Residents & Agencies

Working & Learning Together

BePart

Collaborative Research Report

BePart Steering Committee

March 2010

WELLESLEY INSTITUTE
advancing urban health

BePART
Lawrence Heights & Neptune Research Collaboration

Lawrence Heights
Inter-Organizational
Network (LHION)

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This project was funded by the Wellesley Institute (WI) as well as select agency members of the Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION). The views and opinions expressed in the paper are those of the BePart Steering Committee and do not necessarily reflect those of the Wellesley Institute or LHION or LHION agency members.

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

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.
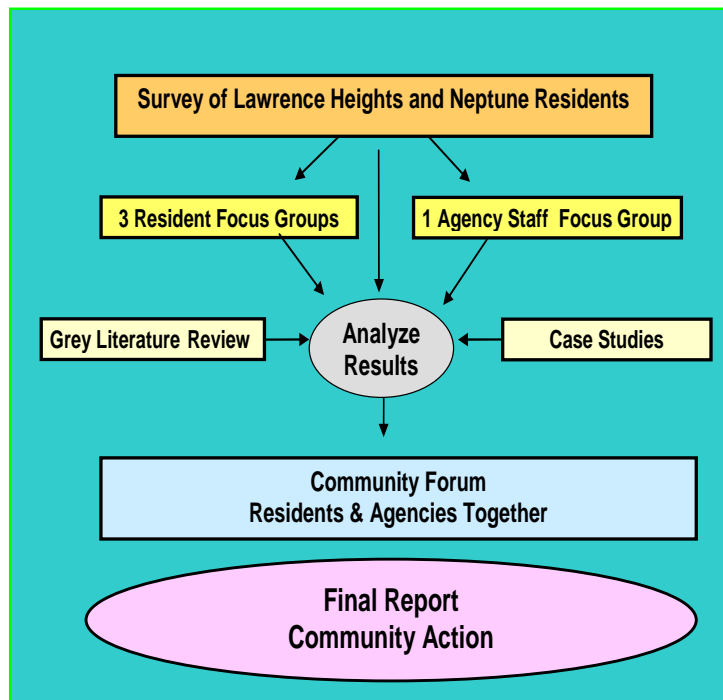
BePart Survey

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 effectives 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[1] 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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[1] 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.

<u>**For Residents**</u>

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.

<u>**For Agencies**</u>

1) Develop communications plans (at each agency and at LHION[2]) 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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[2] 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 or call 416-787-1676 ext 239 or 254. For more details or to comment on this report, visit www.bepart.ca

1. Introduction

BePart is a research project led by *residents and agencies working and learning together.* Our original project title was "Building Equitable Partnerships for Neighbourhood Collaboration", but at our first official partnership table meeting (between interested residents and agency staff) we agreed to shorten this name to "BePart". We wanted others to know we are an accessible and inviting research project, which values inclusion and intends to make an impact.

BePart is based in the Lawrence Heights and Neptune neighbourhoods (for an outsider's introduction, see below). 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.

The question that led our first research project was ***"How can residents and agencies be more effective partners in addressing needs and services within the Lawrence Heights and Neptune community?"*** To learn what we found out about this question, see our research results in section 3 of this report. To hear more about our community and how this project evolved, please read on.

1.1 The Community Context of BePart

Residents

Community members in Lawrence Heights and Neptune are resilient. Over the years, local residents have dealt with a variety of difficult issues and many have been active in community initiatives to address them. BePart is built on this foundation and includes individuals with a strong history of community involvement. Members of the BePart Steering Committee have participated in resident action groups, school councils, and planning and advisory committees. Some work as animators in TCHC tenant engagement activities. Many have been leaders and/or facilitators of groups addressing youth, safety, parenting, women's, seniors' and other community issues. In addition to experienced community leaders, BePart also includes several residents who were becoming involved for the first time. All bring a range of knowledge, skills, culture and perspective that reflects the broader diversity and assets of Lawrence Heights and Neptune.

A bird's eye view of who lives in Lawrence Heights & Neptune

Lawrence Heights and Neptune are related social housing neighbourhoods located in North Central Toronto. Together they include more than 5700 residents living in mid-rise and townhouse dwellings managed by Toronto Community Housing (TCHC). The community has a culturally diverse population, including a large number of residents who immigrated to Toronto from countries in the Caribbean, East Africa, Latin America and West Asia. According to Census data, in 2006 half of residents in Lawrence Heights and Neptune were immigrants and almost two thirds were visible minorities. The largest visible minority group was Blacks, who comprised 40% of the total population. Since the Lawrence Heights and Neptune neighbourhoods are exclusively rent-geared-to-income housing, they represent a significant concentration of low-income families and individuals. In 2006, more than 53% of families were headed by a single parent (compared to a city-wide average of only 20%) and 52% of all persons were living with before-tax income below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-off.

Agencies

Agency involvement in BePart takes place in the context of a growing collaborative network called LHION (Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network). LHION was initiated by local agencies in 2005 in the aftermath of a traumatic summer that witnessed increased youth and gang violence in the community. Residents were asking agencies to do something, and agencies realized they had limited capacity to take collective responsibility and action if they did not work together. Later that year, Lawrence Heights was designated a "priority neighbourhood" by the City of Toronto.[3] Today, LHION member agencies work together with the City, TCHC and local resident organizations addressing community priorities through issue-specific workgroups including community safety, employment and training, education, food justice and youth outreach – all supported by a steering committee with representatives from each workgroup. Residents have been included in some (but not all) workgroups. One of the LHION workgroups, which initiated the BePart project, is the LHION Revitalization Workgroup.

Revitalization

In 2008, Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) announced plans to revitalize[4] its Lawrence Heights property, alongside a parallel City of Toronto planning process that covers the broader "Lawrence-Allen" area. Both agencies view revitalization as a means to improve the existing social housing stock, mix it with new housing types, and transform the area over the next 20 years from a geographically isolated low-income neighbourhood to a mixed-income community that is more integrated with the surrounding Lawrence-Allen area - with enhanced community programs, services and facilities. Whereas planners see revitalization from a bird's eye view, residents view it from the core of the community. As one resident jokes "in our family, revitalization has become a household word." Most resident leaders are engaged in the revitalization planning process, but cautiously. They invest energy in working for change towards a better "revitalized" community, all the while wondering *"what will the reality hold?"* The one change residents have consistently asked for (in casual conversations, at meetings, and in documents) is an equal seat at the planning table.

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[3] The City of Toronto's "priority neighbourhood" designation recognizes the difficulties faced by under-resourced low-income communities and the need for adequate and appropriate spaces, organizations, programs and services to enhance opportunities and enable residents to improve their overall quality of life. Toronto has designated 13 priority neighbourhoods. In Lawrence Heights (including Neptune and Lotherton), this designation opened a new channel for targeted community investments and provided further supports to a neighbourhood development approach that emphasizes coordination among agencies and, more importantly, inclusion of residents in identifying priorities, decision-making and planning.

[4] Generally, revitalization refers to efforts that seek to improve a neighbourhood's physical, economic, and social conditions to enhance the overall quality of life and economic opportunities for residents.

This is the community context where BePart emerged. BePart provided a focus for a growing number of residents and agencies to practice new ways of working and learning together, while studying a topic with a similar theme: *"How can residents and agencies be more effective partners in addressing needs and services within the Lawrence Heights and Neptune community?"*

1.2 The Birth of BePart

Since revitalization discussions began, residents have continued to talk about their interest in a "seat at the table" with revitalization decision-makers. On their part, the City, TCHC and community agencies (both individually and through LHION) have taken steps to include residents in new ways. When LHION's Revitalization Workgroup first talked about engaging with residents in a process of community-based research, they knew the context was revitalization but they did not pinpoint the focus for the research. To develop the project, two agency staff hosted a planning meeting attended by three active community leaders. At this meeting the residents identified: what are key issues and priorities in this community today? what do residents want in terms of outcomes and solutions? and what research methodologies could help the community to get there? Not surprisingly, the key theme that emerged was partnership – how to build connections among residents, and how to build equity between residents and agencies.

According to the research plan outlined by residents at that initial planning meeting, members of the LHION Revitalization Workgroup developed a research proposal. The proposal received funding and project support from the Wellesley Institute's Enabling Grants program, as well as contributions (in cash and in kind) from participating agencies: New Heights Community Health Centres, Family Service Toronto, the City of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing and North York Community House.

