Newsletter of the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning Project

Learning Changes

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Maleda Mulu, Esel Panlaqui, Nivethan Amirthalingam and Sandra Van are part of an enthusiastic group at a Collaborative Data Analysis session. Photo courtesy of Gabrielle de Montmollin

Community Connection

Toward a Poverty Elimination Strategy for the City of Toronto: Alliance for a Poverty-Free Toronto

by Sharon Simpson

It may be safe to say that poverty has been a part of societal construct from the time human beings transitioned from communal societies to the hierarchical societies in which we now live. In very many cases the hierarchical construct of society has resulted in the creation of the "haves and have-nots". Those in our society who are among the have-nots are often categorized as being poor. Addressing poverty has been the topic of numerous studies and conversations.

In June 2013 the Alliance for a Poverty-Free Toronto (formerly the Toronto Working Group on Poverty) drafted a poverty elimination strategy for the city of Toronto. While anti-poverty issues have often been a topic of discussion in Toronto, a contemporary strategy focused on Toronto is a new addition to that discussion. The Alliance for a Poverty-Free Toronto (APT) members are a mix of folks working in the community social service sector, individuals with lived experience of poverty, and concerned Torontonians. APT's membership is broad based and reflective of Toronto's multiple identities. This allows for many different voices to be heard in the strategy document.

The strategy, Toward a Poverty Elimination Strategy for the City of Toronto; is pragmatically divided into 2 parts. The authors Winston Tinglin and Beth Wilson describe the document's content as follows:

"Part 1 provides an overview of poverty in Toronto, drawing on related research to outline the scope and depth of the problem and the threats it presents for growing numbers of residents, and for the future prospects of the city. Part 2 explores possible solutions. It identifies a number of actions that can be taken to reverse current trends and set the city on a different path – toward "eliminating" poverty altogether. Within the range of strategic actions identified, government - the City of Toronto in particular – plays a lead role. But the report also notes the importance of including other sectors in the effort and outlines specific ways in which they can make a significant difference."

Now that the strategy document has been completed the dissemination process has started. The task ahead is to have Toronto's city council adopt the strategy and undertake the outlined actions. It is important to acknowledge that such a task is not simple nor will it be achieved in short order. However it is one that must be embarked on in a very substantial, organized and methodical manner. If poverty in the city is to be tackled, the City of Toronto must play a lead role as a pace-setter and advocate with other levels of government while implementing the cross-sectoral approach identified in the strategy. By adopting the strategy, Toronto will have taken the necessary first step in moving away from studies and conversations to decisive action to bring poverty to its lowest level.

Sharon Simpson is Special Projects Coordinator for Labour Community Services, and community co-leader of the APCOL project. ⌘

Easier Said Than Done: Collaborative Data Analysis

It made such good sense. Once we had taken the big step of having residents take the lead in conducting interviews, it made sense that the next steps of building a community-university partnership should follow the same pattern. On that logic, we gathered the initial results of more than 400 interviews and engaged residents directly in making sense from the data. Here are some impressions of that experience, from people who lived it.

Fulfilling the Promise of Participatory Action Research

by Ruth Marie Wilson

All of us in the APCOL project share a belief that the knowledge and experience of all stakeholders is critical to success both in procedural and in empirical terms. This principle of participatory action research (PAR) promises that community members and academics will work together as co-researchers at all stages of the research process. But this is a difficult promise to keep for all parties involved.

A PAR project can be considered as a participation ladder, with community-driven, meaningful, and equitable participation marking the top rung, and exploitation and tokenism at the bottom. Community members (or community researchers) are asked to travel up and down as the process unfolds. They might find themselves at the middle of the ladder during the planning phase, at the top during recruitment, back to the middle during data collection and back to the top during dissemination. At other stages, however, they are frequently kicked off the ladder altogether.

During data analysis, community researchers typically see their roles in the process dwindle or disappear completely. At this stage, academic researchers (many with the best intentions) will independently organize, mull over, and take meaning from the data using their own interpretive lenses. Even in some of the most celebrated PAR projects, community researchers are highly visible and meaningfully engaged at all other stages of research but then strangely disappear during data analysis. I believe there is a troubling assumption that the analysis or interpretation of data falls outside of the scope of community researchers' responsibilities or personal capacity; hence, at the moment of data analysis, the participatory democracy of community becomes compromised by the tyranny of low-expectations.

To exclude community from data analysis is to impose a devastating interruption to the dialogue responsible for building theory into action - the dialogue that separates the 'knowing about' approach of traditional research and the 'knowing with' approach of

Ruth Wilson and and Matt Adams co-facilitated the final CDA session. Photo courtesy of G. de Montmollin

PAR. The act of silencing this dialogue at the very moment where inquiry meets reflection calls into question the sincerity and validity of previous efforts to ensure the authentic participation of community researchers and perpetuates the dominance of academic knowledge over popular knowledge in the world of research.

