



Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) Project Final Case Study Report

Identification

Community:
Weston

Major Theme of Case Study:
Housing

Community Co-Lead (include all contact information):
**Judy Duncan
ACORN**

Academic Co-Lead (include all contact information):
Doreen Fumia

Report Author(s):
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Date Submitted (dd/mm/yyyy):
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2. Overview of Case Study (1pp)

a. Summary of focus of case study:

The case study focused on Toronto Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Canada's (ACORN) Weston Chapter and their activities over a 6-month period of time. As well, our research focused on the broader Weston-Mt Dennis neighbourhood as defined by the City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles from settlement to the present. The case included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants in anti-poverty organizations and campaigns and a photography component whereby participants told stories through photographs.

b. Relation to APCOL project themes

This case study fits in with APCOL's commitment to working closely with community members through Participatory Action Research (PAR) in order to generate profiles of current local knowledge, archival information about the area and attitudes and available resources in relation to housing, community building and belonging and organizing for social change. This approach is intended to develop a *holistic and integrated approach* to community anti-poverty organizing campaigns in Weston-Mt. Dennis.

c. Linkage to community need

ACORN's central purpose is to effectively represent and champion the interests of Canada's low and moderate-income urban citizens on the critical issues of social and economic justice. The number one community need, as defined by the Weston community members, is affordable and liveable housing. The campaign followed in this research for three demands made just prior to a provincial election in October 6, 2011: *landlord licensing, remittance and rent control*. The case study provided an infusion of human and monetary resources that helped to build a strong campaign that was kicked off by the election and extended to ongoing discussions and strategies around the three demands. It also strengthened ACORN's ability to draw and train new members and retain old ones.

d. Summary of major achievements

Community partner and university researchers

- ACORN members and university researchers met and attended a "Stop the Cuts" protest at Nathan Phillips Square (September, 2011)
- 13 meetings and events held with ACORN members that turned out a total of 229 people. Purpose: develop anti-poverty strategy for housing and remittance control. (August 2011)
- Successful campaigns measured by the passing of Bill 19 (caps on rents) and political campaign material (housing) in response to the unfolding campaign of ACORN members. (September 2011-October 2012)
- Met with MPP Laura Albanese to hold her to her campaign promise to improve tenant legislation (December 2011)

- Completed 23 in-depth interviews, coded and presented at one conference (January 2012-June 2012)
- Final event to assess the benefit of the project to the ACORN members (July 2012)

3. Description of University-Community Research Partnership (1p)

- a. Roles of organizations involved in the case study, their contributions and changes in capacities in relation to APCOL project themes.

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Canada (ACORN) Judy Duncan, National Head Organizer

The APCOL case study was conducted in partnership with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Canada (ACORN) and one anti-poverty campaign in Weston. The specific campaign with which we were involved was coordinated by Judy Duncan and facilitated by Tatiana Jaunzems, Field Director, Toronto (ACORN). At the beginning of the project, the community partners, student researchers and Faculty held a series of meetings to plan the strategy for collaboration during the project. Judy Duncan facilitated these meetings and provided abundant sources of information about ACORN in order for the community researchers to familiarize and be prepared to enter the Weston-Mt Denis community. Tatiana coordinated the ACORN meetings in Weston with the university researcher's assistance and all attended them with community residents. ACORN staff and Weston-Mt Dennis community residents were included in the interview process and provided researchers with opportunities to learn more about the various organizing activities in the area.

The project themes emerged throughout the case study in relation to the community partnership, most directly when considering anti-poverty campaigns, the effects of these on the people living in the area, and the possibilities for organizing to improve housing and social conditions. These aims fit into APCOL'S themes of *participatory action research in anti-poverty organizing, social networking, community building, individual challenges understood as social problems, and the effectiveness of information sharing*. One of the most valuable contributions cited by participants was the increased strength of local community through the collaboration and resulting ideas and information about how to encourage stronger networks and social change in their communities. The *resources* provided by the APCOL project were imperative to the success as they ensured time and space for local activists to hold meetings and discuss anti-poverty strategies. The interviews and final focus group allowed the participants to reflect on their activities in ACORN and as residents in the local and broader community. While some had previous ties with each based on friendship and family, most had limited ties through anti-poverty activity. As the case progressed, participants became more strongly connected with each other through their shared experiences and common goals. With the help of the ACORN facilitator and support of the university researchers, the Weston chapter of ACORN conducted effective outreach to bring together people

from a mix of ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and newcomers compared to long-term residents in order to build stronger antipoverty organizing in the area.