Over the previous few years, driven by both revitalization and general social service planning, a great deal of research about Lawrence Heights community demographics, needs and perspectives had taken place. While some of these efforts included residents in an advisory role or employed them to carry out data collection tasks, BePart envisioned a much broader scope for resident and agency shared leadership. With funding secured, in addition to recruiting resident and agency involvement, BePart's emerging Steering Committee needed to create a common language to dialogue and move forward an uncommon approach to research (i.e. community-based research). So, to launch the BePart project and develop a shared understanding about community-based research principles and practice, early members of the BePart team co-developed and co-led workshops for residents and agency staff that reviewed and evaluated recent neighbourhood research projects using a participatory dialogue approach.[5] These workshops helped ground people's understanding of community-based

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[5] For materials and notes from these workshop, see BePart's research report appendices at www.bepart.ca

research theory in the context of our shared local experience. As well, the collective analysis generated by workshop participants helped guide BePart's Steering Committee in terms of what strengths to replicate, what pitfalls to avoid, and what insights to remember as we moved forward on our own research project together.

Guiding BePart's work from this early point forward were the Steering Committee's goals to:

- 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; and

- connect across the neighbourhood to create a shared vision for the future.

1.3 Our Current Research 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?"

Figure 1.1 below illustrates our collaborative research design.
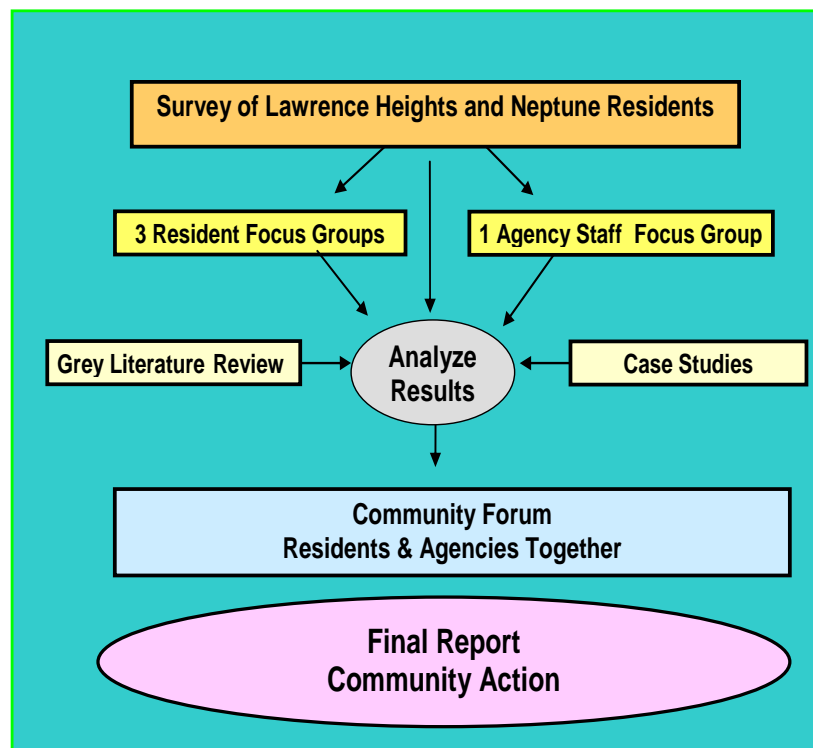
Figure1.1. Research Model

2. BePart Project Process

BePart members invested thought, time and energy to develop clear processes for working together, in line with our common values and objectives. Sometimes we struggled along the way, but in the end we made it. This section contains two figures that explain our coordination and research processes - for more details such as our memo of understanding, visit www.bepart.ca.

BePart Steering Committee

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 LHION agency staff. We meet on average 2-3 times a month. To keep on track with our goals and values and due to the "high" interest BePart generated, we put rules in place around membership and participation. There were several intake stages where we invited new members to join the BePart Steering Committee and, after attending three meetings, become a decision maker with the BePart team.

Over the summer of 2009, fifteen of us collaboratively revised and developed the project's research design. After completing a community-based ethics review in the fall, we recruited new residents to help us conduct the research project. 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.

Along the way, our Steering Committee organized training workshops to ensure all members shared enough knowledge and skills to move forward together. Topics included community based research, anti-oppression, research methodologies, and dissemination. Specific trainings were done within each research team as well. Our Steering Committee coordinated the research activities and analysis, picking the most feasible way to conduct our community-based research within our budget and timeframes negotiated with the Wellesley Institute.

Survey Team

BePart's Survey Team recruited new residents to assist in surveying (the final team included 12 residents and two agency staff).   In October, trained resident surveyors interviewed "general residents" of Lawrence Heights and Neptune.   Anyone "active" with a community group or agency was invited instead to a focus group. Preliminary data found by the Survey Team was later fed into the resident and agency focus groups for more in depth exploration.

Focus Groups Team

BePart's Focus Groups Team was made up of 6 residents and two agency staff. Together they organized and conducted three resident focus groups and one agency focus group during November 2009. Each focus group had a facilitator, a co-facilitator and a note taker.   No agency staff were present within the resident focus groups. The focus group team used the information analyzed by the survey team to gather more findings.

Grey Literature Review & Case Study Team

BePart's "Lit Review" Team consisted of six residents and two agency staff. The team used the Thematic Method (to group & discuss sources) looking at other neighbourhoods that had similar issues like Lawrence Heights and Neptune. The team later prepared eight questions to gather further information on "Lessons Learned" from two of the neighbourhoods studied.

Survey of 102 "General" Residents

The Survey Team completed 102 surveys with Lawrence Heights and Neptune residents who were over the age of 16.

The survey respondents were "general" residents (who were not active community leaders).

Analyze Results

The information gathered from the surveys was analyzed by the survey team over several meetings.

This information was then fed into the resident and agency focus groups.

3 Focus Groups with "Active" Residents

The resident focus groups were conducted by residents only. Participants in the resident focus group consisted of community leaders or residents who were active within the Lawrence Heights/Neptune community.

1 Focus Group with Agency Staff

The agency focus group was conducted by 2 residents and 1 agency staff co-investigator. Participants were staff of various LHION member agencies.

Grey Literature Review

The Lit Review & Case Study Team selected four Toronto communities similar to Lawrence Heights and Neptune, and reviewed partnership project reports from the communities selected. The team documented highlights from each project and listed recommendations that could inform the BePart research project.

Analyze Results

Focus group notes were analyzed, as were learnings from the Grey Literature Review & Case Studies to form, along with the survey results, 'emerging' research conclusions.

Case Studies

The Lit Review & Case Study Team prepared 8 questions and conducted phone & in person interviews with representatives from 2 partnership projects that had been highlighted in the Grey Literature Review.

Community Forum

BePart's Steering Committee presented preliminary findings to over 50 residents and agency staff at a Community Forum held January 15, 2010 at the Lawrence Heights Community Centre. After sharing these results, we asked forum participants for feedback on our findings. Each table engaged in lively discussion and shared back a list of suggestions: for residents, for agencies, for the BePart team, and for other stakeholders. BePart members stationed at each table recorded these comments, which were used later to inform our further analysis and recommendations.

Analyze Results & Decide Recommendations

The Steering Committee gathered all themes and related suggestions from the Community Forum, Survey Team, Focus Groups Team, Grey Literature Review and Case Study Team. We then sorted and grouped these themes and suggestions, and geared them as recommendations to the following three groups: residents, agency and funders. At a later meeting, to further focus our action efforts, we worked together to prioritize the recommendations. Finally, we struck a subcommittee to collectively write our final report.

Final Report

YOU ARE HERE

3. BePart Research Results
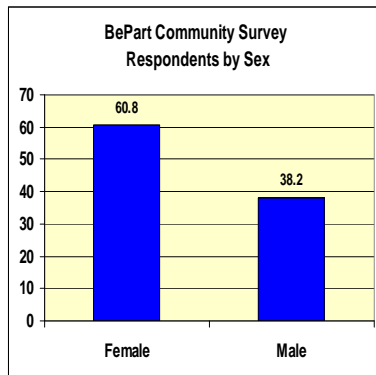
3.1 Survey Results

The Survey Method

In October 2009, BePart conducted survey interviews within Lawrence Heights and Neptune. A copy of the survey questionnaire is available (with other final report appendices) at www.bepart.ca. The survey asked residents about:

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

In total, 102 residents completed the 15-30 minute survey questionnaires. In undertaking the survey, efforts were made to include proportionate numbers of men and women, as well as residents in all age groups and a diverse geographic sampling across the neighbourhood. The final sample includes a much larger proportion of people under age 45. Despite this, the information collected reflects a significant cross-section of experience and opinion in Lawrence Heights and Neptune and contained many themes that were resonant with participants in our subsequent focus groups. The following presents an overview of key survey findings.

Who did we talk with?