Last winter, community and academic researchers from the APCOL survey team challenged this all-too-common practice in PAR and entered into a time-consuming, resource-intensive collaborative data analysis process. This brought together 11 neighborhood residents, 7 staff from community agencies, 7 graduate students and 4 academics. Under the guidance of Matthew Adams from the Catalyst Centre, students designed and delivered two trainings and 8 full day collaborative data analysis (CDA) sessions to neighborhood analysis teams across the City. At each CDA session, neighborhood teams (made up of residents, students, agency staff and at least one academic) reviewed, debated and drew inspiration from the survey results for their neighborhoods and the full City data set. At our final session, all of the neighborhood teams gathered together to share their interpretations of the data and discuss the implications of their findings.

The entire process took over 5 months to complete and a considerable amount of financial and human resources. But more than that, the process required a considerable amount of faith, trust, patience and commitment from all who participated. As the coordinator of this process, I've been invited to write about some of the challenges we faced. While I don't deny that there were a number of challenges that happened alongside what I believe were some invaluable achievements, I would rather take this space to congratulate the APCOL team for demonstrating the depth of its commitment to the true spirit of PAR by honouring people's feelings, beliefs, and personal experiences as important ways of knowing and as critical to the production of new knowledge.

Ruth Marie Wilson is a PhD student at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Her research interests include the racialization of poverty and labour, immigrant integration into the labour market, anti-poverty community organizing, and community-based research. Her social work experience includes 7 years in community development, four of which were spent as a Community-based Researcher for

the Income Security, Race and Health Project, led my Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services. ⌘

Embracing diversity in data analysis

by Israt Ahmed

Over the years I have had the privilege to work with a wide range of individuals and groups in research projects. Often attempts are made to engage community-based researchers to ensure participation and inclusion in research. Through local level hiring and training, community-based researchers can make a significant contribution in developing and testing questionnaires, conducting interviews, collecting and compiling data. At that point, the process of data analysis begins, and if it is conducted entirely by professional researchers it can sometimes overlook local nuances or experiential knowledge. The APCOL project went extra miles to engage community based researchers and partners from that point, in analyzing data sets collected from Toronto neighbourhoods to understand poverty.

I was one of the participants in the collaborative data analysis (CDA), in which all APCOL researchers and partners were challenged to see poverty through the eyes of others. I was pleasantly surprised to see how APCOL researchers reflected Toronto's diverse population as we connected data with the reality on the ground. In our joint sessions we all took a set of data to explore what makes sense from the numbers, what are the surprises, where the discrepancies are and why people get involved in their community. We then compared one data set with another and shared each other's understanding of the data.

Through this process I realized why people are more involved in food banks when their primary need may be affordable housing or good jobs. That is because food programs at the neighbourhood level are opening their doors to people to volunteer, so that residents feel they are contributing practically to help those in need. I was surprised to find people tackling poverty through addressing food security, even though they defined poverty more in purely financial terms. At a systemic

Grace-Edward Galabuzi contibutes to a 'round table' during the final CDA session. Photo courtesy of G. de Montmollin

level people do not have engagement opportunities to address unemployment, lack of affordable housing and accessible social programs that can help eliminate or reduce poverty. They act where they feel they can make a difference. Surely all of us concerned about social justice can learn from this about how to do our work in a more inclusive and effective way.

This process of data analysis and reflection reminded me that poverty exists both at a conceptual level and an experiential level intersecting when we have a platform to explore both contexts. While we were analyzing the nature of poverty and people's engagement in addressing it, we realized that people genuinely wanted to be involved in their neighbourhood in a way that is welcoming, sustainable and accepting.

Many of us at the table represented marginalized groups and we expressed our vulnerability in not having a voice or an ideal space for civic participation. This ideal space may be a physical space, or a program on citizenship or a project on community building. But this SPACE will be community-led and give people an opportunity to raise concerns, share ideas, encourage innovation, promote local leadership and nurture constructive dialogue on systemic barriers. This SPACE for civic engagement will enable people to build a shared picture of poverty and inequality at a systemic level and seek solutions in the areas of affordable housing, food security, good jobs, and community infrastructure but not limited to these areas.

APCOL brought Toronto's diverse voices to the table to analyze poverty through the eyes of the other. I felt we went deeper into understanding inequality and marginalization in that process. Many of us agreed that the lack of civic engagement creates more isolation and reduce people's status to clients of the state as opposed to active citizens who feel powerful enough to shape their lives. In this process, we experienced a shared civic SPACE, a taste of an inclusive society where people will have the power and means to change the face of poverty. Our conversations moved from poverty reduction mode to the elimination of poverty. Through collaborative data analysis APCOL hosted a SPACE of inclusion, participation and dialogue that can be institutionalized in every neighbourhood.

