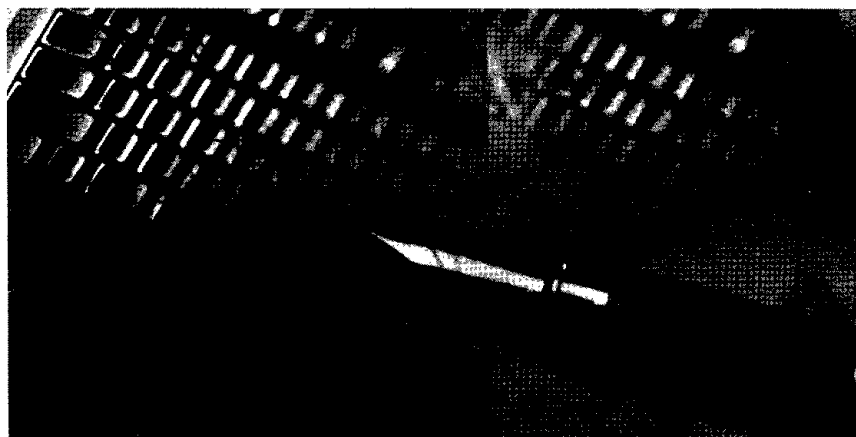


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RESEARCH REPORT

INVOLVING HOMELESS AND FORMERLY
HOMELESS CLIENTS IN PROJECTS AND
PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

FINAL REPORT



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**INVOLVING HOMELESS AND FORMERLY HOMELESS
CLIENTS IN PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS
HOMELESSNESS**

FINAL REPORT

**SUBMITTED
TO
THE CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION AND
THE NATIONAL SECRETARIAT ON HOMELESSNESS**

**BY
JIM WARD ASSOCIATES**

OCTOBER, 2001

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a study of the ways in which agencies that address homelessness involve their homeless clients in the work of the agency itself, through participation in governance structures, development of policies, work (both volunteer and paid), research and evaluation, building design and development, creative activities, community projects and training/mentorship activities.

The study examined the involvement approaches of twelve agencies in different locations across Canada. The agencies were selected to achieve good regional representation, as well as in terms of the services and programs provided and the characteristics of the homeless population served. Agencies providing services to adult women and men, youth, families and First Nations people were studied in Halifax, Fredericton, Trois-Rivières, Montréal, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria. The types of services provided include emergency shelter, drop-ins, supported housing, newsletter production, education/training, and counselling.

At each of the twelve sites, interviews and group discussions were conducted with management and front line staff and homeless clients of the particular agency.

The main findings of the study are:

- In all the involvement modes, long-term agency planning that sees client involvement as an essential aspect of the way the agency does its work is essential. The notion of a continuum of involvement also appears to be the key to move clients from low-level to high-level involvement, e.g. from program volunteer to client committee involvement, to standing committee involvement, to board involvement or from volunteer work to paid work.
- Of the eight areas of involvement, paid or voluntary work is the most widely used and is probably of the greatest importance in terms of its ability to 'rescue' clients from a life of marginality. It is also the area of involvement in which clients have the highest level of interest.
- There is a strong sense among both agency personnel and clients that an opportunity to influence the nature of the agency plays an important role for clients in terms of their readiness to be involved.
- A key motivator for clients to become involved is that it provides an opportunity for them to feel good about themselves.
- Confidentiality is a frequently identified obstacle to increased client involvement. This most often is related to concerns about certain clients having access to written records of other clients.
- Another concern was authoritarianism or "power-tripping" by involved clients (an issue common to any form of empowerment.) For client involvement to be successful, particularly in the work area, agencies must develop an effective strategy for nipping authoritarian tendencies in the bud. Successful client involvement requires training to ensure that those who, up until recently, have been without power can now use that limited power in a way that does not threaten the status of ex-peers.
- The two areas of governance -- i.e. board and committee involvement, and involvement in policy,

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consultations and planning -- are those where the greatest possibility for agency change towards increased client involvement can be found.

- Of the remaining areas of possible involvement, the greatest, virtually untapped possibilities lie in research and evaluation.
- Involvement in building-related activities such as development, design and renovations also offers practical opportunities for client growth.
- Training and mentorship approaches are used fairly sparingly. There is room for growth in this respect.
- Creative activities are used by six of the 12 sites as client involvement approaches. They appear to work best when the creativity goes beyond the aesthetic to community action or advocacy.
- In all the involvement modes, long-term agency planning that sees client involvement as a critical aspect of the way the agency does its work is essential.
- Agency size, service/activity diversity and philosophical milieu can have important influences on the opportunities for client involvement. The most important of the three characteristics, in terms of client involvement possibilities, is philosophical milieu. Those agencies with a philosophical predisposition to community development and/or advocacy on behalf of marginalized people are most likely to encourage and be successful in involving clients.

An argument can be made that, by involving clients, opportunities for ways out of marginality are increased. When agencies serving homeless people simply provide them with a service, the tendency is to maintain the *status quo* for those clients. The service may well improve the immediate situation of the client by providing food and shelter, but the likelihood of this experience leading to an improved future is minimal. By contrast, involvement in real opportunities for growth through, for example, involving clients in governance or work can lead to real change in clients' lives. Many examples of this occurring are provided in this report which ideally will lead agencies to look more seriously at client involvement as a means for bringing real and positive change into clients' lives.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le présent rapport est fondé sur les travaux de recherche portant sur les moyens qu'ont mis en œuvre les organismes d'aide pour faire participer les clients sans-abri à leurs activités, que ce soit dans le domaine des structures de gestion, de l'élaboration des orientations, du travail (tant rémunéré que bénévole), des activités de recherche et d'évaluation, de conception et d'aménagement d'ensembles, d'ateliers de création, de projets communautaires ou d'activités de formation et de mentorat.

La recherche a porté sur l'examen de 12 organismes à travers le pays qui font participer leurs clients à l'intervention auprès des sans-abri. Ces organismes ont été choisis parce qu'ils sont représentatifs et qu'ils fournissent une vaste gamme de services et de programmes à une population diversifiée. On a étudié des organismes qui fournissaient des services aux hommes et aux femmes adultes, aux jeunes, aux familles et aux Autochtones à Halifax, Fredericton, Trois-Rivières, Montréal, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver et Victoria. Les différents types de services offerts comprenaient l'hébergement d'urgence, le service de halte-accueil, le soutien au logement, la production d'un bulletin, la sensibilisation, la formation et les conseils à la clientèle.

Dans chacun des 12 centres, on a mené des entrevues et formé des groupes de discussion avec les gestionnaires, le personnel à pied d'œuvre et les sans-abri de l'organisme.

Voici les constatations les plus importantes :

- Quel que soit le type d'activité de participation, il est essentiel que les plans à long terme des organismes traitent la participation des clients comme une dimension cruciale de leur mode de fonctionnement. Autre notion d'importance : la mise en œuvre d'un ensemble homogène de mesures incitatives de participation des clients pour les encourager à progresser d'activités simples à des activités plus complexes. Ils peuvent, par exemple, passer d'un travail bénévole à un travail rémunéré ou d'un travail bénévole aux programmes à une participation aux comités-clients, aux comités permanents ou au conseil d'administration.
- Parmi les huit activités de participation possibles, le travail bénévole ou rémunéré suscite la participation la plus fréquente et intéresse le plus les clients. Il est aussi probable qu'il s'agit du meilleur moyen d'aider les clients à sortir de la marginalité.
- Tant le personnel des organismes que les clients estiment que c'est l'occasion de modifier la nature de l'organisme qui pousse les clients à vouloir s'impliquer.
- Un élément clé motive la participation des clients : la possibilité pour eux de se sentir bien dans leur peau.
- On signale souvent que la confidentialité constitue un obstacle à la participation accrue des clients. Il s'agit surtout de cas où l'on s'inquiète de la possibilité que certains clients puissent avoir accès aux dossiers d'autres clients.
- Autre inquiétude : le comportement autoritaire de certains clients participants (problème typique de tout exercice de responsabilisation). Pour que la participation des clients soit fructueuse, particulièrement dans le domaine de l'emploi, les organismes doivent mettre au point des stratégies

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pour tuer dans l'œuf ce genre de comportement. Ils doivent former ces personnes qui, jusqu'à tout récemment, étaient sans pouvoir afin qu'elles puissent exercer le pouvoir limité dont elles disposent dorénavant, sans être une menace pour leurs ex-pairs

- La participation aux activités de régie interne, soit le Conseil d'administration et les comités, ainsi que l'élaboration de directives, les consultations et la planification, constituent les deux domaines d'activité où les organismes peuvent le plus augmenter la participation des clients.
- En ce qui a trait aux autres domaines, ce sont les activités de recherche et d'évaluation qui recèlent le plus grand potentiel non exploité.
- L'aménagement, la conception et la rénovation de bâtiments offrent aussi de nombreuses occasions de croissance personnelle pour les clients.
- La formation et le mentorat, très peu utilisés, gagneraient à être employés davantage pour faire participer les clients à l'intervention des organismes.
- Employées dans 6 des 12 centres étudiés, les activités créatrices semblent mieux réussir lorsqu'elles ne constituent pas qu'un simple passe-temps, mais lorsqu'elles visent plutôt des initiatives pratiques au sein de la collectivité ou à des activités de sensibilisation.
- Quel que soit le type d'activité de participation, il est essentiel que les plans à long terme des organismes traitent la participation des clients comme une dimension cruciale de leur mode de fonctionnement.
- Trois caractéristiques influent grandement sur la possibilité de participation des clients : la taille des organismes, la diversité de leurs services et leur philosophie. De ces trois éléments, la philosophie est le plus important. Les organismes qui adhèrent à une philosophie d'implication dans le milieu et de sensibilisation pour le compte des personnes marginalisées sont les plus susceptibles de réussir à convaincre les clients de participer davantage aux programmes et aux services.

On estime que le fait de faire participer les clients à l'intervention auprès des sans-abri augmente les possibilités pour eux de s'en sortir. Lorsque les organismes ne font que fournir des services aux sans-abri, il semble que cela ne fasse que maintenir le *statu quo* : la situation immédiate du client s'en trouve améliorée si on lui fournit nourriture et abri, mais la probabilité est faible que ces services améliorent son sort. Par ailleurs, la participation des clients à de réelles occasions de croissance personnelle, comme les activités de régie ou l'emploi, peut produire des changements fondamentaux dans la vie des clients. De nombreux exemples sont cités dans le rapport, ce qui devrait en principe inciter les organismes à se pencher sur le potentiel de la participation à rehausser la qualité de vie de leurs clients sans-abri.



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1. INTRODUCTION

This report brings together the results of a study of client involvement based on case studies of the client involvement experience at 12 locations across Canada. The background research was carried out in the spring of 2001 and the field research was carried out in the summer of that year. The 12 particular sites were chosen because they provided a range of geographic settings, a range of service/program types and a diversity of homeless user groups. In the report, the sites will be referred to by the particular city in which they are located. These city locations were: Halifax, Fredericton, Trois- Rivières, Montréal, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria. The types of services/programs included youth shelters, referral/education services, drop-ins, women's and men's emergency shelters, supportive housing and street newspapers. A brief description of each of the 12 study site agencies is provided in Table 1.

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TABLE 1 - DESCRIPTION OF SITES

SITE	DESCRIPTION
1. Halifax	- Short-term emergency shelter for women and their children, with accommodation for up to 19 people
2. Fredericton	- Short-term emergency shelter for men, with accommodation for up to 30 men.
3. Trois-Rivières	- Emergency shelter for men (accommodates 15), several supportive housing sites, developing a women's shelter, outreach to street people, produces community newspaper <i>Vagabond</i>
4. Montréal	- Drop-in, gathering place for homeless people - a major activity is the production of <i>JOURNAL L'ITINÉRAIRE</i> , area for computer access for low income and street people
5. Toronto	- Supported housing for previously homeless single men and single women, with accommodation for 69 people in 11 clusters of between five and seven rooms around common kitchens, known as 'houses'
6. Hamilton	- Emergency shelter for men, with accommodation for 105 people, 22 of whom live in longer-term rooms, the remainder in dormitories.
7. Winnipeg	- A youth drop-in and counselling facility during the day. - An emergency shelter for male and female homeless youth at night, accommodates eight people
8. Regina	- A short-term education program aimed at First Nations people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. About 20 people involved in the program. - Taught in a converted school in suburban Regina
9. Calgary	- A very large drop-in centre that is converted to an emergency shelter each night, accommodating over 100 men and women (mostly men) each night (soon to be replaced by a multi-storey building that will offer drop-in, emergency shelter and longer term supportive housing, a range of counselling, job-finding services, etc.
10. Edmonton	- A women's emergency shelter, located on several floors of Edmonton's flat iron building - accommodates about 70 women each night.
11. Vancouver	- A supportive housing project for men and women in downtown Vancouver that also acts as sponsor and conduit for several long-term group house projects
12. Victoria	- A drop in centre for men and women that converts to emergency shelter each night (mostly men)

The approach used in the case studies was to carry out structured one-on-one interviews with management and front-line staff at each of the case study sites and to conduct a focus group discussion with homeless clients at each of the sites. In total, 48 staff members were interviewed and 114 homeless clients participated in the focus group discussions. This report is based on the materials collected through the staff interviews, focus group discussions with homeless clients and general observations made during the site visits.

2. AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT

A key part of the research was to identify in which areas the sites involved their homeless clients. Specific areas of involvement that were identified by staff interviewees and homeless clients that were used at the particular site included:

- Board/Committees
- Policy input/consultations
- Work - volunteer or paid, part/full-time
- Research/Evaluation
- Building development/design/renovations
- Creative activities
- Community projects
- Training/mentorship

The types of client involvement used by each of the 12 study site agencies are shown in Table 2, below.

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TABLE 2 - CLIENT INVOLVEMENT APPROACHES BY SITE

✓=as identified by staff ★=as identified by clients

←client approaches used →

SITE ↓	Board/ Committees*	Policy input/ consultations/ planning	Work - vol., part/full-time	Research/ Evaluation	Building development/ design/ renovations	Creative activities	Community projects	Training/ mentorship
Halifax		✓	✓★		✓			
Frederickton	✓★	✓★	✓★		✓★			✓
Trois-Rivières	✓★	✓★	✓★	✓★		✓★		✓★
Montréal	✓★	✓★	✓★	✓★		✓★		✓★
Toronto	✓★	✓★	✓★			✓	✓	
Hamilton			✓★					
Winnipeg		✓★		✓★		✓		
Regina								✓
Calgary		✓★	✓★		✓★			
Edmonton	✓		✓★		✓	✓	✓	
Vancouver	✓★	✓★	✓★			✓★	✓★	
Victoria	✓		✓★					✓★

* As discussed below, the Board/Committee involvement is most often at the 'lower level' committee level, e.g. client committees and *ad hoc* committees without direct Board connections. Thus, the fact that seven organizations are listed as using Board/Committee involvement approaches should not be seen as a high level of commitment to involvement in the governance area. Rather, it is an area with considerable potential for growth.

