

*Write-Ups From  
The Riverdale Community  
Quality Of Life Study*

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## Introduction

This report contains the information provided by community members, service providers, and elected representatives as part of the *Riverdale Community Quality of Life Project*. Fourteen group discussions were held which involved 102 community members. Five groups involved Riverdale adults, three were with youth 25 years or younger, three involved seniors, and three were with New Canadians.

Eleven service providers were individually interviewed. Six elected representatives also were interviewed. All these discussions and interviews were taped. Project staff used these tapes and notes from the discussions and interviews to provide the content for the write-ups.

Before finalizing these write-ups, they were provided to the participants and interviewees in order to verify their accuracy. This process allows us to be confident that we have captured the views of those we interviewed.

The first series of write-ups are from the group discussions with community members. First we provide the write-ups from adults, followed by those from youth, seniors, and then New Canadians. We then provide the results from the interviews with service providers. These also follow the general format of those who provide services to adults, youth, seniors, and New Canadians. We conclude with the interviews carried out with the elected representatives of Riverdale. These include both the political representatives as well as the public school trustees.

The content of the community members' narratives contain their responses to questions about the aspects of Riverdale that support quality of life and those that do not. We also found out how people cope and manage, and the services and programs they would like to see.

The information from the service providers and representatives is similar in that we asked about the positive and negative aspects of life in Riverdale. We also inquired into the mandate and activities of these individuals and their organizations and how they attempt to improve the quality of life of community members.

For an analysis and interpretation of these findings, please see the reports: *The People, Places, and Priorities of Riverdale: Findings from the Community Quality of Life Project* and *The People, Places, and Priorities of Riverdale: Conclusions from the Community Quality of Life Project*.

# Findings from Community Members

## Adults

## **Women's Healthy Weight Group**

**November, 1996**

**3 participants**

### **A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

#### **Access to Food**

The availability of affordable food was an important theme. The fruit and vegetable Market was mentioned and much discussion focused on the Good Food Box from FoodShare. Participants had extensive knowledge of its content, its costs, and the range of options available. Mention was made of community gardens, and the availability of free and low-cost meals at a variety of locations in the community, including three United churches: Hope United, Glen Rhodes and Woodgreen. "Community dinners, like at Woodgreen Church, are really good. It also gives an opportunity to talk and socialize, and you get a free meal, of course, which is good, because some people are not able to cook, or they don't have . . . financial reasons, are not able to afford it."

#### **Community Health Centre**

The activities of community health centres related to food was discussed. Also mentioned were the South Riverdale Community Health Centre's organized bus trips to farms that allow community members to acquire low-cost food. The SRCHC's My Weight, My Plan Workshop and the Metamorphosis support group were provided as other examples of such community support. The importance of letting the community know of these resources was stressed.

#### **Neighbourhood and City Events**

Events in the neighbourhood were identified as an important contributor to quality of life. These events include Seasonal Festivals and parties, for example at Simpson Recreational Centre and Don Mount Court. Other events mentioned included the Police Department's Annual Open Houses and the Pow Wows held at Moss Park and the Sky Dome. These events are seen as important since they contribute to neighbourliness and helping people with coping with day-to-day issues.

#### **Neighbourliness**

South Riverdale was seen as a "friendly" and "close-knit community." Neighbours are seen as helping each other and examples such as finding a missing girl were cited. People get together at various community events and agencies, such as dinners at Woodgreen Church: "It's nice to get together, it really is. It helps a lot, a lot of people financially, but socially too. It's really important to know people in this area. Just to get out."

Additionally, people look to each other for assistance when dealing with issues of crime. One participant's neighbour has a direct line to the police and she noted that "we all watch each others backs."

People were seen as having a vision of caring for and helping each other. This vision shows itself in how people volunteer and help out at numerous community agencies.

#### **Public Transportation**

The availability of the King, Queen, and Dundas street cars was mentioned as an asset to the community.

## **Recreational Programs**

This theme is primarily related to the recreational activities that are available for children. Among those mentioned were activities at Pape Recreation Centre such as jazz dancing for children, and activities at the S.H. Armstrong Centre and the Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre. Participants appreciated that most programs were free or offered at a low cost and that low-cost childcare was generally available. Also mentioned were the Riverdale Zoo and various tours. This theme touches upon a concern with children which emerges as an important theme in itself.

Also included in this theme was the important need for these Centres' outreaching to community members. This was mentioned in specific relation to the Jimmie Simpson Centre where an example of under-used basketball facilities was cited, and people being made aware of Pape's facilities, for example. This issue of community outreach emerges as its own theme. Recreational facilities are also seen as helping in preventing crime among youth. There was also mention of a need for more programs and activities for young adults with a disability.

## **Volunteering at Community Centres and Agencies**

For these participants, volunteering at local community agencies is an important part of living in this community. These include activities at such places as Hope United Church's community dinners, the Parent Resource Centre drop-in, and Riverdale Hospital. These activities are important since it allows for "communication with people with problems." Other agencies which require and use volunteer assistance are the churches, and the fruit and vegetable market. Frequently, the agencies that people chose to volunteer at were those that were available to assist them when they themselves required assistance.

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Appearance of Community**

The neighbourhood is seen as very clean, but some of the buildings are beat up looking. A facelift of some buildings was required, it was felt.

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Crime and Safety**

Crime is seen as being "pretty high." It is primarily viewed as involving "kids and teenagers," smashing car windows, for example. This problem was seen as resulting from the failure of parents to set rules for children, and the large number of single parent families and parents having to work a lot and not being able to supervise their children. Related to crime is the increasing use of the F-word and other poor language. Recreational centres are seen as an important means of helping to prevent these problems with youth.

One participant mentioned that she "would like to see the crack dealers get out of here," and that a problem with crack dealers in the area has been cleared up due to the efforts of community members, the police and a local councillor.

### **Cuts in Services**

One participant felt that "we can't continue to blame Mike Harris, he has to do what he has to do. For me, the cuts are a good thing because I feel that too many people have become

dependent on the government and with that dependency they don't get a chance to look into themselves and see what talents they have." However, the same participant noted that "with all the cuts people are more stressed out and more depressed" and that a lot of encouragement is needed to get people to be active and participate in their community. Another participant felt that Mike Harris "went a little bit too drastic and is hurting a lot of people . . . single moms with children, seniors, health and community services." The participant added that her family was no longer eligible for free or subsidized dental care, and the group agreed that more free or low-cost dental services are needed.

### **Negative Perceptions of Low Income Areas**

There was concern about the negative perception of low-income neighbourhoods. The media was seen as stereotyping neighbourhoods. It was mentioned that people are sometimes talked down to at tenants meetings. This perception of people with lower incomes can lead to "kids feeling bad about themselves." There is also concern that these perceptions are associated with poor treatment by the police. This is especially important in relation to children. There were also concerns that minority youth were especially targeted by the police for harassment. Numerous instances of this intimidation were cited.

### **Police Issues**

There is a concern that police unfairly target poor and minority youth. This concern involves the belief of police violence towards some community members. There has been some improvement in the last while but generally, "police have to stop labelling people and stop looking at the colour of your skin and being so racist." The police recognize a need for improvement and they do attempt, through their open houses, and visiting of schools, to improve their relationship with the community. These activities could help instill a respect for authority figures in children.

### **D. Coping and Supports**

Each participant had a story to tell about how they have coped with personal issues. Individuals spoke of their moving to Toronto from a very different kind of community, of personal obstacles and problems they have encountered, and problems they currently face. All commented that it is important to meet people and get help. It is sometimes difficult to get this assistance. Some cope by learning, teaching, sharing, and helping others. Others depended on neighbourhood, family, and friends.

When explicitly asked about coping people reiterated their activities as volunteers, having places to go to, and helping neighbours. The availability of resources such as Applegrove Parent-Child Drop-In, Woodgreen's dinners, and volunteering with FoodShare was mentioned.

### **E. Desired Resources and Services**

Both word of mouth and written materials were seen as important ways to provide information. Participants felt that a booklet identifying community services and resources was a good idea. Information about community resources could be posted in libraries. These resources should be available in different languages and be culturally sensitive.

Related to outreach, the Daily Bread Food Bank was known to provide a Community Information Booklet for approximately ten dollars. It was felt that community centres should

work harder to make the availability of their programs known. These agencies should make people feel welcome. This is especially important for those people coming from different backgrounds and cultures, as well as those moving into the neighbourhood. Participants related that they had some difficulty finding out about programs and services when they first came to the area: "You do have to push your way in and find things out."

### **Helping and Supporting Children**

An important concern was helping children. This is seen in a concern with "getting them young." The Sparks and Brownies were mentioned as helping children. Parenting programs at health and recreation centres were identified as being helpful for learning how to deal with your children in a different way. A need for quality daycare was recognized: "children are our future and we need to invest in them much more than we're doing now, if that means paying the day care workers more money so they do a better job, do it." The need for the media to stop stereotyping poor people and "street people", and a need to respect elders was emphasized. This theme of helping and supporting children includes aspects of many of the other themes, recreational resources, reducing crime, and having events and neighbourliness in the community.

### **Improving Available Services**

Participants appreciated the services currently available but felt they could be improved. "Take money from elsewhere and put it where it's vital." "Take it from the rich and give it to the poor." Services could be improved by being more sensitive; workers must learn to listen. Employed people should not be restricted from using food banks, since sometimes they cannot make ends meet.

There should be better quality day-care and baby-sitting. More information should be provided to people on parenting and raising children, and life skills were also seen as important. "Conflict resolution skills, that's a big thing. Giving the parents and the children the skills they need before the problems arise. Community workers and everybody must realize that things are changing rapidly and they have to keep changing by always keeping up with new skills, new ways to communicate with people, new ways to teach people and things like that."



**Church Dinner Group #1**  
**December, 1996**  
**5 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Agencies and Resources**

The participants were knowledgeable about where to obtain assistance if it was needed. "If you need help in Toronto you can get it but you have to go to the right person or you are lost. You go to a person and they can help you to the right person." A number of community resources and agencies were mentioned. "Woodgreen Community Centre is good at Carlaw and Queen. People who work at Woodgreen are very good." The Latvian centre was mentioned as were "little drop in centres" which are in the community. "There is the United Church there that can give you help." Also mentioned, though not in the immediate neighbourhood were the Yonge Street Mission, the Genesis Centre, and Dixon Hall. "Connections are all around."

Once these resources are known they can connect people to the city councillor, health, and welfare services. "On health, the welfare system, they can tell me where to get classes, and then it is up to me to go from point A to point B."

**Community Health Centres**

The South Riverdale and East End community health centres were identified as being wonderful places. One participant who had a stroke commented: "I go every nine weeks to the (East End) Community Health Centre. With my daughter I now go there. I've been taking my wife there. We go at the same time. It has been a grand glorious feeling getting the toes looked after."

Another person commented: "They are doing a good job here at the (South Riverdale) Community Health Centre. The community health centre is helping a lot of people, local doctors, they are listening to the people."

**Neighbourliness**

An important theme is that people are friendly and willing to provide help when it is needed. "I fell once and people stopped and helped me. It was a cold winter day and people called the ambulance. This is when you find out about the little things that neighbours will do for you." Similarly, the neighbourhood is perceived as one where "people return a smile." Everyone mentioned being able to get along with people in the community.

