



Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities

Brandon Site Literature Review Summary Report August 2002

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Centre Of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities

Summary of the Brandon Site Literature Review Report August 2002

The Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centered Prairie Communities is focused on the development of a knowledge base to assist Prairie Communities in their vision of nurturing and enhancing the physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social development of children and youth. The first phase of the research project has been focused on surveying existing community literature to establish an intersectoral knowledge base. Within this research phase an examination of how communities have and are responding to the needs of children and their families was undertaken. Critical social, economic and demographic challenges and the determination of formal and informal community supports and services within Brandon, Manitoba were outlined. Throughout all aspects of the community based literature review information and data regarding the Aboriginal population within Brandon consistent with the vision of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities.

This report is a summary of the Brandon Site Report: Phase I review of community literature.

Highlights of the Brandon Population

The following is a brief profile of the Brandon community and its residents, highlighting some of the key demographic information to give a population context for a child's community.

- Brandon had a population of 42,391 in 2001 and has been growing (rate of 1.4% from 1996 to 2000).
- Children under 15 make up 20% of Brandon's population.
- An additional 14.8% of Brandon's population is 15 to 24 years of age.
- Brandon has a growing Aboriginal population. In 1996 7.3% of Brandon's population was Aboriginal, compared to a national rate of 2.8%.
- Brandon has a high number of lone parent families; 16.1% in 1998.
- The average income of individuals in Brandon is \$22,433, which is slightly below the provincial rate of \$22,667 and significantly under the national rate of \$25, 196.
- The average income of families is \$48,908 in Brandon, with lone parent families having an average income of \$25,787.
- 15.6% of the population has an income lower than the defined "Low Income Cut Off Rate" for a city of Brandon's size.
- In 1996 Brandon had an unemployment rate of 7.4%, which is lower than the national unemployment rate and in line with other prairie cities.
- The service industry is the main source of employment (85.2%).
- Net migration is a major contributor to population growth.
- 97.3% of the migrants are from within Canada and 72.4% are from within Manitoba.
- 61% of Brandon's population owns their home and 39% are renters.

Brandon's Aboriginal Population

Brandon has a growing Aboriginal population. While there was little data available specific to Brandon's aboriginal population, provincial and national data indicates several trends that highlight the importance of considering this group as a special population when it comes to children and youth.

- The aboriginal population is 10 years younger on average than the general population. Children under the age of 15 accounted for 35% of all Aboriginal people compared with only 20% of Canada's total population. Young people (15-24) represent 18% of all age groups within the Aboriginal population, compared with 13% in the general population.
- In Manitoba, Aboriginal children under the age of 15 account for 20% of all youngsters in the age group. It is projected that they could account for up to 25% in Manitoba by the year 2016.
- The Aboriginal population is increasing at almost twice the Canadian average. It is also increasing in every province and territory.
- About two-thirds of all Aboriginal children under the age of 15 in Census families lived in a single parent family, twice the rate of the general population. This rate is even higher in urban populations where 46% of Aboriginal children under the age of 15 in census families who lived in a census metropolitan area were in a single parent family.
- A study of the Metis workforce population in Brandon indicates a 69.6% participation in the workforce. Metis individuals were more likely to be unemployed, the unemployment rate being 24.1%.
- The mobility status of Metis individuals residing in the City of Brandon was quite different than the general population. Of the 1,035 Metis individuals residing in Brandon in 1996, only 510 (49.3%) occupied the same address as they had one year ago and only 150 (17.5%) occupied the same address as they had five years previous. The rates for the general public were 79.5% and 52.6% respectively.

Key Environment Findings

The environment within which children are raised will impact on all ages of children and youth, though younger children may have increased vulnerability to adverse conditions. Some of the aspects of the physical environment and infrastructure in Brandon that affect the health and well-being of our children are listed below.

❖ Affordability and availability of housing

- There is significant concern in this area, highlighted in recent years by the expected population growth due to the Maple Leaf processing plant. Factors that make this an area of concern include a low rental vacancy rate, long waiting lists for subsidized housing and average residential sales prices above the provincial average. There are a number of initiatives in Brandon to address the affordable housing issue but there is also recognition that there is a greater need than these initiatives are currently meeting.