Staff identified the areas of client involvement in their particular agency through the one-on-one interviews, clients through the focus group discussion held at each of the sites. Discrepancy between staff and client identifications does not mean that either group is being inaccurate. The reasons for discrepancies are more likely related to the fact that the 10 or so randomly selected client group participants may not have had full knowledge of the agency's client involvement approaches. At most sites, several key staff members were interviewed, including the Executive Director. Taken together then, the staff interviewees would more likely have a comprehensive sense of the agency and its client involvement approaches. Of key importance, however, is the fact that clients were *always* aware of the involvement approach of volunteer or paid work when this approach was used in the particular agency.

2.1 Discussion on Areas of Involvement

The information in Table 2 is based on data collected during site staff interviews and the homeless client discussion groups. In order to get a clearer sense of what this information means, it is necessary to discuss each of the areas of involvement in some detail. This section discusses each of the areas in terms of the eight column headings used in Table 2.

2.1.1 Boards/Committees

One of the key arguments regarding client involvement is that, to be effective, it must include involvement in the actual governance structure of the agency. This provides two important types of opportunities for clients: (i) the opportunity to influence the decision-making process in the organization in ways that are oriented towards the directly perceived needs of the clients themselves; (ii) the opportunity to develop the skills required to be an active board or committee member.

Although Table 2 indicates that seven of the 12 sites involves clients in its boards and/or committees, in fact very few involve clients as members of the board of directors. Most of the seven involve clients at lower level committee levels. The three organizations that involve clients on their boards of directors are those in Trois Rivières (a drop-in and shelter), Montreal (an outreach paper) and Toronto (a supported housing development). In the case of the former two, clients and past clients make up a majority of board members and on committees of the board. In the case of Toronto, two clients sit on the board of directors of the organization. In all three of these organizations, there is a strong commitment to the involvement of clients on boards and committees. In all three cases, there is a sense of a continuum that goes from volunteer to board involvement, where the early immersion in the culture of the organization takes place whilst being involved in a program volunteer capacity.¹ In two cases, i.e. Halifax and

¹The concept of continua of involvement is further developed in Section 2.7 below.

Vancouver, there had been clients on the boards of directors in the past, but different approaches were now being taken. In both cases, it was felt that having clients on the board is problematic and that the push to include homeless clients on boards that had been so popular in the 1980s had been something of a failure, leading to tokenism rather than genuine participation. In the case of the Winnipeg site (a youth shelter), there has been some thought of including clients on the board and, as an alternative, a Youth Advisory Committee.

"We tried to set up a Youth Advisory Committee but it didn't work. The youth live day to day." (Staff member, Winnipeg.)

However, since this is a youth serving agency, there is particular concern that it may not work because of the high transiency of clients and because of the generally high level of difficulty in including young people in agency governance structures.

With the exception of the three agencies that continue to be committed to involvement of clients on their boards, the general tendency appears to be that boards are moving more towards the so-called Carver model of board structures, i.e. boards that are largely hands-off and policy development driven, leaving the day-to-day operations of the agency entirely up to the Executive Director. This could be seen to raise problems for agencies working with marginalized people generally, since it makes it more difficult for clients to get to 'the centre' of operations and it reduces the possibilities for personal skill development *within* the organization.²

This situation appears to be something of a reversal of a tendency in the late 1980s and early 1990s to work towards the inclusion of homeless people. Funders, such as the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing insisted on there being some representatives from the homeless or previously homeless community on the boards of non-profits seeking funding for housing projects. However, even though a good number of Ontario non-profit housing providers and providers of other services to homeless people did place homeless and previously homeless people on their boards, there was very little developmental and support work that went into ensuring that the new members were effective and into making them feel 'at home' in the board meeting and committee environment. The recruitment seldom went anywhere beyond tokenism. Consequently, many of these agencies now have few, if any homeless and previously homeless people on their boards.³ The fact that the newly recruited clients seldom got fully involved, missed meetings, etc., became the argument for why it did not 'work' and agencies lost interest. Embracing the 'Carver model' became a further reason for losing interest in involving clients at the Board level. This may well be a misreading of Carver, he does not insist on 'experts' on

²See John Carver (1990) *Boards that Make A Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Non-profit and Public Organizations* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass pp 203-204. The writer's view is that the Carver model is fine for non-profits that are in the areas of the arts, etc. but that it can be an obstacle to client involvement in non-profits working to ameliorate the lot of marginalized people.

³ Of course, the fact that there is no longer provincial funding for the development of new non-profit housing in Ontario has removed a major incentive from agencies to involve their clients at the board level.

Boards - in fact he argues against expertise as a key criterion for choosing board members - however the 'normal wisdom' in social agencies has been to see a Carver approach as being one that has a Board made up of various 'experts' who are able to apply their special expertise (e.g. legal, financial) within the system and context of the particular agency. Generally, clients are seen as not having this expertise. Several key staff interviewed in this project spoke of the move towards a Carver model as inimical to client involvement. An example of this is the statement of the Director of a women's shelter, interviewed in this project.

"Boards tend to give a lot of lip service to client involvement and client input. They tend to be very patronizing. They'll say things like "does someone want to move that?" and the client that knows the signal will be to say "yes". To make it work you have to provide a lot of support and information beforehand. Even then, it's very difficult for clients to participate at the same level that others participate. So often, it's not a full and productive relationship for them. It's so difficult to speak up in a board setting. When recruiting clients for this, you need to recruit those with some skills and knowledge of how boards and committees work. They need coaching prior to the meetings re what questions to ask, what to think about, etc. Part of the problem is that there's the need for a support person to do this but if that's a staff person at, say, board meetings then there are all sorts of problems re conflicts, etc. Clients really have to build a trust relationship too. And, as more and more Boards go to a Carver approach then it gets tougher to involve clients."

There is then, relatively little client involvement at the actual board level. In fact this appears to have declined in recent years across the 12 sites, some having previous experience with clients on boards but having moved away from that approach, mostly for the reasons previously given. The more common experience of the sites is for the governance involvement to be primarily at the client committee level.⁴ At the Fredericton site, an emergency shelter for men, the major committee involvement is through the 'family meetings' which are held every six weeks and all residents then in the shelter are expected to attend⁵. The Executive Director describes those meetings and what comes out of them as follows:

"I tell them what we're about and what we expect from them. It's their home and we expect certain types of behaviour. We talk about issues and possible changes. If I come back from a board meeting with a suggested change, we have a family meeting the next day to discuss it. We've had a lot of changes come out of those meetings when people have said "let's change such and such" Sometimes, if it's a big policy change, I take it to the board first before making the change. Some examples of changes that came out of family meeting discussions include:

- We had a pay phone and you could not call in. So we phoned NBTel and they put in a two-way line so that we could receive incoming calls.*
- After the early part of the month, no one has money for phone calls, so why not a phone with a long distance block? So we have that kind of phone here now.*
- We used to have two 60 gallon hot water tanks. When a guy came in he had to have a cold shower. I got us fixed up with a 1000 gallon tank at the Health Centre next door and now we don't run out of hot water.*
- There used to be no air conditioner. The guys complained. We went to the board and got money to install air conditioning and an exhaust fan."*

⁴It is recognized that some of this discussion could also appear in the following section on policy/consultations/planning. As will be apparent throughout, the boundaries between any of the eight involvement area categories are permeable. In the real world of agency work, day-to-day practices overlap considerably with longer-term governance and planning issues.

⁵ Although little interest in becoming board members was generally shown among clients involved in the discussion groups, two participants at the Fredericton site expressed an interest in sitting on that particular Board of Directors.

The Halifax site used to hold similar client meetings on a regular basis, but has stopped doing so in recent months because they became too stressful, i.e. they tended to be dominated by a few outspoken clients. As a client in the Halifax client discussion group put it:

"There used to be weekly resident meetings up until about two and a half months ago. We discussed issues and helped make decisions on how to run the place. They don't have them now because of some of the tensions that came up."

The Toronto site has a long tradition of what they refer to as Town Council Meetings. These meetings are held every two weeks and are open to all residents at the supported housing site. Some years ago, the residents would elect a 'Mayor' of the council but this is not done now. This tradition of Town Councils has been carried over from an earlier supported housing site operated by the same agency. Currently about 25% of the total tenant population (70) typically attend these meetings. They are seen by staff to provide suggestions for how the space within the building may be used and input on policy decisions regarding the operation of the building. A recent "hot issue" being taken up by the Town Council is the number of overnight visitors a tenant should be allowed each month. There appears to be some difference in the way staff and tenants perceive the effectiveness of the Town Council. Staff see it as an effective mechanism for tenant input whereas tenants involved in the focus group discussion for this study said they felt that the Town Council meetings were actually run by staff.

Meetings on a much smaller scale appear to be more effective at the Toronto site. The housing is built within the framework of what was previously an industrial building. Within the shell of the old building, 11 'houses' have been constructed. Each of these accommodates between five and seven people. Each person has their own private room and then shares kitchen and washroom facilities with the other members of the particular 'house'. Each of these houses has its house meetings on a regular basis. At these meetings, the very immediate issues of living together are dealt with. There are also several frequently held, small-scale meetings that are held to discuss the part-time work involvement at the Toronto site. This will be discussed further in the section on work.

At the Edmonton site, a large women's shelter, clients have monthly meetings dealing with day-to-day issues. Staff post a suggested agenda prior to these meetings and clients are encouraged to add items. Staff do not attend these meetings but take into consideration recommendations coming out of them. *Ad hoc* client committees have been created to work on specific issues. On one occasion a group of clients was brought together over the issue of a number of used needles being found in the building. This client group worked with staff to develop a harm reduction policy around the needle issue and a safe disposal needle box was installed. Of the ten focus group participants at the Edmonton site, none had experience of involvement in committee work in the agency and all indicated an interest in being so involved. There was a particularly high level of interest among the members of this group in being involved in an ongoing client committee. One participant stated: "We need to have more discussion groups that will get clients involved."

The Calgary clients involved in the focus group discussion lamented the fact that there was not a client committee and would welcome the creation of such a forum.

Up until fairly recently, the Vancouver site had a number of client committees, however the Board has disbanded most of these. The goal of the Board and staff had been to create a highly tolerant environment by virtue of these client committees. However, the committees were acting like "kangaroo courts" and creating an intolerant environment.

"We work with very high needs people. At first we had a lot of client committees, but we were kidding people, because we wanted a very tolerant environment and the client committees weren't tolerant. So we helped to develop a tolerant environment where people were not kicked out. We allow (encourage) people to be supportive of each other. Intolerance rises very quickly if you don't deal with it." (Staff member, Vancouver site)

Since this site, housing for the so-called 'hard to house', also has a zero evictions policy, client committees with a tendency to want to evict fellow-tenants were problematic and, therefore, were disbanded.⁶

An important strategic direction taken by the Vancouver site is its becoming the official 'conduit' through which funding comes for several other organizations working with homeless and marginalized people. The Vancouver site organization, acts as a 'middle man' between funders and its several satellite agencies. These latter agencies are not considered sufficiently stable organizationally to receive funding directly. One of these agencies is a project that provides group-home-type housing for low-income psychiatric survivors. This agency involves its clients in a number of committees, particularly at the level of the individual house. This enables the Vancouver site to be indirectly involved with relatively "permissive" *ad hoc* client groups. The term "permissive" is meant to refer to those client groups that are relatively tolerant of difference, in contrast to groups that are likely to allow only those to participate who are like themselves, e.g. in terms of race, beliefs, sexual orientation, etc. It should also be pointed out that the client group in the group homes is not so severely marginalized as those at the Vancouver site itself.

At the Victoria site, a drop-in centre, clients are frequently brought together for 'Street Meetings'. Items discussed at these meetings include policy issues around the running of the drop-in as well as larger community issues affecting clients. For example, meetings have recently been held over the issue of panhandling in that city. Deliberations coming out of the meeting on this particular topic were relayed to City Council by the Executive Director. Although clients of the Victoria site are not represented on the Board of Directors (another

⁶This issue gets to the heart of client involvement on boards and committees, particularly when there is a mismatch between the agency's policy and the 'normal wisdom' of the client population. This can happen in either direction, i.e. when a permissive organizational policy clashes with restrictive client philosophies, or when restrictive organizational policies clash with permissive client philosophies. There are cases of both types of situations within the 12 sites. A related issue is that of the degree of 'marginality' of the client group.

organization that has accepted the so-called Carver model), they are involved in strategic planning sessions with the board and staff members.

With a few notable exceptions, i.e., Toronto, Montréal and Trois Rivières sites, there is little client participation at the Board of Directors level but some participation in informal committees at the client level, most of these committees being specifically for client input. There were no examples among the 12 sites of clients sitting on standing or *ad hoc* committees of the Board which are largely seen in the same light as the Board itself, i.e. they are integral parts of the mechanism of governance. *Ad hoc* committees of the Board would seem to be an opportunity for considerable client involvement that is largely untried. However, at most of the 12 sites, *ad hoc* committees are seldom, if ever, used and the Standing Committees tend to comprise only Board members.

Ad hoc committees do provide a useful mechanism for cross-agency involvement, i.e., clients, staff, board members and community representatives are involved.. There are some few examples of this happening in areas of policy development. In the case of the Toronto site, the Mediation Committees are of an *ad hoc* nature, i.e. they are struck to deal with a specific issue and they disband once the issue has been resolved (or not). The Mediation Committees are also cross-agency in membership and thus a direct line to the Board of Directors.⁷ Clients are involved in *ad hoc* committees at the Edmonton site, but these particular *ad hoc* committees have no direct structural connection to the board.

2.1.2 Policy Input/Consultations/Planning

As indicated in Table 2, eight of the 12 sites involve clients in the areas of policy input, consultations and/or planning. However, since very few have clients involved at the board level, much of this input is at the lower level of the organization and relates to short-term program planning and/or policies on day-to-day issues such as opening and closing times, barring policies, etc.

Clients at these eight sites, as indicated by the client focus group discussions, confirm their involvement, through regular, special, or informal meetings in the following kinds of policy input/consultation/planning activities:

- Discussing issues re how the agency is run in regular client meetings.
- Special meetings around issues that arise in the shelter.
- Through board involvement.
- Planning community meetings.
- Through involvement in small functional meetings, e.g. re meals, cooking, mediation.
- Involved in discussion groups and surveys organized by the agency.
- Involved in discussions with public health re STDs.
- Involved in small-scale house meetings to plan meals, etc.

⁷The Toronto site Mediation Committees were seen as problematic by several of the clients involved in the focus group discussion. They were characterized as the location of "strong staff-tenant tensions" regarding the identification of what should be mediation issues.