**Responsiveness of Community Agencies**

It was believed that community and municipal agencies were responsive to the concerns of community members, including children. "Children talk among themselves, especially those on social services. If they have problems with the snack programs or want to clean things up in the parks, the agencies clue in and help." These agencies include the Public Health Department and the Children's Aid Society. When one woman had a problem she went to the City Councillor. "I went to this fellow, told him the problem, and he went to city hall and got help. It was as simple as picking up a phone."

**Volunteering at Community Centres and Agencies**

Two participants mentioned their volunteer work and contributions they make in the community. "I volunteer occasionally in the community and for those who need help at Pape

Recreation Centre where I am on the Centre's Board." "I used to be on the faculty at Dixon Hall, I sing at Woodgreen United Church."

## **B. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Concern About Children and Their Behaviour**

There is a concern about the behaviour of many children in the neighbourhood. "Children are ill-behaved, young girls fool around at the showers [at the recreation centre]. Some listen and some just spit at you." This kind of behaviour is attributed to poor parenting and poor schooling. "Kids can vandalize and parents will tell you to go another direction if you say anything." The children's behaviour and vandalism is seen as improving however. "Many children listen to you. Chinese children obey when you tell them to not scream or run around."

### **Concern About Cuts**

There is a concern about the effects of budget cuts upon these agencies: "some are closing down. There are problems with some of the bigger places. They were not run during June or July and all of them are trying to cut budgets."

### **Crime and Safety**

There is concern about vandalism and crime. The vandalism is primarily attributed to children. "Vandalism still goes around, young kids break the antennae on the cars. It's primarily by youth, at schools and at the recreation centres. Young kids break in, break the locks at the recreation centre."

One participant had been mugged recently. Additionally, there was a concern from one participant about crime being associated with needle exchange programs. "Needle exchanges bring in the drugs. If you don't give the needles away, then drug dealers are pushed away. We don't want the needles here."

### **Environmental Concerns**

One participant was knowledgeable about environmental issues in the neighbourhood. South Riverdale was formerly an industrial area and has much landfill. "We have major problem with land-fill sites. Down by the Commissioners (plant) and the torn down gas stations, there are land fills with animals, sewage, and PCB's. Crummy houses were built on land sites. Industrial stuff that was dumped there and is coming up."

### **Racism and Prejudice**

There was concern about prejudice and difficulties expressed by professionals concerning the diversity of the population. "I hear teachers complain of the different kinds of kids... I'm still hearing school teachers saying they can't cope with different kinds of children." "Kids are told not to attend university even though they have good grades. Racism, this is one of the sad things."

### **Small Businesses Closing**

One participant spoke of how small businesses have been forced to close down by larger chains. "I've seen the little stores close down and the small businesses being put out of business by Knob Hill and Miracle Mart."



**Church Dinner Group #2**  
**January, 1997**  
**2 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Agencies and Resources**

Both focus group participants were active in the community and knowledgeable of the many community resources available in South Riverdale. Spirit Happening, an alternative worship service offered by Woodgreen Church, was seen as “bringing the community together, all different ethnic groups.” Other programs mentioned for the good work they do were the Red Door Women’s Shelter, Literacy for East Toronto, and the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. Woodgreen Community Centre was seen as having “a lot of good programs.” Woodgreen is a place where you can really get involved, meet people, and attend events; the people there are “very friendly.” Food and its availability emerged as its own theme as a number of programs related to accessing healthy food were identified: the Bruce School Breakfast Program, the Morris Street Public School Good Food Box Program, Meals on Wheels, Partners for Food, a local food bank, community kitchens, the People’s Market, and the Riverdale Meadow Community Garden.

**The Community Health Centre (CHC)**

The South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) was seen as “doing a lot of good things for people in this community.” Concern was expressed about the effect of cutbacks, especially for the elderly and people with AIDS. Participants attended groups run by the CHC, such as weight management, self-esteem and anger management. The CHC was also used for primary care by one participant. One participant was involved with the health centre’s Lead Committee, which is seen as doing good work to educate the community about the effects of lead.

**Food and Its Availability**

The availability of healthy and affordable food was an important theme. Participants were aware that there is a need for food programs in the community, since some people have trouble making ends meet. A local food bank, the Riverdale Meadow Community Garden, Meals on Wheels and the People’s Market were mentioned as programs that help people access healthy and affordable food. Also, the Bruce School Breakfast Program “gives children nutritious meals, so that they can go to school and learn, without being hungry.” The Morris Street Public School has a Good Food Box Program, which includes lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. In the local Loblaws, there is a bulk food section which is helpful for people who like to buy in large quantities and save money. Partners for Food is just starting a food buying co-op; they hope to get at least ten people involved who are interested in buying in bulk to get a discount on their food bills. There is presently a community kitchen affiliated with the St. Michael’s Clinic, and another is starting up through Woodgreen Community Centre. More breakfast and lunch programs are needed for children in the community.

## **Neighbourliness**

South Riverdale was viewed as a “close-knit community” where “people help each other.” Participants appreciated the “camaraderie of people around here.” “Whenever there’s problems people work together.” This community spirit is exemplified by both participants’ involvement in community activities. They also cited church activities and meeting with friends and other people with similar interests as important.

## **Volunteering at Community Centres and Agencies**

Volunteering was an important and meaningful activity for the participants. Regarding her involvement with Meals on Wheels, one participant said : “I really like working for Meals on Wheels, it makes me feel good, giving back to the community.” Both participants were involved in a number of community groups. It was mentioned that “the people who volunteer and get involved are the same people over and over again.” Possible reasons for this may be that some people are not oriented to group activities, or are simply used to being on their own.

## **B. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Crime and Safety**

In reference to crime, it was mentioned that “adults get kids to do the crime because they know they don’t have to do the time.” Participants expressed concern about robberies in the area. Also mentioned was finding razor blades and needles on the route that children take to walk to school.

One participant commented: “the neighbourhood has changed a lot, in some ways it’s not for the better. There’s somewhat of a problem with prostitutes around here now, and crack and drug dealers. We didn’t have that problem ten years ago. ” It was felt that these problems start in the South Riverdale area and move to Regent Park. Concern was expressed that people in the neighbourhood are turning a blind eye, denying the existence of crackhouses and prostitutes in the area and that this is related to break-ins. “When you’re in denial about something you’re never going to solve the problem.” Some local restaurants are considered hang-outs which add to these problems, which are seen as getting worse. The need for more rehabilitation programs was noted.

### **Cuts in Services**

Funding cutbacks to health and social services and the proposed Megacity generated some concern. When speaking of services provided by the South Riverdale Community Health Centre, one participant commented that “all of these things are in danger of being lost because of the cutbacks, and there’s a lot of people in this neighbourhood who are going to suffer, especially underprivileged people like the elderly, the frail elderly that can’t get around, people with AIDS that need a lot of care . . . If we lose all of these services in this area, there’s going to be a lot of people who are going to suffer and that’s what we’re all very concerned about.” Speaking of environmental concerns and not wanting an incinerator in the area, the participant also said: “if we get a Megacity, we’re going to get all of their garbage.”

### **Environmental Concerns**

Participants were aware of lead contamination in the area and knew of people who had experienced lead poisoning; one participant worked with the SRCHC's Lead Committee. Participants did not like the bad smells coming from some of the big buildings on Eastern Avenue. They did not want an incinerator in the area, nor garbage from other areas if the Megacity changes occur. Also related to the environment was mention of the work being done to regenerate the Don Valley and the river system; health problems related to smoking and concern about people not complying with the new no-smoking legislation; concern about the effects of the Gardiner expressway on people's health; and a problem with dead rats and garbage (which was quickly cleared up due to the responsiveness of Peter Tabuns' office). Traffic in the area is seen as getting worse, and the number of bad drivers increasing.

### **C. Desired Resources and Services**

When asked explicitly about things they would like to have in the community that are not present now, responses included: more outreach to seniors, the frail elderly and shut-ins; more rehabilitation programs for persons with alcohol and drug problems; additional psychiatric support services; a Parents Without Partners program; and restoration of Maple Leaf Forever House, which was viewed as an important part of local history.

### **Helping and Supporting Children**

Concern was expressed about finding razor blades and needles on the route that children take to walk to school. It was also felt that children need to be taken more seriously in cases of sexual assault. General concern for the well-being of children is expressed in the following comments: "we don't look at children as people until they're adults," "children should be better taken care of," "children are our future." More breakfast and lunch programs was cited as one thing to do to help children.

**Literacy Group  
February, 1997  
5 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Agencies and Resources**

In addition to community centres, participants knew of a number of community resources available in South Riverdale and the Toronto area, for example, the community health centres and legal aid were mentioned. Food banks were mentioned as a way to help people with low incomes. However, one participant felt he was not treated with respect when he visited a food bank and he would not return there. He said: "A lot of the times people that really need to use the food banks won't use them because of the attitude of the people who are running the food banks . . . when I went for the very first time I got so grilled I thought I was in Russia, and it turned me right off after that." He emphasized that people should always be treated with respect when they use community services.

**Community Centres**

Although most of the participants did not live in South Riverdale, they were aware of the services offered by the many community centres in the area. "What I really enjoy in this neighbourhood is that there are many community centres that you can get involved in, there's a library where I can get a tutor, there's a community centre [Jimmie Simpson] right across from Woodgreen Community Centre where you can take part in activities. For example, there could be swimming, weight-lifting, roller-skating."

Woodgreen Community Centre was viewed as a valuable part of the neighbourhood, for both the services it provides and the connections it has with other community resources. One participant described Woodgreen as "an excellent example of a good community activator." Woodgreen is seen as a place you can go to for help with problems.

**Community Involvement**

One participant mentioned that some community members were not well connected to services and ways to get involved in the community. He felt that when people do not know where to go for help, it can lead to crimes being committed, such as robbery. Another person felt strongly that, in addition to the services that are currently available, better communication and more community involvement was necessary. He said: "They have the services here but more could be done. People need to participate, try to find out about things and work together. I think they [services] are doing the best with what they have." Others agreed with this participant's statement that "To make it a better community is having community involvement." Communication materials designed to reach the community, such as pamphlets, should be in clear language.

**Neighbourliness**

Participants felt that it is important to know people in your neighbourhood. The cultural diversity in the neighbourhood was noted and getting along with people was seen as important. Generally, people in the neighbourhood are friendly and pleasant.

### **Public Transportation**

The group agreed that transportation in the area was good. “The good thing is that the transit system runs every ten minutes and I can just jump on it at any time.”

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Crime and Safety**

Some participants felt safe and comfortable in the South Riverdale area. “I find it very comfortable and very easy because I know all the things that are surrounding me, and I feel safe walking the street.” This person, who lived in the Regent Park area, made the following comparison: “I think this neighbourhood is a little safer than some others I’ve been in, and travelled through, I think it’s safer than Regent Park.”

Others indicated they did not feel safe. Mention was made of the increasing number of robberies occurring (in general, not only in South Riverdale). As one participant remarked: “There’s too many murders, people breaking in your own house.” Others cited concerns related to traffic and speeding cars, and cars not stopping when people are crossing at crosswalks. A female participant noted that she feels safe during the day but not at night. Another participant agreed that he takes extra precaution at night and tries to stay in well-lit areas. More lighting and better crosswalks would increase people’s feeling of safety.

