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Other sections in the Mobilizing Resources Kit:

- I. Education and Motivation
- II. Using Faith Groups' Property
- III. Investing in Affordable and Social Housing

USE YOUR COMMUNITY INFLUENCE: “NIMBYISM” AND “NOT-MY-NEIGHBOURISM”

by Carolyn Whitney-Brown, Mobilizing Resources Project Coordinator

There have been many discussions of “NIMBYism” (the Not-In-My-Back-Yard reaction). In increasing numbers of newspaper articles, people opposing affordable housing projects or shelters assure the reporters that “This has nothing to do with NIMBYism.” Our November 2002 event focused on the problem for housing providers of what we called NIMBYism.

But the catchy phrase “NIMBY” can be problematic.

First, “NIMBY” can be a divisive term that polarizes people into only two camps, for and against. To people who feel they have legitimate concerns about a proposed housing project, to be called “NIMBYs” feels insulting, that they are being labelled rather than heard.

Second, the phrase is not accurate. There are many things people legitimately do not want “in their back yards” — things like toxic dumps and airports and mega-highways. In downtown Toronto, a determined group of neighbours joined to oppose the Spadina Expressway in their back yards: this was a fine example of the positive power of NIMBYism.

When we address housing, however, we are not talking about things in back yards, and when neighbours oppose housing, they do not generally oppose the building itself. We are talking about people here. The offensive community reaction that housing providers urge faith groups to work against is perhaps more accurately termed “Not-My-Neighbourism.”

“Not-My-Neighbourism” insists that some kinds of people don’t fit into a local community. The potential new neighbours may be labelled with the most offensive and inaccurate stereotypes — “mentally ill and pedophiles” or “poor and violent.” The community may express concern: “We have our fair share of these poor unfortunates; we have reached saturation; we can’t possibly welcome more of them,” or “There are not adequate social services or public transit or health care or laundromats for them.” The message under this is simply: “The people who might move in here are NOT MY NEIGHBOURS.”

To members of faith groups, “Not-My-Neighbourism” should ring warning bells. Every major religion requires of its members compassion. No religion allows its members to shut out someone in need. Every religion stresses the spiritual cost of rejecting others. “Anyone who is stingy, is stingy only with his own soul,” warns the Qur’an (Qur’an 47:38). Jesus when asked, “Who is my neighbour?” responded with a parable that showed that a neighbour is both the one who welcomes generously and the one who is suffering and needs help.

Any of us could suddenly be in a moment of misfortune, needing a compassionate neighbour. In Jewish sacred writings, a prophet speaks for G-d, saying “Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen; to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke... Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear... you will cry for help and he will

“Faith groups can offer answers to the key question: What should the community look like? Faith groups have a context in which to see homeless people as important community members and essential community assets, and thus to reduce fear between richer groups and poorer people.”

**Bill Bosworth, Manager,
Don Mount Court
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say; Here am I.” (Isaiah 58:6-9). The distinction between the giver and receiver dissolves here: justice and compassion are healing for everyone.

“Not-My-Neighbourism” is also against Canadian understandings of our social fabric. In 1945, the Ontario High Court ruled that a neighbourhood could not “covenant” to refuse to allow a Jewish people to purchase in the neighbourhood (see the Drummond Wren case below). Our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* forbids discrimination on many grounds: The fundamental premise is that no one has the right to refuse another person their rights because of prejudice.

In the early 1960s, members of Methodist Churches across the United States pledged themselves to refuse the fear tactics of real estate salespeople and agents who would warn neighbours that a black family was moving in and it was time to get out before house prices dropped. These groups networked nationally and organized to urge others to make the same commitment to welcome all neighbours.

The Drummond Wren case: You can't choose your neighbours

The Drummond Wren case was decided by the Ontario High Court in 1945. Drummond Wren was with a progressive group called the Worker's Educational Association. They had bought a piece of property with the idea that they would raffle it off in a lottery as a fundraiser for their group. Once they bought the property, they discovered that there was a condition (called a covenant) attached to the property, which said:

“Land not to be sold to Jews or persons of objectionable nationality.”