The Halifax site is in the process of developing an exit interview approach for those leaving the women's shelter. It is expected that the results of the interviews will lead directly into policy development at the Board level. The Halifax site also uses client surveys and focus group discussions to get input on policy development. An example of policy change at the Halifax site relates to an action that was taken by staff and was then ratified as a better way of doing things by the clients. This particular case was explained by the Executive Director as follows:

*"There are some opportunities for clients to influence policy over issues such as theft. For example, we now lock the bedroom doors from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. because we could not get people up in the morning. With this new approach several clients felt safer because their belongings in the rooms are less likely to be stolen. Because of the positive reaction to the bedroom locking we continue to do it. And there is less theft. The women said we like it this way, so we left it that way."*⁸

The day-to-day policy changes coming out of client meetings at the Fredericton site have already been described above. In both Trois Rivières and Montreal, there is considerable involvement in policy development and planning that happens through board and committee membership. The original idea for the newspaper came out of a client meeting at the Montreal site. In Toronto, the Town Council group makes day-to-day policy decisions⁹ and the two client board members have the opportunity for policy input at the board level. Policy input opportunities at the Hamilton site are very limited, if they exist at all, although some staff felt that clients there do influence policy through informal discussions over "snacks and talks at night." At the Winnipeg site, as stated previously, there were failed attempts to set up a Youth Advisory Committee and there is a prominently displayed 'Suggestion Box' into which suggestions - facetious and otherwise, and often contradictory - are sometimes placed by clients. As with the Vancouver site, some previous consultations with youth at the Winnipeg site have led to suggestions for harsh and unforgiving operating rules and regulations and have, therefore, been ignored. One particularly innovative approach to client consultation and policy input was carried out by the Winnipeg site prior to opening the youth shelter at its current site. The Program Manager described it as follows:

"When we first opened this house as a shelter, we took a group of youth who had used the resource centre and we ran the shelter for two nights with these kids

⁸The locking of the rooms takes place once clients have been woken up and have left the room. They are locked out for the day. The rooms are shared and some clients felt they were being robbed by fellow roomers during the day when they (the robbery victim) was out of the room. If all are out of the room for the day, then clients feel safer about their belongings. Some of the clients were asked about this and they confirmed that they prefer it this way.

⁹There is a difference of opinion on how effective Town Council is in affecting policy at the Toronto site. Several tenants involved in the group discussion expressed the view that Town Council was actually run by and for staff members and that clients have very limited say.

staying here. We would then discuss with them what we did right, what needed changing, etc. We'd ask: 'How did we do that, okay?' They had a lot of input into our shelter operating policies at the outset. It was sort of a two-day trial effort. There were issues around stuff such as, 'Why can't the guys and girls sleep together?'. It didn't affect the main policy outlines much, but there were some good small suggestions such as: 'Don't lock the door at night, just close it,' otherwise it felt like a locked setting, and a lot of the kids have had bad experience with that.. Most of their suggestions were around comfort level, bed times, etc."

The Regina site, a training/education program for homeless First Nations people - a program only several months old - had not yet developed a strategy for including their clients in policy input, consultations or planning. Since the site is closely linked to a number of First Nations initiatives in the same building (a disused Board of Education school), there are a number of opportunities the agency plans to explore in the future. The homelessness initiative program is in the same building as: an employment program; an education and training program; a housing program; a daycare program; a restorative justice program. All these activities are First Nations operated and are aimed primarily at First Nations people. Thus, the likelihood of direct, inter- agency connections that could include working, volunteer and governance involvement opportunities is much greater than if these co-located agencies were geographically separated.

Consultations with clients at the Calgary site (a large drop in centre cum emergency shelter, integrated with a number of housing facilities) tend to be informal, one-on-one discussions with staff members in the drop-in setting. The Calgary site is almost in the completion stages of constructing a large supported housing site immediately adjacent to the drop-in. This site, scheduled to open in September, 2001, will house over 500 homeless people in emergency shelter and supported housing configurations. Clients of the Calgary site were involved in informal consultations regarding the design of this new building and clients have been involved in the past in informal consultations regarding the structure of several transitional houses developed by the same organization. In Vancouver, the client involvement regarding policy input, consultations and planning is primarily in terms of informal back and forth discussions between clients and staff, where staff develop policy and it is modified in light of client feedback.

2.1.3 *Work*

Since almost everyone in modern society earns a living through selling their labour power, inability to be able to do this is one of the major factors that marginalizes people and that keeps them on the margins. Involvement in work then, might be seen as one of the most effective ways for reducing the marginality of homeless people. In terms of involvement in work provided by the organization itself, i.e. in the business of running the organization, this would seem to be a rational approach to providing *real* opportunities for clients. To some extent, this possibility has been recognized for many years. The so-called Club House movement within the psychiatric survivor community sees the provision of work *within* the organization as being one of the major tenets of its philosophy. The Salvation Army has, since its beginnings in late nineteenth century England, seen work *within* (under the rubric of 'work therapy') as an important part of putting its clients on the path leading from the edge.¹⁰ However, many of the work approaches as manifested in the two foregoing examples, have had limited success in terms of moving people from the margins towards the centre of socio-economic life. Involvement in work activities *within* the organization, as envisaged in this particular study on the involvement of homeless clients in the agencies set up to serve them, attempts to go beyond the old 'maintenance on the margins' approach. The approach used is one in which work *within* does become a realistic form of upward social mobility for those living on the margins, specifically those who are clients of agencies providing programs to address homelessness.

In terms of the focus group discussions with client groups at the 12 sites, work was the most frequent kind of involvement (beyond being a user of services) identified. The kinds of work involvement identified is brought together in Table 3.

¹⁰ A useful discussion of how the 'work therapy' approach was little more than exploitation forms a major theme in Jacqueline Wiseman's (1970) *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. The book is a classic ethnographic study of 'skid row' in Los Angeles

**TABLE 3
TYPES OF WORK INVOLVEMENT IDENTIFIED BY
CLIENT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

SITE	TYPES OF WORK INVOLVEMENT
Halifax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleaning - dishwashing - cooking
Fredericton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleaning - maintenance - security - counselling - renovations - shelter staff
Trois-Rivières	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - writing - kitchen work - relief worker
Montréal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sales - kitchen work - writing - counselling
Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleaning - maintenance - housing staff - kitchen work - dishwashing
Hamilton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deliveries
Winnipeg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - peripherally involved in, e.g. dishwashing
Regina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - peripherally involved in, e.g. cleaning, cooking
Calgary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleaning - kitchen work - setting up shelter beds
Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleaning

SITE	TYPES OF WORK INVOLVEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - kitchen work - counselling - outreach work - translation - orientation of newcomers
Vancouver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - newsletter development - gardening - peer support - recreation coordinating - outreach work
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - office work - counselling - cleaning - outreach work

For clients then, work involvement in the agency was mostly, but not exclusively, in the unskilled and semi-skilled areas, such as cleaning, maintenance and kitchen work. Key, in terms of work as involvement (particularly as opportunity) is whether or not the experience leads to full-time work within the agency. As discussed below, there are several sites where this does occur. In most of the client focus group discussions, a number of participants indicated that they would be interested in taking on full-time work with the agency. Overall, work as involvement can be seen in at least three forms as utilized by the study sites, these are unpaid work (i.e. volunteering), paid part-time work and paid full-time work. Ten of the 12 sites involve clients in work, as indicated in Table 2.

In Halifax, the work carried out is of a part-time paid nature and is formalized through the Chore Club. The work includes vacuuming, cleaning, helping in the kitchen, grocery shopping and office work. Chores that require completion are posted each day and interested clients carry out the chores for a small honorarium. Clients can earn a maximum \$17.25 per week through the Chore Club. At the end of each week, each person that has carried out chores in that week is eligible for a ten dollar draw. Site staff see this work as providing opportunities to earn some money and to learn new skills.

In Fredericton, all shelter residents are expected to be involved in the daily clean up of the premises. This is voluntary work insofar as it is unpaid. It is, however, mandatory to help out. The pressure to conform is largely peer pressure. The site has recently expanded to include a women's shelter. This shelter is located in a house several blocks distant. The house required substantial renovations. The successful bidder for the renovations contract was a shelter resident. He also hired another shelter resident. Thus, two residents were hired for full time work. A hiring policy in place at the Fredericton site is to hire staff from among the client population. Currently two full-time and one part-time shelter worker are previous clients.

In Trois Rivières and Montréal clients and ex clients form the bulk of the workforce whether it be volunteer, part-time or full-time. They work in the areas of journalism, sales, kitchen and laundry work, building maintenance, computer operating and counselling. The line between services and activities is blurred at these two agencies.¹¹

In Toronto, one full-time staff member - a Community Support Worker - is an ex-client and a large number of clients are involved in part-time, paid work. This work includes janitorial, kitchen work, and maintenance work, most of which is carried on inside the site building itself, although some is carried out in other housing and shelter buildings that are projects under the umbrella of the same organization.

In Hamilton, clients are encouraged to volunteer in carrying out cleaning and kitchen work and, occasionally, they will be taken on as casual workers. The payment in this latter case is through a reduction in the charge for a bed for the night at the shelter. There have been a few cases of ex-clients who have gone through a training program and have come back to take on part-time work at the shelter, e.g., in the area of addictions counselling. Of the volunteer pool of 200 people that the agency picks from to work on its overnight soup van, an estimated five are clients or ex-clients. One of the Hamilton site's sources of funds is renting out parking space behind the building when there are events on at the nearby Coliseum. Client volunteers are often involved in running this initiative.

¹¹ The distinction is made here between 'services' as something *done for* someone else, whereas 'activities' are *done with*. In the first instance there is a clear service provider and a clear service recipient. In the second instance it is people doing things *together*, as equals. The 'done for' approach is the 'service ethic' on which much of the work with marginalized people is based. Critics such as John McKnight characterize this as dependency-creating activity. The 'done with' approach starts off from a base of equality, a belief that 'we are all in this together'. (See John H. McKnight (1995) *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits* New York: Basic Books). The writer's view is that the *done with* approach holds within it fewer possibilities for the development of 'us and them' (i.e. staff and clients) situations. One of the major challenges of the *done for* approach is having clients *doing for* while 'power tripping' at the expense of people who were once peers. Activities - the *done with* approach - don't have quite the same challenge.

At the Calgary site, clients volunteer on a regular basis to do odd jobs in the kitchen, cleaning or in maintenance. There is a policy of looking out for those who volunteer as potential future staff and some of these will be offered contract positions funded through a provincial employment program. The agency has created three new positions in the past few years that have been filled by ex-clients. These positions are as 'Adult Care Workers' who provide direct service to clients at the agency. This includes food, showers, provision of personal hygiene products, a mail service and storage service. The man currently working as the agency's computer technician is an ex-client who was hired five years ago, using the above approach. Eight men currently employed as security staff as the new multi-storey housing building is being constructed next door are clients of the site. The Calgary site sees this approach as a continuum of involvement. This is captured in the following quote.

"The usual process is, someone says, 'Hey can I help out in the kitchen?'. We mostly say 'yes', unless they have some serious problems. Some move very quickly from government support on to our work program. Of our 72 staff, 12 came in as hostel users." (Staff member, Calgary site)

Calgary clients involved in the discussion group expressed the view that the client hiring policy had led to an organization that is closer to client concerns.

In Edmonton, the site is one of many projects under a wider organizational umbrella that brings together downtown churches to provide food, housing, shelter, medical and support programs for children, youth, and adults. The work experience at this particular site, a women's shelter, is primarily of a voluntary nature, i.e. clients can help with clean up, in the kitchen, etc. The policy has become more restrictive around having clients help out since a client who was mopping fell and hurt herself in the 1980s and attempted to sue the agency. This has discouraged the organization from hiring clients. However, several ex clients have been hired in the past as full time workers and the experience has been positive. The current policy is that a client has to have been a non-client for at least two years before applying for a job with the organization.

Clients in the Edmonton discussion group pointed out that they are involved in a range of informal voluntary work activities, including cleaning up, outreach to other homeless women, assistance to deaf clients, and helping newcomers understand the way the agency works. These clients felt their voluntary work was key to making the agency relevant to the needs of its clients. This was particularly apparent in the statement made by one of the Edmonton client focus group participants:

"I sometimes carry disabled people upstairs when the elevator is not working."

Interestingly, the volunteer policy at the Edmonton site is to have clients volunteer in the wider community in preference to *within* the agency. The argument is that within agency approaches tend to cut clients off from the wider world, isolating them from a range of potential opportunities that may come with 'community networking'.

In Vancouver there is a kitchen and a laundromat that is run by clients and one of the cooks is a client. Several of the agencies that are 'arms length' from the Vancouver site encourage clients to work in a voluntary and paid capacity. In one case the Executive Director is a client. In one of the Vancouver site's housing projects, several positions paying honoraria are occupied by clients. Two of these are with the Activity Program, two are outreach positions that assist people in claiming their benefits, and one is as a fundraiser. Each of these positions pays \$200 per month.

In Victoria, the emphasis is on volunteering and part-time work. Of the 50 regular volunteers that help out at the agency, the majority is made up of clients. In some ways this agency is reminiscent of many of the agencies in Canada that serve well seniors (i.e. seniors' centres and multi-service centres with a seniors programming component) in that there is considerable overlap between the categories of service user (or member) and volunteer. This is captured in the statement of one of the Victoria staff interviewees: "This place wouldn't be possible without the volunteers." In addition, the Victoria site offers part-time work that is paid on an hourly basis. This work may be accompanying one of the staff members on outreach work to the streets of the city or it may be carrying out administrative work. One of the full-time staff members at the Victoria site is an ex client, he said:

"I worked here part-time for four months. They were pleased with how I picked up on the computer, cleaning, etc. So they offered me a full-time job."

2.1.4 Research/Evaluation

Relatively few organizations involve clients in research and/or evaluation activities. As noted above, Halifax is in the process of developing an exit interview for clients leaving the agency. To some extent, this could be considered an evaluation activity involving clients. Trois Rivières and Montreal sites both involve clients in research and needs assessment work. Often this is directly related to writing articles for the respective community newspapers. In Winnipeg, the previously mentioned 'up-front' evaluation on the most effective way for running a youth shelter was an important initiative involving clients. The Winnipeg site has also been host to a youth group (some of whom were previous clients) carrying out an evaluation process in the summer of 2000 as the federally-funded Youth Strategy Group. This agency was also host to the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw in 2000, where a discussion group evaluating different approaches to youth homelessness was attended by several clients. Three members of the Winnipeg focus group discussion noted that they had previously been involved in "discussion groups and

surveys, like this one.” In essence the research/evaluation approach to involving clients has been used very little, if at all, by the 12 study sites. This is of particular interest to the project researcher who has hired homeless people on many occasions as research assistants and who has found this to be a fairly successful way of providing opportunities to escape marginality. This experience is discussed more fully in Section 2.7.4 below.