### **Shopping**

Participants mentioned a number of stores in the area such as Loblaws and Knob Hill Farms, although it was noted that there are no major grocery stores on Queen Street. This caused some concern for seniors who cannot get around easily.

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Garbage and Pollution**

Garbage on the streets was seen as a problem, as well as people not cleaning up after their dogs. These problems were observed in Riverdale, as well as in other areas of the city. “The way it is now everybody just throws everything everywhere and people allow their dogs to go on other people’s lawns. They don’t stop to think that this other guy has to come clean this mess up.” One participant felt that the City of Toronto is responsible for cleaning up garbage on the street, and that there need to be some restrictions “to keep the animals out of our neighbourhood.” Another person felt that “Whoever makes the mess should be the one cleaning it up.” Also mentioned was air pollution caused by cars.

### **Housing**

Participants agreed that, in general, there is a shortage of affordable housing and that “There should be more housing for people who need it, especially people who are on fixed



income.” Additionally, it was felt that group homes need to teach people more skills that will increase their independence.

### **Cuts in Service**

Several participants expressed concern about recent cutbacks, and how these were impacting on people with low incomes, and on people experiencing problems. For example, one participant saw a relationship between cutbacks and increasing crime: “. . . what the Mike Harris government has done . . . If someone is taken off welfare, you got no money, you got no food, so what’s the first thing that’s going to come to your mind, you’re going to end up stealing or robbing, and you won’t give a darn who gets hurt in the middle.”

Someone else recognized an increase in homelessness and fewer supports for people who need help: “Due to the welfare cuts, people are short of money and don’t have that much money to buy what they’ve got to buy . . . when the Harris government took power, the first thing he went after was the poor. He went after social housing . . . people now have nowhere to go. You see the growth of homelessness. People don’t have families to go to, for example, people that come from abusive families . . . Counselling for people with psychiatric problems, that’s being threatened to be cut by the provincial government. People out there need help, they don’t need cuts, and the more cuts that appear, the more anger that’s going to keep growing out there . . . People out there have trouble coping and when they have trouble coping they get out of control.” Participants agreed that they would like to see politicians be more responsible.

**Community Health Centre Members**  
**March, 1997**  
**6 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Churches**

Participants agreed that the many churches in the area were a good thing for the neighbourhood and they provide a lot of support to community members. Firstly, churches are places where people can gather “to talk, think, and deal with something a little bit more spiritual which is very important for a community.” Churches also host many programs that are “socially oriented, health-oriented.” Many churches offer programs for the whole community, not just their members. For example, they have lunches, dinners, drop-ins, support groups, food banks, scouts and guides, and community kitchens.

**Community Agencies and Resources**

Participants discussed that there are many services in South Riverdale to help people. This includes community centres such as Jimmie Simpson and Woodgreen. There are also many schools in the area, and that was seen as a positive thing for the community. Recreation centres, skating rinks, and swimming pools were also mentioned. The group agreed that the reason that South Riverdale is so rich in services could be related to a history of activism in the community, as well as there being a high need for services. Community services were seen as particularly important during times of high unemployment.

**Community Health Centre (CHC)**

Participants appreciated having the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) close by. Although most of the group did not use the services of the health centre, they described it as being easily accessible, as well as helpful in case of emergency. The health centre is seen as one place people can go to for help with problems. However, one person felt that many people, especially some Chinese members of the community, are not aware of the CHC and how they could access its services. Related to this, people felt that there was a definite need for translation services (e.g., Vietnamese, Chinese) and generally, more services need to be available in these languages.

**Easy Accessibility to Amenities**

Participants appreciated the many stores and services in the area, although there was a difference of opinion about this depending on whether the person lived in North or South Riverdale. One woman, who lives on Danforth Avenue, commented: “I love living in an area that is almost self-sufficient.” She felt that “big stores can kill a sense of community,” while having a number of smaller stores helps to create a sense of belonging. In contrast, someone who lived closer to Queen Street felt that this self-sufficiency in terms of amenities was less evident. “Down on Queen Street, you can either eat breakfast, take the streetcar up to Danforth, or buy antiques.”

### **Food and its Availability**

Participants were aware of many initiatives in the community to increase access to healthy, affordable food. For example, mention was made of food buying clubs, community gardens, the Good Food Box from Foodshare, and the Stone Soup Food Co-op, which has now closed down.

### **Helping to Improve the Environment**

The work being done by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don was seen as one concrete way to improve the environment. For example, they have “programs all through the summer that includes walks to help people appreciate the nature that we have in this city. It’s amazing to have this many parks. Cleaning it up, concrete things, not just asking for money, but actually taking a garbage bag and going along the Don River and cleaning it up, which is done every year.” Also mentioned were community gardens in the area (such as the one behind the City Adult Learning Centre). These gardens were described as a good way to help people “get back to nature.” The gardens help people to “learn to treat nature better, and garden in a very respectful way.” Also mentioned was the work being done by the Environment Centre and Community Shared Agriculture.

### **Libraries**

The participants were aware of all the public libraries in the neighbourhood. Libraries were seen to enhance quality of life, since they provide the opportunity for people to read more. Literacy was understood as being important to health.

### **Low Cost Housing**

Some participants felt that the low-cost housing in the area was a good thing, as it helps to reduce homelessness. There was agreement that there does not seem to be many homeless people in the area. However, one woman mentioned that she was scared of people living in shelters near her home at Carlaw and Gerrard. She has heard fighting and there is a lot of drinking.

Seniors buildings were mentioned as a good thing, as well as cooperative housing. “The cooperative housing movement is one of the great strengths and always has been of Riverdale.” “Something we would like to keep. We’re afraid of losing it.”

### **Neighbourhood Diversity: Cultural**

The group spoke positively about the cultural diversity of South Riverdale and of Toronto in general. It was felt that South Riverdale benefits from being a part of the City of Toronto and the vibrancy of city life. “The city of Toronto, it’s the most diverse in terms of populations of any city in the world. The downtown core of Toronto has more people of different origins than any other city in the world. That I find a very exciting and a great thing.”

### **Neighbourhood Diversity: Income and Class**

The area was seen as an economically diverse one. One person commented that he “has always been fascinated by the working class roots of the area.” Some felt that the economic disparity may contribute to crimes such as break-ins: “When you have class

diversity, you have people with a lot of needs and you have people with quite a lot to steal, so they're going to get together and that's how they get together."

### **Parks**

The group agreed that there is "a lot of good park space" in the area. For example, Withrow Park and Riverdale Park were specifically mentioned. One person felt that many parks in the area are under-used, except by dogs. This may be due to the large amount of broken glass and debris in some parks. It was felt that, bureaucratically, no one is taking responsibility for maintaining the parks, for example the area around the wading pool at Queen Alexandra. One person knew that the parents at the school had taken some initiative to get the City to clean up this area. The Don Valley was also mentioned as an excellent green space and good for outdoor activities such as bicycling and skiing. More bicycle paths would be seen as an improvement to the area.

### **Public Transportation**

The group agreed that public transportation in the area is very good. Accessibility to good public transportation was seen as very important for the community. For cars, the area is also easily accessible by a variety of routes. Even with the good public transit, one person felt that seniors will not go out, especially in the winter, unless they have someone to drive them.

### **Representatives for South Riverdale**

Participants appeared most supportive of the NDP party, and they spoke highly of Marilyn Churley, the Member of Provincial Parliament. It was also mentioned that the high number of services in the area may reflect that the "NDP fights for its people." One person noted the contradiction that "politically, the area has been a safe seat for the New Democratic Party (NDP) and home to the Ku Klux Klan at the same time." Some felt that it was unfortunate that "the NDP seat is not safe anymore." The local representatives were seen as people to go to for help with certain problems. For example, City Councillor Peter Tabuns is helpful for neighbourhood-related concerns, such as parking. The federal Member of Parliament may be approached "if it's an extremely difficult thing to do, if it costs money."

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Job Opportunities and Environmental Concerns**

Everyone agreed that it is a good thing for the environment that the Lever Brothers and Colgate factories have closed. However, one person felt that there "is always a dilemma in any society between concern for the environment versus the job opportunities it provides." Others disagreed: "I don't believe that there's a direct conflict between us trying to increase employment opportunities here in our neighbourhood and trying to eliminate pollution or polluters. I don't think that it's a contradiction." Someone else concurred: "It is definitely not a conflict of either we have jobs and pollution or we have no jobs and no pollution. It doesn't work that way at all." Examples of a neighbourhood community market and the stores on Danforth were cited as examples of small businesses that pollute less than larger ones, create more jobs, and bring services that are useful to the community.

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Crime and Safety**

In regards to safety, perceptions varied depending on one's location in Riverdale. The area near the Danforth was seen to be safe, while there were concerns about safety in the Queen Street area. One woman commented that: "I really like living in area that is so safe. You can walk on Danforth any time of the day or night. It's clean, it's well-lit, it's safe." However, someone else who lived near Queen and Broadview felt it was "pretty frightening" for his two daughters, in part because of the strip club two blocks from their home. These commercial developments were of greater concern than people spending their days in the park near his home and using the community resources there. Someone else did not feel there was enough of a police presence in the area and that when called, they did not arrive quickly enough. Speeding cars were also mentioned as being unsafe.

Participants were aware of many incidents of violence in the neighbourhood, such as a 7-11 store being robbed. Incidents within the Chinese immigrant community were also mentioned, such as a shooting at Broadview and Gerrard, and a cannon being blown into a house owned by a motorcycle gang. It was felt that "violence is almost getting systemic." It was known that the police call South Riverdale "the toilet" because of the high number of break-ins.

### **Political Situation in Ontario**

Most of the participants seemed displeased with the current Conservative government in Ontario, commenting for example that: "As an area, we're ready to cut our teeth on the Harris agenda. Because it's like a little microcosm of what has really happened everywhere else."

### **Poverty and Unemployment**

Participants noted that "over the past year there's more people begging on the Danforth, things are getting worse. There are definitely more people falling through the cracks." Participants saw a relationship between high unemployment in the area and increased violence. "There's a lot of unemployed people here. This a real centre for unemployed people and when you get lots of people who are unemployed there's lots of frustration and there's going to be violence, and there's no question that without services that's going to increase."

### **Unwanted and Uncharacteristic Businesses**

One participant spoke of two "significant commercial developments that don't have any relationship to the neighbourhood." These are the strip club Jilly's and The Opera House bar. He felt these establishments "are assaults on the neighbourhood. I understand that people have to go to nightclubs, but I feel overwhelmed by them. I have to live there."

## **D. Desired Resources and Services**

### **Support for Small Business**

One participant who had just started her own business saw a need for more support for new small businesses. Concrete support, such as financial help, shared office space and use of equipment, are needed more than counselling and advice, which is already widely available. Toronto Community Ventures was identified as one organization attempting to provide this kind of support. A job creation centre for anyone beginning an enterprise or looking for work was also put forth as a possible pilot project.

# Youth

**Community Centre Youth Group #1**  
**November, 1996**  
**Female Group: 6 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Neighbourhood Community Centre**

The community centre was seen as an important part of the young women's lives. One participant commented: "We are lucky to have one, because some (communities) don't have one." It is a place to meet friends: "There are a lot of people our age here." The community centre is a meeting grounds, a place to "come in and chill out, it's too cold to stay outside." Some of the girls commented that they enjoy special events at the centre, such as celebrations for Thanksgiving, Canada Day, Black History Month, and staff birthdays. They put up decorations and have celebrations in the gym. The girls enjoy participating in soccer, baseball, basketball, and volleyball, but indicated that they would also like to have "more programs for girls," such as cooking, dancing and singing. "They treat us just like the boys."

