and planning work, and ANC staff have built a 30-member Youth Steering Committee (YSC). This group of organizational representatives and individuals helped ANC formulate a proposal which was submitted in December 2006 for further McConnell funding from its “Building Resilient Community by Engaging Youth” initiative. If approved, \$300,000 over three years will be matched by in-kind funding from community, government and nonprofit partners.

The McConnell and in-kind funding – if secured – will be used to address issues which were identified by the neighbourhood’s young people and community organizations. These include: fostering the youth voice in Thunder Bay, developing accessible spaces in challenged neighbourhoods, addressing the young people’s experience of safety, finding ways to better use limited resources and supports, and coordinating services among groups and individuals that previously were working in isolation. Until the end of February 2007, the ANC youth engagement coordinator brought together the YSC and 17-member youth group to develop transportation, safety and financial policies and practices that will guide future engagement projects for young people.

As a testament to the collaborative approach taken by ANC, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth is launching a new engagement program and, upon Ministry approval, 4.6 youth workers and 186 summer jobs will be assigned to Simpson-Ogden area for the summer of 2007 – using the ANC work as a model of neighbourhood building.

#### ***Year two Action Grant work***

ANC’s government funders released a second round of Action Grants totaling \$80,000 in each of the five sites. In Thunder Bay’s second year, a committee of nine people, five of whom are residents of the Simpson-Ogden area, reviewed a total of 14 applications. Groups or organizations without a charitable registration number were required to partner with an appropriate registered charity, and each application had to list six Simpson-Ogden residents who supported the proposal. The projects selected included:

- ***ANC Policy Working Group Housing Sub-Committee*** – The Simpson-Ogden Housing Project will deal with the problems of substandard housing and housing bylaw issues in the neighbourhood.
- ***Thunder Bay Boys and Girls Club*** – Funds will pay for expanded programs for teens, including a mural which will be painted on an underpass linking Thunder Bay’s East End to Simpson Street.
- ***Clothing Assistance Mission*** – The grant will support this new organization’s infrastructure development. The Mission provides free clothing and household goods to all in need.
- ***Community Arts and Heritage Program*** – Funds will be used to enhance their current After School Program in Arts and Heritage at Ogden Community School.
- ***Eco Superior*** – A group of residents will develop two youth environment- and ecology-focused teams in the neighbourhood.
- ***Elizabeth Fry Society*** – The Society will deliver two safety-focused programs for women. One will present information to protect women from theft and fraud; the second will focus on responses to violence.
- ***New Life Christian Fellowship*** – will use grant money to enhance a Friday evening youth program at Ogden Community Centre Gym.
- ***Willow Springs Creative Centre*** – An Urban Art-Creating Community Project will include the production and sale of

artistic greeting cards and the creation of a community art project.

### *Developing residents' skills and capacities*

Long-time Simpson-Ogden resident Linda Bruins became involved in community policing efforts several years ago and was encouraged by her daughter and a police officer to join ANC. Neighbourhood Volunteers for Change (NVFC) – a residents' group begun in ANC's first year – had organized regular collections of litter, focusing particularly on Simpson-Ogden's many back alleys. With trash bags donated by local businesses and a great deal of good humour, Linda and others were joined by a representative of the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and a dozen youth who were involved in a project to keep children away from tobacco. The group hand-delivered notices to businesses and homes in the blocks they were to visit. This activity, and local media attention, had the effect of getting local residents to clean up trash before the 'Trash Bashers' could arrive. By mid-summer, there was hardly any litter left to collect.

Says Linda: "Discussions with the city about the cleanups have resulted in an agreement to pick up the litter we collect without us being penalized for having more than the three-bag limit. NVFC is hoping to provide a garbage can for each block in the neighbourhood. Cans will be decorated by local artists and residents and we are looking for people to adopt and look after them. Our work has helped change perceptions about Simpson-Ogden's back alleys and it's gotten a lot of people involved in ANC. Caring people exist in a neighbourhood, but they need a vehicle for coming together. Though my work in community policing brought me into contact with many of my neighbours, I feel that the work has – at times – created a barrier between me as an individual and the safety issues I was trying to address. I

see ANC as a community builder and a good partner to community policing. I'm happy to offer my skills to both of these projects."

The Simpson-Ogden Housing Project – a sub-committee established by the Neighbourhood Advisory Committee – will model its bylaw enforcement on efforts undertaken by the Regina Inner City Community Partnership to clean up run-down properties. Police in that City have created a mechanism that allows house inspections when requested by residents, and landlords are subsequently held accountable for repairs.

