

The Better Times

You're invited! All-party election forum
How can Manitoba end hunger and poverty?

7:00 to 9:00 pm, Monday, September 26
Eckhardt-Gramatté Hall, University of Winnipeg

September/October, 2011 — Volume 1, Issue 3

This newspaper is free!



The Madison will house 30 Siloam guests in transitional housing. Photo by Robb Nickel

Siloam buys the Madison

People who have no homes may soon have more hope, thanks to the purchase of the Madison Memorial Lodge by Siloam Mission.

Siloam will transform the run-down former nurses' residence into an 87-unit housing complex in which alcohol and illegal drugs will be prohibited. "We will renovate the four-storey building top to bottom to meet building code specs and provide a dignified space for people to call home. We want the Madison to become a place that people are proud to live in," says Siloam Mission's executive director Floyd Perras. The Madison, 210 Evanson St. in Wolseley, currently houses 75 people who struggle with mental health issues, such as depression and schizophrenia, as well as physical and cognitive disabilities.

Siloam will work with existing tenants to coordinate the renovations. Once renovated, Siloam Mission will start moving some of their own guests into the Madison as rooms become vacant through turnover.

To avoid bedbugs, the finished suites will have metal box springs, vinyl mattresses, metal bed frames, metal/plastic furniture and be completely void of carpet or wood.

Guests are encouraged to make the rooms their own with TVs, entertainment units and artwork on the walls.

Communal areas will have arts & crafts sessions and games, including a Nintendo Wii Fit videogame for entertainment. Guests will pay \$627 per month for a room and three meals a day. That

amount can be covered by those who are on pension, disability or Employment and Income Assistance plus the shelter supplement. New guests will have to apply to live there and work with a case manager from Siloam.

After filling out a questionnaire on everything from their health to their financial status, clients identify their strengths and weaknesses and establish a few goals they want to work on. The transition services worker and clients figure out what steps to take to meet those goals. Clients are held accountable through weekly progress reports to their worker.

"Many of Siloam's guests have been staying at the emergency shelter for many years because it is safer and cleaner than many apartments and residential hotel rooms in Winnipeg's inner city," Perras says. They will be able to stay at the Madison for as long as they need, he says.

"Some are ready to move on, but need a support structure around them to succeed. These guests will be given priority," Perras says. "Some might need a supportive environment for the rest of their lives to be successful."

The requirement that guests be drug and alcohol-free is only fair to the other guests, Perras says. "We have a core group of people that use our shelter who are clean and sober and wish to remain that way. The last thing they want is to have neighbours that drink or do drugs and might be a stumbling block in their recovery," Perras says.

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Living in a homeless shelter: Frustrating, exhausting and dangerous

"It's so degrading. You have to stand in line for everything. For a meal, if you want clothing, if you have to go to the bathroom. You just gotta wait and you can't do anything." — Winnipeg Street Health Report 2011 survey participant

By Tiffany Mamakeesic

Just recently, I've had the opportunity to read the *Winnipeg Street Health Report 2011*. In it, I read a lot of things that are very familiar, because I am a woman living in a homeless shelter. I've been here for many years now and it's been very hard to stay positive.

In the report, there are lots of statistics, but they also have lots of quotes from the participants in this survey. I believe that those quotes put the stats into perspective and let me know the real feelings that are there on the streets.

A lot of people are frustrated and angry and feel that there is nobody out there to listen to them. We feel very isolated from the rest of society because most people just want us to go away.

I have also felt like I'm apart from the rest of the world because I don't have cable TV or Internet access to be able to learn about different programs that are being offered out there. The news, around here, gets around by word-of-mouth and sometimes you can't trust what you hear.

What I noticed the most throughout the report is all the discrimination against us. I was also surprised by who was treating other people like dirt, such as medical people and our own social assistance workers.

I just want to add that at least a couple of participants have great doctors and have said so.

I guess that most people don't understand how hard life is down here. People seem to think that being homeless is easy and that we get things handed to us. But they don't realize that it is a very exhausting life.

For everything we need, we have to wait until some very kind person donates it and then wait while the program that got the donation decides how they are going to distribute the goods and then wait in a line to actually get the clothes, food or whatever it is. A big part of life for us is waiting. We wait in a line for everything and we can't leave the line or lose the spot. It can be a major blow to the self-esteem when you have to ask for everything you need.

As a woman living on the streets, I have to be careful. There is a lot of violence out here and the report shows that we (women) are sexually assaulted more often than the general population.