BePart Community Survey Respondents by Sex

BePart Community Survey Respondents by Age Group

- Male/Female numbers were fairly representative of the community. Among survey respondents women outnumbered men.
- While the survey attempted to include people of all ages, survey results are more reflective of the perspectives of residents between 16 - 45 years of age.
- The results reflect a significant cross-section of community opinion.
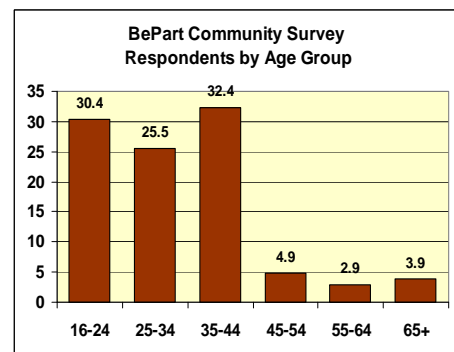
The fact that the results showed more female respondents than male respondents is not surprising at all because more women were at home than men catering to the needs of the family. We also know that 53% of families in the community are headed by a single parent, and most of these are women.
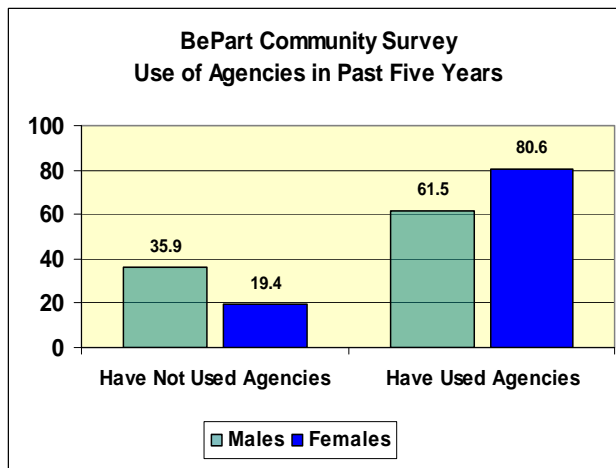
 Senior residents are not very much represented in the survey results. The respondents which are better represented are under 45 years of age. This might turn out to be useful since future

programming and services will serve this age group. The ideas and suggestions of this age group are important for planning.

Use of Agencies and Programs

From a list of 32 agencies who provide services in the neighbourhood, residents identified whether they had used any in the past 5 years.

- Three out of four survey respondents used a program/service in the last five years.
- Women were more likely than men to use programs.
- Among the 25% of respondents who did not use programs, the most frequent reasons were: not knowing about their availability (58%), followed by lack of need (31%). See chart below.
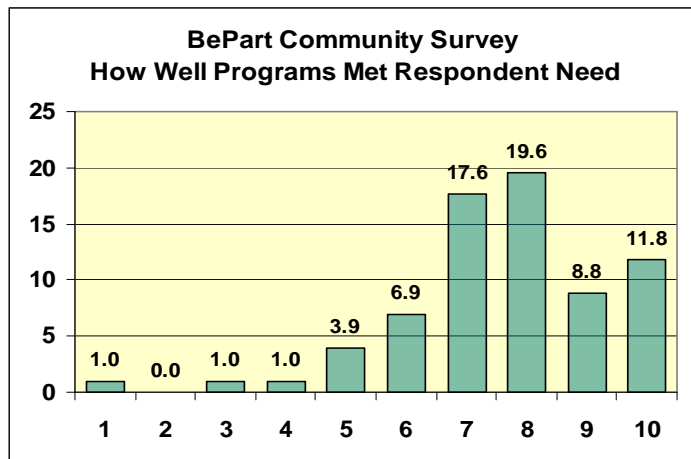
BePart Community Survey
Use of Agencies in Past Five Years

	Males	Females
Have Not Used Agencies	35.9	19.4
Have Used Agencies	61.5	80.6

Most of the agencies' services and programs in the communities cater to women and children and the survey results confirm this.

How well did programs meet the needs of residents?

Based on their personal experience, residents rated how well programs had med their needs.

- The majority of respondents felt that programs and services met their needs well.
- On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being highest, the average rating was 7.6.
- There was no difference in the ratings by men and women

The information gleaned from these results is that the residents are using the programs and services and it met their needs properly. This is very encouraging to the agencies that are actively engaged in the communities as captured from the program satisfaction of the residents' needs.

BePart Community Survey
How Well Programs Met Respondent Need

Rating	Value
1	1.0
2	0.0
3	1.0
4	1.0
5	3.9
6	6.9
7	17.6
8	19.6
9	8.8
10	11.8

What made programs and services effective?

Respondents were asked about things that made programs and services effective. Key themes identified were:
- Helpfulness of staff
- Respect & kindness
- Quality of services & programs
- Good maintenance of program
- Clean and pleasant physical spaces

These key themes identified during the survey are very important indicators to serve agencies in planning effective programs and services. They can also help agencies to capture the collaboration and participation of residents.

What made programs ineffective?

Correspondingly, respondents were asked to "describe those things that were missing of ineffective." Key themes identified were:
- Poor communication
- Bad treatment
- Not enough services
- Not enough resources
- Poor maintenance of program

Obviously, these themes indicate the approaches that agencies must avoid to prevent their programs from being ineffective.

How well do agencies respond to the needs of residents?

The second section of the questionnaire began with a question asking respondents to rate how well they think agencies respond to the needs of residents in Lawrence Heights and Neptune.
- Respondents rated "agency responsiveness" lower than program satisfaction.
- On a scale of 1-10, the average rating was 5.6
- There was no difference in the ratings by men and women. See chart below.

BePart Community Survey
How Well Agencies Respond to Needs
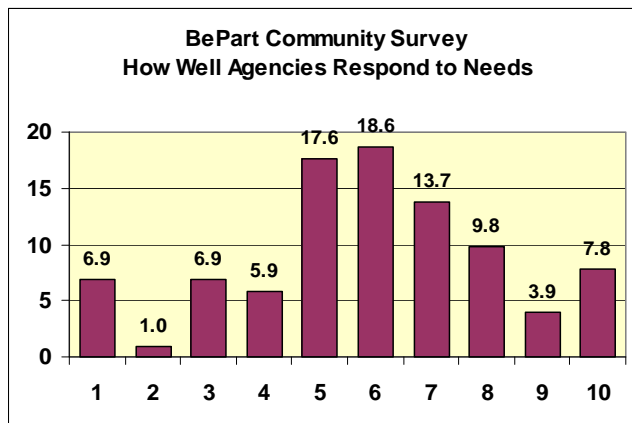
Since the respondents rated agency responsiveness lower than program satisfaction, the agencies may want to turn their attention more to their responsiveness to the needs of the residents.

What can be done to better serve residents?

When respondents were asked to name three things agencies can do to better serve the needs of the community, the following major themes were identified: more safety/police/peace & security; more information about services and programs; more access to programs and services; more youth programs; make things available on evenings and weekends; more diversity of staff; agency collaboration with residents; better attitude towards clients.

Have you had opportunities to share concerns?

Finally, surveyors asked whether respondents had ever been invited by agencies to share their views and concerns.

- 30% said that they had participated in agency or community consultations.
- Men were more likely than women to have taken part. Women may not attend meetings in the evenings since they are attending to their children after school and other demands. It could also be due to cultural reasons.

**BePart Community Survey
Have You Been Invited to Express Concerns**
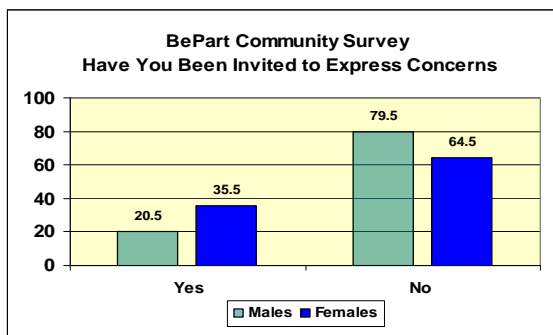
Note that this question does not reflect willingness of residents to share their views, but that they did not feel invited to share their views and concerns. A large percentage who said yes gave examples of sharing their views and concerns recently during Revitalization planning consultations in 2008-2009.

How would you like to share your views and concerns?

Respondents were further asked to identify from a list ways they would like to share their views and concerns to agencies

- While a variety of modes were popular among all respondents, online was the lowest rated.
- Men expressed a much stronger preference for public meetings than women. This may reflect differences concerning childcare, safety and other gender issues.
- Note that there is likely some bias in the high rating of surveys as a method, since this same method was used in collecting responses for this research.

The residents indicated their preferred way of sharing information with the agencies – a combination of public meetings, surveys, focus groups, resident groups, and suggestion boxes.

**Bepart Survey
How to Share Views and Concerns**
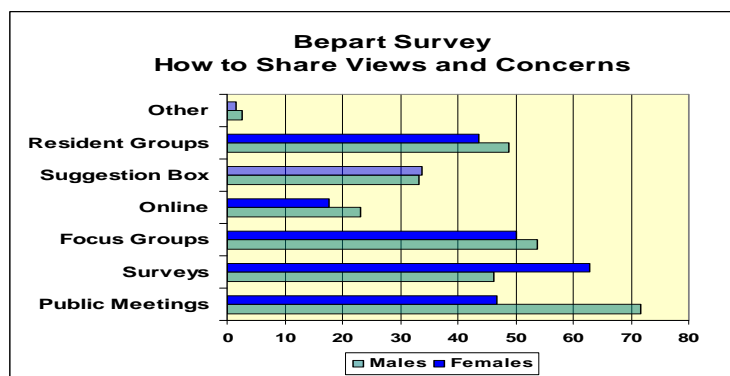
3.1.1 Survey Conclusions

The conclusion that can be drawn from this survey is 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.