Kevin Roy became involved in Thunder Bay ANC at the encouragement of his pastor whose church is located in Simpson-Ogden. Kevin is building a core of up to ten volunteers who will be given training by the City's bylaw enforcement office, fire and rescue and the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. They will be taught to recognize signs of inadequate housing and perform inspections. Says Kevin: "Our process will be a voluntary, committee-based initiative which we will conduct on behalf of renters. They can call in with complaints and we will offer both information on how to resolve the problem and a free inspection. Once we complete an inspection, we will contact the relevant City departments for followup. We're currently drafting a housing checklist similar to the one used in Regina. Developing our community's capacity for the work and our ability to help clean up unsightly properties is really motivating. All we need is a telephone, a computer and a desk."

Kevin was also pleased to take part in an ANC cross-community exchange where residents were able to visit other project sites, and compare notes and strategies. Says Kevin: "The community gardens we established in year one – where residents who were too old or busy to manage their gardens opened up their yards for others to plant fruits, vegetables and herbs – really got the

people in Scarborough Village excited. Our housing work stemmed directly from our contact with ANC operations in Regina. This type of cross-site learning is very effective and invigorating.”

### *Future plans*

Though ANC is at the end of its two-year mandate, staff and residents recognize that much remains to be done to ensure the continued health of relationships and projects initiated under the guidance of the project.

Ernie Flechner joined ANC’s Policy Working Group in June 2006. Another long-time resident, he too sees litter cleanup as symbolic of the neglect Simpson-Ogden has suffered – both as a result of reduced levels of local government support, and at the hands of residents whose lives have become harder and whose attitudes have become more cynical. Says Ernie: “People who live on low incomes have little time to get involved in volunteer work, but I’ve seen citizen participation increase with ANC. With time, ANC will influence even more municipal staff and residents to get involved in our neighbourhood – there is still a lot of work to do.”

Linda Bruins’ daughter has the same name as her mother and shares her commitment to community work. Now the chair of the Neighbourhood Advisory Committee, she appreciates the support that United Way of Thunder Bay and ANC provided to residents as they worked their way through the process of defining and structuring their group. Says Linda: “I always suspected that people working together could do great things, but you have the time to set structures up properly. As our committee con-

tinued to meet in the background, Action Grant projects and the cleanup work have led more people to comment that the neighbourhood is looking brighter. ANC has given residents many different ways of affecting their community.”

The two Bruins and Ernie Flechner are in agreement that neighbourhood revitalization requires the support of paid staff to supplement and extend resident efforts. Because most people have full- or part-time paid work, attending daytime meetings can present a barrier to participation. All three hope that more flexible meeting arrangements can be found.

Genevieve Cernjul has lived in Simpson-Ogden for her entire life, raising children and volunteering at their schools, in her church, at the Polish Women’s Club – on virtually any committee that was looking for assistance. Says Genevieve: “When I first heard about ANC, I was concerned that yet another pilot project was here to tell us how to fix ourselves, but after the giant block party in July 2005, I realized that something different was about to start. My work at the NorWest Community Health Centre has also given me new insights into my community and the work being done at many levels to build partnerships. ANC has lent credibility to resident-led efforts and provided direction that helped avoid the development of splinter groups. I was initially anxious that there seemed to be little visible evidence of work being done, but my involvement with the NAC and on the committee which approved Action Grant proposals has made me very excited at the prospect of this year’s cleanups and art projects. We are really on our way to a healthier, brighter future.”

*Anne Makhoul*

## Endnotes

1. The purpose of ANC was to work at a neighbourhood level, providing funds and partnership opportunities to help residents effect positive change. ANC also presented a structure for building collaboration across five key federal government sponsors, United Way of Canada-*Centraide Canada*, five local United Way agencies, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the National Film Board. The lessons learned by the national partners are captured in *Final Reflections from the Action for Neighbourhood Change Research Project* [Gorman 2007].

2. Two previous ANC stories about Simpson-Ogden can be found on the Caledon Institute and ANC websites:

*Action for Neighbourhood Change in Thunder Bay* (October 2005).

*Thunder Bay's Simpson-Ogden Neighbourhood: Gifts in Unexpected Places* (April 2006).

3. Vibrant Communities is a pan-Canadian initiative which creates multi-level partnerships which are capable of sustaining community revitalization and poverty reduction efforts. Operating in 15 municipalities, it offers members resources and support for their work, and has created a structure for sharing information that allows participating sites to learn from their respective experiences. For more information, visit: [www.vibrantcommunities.ca](http://www.vibrantcommunities.ca)

## Reference

Gorman, C. (2007). *Final Reflections from the Action for Neighbourhood Change Research Project*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.

Copyright © 2007 by The Caledon Institute of Social Policy

1390 Prince of Wales Drive, Suite 401  
Ottawa, ON K2C 3N6  
CANADA

Phone: (613) 729-3340

Fax: (613) 729-3896

E-mail: [caledon@caledoninst.org](mailto:caledon@caledoninst.org)

Website: [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)