We also have trouble keeping ourselves clean during our monthlies. The pads and tampons are very expensive. The shelters and drop-in centres usually only have so much, so you can only get maybe one or two, if they have any at all. So we have to use rags and tissue paper, and still wear dark clothes, but that is another thing to wait for.

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We want the Madison to become a place that people are proud to live in —Siloam Mission's executive director Floyd Perras

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The Better Times

September/October 2011

The **Better Times** is an independent, bi-monthly publication for people in Winnipeg concerned about hunger and poverty.

The **Better Times** is distributed free of charge to clients of agencies associated with Winnipeg Harvest and at other community locations.

Our mission is to empower and inform people who live with hunger and poverty. Our goal is to find and tell the stories that reflect the realities and the dreams of our readers.

The **Better Times** is overseen by an Editorial Board composed of persons who have lived the experience of hunger and poverty. All responsibility for content rests with the Editorial Board.

The views expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or our supporting organizations. The Editorial Board may edit submissions for length and style, and reserves the right not to publish submissions.

For publication, we welcome letters, stories, story ideas, photos, cartoons and illustrations from our readers.

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Point Of View



Tax returns prepared for free

Get your GST rebate and other credits

Winnipeg Harvest clients and other people with low income may have their income tax returns prepared for free at Winnipeg Harvest, if they qualify. Many low-income people end up getting money back through GST rebates, income tax refunds or other credits they're eligible for.

"If I had known it was this easy, I would have done it much sooner!" said Brenda Turnley, Winnipeg Harvest volunteer.

Based on information from the Canada Revenue Agency, Winnipeg Harvest estimates up to \$7 million will flow back this year into the pockets of the more than 3,000 clients and other low-income Winnipeggers who use the free tax return service.

"We want to encourage and educate people on the benefits of doing their taxes so they can have monies that they are entitled to. Money in their pockets is money that gets put back into the community," said Morgan Thomas, referrals coordinator at Winnipeg Harvest.

Under the law, every adult in Canada has to send in a tax return. Some low-income Canadians put it off, not wanting to tackle it themselves and not being able to afford a professional tax service.

Winnipeg Harvest is open 10 months of the year as a drop-off site for the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP). Since 2007, volunteers at Winnipeg Harvest, working in cooperation with the Canada Revenue Agency, have prepared thousands of returns.

To qualify, a single person must have a total family income of less than \$30,000. For a couple, the figure is \$35,000. There are a few other qualifications, such as no capital gains and no business or rental income or expenses.

If you are a low-income person and you still haven't filled out a 2010 income tax return, bring all your information slips and your Social Insurance number to Winnipeg Harvest, 1085 Winnipeg Avenue.

Why some poor people vote Conservative

By Nick Ternette

One of the quirks in elections, including the 2011 federal election in May, is that the results in poor areas have been NDP first (of course), but the Conservatives have come in a strong second!

This happened, for example, in Winnipeg Centre, one of the poorest federal constituencies in Canada when measured by low income cut-off (after tax). NDP MP Pat Martin won re-election easily without even bothering to campaign. But the Conservative candidate, Bev Pitura, came a strong second. Why? She didn't attend a single town hall meeting with other candidates in order to address the area's issues of poverty and crime. Maybe we, as anti-poverty activists who promote the interests of low-income people, need to ask why so many poor people vote Conservative, a party that is against their own class interests.

We know that the Conservatives are not on the side of food bank users and social housing users. But, hey, these people still vote Conservative. No question, it's easy for us in the anti-poverty movement to argue that the Conservative victory was a result of vote splitting. And no question, this did work in Ontario and some Western ridings,



such as Winnipeg South Centre. *Toronto Star* columnist Carol Goar (*Why The Poor Cast Votes for Conservatives*, May 11, 2011) said anti-poverty campaigners need to figure out how right-wing cost-cutters connect with low-income voters. For example, many people living in low-income neighbourhoods are victims of drug dealers and violent offenders. They want to get rid of gangs and gang cultures because their children are so easily drawn into that lifestyle. And the Conservatives make the most sense when it comes to anti-crime policies, as opposed to the NDP and the Liberals.