**B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

**The Neighbourhood**

One participant appreciated the size of the community: "It's small. I don't like big areas. Big environments are too crowded. There's more space here." There appeared to be some frustration among the group in regards to living in a community with limited resources: "The community is cheap...the community needs serious help. They don't know how to take care of things . . . used to be fun before around this neighbourhood. There used to be more things to do and more people." Someone commented that "it [the community] needs to be re-done."

**Respect for the Community and its Members**

One participant felt there was a sense of belonging to the community: "We all stick together, the whole community, adults and everyone...we don't fight against one another, we treat each other with respect." However, someone else disagreed and said: "The kids they're brats. I don't think we give respect to everyone. Kids around here have no discipline."

**School**

When asked specifically whether school was a good thing in their lives, participants commented: "School is good ... we are learning things everyday." "Yes, because I get an education and I need one. No, because there is too much confusion and mix-up. Too many stories of people talking about other people."



### **C. Coping and Supports**

When asked about coping with problems, some participants indicated that they could go to community centre staff for help. It appeared to be difficult for the group to identify other places to go for help. They said there is "nothing in the community to help with families" and that if they needed help they would "need to go somewhere far, maybe downtown." When asked explicitly about getting help from friends or family, one person responded: "What are they going to do?".

**Community Centre Youth Group #2**  
**November, 1996**  
**Male Group: 11 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Neighbourhood Community Centre**

The community centre appeared in many ways to be a centrepiece of the participants' lives. It was at the centre that a variety of recreational activities could be engaged in. These included basketball, indoor soccer, floor hockey, and use of a pool table. Some of the participants belonged to a leadership club. While the leadership club "was a good way to meet girls," the club also engaged in fundraising for the United Way and the centre.

The community centre's importance was highlighted since participants appeared put-out when other community members accessed the centre. For example, "on weekends, there's nothing to do, just stuff for little kids." The participants were very concerned with how facilities at the centre depended upon successful fund-raising. The pool table being beat-up was a major concern as was the need for new equipment. The group agreed with the comment "We would just sit at home or at the mall if the centre was shut down."

**B. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

**The Community's Image**

The neighbourhood was perceived as "having a bad reputation." Some suggested that outsiders were responsible for the problems in the neighbourhood: "People come from outside and cause trouble" and "There's crackheads at the high school." One commented that "Kids make fun of people here."

**Limited Employment and Educational Opportunities**

For some of the participants, access to part-time jobs was problematic: "We need jobs, no one wants to give us jobs." Additionally, some of these same individuals perceived limited educational options: "We won't make it to college." For some, these issues were related to their being black. "When people see you're black, they get scared."

**Limited Leisure Opportunities**

The immediate neighbourhood and community was seen as having few leisure opportunities. Participants felt that "There's nothing outside" and "There's nothing to do." One participant wanted to engage in activities such as "rock climbing." Most responded with a strong "No" when asked if they "got out of the city."

### **C. Coping and Supports**

When asked about how they cope or manage when they have problems, comments were limited to staff at the community centre. “You can always talk to these guys when you've got problems.” There was an Outreach Service and a youth worker at the centre that “we can talk to.” Some concerns were raised about some of the rules at the centre: “The one strike and you're out rule was too strict” but overall, staff at the centre were seen as being “good guys.”

**Young Mothers' Group**  
**December, 1996**  
**6 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Agencies and Resources**

The women discussed the availability and quality of community services and facilities. One person commented on the relatively large number of services (e.g., Woodgreen Employment Centre). However, another noted that it can be difficult to find out about the programs that are offered. Two women noted the presence of several parks with free wading pools to which they take their children. One participant noted the benefit of drop-in centres and medical centres near her home in South Riverdale. Two women mentioned the benefits of non-profit housing in the community, although there are waiting lists.

**Community Centres**

At several points throughout the meeting, the group discussed community centres. They noted the valuable programs that make life good in their community, such as swimming, skating, aerobics, parenting class, and availability of babysitting. Two participants noted that such activities "get you out of the house...you get to meet other people...your children get to meet other children." One woman commented that the community centres were "very organized" and mentioned, in particular Pape Recreation Centre, Jimmie Simpson, and Applegrove.

**Easy Accessibility to Amenities**

Two participants commented positively on how accessible things are in their community. One woman stated that "everything's close, it's nearby, like if you need to go to a doctor, grocery store, everything's accessible, within a five or ten minute walk." The other woman noted that "mostly everything's good about the area...you don't get the same problems as downtown...you're close to everything -- the beach, Scarborough, shopping."

**Family-Oriented Neighbourhood**

Participants discussed the family-oriented nature of their community. They contrasted this community with the downtown area which is "for people that don't have kids." One participant felt that since the area was family-oriented, not many "kids are hanging out on the street" and "people are doing something, not just standing around." However, another noted that kids do "hang around the high school."

**Public Transportation**

The women discussed how good transportation services are in the area (i.e., streetcars, subway, buses). One participant commented: "the streetcar is my best friend." However, another participant noted that she did not like taking transit at certain times of the day (i.e., "when kids are coming home from school").

## **Young Mothers Drop-in**

The women spoke very positively about the drop-in they attended on Tuesdays with other young mothers. They appreciated the casual atmosphere of this group and the opportunity it provided to learn about children and parenting from other young mothers. In this group the mothers could "talk about anything" or "nothing."

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Police**

The group noted the presence of police in their community. One mentioned a positive experience in which she called the police for aid and they arrived very quickly. Two participants discussed police officers (at 55 Division) they liked. Two others voiced negative opinions, with one woman noting two incidents in which she felt that officers in her community had treated her unfairly. She also stated that she lived in "low income housing" and police do not respond when they are called by residents there. Another woman stated that there were not enough police in the area and, in fact, she never saw police officers near her home, in spite of a shooting in the area.

### **School**

School was viewed as a very positive option for these women, and most of those who are not attending school would like to. Availability of low-cost child care can be a barrier for them. One participant indicated that having lots of schools in the area was a good thing, while another felt that this was related to problems with kids hanging out and cutting through her yard.

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Child Care Needs**

Finding affordable child care was a barrier for some of the young mothers who wished to pursue their education. "I would go to school if I could afford daycare. There's not very many community colleges that have child care, at least that's affordable, so I can't go."

### **Crime and Safety**

Three participants discussed concerns about crime in their community. One woman commented that crime seems to be getting worse: "When our parents had us, teenagers weren't doing near what they're doing now, especially girls, and now girls are doing it just as much as guys and they're doing it younger, even having kids." It was felt that people doing crimes "have no fear" and that "kids get away with murder now." Also mentioned was that "kids are doing it (drugs) younger now and it's no big deal to get it." Participants also noted a break-in at a neighbour's house at one o'clock in the afternoon and another break-in attempt at the home of one of the participants.

Regarding personal safety, one person felt unsafe because she didn't know her immediate neighbours. She also feels this way because she has been approached by men (seeking prostitutes) on the street at night. Another felt unsafe because young people (in their teens and early twenties) hang around her neighbourhood.

## **Cuts in Services**

Several participants briefly discussed the effects of cutbacks on the community. They did not like that "things that are free now...parks, centres...we'll have to pay for later." They also associated the community not knowing about services to these services being cut: "If Mike Harris goes to cut something I'm sure he's going to look and see how many people use these things, and it's not that people aren't using them, it's just that people don't know that they're there so they don't know to use them, so I think that's why a lot of these programs are getting cut." Two participants noted the presence of people on the street asking passersby for money.

## **Neighbour's Judgements**

A few participants felt that some of their neighbours judged them negatively because they are young mothers. Some people "look down on you because you're young and you have a kid, and they don't know you, they just judge you . . . if you go to the mall people look at you and stare at you." "The neighbourhood's good, but the people in it, no . . . maybe because I'm the only young mom on my block."

In general regarding neighbours, some participants thought that people tend to "mind their own business" too much and not get involved if someone was in trouble, or else they can be too "nosy." However, others thought that people were "nice" and would generally help a person in trouble.

## **Noise**

Three women mentioned the high noise levels in their neighbourhoods. Dogs barking, traffic noise, and people are the main sources of noise, which is particularly bothersome at night. One participant noted noise made by children in a nearby school.

## **D. Coping and Supports**

When asked where they have sought or would seek help when the need arose, the women mentioned a variety of formal sources of aid: a public health office, health clinics, the Hospital for Sick Children Information line (which recommended a clinic), and a paediatrician. One person mentioned a "health nurse" by name and said she would call her for advice. She also stated that she did "not feel comfortable calling the community health centre...they aren't very polite to you on the phone...they want you to come in." Another woman said she would call one of the members of the mothers' group (i.e., others in focus group). The group agreed that there are enough programs and services but people don't know about them.

## **E. Desired Resources and Services**

When asked about resources they would like to have in the community, one participant wanted a place to toboggan and a drop-in Kinder Gym (which another participant indicated they had at Pape Recreation Centre). Also mentioned was more activities especially for young mothers, such as a drop-in centre at a convenient location. The group discussed how other (older) users of the drop-in treat them differently and judge them according to how they dress their children. As an alternative to the larger drop-in, and in addition to their Tuesday young moms group, they discussed meeting at another time and location.

## **Employment**

Some of the women indicated that they would like to have jobs in their neighbourhood, but felt there were few jobs available. "That's something there's not a lot of around where we are, is jobs." One participant noted that some local family businesses "don't want to hire young people." Another added that, in general, employers "don't want to hire you if you have a kid." One woman stated that she hasn't yet told her employer that she has a child. Another participant commented that "it's hard for people I know in a wheelchair to get a job."

# Seniors



**Seniors Wellness Group**  
**November , 1996**  
**8 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Activities**

Participating in community activities was an important factor contributing to making life good for these seniors. The seniors agreed that social activities in the community are “a nice time, where we can laugh, have lunch, and be together.” The Seniors Wellness Group is one such activity. As one participant said: “The Seniors Wellness Group is number one!” Seniors also get together at Woodgreen Community Centre for a variety of activities. For example, they play euchre and have monthly birthday parties. Woodgreen also hosts community bazaars, where you can “eat and have a nice laugh.”

**Community Health Centre (CHC)**

The South Riverdale Community Health Centre is a very important and valuable part of the community, as exemplified by the following comment: “I give them 100% . . . if the health centre closes I will be lost!” The health centre was described as a wonderful place where everyone is helpful and the staff will answer all the questions you have. It was also identified as a place you can go to for help with problems. One member of the group has been going there for 16 years.

Participants felt that the doctors and nurses are genuinely concerned about helping people feel better: “They only want us to come if we need it, they don't make you come back for check-ups if you don't have to.” In addition to the medical care some seniors receive at the SRCHC, they are also involved in the centre's health promotion programs. The Home Safe Home/Seniors Wellness Group is a much valued program. “Elsie is one lovely lady, always nice, and Liz too.” The My Weight, My Plan program was also mentioned.