Israt Ahmed currently works as a senior planner with Social Planning Toronto. She is also an active volunteer in Scarborough where she is the current President of the West Scarborough Community Legal Clinic Board and member of the Expert Panel Integration Leadership Committee that is exploring a Scarborough Hospital Cluster. Israt holds a PhD. in Social Anthropology and a M.A in Social Science from University of Sussex, U.K.

Analysing data Together in Steeles-L'Amoreaux

by Cathy Zhao

In 2011, the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning Project (APCOL) conducted community research in eight neighborhoods across Toronto, including

CDA participants worked in pairs, gathering and sharing information and insights from each other's respective neighborhoods. Photo courtesy of G. de Montmollin

Steeles-L'Amoreaux in the northeast part of the city. Here six trained Chinese-speaking researchers recruited 58 residents to respond to a questionnaire.

To make sense of the massive amount of data that was collected, a process of Collaborative Data Analysis (CDA) was organized. It directly involved the community researchers in looking at the results of more than 450 interviews. People from eight communities worked from March to May in 2012 to shape their own questions and to compare the data from their own neighbourhoods with data from across the city.

As an active participant, the following is my learning about the Steeles-L'Amoreaux community.

The context

Steeles-L'Amoreaux community is an immigrant gathering area. The web site of the City of Toronto shows that in 2006 about 66% population are immigrants from outside Canada, with 47% arriving after 1990. Chinese speakers make up 30% of the residents. As for age, 61.7% population is from 20 to 64. As for education, 52.5% of those over 20 years old have finished college or other post-secondary education. It is from this group of Toronto residents that our 58 interviewees were drawn.

The respondents

Of the 58 surveys conducted in Steeles-L'Amoreaux neighbourhood, 42 respondents were female and 16 male. 54 respondents described themselves as Chinese and 52 can speak Chinese. Half of them live with children, 46 have finished college or higher level education. 43% of them are unemployed and 44.8% obtained their main income from employment while the remainder have no income. Most of them think their current health is fair or better.

The observations

Community Involvement

Based on the research, we found that many of the residents don't know the meaning of "anti-poverty" and over half have no awareness of major problems in their neighborhood. For those who think that there are problems in the neighborhood, their first two concerns are Housing/Safe Shelter (50%) and Access to Jobs/Living Wages.

From this survey, we found almost half of the respondents (47%) have no knowledge of anti-poverty activities or campaigns in their neighborhood and have not participated in any such activities. For those who are

"It's not only about the poor people, it's about everybody in our community, it's about the whole society"

currently, or used to be, involved in anti-poverty activities/campaigns, their first focus was related to Health/Nutrition/Food Security issues, and secondly to Access to Jobs and Living Wages. They became involved in community centres and apartment buildings. They were mostly invited in by a friend and played a passive role as a member in multiple campaigns. The main motivations for the participants were: "I want to make change", "I want to learn skills" and "I have been personally affected". They also think that the only way to make change is by organizing collectively.

Experiences of organizing

The reason why people chose to stay in the activity included: developing their relationships in the community, enjoying helping others, caring about the specific campaign issues. They tended to stay involved when they felt that their participation was important to others, and that their participation had become an important part of their life. Involvement was discouraged when they had no time, or experienced a barrier in personal costs, and when they lacked information.

Active participants said they got to learn more about the issues of other residents, as well as the diversity of their neighborhood. They enjoyed interacting with neighbors and had an increased sense of belonging in the neighborhood. Most felt that community members lacked the information to identify problems in the neighbourhood and the power to resolve issues.

Learning

Most active participants (90%) had attended some form of structured training as part of their involvement in activities and campaigns. This helped in a variety of ways: to improve their teamwork skills, to increase their general knowledge about poverty issues, to use computer and social technologies, to understand social or political issues and to engage with media and public relations. Their learning helped in volunteer work, in household responsibilities and in addressing a range of anti-poverty issues. They felt that this learning helped them know more about the issues facing the residents of their neighborhood, and also increased their skills to actually solve problems.

Implications of this data

To raise more awareness about anti-poverty issues in the Steeles-L'Amoreaux community, a practical plan is needed to meet the concerns of residents. Compared to other Toronto neighbourhoods, there are more newcomers and ESL residents, many of them are struggling to find jobs. Rather than a broad campaign on "poverty", organizing should focus on creating more good job opportunities, improving community safety

and gaining access to affordable housing. Once these priority concerns are addressed, other issues likely to emerge include enough neighborhood spaces for physical activity, access to affordable, nutritious food and the number of childcare facilities in the neighborhood.

Given the multiple issues, organizers need to have clear work plans, going step by step, in order to gather support from residents, community agencies and governments. When actions generate change, this needs to be measured and celebrated, so that an informed public will encourage more resident involvement in the campaigns.

In addition to thinking about language issues during meetings and public communication, residents will become more involved if there is a reasonable schedule that recognizes people's time constraints, and if there are opportunities built in to learn skills. By sending a newsletter or notices for community gatherings, a stronger sense of belonging can be built, and conditions are created for leadership to emerge.