A lot of low-income Canadians want jobs, not abstract poverty reduction plans and certainly not charity. The Conservatives talk more about jobs, while the NDP and the Liberals talk about poverty and charity. It is interesting to note that Carol Goar also suggests that some low-income Canadians are angry watching middle-class bureaucrats in public sector unions getting pay hikes while they have to live on public assistance – i.e. Income Assistance, Employment Insurance, and Old Age Security. Even more interesting is that low-income Canadians often have little regard for anti-poverty activists, professors and planners who profess to speak for them. If they did have

any regard for them, they would vote NDP or Liberal. Low-income Canadian voters tend to mistrust all politicians, no matter what their stripes, be it NDPers, Conservatives, Liberals, and even Greens and Communists on the left, and Libertarians on the right. No matter who they elect, nothing ever changes. They don't believe their promises and don't pay much attention to their rhetoric. So, in fact, the majority don't vote.

We continue to organize town hall meetings on poverty and crime at the municipal, provincial and federal level in order to influence low-income people to vote, and to vote within their class interests. But to what end? Perhaps a new approach is needed to engage

low-income people in democracy, one that starts without assumptions about what is in their best interests.

Instead, anti-poverty activists, political parties, the media and others should engage in genuine and respectful dialogue with low-income people, asking questions, listening to the answers and genuinely responding.

It will take many years for low-income people to trust and engage in the political system. It should begin now.

Winnipeg Harvest volunteer Nick Ternette is Chair of the Editorial Board of *The Better Times*.

Low-income Canadian voters tend to mistrust all politicians, no matter what their stripes —Nick Ternette

Future doctors sort food at Winnipeg Harvest

Food Banks Canada conference studies Manitoba model



Medical student Dwight Klippenstine sorts food at Winnipeg Harvest in 2007.

When medical student Bryan Kroeker walked through the doors of Winnipeg Harvest, he already knew he would be put to work. Every year, students from the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine come to Winnipeg Harvest to sort potatoes, bag flour and learn what it's like to live with hunger and poverty. The half-day class includes advice from welfare advocate Harold Dyck on how the future doctors should interact with low-income patients.

Kroeker told a national conference of Food Banks Canada the hands-on experience is valuable to students.

"Medical students sometimes have real difficulties in getting down to the issues related to food security because we are educated to get very particular information early in our careers," Kroeker says.

His class colleagues agree the experience is valuable. "We have enough food in Canada for everyone. No one should go hungry. I think this was a great experience for us," one student wrote in a survey.

"Learning the reality of challenges faced by poverty-stricken people dispelled many myths," said another student.

Kroeker and two other students presented an overview of the learning experience and the results of the student survey at Growing Together, the national conference of Food Banks Canada, held in Winnipeg June 8 to 10.

They were joined by their instructors, Joe Kaufert and Gladys Stewart of the Community Health Sciences department, who have been taking medical students to Harvest for the past five years.

"The Faculty of Medicine is committed to equity, social justice and recognition of the importance of the health of the community," Stewart said. "We want doctors to learn about health advocacy. We want to expose them to the realities of available food and prescribing for special dietary needs," she added.

Kaufert said doctors can play a leading role in social change. "We want our graduates to be able to describe the diverse social and economic factors which influence food security and how the inter-

"We have enough food in Canada for everyone. No one should go hungry." —U of M medical student

vention of organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest contributes to the health of the community," Kaufert said. "We believe that engaging medical students in discussions around poverty and food security can help influence public policy."

David Northcott, executive director of Winnipeg Harvest, welcomed the initiative. "Winnipeg Harvest values the relationship and the opportunity it provides to open a respectful dialogue with future professionals who are likely to interact with Winnipeg Harvest clients and other people living with hunger and poverty," Northcott said.



From left to right, David Northcott, Executive Director, Winnipeg Harvest; Gladys Stewart, Joseph Kaufert, Department of Community Health Sciences; Timo Gosselin, Samuel Victor, Bryan Kroeker, Medical students, University of Manitoba.



Joe Kaufert speaks to participants at the conference.

Structured environment best for Madison resident

Three meals a day and things don't "disappear"

The structured environment at the Madison is its biggest drawing feature, say both a current resident and a Siloam Mission client hoping to live there.

"I get my own room and I can watch TV in my room, play music during the day," said James Gorko, 52, who has been living at the Madison for a decade. "I can handle myself on my own (and) they take care of me here."

Gorko, a soft-spoken man who suffered a head injury years ago, said the three meals a day provided at the Madison and its location between both downtown and Polo Park make it an attractive place to live.

Not only that, but Gorko's brother and family live nearby. They fully support his residing at the Madison, and believe it provides a good support for Gorko.

"They don't want me to live in an apartment," said Gorko, adding that he has peace of mind knowing that he can lock the door on his room and "things won't disappear."

