

# Residents & Agencies

## Working & Learning Together



## BePart

### Collaborative Research Report

### Executive Summary

BePart Steering Committee  
March 2010



Lawrence Heights  
Inter-Organizational  
Network (LHION)

# Executive Summary

BePart is a research project based in Lawrence Heights and Neptune neighbourhoods that was led by residents and agencies *working and learning together*. BePart emerged in a context where the dynamic efforts and relationships of resident leaders overlapped with growing interest and capacity among local agencies to embrace a collaborative approach to research and action.

Once project funding was secured, the BePart Steering Committee developed over a six month period. We started with five residents and one agency staff, and have grown to over 15 people. Our Steering Committee is made up of 2/3 Lawrence Heights & Neptune residents and 1/3 agency staff. Guiding BePart’s work from the first months forward were the following Steering Committee goals:

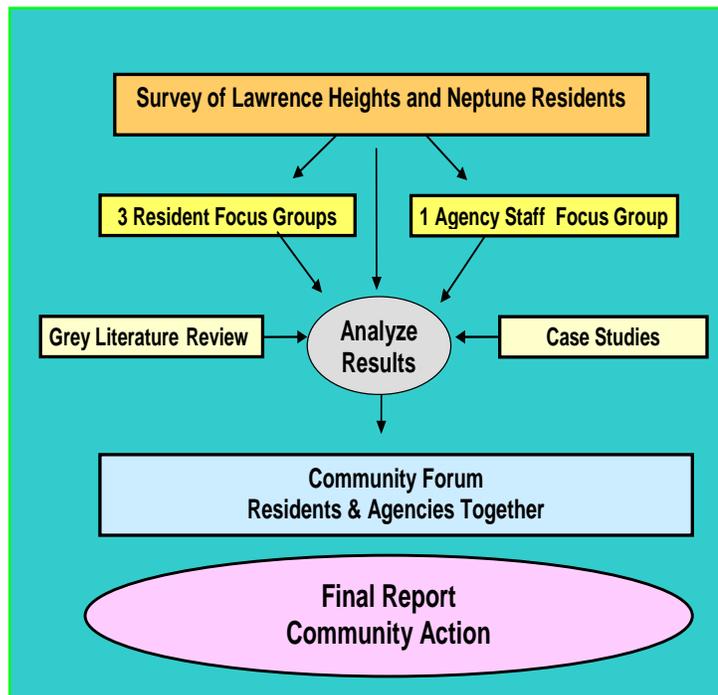
- Undertake research that leads to effective community action and improvement.
- Build networks, connections and bonds between people across the community.
- Build trust and the capacity for residents and agencies to learn and work together.
- Connect across the neighbourhood to create a shared vision for the future.

## Our Current Project

After extensive collaborative discussion by Steering Committee members, BePart decided to focus its first research initiative on the following question: ***“How can residents and agencies be more effective partners in addressing needs and services within the Lawrence Heights and Neptune community?”***

The research design included a survey of general residents, separate focus groups with residents and agency staff, a grey literature review followed up with case studies of two local neighbourhood collaboration projects, and a community forum to review preliminary results and seek input from more residents and agency staff on suggestions for action.

Steering Committee members not only designed the research, but coordinated (and participated in) three research teams: The Survey Team, the Focus Group Team, and the Grey Literature Review and Case Study Team.



## BePart Survey

In October 2009, BePart conducted survey interviews with general residents within Lawrence Heights and Neptune. The survey asked residents about:

- their use of neighborhood services;
- their satisfaction with the experience; and
- ways in which agencies can create more effective programs and partnerships to address community needs.

The survey used a “convenience sample” of 102 residents, reflecting the views of men and women living in different parts of the community. Most respondents were between the ages of 16-45 years. From the survey results, it is clear that members of the community have ideas and attitudes about the agencies that serve them and about the programs and services the agencies bring. The results show that residents want agencies to work in collaboration with community members in soliciting their relevant ideas and in asking for their active participation in programs and services.

Other important conclusions obtained from the survey results are:

- Residents are using local programs and services and for the most part, these met their needs properly at the individual level. This is very encouraging to the agencies that are actively engaged in the communities.
- Since the respondents rated agency responsiveness lower than program satisfaction of their needs, agencies should pay attention to their responsiveness to residents’ needs.

The key themes identified during the survey can be important indicators to serve agencies in planning effective programs and services and in capturing the collaboration and participation of residents. Briefly, these key themes are: helpfulness of staff, respect and kindness towards residents, quality of services and programs, good maintenance of programs, clean and pleasant physical spaces.