4. Financial Summary (2pp)

- a. Final copy of case study budget/expenditures including brief notes of explanation where revisions were made to approved original budget document.

{Not Included in Condensed Final Report}

5. Summary of Work Plan & Case Study Outputs (3pp)

- a. Final copy of case study work plan document including brief notes of explanation where revisions were made to approve original work plan document;

APCOL WORK PLAN ACORN/RYERSON/OISE				
Objectives	TASKS	GOALS	No. of Events	Timeline Status 2011
Develop community base	2 nd OC Meeting Community brainstorm plus issues analysis (short term-long-term); community research assignments. Drive plan. Schedule Big Meeting date and action. Develop Community research plan	Meet with mix of new and former community members (from OC1) 25-30 residents	1x	August Week 1
Develop community base	3 rd OC meeting A/A Plus issue selection (to include demands and	Meet with mix of new and former community members	1x	August Week 2

	targets).	(from OC1 & OC 2) 25-30 residents		
Develop community base	4 th OC meeting A/A	Meet with mix of new and former community members (from OC1 OC 2 & OC 3) 25-30 residents	1x	August Week 4

APCOL PROJECT PLAN ACORN/RYERSON/OISE				
Objectives	TASKS	GOALS	No. of Events	Timeline Status 2011
Launch Community Action Plan				
Develop Action Plan	Big Meeting Outreach pitch for action: (Stop the Cuts Demo, landlord licensing, remittance and rent control)	Meet with 100-150 residents	1x	September Week 1

Put Plan into Action	Activate plan Contact the Press Win demand	30-40 residents	As needed	September Week 2
Assess action plan and action taken	2 Follow-up meetings	Over next two weeks with residents involved in action	2x	September Weeks 3&4
Research Training Sessions				
APCOL Research Training Sessions identify training needs	Brainstorm session ACORN outreach workers, community residents and University researchers	5-7 workers 1-3 selected community residents team	1x	September Week 1
Research Skills Development	APCOL Interviews Conducted by university researchers; completed by outreach workers	those on the 5-7 interviews w ACORN outreach workers	As needed	September Weeks 1&2
Research Skills Development	APCOL Interviews By ACORN outreach workers, select community workers and	Prepare for interviews with APCOL organizers and Weston-	As needed	September Weeks 2-4

	University researchers	Mt Dennis community		
APCOL PROJECT PLAN ACORN/RYERSON/OISE	Final Stages			
Objectives	TASKS	GOALS	No. of Events	Timeline Status 2011
Interview Research Development	*Focus groups	2/5-6 person groups pursuant to action	2x	September Weeks 2-4
Analyzing Data	Preliminary analysis; Generate themes	Establish methodological framework for analyzing data	On-going as needed	October
Complete Weston Case Study	**Analyze data deploying established methodology and themes	Write Final Report	On-going as needed	November
APCOL Newsletter based on case study	***Brainstorm and develop important aspects of study for the newsletter	Co-authored with community and	On-going, as needed	December

		academic co-leads with assistance from graduate assistants		
Academic Conference paper (and or academic article) related to ACORN/Weston Case Study	****Academic lead to write paper	Attend conference, +/-or submit paper for publication	As needed	January 2012

*Focus groups were not held however we interviewed a total of 23 ACORN organizers and activist and community residents between January 2012-August 2012.

**We did not write a final report in November 2011 because we extended the research plan to include additional archival and literature research to strengthen the analysis and future writing projects.