❖ Water, air and soil quality

- As world attention is focused on water quality so too should be Brandon's. Brandon is not immune to environmental risks and indeed disturbing trends are identified. The impact of economic growth on the river system of the Prairies is negative at best. A major issue that can impact the lives of the children of the Prairies, in the near future, if not now, is the growing pollution of our lakes and rivers. Canadian guidelines and standards related to water, air and soil quality are sorely needed.
- Brandon's water, air and soil quality are affected by a number of factors, including the agricultural industry in the area. Although these environmental factors are a growing concern there are relatively few programs that address air, water and soil quality.

❖ Policing and Safety

- Most residents feel that Brandon is a safe place to live.
- Things felt to make the community unsafe include vandalism and property crime. There is also concern about youth crime and traffic offenses.
- Brandon has a number of safety and prevention programs run by the Brandon Fire Department, Brandon Police Services and other organizations.
- Rates of child and youth injury, injury deaths and hospitalizations for infants and preschoolers as well as school age and youth are lower in Manitoba than in Saskatchewan and Alberta. This needs further examination to explain fairly substantial differences between the Prairie Provinces.

❖ Green Space and Recreation

- A 1991 study indicated several areas of Brandon with poor access to green space and a need for long term planning for Brandon's green space allocation.
- Pathways, nature trails and natural woodlands were top choices for green space needed in Brandon, followed by playgrounds.
- Additional trails and walking/bike paths have been added to Brandon in recent years, as well as the development of the Brandon Riverbank.
- A recent initiative of the City of Brandon's Community Services Department, the Community Action Program, has been the catalyst in the formation of several local community groups looking at the improvement of neighborhood parks and playgrounds in their neighborhoods.
- Brandon has a wide variety of recreation facilities and programs. Recreational activity is fairly accessible and is funded in many instances for economically disadvantaged youth.
- The high usage of free recreational programs in the core area of Brandon, such as the Lighthouses "Youth To Youth" recreational program which allows access to school gyms in the evening, illustrates the need for this type of program.
- Youth have been involved in lobbying for additional recreation facilities. A local group has been lobbying for permanent skateboard park.

Parent characteristics

The health and well-being of parents undoubtedly have a large effect on the health and well-being of children. In Brandon some of the key characteristics of parents that may affect their children's well-being include:

❖ Low income and poverty

A number of issues impacting on the children and youth of Brandon relate to the reality of poverty. Access to services, transportation, affordable housing, and employment opportunities are sources of stress and create high risk environments into which children are born.

- The high usage of food bank programs in Brandon, especially among families with children suggests that many parents are facing financial stresses.
- Homelessness or the ongoing threat of homelessness is a social issue within Brandon. Of the estimated “at risk of becoming homeless” population in Brandon, one third to one half of these are children or youth under 18.
- There are a number of services attempting to mediate the effects of poverty however the numbers of individuals requiring supports isn't abating and more initiatives regarding long term solutions for the prevention of poverty needs to be given higher priority.

❖ Use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs

The use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs by parents are factors that affect their children both physically and socially.

- In 1995, 35% of pregnant women and 28% of breastfeeding women in the Brandon region smoked. This was higher than the provincial rate.
- While overall rates of smoking in Manitoba are lower than national rates, Manitoba is the second highest among the provinces in the prevalence of heavy drinkers; 19% for those 12 and over. Manitoba was also slightly higher than the national rate for marijuana/hash users.
- Just over one quarter of Brandon households have at least one smoker in them.

❖ Access to childcare

- Childcare has been documented as an area of concern for working mothers, both its availability (flexible hours) and accessibility (affordability).

❖ Lone parent families

As mentioned in a previous section, Brandon has a high number of lone parent families. The number of lone parent families has significant implications for the supports a community needs to provide to mediate the negative effects of economic disadvantage lives amongst other struggles.

- In Brandon, 16% of families are lone parent families.
- Nationally, two thirds of all Aboriginal children under the age of 15 live in a single parent family, twice the rate of the general population.

Supporting Children and Youth

❖ Infancy and Preschool Age

- There are a number of programs that focus on the needs of “high risk” children starting prenatally or at birth. Learning development initiatives such as developing literacy are also being aimed at infants.
- One of the key areas in regards to the well-being of preschool aged children is the growing focus on identifying developmental delays in a number of areas during the preschool years. In the past, these developmental delays were often not identified until the child entered school, putting the child behind his or her classmates. Speech and language development is one of the particular areas in which improvements have been made to providing access to service for preschool children.