Judge McKay, who wrote for the majority in this case, said that the covenant was invalid because it was against the public good and therefore contrary to public policy. He specifically cited the *San Francisco Charter* (which was the founding document of the United Nations) and prominent statements by world leaders such as Churchill and Roosevelt.

Here are two specific quotes from Judge McKay in his 1945 decision:

“If sale of a piece of land can be prohibited to Jews, it can equally be prohibited to Protestants, Catholics or other groups or denominations. If the sale of one piece of land can be so prohibited, the sale of other pieces of land can likewise be prohibited.

“Ontario, and Canada too, may well be termed a province, and a country, of minorities in regard to the religious and ethnic groups which live therein. It appears to me to be a moral duty, at least, to lend aid to all forces of cohesion, and similarly to repel all fissiparous tendencies which would imperil national unity.”

The same argument that Judge McKay used to declare that discriminatory covenants are against public policy in 1945 should apply with equal vigour to discriminatory zoning and planning practices in 2003 that act to discriminate against a certain class of people (such as low-income people) and keep them from particular neighbourhoods. Social cohesion is a good thing, said Judge McKay in 1945. It is equally good in 2003.

Michael Shapcott

Faith groups can likewise take a strong stance that people who have suffered most in our society are neighbours with an equal right to respect, welcome and privacy. Canadian songwriter Bob Snider observes in “The Old Nova Scotian” that the man who has lived a hard life without an adequate home is a tragic figure, but the affluent people jeering at him are far more pathetic (see Snider’s lyrics on page 15).

Canadian faith groups can commit themselves to support new housing efforts. See the proposed draft “Pledge” below. People who are poor, who have lived without a home, who are living with challenges such as a physical disability, psychological illness, intellectual handicaps, people who have arrived in Canada as refugees — members of our society who have often shown profound courage in the face of their suffering — are neighbours. Many people can tell of a time when they were in need, and it was the person who understood what it is to suffer, someone not afraid of the suffering of another, who could stand with them as a friend and neighbour. (See page 16 for some suggested reading.) Faith groups can publicly announce their understanding that everyone is a member of the community and as such deserves respect. And we can go beyond that and seek out people who have experienced great suffering to be our neighbours.

A PLEDGE: HAVE A VISION OF WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY YOU CHOOSE

proposed by Mo Srivastava, Homelessness Action Group Steering Committee member, and Karen MacKay Llewellyn, Minister at Trinity-St. Paul’s United Church

Witnessed by the spirit of a faith that urges us to assist those who are most in need and to work for a more just world in which their needs are met, we pledge:

- to educate ourselves and our neighbours about the problem of homelessness, about possibilities for lasting solutions and our capacity to use our resources and talents to assist just solutions;
- to enter into the bonds of friendship with those who are homeless and who seek homes in our community, to welcome them and to be ready always to encourage others to do the same; and
- to recognize that the plight of homelessness leaves many with additional needs beyond a mere roof over their head and a warm bed, and that these needs also must be met.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH REAL PEOPLE

Look for concrete ways to do what’s promised in the pledge above — “to enter into the bonds of friendship with those who are homeless and who seek homes in our community, to welcome them and to be ready always to encourage others to do the same.” You can find ways to commit yourselves as a group or a faith community to build relationships with people who are homeless or in housing that is not what they would choose, such as shelters, rooming houses and boarding houses.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Get to know and support the Dream Team, an ONPHA award-winning group that demonstrates the life-altering benefits of supportive housing for people living with mental illness by telling their personal stories. “We want politicians and the general public to know about our lives and our contribution to the communities we live in.” See www.thedreamteam.ca
- Get to know people who come to Out of the Cold.
- Make a long-term commitment as a faith group to volunteer somewhere to really get to know people. Ask the Toronto Volunteer Centre for suggestions: www.volunteertoronto.on.ca
- Consider the more structured Boarding Homes Ministry model: BHM at this point includes only Presbyterian churches, but can be used as a model by anyone. See www.presbycan.ca/bhm
- Work with groups starting something new: Use information about community meetings to find places where people in shelters or new affordable housing projects might need committed neighbours or friends.

