



## An Overview

*Action for Neighbourhood Change* is a unique learning initiative that will explore and assess approaches to locally-driven neighbourhood revitalization that can enhance the capacity of individuals and families to build and sustain strong, healthy communities.

Working with local residents, not-for-profit agencies and public and private sector partners, *Action for Neighbourhood Change* combines local resources in new ways to develop creative locally-based solutions for sustainable community development and neighbourhood revitalization.

*Action for Neighbourhood Change* will begin in the cities of Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Halifax. Neighbourhood sites were selected by the local United Way in consultation with residents, community leaders, government and key community organizations. Based on the results of this learning initiative, *Action for Neighbourhood Change* may be expanded to a number of additional communities.

## Background

Recent studies show that poverty is increasingly concentrated in specific community neighbourhoods, and these neighbourhoods often experience housing instability, lower levels of literacy, more unemployment and elevated crime rates.

Strong, healthy neighbourhoods improve the quality of life for all of us. Not long ago, our communities were small and homogenous with strongly integrated social and civic networks. Today, our community fabric is fraying as people struggle to make ends meet in our cities, where the cost of living is soaring and where services and community facilities have not kept pace with the demands of changing neighbourhood populations.

Left unchecked, increasing stress on neighbourhoods can cause property values to plummet, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of decline and decay. Moreover, the growing gap between rich and poor neighbourhoods reinforces the exclusion and stigmatization felt by residents of low income areas. The need for neighbourhood renewal is deeply felt by the residents in these communities but many feel cut off from the political process – unheard and overlooked.

Since 2003, the National Secretariat on Homelessness (NSH) has been working with federal colleagues and community development experts to develop a clearer understanding of the linkages between distressed communities, concentrations of poverty, homelessness prevention and housing stability.

To understand these linkages better, NSH recently joined together with the Office of Learning Technologies and the National Literacy Initiative (both a part of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada), Canada's Drug Strategy (Health Canada) and the Crime Prevention Strategy (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) to launch a new learning initiative called *Action for Neighbourhood Change*.



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## Local Solutions for Local Problems

Every neighbourhood is unique and vital tools, knowledge and strategies for solving local problems are rooted in the local experience. By bringing all sectors of the community together and offering resources that strengthen its capacity to work collectively *Action for Neighbourhood Change* provides a common space in which to identify local assets, develop cooperative solutions to complex common problems and forge a neighbourhood vision.

While local actors have a critical role to play in revitalizing their neighbourhoods, they must be supported by targeted and effective policies and services. An ongoing policy dialogue among participants, informed by thoughtful research, will help *Action for Neighbourhood Change* identify how government can support neighbourhood initiatives more effectively.

Learning how individuals, governments, business and the not-for-profit sector can work together in a coordinated and productive way is an important first step towards sustainable neighbourhood change. Over the long term, the lessons learned through *Action for Neighbourhood Change* will inform the way governments design policies and programs to support ongoing community well-being across Canada.

## Key Partners

*Action for Neighbourhood Change* is an initiative funded by the Government of Canada and coordinated by United Way Canada - Centraide Canada in partnership with the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement and the National Film Board of Canada, as well as the United Ways of the Lower Mainland (Surrey), Regina, Thunder Bay, Greater Toronto and Halifax. Working with local United Way coordinators and engaged citizens from all sectors of the community, these partners bring with them the necessary blend of knowledge, expertise, networks and hands-on experience to make *Action for Neighbourhood Change* a meaningful success.

As the national coordinator, United Way Canada - Centraide Canada is responsible for the project's overall administration including finance, communications, evaluation and partnership facilitation.

Focusing on leadership development, Tamarack uses proven community engagement strategies and supportive coaching to help communities take ownership of local issues and work together collectively to create a bold new vision for their future. Tamarack is also responsible for developing and implementing the project's action research and learning framework.

The Caledon Institute is a social policy think tank with a strong focus on community capacity building whose work encompasses a wide range of social policy issues, including community-based strategies for addressing complex issues such as poverty. Caledon is leading a policy dialogue that will improve the way government and neighbourhoods share experiences in order to create better policies in support of neighbourhood renewal.

As an important supporting partner in the initiative, the National Film Board of Canada is providing video cameras and training for youth in all five pilot neighbourhoods to help establish communications linkages and capture important lessons learned in a personal, creative and meaningful way.

For more information about *Action for Neighbourhood Change* please visit our web site at [www.anccommunity.ca](http://www.anccommunity.ca).