*** Academic lead submitted an article for the APCOL Newsletter Autumn, Vol 3 No 1.

**** Academic Lead presented a paper at the “Culture of Cities” Conference in Portugal, May 2012. Conference preparations and writing are ongoing.

b. Training, skills development: community organization and community members (list names of all people involved and the capacity in which they participated)

ACORN Organizers

Judy Duncan, Community partner

Tatiana Jaunzems, Community Partner

- Two training sessions for participating in a public protest during local ACORN meetings (September 2011). Just prior to the provincial election, a significant contingent of ACORN organizers, university researchers, and ACORN activists met at Nathan Phillip’s Square to join a large “Stop the Cuts” demonstration calling for Mayor Ford to back down on his cuts to services in the City of Toronto. This energized the campaign as it unfolded. (September 26, 2011)
- Held 13 meetings or events with ACORN activists and turned out a total of 229 people (our joint participation in meetings continued after the target date of specific campaign since housing campaigns are ongoing and the continued

contact with ACORN members contributed to the analysis of the campaign and the broader research project). (August 2011-November 2011).

- Meetings are outlined on the work plan charts below. ACORN organizers and university researchers were also in contact over phone and had regular meetings June 2011-February 2012 (Dr. Fumia was out of the country on study leave from March 2012-April 2012). From June 2012 joint meetings resumed and the interviews with community residents also resumed.
- Successfully made full rent control and Landlord Licensing a election issue in the apartment buildings (both the Liberal and the NDP candidate had a commitment to full rent control and better maintenance and standards enforcements on their campaign literature). (September 2011-October 2011)
- Along with four ACORN leaders, one university researcher met with the local MPP, Laura Albanese after the election to hold her accountable to her campaign promise to improve tenant legislation in the province (December 9, 2011)
- Partially due to the ACORN members' efforts during the campaign that this project followed, after the provincial election in October 2012 the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing introduced Bill 19 (2012) that if passed would cap the annual Rent Increase Guideline at 2.5 per cent.
- Completed 22 in-depth interviews with existing and new ACORN leaders, members, community residents (not all ACORN members) and activists. Interviews took place between January 2012-August 2012. In August we took four separate walks with in the neighbourhood with three interviewees at which time we took photos to document their relationship to the neighbourhood space. At the end of our direct involvement with the residents in August 2012, we held a final meeting in the Jane St Hub to discuss what the joint community-university project produced, their expectations of us and displayed the photos the residents had taken on our walks. We presented a book of photos to each of the four participants who walked and photographed with us as well as one to the ACORN organizers. (August 2011-August 2012)

6. Research Findings (8pp)

- a. Summary of academic and policy research literature relevant to the concerns of the case study;

Weston-Mt Dennis is one of the 13 priority neighbourhoods (United Way of Toronto, 2004) and while the area has two separate neighbourhood identities embedded in it (Weston and Mt Dennis) they are often referred to as one given their overlapping histories, shared boundaries and community services. This research involves collaboration with both the community partner who identified as *organizers* and community residents who identified as *residents* or *activists*. On the one hand ACORN organizers understood their role as one that facilitated activism and on the other local residents developed and carried out the actions.

This case study overlaps and yet varies somewhat from others in the APCOL series of case studies. It is similar in the way in which it follows key conceptual themes in the research literature relating to community anti-poverty activity, organizing and learning. It varies since we viewed building a relationship with and focusing on the local anti-poverty *activists* who were community members at ACORN as integral to our work. Further, in an effort to develop a broader understanding of the neighbourhood and how the conditions of possibility exist for establishing strong community activism and community building, we delved into the history of settlement in the area. This entailed archival research, local knowledge and media reports.

There was a steep learning curve to establish good working relations between the community partners who were anti-poverty *organizers* at ACORN and university researchers who were a mix of activists and organizers as well as academics. ACORN has a clear and successful strategy for organizing and there was considerable reluctance to include the faculty member and graduate students in their plans. While they were very open to introducing us to community members and welcomed us at their meetings, they were not so welcoming to us as participants in the organizing of the campaign. This limited the opportunities for us to collaborate in ways that enabled productive learning on both sides. As well, frustratingly there were bureaucratic stumbling blocks that meant monies promised for the ACORN campaign were slow coming and delayed the progress ACORN was able to make. It wasn't until the end of the project that we were able to engage more collaboratively. As we looked back and assessed some of the blocks to doing this earlier (Interview with ACORN organizers) we agreed that there were steps that we would take in the future to improve such a relationship (for example, more frequent communication, understanding the different time pressures of each). In this way, there was a great deal of *learning* about how to work in community-university partnerships in ways that optimize collaboration over separate and overlapping goals (Hart and Wolff, 2006). The literature on community-based research and community-university collaborations informs us about what may or may not work when partnerships are forged (Capraro, 2004; Flynn et al, 1994; Jakubowski & Burman, 2004; Sawchuk, 2006a). What is clear is that these partnerships are never perfect, it is important to assess the partnership at various points during the study, and it is imperative to remain open to being flexible in order to maintain good relations and productive learning. Community-based research scholarship (Hart and Wolff, 2006; Boyd, 2008) reflects on the unequal power structures that sometime impede partnerships and advise careful planning at the beginning of any project in order to develop complementary roles, a learning that both parties gained from this case study.