THE HOUSING PROCESS AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS: SUPPORT FROM FAITH GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS IS NEEDED!

adapted from presentations given at the November 2002 workshop by Leslie Wright, Novita Interpares Ltd; Rosemary Bennett, City of Toronto; Leslie Gash, Dixon Hall; Nancy Singer, Kehilla Residential Programme; Paul Dowling, Housing Consultant; and Cathy Tafler, Tafler-Rylett Architects

Good projects can be stopped by determined and well-organized community opposition. People who oppose a project have more motivation to organize than people who support it: Fear and anger are great motivators! Community members who support a project often don't realize their presence is needed at community meetings. Here are some tips:

Informing vs. consulting

It is very rare that a project can proceed without a rezoning or Committee of Adjustment approval. In those rare cases, a housing project is not required to have a public consultation process. Under the new shelter by-law, the community information process will include a community meeting. Most of the time, rezoning or other approvals for housing require some public consultation process. Consultation does not however mean that residents have final decision-making power. People don't have a right to choose their neighbours according to a commitment of City Council.

This can lead to some of the nasty “NIMBY” meetings so widely reported in the press. Whether the housing developer is building a shelter, a nursing home or supportive housing, they must figure out who the stakeholders are. The same kind of nasty meeting can occur around plans for a new home for the aged!

For faith groups and individuals to be able to support a project in an informed way, it is important to know who the players are — who are involved — the

sponsoring group, housing provider, local councillor, ratepayers' and business groups, funders, neighbours and businesses in close proximity, local faith groups, etc.

Be committed to your neighbourhood

People who chair community meetings advise that people and groups planning or supporting a housing project treat neighbours equitably and follow a consistent process. Communicate whatever you can. Share the information. Make a commitment to plan and carry out your project in partnership with the whole community, including present and future neighbours. The minute the consultation process begins, actively counter fear with accurate information. (If approvals are required, this process may start much earlier.)

As you hit milestones in your project, send out letters to the community. This serves a number of purposes — you're there, you're consistent, you're not going anywhere, you're not hiding, you're in your neighbourhood.

Community meetings

Community meetings to discuss affordable or social housing projects can become abusive shouting matches. People dislike change: They are anxious of the unknown; they may project their worst fears onto their new potential neighbours; they fear the changes will destroy their property value or retirement plans.

These community stresses are real and must be understood and respected. Recognize that these are pastoral care situations. Hold in mind, though, that the stress of living without an adequate home is even more unfair and unbearable. Without taking sides, recognize that those without a home are in a more vulnerable and unjust position here, and continue to publicly affirm every person's need and right to have a home.

Some projects that have been required to inform rather than consult have had success with open houses rather than meetings as they provide an opportunity for information sharing without providing a platform for intolerance.

You may not be friends, but you will be neighbours...

An important consideration: You may not be friends, but you will be neighbours. Take the high road. Some members of the local community are going to say ill-informed and offensive things; make sure your actions are above that level. As members of a faith group, be consistent and committed to being a good neighbour. In meetings, watch your body language. Smile — be polite, don't become argumentative or defensive. Supporters must recognize that verbal attacks are not to be taken personally. Being able to keep a sense of humour helps.

Choose a facilitator/moderator who is not closely identified with the project and so is perceived as objective. A good moderator is able to deal with angry comments in a non-confrontational way and without losing his or her cool. **However, insults or attempts to exclude people from the community on the basis of race or disability or sexual orientation or religion cannot go unchallenged. Nor should discriminatory or hate-filled expressions directed towards poor people be tolerated. Inflammatory hate language directed towards any group of people is contrary to Canadian law and should not be tolerated by any community of faith.**

MOBILIZING RESOURCES: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

Many people committed long term to social equality and justice suffer from burn-out, exhaustion, and loss of perspective. So do people who are homeless or living in housing that is not a home for them. Faith groups can affirm the value of reflection, the necessity of solitude, of retreats to step back and keep perspective and listen. Some traditions offer reflection days, retreat days, times of silence and renewal, meditation. Think about what your faith group can offer to renew peoples' weary hearts and souls.