**Neighbourliness**

The value of good neighbours was shared as a common theme. Neighbours are seen as friendly, co-operative, and helping each other when needed. The availability of neighbourhood volunteers was clear. For example, one woman shared that a neighbour was quick to offer assistance when her spouse was sick: “They offered rides to the doctor, to pick up my groceries, and to cut the lawn.” Another participant's son works night shifts and her neighbours offered to help with whatever she needed when he is away. Someone else had the house keys of three different people, to help in case they lock themselves out or have other problems. One participant's neighbour insisted: “If you ever want anything when you are alone, just call!” This neighbourliness reflects how the community supports each other in day to day life.

**Police Presence**

The police are seen as a positive force in the South Riverdale community and they help to keep a focus on safety. Participants mentioned the importance of being aware of what is going on in the neighbourhood. They appreciated the police's automated telephone service which gives a recorded message about any community crime concerns. One participant commented: “A local officer at the Division made it clear to me that there are no stupid questions and no stupid

answers, we should come to them no matter what the problem is.” It was also noted that there is a greater visible policing presence as “they are moving around more in the area.”

### **Public Transportation**

All participants agreed that the TTC service in South Riverdale is excellent, especially the availability of the King, Queen, and Dundas streetcars. “The Queen streetcars are wonderful, and the drivers are always so lovely, I always enjoy taking the transit.” The Jones Avenue bus was also mentioned as being an appreciated service. Some participants frequently used the TTC telephone service to find out bus route information: “I can call and they tell me when the next bus is coming so I know when to get ready.” The transit service is an important part of South Riverdale that helps seniors to be mobile in their community.

### **Woodgreen Housing**

Woodgreen housing was identified as a “wonderful place to live.” Some participants felt that the cultural diversity of Woodgreen, and of the community in general, was exciting. Woodgreen hosts activities that bring people from different cultures together. For example, they have Bingo, and there are celebrations for Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. They also have a community supper every two weeks, as well as a food co-op. Meals on Wheels is also affiliated with and provided through Woodgreen Community Centre. This service helps seniors remain independent. “For \$4.00 you can get a good meal, bun and butter, soup, entree, and a dessert.” It was also mentioned that Woodgreen has helped some people who used to be homeless.

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Aging of the Community**

Of some note, the group shared a feeling that the community was getting older: “You don't see kids around anymore, they are all grown up. Forty-two years ago, the community was full of children.” Children are seen as an asset to the community, and contribute to the excitement of daily activities. Today, the older children are becoming the support network.

### **Crime and Safety**

Generally speaking, participants felt safe in the area. They applauded South Riverdale for not having a visible presence of violence on the streets. It was felt that the violence is “restricted to the bars.” However, there was some concern that vandalism is becoming more evident. One person felt that “there are less drugs in this area than in the Annex, where people are sniffing glue and holding out their hand for spare change at the same time.”

Included in this theme was concern about the “ladies of the night working the streets of South Riverdale,” as reported in a local community newspaper. This concern was primarily for children: “I have children who might see this and this is wrong.” Another participant said: “I don't like to even think that they are there!”

### **Neighbourhood Stores**

The theme of convenience within the community was mentioned as an asset. The group agreed that there are many grocery and variety stores in the area. They appreciate many of the

stores on Queen Street because the products are inexpensive. The Beaches area also has good stores and it is easy to get to them by the Queen streetcar. Also mentioned was the importance of receiving flyers that describe what is available and on sale.

In contrast, there was some mention of the lack of availability of fresh vegetables within a reasonable distance. As well, participants noted the lack of postal service outlets in the area. Local stores will sell 45 and 96 cent stamps but you have to go to Gerrard and Pape to get other denominations. The familiar outlets have been closed down and now the community must use the bigger outlets.

### **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

#### **Cuts in Services**

There was some concern about funding cuts to community agencies. The South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Woodgreen were seen as having to cope with policies that “are taking it all away, giving it to the upper middle class.” To date, they seem to have been able to cope with these cuts, but there is real worry about the future. Someone commented “how wonderful it all was here” before these changes.

The possibility of losing community services, such as the health centre, would be devastating. “We would have to show them what we got and stand up and fight for once. They'll see the tiger in us yet!” There was a sense that the community would be proactive in their efforts to keep those things that are important to them.

There was also some concern about changes to the pension plans, as well as to the Guaranteed Income Supplement. “I am afraid of being truly poor . . . I am poor on paper now, but I am able to manage . . . what about later?”

### **D. Coping and Supports**

When asked about techniques for coping with problems, people mentioned the community health centre and Home care/VON nurses when needed. Participants also reported contacting City Councillor Peter Tabuns for help in a parking crisis and regarding a situation with a rooming house.

## **Community Centre Seniors Group February, 1997 9 participants**

### **A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

#### **Accessibility to the Beach**

The Toronto beaches are easily accessible from the South Riverdale area. The seniors agreed that the beaches are a lovely place to go and spend time. For most residents, it is a matter

of taking one streetcar, or perhaps a short walk, to be able to enjoy the beach. The beach is seen as a ideal place to do some walking and get some exercise. It is also good for some peace of mind and to get some fresh air.

### **Community Centres**

One positive aspect of the neighbourhood is the many community centres. In particular, Woodgreen Community Centre, Jimmie Simpson and Pape Recreation Centre were discussed.

Woodgreen Community Centre was identified as being a great place for both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking seniors. The seniors appreciate the many activities which take place at Woodgreen, such as choir, crafts, and Tai Chi. Another important program offered by Woodgreen is a CARE program for people with Alzheimer disease. One person commented that “a lot of people would not know what to do without Woodgreen.”

Jimmie Simpson and Pape Recreation Centres have activities for all ages. For adults and older adults there is Aquafit and crafts, for example. Other activities include dancing, roller skating, ice skating, hockey, and T-ball in the summertime.

### **Diversity of Neighbourhood**

One participant brought up the topic of neighbours by saying “All the people in the community are nice. There are no problems.” This led to a discussion of how the neighbourhood has changed: “There are a lot of changes . . . the district is all changed.” For example, the neighbourhood is now very multicultural. “I have neighbours who are from other cultures, the language is different and it makes it hard . . . but they (people who speak different languages) smile sometimes.” Regarding the cultural diversity, someone else said: “It’s fine, it works one way or the other for everybody.” One participant summed up by saying: “If you are a good neighbour yourself, you’ll have good neighbors, it is as simple as that.”

### **Other Community Agencies and Resources**

In addition to the community recreation centres, the seniors mentioned other neighbourhood services and facilities. For example, Woodgreen Church, as well as other area churches, were known to offer community meals once a month. Woodgreen Church also hosts “Spirit Happening” get-togethers.

Although it is further away, some of the seniors use services available at Dixon Hall and they participate in some of the groups there, such as a sewing group. Finally, there are a number of excellent public libraries in the area which many of the participants make use of.

### **Medical Care**

Some people mentioned the strengths of the medical care provided to them. A few participants go to doctors in the local hospitals, while others prefer to visit the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC). When commenting on the SRCHC, some participants agreed that “it is wonderful.” One participant continued to say “the nurse knows what’s wrong before the doctor and talks to the doctor about it.” The SRCHC’s toenail cutting clinic at Woodgreen was an appreciated service.

### **Public Transportation**

The group agreed that South Riverdale has very good public transportation. All participants relied on the TTC for their transportation needs. One participant commented that he is able to go virtually anywhere he needs to using his metro pass. Someone else appreciated the

fact that it only takes one streetcar to get around the neighbourhood. “Everyone is always so friendly.”

It was of concern that Wheel-Trans services are becoming increasingly difficult to access, and that there is a new fee that you must pay up front to use this service.

## **B. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Closing of Smaller Stores**

Some of the participants who have been long-time residents of the area made reference to how the neighbourhood has changed over the years, and this includes turnover of some of the local stores. They recalled that “the stores used to be beautiful . . . there was no place like the east end.” Because of the good TTC service, people used to frequent the stores of the east end. “It was convenient for a lot of things.” Things have changed now, as stores “come and go”.

It was mentioned that the smaller, local supermarkets have largely been replaced by bigger stores such as Knob Hill Farms. Butcher shops and hardware stores have also closed down. The larger stores may be taking away customers from places like the Toronto Groceteria, which has been in South Riverdale for many years. Some people, such as those families with children, are almost forced to go to Knob Hill Farms, Eddie’s Food Basics and the dollar stores to get better prices.

The group also noted that the small, family-run pharmacies have been replaced by larger drug stores. These larger stores are seen as less friendly than your local pharmacist. A few people in the group commented that there were no shoe repair stores in the area.

Another issue is that some landlords are seen as not paying attention to their properties and these homes are becoming dilapidated and an eyesore in the neighbourhood. “Who is going to buy a house in this neighbourhood if they see that?” There is also a problem with loose garbage on the street, and one participant consistently finds garbage in front of her yard on collection days.

### **Concern About Children and Their Behaviour**

Some of the seniors expressed concern about the behavior of children and youth, and their apparent lack of respect for others: “They (children) are worse now-a-days, they have no respect.” People are unlikely to say anything to these children because “they will hit you or throw things at your house.” “They’re looking for attention.”

### **Crime and Safety**

Most seniors in the group feel quite safe in the area, although they recognize that “there is crime in the area.” One woman told of how someone tried to break in through the back door when she was home. Participants mentioned a local newspaper that reports the details of crimes in neighbourhood. “It isn’t in the middle of the night, it is in the middle of the day that crimes happen.” People always try to be aware of what is going on around them.

### **Cuts and Their Impact**

The participants recognized some of the effects of recent cutbacks, such as loss of job security. They mentioned that people are worried about jobs and that there is generally a higher level of stress among people who are working, as well as those who are unemployed. One participant compared the current situation to events of the past: “People are worried about jobs now, everyone is, but then again, we were during the depression . . . it seems like we are getting

ourselves into a depression instead of getting out of one.” The seniors were also concerned about the cutbacks to Wheel-Trans service.

### **Maintenance of Sidewalks**

Participants commented on the aesthetics of the community and its maintenance. For example, people not clearing their snow from the sidewalks is a problem. As one person said: “the people on Logan Avenue don’t shovel their snow, so I can’t walk up the street.” Also, some store owners do not clean their sidewalks. As the following quote suggests, lack of snow removal can force seniors to stay indoors: “Do I have to stay inside all day because people won’t shovel their snow?”

### **Reduced Police Presence**

Related to crime and security is the involvement of the police department. The seniors have noticed that over the years, the police “walk the beat” less frequently, if at all. It was felt that the police officers and the area residents do not know each other like they used to. Participants agreed that this is unfortunate since “it makes the neighbourhood feel safer when a policeman is out walking.”

### **Traffic Safety**

Some members of the group felt that the area has become over-crowded with cars and traffic. “There used to never be so many cars, as a kid I used to be able to play on the street.” You can no longer walk on the road without being worried about traffic. The drivers are worse than before; often they do not stop for pedestrians, or they will go through puddles and splash pedestrians on the side of the street. Furthermore, there is an increase of pollution from all the cars and buses.

To ensure their safety, people use the crosswalks and sidewalks. However, most people felt that the time given to cross at an intersection is too short -- when you are halfway into the intersection, the stop hand starts flashing.