2.1.5 Building Development/Design/Renovations

The development, design and renovating of buildings to house facilities and to provide shelter for homeless people would seem to be obvious approaches to involving clients for at least two reasons: (i) they provide a range of work opportunities that could be transferred to the wider community; (ii) many of the skills required are skills with which people on the margins of the labour market have some experience - e.g. construction labourers, carpenters helpers, etc.;(iii) most of the agencies providing services to homeless clients are directly or indirectly involved with building development, design and renovations. Four of the sites are currently involving clients in some aspect of building.

The Halifax site is looking at expansion of its projects to include a site that will provide 16 housing units for women and families. If they acquire the funding, they will be in the business of renovating a school building to become these 16 housing units. They will be hiring a contractor who will be required to hire and train clients as part of the renovations workforce.

As previously noted, the Fredericton site has already hired a client as contractor to convert a residential home into a women’s shelter. The skilled renovator client has also hired another client as an assistant on this project. These two clients were involved in the focus group discussion in Fredericton. Also, as previously noted, clients at the Calgary site have been involved in design discussions for the new building being completed next door to the drop-in centre. At the Edmonton site, clients are involved in the development and design of buildings and when they hire building contractors, they insist on hiring what they refer to as ‘inner city’ people.

2.1.6 *Creative Activities*

Creative activities go beyond the regular Maslowian sense of what homeless people need for survival, i.e. food, shelter and security. It recognizes that meaning sometimes comes from more than the mundane realities of day-to-day life. The notion of creative activities as a form of client involvement is often something that really creeps into an organization by the back door rather than the conscious creature of agency policy. Thus, creative activities as involvement are often serendipitous. There are six of the 12 sites where creative activity has been a route to client involvement. In the first two cases, Trois Rivières and Montréal, this is conscious because the sites are largely focused around creative activities, particularly the former as a community paper, but the latter too, since a community paper is an important part of what the Montréal site does. Certainly it is a pathway into involvement at both locations. In these two locations, the creative activity is primarily writing.

In the case of Toronto the creative activity has been incorporated into the programming for clients and is manifested in an arts and crafts program and an annual activity that produces Christmas cards. In Winnipeg and Edmonton, the creative activity is something that particular clients have taken on themselves. In the former case, a young Native man has sketched a wilderness scene that takes pride of place in the kitchen. In the latter, an ambitious mural covers the wall of the ground floor entrance way to the women's shelter. In both these cases, the clients' creativity has led to a greater sense of ownership for clients generally. They point to these pieces of work with pride. It is done by one of their peers. In Vancouver, clients are publishing a book of their poetry and are in the process of developing a compact disc of their own songs, and the lobby of the main building houses a sculpture done by a client. That particular client will be happy to tell anyone with an interest about what the sculpture represents. Finally, several Vancouver clients are involved in a street banner design program to decorate and 'brand' the local streets.

The incorporation of creative activities as an involvement avenue has to go beyond the trap of simple 'time filling' for clients. Much like work that can be non-empowering, if approached in the 'sheltered workshop' sense, creative activities can become simply a way of keeping idle hands busy. However, they can become a foundation for much more. Creative activities can, for example, include involvement in reading and discussion groups, an area in which Earl Shorris has been something of a pioneer in working with marginalized people in urban America.¹² His Humanities 101 courses for marginalized people have been important ways in to empowerment for many. A similar Humanities 101 course has been set up in Vancouver as a joint project of the Downtown East Residents Association (DERA) and the University of British Columbia.

¹² See Earl Shorris (2000) *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities* New York: W.W. Norton and Company

2.1.7 Community Projects

Three sites are locations where client involvement happens through community projects. The Toronto site has garden space to the south of the building. Clients are able to lease a small plot for \$10 per year and several grow vegetables in these plots. Several clients at the Vancouver site are involved in a community garden and are growing vegetables for the first time in their lives. In Vancouver too, a joint client-resident group organized a cabaret night. A group of clients at the Edmonton site came together spontaneously to develop crafts for fundraising purposes. The Edmonton site policy of encouraging clients to become involved in community activities could also be considered a community project approach. In housing projects under the same organizational umbrella as the women's shelter, major aspects of staff work are in the area of community development and this leads to client involvement in activities such as a jobs bartering service, a food bank and in a service that provides help to sex trade workers.

2.1.8 Training/Mentorship

Several of the sites are creating pathways to training opportunities for their clients. In one particular case, Fredericton, a mentorship program is being developed. Working together with a placement student, the Fredericton site is developing a structure for partnering people who work and live in Fredericton with clients at the site. It is planned that the mentor group will initially be drawn from the membership of a local church congregation that has shown an interest. The intention is to have the partnerships first develop in informal situations such as on the basketball court. The Fredericton site has a recreation program that brings clients to a local basketball court on a regular basis. The plan is to concentrate first on getting some of the younger clients involved in the program.

The underlying assumption driving the Fredericton program is: (i) one of the major factors that keeps people on the margins is the fact that they have few, if any connections, with people closer to 'the centre'; (ii) by bringing marginalized people together with people closer to the centre, linkages will be formed that will lead to opportunities. The most obvious way in which this may happen is through 'Fred' from the emergency shelter getting to know 'Bill', who owns a small construction business in town. Bill needs someone to work on one of his sites and, now that he knows 'Fred' as a person rather than as a stereotyped shelter residents, he may be willing to offer him work. Other, more subtle connections, may be made. An example would be finding out that a shelter resident was illiterate but had been too shy to let anyone know. In such a case, a local citizen may become aware and help this individual become connected with a local literacy program. A mentoring program, such as the one Fredericton is creating, recognizes that the most effective connections are made informally rather than through formal channels and programs. (For example, many students get summer jobs because they or their parents 'know somebody'.)

The backbone of the Trois Rivières site is the training of clients in the newspaper area and in learning work skills that can be used in the wider organization. In this case training and involvement go together. This is also the case with the Montréal project, where training in journalism and other aspects of the community newspaper business is central as well as training in intervention work.

The Regina program is primarily a training initiative, raising awareness particularly for First Nations people on ways to escape or stay out of economic marginality, through finding work, housing and support services. The fact that the program is taught in the centre of a cluster of programs aimed at the needs of low-income First Nations people - housing programs, employment programs, restorative justice programs, etc. means that the training can be readily utilized.

At the Victoria site, the part-time work is seen very much as a training opportunity that may eventually lead to full-time work, either within the organization or in the wider community. The outreach program in particular is used as a training opportunity. One participant in the Victoria discussion group had made a link with a college training opportunity through the site and is now a qualified youth counsellor.

2.2 What Works Best in Terms of Successful Client Involvement

Agency respondents were asked which of the areas of client involvement they used was most successful. The most frequent responses from staff interviewees are brought together in Table 4.

**TABLE 4 - SUCCESSFUL CLIENT INVOLVEMENT
ACCORDING TO AGENCY PERSONNEL**

AREA OF INVOLVEMENT*	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Cleaning/maintenance work	7
Using volunteer work as the entry point to paid work	6
Opportunities to provide opinions - e.g. informal meetings, <i>ad hoc</i> committees	6
Food oriented work - kitchen, cooking, etc.	4
Situations where those involved are frequently told they're doing a good job	3
Work with obvious end goals - e.g. deliveries	3
First find the individual's interest and then link with an activity that furthers this	2
Work that makes people feel involved in the project	2
Expectations must be flexible	2
Something that relates directly to a personal situation - e.g. birthday celebrations, baptisms	2

*It is recognized that these areas are not mutually exclusive.

Cleaning and maintenance work were the areas of successful involvement most frequently identified. This is seen as being a reflection of the likely work skills and experience of clients. The use of volunteer work as the entry point to paid work was often seen to be the most effective approach to involvement. This provides opportunities for clients to become familiar with the nature of the work prior to becoming committed. Food-oriented work is also seen as being an area of reasonably high client involvement success.

In terms of involvement in governance activities, most felt that board involvement was relatively unsuccessful, (the Trois Rivières project was the one exception), but the more informal involvements such as *ad hoc* committees and informal meetings were seen as being relatively successful approaches by several. The remainder of responses could be seen as a plea for taking an approach that is highly informed about the individual client's particular interests and abilities, i.e. the need for identifiable and reachable goals, the need to link with the particular client's interests, the need to provide a real sense of involvement with the particular project, and the need to have expectations that are flexible. One staff respondent at the Fredericton site stated:

"You can't expect homeless people to perform the same as someone who is not homeless. You can't have 'business-type' expectations."

And a staff respondent from the Calgary site noted:

"The challenge is to find work where people don't have high expectations. That's why the internal jobs work."

And:

"It's more the individual than the particular area."

When participants in the client focus groups were asked in what areas of the agency's work they would like to be involved, they responded as indicated in Table 5.

**TABLE 5 ASPECTS OF AN AGENCY'S WORK IN WHICH
CLIENTS WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED**

SITE	ASPECTS IN WHICH CLIENTS WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED
Halifax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - painting - gardening - renovations - office work - babysitting
Fredericton	- Outreach talks
Trois-Rivières	- Current involvement sufficient
Montréal	- Organizing
Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In staff meetings - More say over staff's work
Hamilton	- Clients take on more of the jobs as staff leave
Winnipeg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full-time work here - On the Board of Directors - Client discussion groups
Regina	- On the Board of Directors
Calgary	- Administrative work
Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translating - Kitchen work - Resource centre 'librarian' - Counselling - Care giver - Janitorial - Administrative/secretarial - Life skills - Maintenance - Life skills teaching
Vancouver	- More knowledge of how place is run
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On Board of Directors - Outreach work - Counselling

Overwhelmingly, the interest is in the work area, although at three locations - Winnipeg, Regina and Victoria- the client focus group participants spoke of an interest in being on the agency's Board of Directors.

2.3 Knowing When Clients Are Ready for Involvement

It is important for agency staff to have some way of identifying which clients may be 'more ready' for involvement. In order to get a sense of this, one of the questions asked of agency personnel was if there is anything they look for in a client before inviting him/her to become involved. Table 6, below provides the characteristics sought when staff are identifying clients who may be ready for involvement.

**TABLE 6 - IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS
FOR SUCCESSFUL CLIENT INVOLVEMENT**

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Motivated, self-starters, people who go ahead and help out of their own accord	10
Those whose lives are relatively uncomplicated and running smoothly	8
Those who demonstrate some of their own successes*	5
Those with the skills to match the needs we have	5
The people who have been around for a while	3
The non-judgmental ones	3
Need for money	2
We would involve anybody, we see the involvement itself as the opportunity	2

* i.e. clients who are seen to follow through on plans they have verbalized to agency staff.

The most common response was that agency personnel tend to look for those clients who are most obviously motivated to do something for themselves and/or the agency. It may be something as simple as picking up a broom and sweeping a room out. It may be something more complicated, such as coming into the office and offering to help out.

"Motivation is what I look for mostly. But maybe I really don't look for anything. Because if I get picky, I'm going to eliminate a lot of people. The simple fact that they're here and have been for some time, staff can give some input. I may say 'tell me about this person, what do you think about him working here? etc.?' And by not grilling a person you're sending a message. I make an assessment on what I see in front of me. I'm dealing with the here and now, not what happened in the past." (Staff member, Calgary site.)

And:

"Maybe it's people who have come to me and said, 'It would be really good if we could do such and such.' There's a natural evolution of involvement. If someone has sat on a couch for six months and hears we're hiring and he gives me his resume, I think 'Oh come on. What have you done?'" (Staff member, Fredericton site.)

Many agency respondents are reluctant to involve clients with high levels of addictions or mental health problems. They prefer to involve those clients whose lives are running relatively smoothly. They see problem clients as potentially more disruptive if they become more involved in agency activities. Others see involvement for such clients as an opportunity for gradual growth.

"I look to those without mental health problems and I do it steadily, with short tasks, rather than putting a load on them all at once." (Staff member Calgary site.)

Some clients are seen by agency personnel as 'better bets' for involvement because they demonstrate their own successes through, e.g. getting work on their own or through following through on some plan they have previously verbalized. An example of this would be someone who has said he/she is going to start getting up earlier in the morning to search for work. If the person actually follows through and does that, this becomes an indicator of possible involvement success. If it does not go beyond the talk stage, then this is a valuable clue that success is unlikely at this point.¹³ These relatively self-driven clients are seen as likely leading towards greater involvement success. In some cases, the involvement comes about because certain clients

¹³ A common way of coping with long-term socio-economic marginality is to make unrealistic statements regarding one's past triumphs and future possibilities. The more often such statements are made without any really concrete evidence or follow up, the more likely the statements are untrue both about the past and the future possibilities.

are known to have the skills that the agency requires. At the Toronto site, for example, a client involved in kitchen work was referred to as, "The guy who cooked in half the jails across Canada." and, at the Winnipeg site:

"We needed shelves for the clothing department in the basement. This guy had talked to us about doing carpentry with his Dad. He built the shelves (in a unique style) but it worked. He felt good about doing the job and he got lots of praise. So it was really based on his needs and his abilities." (Staff member, Winnipeg site)

Seniority counts for a great deal at several sites. The "guys who've been here for a while" are often seen as having a greater probability of success than those who have just arrived. An ex-client staff person at the Fredericton site said:

"When I book someone in, I let it go a couple of days without expecting anything and then you get to know what kind of person you're dealing with. Most of the people in here now are repeats so you know what kinds of character they are." (Ex-client staff member, Fredericton site)

An important characteristic that some of the agency personnel look out for is that of being non-judgmental. This is particularly the case if the area of involvement puts the client or ex-client in a position of power over his/her erstwhile peers. Agency personnel related several stories of the client/ex-client exercising his new-found power at the expense of other clients. One of the Fredericton agency respondents put it most succinctly when they said: "We have to see if they can exercise authority evenly."

Knowing that a particular client has an urgent need for money (even more so than his/her peers) is sometimes the catalyst for inviting involvement.

"When we did the part-time odd-jobs stuff, we did it based on client needs for the money. For example, if someone needed \$10 for bus fares to such and such. So we'd provide an opportunity to earn the money. So we weren't necessarily concerned about the quality of the job. It was more the empowerment process. More about them having the opportunity to earn the money." (Staff member, Halifax site.)

Some agency respondents felt that to choose one particular client over another because of some characteristic or condition such as those discussed above, was basically unfair; that the involvement itself was an opportunity that should be even-handedly (or randomly) distributed; that, in fact, to provide that opportunity to someone with particular positive characteristics was doubly unfair, since it increased the advantage of those already relatively advantaged.

"My experience is everybody needs a second chance. If it doesn't work 100%, I still tell them what a great job they're doing." (Staff member, Victoria site.)

"I try just to get people involved, then talents will develop will develop according to their own timing." (Staff member, Montreal site.)

"You need to keep working with people and not give up." (Staff member, Trois Rivières site.)

"You have to tell some people they can do the work. You need to work with them to build their belief level. You need to change their thinking." (Staff member, Montreal site.)