Establish a good relationship with the local councillor early in the process. Councillors can be your best ally or your worst enemy. Keep them informed of the process and respond to their concerns. Figure out where they are coming from and what pressures they are under. They are elected officials and need a place to land. Councillors are experts on the social dynamics of the people and groups in their wards. They and their staffs can provide helpful advice. Sometimes you're dealing with more than one councillor (if a project is near a ward boundary) and even different levels of government

Healing afterwards

After a difficult process, after the housing is built and people move in, healing has to happen in communities. People have discovered disturbing things they didn't know about each other as neighbours: They've seen each other's fears, prejudices, even hatred. This affects churches and schools: What is the role of local faith groups to gently encourage healing and reconciliation?

This might mean sitting with people, meeting with people, being aware of how we encourage peoples' growth. There are many stories of people who were violently opposed who became committed neighbours.* Expect the best of everyone.

One recommended way to assist with healing and increase support over time is to invite neighbours to join an ongoing community liaison or reference group. This will allow people to air their concerns and feelings and discuss any issues that arise once the housing project is opened. In the case of shelters, as part of the process the new by-law includes the establishment of a community liaison committee.

(See, for example, June Callwood on Romero House in "Miracle on Wanda Street," Toronto Life, May 2002.)*

TIPS FOR SPEAKING AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

Making a deputation to a Community Council Meeting: Things that are helpful to know before you make your first deputation

*by Dave Snelgrove, Mobilizing Resources Coordinator, with Nancy Singer,
Executive Director, Kehilla Residential Programme*

By the time your project appears on the agenda of a Community Council it will have been through several layers of approvals, most of which will hear deputations — usually Standing Committees of Council: Community Services Committee/Policy and Finance if city money is involved, and Property & Transportation if building on City land — then on to Community Council, which in turn makes recommendations to City Council on land-use issues. City Council is not a rubber stamp, but they usually approve the recommendations of the Community Councils. (Note: you cannot make a deputation at City Council.)

The meeting will deal with a whole variety of motions and proposals, not just the one you are there to speak to. Deputation items are scheduled for a specific time and people have been notified of that time. If the meeting is behind schedule, the Chair may ask who is there to speak to an item and move to it since people have been waiting a long time. However, don't expect to speak at your appointed time; book off a fair chunk of time and be prepared to wait.

Each committee has staff who will help make the meeting run smoothly, and they have done a lot of preparation for these meetings.

It is a formal setting: Decorum is expected and enforced. This makes it easier to say your piece without interruption. The purpose of the meeting is to allow the elected representatives to hear and see what their constituents think and feel about the proposals before them. Cheering and booing are generally discouraged. Speakers are expected to address their remarks to the Chair.

The housing provider you are there to support will likely present the project in some detail before other speakers are asked to contribute.

Bits of advice

You are not alone. Others will also be speaking, and supporting you, even if they don't cheer.

Coordinate with the housing provider in advance. Let them know you are willing to speak and who you are and who you represent. They will also be able to brief you on any matters to do with the proposal.

It is usually possible and preferable to advise the committee of your intention to speak well before the meeting, by fax or phone. The housing provider will have the numbers to call. Sometimes that is not possible, and a speakers' sign-up sheet will be available before the meeting. The Chair will call on speakers in the order they appear on the list. It is often most effective if three or four people in a row speak in favour without all making the same points.

The Committee will also want to know general information such as "My name is Bob Smith and I am speaking on behalf of the Homelessness Action Group. We have 100 members living in Toronto, and I live three blocks from the proposed site of this project. I would like to speak in favour of this project..."