It is important to distinguish between community organizing and community development, at the same time noting the strong connection, and sometimes discord,

between the two (Stoecker, 2003). Community organizing and development have shared goals, for instance understanding the need to make a neighbourhood safer. Yet there are contradictions in how to achieve these goals based on different ontological perspectives, strategies and available resources. Weston-Mt Dennis has an unusual mix of, on the one hand, precariously employed populations, many who are newcomers, who make up some of the city's poorest. Many of these people live in bug-infested, dilapidated high-rises. On the other hand in propinquity to these lower and moderate-income populations are securely middle class residents, many who lived there for generations in privately owned, individual family homes. With increased newcomer populations settling in low-rent areas like Weston-Mt Dennis, these class lines are increasingly and complexly constructed along racial lines, a process that Galabuzi terms the racialization of poverty (Galabuzi, 2006). For this reason, community development in this area has ignited a contestation (along class and race lines) about the kind of organizing and activism necessary in order to improve the neighbourhood.

In light of the specific study to follow the campaign that made three demands at the time of the October 2011 provincial election, *landlord licensing, remittance and rent control*, the case study participants made explicit the focus on *community organizing* and the university researchers broadened the scope to make explicit the context of *community development*. Bringing together these two aspects in dialogue with each other has been one of the strongest benefits of the study that, in the end, reflects a social movement and collective action that includes collective aims on target authorities, public meetings, media statements, demonstrations and the public representations of the causes commitment (Tilly, 2004:7).

The APCOL proposal cites five key themes that shape much of the work in this research: social networks (for example Bourdieu, 1985, 1999; Portes, 1998) social differences, local labour market conditions (for example Shiva, 1989; Shragge and Fontain, 2000; Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich, 2003; Jackson, 2004; Martin, 2006) grievance construction process (Conway and Hachen, 2005; Osterman, 2006) and material, communication and cultural resources (for example Jenkins, 1983; Buechler, 1993; McAdams, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). These themes help to explicate the multiple dimensions of community engagement in the Weston-Mt Dennis neighbourhood. Further, the process of learning is sometimes hard to quantify and we don't pretend to have a clear measure on the quality of learning that took place amongst the participants. What is clear is that participants understood, and *learned*, the significance of community solidarity and mobilization that was materially reflected in the gains made to their living conditions (for example Bill 19 that addresses rent caps). The interviews revealed that the learning had significant social dimensions (Church et al, 2008) that is, that the campaigns had community-building effects where people *learned*

a sense of confidence about what their individual and collective rights to adequate housing were and by extension that they have a right to the city (Kern, 2010).

In our interviews with ACORN community members we asked about the connection between political action and community involvement, what constituted successful activism, future directions, and the importance of being involved. We balanced this with more general questions about why they lived in the area, what makes it a strong or weak community and whether or not they feel they belong in the community.

Theoretical considerations for understanding anti-poverty activism within community organizing and development community belonging

Our aim in this research undertaking was to contribute to a local social history as a step towards social justice and social change and to contribute to a broader academic discussion about neighbourhood development and renewal. Toronto, Ontario (Canada) prides itself on being one of the most diverse cities in the world. Its population is 2.5 million and it boasts over 140 neighbourhood enclaves that have their own class, ethnic and race identities. Thirteen of these neighbourhoods, including Weston-Mt. Dennis, have been designated a “priority” for the city based on their need for state intervention towards revitalization. As we have seen in numerous examples, approaches for responding to neighbourhoods “in need” often circumvent improvements that might best assist low and moderate income residents and instead create spaces in which middle class interests are served, such as in gentrifying projects of heritage preservation and beautification (for example Bain, 2003; Fumia, 2010; Lees 2008; Purdy, 2004; Slater, 2005; Smith, 1996). It is this very point that led us to interrogate connections between the past and the present and ask how social histories are remembered in ways that create privilege in mythical proportion to invisible histories of struggle. Further, we wondered how these elite histories of prosperity overshadow histories of struggle when local redevelopment plans are shaped by visions for the future.