My own learning

As an immigrant myself, in Canada for 7 years, working with the APCOL project has changed my understanding of anti-poverty activities. I used to think anti-poverty activism was just to provide food, shelter and holiday gifts to those poor people who couldn't obtain enough income to maintain their daily life. Through my APCOL involvement, I have learned to think more widely, about jobs, living wages, fair education, safe shelter and food security. It's not only about the poor people, it's about everybody in our community, it's about the whole society.

More specifically, I have found the learning through the CDA to be very productive. By combining residents' insights of their community with professional research methods from the university, the resulting analysis is more realistic and practical. At the same time, both the community members and university people got to learn from each other about active research that contributes to community development, truly a win-win! As a community researcher, I got to broaden my views on many community issues, while learning how to link community concerns with survey data. The process has enhanced my working skills on figuring out the priority issues of the community, and made me more confident.

For community members, the CDA learning has connected people from different parts of the city, bringing different communities closer. We have shared, not only issues from other communities, but experiences in dealing with them. The training and the analysis sessions provided the chance for all researchers to know each other, building up a strong sense of belonging among the project members, so that now we are taking the initiative to ask for help from each other!

Cathy Zhao has been working as a project coordinator, event organizer, community based researcher and life skills coach since 2007. With a strong dedication to the Chinese community and North Scarborough where she lives, Cathy works on a wide range of social issues to advocate civic engagement and public education. She is experienced in developing varied community based projects. ⌘

City's Pulse

by Ritallin

when you look at a
map of Toronto
a few of its features
jump out

the shoreline of the
lake
as it curves and
undulates
from southwest to
northeast across the
bottom edge

Photo courtesy of G. de Montmollin

the hard solid line of Steeles Avenue
a manmade barrier that separates
an expanded historic York
from a region of the same name

the circles and loops of
Spadina Circle, Queen's Park
the Donway and the Peanut
within military grid precision
of township surveyors who
worked in a bygone era

the twists of rivers significant
to our history – Rouge in the east
Don in the centre and Humber
in the west etching their indelible
marks on the topography

but there are many features you can't
see on first inspection

you cannot see the street people
hands out hoping for a
hand up
as hands halt progress
and force a life
of hand to mouth

the filled buses on
Finch West
ferry the fierce on buses
along
a congested corridor
battling stress, time and hardship
to etch an existence into asphalt
that leaves a lasting indentation

or the children in housing complexes
living off the avails of poverty
victims of a socioecomic crime spree for
which the perpetrators remain at large

and the garbage that floats up
to clog beaches at base of bluffs
litter that bespeaks the pollution
forcing residents to observe
instead of enjoying against skin
water meant to be fresh

we all feed on perceptions
from a wide assortment of angles
and hold up mirrors to our inadequacies
as a civic unit and
despair at much of what we see

but we must understand an aerial

imprinted onto blank paper
shares not the richness of what lies beneath

we can't see the peacemakers
building sustenance of mind, body and soul
who provide inspiration for
everyone young and old
who come to learn of their efforts

nor are the activists visible
who march and shout but also
labour within the system to
force new interpretations
of the words that guide our society

a map cannot show you
the youth who band together in
common cause across old divides
to disintegrate solitudes and
create a 21st century unity
for all the kids of the T-Dot

it cannot let you hear the music
or view the creation of the artists
who forge new identities within
out communal identity and
provide strength through diversity

my city
this city
your city
our city

this place of humanity
that grew on this land like planted seed

my streets
these streets
your streets
our streets

are only lines upon a page
but have etched into each of our hearts

take pride in this place
embrace the challenge of our lives
within our shared geographic space
and share whatever it provides

we have been part of a grand experiment
and the results are coming in
the science used as social method
lights us up from deep within

never cease to step boldly forward
never stop pushing for change
always innovate and create
seek out new partners in your range
link together to find solutions
that elude those isolated
work relentlessly to gain success
til broad improvements are created

when you look at a map of Toronto
the lay of the city is what jumps out
but the people in between the lines
define what we're all about.

Greg Franson debuted his Ritallin persona at an Ottawa spoken word event in summer 2003. Since then he has developed a reputation for delivering powerful poetry in a way that is lyrically appealing, widely accessible and unapologetically provocative in its socially conscious message. Greg has always written about issues that matter, including social justice, racism, the plight of Afrikans across the Diaspora, and empowerment of the disenfranchised. He composed and delivered this poem at a Community Food Action Gathering at FoodShare, April 21, 2012. ⌘

Systems Thinking and Social Change: Spotlight on Michael Shapcott

by D'Arcy Martin

DM: You've been active in community issues in Toronto for a long time. How is your thinking different today from when you started?