"It can be difficult but when you start to pay people for their work, they gain confidence." (Staff member, Montreal site)

2.4 Problems to Watch For

When staff respondents were asked in which areas client involvement was least successful and what they saw as major obstacles to successful involvement, they identified those aspects listed in Tables 7 and 8, below.

**TABLE 7 - LEAST SUCCESSFUL AREAS
FOR CLIENT INVOLVEMENT**

LEAST SUCCESSFUL AREAS	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Those needing a high skills level	11
The highly formalized activities (e.g. board membership)	9
Unsupervised roles	6
High turnover areas	5

Closely related to the above 'least successful areas' for client involvement is the obstacles that are perceived by agency personnel to stand in the way of successful client involvement. These obstacles are listed in Table 8.

TABLE 8 - OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED TO CLIENT INVOLVEMENT

NATURE OF OBSTACLES	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Confidentiality issues	14
Chaotic personal lives	8
Addictions issues	7
Mental health issues	6
Transience	6
Skills required at too high a level	5
Lack of staff time to organize/ supervise	5
Authoritarian approach (of client)	4
Organizational resistance	4

Lack of trust (between staff and clients)	3
E.I. eligibility	1
Short attention span (clients')	1
Fear of liability (organization)	1
Short funding cycles	1

Confidentiality issues were by far the most frequently identified obstacle to increased client involvement. These agency respondents expressed their concerns about clients being able to have access to the written records of other clients. This concern is largely based on an "us and them"¹⁴ environment which tends to permeate most of the sites, the Fredericton and Victoria sites being the clearest exception to this concern. At these two sites clients and staff differ little.

The chaotic personal lives of many of the clients' personal lives ranked second as an obstacle to involvement. This chaos was seen as making the ongoing contact and commitment required difficult for many clients to get involved in any meaningful way. Addictions and mental health issues were identified as further obstacles, often difficult to separate from the general chaos of some clients' lives; as is the fact of a high level of transience. 'Here today, gone tomorrow' is very much a fact of life for many homeless people. Such highly transient people are difficult, if not impossible to involve in agency's activities. The involvement normally requires a minimum of geographic stability. Transience and 'chaotic lifestyle' is probably a greater problem with the younger homeless population.

"Most of them are street kids. They have their own hours. They're up all night, into drugs, etc. They 'work' at night and sleep in the day. Addictions interfere, night life interferes. They often have low self esteem. There's a lack of trust. What does this person want?" (Staff member, Winnipeg site.)

"A lot depends on the stability of the person. Many have drug and alcohol problems." (Staff member, Montréal site.)

"Our mandate is to house the hardest to house and with that come the issues of mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, etc. This makes involvement a real challenge." (Staff member, Toronto site.)

¹⁴ "Us and them", whenever used in this report refers to a situation in which clients and staff are seen as very different entities where what is good for one side of the divide is bad for the other and vice versa.

Organizational resistance and lack of staff time work together as obstacles making client involvement difficult. Upper level organizational (board and management) resistance to the idea of involvement manifests itself in the absence of staff budget lines to ensure involvement happens. Without the minimum of one full-time staff person devoting her/his time to the development of a client involvement strategy and to its implementation, it is unlikely to happen on any scale.

Some see the skills required for involvement to be lacking in most of their clientele and this deters them from making any involvement attempts. This obstacle also relates closely to organizational resistance, since the necessary skills *can* be taught clients, given the staff time and money, although this does require a very high level of organizational commitment. As is argued throughout this report, some of the best opportunities for training lie *within* the agency but full recognition of this fact also requires the organizational recognition that clients are 'trainable'.

Sometimes there is a generalized organizational/staff resistance to client involvement because: (i) it may threaten the traditional social work model of 'helping those less fortunate'; (ii) it may sometimes be manifested in what appears to be a lack of trust, particularly if there are opportunities for theft in particular positions in the organization¹⁵; (iii) it is seen as 'unrealistic' to expect people who are 'so damaged' or who have had so few opportunities to develop the skills required to function in a normal way. This ties in closely to the sense that it is difficult because clients have low self esteem or 'short attention spans'.

"It's an open landscape and can be threatening to some staff - it blurs the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'." (Staff member, Calgary site.)

"You need certain skills to do a lot of what we do, e.g. the counselling. It's largely a professional place. There are other places in the city where youth are part of the staff but not here." (Staff member, Winnipeg site.)

A not uncommon and certainly not unreasonable sense of the 'realism' reflected above can be found in the following statement made by an agency respondent in relation to getting clients work on the 'outside'.

"We've found a lot of people work out there. We're actually finding that work is not the problem. It's having the communication and life skills to keep a job. Many get fired or quit within a few days of getting a job, because we're talking about people who function way below average - low educational qualifications, addictions issues, mental health issues, and so on." (Staff member, Fredericton site.)

¹⁵ Some, although few, organizations have a high tolerance for theft and accept it as one of the risks to be taken. For example, speaking of a agency for which the Vancouver site accepts responsibility, one of the agency personnel interviewed said: "They can be flexible about having money stolen - no big deal - it's not unexpected, some people have been stealing all their lives, you can't expect all that to change overnight."

The authoritarian approach of involved clients is an issue that is common to any form of empowerment. Involvement can often lead to harmful 'power tripping' without the necessary training to ensure that those who, up until recently, have been without power can now use that limited power in a way that does not threaten the status of ex-peers.¹⁶

"There was the case of the guy whose sense of ownership became so strong he felt he ran the place. (He was cleaning the lounge). He got violent when we had to get rid of him, so we suspended him from the place for several months." (Staff member, Hamilton site.)

"Sometimes the tenants bar people because they don't like them. Involvement means pressure from peers when some are accused of trying to "brown nose" staff. Some won't file grievances because they are afraid. It's hard for residents to be really open and trusting with staff." (Staff member, Toronto site.)

"When you have people volunteer where they live, they develop a sense of ownership, etc. but they also develop a hierarchy. They get knowledge about things that they would not have and they may power trip at others' expense." (Staff member, Edmonton site.)

The E.I. eligibility issue was mentioned only once but can be a problem when there are programs that require the participant to be E.I. eligible. For most homeless people who have very long records of unemployment, such programs are of little use and can not be utilized by agencies as a way for creating internal (or any) job opportunities. The issue of short funding cycles is a broader one that impacts on any agency attempting to set up ongoing programs that may lead to work opportunities for their homeless clients. The result is an organizational reluctance to commit to such an approach in a 'here today, gone tomorrow' world.

The fear of liability was only raised in one particular case but was seen there - the Edmonton site - as a key factor for no longer employing clients internally.

"In the old days (1980s) a resident was mopping fell to the floor and hurt herself. She tried to sue the agency." (Staff member, Edmonton site)

2.5 What Client Involvement Can Lead To

According to the information gathered at the 12 sites, the involvement of clients can lead to increased client opportunities in the following areas.

¹⁶ A particularly trenchant example of the issue of authoritarian approaches came with the writer's experience of hiring a street person to manage an emergency shelter for homeless men in Toronto, when he was Executive Director of Dixon Hall in the early 1980s. Men would stop him on the street and tell him he had to get rid of this particular person because he was throwing men out into the street on cold and snowy nights, for trivial reasons.

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- Board/Committees
- Policy input/consultations
- Work - volunteer or paid., part/full-time
- Research/Evaluation
- Building development/design/renovations
- Creative activities
- Community projects
- Training/mentorship

The foregoing discussion has indicated that involvement in some of these areas tends to be considerably greater than others. For example, the involvement in the research/evaluation area is relatively rare but involvement in work, particularly as volunteers or on a part-time basis is relatively common.

To gain a sense of the extent to which clients' lives were altered through involvement of any kind, agency respondents were asked to identify ways in which they had seen clients' opportunities increase because of their involvement in the work of the agency; in other words, improvements in life conditions that client involvement has led to. The responses are aggregated in Table 9, below.

**TABLE 9 - HOW AGENCY STAFF SEE INVOLVEMENT AS
INCREASING THEIR CLIENTS' OPPORTUNITIES**

OPPORTUNITIES	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Improved self-esteem/confidence	19
Ongoing employment	15
Improved quality of life	6
Improved housing	5
Training/education	4
Ongoing involvement in governance	2
Drinking less	2

A sense that clients' self-esteem or confidence has improved, closely followed by the sense that the involvement led directly to ongoing employment were by far the most frequently mentioned effects growing out of client involvement. Improved self-esteem/ confidence was pointed to in many ways as *the* outcome that was really apparent.

"It gives people confidence. They feel good. They also have money. People go to conferences and meetings. The trip, the travel, the meals are paid for." (Staff member, Trois Rivières site.)

"People do a job for the first time and then they do it again. They think, 'Oh, you want me to do it again?' It gives them a better sense of self. They may start to bathe more frequently, may do their laundry more often." (Staff member, Hamilton site.)

As one involved Montreal client put it:

"People get self confidence. My quality of life is better. For example, when I interview people now I know I have to be sober. So you drink less. You have responsibility. You feel good about yourself." (Ex-client staff member, Montreal site)

"Sometimes you see daily changes, take ..., when I asked him to work a day or so as a staff, he said 'Thanks a lot, I've grown a lot.' When people answer the phone for a while, as a volunteer, they're so proud, they say, 'I've got to go and do my job.' It's the meaningful thing in their life." (Staff member, Victoria site.)

A considerable number of agency respondents felt that client involvement in their agency had led to ongoing work, either within the agency at sites such as Fredericton, Toronto and Victoria or in the wider community at such sites as Winnipeg and Edmonton.

"I was here two months (as a client). I cleaned the bathroom one night. Pat then said, 'Do you want to do that again? You did such a good job.' That led me to think when I moved out. I came back and asked if I could do my laundry here and I'll volunteer? This went from volunteer to casual to full time. In a year, I was here full time." (Fredericton site.)

"There was the young guy who used to stay here who I got to help with cleaning the bathroom on a regular basis. It helped him to gain a sense of independence and self-value. Now he's out there with a regular job." (Staff member, Winnipeg site)

And an ex-client now in a full-time job with the Toronto site said:

"It's worked for me (client involvement), this is the best job I've ever had." (Ex-client staff member, Toronto site)

For some agencies, it is important to open up opportunities beyond the traditional 'food, filing and filth' areas, into more demanding work roles that are seen as having a greater chance

of being the gateway to upward social mobility. At the Calgary site, some clients have moved into computer-based work. At the Vancouver site, an example was provided of a client who worked to create a running club. This same ex-client is now responsible for coordinating the Humanities 101 program, an educational program, run in conjunction with the University of British Columbia that encourages the involvement of marginalized people.¹⁷

Although improvement in quality of life is something of a catch all, difficult to define and even more difficult to link directly to client involvement, there was certainly a strong feeling among some agency respondents that client involvement had led to exactly that. Sometimes this was indicated more specifically in such terms as "he drinks a lot less now". One client participant at the Montreal site said,

"My quality of life is better. For example, when I interview people now I know I have to be sober. So you drink less. You have responsibility. You feel good about yourself." (Involved client, Montreal site)

"Because they are involved, it helps with their self esteem and their quality of life. It's related to the fact that they are accepted in the organization." (Staff member, Trois Rivières site.)

For some, there appeared to be a direct connection between particular clients' involvement and an improvement in their housing situation.

"It's sort of like a cycle. People feel better about themselves, they work at getting better housing and then, once they have that better housing it gives them that extra stability they need to continue working." (Involved client, Montreal site.)

At the Calgary site, where an ambitious new housing/shelter project is nearing completion, on a site close by the drop-in centre, many of those who are seen as appropriate to move into that housing are clients who have become involved in volunteer or part-time work activities with the agency.

Several respondents noted that client involvement had led to some becoming involved in training or educational opportunities. At the Calgary site involvement frequently leads to clients being eligible to work in positions funded by the Alberta Community Employment program (ACE). At the Hamilton site, those who more readily get involved in volunteer and part-time work opportunities are the first to be recommended for links to job training and educational opportunities. The homeless youth at the Winnipeg site are often encouraged to 'go back' to school.

"They find out they have skills they thought they never had because of our

¹⁷See Section 2.1.6, above for a discussion of this educational program.

encouragement. A good example is when a kid feels he's really stupid and then he says, 'I write poems you know.' They're far from stupid. We've helped to get kids like that into school." (Staff member, Winnipeg site.)

And, at the Victoria site:

"There's the example of a guy who's living in his car near hear. He was doing a lot of horrible things. He got involved doing voluntary work here, then he got his own place. Now he's back in school. It leads to going back to school for a lot of people. There's ... too, he's a Native guy who started coming in here years ago and getting involved. He ended up going to college and getting qualified as a youth counsellor." (Staff member, Victoria site.)

In terms of becoming involved in governance roles in the wider community, in an ongoing way, there were two examples provided. Staff at the Winnipeg site talked of young people who have become articulate through involvement in discussions and focus groups there and have gone on to youth and social committees in the wider community. At the Edmonton site, staff gave examples of clients becoming more vocal at client meetings and moving on to take up ongoing client spokesperson roles and or committee activities in the community.

When client focus group participants were asked how they felt involvement had changed things for them, they answered as indicated in Table 10.

**TABLE 10 - HOW INVOLVEMENT CHANGED THINGS FOR ME-
CLIENT RESPONSES**

SITE	HOW INVOLVEMENT CHANGED THINGS FOR ME
Halifax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes me feel more comfortable here. • It helps me overcome the feeling of strangeness. • I mark my territory that way. • It gets you ready for your own housing. • Sometimes there's a sense of being pressured to be involved in doing the activities. • It can be stressful for me. • It can lead to peer pressure when there's a lot to do. • For me, it relieves stress. When I get upset I like having the chores to do, it relieves my stress.
Fredericton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's helped me to learn how to communicate with a large group of people. • It's improved my communication skills. • It got me linked up with work outside. • There are lots of chances to get work through here. • I've learned to understand my own and other's experience. I've become less judgmental. • I've learned to fit in as a member of a group. • I now see everybody at the same level with their dreams and goals. • While I was away from the place (in Northern Ontario), I made links via Patricia (ED) to other opportunities there. • The staff shows a greater concern about us. • All the staff that work here lived here too.
Trois-Rivières	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It teaches people how to get involved in delivering the services. • It helps develop a social conscience for people.
Montréal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved my self esteem. • I felt useful. • Before, I was always depressed. Now I feel good. I got my confidence back. • I needed to do something (female) to keep occupied. I learned what empowerment means. • I went back to school. • I learned you need to have good work habits. • We got a chance to work. • You learn to work with other people who also have needs so you don't always focus on your own problems. The people here are like family. People here listen to you. Then you learn to listen also to other people.
Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meal club helps tenants because their food costs less. • Camaraderie among tenants. • We have one of the cleanest buildings around and when visitors come they see that. We become examples. • Others learn from our mistakes. • If people - as many of us are - are workaholics, then they need to do that. • With a job you've got a bit of freedom to play with (money wise)
Hamilton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was just something to do. I need to be busy. • It makes a good distraction. It takes a couple of hours out of the day.