Gorko said he lived in many places before but "it didn't work out." He plans to stay at the Madison and sees Siloam Mission's taking over the building as a positive move for the tenants, especially the \$1.2 million being put towards renovating the entire building.



Long-time Madison resident James Gorko, 52, says "I can handle myself on my own (and) they take care of me here."

Gorko also agrees with the prohibition of drugs and alcohol on the premises.

"I'm glad they don't want people drinking here," Gorko added. "I quit alcohol. No one should bring drugs or alcohol into the building, or weapons."

It's this stability that Dave Neufeld would like to enjoy. For the past couple of years, since a job loss started a chain reaction in his life, Neufeld has been without a permanent home and turned to Siloam Mission for help. Today he is also a Siloam Mission volunteer — cleaning dishes, helping with the food bank and cleaning the shelter area — who cannot wait for the day when he can finally call a place his own.

Neufeld, 41, said living at the Madison would give him the chance for something that can be summed up in two words: "Get stable."

"Knowing that you have a place to go to ... not so many worries," he said. "Not around so many people all of the time, and the frustrations."

Like all other guests at Siloam, each and every day Neufeld gathers up his belongings only to return in the evening to stay the night. This takes a toll emotionally and physically.

"A lot on the brain ... just because you got to lug around

your baggage," said Neufeld, adding that it's easy to accumulate more things, which ends up being "more baggage to lug around."

Neufeld, who has also applied to live at the recently renovated Bell Hotel, said he agrees with the Madison's no-alcohol/drugs policy as a way for people to avoid a return to a lifestyle that ends up keeping them homeless.

For Neufeld, it's not just about a room with a locked door. "Get my life straight, start working again and move step-by-step again," he said.

The community responds

The following are some of the responses on the Siloam Mission website to the news that Siloam is taking over and renovating the Madison:

"As a resident of the street I am ecstatic about this news and look forward to the changes and growth of the Madison!" — Jen

"This is awesome! Congratulations!" — Corinne Basarowich

"I am so pleased to hear that you guys are taking further steps in helping the struggling citizens of Winnipeg become self-sufficient towards a much-deserved better life." — Bev

"Welcome to the neighbourhood. This is a wonderful initiative and we are delighted to see the Madison continue to support people in transition to better lives." — Lynn

"Congratulations! A safe, decent place to call home is invaluable." — Getty Stewart

"I think this is wonderful. Now instead of homeless people sleeping in bus shacks and under bridges, they will have the invaluable assistance from Siloam housing that will provide them with a safe and humane place to sleep. Not only will this physically assist them but mentally, it will create an environment that enables them to see hope. Congratulations." — Janice

"Great news — Welcome! I live in the neighbourhood and am so excited to see that you've taken this amazing step!" — Jennifer

Siloam buys the Madison

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If a guest does drink or do drugs on the property, "then we will work with them to see if the Madison is still a good fit for them. Every person has unique needs and challenges that need to be addressed individually. We believe in extending grace to all." Siloam intends to partner with mental health, addiction and community agencies to provide on and offsite services for residents.

The Madison residents will have full access to Siloam's Saul Sair Health Centre, which includes access to doctors and dentists.

Siloam is forming a Community Advisory Committee of Wolseley-area residents to build connecting points

between the community and the Madison residents.

Siloam anticipates having 30 of their guests moved into the Madison by the end of 2012.

Siloam spent \$300,000 to buy the building. It has received \$1.2 million from the city, provincial and federal governments to renovate it.

In 2007, the Madison was the site of two deaths. Police shot and killed a resident who they said fatally stabbed a fellow resident and injured another.

In 2008, media reported that police discovered a methamphetamine lab in the building. Following a police search, all charges were dropped.



David Ladd, a writer for *The Better Times*, graduated from Adult Education Centres with a high school diploma on June 24. If you or someone you know needs to finish high school later in life, you can contact Adult Education Centres, 1240 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R2W 3S9. Phone: (204) 953-0818 Fax: (204) 953-0819 Email: aec@adult-education.ca

Food, water, shelter —a line for everything

By David Ladd

I was at the local food bank this past week when the Winnipeg Harvest truck pulled in. As the regulars began lining up to begin unloading the truck, I instinctively followed. Suddenly, it occurred to me - I'd been conditioned! So I said to the person in front of me: "You see a line-up, you get in it. Don't ask questions, just do it."

Sometimes it's food, sometimes bottled water or coffee, sometimes clothing, sometimes work, and sometimes shelter, but more often than not it's something good and something necessary for survival.