Learn as much as you can about the project so you can speak with authority about the details. For example, "The 40 units being proposed are a small step in the right direction, and the neighbours surrounding the project community have had several opportunities to learn about the plans and to give their input into the design. The Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre has been an asset to the neighbourhood for 15 years and has an excellent reputation for being sensitive and responsive to their clients and running effective programs. They conducted a long and thorough consultation process and have listened to people's concerns. The architect has designed a facade that will enhance the streetscape and allow for the kind of lighting and sight lines recommended for safe streets," etc.

Do not fear showing some emotion. The councillors have had time to come to an opinion of their own, and you are trying to influence them on all levels of their understanding. E.g. "This project is designed and planned to provide modest,

“ One percent of federal spending on housing is, in many ways, a typically modest Canadian response. We’re not shooting for the moon. The goal is realistic and affordable. In April, the federal government announced that it was running a surplus of about \$1.3 billion every month. So our campaign calls for about six weeks worth of federal surpluses going to new housing every year. ” (Source: National Housing and Homelessness Network)

**Michael Shapcott in
the Catalyst**

safe, affordable housing for my friends and neighbours. The people who will move in are my neighbours now and should continue to be my neighbours for as long as they want. They need the housing and we demand it. If this project is rejected, every volunteer at every Out of the Cold shelter in Toronto will go on strike, and you will have thousands of homeless people knocking on your door in the middle of the night.” Okay, I may have gone too far with that last bit. Threatening dire consequences is not usually recommended in this setting.

If you are not an experienced public speaker, have your points written out in advance, or your whole speech if that makes you feel more comfortable. It is perfectly fine to read your deputation, but keep to the expected time limit. Once you have done this a few times, you may become an expert. Pass on your tips to others.

Sources of information on upcoming meetings:

- The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee often receives and distributes notices of community meetings. To get on TDRC’s e-mail list, contact Carly Zwarenstein, telephone 416-599-8372; e-mail: tdrc@tdrc.net
- Visit the City of Toronto website, www.city.toronto.on.ca; get on the mailing list of City Clerks for items of interest to you.
- Read your city councillor’s newsletters; ask at the office what new housing is being considered in your area.

WHAT CAN CONCERNED INDIVIDUALS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES DO?

Michael Shapcott, Research Coordinator with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and the University of Toronto’s Centre for Urban and Community Studies, was interviewed by Murray MacAdam in the Catalyst, a monthly newsletter of the Citizens for Public Justice. The following is from “Our voices lead to action: Responding as moral beings,” Vol. 25, #3, June/July 2002 (used with permission). See www.cpj.ca

The first priority is to speak out on the issue. Continued inaction is intolerable.

Use the tried-and-true methods of writing letters to your MP, meeting with your MP, letters to the editor. These efforts get counted up, and are part of the way that our political system does work.

I understand why many people are cynical about the political process. My inspiration is Martin Luther King, who said our goal must be to create the “constructive coercive pressure” so that no government can elude our demands.

Since the 1990s, there has been an explosion of charitable responses like Out of the Cold to help the homeless find food and shelter for a night. The dedicated volunteers involved are to be applauded. They have the best of intentions.

But it’s important not to legitimize the government’s action in cutting funding and withdrawing from housing programs. Faith groups should join with housing advocates in rejecting the notion that individual acts of charity can replace the need for strong social programs at the national and provincial level.

The moral dimension is so important. There are plenty of economic arguments that it's cheaper to build housing than put people in shelters. We can talk about job creation from housing and the like. Yet it's cruel to reduce people to economic units, as right-wing governments so often do. We can't say that the only value for people is related to the market and how much money we bring in. It's profoundly radical to assert that people are people, that we are moral beings. Faith groups should respond morally to this crisis.

I believe that the vast majority of Canadians feel a fundamental moral repugnance when they see that people are forced to live and die on the streets of Canada. The faith community can play a prophetic role in emphasizing this core value.

Faith groups can also do practical things. They can do an inventory of their assets, including those of their members, and turn them into tangible initiatives. Many churches have property that's not needed anymore and could be used for housing.