Contemporary anti-poverty struggles are intertwined with development narratives shaped in the past (original settlement and industry) and the present (ongoing re-settlement and changing access to secure incomes and employment). The ACORN campaign sought to highlight unliveable conditions and the neglect the state demonstrates in relation to them. The goals and motives for such (re)development are driven on the one hand by exchange value, for instance encouraging rising real estate values, and on the other by use-value, such as community building and social justice. These two goals are not necessarily at odds with one another, however, ignoring the complementary nature of the goals leads us to believe they are. For this reason we

theorized the colonial nature of the drive to recapture a past in a local vision for the future that sidesteps the immediate and urgent anti-poverty activism that affects the neighbourhood in important ways.

The specific campaign served to acquaint the researchers with the anti-poverty activists, how they interacted with government agents and middle class property-owners. As well, the community organizers and activists gained fuller knowledge about how the state and property-owning neighbours often were oblivious to the demands and needs of low and moderate-income neighbours. In the following analysis we advance the themes that emerged in various quotes from the interviews and in the archival research to highlight links between the past and present and ongoing colonial frameworks that delimit property owners and renters from collaborating on redevelopment strategies for the neighbourhood. This divide is of course much more nuanced than stated here since not all people on moderate incomes are property-less nor are the entire middle classes property owners, etc. What is important is that all who live in a neighbourhood have a say about its future and can anticipate it being a space for them.

Then President and CEO of United Way, Frances Lankin states (in a report on investing in Toronto neighbourhoods 2005 (http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/wp-content/uploads//2011/06/United-Way_Toronto-2005-Priority-Neighbourhoods-initiative-announced.pdf), "Toronto's most distressed neighbourhoods all lack access to public space and community hubs where residents can come together to access programs, link to neighbourhood resources and have the opportunity to influence and shape how their communities evolve."

b. Summary of initial data analysis

There was a firmly established view about what anti-poverty organizing and activism entailed. From the ACORN leaders, it entailed a well-rehearsed method whereby the first step was to recruit and hire paid workers through a local advertisement. Next, the workers, usually about five (however for this campaign only one was recruited due to the short time frame) were then trained to knock on doors and recruit people to join ACORN and support the campaign. The worker was then employed to be present at meetings and continue recruitment for the duration of the Weston ACORN campaign. As the campaign progressed, the university partners, one faculty member and initially three students, which was reduced to two due to illness, distributed flyers, shadowed the ACORN organizers, and along with ACORN members, attended several planning meetings, protests and a meeting with the local MPP. Towards the end of the study, the university partners conducted in-depth interviews with ACORN members and local community residents in the Weston-Mt Dennis neighbourhood.

Throughout the research and various meetings, gatherings and interviews, the themes of community belonging and *grievance construction* emerged. According to the APCOL's model of community organizing, the grievance construction process includes "issues that people perceive as individual challenges in their lives, and the social processes through which these become constructed as potentially resolvable social problems in their communities." We build on this to include a colonial history as part of the social problems, although not necessarily solvable ones. What is solvable are the ways in which people come to understand the influence colonial histories have on contemporary forms of neighborhood redevelopment through anti-poverty organizing and activism.

We examined elite histories of prosperity and how they overshadow histories of struggle when visions for the future through local redevelopment plans are considered. Thinking about how this high poverty inner suburb of Weston-Mt Dennis is undergoing renewal and knowing that such processes more often than not displaces the working class and poor out of revitalized areas that become more desirable to the middle classes (Brock, 2009; Slater, 2004; Smith, 1996) we wondered about how past colonial scripts inform these processes. That is, how is community revitalization envisaged as a project in which local communities and the state, perhaps with good intentions, engage in the reproduction of colonial relations of power? Also, we acknowledge that cities such as Toronto are influenced by the flows of human and financial capital to produce what is now commonly referred to as globalized cities (Jacobs, 1996; Kipfer and Keil, 2002) and intend to pursue this line of thought.