MS: Now I try to see issues as part of a system, rather than separately. The lived reality of all of our lives is that everything is connected to everything else. When we get out of bed in the morning, and go to the fridge and get out food for our breakfast, there are all sorts of connections back to the farm. There are also issues around income, because you have to be able to purchase the food. So you know, we all live our lives understanding that there are all sorts of complex connections. But when it comes to social policy, we've tended to try and silo and isolate things and say that it's, you know, all about one factor like housing, or all about one factor like income.

DM: How has this systems approach evolved in the Wellesley Institute?

MS: We are building from the several decades of work that's been done in the environmental field in systems thinking, around the understanding that in the physical world, everything is ultimately connected to everything else. And when you intervene in one part of the system, it has an impact in often unexpected ways in other parts of the system. That kind of thinking also needs to be brought into social and economic policy. In a complex system like an urban area like Toronto, we are also using some of the models that have been developed in systems thinking.

We came to this after some years of taking huge amounts of data and sticking it on maps. There's something that for many people is appealing about doing data mapping as a way of looking at our own neighbourhood. Take something like income, using David Hulchanski's "Three Cities" maps of Toronto, showing changes in income over a thirty-five year period. When we took Hulchanski's thirty-five years of income and overlaid that with the prevalence of diabetes, we came to the rather stunning conclusion that the prevalence of diabetes is closely correlated to income. So the richest neighbourhoods have the lowest prevalence of diabetes and vice versa for the poorest neighbourhoods.

That led us to linking other issues. A few years ago we did some work with Toronto Public Health on looking at a range of health indicators, everything from low birth weight babies to respiratory diseases, to accidents, people tripping and falling and breaking their leg. In every case there was a close correlation. So in other words, the poorest neighbourhoods had the highest burden of

poor health, the highest number of accidents. And what we wanted to do is understand what's behind this set of relationships, what are the links. Think of accidents related to falling – does the correlation mean that poor people are more clumsy than rich people? Well, probably not. The real explanation is around housing. If their housing is more poorly maintained, they may not have proper hand rails, they may not have proper anti-slip things on the stairs, their health may already be compromised anyway and so they may be more fragile and frail and that makes them more prone to tripping hazards and things. When we start to think about an urban area as a system, as opposed to a series of discrete issues where you make discrete interventions, it allows us to understand much better the interventions that will actually address health and equity in much more powerful ways.

DM: Have you tried co-production around issues of health?

MS: We were one of the seed funders for a study a few years ago on people living with HIV-AIDS, to look at the impact of housing, of horrible housing, on their health status. Similar studies like this had been done in many parts of the United States and Canada, Vancouver and Chicago and San Francisco and so on. All the studies are consistent in saying that people who are health-compromised, living with HIV-AIDS, for instance, and homeless, experience a high degree of respiratory and other common sort of ailments which force them into the emergency wards. So they spend a lot of time in a hospital, which is, of course, a very expensive place, from a government perspective, to deliver health care. Of course it would be better that they be healthier in the first place. When people are well housed, they still have HIV-AIDS and they still require all the anti- and retro-virals and all the complicated regime of treatment. But they're not constantly getting the colds and the pneumonia and all that stuff and spending half their time in emergency wards. We were able to quantify all that. But working with people who are living with HIV-AIDS, we wanted to dig deeper into what kind of housing works for them, what are the supports and services.

DM: What has come out of that?

MS: One advantage we had was the chance to actually build such housing. The Wellesley Institute is the legacy institution of the old Wellesley Hospital. We had ownership of the site once the hospital was shut down by the Harris government. One initiative we always had wanted to put on the site was housing for people with HIV-AIDS. Partly that's a nod back to the old Wellesley Hospital which had, through its urban initiative, had a very dynamic health practice with people living with AIDS. We had also, through the course of our work, identified that there was a huge need for supportive housing for seniors, frail elderly seniors.

Our original idea had been an eight- or a ten-story residential building on the old Wellesley site, with half of it for people with HIV-AIDS and the other half for seniors. We would segregate them by floors because the notion was that maybe seniors didn't want to share facilities with people living with AIDS and vice versa. However, luckily, before we actually made the mistake of creating a segregated building, we actually got people together and asked them "What kind of home would you want to live in? Do you want to sort of have your neighbour like yourself?

Etc., etc." And what we actually found overwhelmingly was people said "We don't care about that kind of artificial distinction. This is housing for people that have special support needs over and above just four walls and a roof." So everyone got all mixed up together. Now it's a wonderfully dynamic building where people are supporting each other and a real community has emerged there in which people do take care of each other physically and emotionally. A network has been created. The necessary knowledge was co-produced.

DM: In social research, there's sometimes a time pressure, a push for quick results, so that people say we can't afford co-production of knowledge because it is too slow. How do you handle that?