When I worked at Toronto's Christian Resource Centre in the 1980s, many big old houses that had long housed low-income people were being bought up and turned into yuppie mansions. We wanted to save some of them for low-income people. So we went to local churches and urged them to take up special collections to help buy some of them. Those homes continue to provide decent low-cost housing even today. It's also important to join with like-minded people.

THE ONE PERCENT SOLUTION: WHAT IS IT? WHAT WILL IT DO?

by the National Housing and Homelessness Network (NHHN)

The One Percent Solution was launched in 1998 by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee. It is based on the finding of Professor David Hulchanski of the University of Toronto that, in the mid-1990s, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments spent about one percent of their budgets on housing. Since then, there have been additional cuts. The One Percent Solution calls on governments to restore and renew housing spending.

The National Housing and Homelessness Network recommends five components for a new national housing program:

- supply (new social housing supply);
- affordability (rent supplements for low-income households in new and existing social housing units);
- supports (additional supportive housing units);
- rehabilitation (acquisition and conversion of substandard units to social housing); and
- emergency relief (double annual spending on services and shelter for the homeless).

We do not support tax-based measures or grants to private developers or landlords. The history of these programs (ARP, CRSP, Renterprise) is that new units are generally not targeted to low- and moderate-income households and many

Thousands of individuals and organizations have endorsed the One Percent Solution. These groups include municipalities, universities, social agencies, national organizations and faith groups like the Anglican Church and United Church.

For more information, visit www.tdrc.net or contact Carly Zwarenstein, telephone 416-599-8372; e-mail tdrc@tdrc.net

were quickly flipped into condominiums (MURBs). Numerous studies, including those funded by CMHC, show that:

- community-based social housing is cost-effective when compared to private subsidies;
- social housing offers the greatest economic and social benefits; and
- social housing offers affordable rents to the households that need it the most.

THE HOMELESSNESS ACTION GROUP: A CASE STUDY

One group's attempt to balance charity and social justice

by Mo Srivastava, Homelessness Action Group Steering Committee member

A bit of history

For most of the 1990s the single biggest outreach activity of Trinity-St. Paul's United Church (TSP) was its participation in the Out of the Cold program (OOTC). In addition to serving as the venue for a shelter in the Bloor-Spadina area (a responsibility it has shared with Bloor Street United Church), TSP has also provided many of the volunteers and a share of the cash funding for this program.

With active volunteer and financial support from six other churches, synagogues and faith groups in the area, as well as from the community at large, this particular OOTC shelter, like many others in the city, has started growing roots, becoming less of a temporary stop-gap measure to alleviate a short-term crisis and more of an enduring institution. By 1999, the total resources being committed to this shelter was greater than \$100,000 per year, including volunteer time valued at minimum wage. The shelter had two paid part-time staff of its own and was using paid staff from the City. Over a single winter, it provides nearly 2,000 shelter beds and nearly 10,000 meals.

Though we took pride in the fact that we often received positive feedback from homeless people, it started to bother us that this might not be a sign of "success" but rather of failure. Was it such an accomplishment that we were getting really good at running a shelter? Wouldn't it be better if there was no need for shelters? Was our active participation in the OOTC program actually disserving the very people we were trying to help? By trying to plug holes in the social safety net, were we allowing all levels of government to shirk their responsibility? Were we allowing homeless shelters to become the same kind of quasi-permanent institutions as food banks have become?

The consideration of these troubling questions led to the formation of the Homelessness Action Group, "HAG" as we've become known — we didn't give much thought to a clever acronym! The original mandate of HAG was to explore two kinds of options for the congregation's involvement in lasting solutions to the problem of homelessness. One area where we felt quite sure that we could be useful was in putting pressure on government through letter-writing campaigns, depositions to government committees and other public-awareness raising activities. We were less sure about the other area: an actual "bricks and mortar" project. HAG's original purpose was to explore both of these options.