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SITE	HOW INVOLVEMENT CHANGED THINGS FOR ME
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a positive experience. • I do it in terms of friendship - give a helping hand.
Winnipeg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes us feel more welcome here.
Regina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we <i>were</i> more involved it would give us a sense of empowerment.
Calgary	None of the Calgary focus group participants had been directly involved in agency activities. All expressed an interest in being involved.
Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You get more attached to people • It makes you feel like you're not alone • Increases self esteem • Makes you feel good about yourself • You gain more self respect • Builds friendships • You learn more about your own abilities • It makes you more conscious of your own surroundings • Increases your confidence • It helps you to learn what the boundaries are - teaches you to be able to say "no"
Vancouver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You get a sense of ownership. If you're not involved, you don't care about the successes of the organization. We came as being as close to being <i>consumer</i> run as you can be without being totally consumer run. • Sometimes though we do not get the full information. This makes it difficult to make good decisions. • The more involved you are in the organization, the more you'll have a sense of ownership and maybe put the organization's interests ahead of your own. • Being involved in the garden is my first experience of being involved. It's great.
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps you to stay away from trouble. • It gives me self confidence • It builds self esteem • Pay is not always monetary • It's lead to some real work in some cases if you stay sober • I was right into the needle, I went back to school. Now I have an Aboriginal Youth Counselling Certificate.

Thus the involvement experience is seen by client participants in the focus group discussions to make important positive changes in their lives, particularly in terms of feeling appreciated, feeling at home, having a more positive sense of self and in leading towards concrete opportunities such as real paid work and entry into schooling and/or training.

2.6 What Approaches Should Agencies be Taking to Increase their Levels of Client Involvement?

This section draws on the foregoing materials and on the client focus group discussion materials to identify what works best, in terms of encouraging client involvement. The section is divided into three subsections: (i) areas of involvement; (ii) what motivates clients to get involved? (iii) What works best - how to involve clients.

By 'what works best', two things are implied: first, is meant in what areas do agencies have most success in involving clients, in a simple quantitative sense; second, is meant in terms of involvements that lead to improvements in life chances for homeless clients. Where there is ambiguity, i.e. particularly in the sense of there being a difference between what works best for the agency and what works best for the client, the attempt is made to make this clear.

2.6.1 Approaches and Areas of involvement

Based on the information gained through the study of the 12 sites, primarily that gained through agency personnel interviews and client focus group discussions, the areas of involvement are listed in Table 11 below, in terms of the level of frequency of the particular areas, as indicated above in Table 2. Those occurring most often being listed first.

TABLE 11 - AREAS OF CLIENT INVOLVEMENT BY NUMBERS OF SITES

AREA OF INVOLVEMENT	NUMBER OF SITES
Work - voluntary, part-time, full-time	10
Policy input/consultations/planning	8
Board/committees	7
Training/mentorship	7
Creative activities	6
Building development/design/ renovations	4
Research/evaluation	3
Community projects	3

The work area, whether it be voluntary, part-time or full-time is the area that almost all sites, 10 out of 12, utilize as an involvement approach.¹⁸ There is, of course, some overlap among the categories, as there must be in the real and messy world of programming and

¹⁸ Even in the remaining two sites, Winnipeg and Regina, there is minimal involvement. As in the case of the young man building the shelves in Winnipeg (see page ... above) and the Regina participants sometimes helping out with cleaning up and cooking.

agencies. These overlaps are most obvious between work and creative activities, between board/committees and policy input, etc., between community projects and work, and between community projects and board/committees. Nonetheless, it is possible to say something about the areas when looking at the focus or emphasis used by the agencies.

Table 12, again drawn from Table 2, provides the number of areas of involvement by site. There are eight areas in all.

TABLE 12 - NUMBER OF AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT BY SITE

SITE	NUMBER OF AREAS
Trois-Rivières	7
Toronto	7
Montréal	6
Vancouver	6
Fredericton	5
Edmonton	4
Halifax	3
Winnipeg	3
Victoria	3
Calgary	2
Regina	1
Hamilton	1

The widest range of client involvement by areas is at Trois-Rivières and Toronto, the narrowest at Hamilton and Regina. With seven of the agencies being in the mid range of between three and six areas of involvement.

2.6.2 What motivates clients to be involved?

When agency personnel were asked what they felt their clients expectations were around becoming involved in the agency and involved clients were asked what their expectations were, they answered as indicated in Table 13. Each of the expectations is ranked from 1 to 7, with 1 implying the highest frequency.

**TABLE 13 - CLIENT EXPECTATIONS OF INVOLVEMENT,
CLIENT AND AGENCY STAFF PERSPECTIVES COMPARED**

MAIN EXPECTATIONS	FREQUENCY RANKING* (i.e. 1 = most frequent)	
	Agency Staff	Involve d Clients
An opportunity to earn some money	1	5
An opportunity to influence the nature of the agency	2	2
Leads to more opportunities generally	3	3
Provides more control over one's life	4	0
No expectations	0	4
An opportunity to 'give back' to the agency	5	7
Simply the wish to be involved, to belong	6	6
To feel good about themselves	7	1

*Based on content analysis of one-on-one interviews with staff members and materials from client focus groups.

Table 13 indicates that there is apparent agreement in three areas between what agency staff see as the major expectations of clients who become involved and what the involved clients see themselves, i.e.(i) the opportunity to influence the nature of the agency,(ii) that involvement leads to more opportunities generally and (iii) the wish to be involved. In the latter area, these expectations are not of a high frequency. It is in the areas of opportunity to influence the agency that the agreement is both close and of high frequency. Interestingly, the opportunity to earn some money appears virtually at the opposite end of the spectrum as an expectation from the staff as opposed to one of involved clients. For the staff it is seen as the primary expectation and, therefore, it might be surmised the key motivator, whereas for involved clients this appears almost at the bottom of the list. Thus, it would seem that the opportunity to influence the nature of the agency plays a major role for clients - as they see it themselves and the opportunity to feel good about oneself is *the* key motivator.

2.7 What Works Best? How to Involve Clients

In this section those aspects that 'work best' in terms of effective client involvement are identified for each of the eight involvement areas.

2.7.1 *What works in governance?*

In the area of governance, client committees (mostly informal) are more used than boards or board committees as areas of involvement. This appears to be because it is 'simpler' and more immediate. However, in the few cases where board involvement is still an important aspect of client involvement, it is seen as being a useful approach. Obviously, boards and board committees provide real concrete opportunities for the development of the kinds of skills that are required in being involved in governance - i.e. verbal discussions, decision making, note taking, confidence in interacting with a group of people.

One of the most valuable benefits that may come out of board involvement for homeless people is the opportunity to mix with people who are not marginalized, in a milieu where all are equal, at least theoretically. However, for agencies to make this work, time effort and commitment are essential. Agencies need to ensure that there is a full understanding at the board and staff level of what the possibilities and actual opportunities are for board and committee involvement (how many committees, how many members, etc.). The concrete ways in which involvement can become growth experiences must be acknowledged, i.e., learning of new skills such as minute taking, expressing views and having them listened to, etc. These possibilities next need to be written into the policy documents of the organization, particularly the bylaws which would define the terms of membership of the board and its committees. As example, an agency may decide that a certain number or percentage of the Board will be clients and at the same time establish ways in which conflicts of interest that may grow out of this policy can be dealt with.

Since a fairly large number of agencies, if the current 12 sites are in any way representative, are likely to have some kind of client committees, these would seem to be the "thin edge of the wedge" towards increased client involvement in governance. The Fredericton site, for example, has a ready conduit (via the Executive Director) between its fairly frequent client meetings and the board. This stepping off point could be used to gradually build to client board and committee membership through: (i) presentation of client concerns/issues/suggestions to the board by a client (rather than the Executive Director); (ii) creation of a client committee as a standing committee of the board; (iii) client committee being used as the 'training ground' for

potential board members; (iv) clients' moving to membership on the board and its other committees.

The Toronto site 'Town Council' structure provides an example of how this might be done, although the presence and controlling role of staff at these meetings makes it difficult for clients to have their real concerns heard. An effective Town Council, together with the smaller-scale 'house meetings' may be the most useful kind of structure. *Ad hoc* client committees, created to address specific client concerns vis-a-vis the agency is another method that can act as a beginning point.

This approach appears to work fairly well at the Edmonton site. However, unless these *ad hoc* committees act as training grounds and become entry points to the decision-making structure deeper inside the agency, it is unlikely *ad hoc* committees will lead to more effective client involvement in governance.

2.7.2 What works in policy input/consultations/planning?

Eight of the 12 sites involve clients in policy development, consultations and/or planning. However, much of this tends to be at the lower organizational level, so that it becomes more about program and activity development and planning rather than that which involves the major direction of the agency. Those examples of policy and planning input that appear to have worked best tend to be those where client groups are brought together in an *ad hoc* fashion around specific issues. One useful example of this working well was that at the Winnipeg site, where clients were involved in an 'anticipatory shelter' exercise, in order to be able to comment on policies and procedures through their involvement in this trial run. Another example is the involvement of Calgary site clients in a consultation over design of a new supportive housing building right next door to the drop in - housing for which Calgary site clients were eligible to apply.

2.7.3 What works with work?

As previously stated, work as discussed in this report does not refer to 'work as therapy' but work as a means to upward social mobility or, at the very least, as a means to become less marginalized. The area of work, be it of a voluntary or part-time or full-time paid nature, is the most used approach to client involvement among the 12 sites, with 10 out of the 12 using this strategy. In cases such as the Halifax site, work is of a very short-term and limited duration and mostly in the area of cleaning, although on occasion a client may be hired to input data on the computer. At Fredericton, a mix of short-term paid work in renovations (at another site), full-time work in the shelter and part-time and volunteer work at the shelter make for a balanced approach.

The experience of the different sites appears to indicate that the most effective approach to work as involvement is one that utilizes the continuum from volunteer work, to part-time paid work to full-time paid work. This approach then has a built-in training and preparation component. At the Fredericton site, clients suggest themselves through their willingness to be involved in volunteer work, cleaning up the shelter, etc. Three of the current full-time shelter workers began work there in this way.

The kind of work provided by activities rather than services (see footnote 11 above) presents fewer potential problems of clients' "power tripping" at the expense of prior peers. The Trois-Rivières and Montréal projects, which are largely activity-based, support this contention. However, most agencies are service-focused, since service to homeless people is, after all their major *raison d'être*. Given this, then the previously suggested continuum of volunteer to full-time paid involvement appears to be the most effective system for involving clients in work that leads to real opportunity. However, work curtailed at the volunteer level is unlikely to lead to much more than a way to 'pass the time' whilst 'marking time' in the same marginalized position.

Interestingly, however, referring to Table 10 above, clients *do* see a key benefit of involvement as being that it makes them 'feel good about themselves'. Some of this work experience is voluntary and the benefit of providing the opportunity to "feel good" should not be dismissed. However, from the perspective of this particular study, volunteer work is most effective when connected with other work opportunities, such as paid part-time and full-time work.

The argument at the Edmonton site that in-agency work can be more narrowing than work in the wider community is worthy of some discussion. Intuitively, it may be true that extra-agency work is more likely to lead to a wider range of contacts and opportunities, simply because there is more to choose from in the wider community. However, it is the contention here that in-house work - be it directly at the site project, or at some other project under the same organizational umbrella - provides some protection, more predictability and greater possibilities of support in an organization with a mandate to provide real opportunities for its clients through involvement.¹⁹

Of the nine sites that hire clients for paid work - full or part-time- two expect a client to be away from the facility for some time before being hired.²⁰ In Edmonton, the period between being a client and being paid staff is at least two years. In Hamilton the amount of time away is

¹⁹Parallels might be drawn here with the success of the psychiatric survivor business initiatives in Ontario, e.g. A-WAY Express Couriers, Fresh Start Cleaning, the Raging Spoon and Abel Enterprises. These organizations provide *real work* opportunities in environments where psychiatric survivors are close to the support of their fellow psychiatric survivors. They work in an environment of mutual support and understanding. The extension of these businesses is not as broad as the greater community - obviously - but the opportunities for *successful* employment are infinitely greater.

²⁰The rationale behind having clients be away for some time before they can be hired is that, by that time, they are less likely to be involved with current clients and, thus, conflict of interest issues, favouritism, etc. are less likely to play a part.

**INVOLVING HOMELESS AND FORMERLY HOMELESS CLIENTS IN PROJECTS AND
PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS
JIM WARD ASSOCIATES**

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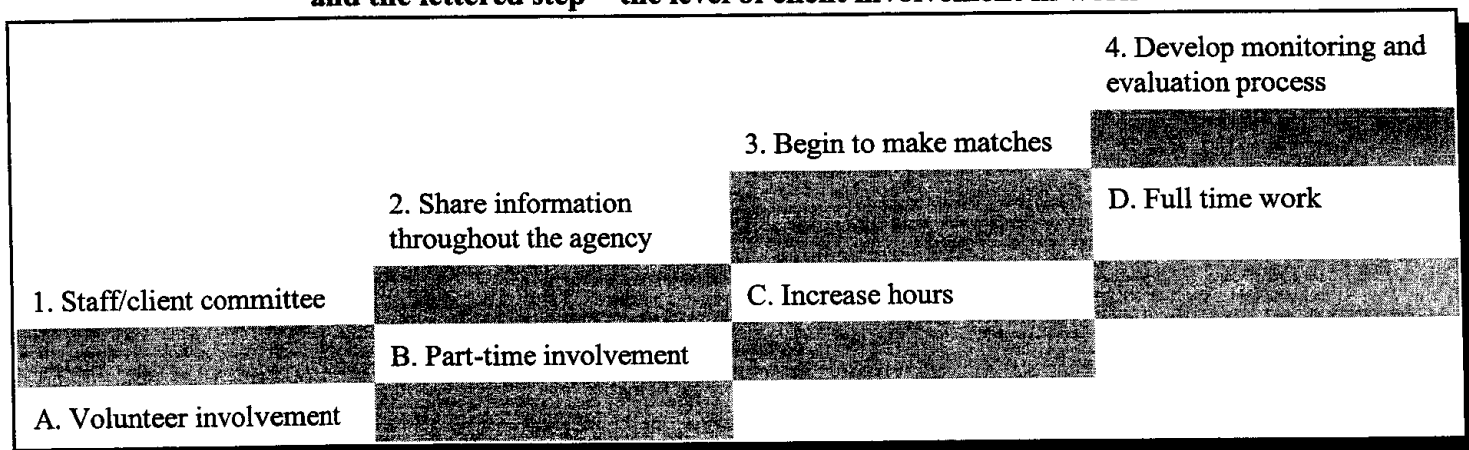
not specified. The agency's experience has been with clients who have left and have subsequently become involved in a training program. On completing the training program, the former clients have returned to the agency and applied for work. This has happened on several occasions.

