



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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Drop the Stereotypes, and Deal with the Real Problem

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In August the *Free Press* published an article (*Safety complaints at Lord Selkirk Park, Aug. 24, 2018*) that painted a very negative picture of Lord Selkirk Park, a large Manitoba Housing complex in Winnipeg's North End. The story claimed that safety complaints had doubled in 2017, and that despite investments in the community, residents "are not seeing improvements."

I found this disturbing, since there have been many positive changes in Lord Selkirk Park since 2005. These have been documented in various publications and in the film *A Good Place to Live* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr6h-m_-1vM).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, many described Lord Selkirk Park as a "war zone." It was a place to avoid. Starting in 2005, community development work and public investment produced dramatic changes. Lord Selkirk Park became a good place to live, with a range of educational initiatives and a strong sense of community.

So, what has happened? Have all the gains since 2005 been lost? Over a recent three-day period I spoke with 18 residents, asking them to tell me what's happening. I also spoke with two long-time community workers, three educators, and three Manitoba Housing staff, all but one of whom work daily with residents of Lord Selkirk Park—a total of 26 people.

What became apparent is that all the previous gains are still in place. Staff at Kaakiyow, the adult learning centre, said

"we're thriving now." The Resource Centre is a vibrant hub of community activity. Residents say the Resource Centre staff are "fabulous," as are local Manitoba Housing staff.

There continues to be a strong sense of community. You can feel it walking around, and the people I spoke with confirmed that feeling. One resident said: "I think it's awesome. People look out for each other." Another said "I love the people who live here." A community worker told me, "It's far better than it was when we started in 2005. There's far more good than bad here." A resident told me that securing housing at Lord Selkirk Park was "like a godsend" to him and his family, and added that the sense of community here is "unlike anything I've ever experienced in my life." Another, when asked what it's like living here, said "it's beautiful."

But there is a problem. Those I spoke with are virtually unanimous that the problem is meth. "It's a different animal," I was told by one person. "It's a beast," said another. An educator told me: "What we're seeing is a shift in the reason for crime," which is now being "driven by meth." Incidents of erratic, meth-fueled violence were described. It's "making people crazy," one resident told me. Police and social workers and community workers are all "overwhelmed," and

there is an alternative.

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“everyone’s inundated.” Nobody has a real solution, and the resources to deal with the meth problem are just not there. It “came out of left field and just blew up,” one worker told me. The problem is city-wide, although it hits people who are low-income and dealing with trauma particularly hard.

The Free Press article made only passing reference to meth, even though it’s clear that meth is the real issue. The reporter spoke with two people only. Everything about the story was negative. Not a positive word was included. There is of course a long history of reporting only the negative about the North End. The old newspaper maxim, “if it bleeds, it leads,” has long applied here. All the usual stereotypes were present in the Free Press story.

People I spoke with say the story did not accurately portray their community. The article implied that Lord Selkirk Park is a failed community. This is simply not the case. The claim that residents are not seeing any improvements is false. The housing complex is full, has a wait list of people who want to live there, and has some 60 newcomer families who are doing well. The sense of community is strong, and most people I spoke with are grateful and happy to be living there.

The problem is meth. Residents and community workers are pretty much unanimous in saying so. And they told me over and over that they need treatment facilities and supports in the community.

What we’re talking about is a healthy low-income community being hit by a

problem that is not of their making.

Last month’s Free Press story missed all of this. It missed the good news story about how real gains continue to be made in this low-income community. And it missed the bad news story that recent problems are caused by meth, for which insufficient resources are being made available.

We should drop the old stereotypes, and listen to what those who are closest to the issue are telling us—meth is the real problem; community-based resources are needed.

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