We quickly found support from our partners in the Out of the Cold shelter. Like us, many of them were looking for ways to balance their charitable efforts in the shelter with some other kind of activity that would have more of a social-justice focus — something that had a chance of contributing to lasting solutions rather than being a perpetual short-term Band-Aid on a chronic and growing problem. With modest financial support from TSP and from other congregations (about \$5,000 in our first year), we were able to hire a part-time coordinator.

Our first year's activities included a surprisingly successful campaign to redirect the \$200 provincial tax rebates received by individuals to projects that were trying to develop long-term solutions to the affordable housing shortage. More than 200 people participated in this campaign, with nearly \$40,000 being redirected. Our other main activity in the first year was self-education on bricks-and-mortar projects. We invited people from several different groups to talk with us about the realities of building affordable housing so that we could start to figure out the details of what would be involved.

By the end of the first year, we had decided that our best contribution was not likely to be in an actual building project. The lobbying and public-awareness activities continued as we looked for a way that we could assist the many other organizations trying to get housing built.

We organized a letter-writing campaign directed at Paul Martin, then Finance Minister, which was so successful that his office called us to request that we stop the flood of mail and to set up a time for us to talk with him.

We regularly send out Action Alerts summarizing a current issue and outlining the action needed to an ever-growing e-mail list.

We decided to apply for funding from the SCPI (Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative) program to offer workshops and develop resource kits (which you now hold in your hands) on property, investment, and community building in an attempt to mobilize the resources that many churches and faith groups have at their disposal. This project, along with our continued lobbying efforts has broadened our network of contacts and liaisons with other groups and committees.

As we approach the end of our third year of activity, participation in the regular HAG meetings remains strong, with a solid core of key participants. We feel well connected to the network of groups that are working on the problems of homelessness and housing. It's always hard to gauge one's true effectiveness, but we take considerable pride in the respect shown for our group by politicians (like the provincial Liberal Party, who met with us to discuss policy) and by media (like Dale Goldhawk, who sought our participation in a show he was working on).

What has worked well?

There have been several factors that have helped us become stable and successful:

- we had a ready-made group of natural allies in our OOTC partner congregations;
- we engaged many new allies in our own congregations by taking advantage of the opportunity to plan and lead worship services that focused attention on the need for a balance between charity and social justice in our outreach activities;

**For reflection and
discussion:**

Can your faith community increase the value of your “People Resource”? How can you increase your resource of respect and influence in your local and wider community? What does it mean to be a good neighbour?

- we were able to establish modest funding immediately and to build on this each year by attracting financial support from charitable foundations and other organizations;
- we were able to hire a part-time coordinator almost immediately, and suffered less, therefore, from the ebb and flow of volunteer time and energy that affects many social-justice initiatives; and
- we received enthusiastic support for all of our various “campaigns”, probably far greater than we had initially hoped, a sign that there are many people supportive of what we are doing. We have not become overly ambitious and have managed to focus on tasks and projects in which we are likely to succeed, creating considerable goodwill.

What has not worked so well?

We haven’t succeeded in increasing the volunteer base much beyond the core “first generation” volunteers. We were able to develop a core group of volunteers quickly; this meant that the success of the group did not rest on the shoulders of one or two key individuals. But we have not yet leveraged this initial success to create an even larger pool of “second generation” volunteers. A few new people are discovering our group and bringing new enthusiasm and fresh ideas. Work on homelessness and housing issues can be dispiriting and draining, therefore we need to find ways of bringing in new blood so that we don’t find ourselves running out of steam.

One other thing that has not always worked is our sincere attempts to be supportive of the good efforts of others. There are many groups, small and large, that have sought our support for their own projects. We are often able to lend our support, but we have also tried not to be all things to all people; we have occasionally chosen not to actively support the good works of others in order to maintain our focus on the few modest things that we think we can do well. As we continue, we will need to examine how we can balance the need for modest focus with the wish to assist other worthy initiatives.

What of the future?

The Homelessness Action Group will continue to consider and plan new initiatives for action and recruit new volunteers in the year ahead. Please join us!