## **C. Coping and Supports**

This group of seniors identified a number of strategies for coping with problems. One approach is neighbours looking after each other. A more formalized version of this is the popular Neighbourhood Watch where people will look out for anything suspicious, and then report it to the police. Other ways people coped with problems are to call the police, call or write to city hall, call 911, or talk to a therapist or counselor. In one woman’s experience, neighbours in an apartment building are less likely to help when you had a problem.

## **D. Desired Resources and Services**

When asked about services they would like to have in the immediate area, the group had several ideas. One suggestion was to have a lawyer made accessible to the seniors, for financial advice and other legal matters, as they now have at Dixon Hall. Another suggestion was that more programs be held where seniors live. This is particularly important due to cuts to Wheel-Trans. Finally, some participants felt that there needs to be more activities in nursing homes, “to

get the people thinking, because otherwise they put their heads down and are discouraged, and have nothing to look forward to.”

**Seniors Residence Group**  
**March, 1997**  
**11 participants**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Easy Accessibility to Amenities**

There was agreement that the immediate neighbourhood was full of amenities. “This place is pretty handy.” Others commented that “Everything they need is right outside the door.” “Everything is handy and nearby. The doctors, restaurants, stores, shopping, everything.” The presence of these amenities was contrasted with the apparent lack of activity among some residents. “You don't have to stay upstairs in your room. You don't need to stay put.”

**Family, Children and Grandchildren**

For one or two of the participants, family members were seen as an important source of support. This support was contrasted with those residents who don't seem to have family nearby. “There are some people who don't have anyone. I have twelve grandchildren. They are all here to help.”

**Neighbourliness**

There was a general belief that neighbours are important. “Neighbours are a good thing.” It was also felt that people in the neighbourhood were friendly. This was especially true for those who had lived in the neighbourhood for a number of years. “People talk to you, in this neighbourhood. I've been here 40 years.” One participant, who has a physical disability, commented: “The people help me and I'm disabled. People come willingly and help open the door. That means that the neighbourhood is good.”

Yet, reference was made to changes in the neighbourhood and some participants expressed that they feel less connected to their neighbours: “There's a lot of people inside this neighbourhood, I don't even know who they are. I've been here 23 years and I don't know anybody's name.” This was also the case within the building: “Person next door 9 1/2 years and don't know their names. I don't know them, and I never walk down to the other side.”

One person commented on how the neighbourhood had mobilized to close down a local theatre. “People are responsive, people in the neighbourhood closed this show. Selling marijuana and showing these disgusting films. [There was a] big petition and everybody in this neighbourhood signed it.”

In general then, the neighbourhood is seen in a positive light. “I have no complaints about this neighbourhood.” “There is always room for improvement. I think this is a terrific neighbourhood but there still is room for improvement. I don't have any major beefs.”

**B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

**Concern About Youth and Their Behaviour**



There was discussion about youth. Some members of the group felt that youth were disrespectful. “There are some things that are not satisfactory. Kids come out of school, smoke up and down the place. They hang out in pool halls, and are in the restaurants during the school hours. They got no money and there is nothing we can do about it.” However, not everyone agreed with this view: “I think they are pretty respectable. I think that in general the young youth, I think they are pretty decent. I see them differently than he does. They dress differently and they have a different approach to life then we do. But in general they are pretty decent.” This person also commented on some of the difficulties that youth are facing today. “We tend to take our values and equate them to today. We cannot understand the youth's lack of motivation. Everything was more community-minded then. The values of youth today are completely different from ours. How can we comprehend what the youth have to face today? Their work prospects are even worse than they were in our day.”

### **Crime and Safety**

Generally, the neighbourhood is seen as a safe one. “I like my apartment. It’s always lit up. And I’m not nervous about coming home. I generally feel safe.” The comment “No gunpowder around this area now” also suggested safety. The neighbourhood was also seen as safe in the past, as one woman indicated: “I worked evenings in the hospital, but always walked home. I’d walk down Coxwell Avenue and nothing would bother me. Not a soul. People would call me a *senorita*.”

However, there was some concern about going out at night. “I don’t go out at night. There is crime anywhere. The day is okay but nighttime is different.” “It depends on what area you are in.” There was also concern about building security and outsiders entering the building. “Friends who come in here, people walk in and get into the building.” “A few weeks ago, there was someone in the room. How did he come in?”. “People enter through the front door and don’t look back.” There was also some concern about apparently homeless people getting into the building and sleeping in the hallways, and other nooks and crannies. However, someone commented: “You don’t have to worry about those people.”

### **Helping Out Neighbours in the Building**

One or two people commented on how they try and help out others living in the building. “A lot of people volunteer to help out these poor souls.” “I enjoy helping other people. When I would cook, I would cook for myself and I made food for her. They would come see me and both of them would talk about the old times.” However, when specifically asked about volunteer work, no other comments or instances of helping were forthcoming.

### **Isolation and Inactivity of Some Residents**

A recurring topic was the characteristics of some people who live in the building. This involved particular eccentricities, but also some of the problems associated with getting older. “The older people are all good people, they just need a little bit of understanding. They just change a bit.” Participants commented on some of the residents in the building in terms that suggested difficulties. “You would be surprised at the people who just live in a room. Nothing in their place to eat.” “That poor soul, she never had much of a life.” “But you know there are a lot of people here who need help, not me, because I have such a large family.”

### **Living Arrangements**

There was general satisfaction with the living arrangements and the apartments. “I like my apartment. They are all nice.” While there are some one bedroom apartments, most of the residences are bachelors: “They are a nice sized bachelor. They have a kitchenette.” All participants felt that finances are a concern especially in relation to the cost of living arrangements. “My rent has gone up. Everybody's rent is going up. Nothing is going down in price.”

### **Neighbourhood Diversity**

There were occasional references to the ethnic diversity of residents in the building. “[There are] all kinds in here now.” “I never had a problem with anybody here. Here we have variety like that of Heinz 57.” The need to be polite and cordial was emphasized, but there was also some uncertainty on how to approach and interact with people of diverse backgrounds. “I speak to everybody. They are encumbered by reasons we can't talk about, religion, orientation. Could be Chinese, Greek, but someone has to make the first move. Start it going. You don't know whether to talk to them or not. People are here in the country, and have to live with it.” Another person commented that: “[You have to] take ‘em as you find them.”

### **The “Old Days” in the Building**

Long-time residents of the building spoke of activities that used to take place frequently, but now occur less often. “There were banquets, field trips, and bus trips. We had trips twice a month.” The money for these trips were raised through volunteer activities. “We volunteered everything, and there was no expense - you could not get a cheaper trip.” “We had a large bazaar, and we took in hundreds of dollars.” “Everything was donated.”

### **Reminiscing About the Past**

Throughout the discussion, there were frequent references to the past. For example, people spoke of their jobs: “I had a good job at Eatons.” “I worked as a nurses’ assistant at Toronto East General.” Of life in general, people said: “If I live until May, I will be 89 and I still have all the marbles. I can remember back to the old days, and the home I was raised in. They were happier days than they have today, that I'll tell you.”

### **Use of Community Services**

Participants did not seem to use many of the community services available in the area. One resident indicated that she had familiarity with Woodgreen Community Centre, but it was unclear whether this involvement was continuing: “I belong to Woodgreen, I've been there. I used to go to play bingo. I was in the program *In the Picture*.”

One participant mentioned that some residents use Meals on Wheels. “A lot of people have Meals on Wheels. Meals on Wheels comes everyday except Saturday. The price of \$4.25 is pretty reasonable. A lady I look after uses it.” None of the participants reported using Meals on Wheels themselves. It was felt that “A lot of people don't know about it.”

### **Ways of Being and Interacting**

One participant spoke of being responsible for one's own behaviour. This applies to both personal behaviour towards oneself, as well as to others in the community. “Being efficient, you can apply yourself as a person, and also as a member of a community. You can be polite and cordial.” “Be cordial and polite, and address each person, yes sir, how are you today.”

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **The Building's Recreation Room**

There was some discontent with the availability of the recreation room to residents. "There should be access to the recreation room. Chinese people should be able to use it." There was also some discussion about events held in the recreation room, apparently by the Metro Toronto Housing Company. "They had wine and cheese parties. They had banquet permits. There was no trouble and we all cleaned up. But you are only a spoke in the wheel to these people." In response another participant commented: "There are a lot of complainers here. People that work here are okay, if you use them right."

### **Lack of Involvement in Building Activities**

Participants described a lack of spirit or involvement among many of the residents of the building. "There seems to be a lacklustre concern to be involved for some reason. Kind of disappointing." Some of this was related to the personal characteristics of the residents, but there were also comments suggesting a lack of structure within the building to support such involvement. "Inside the building, there is no encouragement. There is Bingo Tuesday and Thursday, when and if the guy feels like doing it."

There were some suggestions on how involvement could be supported. For example, one person indicated: "I come down to talk to people." Someone also asked of the group: "If we had activities, would you like to be involved in a kitchen, community spirit, creating home-spun creations?" Trips were also mentioned: "I agree with her that a trip once in a while is good."

### **Lack of Work Ethic**

One participant spoke there being a lack of work ethic today. "What makes me positively mad -- I have occasion to walk up and down Danforth, I see public employees making anywhere from a minimum of \$14 per hour and I look at the effort that people put into their job. There is more garbage between Victoria Park and Broadview than I can remember in my 35 years in the city. The transport department have all their trucks running but they are sitting in their coffee shops for an hour, three times a day."

### **Maintenance of Sidewalks**

There was general agreement that the sidewalks are in disrepair: "The sidewalks need to be fixed. Ice is not a problem." "I would like a new sidewalk."

## **D. Coping and Supports**

### **Coping with Life Changes**

One participant related his feelings about recent changes in his life: "Everything is relative, she's speaking of her experience, while I am living and coping with my own situation. It's a whole

new ball game for me. I would still like to go out and work, and get myself out of a situation where I have to be semi-confined individual within a community. I have no other alternative except to be retired.”

### **Coping With Problems**

The participants knew where they could go for help if they needed it. “There is lots of help at Woodgreen. There is Homecare and Greenwood Place has [physical] therapy.” “I go down to get my nails done.” Apparently, there used to be other services available: “We used to have a lady that came here from Woodgreen. She was our worker. She was a worker from Woodgreen Community Centre.” People have their own physicians: “I have the same doctor for 23 years. I don't use a community health centre.”

# **New Canadians**

**New Canadian Centre Group #1**  
**March, 1997**  
**11 participants**

*The participants' country of origin included Turkey, Iran, China, Ukraine, and Africa. They lived throughout the Metro area.*

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Libraries**

Several participants used public libraries, including the central Metro Reference Library. One participant who used the central library said it was “very, very good, very organized and clean.” Another commented: “I like it very much because I can find many books in my language and I can study English. I hope it will be continued. I think everybody, newcomers, people immigrating from different countries, need this because they can find their culture. I can find many books, different opinions. I like to use the Internet in the Metropolitan library. I hope it will continue because people learn what happens in their country and the world.” The participant hopes that other libraries will also have the Internet in the future.

The drawback to the reference library is that you cannot take books out and this can be inconvenient. Participants would like to be able to take books home so that they can work there, for extended periods of time. Similarly, one participant noted that she could not take books out of a university library either, since she is not a student there.

**Medical and Dental Care**

One participant received health services at her local community health centre and has had very positive experiences there. “Really polite people, really help us.” There was some brief discussion about how expensive dental services are in Canada.