The remaining six sites have no such absence requirement between being a client and becoming paid staff - part or full-time. Although it is difficult to find concrete evidence, it could be surmised that an absence requirement brings about a break in the continuity of the client's experience and makes it virtually impossible to develop a smooth volunteer to full-time paid work continuum. In a site without an absence requirement, a client can move smoothly along the continuum, as appears to have been the case, for example, at the Fredericton site, for a number of clients. Fredericton clients are expected to leave the site, i.e. become ex clients, once they become full-time, paid staff

As stated above, one of the key ways in which work in the agency can be successful as a client involvement approach is to create a continuum from volunteer, through part-time to full-time work opportunities. Figure 1 provides a structure by which such an approach can be taken by agencies providing services to homeless people. The figure shows a step-wise process that begins the client's work experience at the volunteer level and moves eventually to full-time work. At each step, the organizational structure is simultaneously adapted or developed to make the client's success at each step more possible.

**FIGURE 1 - STEPS TOWARDS CREATING WORK OPPORTUNITIES
FOR HOMELESS CLIENTS**

Where the numbered step = the organizational process
and the lettered step = the level of client involvement in work



The organizational and client involvement process outlined in the stepwise diagram of Figure 1 is as follows:

1. Form a staff/client committee to look into work involvement possibilities in the agency, identify what these are. It is important at this step to ensure that the organization as a

whole is fully behind the idea. This would mean involvement of the Executive Director and the go ahead from the Board of Directors. If the labour force is unionized, it is imperative to include union representatives at the very beginning. At this stage (A) the client is involved in a volunteer capacity.

2. Share the information on work involvement throughout the agency. Be comprehensive in the coverage. Make sure everyone understands what is involved. At this stage (B) the client is involved in a part-time working capacity.
3. Make clear matches between interested clients and job opportunities within the agency. Identify training and support needs. At this stage (C) the client's work involvement hours are increased.
4. Develop an effective monitoring and evaluation process. Ensure the system becomes integral to the agency structure. At this stage (D), the client's hours are further increased to full-time, paid work involvement.

2.7.4 What works with research/evaluation?

With the exception of very limited research/evaluation involvement at three of the sites, Trois-Rivières, Montréal and Winnipeg, the option of research and evaluation as an involvement mechanism has hardly been used at all. This appears to be a reflection of a belief that research and evaluation can only be carried out by 'experts' in those fields. The writer's own experience indicates the contrary. He has conducted many evaluation and research projects over recent years that have used this work as an opportunity creator for homeless and otherwise marginalized people.

Most research and evaluation work is fairly easily taught to people with limited formal education and it constitutes a useful avenue for upward social mobility. This is particularly the case where research and evaluation work is being carried out into services and programs that are built to cater to the needs of marginalized people. In essence, marginalized people are 'experts' in marginality and can bring important insights to bear. Experience has been, particularly in studies that require consultation, such as interviews and group discussions with marginalized people, that those able to get the 'best information' are those most like the persons being consulted. Having "like consult with like" removes many of the social barriers to clear communication that so often act as barriers when people attempt to consult others across class, cultural and racial divides.

Relevant projects in which this writer has involved homeless and other marginalized people in recent years include: (i) hiring of homeless people, whilst Executive Director of Dixon Hall, to carry out research on housing needs and opportunities for a group of people using a Toronto Drop In. This group became known as SPACE. The result was the location of long-term residential opportunities for most members of the group. One of their members became a full-time community development worker for Dixon Hall; (ii) hiring 10 homeless and

previously homeless people to assist in developing questionnaires and to carry out interviews with Toronto rooming house residents for the evaluation of the Rupert Hotel Pilot Project, a project aimed at improving rooming house conditions in Toronto. This group was hired on a part-time basis for almost two years; (iii) hired homeless people living on the street to 'write their stories'. This material was edited and incorporated in a study entitled *Homeless Voices* (1999) and was published by the City of Toronto's Healthy Cities Office; (iv) hired three homeless and previously homeless people to design and carry out an evaluation of rooming house conditions in Durham Region; (v) in partnership with St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, hired 10 homeless and previously homeless people to carry out a study of the health issues faced by rooming house residents in downtown Toronto. This also involved a training component. The work lasted for four months.

Finally, Jim Ward Associates won the contract with the City of Toronto to carry out a count of homeless people 'sleeping out' in the early spring of 2001. The intention had been to hire 100 homeless and previously homeless people to do the count. This would have included a full day of training and the actual carrying out of the count itself. The City came under a great deal of criticism for considering such a project. Critics felt that such a count was an infringement on privacy and might lead to people sleeping out becoming vulnerable to being disturbed by members of the public, the police, etc. The City considered such criticism and decided not to carry out the count. A file of over 100 names of homeless people who had phoned asking to be hired to help carry out the count still exists.

Thus, although little is being done by agencies serving homeless people to involve them in research and evaluation, this area is one of considerable opportunity and should be examined seriously by all such agencies. Investment of the evaluation research dollars in the homeless themselves rather than in outside 'experts' would achieve several laudable ends, including the development of new skills, the creation of linkages that may lead to further similar work, and getting money into the pockets of those who most need it.

2.7.5 What works in building development/design/renovations

Social agencies have an important history of involving homeless people in the development, design and renovation of buildings. Some of the better known recent examples are those brought about through Homes First Society in Toronto, e.g. the development and design of StreetCity, in which an industrial building was converted into homes for over 70 chronically homeless people and its sister project, Strachan House, again the conversion of an industrial building into housing for chronically homeless people. In some cases such involvement has gone beyond consultation to actual paid work on building and renovating, as was the case with both StreetCity and Strachan House.

Four of the 12 sites in this study are involving clients in some way in building development, design and/or renovations. These are Halifax, Fredericton, Calgary and Edmonton. In Halifax, it is likely that clients will soon be involved in renovating a building; in Fredericton a client has been hired as the contractor to renovate a shelter and he, in turn, has hired another

client as his assistant; in Calgary a large number of clients have been consulted regarding the design of an ambitious new housing project and others have been hired as security guards on the building site; at Edmonton it is an ongoing policy to have contractors hire clients in the renovation of buildings. The actual Toronto site was built with considerable client input, but the slow down in building activities for the umbrella organization has reduced this as an option for involvement for the time being.

What appears to work most effectively in terms of client involvement in the building design and renovations area is for organizations to keep uppermost in their minds the very real possibility that a number of their clients may well have previous experience as labourers on construction sites, etc. In addition, one of the most effective ways of focusing clients on something worthwhile is the focus on the actual concrete reality of a building. Many clients are keen to be involved in helping with the design aspects of proposed buildings and in renovations designs. Posting plans for buildings on notice boards at sites is a useful way of getting involvement and input. With a staff person being given the responsibility to coordinate such input, design discussions can be a useful way for building a sense of community among homeless clients.

2.7.6 What works in creative activities

Six of the 12 sites use creative activities as a route to client involvement: Trois- Rivières, Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver. The actual activities include writing, arts and crafts and, in two locations, Aboriginal arts. The most effective ways of having creative activities form the focus of client involvement activities appears to be when the work has a purpose beyond the aesthetic or therapeutic, i.e. when it is connected to a wider political or community concern. The art work in Vancouver helps to create a sense of belonging in the local community, through its production of street banners. The community paper work in Trois-Rivières and Montréal brings together creativity and a sense for the client that they are doing something about the conditions of poverty and powerlessness that are so instrumental in putting them where they are. Recent issues of the Montréal site's *L'ITINÉRAIRE* deal with such topics as gentrification and social housing, and health and social services.

2.7.7 What works in community projects

Only three of the 12 sites involve clients in community projects - Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. In Edmonton, the involvement links to the agency staff's notion that the wider community is the best place for client involvement rather than *within* the organization. In Toronto and Vancouver, community project involvement is in the area of community gardens and, in the latter case, some of the community involvement is around developing and delivering entertainments, i.e. organizing and presenting musical shows. Community involvements are likely to be most successful where they bring homeless clients together with other marginalized

people to develop a sense of common cause and that of dealing with the common problems of getting by.

The community garden approach can also be practical in making some nutritious food more readily available as well as providing the opportunity for the satisfaction that comes with providing for oneself, even if on a rather modest scale. There is some potential for combining homeless client community garden projects with those of university students. There are some common threads shared between the two populations - e.g. low income and marginality even though, for the students, the marginality is usually of a somewhat temporary nature. The linking of homeless people with university students can also assist the former in making links into the non-marginalized community.

2.7.8 What works in training/mentorship

Training and/or mentorship as a mode of client involvement is occurring at five of the 12 sites - Fredericton, Trois-Rivières, Montréal, Regina and Victoria. Several other sites may refer clients to training opportunities in the wider community, e.g. Hamilton and Vancouver. The most interesting and creative example of the training/mentorship among the projects, particularly in terms of providing opportunities for decreasing marginality, is the new mentorship program at the Fredericton site. The goal is to develop ways for clients to make direct contacts and build relationships with established people in the local community. It is likely that this project, given sufficient support will provide a useful model for others to follow.

In all the involvement modes, long-term agency planning that sees client involvement as an essential aspect of the way the agency does its work is essential. The notion of a continuum of involvement also appears to be key in moving clients from low-level to high level involvements, e.g. from volunteer work to paid work, from program volunteer to client committee involvement, to standing committee involvement, to board involvement.

2.8 What May Not Work - Some of the Key Pitfalls

Although the previous section raises most of the issues and obstacles that may militate against effective client involvement, there are several further obstacles that deserve mention. This section highlights the most important of these: (i) staff presence in what should be client only venues; (ii) the perils of authoritarianism that can come with new-found power; (iii) unnecessary avoidance of conflicts and potential conflicts; (iv) clashes between notions of "political correctness" and the day-to-day realities of marginalized people; (v) volunteer work as exploitation vs. the 'way in' to opportunity.

2.8.1 Staff presence in client venues

Often there is reluctance for agency staff to allow clients to meet on their own, make their own decisions, etc. This partially comes from a genuine concern that clients may not really understand all the issues involved. (It is true that - by and large - marginalized people may have relatively little knowledge of the way the world works and, more relevantly, the way the agency works within that world. It is also true that clients are likely to have a more profound understanding of marginality, since they have and continue to experience it at first hand.) It also may come from the less charitable feeling that the clients are out to undermine the agency and its staff members. There may well be some truth in this too. However, for client involvement to work effectively, there have to be occasions on which clients can meet to form their own opinions *without* staff being present. In the current study, clients complained at several sites that they were unable to meet, on the site, without a staff presence. In most cases, the clients felt that this condition prevented them from expressing their true opinions. Certainly, staff presence on all occasions is going to mean that clients will be unable to put forward their own beliefs about how they might best and most fairly be involved.

2.8.2 The perils of authoritarianism

This issue has already been touched on in several places above, however, it is important enough to raise it again. For client involvement to be successful, agencies have to develop a strategy whereby authoritarian tendencies that involved clients may exhibit are “nipped in the bud” as soon as they become apparent. The most effective way for doing this is to have discussions with clients, individually and in groups about what authoritarianism actually looks like and how it can endanger effective involvement. If conscious action is not taken, it is easy for staff to overlook the tendency or even to unwittingly encourage it through the tacit approval of saying or doing nothing. Without support and advice, it is extremely difficult for many clients to move from a position of absolute marginality to one that is relatively less marginal, without seeing an opportunity to ‘stick it to’ erstwhile peers. After all, someone has been ‘sticking it’ to them for most of their lives - from parents to teachers, to bosses, to jail guards, to the tougher people in jail, etc. Thus, working to combat authoritarian tendencies is an important part of pre-training and ongoing training for both clients and staff.

2.8.3 Unnecessary avoidance of conflictual situations

In several instances in the course of this study, agency personnel and clients stated that client committees had been disbanded because they were simply too stressful. The stress was caused because of vocal disagreements being expressed or because one or two individuals tended to dominate the discussions. Decisions to disband client committees or to discontinue client involvement strategies in order to avoid conflictual situations can be doubly problematic. First,

and most obviously, it closes off involvement opportunities; secondly it can poison intra-client relationships. It behooves agencies with an interest in client involvement to face such challenges head on both by taking the stress in their stride and by developing ways for making client forums more productive and less threatening. This may require training for staff members and clients, much of which can happen in-house. This is very much a case of "where there is a will, there is a way".

2.8.4 Clashes between notions of "political correctness" and the day-to-day realities of marginalized people

The reality of many social agency settings where the clientele is comprised of marginalized people, is a discontinuity between what some would see as the largely middle class notions of the service providers in contrast to the mostly lower working class experience of the service users. These class differences tend to bring about 'values discontinuities' or 'lags'.

One of the most obvious current cases is the anti-smoking issue. Much of mainstream society has given up smoking and see it as a senseless and harmful habit. For homeless people, cigarettes may be one of the few accessible material benefits. When non-smoking rules are instituted in buildings serving homeless people, the burden is overwhelmingly on the clients as compared to staff. The smoking-non-smoking debate is most often couched in terms of health. (And there is considerable evidence to show smoking is downright bad for you, in terms of health.) However, the real discontinuity is about values, not about health. The health argument - true though it may be - covers-up the real tension. i.e., for some (mostly middle class), it's simply not 'cool' to smoke anymore (as it was in the 1940s and 1950s), whereas for those at the bottom end of the social structure it's as cool to smoke as it ever was.

Values discontinuity becomes more subtly problematic in the areas of sexual and racial tolerance. When agency staff become incensed when they realize that a resident client committee is "giving the thumbs up" to a particular person rather than another because the former is more 'like them' than is the latter, it is important to step back and ask why that is so. Simply developing an intolerance for the clients' intolerance is not a useful approach. Some agencies try to overcome this phenomenon through anti-racism training for clients and staff, but training may be too unsubtle and difficult to make work. Clients may see the staff's position as an imposition by those who don't have to 'live with' the decision to accept the 'other' person.

On the other hand, policy development can become harsh rules-based if entirely given over to clients. This was the experience of the Winnipeg site, where staff ended up ignoring rules suggested by youth around such issues as barring, curfews, etc. Agencies that wish to

involve clients have to deal with these issues of values discontinuity in a way that doesn't overly threaten either side of that discontinuity.²¹

Some examples of the values discontinuity pitfalls in this current study are: (i) the tensions that grew at the Vancouver site when established residents in some of their houses made decisions to allow in certain new residents and not others based on, as staff saw it, biased attitudes towards potential tenants who were ethnically or racially different from the majority of established residents; (ii) the decision by staff at the Halifax site to discontinue the regular client meetings because of potential verbal and physical conflicts between tenants; (iii) the readiness of some agency personnel to see a client as inappropriate for involvement because of a perceived mental health, addictions or behavioural problem (such individuals may benefit most by involvement and the perceived problem may be related to values difference re 'acting out', etc.)

