



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

**June 15, 2017**

## Funding Community Strength in North Point Douglas

First published in the Winnipeg Free Press, June 15, 2017 *Inter-agency effort to support inner-city women's centre*

It may seem unusual for an organization that works with incarcerated men to take a position in support of a program that supports women living in the inner city. But there is a direct link between the work of groups like the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, which is facing a significant loss of funding, and the safer communities that the John Howard Society is committed to creating. The link is especially strong in a neighbourhood like North Point Douglas which is challenged by poverty, intergenerational trauma, and the ongoing negative impact of residential schools.

The John Howard Society has twice assisted inmates in the Winnipeg Remand Centre with raising funds to support programs for families in Point Douglas and the North End. These men, who are paid less than six dollars a day for jobs inside the Remand Centre and acting on their own initiative contributed several hundred dollars to support the work of two community agencies, because they clearly recognized the importance of these programs to their own families.

Women's and family centres like North Point Douglas Women's Centre do the heavy lifting of stabilizing communities. They provide basic services, community development, healing programs and organizational support. They also support individuals coming out of incarceration as they lead healthier, more stable lives.

In recent years, the Red Road to Healing Program, a core program at the North Point Douglas Women's Centre developed by Shannon Buck, assists women as they identify and heal from cycles of violence.

At the rally for the women's centre last week, one participant from Red Road to Healing spoke publicly about how the program had helped her raise her child and improve the health of her family. Participants face a complex array of challenges alongside intimate-partner violence: interacting with Child and Family Services, family members who are incarcerated, prevalent mental illness, and intense poverty. The Red Road to Healing Program is an example of the vital service the women's centre provides for residents.

Women at the centre recently led the call for more supports for men. They said if women go home to partners who don't have the same opportunities for growth and healing, the family as a whole isn't much farther ahead. As a result, a men's group now meets on a weekly basis.

The women at the centre also created the Mama Bear Clan, a community care and outreach project. This is a group of volunteers of all genders that goes out into the community two

there is an alternative.

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evenings a week and offers care and problem solving.

The women's centre is a community hub that strengthens families. Kids raised by their own families, in their own communities, are far less likely to be incarcerated as adults. They are more likely to stay in school, and find subsequent employment. In addition, a person who has a family to go back to after they leave jail is far less likely to reoffend.

We know that incarceration on its own does not stop people from reoffending. Nearly half of those behind bars in the province have a record of previous offences. People stop reoffending when they have a reason to do so, and one of the most common reasons is the desire to be a better parent and role model for children. This is much more likely to happen when the family unit remains strong.

We can turn the tide on poverty, intergenerational trauma and the legacy of residential schools, struggles that are felt so keenly in North Point Douglas and many other neighbourhoods. The good work that is happening through community organizations needs to continue in order to build health and strength from the ground up. The more they are properly supported, the deeper their impact will be.

As an organization, the John Howard Society remains committed to working towards safer communities and addressing the causes of crime. We see a group like the North Point Douglas Women's Centre as a critical ally in this important work. We urge the broader community to support this important organization and call for its funding to be fully restored.

*Kate Sjoberg is a board member with the John Howard Society of Manitoba and a former Executive Director at the North Point Douglas Women's Centre. John Hutton is the Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Manitoba.*

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