Being good at lining up is essential if you want to survive on the streets. If you're too shy or quiet, too polite, or too slow, you'll lose out. On the other hand, if you're too loud or too rude or pushy, you could have an unruly crowd against you. Balance is the key word here.

Whatever you do, don't cut in. There's no more sure-fire way to make people angry with you than to push your way in front of them, even if you are mentally unbalanced. Pretending to be somebody's brother also falls into this category, and doesn't go over very well.

Showing some basic courtesy is also in your favour. It won't kill you to let an elderly person or someone with mobility issues go ahead of you. If you are a young man, this will impress the ladies!

But no matter what you do, and how good your intentions, there always seems to be somebody who thinks they are better than everybody else, and that they should be first. Ask yourself this - are they really worth losing any sleep over? Remember, the first will be last!

David Ladd is a writer for *The Better Times*.

Living in a homeless shelter

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The report is very good in showing why things are the way they are. There are plenty of recommendations for the different organizations and branches of government to make their programs better.

The Winnipeg Street Health Report 2011 is available on the net at the Main Street Project website, <http://www.mainstreetproject.ca/winnipeg-street-health-report.pdf> or from the Millennium Library at Graham and Donald free of charge.

I would encourage everyone to read it and see if there is anything you can do to help.

People can't grow if they have to spend all their time filling their basic needs. As a result, society as a whole will also not be able to grow or move forward.

Tiffany Mamakeesic volunteers at Winnipeg Harvest in the food room and in the personal care area. She won the Premier's Volunteer Service Award from Volunteer Manitoba. Tiffany is a member of the Editorial Board of *The Better Times*.



Terry MacLeod (left) and Marcy Markusa of CBC Radio receive the Golden Hand Award from Winnipeg Free Press Editor Margo Goodhand for raising money for Winnipeg Harvest.

Premier honours Winnipeg Harvest volunteer CBC radiothon recognized

By Robb Nickel

Tiffany Mamakeesic overcame drug and alcohol addictions to help other people by being a long-time volunteer at Winnipeg Harvest.

Premier Greg Selinger recognized Mamakeesic's guts and generosity with the Premier's Volunteer Service Award at the Volunteer Manitoba Awards Dinner on April 27. "Harvest has been the biggest help to me in all areas of my life. I started getting the food I needed and ended up growing as a person. I can't wait to do more growing," Mamakeesic says.

Mamakeesic has volunteered at Winnipeg Harvest, donating more than 1,500 hours of labour since August 2005. She volunteers two or three times a week, making emergency food hampers, organizing the warehouse shelves, participating in public education initiatives and speaking to the public.

Mamakeesic is also a member of the Editorial Board of *The Better Times*.

CBC Radio Manitoba received the Golden Hand Award for Media for their radiothon raising money for Winnipeg Harvest on December 3 last year.

The full-day fund-raiser featured Winnipeg Harvest staff, volunteers and clients on all three local shows: *Information Radio*, *Radio Noon* and *Up to Speed*.

The radiothon achieved three goals: Raising awareness of hunger and poverty issues in Manitoba and informing the listener on how to make a difference; Raising funds and food for Winnipeg Harvest by encouraging the public to drop off a tin for the bin or a monetary donation; Raising more funds than

Harvest has been the biggest help for me in all areas of my life—Tiffany Mamakeesic

last year's radiothon. The event raised \$130,000, exceeding the previous year's effort by \$30,000.

Volunteer Manitoba handed out 33 awards to recognize charities, businesses and citizens who help their community by lending a hand to others in need.

Executive director Dennis Dyck said 60 percent of Manitobans engage in some kind of volunteer work - the highest rate in the country. He said the most recent sandbagging efforts show most Manitobans genuinely want to help those around them.

"Without them, we wouldn't have any community," he said of all volunteers. "We're Prairie people. We realize we want to help each other to get along."

Robb Nickel is a writer and photographer for *The Better Times*.



Tiffany Mamakeesic receives the Premier's Volunteer Award from Premier Greg Selinger

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- Vote for food security for all
- Vote for effective crime control through prevention
- Vote for better health care through prevention
- Vote for a healthy environment
- Vote for meaningful, long term job creation

Vote for a real alternative, a real voice for working people and low-income citizens!



**This election, in Minto
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For more information or to help, contact the Green Party of Manitoba: 120 Sherbrook St., Winnipeg R3C 2B1; phone 488-2831, or visit our website at greenparty.mb.ca

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