❖ School age and youth

- There are a high number of “at risk children” in the school system.
- “At risk students” are defined by Manitoba Education and Training as “learners who may be at risk of not meeting, or who are struggling to meet the expected provincial educational outcomes in academic, personal, social, career and life management”. As a percentage of the total number of students, students at risk in K-4 reach percentages that range from 17% to 26%. For Grades 5-8, percentages range from 19% to 25%. In the senior years percentages drop from Senior 1 to 11% and remain under 10% for the remaining senior years. The significant drop in at risk children in the higher grade levels may be attributed to drop out rates for these children.
- A review of the programs available in Brandon shows an increasing link between schools and programs for at risk children. The effectiveness of these programs and areas that may be being overlooked could be a focus of further research.
- Addictions continue to be an area of concern for youths. Youth gambling has become an additional concern being addressed by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) in addition to alcohol, smoking and drugs. The AFM 1999-2000 annual report notes a 15.5% increase in services for youth from 1995 to 2000. A 1997 student survey indicated that alcohol use by students had decreased but the use and social acceptance of drugs other than alcohol is increasing. It noted that alcohol and drug use is recognized as major problem facing students.
- Admissions to the Child and Adolescent Treatment Centre have been steadily increasing from 1990. On average 31% of the admissions were repeat admissions across the years (1990-1997). The number of inpatient admissions for those under 12 was triple previous rates for the years 1997/8. Data was not available regarding the types of diagnostic categories assigned, however, this data will be collected in the key informant interviews.

❖ Youth engaged in criminal activity

- Youth criminal activity appears to be a high concern of citizens of Brandon when considering the safety of our community.
- Provincially, youth probation supervision caseloads have been increasing.

- Education, employment and recreation are all acknowledged as important factors in relation to youth and crime.
- In Brandon, youth criminal activity is a focus of many programs, organizations and collaborative groups. The concern of gang activity brought together many community organizations to form the Youth Services Committee in 1987. The committee still exists and has given birth to several crime reduction initiatives including the MAPP program and the Lighthouses program.

❖ **Teen parents**

- Teen pregnancy reveals rates which may not be rising, however more teens are keeping their babies which places more and more teenagers in high need with regards to a variety of support programs.

❖ **Youth Aged 15-24**

- It is noted that youth aged 15 to 24 face a number of unique challenges.
- There is a high number of youth unengaged in a learning environment. With 56% of youth aged 15 to 24 not engaged in a learning environment, Brandon has the lowest rate of school attendance amongst all the sites involved in the Centre of Excellence. Our questions in this area include: where are they, what are they doing, where is education in their lives, what is it they would like to be doing and how can the community assist them.
- Unemployment for youths in the 15-24 year old range was 14.2%; almost double that of the general population. For Metis youth aged 15 to 24, the unemployment rate rose to 34.5%.
- Youths in the 15-18 year old range in addition to the above stressors are also making more demands on Child and Family services for supportive living arrangements and housing needs.
- Between the ages of 15 and 24, youth are often making the transition from being dependant to independent. These youth do not always have the skills required to live independently. Those youth who do not have supports to assist them in the transition may be at risk of becoming homeless or experiencing other negative consequences.

Challenges for Brandon Programs and Services

Numerous programs are available in the Brandon community to mediate for positive outcomes for children and youth. Less clear is the integrative delivery of these multiple programs and additionally, informative data with regards to programs which are working vs those that are not. The development of outcome measurement will need to be addressed in a future phase of the project, perhaps in the logic model analysis a beginning may be made in this area.

Preliminary investigation into the challenges of Brandon programs and services for children and youth has identified the following needs:

- Culturally appropriate programming across the spectrum of programs and age groups.
- Continued collaboration and increased communication between organizations.
- Commitment of resources (human and financial) to continue programs.

The client home environment is also often a challenge for running programs and services. Clients often have multiple needs, low income, and lack of transportation or access to daycare.

With poverty comes secondary effects of low self-esteem and loneliness. Accessing services that are insensitive and threaten one's dignity add insult to injury. Training in human relations and cultural sensitivity are needs identified.

Concluding Comments

The review of community literature has highlighted a number of societal factors that effect children and youth, the community's response in attempting to mediate for those factors, and to a lesser extent the effects of the community's mediation on the well-being of children and youth.

The results of this report will be used to help guide the next stages of research. The themes identified in this report will be further explored and verified through key informant interviews and focus groups with members of the Brandon community including youth, parents, service providers, professionals and other community members.

The full report is under review and the above represents the highlights of the report.

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