**Parks**

One woman lived near a park (in Scarborough) and she enjoyed the opportunity it provided to meet other people. She felt there were many beautiful parks in Toronto. She did not want to see parks affected by government cutbacks: “If the government will pay more attention to these things [parks] it would be great for families and kids . . . too many programs now the government is cutting money. I don't want the government to stop providing money for parks.”

**Public Transportation**

Most participants used the TTC to get to school and around the city. Generally, people felt the public transportation system worked well. One participant commented that she is scared when she drives on the highway near big trucks.

## **B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

### **Community Centres**

One woman who lived in East York found her local community centre too expensive. She felt that this was unfortunate since she and others need places like the community centre to go to for leisure activities. “I know many people like me who need the gym, because now all day we have to study, study, study. Sometimes we need to relax, and it’s expensive there.”

Another participant agreed that you cannot study all the time. She goes to her community centre to swim, but was unhappy that she had to buy tickets (to use the pool) for a whole month, rather than for a day or two at a time. “It is a problem for me because I am very busy. I take some courses, I go to school, I go to work, so I cannot decide when I can go for a swim or when I cannot. So maybe they need to be a little bit flexible.”

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Garbage and Pollution**

One participant who walked to school from downtown noted that there is quite a lot of garbage on the street and sidewalks. Another mentioned that many people do not pick up after their dogs. Someone else related that a building she used to live in when she first moved to Toronto was very dirty and had many cockroaches.

### **Concern About Children and Youth and Their Behaviour**

Participants agreed that generally teenagers are not polite and do not help other people if they need it. For example, on the TTC, they take up seats and do not let other people sit down, and they will block the doors so that people cannot get in and out easily. One participant suggested that perhaps children in Canada have too much freedom. “Kids have to respect old people, parents. I can see in Canada that kids don’t respect. What is worse is that kids in Canada can complain about teachers . . . teachers are afraid, they can lose their jobs.”

### **Crime and Safety**

Two participants indicated that they have seen people using drugs, either where they live or on the street. “Sometimes I go to the central library and a few times I saw some boys, teenagers, using cocaine, or I don’t know, drugs. Very, very bad smell. I saw them very free, sitting behind the library, smoking. Sometimes the police comes. They [smokers] are not scared of them.”

Participants indicated that generally they felt safe, especially during the daytime. However, one woman indicated that she sometimes does not feel safe on the TTC, when she encounters groups of youth or people who are drunk. Another participant related an experience of being scared when a group of youth came up to her at a coin laundry.

## **Opportunities for Employment and Training**

Most participants expressed that they have had a difficult time finding a job in Canada. Many are not able to use degrees they obtained in their home country. As one woman emphasized: “They don’t accept my degree, it is very difficult for me to get a job in my area of study.” Another commented: “In the employment centre I found some interesting jobs, but it was only for people who have UI.” Someone else agreed that “it is very difficult” and another participant indicated she had trouble finding volunteer work. Participants also agreed that courses they completed in their country of origin were sometimes not recognized by Canadian universities and that the “universities don’t have any flexibility to our situation.”

Assistance in getting Canadian work experience was seen as extremely important. For example, when people complete courses offered by the local boards of education, there should be something in place to help them find a paid or volunteer job. “Every job . . . they ask you about Canadian experience . . . where can we get it if we just arrived in Canada . . . but we have experience and background.” “Every immigrant who comes to Canada today wants to participate.”

## **C. Coping and Supports**

When prompted about things that help people to cope when they have problems, one participant asked her neighbours for help. Another agreed that generally people are helpful and kind. One participant called or went to the Ukrainian Immigrant Centre when she required assistance.

One person’s experience was that when he first came to Canada, there was no one to go to for help. Another felt she received some bad advice from someone at a community centre.



**New Canadian Centre Group #2**  
**March, 1997**  
**11 participants**

*The participants' country of origin included Iran, Vietnam, Somalia, Korea, Pakistan, Mexico, China, and Korea. Nine had come as immigrants and two as refugees. They lived throughout the Metro area.*

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Centres**

A few of the participants had made use of community centres. "At the Coxwell Community Centre, I can go swimming or do sports." One newcomer said: "Before I came to Canada I used centres for swimming, but I will try and do it in Canada also." One mother commented that: "Teenagers need good places to go. Newcomers need this and even second generation need it. They aren't Canadian, and they aren't Korean. They just go to the shopping mall."

**Libraries**

Participants all commented on how important libraries were. "The library has books in all kinds of languages." But there was also a view that "Libraries should be open longer hours and sometimes people in the libraries make noise." The people making noise was not only children but others as well. The security people don't intervene to stop noise.

**Medical Care**

The participants who had been in Canada for more than a few months felt that the health care that was available was good: "OHIP is good, the medical care you can get is good."

**Shopping and Obtaining Food**

Most participants felt shopping for food was convenient. "We can find many kinds of foods here all in one place. In my country it is very difficult to get all the foods we need. We have to go to many different kinds of shops." All felt that it was easy to get the kinds of food they were used to eating.

**B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

**Environment and Pollution**

Participants expressed interest in and concern about the environment. It was felt that the clean air and water in Canada was important to quality of life. "The environment is okay but pollution is getting worse." One participant had asthma and was concerned about air quality. Recycling was mentioned as being important and participants commented that the parks and the lake were very nice to have.

### **Public Transportation**

Only one participant owned an automobile. They all took the subway, streetcar and bus and felt it was very convenient. But they also felt that public transportation was expensive: “It costs a lot of money.”

### **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

#### **Future of Canada**

One participant was worried about Quebec and whether it would separate. “I am concerned about the future of Canada; different colour or nationality doesn’t matter; people should stick together.” He was the participant who had been in Canada for seven years.

#### **Opportunities for Employment and Training**

Virtually all of the participants were without employment. It was commented that “People aren't allowed to work even with high education. They cannot find a job, so they go into business.” While many of the participants had only been in Canada a few months, others had been here for a number of years and were beginning to despair of gaining employment. “I have been in Canada four years and I don't have any hope any more. I feel hopeless. I want to find a job but cannot. I brought enough money but almost all of it is spent. I cannot find a job. I feel hopeless and afraid.” The one woman who had worked recently had been employed in a market for three months.

#### **Stresses of Being Newcomers to Canada**

Though some participants pointed out that life was calmer and with less stress from where they had come from, there was general agreement that the stresses of coming to a new country were many. “It is a different kind of stress because we are newcomers. It is difficult to find jobs, make new friends, and get new homes.” Findings jobs and using one’s education are important themes that are considered in their own right.

#### **Unfriendliness and Indifference of People**

There was a perception among those who had been in Canada for a few years that people were cold and indifferent, perhaps even unfriendly. “People look so kind, but they don't really care about their neighbours. My sister lived in an apartment for many years but didn't know her neighbours.” The three or four participants who felt this way did not think it was the language as much as people being distant and just too busy. “People are very indifferent, seem very cold, and not interested in you. It’s not the language, I can speak English well. When I ask people about it, that I feel like a stranger, they say it’s not that you are an immigrant, it’s just that we are too busy.” One participant noted that “Their children do not play with other children. They stay home alone, and play games with themselves. They do not play with nature, they just watch TV.”

#### **Welfare and Tax Issues**

A few mentioned concern about welfare fraud and that people cheat on their taxes. "Canada is very wealthy but some people need welfare. But a lot of people abuse the welfare, because I read about people from another country can get \$500 a month for welfare, and don't even have to work." All participants felt that "taxes were too high."

### **Working and Using One's Education**

There was general agreement with the statement "Education and occupation are the most important things to a successful life." Many of the participants were highly educated and included three medical doctors, a physicist, a chemical engineer, a sociologist, a specialist in international affairs, a nutritionist, and a cosmetologist. There was real concern about being able to use one's education in Canada. "Many people have a good education but can't get proper jobs. Even licenced doctors and sometimes people with Ph.Ds have to take low level jobs."

### **D. Coping and Supports**

Participants had only an incomplete knowledge of where to access resources and support. Participants who had been in Canada for a while knew about going to the emergency room of a hospital and calling 911. These individuals also knew about services for particular groups such as those for the Vietnamese community. Other sources of help mentioned were lawyers, ministers of a church, and the family doctor. One person mentioned that "One can go to a Chinese Store that has a calender with information, also the Yellow Pages has it." The very recent newcomers had little idea of how to access services, nor did any of the participants know anything about community health centres.

### **E. Desired Resources and Services: Information in One's Own Language**

Being able to get health services and information in one's own language was seen as very important. "I have an Iranian doctor, and some dentists." "We have little information about health services in Ontario." "We need information about glasses and which hospital to go to." "Need information about services in our language."

In general, all the participants wanted services and supports in their own language. "People need more information about services, more information about education and jobs, and information about health and community centres." "They want opportunities to practice their profession and be able to work." One person concluded: "For one year, we have hope and we have money. After that year is ended, and we cannot find a job we will be depressed." One participant stated: "We need more care for old people. They seem very lonely. We need more support for older people."



**Chinese Women's Parenting Group**  
**April, 1997**  
**8 participants**

*The participants who have lived in Canada between one month and six years*

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**Community Centres**

The women spoke positively of the community centres in the neighbourhood, especially Woodgreen. For example, one woman said that she can walk into Woodgreen Community Centre when she has a problem and they will help her, or if necessary they will refer her to other services, such as employment services. Someone else remarked that Woodgreen offers trips for families, for example to the zoo and Niagara Falls, and that they have an ESL service and some child care. Woodgreen is one place people can go to if they need help with a problem. Also mentioned in this regard was Eastview Community Centre.

**Community Health Centre (CHC)**

The women appreciated the services offered by the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC). Several of the women visited the doctors and nurses there and found them to be very helpful, patient, and willing to spend as much time as needed. They also valued the interpreters who were available. They appreciated the support and friendship of Phyllis at the health centre, and she was seen as someone they could go to for help with a problem.

**Easy Access to Chinese Stores and Services**

The group agreed that they liked that "Chinatown" was close by. They frequented the stores and restaurants there. They appreciated that there were many stores and services for the Chinese community.

**Libraries**

Libraries were viewed as a good thing in the community. One participant commented that she had three libraries near her home. Another woman mentioned that there is a library within a fifteen minute walk from her home, and although she does not use the library frequently, her children do.

**Public Transportation**

Public transportation in the area was seen as convenient.

**B. Neutral or Contested Issues**

**Child Care Needs**

Child care was a particularly important issue as all the women have children. Whether they had child care or not impacted on other aspects of their lives, such as their ability to find

work or attend school. Child care was available for some of the women when they took their ESL classes, but not for all. One participant explained that where she took classes, child care was available only for children six months and older. Someone else mentioned that the application process for child care takes a long time, and that there is a long waiting list. Not being able to get child care can also prevent people from finding work, and then they may require welfare.

### **Health Care**

One woman appreciated the philosophy of Canada's health care system and OHIP -- that whether rich or poor, everyone can enjoy the same health services. However, also mentioned in regards to health care, were long waits to see a doctor for only a few minutes, and the high cost of prescriptions. Some also felt it was unfortunate that OHIP covers only Western doctors, and not Chinese herbal medicine. There was also concern about the high cost of dental services, and having to pay for eye examinations. They hoped that dental services may be covered by OHIP in the future.