There are other important conclusions that can be obtained from the survey results:

- 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 the needs of the residents.

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.

There are very important key themes identified and highlighted by the survey concerning the question on "What can be done to better serve residents?" Again, this is a general question directed to the network of agencies operating in the community. Major themes for improvement are: more safety/police/peace & security, more information about services and programs, more access to programs and services, 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 the preferred and effective ways of learning about resident's 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 with residents.

Important findings from the BePart focus groups, which included further discussion of the survey results, are documented in the following pages. While the survey results reflect the experience and views of general residents, the focus group results share insights from residents and agency staff who have been active in partnership efforts.
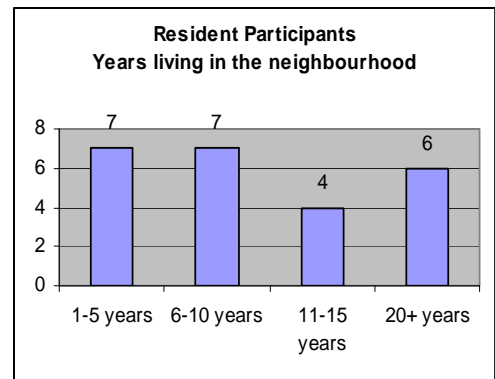
3.2 Focus Groups Results

During November 2009, a team of six resident and two staff co-investigators organized three focus groups with residents who have been active in community leadership, as well as one focus group with staff from local agencies. We wanted to explore some of our survey questions more deeply with people who have been involved in resident-agency partnerships in various ways. We also wanted to learn their ideas about pathways and priorities for building more effective partnerships between residents and agencies. The results that follow are highlights from the focus group results. For the full focus group analysis, see appendices to this report available at www.bepart.ca.

Who Participated

We heard from 33 people: 24 residents and 9 staff of diverse LHION member agencies.
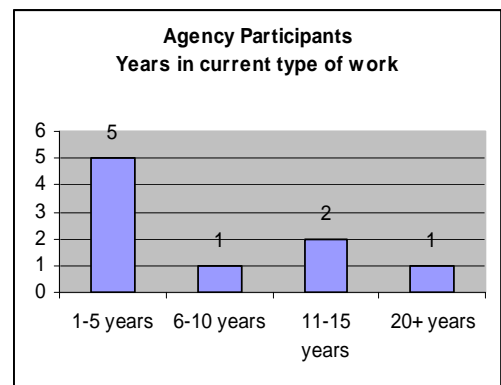
Who were the residents?

- The participants represented a wide range of community involvement (from 5 to 30 years).
- We heard from a mix of women and men and a wide range of age groups (16 to 65+).
- Participants had varied lengths of residence in Canada (including 1/3 born in Canada) as well as varied lengths of time living in Lawrence Heights (including 5 who have lived here over 20 years).

Resident Participants
Years living in the neighbourhood

1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	20+ years
7	7	4	6

Who were the agency staff?

- Of the 9 staff participants, most were frontline staff (none were managers).
- One staff introduced herself as living and working mostly in the Somali community; another worked mostly with youth; the rest worked across the community.
- More than half (5) of the agency participants had been working in their current type of work for only 1-5 years; one had worked for 6-10 years, two for 11-15 years, and one for 20+ years.
- All agency participants had worked in Lawrence Heights for less than 5 years.
- Their age range was 25-54 years old and 2/3 were born in Canada
- Only one has had experience living in a TCHC or other social housing community like Lawrence Heights.

Agency Participants
Years in current type of work

1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	20+ years
5	1	2	1

Mood in the Focus Groups

Each focus group varied in the energy levels and level of consensus/difference of opinions among participants. However, all of the resident groups had moments of strong agreement among the participants. In one resident focus group, participants were very emotional and energetic throughout the discussion. In the agency focus group, most participants were cautious in their response. Unlike the residents, they needed to negotiate "two hats" – one as an individual and one as an agency representative.

What We Learned

Agency staff looked through a different "lens" and had a different approach to developing more effective partnership with residents, but for the most part they were in general agreement with residents about both the current situation and directions for change.
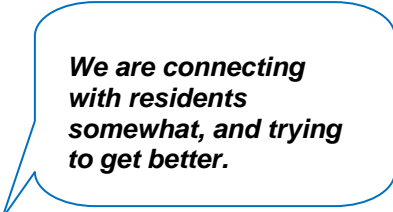
Describing the Current Situation

The Residents

It was noted by participants in one resident focus group that this community includes many residents who are well educated. Some residents became involved as community leaders because of loss of jobs or health reasons. As one resident expressed *"My goal is to get involved in the community as my way of giving back."* (resident participant) Residents really want to get involved but often do not know how. They also recognize that residents need to be proactive in seeking out their needs.

The Agencies

Agencies are starting to become more aware of the need to work more with residents. They recognize the role that LHION's work has played in facilitating and showcasing more collaborative ways of working. *"We are connecting with residents somewhat, and trying to get better. We work with agencies who are working very closely with residents."* (agency participant*)*

> *We are connecting with residents somewhat, and trying to get better.*

Current Collaborations

Most, but not all, focus group participants felt that agencies are working "somewhat" closely with residents (the perspective was similar in resident and agency focus groups). Residents and agency staff agreed that the extent of collaborations varies widely from one agency to the next. Two agency participants noted that at the policy (versus program) level there is often no collaboration with residents.

Participants in the focus groups identified memorable examples of how they felt residents and agencies had worked well together. Ten specific examples were cited (some mentioned only once). They were all recent examples. They are listed in the chart below in alphabetical order.

Table 3.1 Examples of Collaboration of Agencies with Residents

RESIDENTS MENTIONED	AGENCIES MENTIONED
After School Programs & Homework Help	After School Homework Help
Bedbug Education Project	Bedbug Education Project
Community Gardens	Friday Night Café
Friday Night Café	Sports Clinic
Library Programs	
Lawrence Heights Community Centre Programs	
New Heights CHCs work with the community	
Revitalization (especially TCHC animators)	
Tenant Reps (TCHC)	

Some but not all focus group participants felt the agency ratings in the survey results were higher than they expected. There were lots of different opinions.

One resident participant described the situation as *"the agencies talk the talk but do not walk the walk"* (i.e. they need to begin practicing what they preach). In the words of another resident, *"Stop beautifying the 'outside' (e.g. buildings and grounds). Agencies need to spend funds on the 'inside' by providing programs and services that reflect the needs of the community."* Echoing these concerns, within the agency focus group one staff participant said, *"we have overdone consultations without action".*

> **The agencies talk the talk but do not walk the walk.**

Agency focus group participants discussed how the rush to deliver outcomes for their funders gets in the way of collaborative process. According to one staff, "*we miss the 1st step of celebrating community. We undervalue trust - social capital - because they seem less tangible."* Residents describe the same dynamic from a different perspective *"They plan stuff and then include the residents – they are not working with the people."* Some residents expressed their aggravation with what they saw as a systemic problem.

> **They plan stuff and then include the residents – they are not working with the people.**

Some (but not all) agency staff shared residents' strong desire for change in the way agencies address their work. One talked about facing challenges within his organization because others in the agency were not interested in moving towards a collaborative approach with residents.

Although LHION includes a wide array of over 30 agencies working in the community, various comments from resident participants emphasized how TCHC is the one agency all residents are required to engage with (as tenants). As such, residents are more affected by TCHC that by other agencies. Changes in the way TCHC relates to residents are of primary importance to them.

On another note, residents are concerned with agencies that are not that visible. They are not "out there". More than one resident spoke about agencies' lack of face - *"Who are these people?"* Without a face, residents felt there is no accountability (to residents). In the words of another resident *"There is a cloud of suspicion around agencies. Some agencies dodge info… they need to set trust."*

Directions for moving forward as more effective partners

In all the focus groups, we asked participants: *How can residents and agencies be more effective partners in addressing needs and services within the community?* From what participants said, there is clearly lots of room for improvement in collaborations between agencies and residents.