For more information, contact the Homelessness Action Group at (416) 922-4954, ext. 31 or visit www.homelessness.on.ca

RESOURCES

These are some websites, groups and readings that we have found valuable. Additions are welcome, and will be added to the online version of this kit at www.homelessness.on.ca/mobilizing.html

Websites:

Homelessness Action Group (HAG): www.homelessness.on.ca

Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association offers suggestions for action: www.onpha.on.ca

The Old Nova Scotian

a song by Bob Snider, used with permission

He's an old Nova Scotian, far from the ocean,
Lost and alone on the street...

Then he jumps up and shouts, "I come from the South Shore.
I left in the fifties 'cause the living was poor
but I've spent all these years walking up and down Bloor Street
living on handouts and wine."

Then he strums his guitar and he starts in to sing
but the words don't make sense and he gets caught in the strings.
But what was by far the sorriest thing
was the audience howling for more...

And all that's no reason to be sitting there teasing him,
laughing the way that you are.
You're a far sadder sight in the deep of this night
in this cold, neon lit coffee bar.

Ancient Eyes

a song by Bob Snider, used with permission

The Indian walks to the end of the street.
He is looking for someone he promised to meet
for a bottle of wine to share the defeat
of a long time ago.

The Indian's wearing a feather that fell.
For a joke he has got it stuck in his lapel.
It comes from a pigeon 'cause the eagles don't dwell
here anymore.

And he panhandles change as he wanders along.
And he dances in front of me as I play a song.
And he asks if I've been in the city for long
in a voice as soft as the wind.

Ancient eyes — set in a face that is young.
Deep and wizened. Rimmed in red. Overhung...

But I watched him go as he went after his drink.
Lost in the crowd. Pushed to the brink.
But the spirit persists in an unbroken link
you can see looking back from those eyes.

Ancient eyes...

For more information, contact www.borealisrecords.com



Toronto Disaster Relief Committee's (TDRC) website lists a speakers' bureau, resources, excellent links, etc. www.tdrc.net

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) was "born out of the hope that together a coalition of faith groups could contribute to new public policies based upon greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalised by poverty." www.isarc.ca

The Dream Team is an ONPHA award-winning group of speakers. The website is full of useful facts and information. www.thedreamteam.ca

Pay the Rent and Feed the Kids: Inadequate shelter allowance rates are leading to increased hunger and homelessness. In Toronto, the Pay the Rent and Feed the Kids campaign is an effort to challenge the provincial government to raise social assistance rates to reflect the actual cost of living. www.paytherent.ca

B.C. Housing's website at www.bchousing.org has a number of good resources:

Impact of Non-Market Housing on Property Values: The provincial government released an update in 2000 on the impact of social or non-profit housing on neighbourhood house prices. *Impact of Non-Market Housing on Property Values* updates a similar study done in 1995. Four appraisers examined sales data in seven B.C. communities. They worked independently but came to similar conclusions — the presence of social housing in a neighbourhood does not reduce house prices. The results parallel those of the 1995 study and support the results of similar research conducted across North America. www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/00_Jan_PropVal.html

Toward More Inclusive Neighbourhoods: "The NIMBY Toolkit" provides helpful tips and tools for addressing and mitigating neighbourhood and community concerns with regard to the purchase or development of non-market or special needs housing. www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/NEIGHBOUR/index.htm

A Mini-Guide to Monitoring Property Values (2000): The guide outlines several ways local government and community housing groups can monitor the effect of non-market housing on property values in their communities. www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/Mini-Guide.pdf

Affordable Housing Opens Doors Fact Sheet: Myths and Attitudes about Social Housing: This is one of a set of five fact sheets that provide information on a range of housing issues. www.bchousing.org/files/Myths_Attitudes00.pdf

Suggested Reading:

At the Border Called Hope by MaryJo Leddy

Becoming Human by Jean Vanier

Upstairs in the Crazy House: the Life of a Psychiatric Survivor by Pat Capponi

Dispatches from the Poverty Line by Pat Capponi