We followed different, local examples of activism and community building and examined how power operates in ways that sustain social inequalities through the development of and claims to place (Massey, 1994). Claims to place and place-naming strategies are not new in this area and part of the project examines archival data about Weston-Mt Dennis' past. This research explores the emergence of the Weston-Mt Dennis community in the context of British imperial economic interests and settler colonialism. Paying particular attention to the settlement patterns of the Dennis' (after which "Mount Dennis" is named) we insert the geopolitical context of empire and industrial capitalism into the narrative of community development, and how such processes are silently encoded into name-honouring practices. These imperial histories of power and privilege, propertied and propertyless reverberate on the same lands 250 years later following harsh economic deindustrialization and decline.

The ways in which our historical research blends and informs community organizing and activism is through interview discussions about the future of the area and who is imagined as part of that future. (Interview participants are identified by numbers to maintain anonymity.) Long-term residents (20+ years) invested in shaping the future of the neighbourhood continue to identify with a history that frames Weston-Mt Dennis as a space for local pride and middle class respectability. For example, such participants note their connections to the past and the importance that history has in this

area as well as the specific history and identity that requires preserving as one that harks back to the founding fathers of imperial rule.

...there was always a sense of history. [Weston-Mt Dennis takes] a great deal of pride in its home, its history. (I-9)

...[threats to] a home built by the founding fathers of Weston created the impetus [...] to want to protect buildings like that. [...] it's better for community, because it preserves its identity. Every time you knock something down you're chipping away at an identity. (I-16)

Several participants enthusiastically reference earlier days of settlement and industriousness as a way to situate the past as a testimony of the lost neighbourhood in need of reclamation. Embedded in this narrative is a logic evoked by Seth (2010) whereby landed property became a central symbol of having achieved political modernity. As well, Mitchell (2002) argues that the institutionalization of private property as a universal right emerged as a constitutive marker of modern political governance. It is, then, through an extension of this logic that owners of property make claims to space in ways that invoke entitlement and privilege based on private property, in turn effacing systemic factors where histories of precariousness and struggle are situated. Landowners project this narrative onto old buildings and the need to preserve them, original small family businesses and their contribution to the community - at the same time they mark a distinction between landowners and apartment dwellers. Neglected, low rent, high-rise buildings are often referred to as a blight on the landscape and not considered historic regardless of age and always already subject to destruction. The people who live in these buildings are conflated with the buildings themselves thus creating a toxic mix of stigmatization based on class discrimination and racism that separates mixed communities into divisive categories of "us" and "them."

The following excerpt is from a white, middle class homeowner and member of the local Historic Society. In it she struggles with how to describe apartment dwellers and "their" interests in relation to homeowners and "our" interests. Preserving the history of Weston-Mt Dennis was foundational to her sense of making the neighbourhood a better place.

Well I think you have to preserve the past so that people feel like they are part of something; there are roots in this area. [...] I think that ...one of the great challenges is to incorporate the ... *renters* and the *owners*; some way to get them [renters] to see that their interests are in common [with ours]. Coming together is very important and I think if you talk to them [renters] individually they'd feel they have a stake in the community in a sense but they...it's hard to persuade them to come out and join in [with homeowners] and maybe put an effort in and try to make it a better place in the sense that maybe they feel that they are only there temporarily. (I-18)

The next excerpt is from an ACORN anti-poverty activist. It demonstrates a very different understanding of the present community; one that has strong community ties that are not attached to a former time. The realities of street violence, everyday poverty and the need for social change differ from the vision to resurrect the past.

It's a tight neighborhood, that's what I like, but what I don't like about it is the destruction, the standard of living, it's very low, that's what I don't like. My neighborhood, my community, I like. [...] [B]ut the main concern is safety. (I-8)

In the above quotes there are a number of assumptions made about who has a stake in the neighbourhood. What we found is that there are two distinct types of community formations/agendas, producing differing notions of community development and empowerment: ones that sought support for preserving history and improving the streetscape (aesthetic) and ones that developed anti-poverty strategies to address inadequate housing, rent control and bug infestations (systemic/institutional/pragmatic).