Other key themes indicate the barriers that agencies must address to prevent their programs from being ineffective. These are: poor communication, bad treatment of residents, not enough services, not enough resources, and poor maintenance of programs.

Concerning the question “what can be done to better serve residents?” major themes for improvement were: more safety/police/peace & security, more *information* about services and programs, more *access* to services and programs, more youth programs, make things available on evenings and weekends, more diversity of staff, agency collaboration with residents, and better attitude towards clients. These major themes send very practical messages to agencies as priorities for action and implementation.

The final area of important findings of the survey was concerning residents’ preferred ways of sharing their views and concerns. Agencies can use a combination of the following methods:

public meetings, surveys, focus groups, resident groups and suggestion boxes. Online methods were the lowest rated means of communication.

These survey results reflect the experience and views of general residents, and were later reviewed in focus groups with residents and agency staff who have been active in partnership efforts.

### BePart Focus Groups

In the month of November 2009, BePart’s Focus Group Team facilitated 4 focus groups hearing from 24 active residents and 9 agency staff. In the focus groups, participants shared a deeper perspective on our survey questions, and further elaborated first steps for improving collaborations between residents and agencies.

The six themes that emerged are highlighted in the figure below:



Local efforts are already underway related to most of these themes. The results of the focus groups can help refine and reinforce those efforts. They also offer a new common language with which residents and agencies can approach future collaborations to enhance their positive impacts within and across Lawrence Heights and Neptune.

### Grey Literature Review and Case Studies

This team used the “thematic method” to group and discuss grey literature<sup>1</sup> sources. After scanning documents from other neighborhoods the team selected to review 4 reports and one literature review. Later, they conducted interviews for further case study of two of the Toronto initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> refers to original reports, working papers and articles published in locations other than academic journals.

The 2 case studies shared valuable insights to inform partnership building in Lawrence Heights and Neptune, including:

- Agencies that have good relationships in the community should lead the work with the residents.
- Invest in strategies to overcome barriers, such as: door to door knocking, producing flyers in different languages, adopting new ways to work with the community, making workshops closer to home, offering childcare using staff on site, opening up doors to any community member, etc.
- Offer employment opportunities to help engage residents.
- Avoid dumping agency ideas onto residents.

### **BePart Research Report Recommendations**

We have directed our recommendations to three specific sectors: residents, agencies, and funders. This is based on our understanding that action is needed on all sides in order to shift from historic patterns towards more collaborative and equitable resident-agency partnerships that can promote healthy communities for everyone.

#### **For Residents**

- 1) Every resident commit to be more informed and more involved.
- 2) Organize together as residents. Listen to and communicate across diverse groups.
- 3) Build residents' capacity to know their rights and take action for change.
- 4) Recognize and reinforce "good examples" of resident/agency partnership.
- 5) Pursue further community-based research in new areas.

#### **For Agencies**

- 1) Develop communications plans (at each agency and at LHION<sup>2</sup>) to improve the visibility and accountability of agencies, their staff, and their services.
- 2) Invest in the processes and activities that build relationships and trust between agencies and residents.
- 3) Develop new ways of working with residents that ensure respect and foster equity.
- 4) Build agencies' capacity to work in collaborative partnerships with residents.
- 5) Adopt program planning models that include community members as key stakeholders, not just clients.

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION)

### **For Funders**

- 1) Make community participation in the planning, development and evaluation of services key criteria in the evaluation of agency funding proposals.
- 2) Fund research initiatives that support the involvement of residents in diverse phases of the research process, especially at the decision-making table.
- 3) Fund resident-led groups and organizations to broaden resident engagement and support resident partnership in community dialogues and activities.
- 4) Look at BePart's recommendations to agencies and residents and emphasize those activities in your funding priorities.

BePart members are excited to be wrapping up our initial research. Today we are engaged in extensive debate about where to focus BePart's energies in the future. Some things we know – such as our recently elaborated dissemination plan. We expect to keep busy sharing our results, as we have already received an overwhelming number of requests for presentations. Moving forward into the Spring of 2010, the completion of our project evaluation will help us explore and decide directions and resources for future action.

**To contact the BePart Project (e.g. to request a presentation) email [bepart@newheightshealth.org](mailto:bepart@newheightshealth.org) or call 416-787-1676 ext 239 or 254. For more details or to comment on this report, visit [www.bepart.ca](http://www.bepart.ca)**