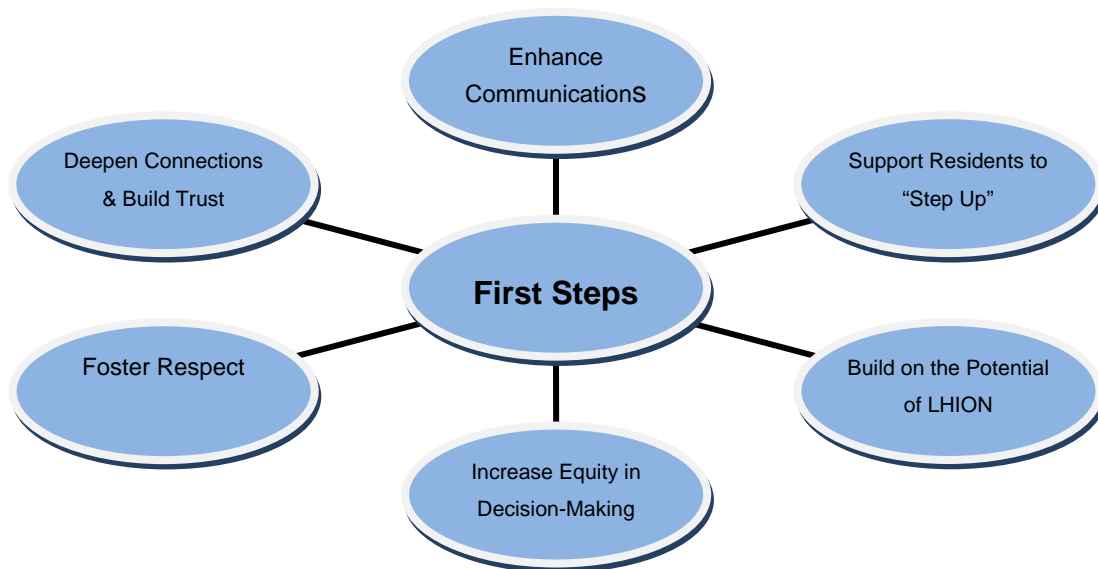The following themes emerged from the focus groups:

Figure 3.1 Six Themes Emerging from the Focus Groups

For the most part, there was a general accord between resident and agency staff participants about these key first steps.

Enhance Communications

In the words of one resident "*agencies should be proactive and communicate with residents."* Participants in all resident focus groups emphasized the need to increase communication and information about programs and services existing in Lawrence Heights. The agency participants agreed with this perspective. In fact, they focused on visibility as a first step to improving collaborations. Interpretations of how to do this (increase visibility) varied. Agencies discussed developing a catalogue of agencies and their services. This suggestion also came forward from residents. But residents also wanted information about the people in the agencies and what they do. In the words of one resident, *"bring a face to the organizations."*

> *Bring a face to the organizations.*

In line with the survey results about how residents want to share their views and concerns, focus group participants suggested agencies use a variety of different methods for gathering information and sharing information. Working with grassroots groups in the community (ranging from those with 5 to 105 members) was identified by one agency participant as an important way of responding to people's needs. On several occasions, participants in the resident focus groups asked for more opportunities like the BePart focus groups - where residents facilitated the dialogue (and were sharing the results with agencies afterwards). As one resident noted "*… that way more residents could get together and talk about what is happening in their community."*

Deepen Connections & Build Trust

Many residents felt strongly that building trust between residents and agencies was both a challenge and a priority. One consequence of lack of trust was noted in the agency focus group, where a staff said, *"it's hard to find out when no one wants to talk with you."* Meanwhile, in one of the resident focus groups, a participant explained, *"I [resident] need to feel comfortable to talk with you [agency]."*

> *Agencies need to come to the community – not the other way around.*

Residents suggested in many ways that agencies need to "go out" and "reach out" to the community in order for relationships to improve. Put simply by one resident, *"people don't warm up to people they don't know."* A strong resident perspective was that *"agencies need to come to the community – not the other way around."*

In the latter part of their focus group, agency staff discussed the importance of building trust. The initial focus of their comments was on the relationship between agencies and residents as a whole, but it later broadened to also include the importance of building trust among residents (e.g. residents from different cultural groups). It was noted by one agency participant that agencies can play a unique role in bridging different community subgroups together, *"we should avoid maintaining boundaries between groups."*

> *We should avoid maintaining boundaries between groups.*

A further suggestion for building bridges that many residents emphasized was for agencies to employ more people from the community and more culturally diverse staff on their teams. Residents felt that people from the community better understand needs and can build the connection that's missing between agencies and residents.

Foster Respect

Resident focus group participants emphasized that they need to be respected. They agreed strongly with BePart's resident survey results (page 13) which highlighted "respect and kindness" and "helpfulness of staff" as key elements of effective programs and services.

Residents did not give specific positive examples of what respect looks like. However, some ideas can be identified from BePart's focus group results describing *Current Collaborations* (page 19). Here, residents described as a lack of respect: when agencies do not openly share information, when agencies invite residents into planning meetings late in the process, and when agencies do not follow through on their stated values.

Residents described one-on-one communications as another signal of respect. Two of the focus groups noted that agencies (especially TCHC staff) must stop being condescending in daily interactions. Residents want agencies to be more careful to really listen to residents. As one resident remarked, just because residents *"don't get paid"* does not mean residents' perspectives are not important.

Increase Equity in Decision-Making

In one resident focus group it was emphasized that residents want to be "equal participants" not just "input participants" in planning and decision-making.

Resident participants want agencies to work with them and understand the real needs of the community (not funders' needs or assumed needs) before they apply for funding. Two comments were: *"Agencies need to stop assuming our needs and plan with residents first,"* and "*residents should be given the ownership of what is happening and impacting their lives."* This priority was also recognized by some agency participants. One agency staff said *"If residents were being engaged in the development of services/programs – that could change the [BePart] survey results on how well agencies are working with residents."*

> *Agencies need to stop assuming our needs and plan with residents first*

Suggestions for how to build equity in decision-making included: focus groups (like the BePart ones) or a regular community forum where community members can address specific issues/wants to specific agencies/organizations.

Build on the Potential of LHION *(Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network)*

Agency staff noted that LHION is a good space for agencies to learn new ways of working with residents. One agency staff shared a challenge: *"Where I work it is a real culture change to get our agency to be more participatory. What can other agencies do to help their fellow agencies?"* It was felt by another that LHION can facilitate progress: *"When agencies share their positive experiences, others can get on board."* Several agency participants felt that LHION holds a lot more potential for actually reaching out and talking with residents (not just coordination). For example, connections with grassroots groups, facilitated by LHION, could help agencies respond to people's needs.

> *When agencies share their positive experiences, others can get on board.*

Support Residents to "Step Up"

Participants in two of the resident focus groups felt that while agencies need to engage differently, residents need to better respond to agency efforts to engage them. Sometimes, participants agreed, residents need to "step up". *"Every resident should commit to be more informed and more involved."*

Meanwhile, resident and agency respondents also identified that supports may be needed. As one resident noted, *"we need organizations with strong leaders to help us - support us to facilitate our needs."* One agency participant who works in planning offered an analogy: a city park is a space where different groups of people and individuals come and use one common space for different purposes. *"Can we create a community space where different people come and express their different needs and ideas?"*

> *Can we create a community space where different people come and express their different needs and ideas?"*

3.2.1 Focus Group Conclusions

BePart's Focus Groups 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 were:

- Enhance Communications;
- Deepen Connections & Build Trust;
- Foster Respect;
- Increase Equity in Decision-Making;
- Build on the Potential of the Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network; and

- Support Residents to "Step Up" (*to be more informed and more involved*).

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.

3.3 Grey Literature Review and Case Studies

BePart's Grey Literature[6] Review Team conducted research to gain insights into other communities' experiences on the topic of residents and agencies working together. We wanted to learn more about what worked and what didn't work.

We used the thematic method (to group and discuss sources) by reviewing and highlighting common threads in terms of theme or topic. We started off looking at other neighborhoods that had similar issues as our neighborhood. Seeing that our neighbourhood was designated as one of Toronto's 13 priority neighbourhoods, we researched the other 12 priority neighbourhoods to find out if they had experiences of agency and resident collaboration. We noticed that most of the collaborative initiatives had the same funder - the United Way's Action for Neighbourhood Change program. In order to review a diversity of initiatives, we finally selected 4 community initiatives within Toronto (one of them a United Way ANC project) and one lit review outside Toronto located in Saint John, New Brunswick. Later, we conducted interviews for further case study of two of the Toronto initiatives.

3.3.1 Report Reviews

These are the initiatives we reviewed:

1. Jane & Finch: The Green Change Project

2. Scarborough Village: Key Learning & Implications for Practice

3. St. Jamestown Initiative: Neighborhood & Health

4. Regent Park: Lessons Learned from Regent Park's Employment Planning

5. New Brunswick: Poverty, Homelessness & Teen Pregnancy

Jane Finch Community

Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre. (2009). *Green Change Project: Jane and Finch on the journey to Green Change… because it makes sense!.* PowerPoint presentation (17 pages). For more information, visit www.janefinchcentre.org

In 2009, the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre partnered with a number of agencies to do a project involving Jane Finch residents. This project was called The Green Change Project. It was a one-year initiative to build capacity in reducing waste, conserving energy and making

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[6] refers to original reports, working papers and articles published in locations other than academic journals.

other simple life changes that can save money. The project also had a job creation vision to establish a building trades workers' co-op in the Jane Finch community that could be positioned by their third year of operation to bid competitively for major green building and retrofit contracts with the City of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing or other property management companies. The approach used to engage with residents and community members throughout the project emphasized community capacity building, social justice, and anti-oppression

The "Green Project" was a fun way for residents to be self-employed. Residents enrolled in the "Green Project" went door to door to find out how other residents within the community are currently being "green". As well, they educated them of other ways to be "green", and to better the environment.