The different observations about the neighbourhood's decline and what to do about it emerged in different meetings we attended where local residents gathered to discuss the future of Weston-Mt Dennis. During the ACORN meetings we attended from August 2011 to April 2012 there were around 15 people at each meeting, predominantly women, who met to plan ongoing campaigns. The campaign that we were most involved in was one that aimed to bring the ongoing concerns for rent controls, caps on remittances and landlord licensing to the attention of local candidates in a provincial election in October 2011. Further campaigns continue to seek the attention of the media and target politicians and landlords. Those present at the meetings to plan anti-poverty strategies carried on feminist traditions of oral history as they passed on their stories (Razack, 1999; Trinh, 1989) about past campaigns and the value of community organizing in order to draw attention to their concerns. The history recalled is one that holds landlords and the city accountable for substandard/inadequate living conditions.

Despite landlords' ongoing attempts to intimidate and block anti-poverty activists from engaging in fights for adequate conditions in their apartment towers, the residents pursue their campaigns, often with the help from organizers such as ACORN Canada members. There is a small office in Toronto from which ACORN operates and in this office is a growing archive of the various campaigns that take place in a number of communities across Toronto facing issues that relate to poverty, including Weston-Mt Dennis. The documentation of these actions contributes a very different history than nationalist narratives encoded in Weston-Mt Dennis' name. It is a very specific history of anti-poverty organizing that addresses the immediate concerns of living conditions, rent controls, bug infestations, and landlord licensing. It is community-based, grossly underfunded, well organized and especially effective when drawing the attention of the media, politicians and Torontonians in general. Sustaining active participation is a problem exacerbated by uneven communication between ACORN staff and members whose participation is inconsistent, often due to issues related to living in poverty. The campaigns are labour intensive and while activist strategies are in play, they can often effect short-term change, yet sustained change is much more difficult. For instance in

2005 a successful ACORN campaign in Weston resulted in a positive Tribunal ruling with renters in buildings in the “high-rise canyon” of Weston Road receiving monetary compensation for prolonged, poor building standards. However, it has been impossible to sustain the media attention on landlord neglect that framed the campaign and led to the Tribunal decision. Capturing the attention of the media and the public propels campaigns to success. The details about living conditions, campaigns, successes and failures are methodically recorded in photos, print media and through storytelling. This history is effectively delinked from regimes of property ownership and the bureaucratic loopholes that minimize the claim of tenant rights. There was, however, a sense of entitlement that was amplified through the collective marginality and disadvantage of anti-poverty activists. One respondent thoughtfully observed,

And they don't know there are a lot of resources available to them. We did a financial literacy campaign. A lot of people don't understand how our systems work in this country [...] and what they are entitled to.... So therefore their voice was never heard – until ACORN came and said “well you are entitled to this!” This is the law. ... First of all, they didn't know they had the right to complain. (I-6).

Most of the actions taken by the anti-poverty activists are not widely known in the general Weston-Mt Dennis population such as the one noted here.

We had the news media, Frances Nunziata [city Councillor] came and toured the buildings. The pipes had burst. We brought them around and showed them. My son and I went floor to floor and took photos and showed what was wrong – the cracks in the building – walked down the hallways, the tiles would fall on people. (I-1)

Unlike the assumption made by the property owner above (I-18), apartment dwellers do attend meetings, just different ones from the historic society's meetings. Despite often working shift work or multiple jobs to make ends meet, ACORN members have been diligent about attending meetings that collectively generate ideas for campaigns and actions. As we interviewed this group of residents we found that their visions for an improved Weston-Mt Dennis neighbourhood differed from middle class residents and developers when it came to the immediate concerns within the four walls of a home, yet overlapped with other concerns such as a safer neighbourhood, better transportation, improved shopping choices (although for lower incomes), a community centre and more resources for youth. Yet there are other meetings that take place where there are no ACORN members present and where vision from anti-poverty activists for an improved neighbourhood space is silent. Two ACORN members who have been active in the area for a number of years told us at our final focus group meeting that they try to attend as many of the neighbourhood resident meetings possible in order to insert the concerns of low-income residents into the space of middle class concerns. They felt their attempts were invisible, but important, if they were to

make their concerns – eventually – heard. They were angry and weary of being silenced, leading to the important question: are the living conditions of those who are moderate and low-waged an important part of visioning for the future?