MS: We make no apologies, we're in this for the long haul. In urban health, we have created a forty-year horizon. We gather a very detailed social, health, and economic data. And then the model does whatever it does, and then we're allowed to kind of peer forward for forty years, and we can do things like address the impact of increasing investment in affordable housing on the prevalence of diabetes three or four decades away. When I think back to my days in journalism, I remember that the political policy window tends to be very short term. It's the next budget or the maybe the next election and that's it. Sometimes it's not even that long. And yet in the real world, we know that the complex mixture of issues and solutions which ultimately help us to build both individual health and population health are really long-term enterprises. We need to have better tools to allow us to look at the long term issues as well as the short-term.

DM: But doesn't that delay the needed action?

MS: When I first started doing community organizing in the east of downtown Toronto, with homeless adults, I was still in law school. We used to have a weekly dinner, a community dinner, at a drop-in centre. People came because they wanted the food. But the sort of quid pro quo was we wanted them to stay and talk about what was going on in their lives. Inevitably, we'd get into a fierce discussion about how, in those days, the landlord-tenant laws were skewed against low income tenants. A lot of tenants were being evicted on a fairly rapid basis by predatory landlords and ending up being homeless. So we wanted to engage in a law reform exercise to address this particular law.

But then somebody would put up their hand and say "Why are you talking about a six-month or a year-long law reform process when I don't have a place to sleep tonight? I want somebody to tell me where I'm going to sleep tonight." And of course, you can't just simply say to that person "Thank you brother. Come back in a year and we'll have the law changed and we'll tell you where you're going to sleep". So you always have to have something that addresses where people are at that particular moment. You can't say to that person "Shut up. We're into some strategy here and you're interfering with our ability to change the world in a way that will make life better for tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people across the province." You have to stop and problem solve about where that person can pick up the phone and find an empty bed in a homeless shelter that night. Balancing the immediate with the long term, that's always an issue for us. ⌘

Filling Holes: Confronting Gentrification in Anti-poverty Organizing

by Katharine Rankin

Anti-poverty activists and social movements have long grappled with the slippery distinction between economic revitalization and gentrification. Economic revitalization, resulting from investments in a neighborhood by the private and/or public sectors, holds out the possibility of improvements—livelier and safer streets, better amenities, beautiful spaces, feelings of belonging. Gentrification raises the spectre of displacement. Fixing up a neighborhood attracts more and more gentry (highly educated, highly skilled, highly paid middle and elite classes) to move into a neighborhood; increased housing costs, demolition for new construction, changes in the social fabric, threats to critical community networks, all put pressure on people with low incomes and other vulnerabilities to move out. A key challenge for anti-poverty organizing and community economic development is whether and how it is possible to achieve revitalization of disinvested neighborhoods, without displacement of the people who live and work in them.

To grapple with this question, it is important to take seriously the analytical focus on class that is suggested by the term gentrification. Reformulating revitalization as gentrification directs attention to changes in the class composition of a neighborhood and to the perspectives of those who are excluded from or displaced by upscaling processes.

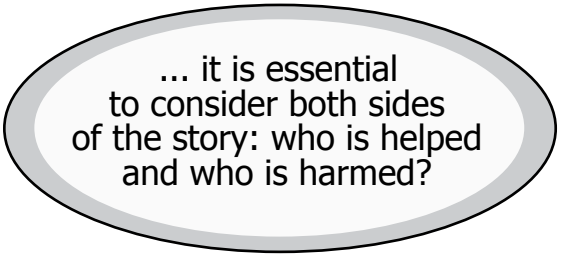
An expansive literature on gentrification furnishes some important analytical tools for probing these dynamics. The notion of 'displacement pressure' captures the ways in which social and cultural marginalization may precede actual physical displacement—when a neighborhood ceases to feel welcoming, meaningful or livable, pressure builds on people to move, rather than wait for the inevitable. 'State-led gentrification' acknowledges that these processes are not merely the purview of an open, competitive market, but may be produced in large part by state action: when governments invest in transportation improvements, furnish incentives to developers, or help upscale streetscapes, they create enabling conditions for real estate capital to invest in new spaces of consumption targeted to professional-class elites.

Much of the research on gentrification focuses on how the tastes and desires of the middle class shape neighborhood upscaling processes and the formation of neighborhood identity. Or on the demands of real estate capital to reap the benefits of a 'rent gap', the difference between rents that a disinvested area can generate now and rents it could generate after redevelopment.

There has been relatively less attention given to the experience of gentrification from the perspective of poor and marginalized groups experiencing displacement pressure and physical displacement. Recent research has begun to identify deterrents to gentrification—such as high levels of working

class employment, high concentrations of social housing, rent regulation, non-market sources of housing finance, political mobilization and local resistance; but little effort has been made to actively bring these insights to bear on planning processes in areas that may be ripe for redevelopment.