Discussion:

The 2 most important learnings from this literature review, in terms of BePart's research question were:

- Residents involved with the "Green Project" found it difficult to talk with their own neighbours. They found the residents not "open" to talk with them. Residents who are active in the Lawrence Heights & Neptune community also find it very hard to approach fellow residents around community engagement.

- Participants in the "Green Project" felt "it's always the same faces at the meetings". This is a similar scenario to the Lawrence Heights & Neptune community. It's very difficult to motivate new residents to get involved in community projects.

Active residents are at times faced with a wall that is very hard to penetrate. Residents working with agencies are sometime viewed as the "bad guys" (as having moved over to "the other side"). It's hard to get fellow residents motivated and involved, even when it's beneficial for them, because they are used to being disappointed by agencies. To tackle this, agencies need to stop assuming they know what the community needs are. They need to take the time to get to know the community and their needs. Gaining trust within a community takes time. This is not something that will happen overnight. Good agents understand this concept, respect it, and have a lot of patience with it.

Scarborough Village

> United Way of Greater Toronto. (2006). *Toronto's Scarborough Village Key Learnings and Implications for Practice.* Action for Neighbourhood Change report (49 pages).

Scarborough Village is one of the 13 priority communities identified by the City of Toronto (as is Lawrence Heights). It faces challenges of poverty in the suburbs with a high newcomer, visible minority, and children & youth population. It is a community in dire need of social tools and infrastructure necessary to help create change for the better.

Strong relationships with local service providers are crucial. New opportunities often present themselves quickly and might slip away in the absence of the capacity to develop partnerships in a timely manner. The Action for Neighborhood Change (ANC), a major component of the United Way's Neighborhood Strategy, encountered a very high level of interest among agencies

both within and outside the neighborhood, in collaborating and developing informal partnerships to deliver programs and services.

In two short years the ANC has helped Scarborough Village launch indoor soccer, basketball and badminton programs as well as a youth leadership program, a theatre and film clubs for kids, $80,000 in playground equipment, and a new residents' association (SVNA). It seems that "community engagement" has been a choice course of action for building a strong community in the Scarborough Village, with the United Way's ANC as the catalytic agent that brought change.

Discussion:

The 2 most important learnings from this literature review, in terms of BePart's research question were:

- The guidelines outlined for community engagement are useful and certainly parallel Lawrence Heights efforts in this regard. They can be applied through neighbourhood capacity building and community forums.

- Forming a formal and legal neighbourhood association is essential if community interests and outside supports to the community are to be attracted and maintained. This can be achieved by seeking locum legal support to help the residents' group set up such a neighbourhood body.

This ANC initiative shows how agencies working or interested in working with communities can set up programs in close collaboration with community members. If a community is enlightened through collaboration and information, it is best suited to define its needs. This is far better than having agencies assume the needs of the community in isolation. Mutual respect and trust have to be established between a community and the agencies that serve them. The key to success is for no one to lose sight of the collaboration. A similar approach could be taken in Lawrence Heights.

St. James Town

> Haque, N., Moriarty, E., Anderson, E. (2008). *Community Voices: Tackling Inequity Through Community-Based Initiative on the Social Determinants of Health.* St. James Town Initiative Neighbourhood and Health (65 pages). Wellesley Institute, Toronto.

The St. James Town Initiative (SJT) has been underway since March 2007. The main goal of SJT is to help newcomers maintain the good health they have when arriving in this country (Canada). For the first year, this initiative focused on effectively engaging the community and to understand the perceptions of newcomers regarding neighborhood and health. To achieve these objectives, two arts-based participatory research methods were employed: photo voice and community mapping.

Objectives for photo voice project included: help newcomers identify SJT characteristics they perceive influence their health and well being; and advocate for positive social changes in SJT through recommendations for policy reforms.

A community-based research (CBR) approach was employed because it recognizes community as a unity. Also, the overall goal of CBR is to bring people with diverse skills and knowledge together to develop meaningful/responsive research to advocate policies and interventions to improve health & wellbeing.

The CBR results included:

- Many newcomers' face barriers of financial stability, difficulty gaining and maintaining a good job due to lack of Canadian experience and employment references.

- Participation in the community and society helped individuals understand the nuance of Canada society and also learn important language skills and build relationships.

- Residents felt they were not being listened to by authorities at many levels, including building managers and government officials.

- Photos and stories collected through the photo voice project and shared with the community and others at the community forum & expo kept residents, grassroots organizations, and other stakeholders aware and involved in the project. In total 300+ people from SJT, government, universities, and various organizations attended the community forum and expo.

- Moving forward, local youth were employed to do an environmental search of existing social resources, services, and organizations in SJT.

Regent Park

Wang, Chao-Yuan Joanne. (2009). *Lessons Learned from the Regent Park Experience of Developing an Employment Plan*. Unpublished report (44 pages). York University, Toronto.

This was a research study led by an advisory of LHION member agency staff and one resident from Lawrence Heights. The study looked at Regent Park's experience of developing an employment plan, in order to help develop a tool to guide Lawrence Heights on the same path. The aim of Regent Park's employment planning was to develop opportunities for local residents to gain employment in the context of revitalization. This study presents guidelines for building employment opportunities for Lawrence Heights.

Discussion:

The 2 most important learnings from this literature review, in terms of BePart's research question were:

- Some conclusions that were presented were: the importance of knowing the community; providing an access point for residents, government, and community agencies to communicate with each other more effectively; and building collaborative partnerships.

- Residents of Regent Park have been faced with many employment barriers like language barriers, transportation, childcare, Canadian credentials, survival jobs and

systemic issues. Lawrence Heights shares many similarities in terms of employment problems and issues.

To build and improve on the experience of Regent Park, the people who should be on a Lawrence Heights employment planning committee should include:

- ➢ All grassroots community members of Lawrence Heights
- ➢ Youth organizations and youth leaders
- ➢ Representatives from colleges and universities (e.g. Humber, Seneca, George Brown & York University)
- ➢ Union representatives (e.g. construction unions)
- ➢ Pathways to Education
- ➢ LHION member agencies
- ➢ City of Toronto
- ➢ TCHC
- ➢ Representatives of businesses that reside in the Lawrence Heights area

Saint John, New Brunswick

Dilworth,T. (2006). *Literature Review on Poverty, Homelessness, & Teenage Pregnancy.* First Steps Housing Project Inc. New Brunswick (59 pages).

BePart's Literature Review team decided to choose one report from outside the Toronto neighbourhood context. The research chosen was a literature review done in Saint John New Brunswick. It reviewed and summarized research about issues that affect teen parenting, poverty, homelessness, and pregnancy.

Of this review's different sections, the one relevant to BePart's research question discussed program provision through residential homes for young mothers. The report identified challenges to service delivery which included: coordination of services, training of staff, and need for community support. It was noted that "program design and service delivery must be highly responsive to the needs of the community where the home is located." (p. 43)

Discussion:

The section of this report noted above confirms the importance of agency responsiveness to community needs. But the report did not directly address the question of improving partnerships between community members and agencies in responding to community needs.

3.3.2 Case Studies

The team attempted to contact people from each project for further case study. Due to time/resource constraints and who we heard back from, Jane Finch and St. James Town became our 2 case studies. The team developed a series of questions for phone/in person interviews, adapted from the BePart survey questions (through a series team meeting discussions). The final questions and raw case study data are available in BePart's report appendices posted at www.bepart.ca.

When asked "what would you advise to any other agency that wanted to do collaboration with residents or a community?" case study respondents noted:

- We need to build trust. Building trust takes a long time. You have to be patient.
- Find a common interest with the residents and work with them. "You have to find what perks them [residents] up and work with it". Also, take it slow - don't enter their space and dump ideas on them. Start with a realistic thought first.
- Offer better paying jobs.
- Always involve residents in any planning and let them voice their concerns.

The 2 case studies shared valuable insights to inform partnership building in Lawrence Heights and Neptune. Following are the highlights:

1) Both the SJT and Jane Finch case studies talked about the agencies knowing the community. They also used agencies that already had established a relationship with residents to start their work with residents. In Lawrence Heights, agencies that have good relationships in the community should be involved in leading the work of the residents.