As we proceed with the analysis, there are multiple insights to be gained from the narratives of activists, residents and organizers. Strategies for overcoming poverty and developing visions for a future that includes the whole mix of the population that live in Weston-Mt Dennis might be complex, but as the case study revealed, attending to the everyday activities is a way to how residents can bring their approaches for social change together for a collective vision. We noted (at least) two approaches to future visions for the area. The middle class residents we interviewed discussed the need for active pursuit of a gentrifying process that will return the beauty and safety of the past and encourage more upscale business opportunities and investment. The low and middle income, anti-poverty activists we interviewed agree that beautification and safety are important, however in an area with a complex mix of race and class, have visions that are not aligned with a return to the (bourgeois) past.

c. Summary of three contributions the research has or may potentially make to the academic and/or policy research literature.

i. Bringing the above two approaches together (aesthetic and systemic/institutional/pragmatic) in community meetings as a way to join and accommodate different interests and visions for the future is an important contribution this research has the potential to make. We have begun this communication through contact with local politicians and residents and plan to continue to disseminate information as our analysis unfolds.

ii. The faculty member has written one newsletter article, presented at one conference and with a student will present at another. There is one paper in draft form that is the basis for a working paper in the APCOL working paper's series, a conference presentation in April 2012 and an academic journal article.

iii. There is a willingness to produce two documents: a document, with photos, for the Weston APCOL Chapter for use in future campaigns and for a paper reflecting on the process of collaboration and ways we imagine it as improved if we engaged in similar partnerships in the future. Both documents will be generated through a collaborative effort amongst the community partners and university researchers

7. Lessons for Improving Learning for Anti-Poverty Organizing (4pp)

ACORN organizers met with university researchers at the end of the project to discuss the ways in which we could have worked to build a stronger sense of trust that would have enabled us to work more effectively and collaborate more fully as the campaign unfolded and we gathered data. From the ACORN perspective, the university researchers could have ensured that money promised was released more quickly so that once the project was up and running delays did not impede progress. The ACORN organizers admitted they were reluctant to include the university researchers too much for fear that such involvement would alienate ACORN members, a resource that took ACORN Toronto a great deal of time and resources to establish. At the end of the project, when the two organizers with

whom we collaborated assessed the project, they admitted that the participation of university partners only enhanced the ACORN member's enthusiasm for the work done in the context of ACORN. From the perspective of the university researchers, being informed about meetings in time to plan to attend would have increased participation of the researchers. There were enough people involved so that most meetings someone could attend, but more would have attended each meeting if more notice had been possible. Some of this is because of the nature of activism, particularly with scant resources, whereby meetings were often re-scheduled due to the availability of ACORN members.

In the future the following would be helpful:

- More frequent and regular communication between partners
- Sufficient lead time to plan the campaign and ensure that monies promised will be made available
- Ensure that trust is established between the partners early in the project (this would of course be case specific)
- Create a way to communicate schedules to ensure availability of participants
- Coalition-building across four pillars as identified in the APCOL research project as a whole
- Understanding conditions of poverty locally and in the GTA.

8. Appendix A: Case Study Materials

- a. Include copies of any and all materials associated with the case study, e.g. articles, newsletters, notices of events, photographs, etc.

9. Appendix B: Interviewees Summary

- a. As per the table format below:

Assigned ID Code	Community	AGE	Gender	Education Level	Level Participation/Activism
I-1	ACORN		F		
I-2	ACORN		F		
I-3	Community		M		
I-4	Community		M		
I-5	ACORN		F		
I-6	ACORN		F		
I-7	ACORN		F		

I-8	Community		F		
I-9	ACORN		F		
I-10	Community		F		
I-11	ACORN		M		
I-12	ACORN		M		
I-13	ACORN		M		
I-14	ACORN		F		
I-15	ACORN		F		
I-16	Community		M		
I-17	Community		F		
I-18	Community		F		
I-19	ACORN		F		
I-20	Community		F		
I-21	ACORN		F		
I-23	ACORN		F		