In an expanding city like Toronto, predictions of extraordinary population growth (20% by the year 2031) create conditions where even the disinvested inner suburbs can anticipate redevelopment pressure. APCOL research on the commercial street in these inner suburban regions where poverty and new immigrant populations are concentrated is investigating how exclusions and displacements can begin in the development planning process itself, as publicly accountable approval processes are sidelined in favor of increased influence by privatized institutional actors like developers and property owners. These processes of 'gentrifying participation' can form the front edge of a series of displacement pressures



that start to marginalize people in their own neighborhoods.

Researching processes of neighborhood change in disinvested areas of the city that are experiencing redevelopment pressure brings into focus some common myths about gentrification:

Myth 1: Most people stand to gain from gentrification.

Gentrification brings with it many visible benefits, which might include: cultural assets, government and business investment, active street life, new stores and services. The harms are less visible: the loss of affordable and ethnic amenities, a decrease in socioeconomic and ethnocultural diversity, and displacement pressures on low-income residents and businesses. In order to understand the true outcomes of any process of neighborhood change, it is essential to consider both sides of the story: who is helped and who is harmed?

Myth 2: Gentrification leads to a more diverse and mixed neighborhood.

Early stages of gentrification may indeed increase various kinds of ethnocultural and socioeconomic diversity in a neighborhood. But evidence suggests that this diversity is a temporary characteristic of early stages of gentrification, which will pass with time. If allowed to run its course, gentrification has the tendency to decrease social mix, ethnic diversity, and neighborhood accessibility and affordability.

Myth 3: Gentrification results naturally from the competitive market.

It is tempting to regard the neighborhood commercial street as a self-regulating competitive market subject to autonomous economic processes. But, like other spaces in the city, commercial streets are dynamic, complicated networks of politics and culture – created by individuals, institutions and market rules. There is a great deal of variation around the world in how these spaces are formed—in Shanghai commercial streets are a product of direct or indirect state investment; in Amsterdam, the city government deploys 'street managers' to coordinate desired retail mix; in Toronto, Business Improvement

Areas are afforded some powers to shape commercial streets, but the power is tipped relatively more in favor of real estate capital. If we acknowledge the human decision-making behind the way markets are organized, we may find points of intervention and a new sense of possibility to decide what kind of neighborhood we want to encourage.

Is gentrification of disinvested commercial streets possible without displacement? We are not sure it is, but APCOL research suggests that a first step must surely be to take stock of the views and experiences of small, independently owned businesses that are providing affordable goods and services to the low-income, new-immigrant communities that predominate in Toronto's inner suburbs. A second step must be to name the risks of displacement and the processes of exclusion in well-intentioned attempts to redevelop marginalized neighborhoods like Mt. Dennis, where we are conducting this research. And a third step must be to creatively imagine how revitalization could be engaged critically—not as a euphemism for the displacement of economically and culturally vulnerable groups—but as an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of all people in a community.

Katherine Rankin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto. She is the academic co-leader of the Weston-Mount Dennis case study on small business and local employment for the APCOL project. ⌘

Academy and Community Collaboration - an 'APCOL model'

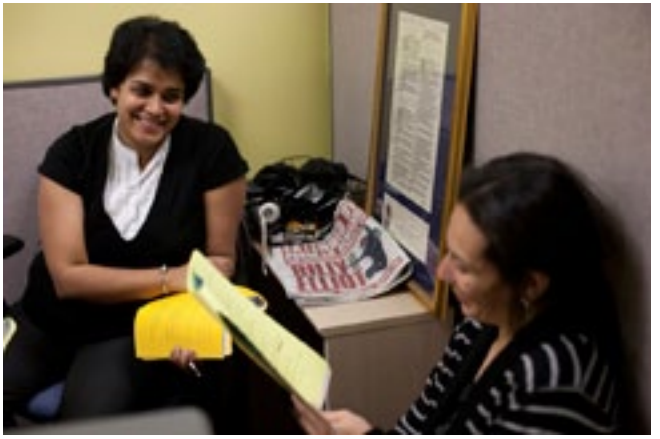
by Agnes Thomas

APCOL has presented me with a different and an exciting opportunity in St. James Town (SJT), one of the neighbourhoods selected for the survey/case study. I wear two hats in SJT, one as a community consultant with women in community organizing and the other as a student researcher interested in informal sector work in urban Canada. Two motivating questions have helped me to play both roles through APCOL in the past year:

How can APCOL bridge the gap between the academy and the community, between academics and non- academics who have the same or more opportunities for learning in their everyday environment?

How do grass root level movements/ organizations in the community inform or guide such research initiatives as APCOL?

So far in my experience with APCOL I do not see it as just community based action research, as it creates multiple opportunities for the community and researchers. Learning, formal and informal, has been a key feature in the process, with the community owning the



Agnes Thomas and Amna Sha at a communtiy researcher training workshop in St. James Town. Photo courtesy of Joseph Sawan

data and its interpretation. This challenges the traditional mode of research and creates space for new dialogue. Furthermore, it forces the academics to look for accessible language to disseminate the research findings and recommendations to the community. Agencies committed to the development of certain neighbourhoods or communities in the city are given an opportunity by collaborating with the project to learn of their neighbourhoods from its members and to define or redefine their goals according to what the data reveals.