2) The case study communities had similar issues among them (and similar to Lawrence Heights and Neptune) regarding language barriers, resident involvement in the community, childcare, safety, funding, and transportation. The case study communities tried to overcome these by:

   - Community involvement through door to door knocking
   - Producing flyers in different languages
   - Adopting other ways to work with the community
   - Making workshops closer to home
   - Offering childcare using staff on site
   - Opening up doors to any community member

3) The case study communities mentioned some noticeable improvements like building better relationships with the community, better funding, better and clear information, better resources for residents and as well better outreach to residents. Their investments have begun to pay off.

4) Both communities had lessons learned. In Jane Finch this was not knowing that there is lots of experience within the community and the residents are very valuable. In St. James Town they learned about their ability to get good feedback to educate others.

5) Offering employment opportunities helped engage residents in both communities. With St. James Town the youth were offered work in the community and now want to remain a part of things. In Jane Finch the Green Change Project offered employment and more residents became involved.

6) Both communities shared advice reflecting a similar concept of not dumping agency ideas onto residents. As the SJT example shows, let residents voice their concerns and learn where they are coming from.

3.4 Reflections on Overall Research Results

Overall, BePart's research revealed that "general residents" and "resident leaders" in Lawrence Heights and Neptune have parallel perspectives about improving relationships between residents and agencies. The "resident leaders" who participated in our research shared added insights about their hopes regarding next steps for the relatively young Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION). Within BePart's agency focus group, we learned that several frontline agency staff share an interest in shifting their approaches and priorities to support more shared leadership with residents.

The focus group results reveal both emerging movement and a desire for far-reaching change in how agencies and residents communicate and collaborate, both amongst themselves and together in partnership. Funders were another key player identified during the focus groups (and as such recommendations have been formulated for this group as well). Through our grey literature and case study research we found similar concerns and "lessons learned" within other Toronto priority neighbourhoods. These connections both supported our results and seeded interest for future cross-neighbourhood sharing and research.

4. BePart Research Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the BePart Steering Committee's vigorous consideration of our research results. The data and analysis outlined above were further supplemented with feedback from a group of over 50 residents and agency staff who discussed BePart's preliminary findings at a community forum in January 2010 (for notes from this forum, see the appendices to this report at www.bepart.ca).

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.

4.1 Recommendations for Residents

1) **Every resident commit to be more informed and more involved.** When residents "step up" change will happen: learn about what's available in the community; bring others out to events; participate in organizing and attending community-wide festivals and events; don't be afraid to say what you really want.

   This recommendation emerged from the focus group results and generated lots of energy at BePart's January 2010 community forum. Residents are already "stepping up" (i.e. community engagement). Both within and alongside BePart's work this past year, residents reflecting a variety of cultural and age groups have become more informed and more involved. The moving forward section at the end of this report further illustrates the changes happening on the ground. BePart members invite all residents, as individuals, to "step up" and together, as neighbours, to encourage and support each other in engaging on community issues.

2) **Organize together as residents. Listen to and communicate across diverse groups.** Listen to seniors, families, youth, women, people with disabilities, children, and others. Hold BBQs in different areas of Lawrence Heights and Neptune so residents can get to know each other across the geography of the community. Build bridges among resident groups to strengthen the voice of residents. Outline a resident platform. Residents could have a resident advisory or forum on various service issues where residents define the agenda. Agencies could come to listen and dialogue. Residents should develop a simple clear and workable plan of cooperation and collaboration with agencies.

   One recent example of residents organizing together is a pilot project developed by the resident-led Lawrence Heights Community Action Team (CAT) and funded through TCHC's Social Investment Fund. CAT's *Community Connections Pilot Project* is supporting residents to knock on doors within their own home buildings or courts and to gather neighbours

(across cultural and age differences) to identify one or more community-building project(s) - and sponsor activities together.   Another example is *Friday Night Cafés.* The idea for these cafés came from residents during the summer of 2009. People wanted a place to socialize with neighbours and families and share food and music together. With support from TCHC, a few resident leaders committed their talents and time and many others pitched in to make the *Friday Night Cafés* a success. These summer *Friday Night Cafés* won a Mayor's Community Safety Award in the fall of 2009. Since then, local residents and agencies continue to use Friday nights as a favorable day for hosting community information, dialogue and celebration events throughout the year.

3) **Build residents' capacity to know their rights and take action for change.** Teach and learn about tenants' rights and newcomer rights. Teach and learn about the school system, social services and more. Teach and learn skills for taking leadership together to address issues and concerns.

Residents are keen on capacity building and numerous one-off and intensive opportunities are offered each year (led by residents, led by agencies, and led by residents and agencies together). In early 2009, BePart led two participatory dialogue workshops that helped participants (both residents and agencies) understand the principles of community-based research. This workshop was co-facilitated by agency staff and residents together. BePart's Steering Committee sees the opportunity for residents to coordinate more of their own capacity building initiatives, with agencies in a supportive, catalyst or funding role.

4) **Recognize and reinforce "good examples" of resident/agency partnership.** When residents appreciate the service or approach of an agency, let the agency - and others - know. Share with others the reason(s) the service or approach was effective (for example, "they were helpful", "my perspectives were respected", "agencies coordinated together", etc).

In BePart's focus groups, good examples were identified (see table 3.1). Residents should continue to share these examples. Meanwhile, BePart's survey results have begun to identify the elements that make programs and partnerships effective. Any resident can be a part of sharing BePart's results – and use this report as a tool for those discussions.

5) **Pursue further community-based research in new areas.** For example, residents can pursue community-based research to explore the issue of service bias (across many agencies) towards single mothers, and the impacts of this bias on families and community unity. Another area of concern, for all residents, is community safety.

The BePart Steering Committee needs to consider its own future interests with regards to research. At the same time, we want all residents to talk with their neighbours, within local community groups and with agencies about their future research interests. BePart can offer support around using a community-based research approach. Also, helpful organizations are listed in the acknowledgments section of this report.

4.2 Recommendations for Agencies

1) **Develop communications plans (at each agency and at LHION[7]) to improve the visibility and accountability of agencies, their staff, and their services.** Be more proactive in creating awareness and outreach – not just through paper. For example, agencies can attend community gatherings (e.g. seniors groups, school events, parent meetings) to explain their work and services. LHION can develop a catalogue and/or website about agencies and programs in the community. LHION can organize a bi-monthly evening forum between agencies and residents to create a dynamic channel for neighbourhood-wide communications.

   As mentioned in the "Moving Forward" section of this report, LHION has hosted many *Friday Night Cafés* since the fall of 2009 as forums for improving agency-resident communications and dialogue on various concerns. LHION has also hired a coordinator who is helping the network make progress around the development of print and online communications channels. Individual agencies vary in the level and style of their existing communications with residents. BePart's research results share ideas for improving those communications, such as having agency staff "out in the community" so residents can know the "face" of agencies - and feel more comfortable talking agency staff to build responsive and collaborative action.

2) **Invest in the processes and activities that build relationships and trust between agencies and residents.** Devote more time for staff to talk directly with residents about community issues and priorities. Build different kinds of bridges to reach different sectors of the community - gender, youth, seniors, families, cultural groups – as well as connection points that include all groups. Promote social integration by providing public space for socialization, for example community gardens and BBQs.

   The popularity of the many recent *Friday Night Cafés* speaks to the responsiveness of residents to processes and activities that can build their relationships and trust with agencies. BePart's Steering Committee itself practiced (and was rewarded by) taking time (6 months) to nurture a collaborative team before moving into traditional outcome delivery. The challenge remains that many agency staff have other communities to go home to and may be reluctant to work evenings and weekends. That challenge needs to be taken up with recognition that the payoffs in terms of program quality and impacts could be substantial. Hiring more local staff could facilitate this.

3) **Develop new ways of working with residents that ensure respect and foster equity.** Although progress has been made, agencies must recognize that in many (not all) contexts, residents continue to experience disrespect and inequality in their relationships with agencies. To rectify this, agencies should adopt approaches that value capacity building, social justice and anti-oppression[8]. As a first step, agencies can review BePart survey

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[7] Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION)

8 *Capacity Building* is about developing skills, competencies, and/or readiness for leadership and action. Most capacity is built by groups themselves, while outsiders can support the process. *Social Justice* is about advancing human rights and equality of

results on what makes programs effective and how agencies can be more responsive - and adapt practices in accordance with this evidence.

These approaches to respect and equity are in line with the theme of "helpfulness" that emerged when BePart asked survey respondents what made programs and services effective. "Helpfulness" means that agency networks, agencies, and agency staff really respect and listen to residents' concerns, needs and challenges, and then direct their (agency) resources to help residents address gaps.

4) **Build agencies' capacity to work in collaborative partnerships with residents.** This should be done through a three prong approach that includes hiring, training, and mentoring. Hire more staff that reflect the community (preferably residents) recognizing that knowledge of local cultures and community is an important performance qualification. Train all staff around community cultures, issues and challenges using an anti-oppression framework. Build on the potential of LHION as a learning exchange where experienced agencies and staff share best practice examples and mentor their peers.