2.8.5 Volunteer work as exploitation vs the 'way in' to opportunity.

The use of volunteer situations as a 'way in' for client involvement, particularly in the area of work, has been a regularly repeated theme in this report. Also the warning has been given several times to beware the danger of using the volunteer work approach as nothing more than thinly disguised exploitation. The whole notion of volunteer work by the 'service recipients' rather than by 'outsiders' (e.g. the current Out of the Cold approach) can fall into exploitation, rather than create upward mobility opportunities. Volunteering should be tied to ultimate possibility of paid opportunities or real governance opportunities. The problem of volunteer work both by clients or outsiders is at least twofold: (i) it reduces the paid work force; (ii) it provides 'real chances' to 'do good', at the expense of real structural changes happening. All agencies have to be on their guard against using volunteer approaches in either of these two ways. There is a long history of doing both, neither is particularly helpful in terms of increasing the levels of effective client involvement.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT ENCOURAGE OR ARE CONDUCTIVE TO CLIENT INVOLVEMENT

There are three major organizational characteristics that are likely to have a profound influence on a particular organization's ability or willingness to be successful at involving homeless clients. These are size, diversity and philosophical milieu.²² One would think that the

²¹ An example of overreaction re the values discontinuity involves a female social worker supervising the Dixon Hall Men's Emergency Shelter in Toronto (the author of this study was E.D. of Dixon Hall at the time) who burst into the 'office' of the two men managing the shelter (ex clients) and tore down their Playboy centrefolds. More subtle approaches would have led to a better ongoing working relationship between the two sides.

²² This might be seen as a similar concept to that of 'corporate culture' that was so bandied about by the business gurus of the 1980s such as found in Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence* New York: Harper and Row, a book that might have been more appropriately titled *In Search of Mediocrity*. However, the

larger an organization, the greater the number of possibilities for involvement. However, there appears to be little, if any relationship between size and success of involvement in terms of the 12 sites studied .

The second factor, that of diversity in the form of multi-service organizations, also creates larger numbers of opportunities. All other things being equal, diversity should provide more possibilities for client involvement, simply because diverse organizations offer greater variety of opportunities under the one organizational umbrella. Should the organization as a whole be keen to promote client involvement, then a wide range of possibilities is opened up. However, the potential and the actuality may be quite different. Ten of the 12 sites are multi-service agencies: Halifax, Trois- Rivières , Montréal, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary and Vancouver, yet only five of these Halifax, Trois Rivières, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver use the available intra-organizational linkages to enhance client involvement possibilities.

The third factor, that of philosophical milieu may be the most important of the three. This discussion draws heavily from the model developed by Patrick Burman.²³ In Burman's model all social service-providing agencies occupy a particular location along a range of typologies. Figure 2 provides an overview of Burman's typology of social service provider agencies and the ways in which 'clients' are likely to be viewed at each point along the spectrum. That is the upper row of five cells describe the 'philosophical milieu', and the second row of five cells describes the ways in which clients are likely to be treated *because* of the philosophical milieu in which the agency operates. The third row of cells locates the 12 sites based on information gathered in the current study.

notion of corporate culture is much more shallow than the deep rooted notion of philosophical milieu. This latter is often based on a world view with strong religious and/or spiritual connections. This is a much more profound force than 'loving the product' as Peters and Waterman expounded when explaining the success of organizations such as Frito Ley potato chips.

²³See Patrick Burman (1996) *Poverty's Bonds: Power and Agency in the Social Relations of Welfare*
Toronto: Thompson Educational publishing.

FIGURE 2 - A SPECTRUM OF INVOLVEMENT MILIEUS
(Based on Burman (1996))

→→ →→ Decreasing organizational resistance to client involvement →→→→					
AGENCY	Moralistic Giving of Charity	Bureaucratic Rights Recognizing	Needs Responding	Community Developing	Anti-poverty Activating
CLIENT	Self-revealing Dependent	Self-revealing with legal rights	Person(s) in need of help, space, structure	Community Participant	Citizen Activist
LOCATION OF SITES	Hamilton	Edmonton	Halifax Fredericton Winnipeg Calgary	Trois-Rivières Toronto Regina Vancouver Victoria	Montréal

The location of the sites along the Burman spectrum is based on interviews with key personnel and discussions with clients at each of the sites, visits to the sites and a review of written materials on each of the sites. This does not, of course, constitute an in-depth analysis of each of the sites and their organizational milieu and structure but it does provide grounds for comparison.

Although the above analysis has limitations, it is still possible to say something intelligent about the relationship between the levels of client involvement at each of the sites and the place of the sites along the Burman spectrum. Generally, it can be said that, as one moves from left to right along the spectrum, the organizational resistance to client involvement decreases and the possibilities increase, so that the 'community developing' and 'anti-poverty' activating locations are those where client involvement would be most likely. This indeed appears to be the case. The current levels of client involvement at the sites increase as we move from left to right.

To summarize, the three organizational characteristics of size, service/activity diversity and philosophical milieu do have a potential influence on the possibilities for client involvement. However, given the experience of the current study, it appears that the most important of these is the philosophical milieu.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The major conclusions that can be drawn from this 12 site study of homeless and formerly homeless client involvement in agencies that serve them, are as follows:

- Of the eight areas of involvement, that of work is the most widely used and is probably of the greatest importance, in terms of its ability to 'rescue' clients from a life of total marginality. It is also the area of involvement in which clients have the highest level of interest.
- Emphasis on work *within* the agency rather than on work in the wider community is likely to be more successful, since the agency has a very high level of control over job opportunities within the agency and relatively little control over those job opportunities in the wider community.
- There is a strong sense among both agency personnel and clients that an opportunity to influence the nature of the agency plays an important role for clients in terms of their readiness to be involved.
- A key motivator for clients to become involved is the opportunity for them to feel good about themselves.
- Confidentiality issues were by far the most frequently identified obstacle to increased client involvement. This most often related to concerns about access to written client records.
- The potentially authoritarian approach of involved clients is an issue that is common to any form of empowerment. For client involvement to be successful, particularly in the work area, agencies have to develop an effective strategy for nipping authoritarian tendencies in the bud as soon as they become apparent. Involvement requires the necessary training to ensure that those who, up until recently, have been without power can now use that limited power in a way that does not threaten the status of ex-peers and/or lead to harmful 'power tripping'.
- The two areas of governance - i.e. board and committee involvement, and involvement in policy, consultations and planning, constitute those areas where the possibility of agency change towards increased client involvement is greatest. There is relatively little involvement of clients at the board level, more at the informal or *ad hoc* committee level, and more involvement yet in the areas of policy input, consultations and planning. Agencies that are serious about client involvement need to bolster their efforts in the governance areas. The establishment of ongoing client committees is likely to be the most straightforward route to success.

- Of the remaining areas of possible involvement, the greatest virtually untapped possibilities lie in research and evaluation. These areas provide a wide range of opportunities for experience and skill development that can lead clients on to further opportunities.
- The potential involvement in building-related activities such as development, design and renovations also offers practical opportunities for client growth. This area is well utilized by only a small number of the sites and some that used this approach in the past are doing less so now, largely a reflection of the slow down in building of affordable housing and shelter.
- Training and mentorship approaches are used fairly sparingly. There is room for growth here also. The mentorship model being developed at the Fredericton site - one that brings homeless people into middle class networks - could be replicated in other locations
- Creative activities are used by six of the 12 sites as client involvement approaches. They appear to work best when the creativity goes beyond the aesthetic to community action or advocacy.
- In all the involvement modes, long-term agency planning that sees client involvement as an essential aspect of the way the agency does its work is essential.
- The notion of a continuum of involvement appears to be key in moving clients from low-level to high level involvements, e.g. from volunteer work to paid work, from program volunteer to client committee involvement, to standing committee involvement, to board involvement.
- Agency respondents felt that client involvement must be based on an approach that is highly informed about the individual client's particular interests and abilities. There is a need for identifiable and reachable goals, the need to link with the particular client's interests, the need to provide a real sense of involvement with the particular project, and the need to have expectations that are flexible.
- Organizational resistance and lack of staff time work together as obstacles making client involvement difficult. Upper level organizational (board and management) resistance to the idea of involvement can manifest itself in the absence of staff budget lines to ensure involvement happens. Without the minimum of one full-time staff person devoting her/his time to the development of a client involvement strategy and to its implementation, it is unlikely to happen on any scale.
- The involvement experience as seen by client participants in the focus group discussions made important positive changes in their lives, particularly in terms of feeling appreciated, feeling at home, having a more positive sense of self and in leading towards concrete opportunities such as real paid work and entry into schooling and/or training.

- The three organizational characteristics of size, service/activity diversity and philosophical milieu can have an important influence on the possibilities for client involvement. The most important of the three characteristics, in terms of client involvement possibilities, is philosophical milieu. Those agencies with a philosophical milieu that embraces the tenets of community development and/or advocacy on behalf of marginalized people are most likely to encourage and be successful in involving clients in their activities.
- In terms of 'what works best' in the eight areas this can be summarized as indicted in Table 14 below.

**INVOLVING HOMELESS AND FORMERLY HOMELESS CLIENTS IN PROJECTS AND
PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS
JIM WARD ASSOCIATES**

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TABLE 14 - WHAT WORKS BEST

INVOLVEMENT AREA	WHAT WORKS BEST	PITFALLS TO AVOID
Board/Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write the principle of client involvement into the agency bylaws and policy documents. Ensure the principle is stated in such a manner that lack of staff time can not be an argument for not involving clients and that organizational commitment becomes a given* - Designate a 'client involvement staff person'* - Have a 'client involvement' budget line - Ensure there are active client committees and use them as the "way in" to Boards and committees of the Board - Institutionalize the use of <i>ad hoc</i> committees to deal with specific client concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff presence in what should be client venues, e.g. client committees - Unnecessary avoidance of potentially conflictual situations - Insufficient support(e.g. moral and administrative) of newly-involved clients
Policy input/ consultations/ planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use client consultations in major organizational decisions thereby going beyond lower level input into program and activities - Incorporate client policy input into institutionalized <i>ad hoc</i> committee structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unproductive tensions over conflicting value systems, e.g., between clients and staff
Work - volunteer, part-time, full-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid 'work as therapy' model - Use a volunteer to part-time to full-time work approach - Build in a preparation and training component - Ensure whole organization is "on side" - If agency in unionized ensure the union buys in - See work <i>within</i> the agency as being a key part of the strategy rather than work <i>outside</i> the agency -For some agencies a period of absence between the client role and the staff role serves to diminish issues of confidentiality and role conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteer work as exploitation - Involved clients becoming authoritarian and "power-tripping" vis á vis peers - If an absence requirement is used by the agency, this can break the continuity between volunteer and paid work involvement
Research/Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize research and evaluation activities of the agency as involvement opportunities (paid work) - Recognize the fact that research into the needs and concerns of homeless people can be done effectively by other homeless people, as can evaluation of programs and activities serving homeless people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belief that high levels of formal education are necessary for effective client involvement
Building development/design/ renovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include clients from the outset when new buildings or renovations are planned, in the design and in the actual building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved clients becoming authoritarian and "power-tripping" vis à vis peers

INVOLVEMENT AREA	WHAT WORKS BEST	PITFALLS TO AVOID
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be fully informed of clients' experience and skills in the building industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency assumptions that the necessary skills are not present in the client population--
Creative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Move creative activities from therapies to involvement in advocacy issues wherever possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative activities as simply 'time fillers'
Community projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use community projects to link with other community groups, such as students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unproductive tensions over conflicting value systems
Training/mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link training, wherever possible, to real internal job opportunities - Use mentorship approaches to link homeless clients with people in the wider community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient support(e.g. moral and administrative) of newly-involved clients

* Applies to all areas of involvement

4.1 Why Involve Clients?

Finally, the question might be asked, why involve clients? The argument made here is that, by involving clients, opportunities for ways out of marginality are increased. When agencies serving homeless people simply provide them with a service, the tendency is to maintain the *status quo* for those clients. The service may well improve the immediate situation of the client by providing food and shelter but the likelihood of this experience leading to an improved future is minimal. By contrast, involvement in real opportunities for growth through, for example, involving clients in governance or work can lead to real change in clients' lives. Many examples of this occurring are provided in the current study. It is hoped that this study will lead agencies to look more seriously at client involvement as a means for bringing real and positive change into clients' lives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are divided into two sections: (i) recommendations to CMHC and HRDC; (ii) recommendations to agencies working with homeless people.

To CMHC and HRDC

- That this study be circulated widely to agencies working with homeless people in Canada.
- That a training package be developed, based on this study, that will assist agencies in the effective involvement of homeless people.

To Agencies Service Homeless People

- That a policy for the involvement of homeless people be developed within agencies and that boards set up Working Committees for the development of strategies for involving homeless people in the work of the agency.
- That the policy for the involvement of homeless and previously homeless people be written into the agency bylaws and into the mission statement.
- That the suggestions made for involvement of homeless people in this study be adopted by agencies in ways that are modified to meet the particular conditions of the agency.
- That those agencies without active client committees develop such committees as a first priority and that such committees have direct linkages to the Board of Directors, i.e. that there be a client committee report item on every board meeting agenda and that the report be delivered by a client appointed by the client committee for that purpose.
- That 'Client Involvement Coordinator' become the job title, or at the very least part of the job description of a full-time staff person in each agency.

- That agencies develop a policy to have a certain proportion of board members be homeless or previously homeless people and that a training and support strategy be developed to ensure that such board members play an active and effective role.
- That agencies work to develop a strategy for hiring homeless and previously homeless people, utilizing the structure suggested in this study as a beginning point.
- That any research and evaluation initiatives commissioned by the agency involve homeless and previously homeless people.
- That any building or renovations activity by the agency involved homeless and previously homeless people at all levels.

6. GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

The following terms have been used in the report. This glossary provides an explanation of what they mean in the context of this report.

Ad Hoc Committees: Committees with a limited life span, set up to deal with a very specific issue, that disband as soon as the issue has been dealt with to the satisfaction of the agency.

Carver Model: a model of governance for non-profit and public organizations, developed by John Carver in his 1990 publication *Board that Make a Difference*. A key aspect of the model is that it moves Boards of Directors entirely out of the day-to-day work of the agency, leaving that responsibility to the Executive Director or equivalent, towards a focus on policy development and planning: from means to ends.

Client committee: A committee comprising clients of the agency that meets on a regular basis. Ideally it is a committee at which staff can only be present by invitation of the client committee chair.

Client involvement: The involvement of homeless clients in the work of the agency rather than as recipients of services, users of programs, etc.

Philosophical milieu: The organization's way of looking at the world.

Marginalized: On the social and economic margins of society, as opposed to being participants in the 'centre' of the society's social and economic activities.

Supported housing: Long-term housing where staff members are available to support clients in terms of their needs.

Work: the use of work here does not include its use in the term 'work therapy'.