In my view, the main outcome of this project so far is the new conversation that it has sparked in the city among activists, academics, community researchers and community partners around: what is activism? Who is an activist in the community? What is poverty? Who defines it, and who are the poor in the city?

My observation of the youth council and my role in the women's council inform my choices as a student researcher. Through my double role at APCOL, I want to probe the methodologies and research tools best suited to understand and strengthen anti-poverty campaigning. I will explore what occurs after the research phase is over, to see who continues the dialogue. To further bridge the gap between academy and people, those people motivated by the project will need to ensure that methods are developed and campaigns started. Playing two distinctive roles in the community will continue to help me in challenging the academic positioning of the researcher in the community as well as the agency position that often has an upper hand in the running of a community or neighbourhood.

The collaboration of APCOL with locally-run SJT youth and women councils highlights many aspects of community organizing and enhances the learning by participants. As a method of inquiry, APCOL shows the importance of participatory action research and the importance of mixed methods in community research. Through APCOL we are showing the potential for academia and community to work together and learn from each other, while activists in the community claim or reclaim their voice through participation.

Youth and women councils of the community are enriched by the opportunity to learn new skills of research and critical analysis to apply in their work Neighbourhoods become aware of how issues can go beyond their boundaries and are sometimes transnational and intergenerational. Addressing this complex web of issues, there is room for the academy, agencies and community members, as long as the work relations are respectful and the collaboration is genuine.

Agnes Thomas is a doctoral student at OISE, University of Toronto and currently works as director of community development at the Yonge Street Mission. ⌘

What's Next?

by D'Arcy Martin

Photo courtesy of Line Bolduc

What have we found out so far in our project? We now have results of case studies, of extended interviews, of survey questionnaires... a heap of data to help map the informal learning processes in which people engage as they become active in their communities.

In recent months, our efforts have focused on making sense of all this information. Along the way, we are surfacing the primary importance of relationships. People are saying that they first attended a community meeting "because a friend brought me". People are saying that they remain involved because of the issues but also because the climate is receptive and not conflictual. People are saying that they withdraw from involvement when family and other relationships make the time commitment impossible.

So what? Didn't we already know these things? Perhaps not, if we look carefully at the way organizations are run in this city, from community groups to the city government. Building safe, respectful spaces for shared reflection is not always a priority at the top levels of policy making.

How then can we move personal connections to the centre of attention among policy makers, social service organizations, governments and others who shape the ways that poverty is experienced?

We could always write up our findings in academic terms and present them at conferences. Not a bad thing, but surely limited in its short-term impact.

Inside APCOL, we are now heading towards two further ways of making our research useful. One is a large, city-wide conference on October 18-19 (see back page) and the other is a set of arts-based initiatives.

The arts-based initiatives will build on our recent contribution to a FoodShare gathering, where APCOL funded a popular theatre and spoken word portion of the program. The popular theatre, facilitated by Naomi Tessler, brought eight residents from Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park onto the "stage", to demonstrate possible challenges in selling healthy food from trucks in neighbourhoods. This changed the tone of the discussion and enriched people individually and collectively.

We want to refine our findings, so that we can be confident of their accuracy. Then we want to feed those findings into digital storytelling, video, music, poetry and theatre, in order to engage people's passion for connection and play.

We will try to engage decision-makers in dialogue ahead of time, to provide us all a shared basis of facts and experiences, to portray and encourage creative thinking about solutions.

Yes, there will be arguments. But there will also be stronger connections amongst us all.

D'Arcy Martin is an activist educator and co-ordinator of the APCOL project. ⌘

APCOL, in partnership with the Toronto Community Development Institute (TCDI) invites you to

Push Back! Move Forward!

Learning, Organising, and Building Community

Friday, October 18 6 PM
Saturday, October 19 9 AM

Metro Hall, 55 John Street, Room 308

- Popular Theatre Performance Friday night
- Panel of Community Activists and Concurrent Workshops on Saturday

Lunch and refreshments
Child Care (book ahead)

Keynote Speakers

- **Uzma Shakir**
  City of Toronto
- **Nina Wilson**
  Idle No More

Panel of Communtiy Activists

- **Nigel Bariffe**
- **Jennifer Huang**
- **Antoine Genest Gregoire**

REGISTER online at http://pushbackmoveforward.eventbrite.ca
or call Social Planning Toronto 416.351.0095 ext. 251
Cost: $30 before October 1, $40 after October 1

Keeping in Touch

Members of the APCOL project are committed to communicating with groups and individuals interested in issues and campaigns involving Nutrition and Food Security, Housing, School Completion, and Jobs/Living Wages. If you would like to be part of this exchange of information please email us at info@apcol.ca and we will add you to our electronic listserv.

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