BePart's research points to the conclusion that capacity building to improve partnerships must be embraced by both sides of those partnerships. Individual agencies should highlight equitable partnership skills on their list of professional development priorities.

5) **Adopt program planning models that include community members as key stakeholders, not just clients.** Include residents when planning programs, events and redevelopment efforts. Make sure residents have a place at the decision-making table. Give residents an equal say in the distribution of resources. Provide meaningful and effective ways for diverse residents to be involved in different levels and stages of the development process. Remove barriers to resident participation by using a diversity of methods/locations/times and providing food, childcare, interpretation, TTC tickets as needed.

BePart's research results have clearly documented how many residents are first and foremost voices for their community and clients second. They have a unique perspective (and years of experience beyond agency staff) within the neighbourhood. Many community development efforts have included residents in this way, such as the examples identified in the BePart focus groups (see table 3.1). Residents are also looking to collaborate on: the development and evaluation of service provision, outside researchers' access to the community, and more. The use of community advisory panels by New Heights CHCs, Lawrence Heights Community Centre and other agencies is a step in the right direction. It is equally important to ensure these advisories are properly resourced with staffing and funds to support informed and effective inputs and collaborations by resident stakeholders.

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opportunity. *Anti-Oppression* is about learning from the perspectives of people from socially disadvantaged groups and working (as a member of an oppressed group or as an ally) to make changes that move us closer to eliminating oppression in all its forms.

While BePart has prioritized the 5 recommendations above for agencies, 3 other recommendations for agencies emerged from this research. These are: build further on existing coordination efforts among agencies; provide resources and support to encourage and sustain a resident forum or association that can collaborate with LHION; and increase dialogue and action to address safety concerns with diverse stakeholders.

4.3 Recommendations for Funders

1) **Make community participation in the planning, development and evaluation of services key criteria in the evaluation of agency funding proposals.** This will ensure services are needed by the people served and tailored to their concerns and priorities.

   Positive examples held up by residents and agencies speak to the value of resident involvement in many ways (see table 3.1). Since agencies noted the challenges of building relationships and trust with residents while meeting funders' activity outcome timelines, a shift in the indicators used by funders to evaluate program/project quality (especially mid-term) will support these same agencies to do what they feel has been missing.

2) **Fund research initiatives that support the involvement of residents in diverse phases of the research process, especially at the decision-making table.**

   This report speaks volumes to the value of community-based research. The dissemination and action impacts of BePart's work even before completion of this final report show the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder engagement in research. Other research in Lawrence Heights and Neptune that has engaged residents in parts of the process (e.g. advisory or data collection) have also achieved noticeable benefits. To reap further benefits, these levels of community involvement should grow. Two local agencies have already turned to BePart to discuss partnership on upcoming research work. Funders could support these efforts, as well as resident-initiated research.

3) **Fund resident-led groups and organizations to broaden resident engagement and support resident partnership in community dialogues and activities.** Provide long-term core funding as well as start-up and pilot funds.

   Funding and other resources for resident leadership in Lawrence Heights and Neptune has been forthcoming, and with great impact. Examples of this include Lawrence Heights' Involve Youth Project funded by the City of Toronto, and several resident-led projects funded through TCHC's Social Investment Fund. More significant, sustainable funding to support both sub-community and cross-community efforts could make a key difference in outcomes at this juncture.

4) **Look at BePart's recommendations to agencies and residents and emphasize those activities in your funding priorities.**

   Funding bodies should review BePart's results at staff meetings and with funding panel members.

While BePart Steering Committee prioritized the four recommendations above for action on the part of funders, three other recommendations for funders emerged from this research. These are: fund the time and effort it takes to build and maintain equitable partnerships between different stakeholders in a project or program; fund efforts that help the community erase barriers among community members; and fund expenses that reduce barriers to resident participation.

5. Moving Forward

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 (see below). 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/decide directions and resources for future action.

5.1 BePart's Results-Sharing (Dissemination) Plan

Because this is a community-based research project, our results sharing-process is not linear. Many residents and many agency staff are already engaged with the goals of BePart, and some are aware of the project's preliminary results from our presentations to over 100 residents and agency staff during January 2010. Now, these stakeholders and others are eager to read BePart's final report and recommendations.

In preparation for the launch of our final report and in order to focus results-sharing to achieve our action goals, the BePart Steering Committee developed a plan as follows:

Our results-sharing goals:

- Research results are shared and available at the community level.

- There is ongoing discussion and learning about BePart's research topic.

- New solutions are found for existing problems.

- Resources are mobilized for follow-up projects.

- Residents and agencies develop positive relationships and a healthy environment for working and learning together.

- The community belongs to residents.

Tools to meet our goals: BePart's website (*which includes select materials in Spanish and Somali*); BePart's Final Report document; promotional postcards; powerpoint presentations; a poster display; a video documenting BePart's Community Forum process; and a video highlighting BePart's Research Results (forthcoming).

Planned activities to share results and animate dialogue with others: presentations to local community groups and agencies; special events (including a large dissemination BBQ during Summer 2010); newsletter/newspaper articles; displays at community events and meetings; networking with other groups locally and across the city; updating BePart's website & blog; future publications; and new creative approaches.

Key target audiences for our dissemination efforts: 1) Lawrence Heights and Neptune residents and grassroots groups; 2) LHION and LHION member agencies; 3) Funders; and 4) others (e.g. residents and agencies in other priority neighbourhoods or researchers and non-profit agencies at large). We hope to access further resources that can enable BePart to be proactive in reaching these audiences.

5.2 A Changing Community Context

During the course of BePart's research work (and sometimes because of the dialogues and momentum that the BePart project has mobilized), changes have been happening in the Lawrence Heights and Neptune community. Here are some highlights:

- Residents have built bridges across cultural divides, strengthening their community and their voice together.

- Residents working with BePart and other resident-agency partnerships have built a base of experience and confidence to undertake stronger leadership roles.

- Tenant representatives, with support from TCHC, launched and hosted a series of "Friday Night Cafés" to gather community members in response to a summer where parks and streets were deserted after multiple incidents of violence.

- LHION workgroups, embracing the community café model, now host semi-regular *Friday Night Cafés* to dialogue with community members on thematic issues

such as safety, food justice, arts production, etc. (BePart followed this trend for our January Community Forum held over a Friday night community meal).

- Agencies working within LHION's various workgroups remain active and positive, while slowly and steadily building their level of dialogue and connection with resident leaders.

- Several residents have been hired on one-year contracts at different agencies through City funding. Meanwhile, more long-term job openings have for the most part not to be filled by local talent.

- During BePart's case study investigations, several community leaders in Lawrence Heights and Neptune connected with resident leaders from other priority neighbourhoods. They value these connections and hope to collaborate in the future.

- LHION secured funding to hire a network coordinator, which has moved forward their work on implementing a communications plan (including a flyer and a website) to improve the profile of LHION's mandate and activities in the community.

- Revitalization planners have shared their "emerging preferred plans". These reveal some areas where residents' efforts to engage made positive impacts, and others where residents' priorities have been put on hold.

- The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) for Lawrence Heights approached and engaged BePart resident co-investigators to assist them with a research initiative that will identify pathways to improve local settlement supports for newcomers.

5.3 Residents Organizing on Their Own

Made for residents. Empowered by residents.

Recent discussions among resident co-investigators of the BePart Steering Committee have explored the idea of residents refocusing on building their own independence to better engage in collaborations with LHION. At this point, future directions are not fixed. One thing we do know is that BePart's research process and results will inform each step forward as residents and agencies work to balance out an unstable relationship and build back the empowerment of the people in the community.

5.4 Community Capacity - Our Resource for Action

At many levels, from various positions, people living and/or working in Lawrence Heights and Neptune are talking about BePart. Each of these people has a unique understanding of *and connection to* BePart's work. Those diverse connections - along with the information and recommendations in this report – are the rich resource (community capacity) we have built together that will

guide our collective actions into the future.

We anticipate many future meetings (and meals) between residents, agencies and funders, to navigate pathways and measure milestones as we implement BePart's recommendations.

In addition, as glimpsed in our grey literature results, sharing our stories and "lessons learned" across neighbourhoods will continue to be an important way to inform future research and action in low-income communities across Toronto, across Canada and internationally.

6. List of Appendices

The following is a list of appendices to this report. These are available both as one combined document and individually at www.bepart.ca.

a) Original Logic Model for the BePart Project (2008)

b) Notes from BePart Launch Workshops (includes introduction to CBR)

c) BePart Steering Committee Memo of Understanding

d) Resident Survey questionnaire

e) Focus Groups question guide

f) Focus Groups Results – long version

g) Case Study Q&As

h) Small Group Suggestions from BePart Community Forum (January 15, 2010)

i) Project Evaluation Report (March, 2010)

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