Most of the women go to Chinese-speaking doctors. One prefers to have an interpreter when she sees her English-speaking doctor for Western medicine, and has a Chinese-speaking doctor for acupuncture.

### **Education and Courses in English as a Second Language (ESL)**

Several of the women attended ESL classes. One woman, who was in a class mainly with seniors, found the course too easy and felt that she was not learning very much. She would like to have more (Webster) phonetics taught. Others were satisfied with their ESL courses.

One participant wanted to attend high school level courses in the evening. She wished to get her high school diploma and then go to college. To do this, it is necessary for her to have child care available. It can also be a problem to find courses at an appropriate level, as many of the women are well educated (although their qualifications from China are not recognized here).

## **C. Liabilities and Negative Factors**

### **Air and Noise Pollution**

A few participants were concerned about air pollution from incinerators and chimneys. Also, one woman lived near the railway and found the noise from trains disturbing, especially at night.

### **Crime and Safety**

Issues around safety, and law and order were discussed. Some teenagers were described as causing violence. For example, one participant and her children felt threatened by teenagers throwing stones in the street. Participants had also heard of robberies that have occurred in people's homes.

### **Cuts to Services**

It was felt that government budget cuts were disastrous, and had a negative effect on people's quality of life. The women recognized that the services they value, such as child care, ESL and job searching services, are all threatened.

### **Housing and Living Conditions**

One woman felt that the living conditions in the area are very congested. She noted that the houses are old and crowded together. Another participant was also disappointed with the old houses. It was felt that one had to choose between this type of living situation or a more suburban area like Markham. A participant described how in Hong Kong they will tear down old buildings and put up new ones, and wondered if the same might be done here. Related to congested city living was mention of there not being many parks in the area. Also remarked upon was that the roads are bumpy and badly damaged.

### **Minority Children in School**

It was felt that some teachers may neglect children from minority groups, especially those who do not speak English well. One participant described an incident where her son's teacher was concerned about his violent behaviour and felt there was a big problem. A Chinese-speaking teacher discovered that in fact there was only a minor problem, but the child was becoming frustrated. It was felt that the teacher did not make enough effort to understand the child's concerns.

### **Sponsoring Relatives**

Of particular concern was the income level required to sponsor other family members to come to Canada. A family income of \$39,000 is now required and this is seen as too high.

### **Unemployment and Welfare**

Unemployment was described as a big problem. "No job, no eat." The women found it very difficult to get jobs. They explained that generally Chinese people do not want to rely on welfare or get things for free, such as ESL classes. They would prefer to have a job and be able to pay for services. Related to their ability to get a job is the need for child care.

### **D. Desired Resources and Services for the Chinese Community**

The participants appreciated the many community resources currently available, but felt that more services could be available in Chinese, such as employment services and vocational training. As well, it was felt that many people are not aware of the services currently offered in Chinese. More recreation services are desired. Both indoor and outdoor recreation activities are needed, however, indoor activities are especially necessary on rainy days and in the winter.

# **Findings from Service Providers**



**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Program Director CHC  
Community Health Centre  
May, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Activist Community**

The Program Director saw Riverdale as a community of activists. She described Riverdale's history of activism dating back to the 1960s with the Greater Riverdale Movement. She also referred to a book by Don Keatings entitled *Making It Happen* that details this history. The Director felt that it was people in the community and their involvement that makes the difference: "When I think of Riverdale, I think of activism. People actively involved in trying to make change. It's that mix and that culture of this community that makes life liveable for people here."

This activism prompted the development of several community agencies and local environmental groups in Riverdale. For example, the need for a meeting place in the community brought about the Ralph Thornton Community Centre. The director explained that people in Riverdale come together to work on community issues such as environmental or economic concerns. The commitment of this activist community is illustrated with the example of the group Greater Riverdale Economic Action Together: "When we organized a meeting, about 50 to 60 people showed up. About 10%, maybe 20%, were service providers, but a lot were residents."

**2. Community Agencies and Resources**

The Program Director saw Riverdale's network of local agencies as a strength. She explained that these agencies were established from the concerns and commitment of local residents. Consequently, the organizations became an integral part of the community itself. As she explained: "This community has worked together in developing human service infrastructure that is very much geographic to this community. When I think about Riverdale, I think about Woodgreen, Ralph Thornton, Applegrove, South Riverdale Community Health Centre. We've become a part of the history of this community."

The director compared Riverdale's local network of community agencies to Trevor Hancock's conception of Healthy Communities: "We have all the circles of healthy community right here. You need a vibrant economic group, a group focused on environmental issues, a group that focuses on social service support issues. When all of these groups are vibrant, you have a healthy community right in the middle."

**3. Diversity**

The diversity of people in Riverdale was identified as a positive factor of this community. The director described Riverdale as a community with many communities in it. She illustrated the diversity among community members with this statement: "Riverdale has such a mixed bag of people. It's highly working class. Very economically mixed, intellectually mixed. You have the arts community, the new age community. Large subsidized housing."

It was mentioned that South Riverdale is an area of the city that is attractive to newcomers. The director noted that this attribute may be a positive or negative factor depending on one's perspective. She offered a few reasons why newcomers would come to South Riverdale. These include lower rents of older housing units, and South Riverdale's service network. She also listed a number of local agencies that offer settlement services for newcomers: Woodgreen Community Centre, Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, and Eastview Community Centre.

The director explained that ethnic communities in Riverdale also attract and support newcomers by providing a familiar culture, language and foods: "This is one area where you will not have problems trying to eat any kind of food. It speaks to how new communities have been able to make this community home. There's east-end Chinatown, there's India bazaar, there's Greek town."

#### **4. Environmental Activism**

As a result of being an eastern port and heavy industrial area, South Riverdale has experienced a long history of environmental issues. Subsequently, South Riverdale has also developed a long history of local environmental activism. Much of this environmental activism stems from Canada Metals, the local lead smelter (to be explored further in the Problems and Issues section). A number of local groups deal with environmental issues in Riverdale: "There is the Safe Sewage Committee, Citizens for a Safe Environment, Greensavers. These are the big ones. Then there's the Save the Don group, and the South Riverdale CHC itself."

### **B. Problems and Issues**

#### **1. Changes in Local Economy: Unemployment and Poverty**

Changes in the local economy have had serious impacts in South Riverdale. The director explained that there were significant job losses when the local economy shifted from heavy industry to service industry: "Over the years, there has been migration of these industries out of this area. We've lost good-paying jobs in this community, and we've got mainly service industry."

Consequently, lower wages and unemployment have contributed to poverty in South Riverdale. Many families and individuals are struggling to make ends meet. "We have higher than the city's average of families living below the poverty line here. We have a large number of single parent families with children below six in this community. Put those two things together and you've got complex issues."

#### **2. Environmental Health Issues: Poor Housing**

The director described environmental health issues related to poor housing as a significant problem. She shared the example of Don Mount Court, a subsidized housing complex in Riverdale. Residents of Don Mount Court contacted the community health centre with some of their concerns: "We went to that community almost invited by the residents to address a certain sewage back-up problem in some of the units. We also found asbestos over there."

Through subsequent audits of several units in the housing complex, CHC staff discovered other environmental health concerns: "The windows were very drafty. The heating and

ventilation systems, the exhaust hadn't been changed over how many decades. It was directly linked to upper respiratory health issues.”

### **Community and Agency Responses**

In response to the initial sewage back-up and asbestos problems, CHC staff advocated, on behalf of Don Mount residents, to the local City Councillor, Peter Tabuns. By working with the City Councillor’s office, CHC staff were able to get the Metro Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) Committee to clean up these problems at the housing complex.

As an agency, the CHC was sensitive to residents' wariness of having outsiders involved in their issues. The director explained that the CHC piggybacked with other organizations like Woodgreen Community Centre, which had already facilitated the organization of the tenants' association at Don Mount Court. This approach allowed the CHC staff to make in-roads with residents, and investigate health issues in a non-threatening manner: “We would go in, almost focusing on maintenance and environmental issues. Through that we recognized the problem that exists in the community was very poor housing and how that affects health.”

The CHC staff worked to have the MTHA clean up the poor heating and ventilation systems that were affecting residents' health. At the individual level, CHC staff began educating residents about managing their own living spaces, such as looking at the chemicals they used indoors. Health promotion and prevention education was provided to residents: “It has taken quite a long time to get the community to understand that poor housing affects health. We're looking at what it is they have control over, and how can they change it.”

### **3. Food Access**

The director identified access to affordable, fresh food as a problem in South Riverdale. She described Queen Street in 1989 as having a disproportionately high number of licensed bars and liquor stores, compared to the number of places to purchase fresh food. She explained the dilemma of food access for local residents who must manage on limited incomes: “You have a large population who is poor, who don’t have cars. Where do they go to buy their fresh fruits and vegetables? To the corner store. There was no point in telling people to eat healthy, when they don't have the means to eat healthy.”

### **Community and Agency Responses**

The director described the community health centre (CHC) staff as being catalysts in facilitating the community's actions around food access. For example, community members were able to bring about the People's Food Market with the CHC’s help. The market, which is now in its sixth year, offers local residents fresh fruits and vegetables at affordable prices. South Riverdale’s food market is the only volunteer-run food market in Toronto.

Since the success of the People’s Food Market, South Riverdale now has a Food Co-op to further promote food access. Funding from the City of Toronto was recently obtained to purchase a van and hire a coordinator for this program. In keeping with the CHC's role as catalyst, the Program Director stated: “We're negotiating with Woodgreen and other organizations to take over. They've been helping all this while. I'm almost at the stage where maybe we can pull out and try to address something else.”

#### **4. Isolated incident: Hate Literature**

An incident that occurred in November 1992 was described, where students at a local high school found hate literature in their lockers.

##### **Community and Agency Responses**

The director emphasized the significance of this event in terms of the swift response of the community. The community health centre, and staff from Woodgreen Community Centre, Ralph Thornton Community Centre, and the Toronto Board of Education collaborated on this issue. They mailed letters about the hate literature incident to elected officials and Boards of Directors of several community organizations. A community meeting was called for December, in which approximately 70 people attended. The director described the pride of this community that was evident at this meeting: “You must make a statement. We're not going to accept this. We're not going to sit back and take this.”

A rally was organized for the following January, during the week of Martin Luther King's birthday, in acknowledgement of an individual who promoted racial tolerance and understanding. The rally was a success as five hundred people from the community attended. “It was a statement about this community. Yes, there's all kinds of problems, there is crime, there is drugs, and there are all those things which happen in most of the communities. We have our share. But we also have this activist spirit, for this community to stand up and say no.”

#### **5. Lead problem**

One of the most serious environmental concerns in South Riverdale came from Canada Metals, the local lead smelter. The director described the smelter and its toxic lead emissions as an obvious presence in the community: “We are right in the shadow of that here. That big giant spewed out lead.” She further explained that local residents were not aware of possible health issues until several years after the emissions began polluting the air: “It was not until the 1970s that we started identifying severe lead poison problems among the children of this area.”

##### **Community and Agency Responses**

Through an ongoing battle over the last 10 to 15 years, pressure from the community resulted in Canada Metals stopping its lead emissions. Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment gave \$11 million to replace the affected soil of 1000 homes. Immediate harm to residents has been managed through the activist efforts of the community. However, the director described the current battle with Canada Metals as an accountability issue: “The battle is now to get that money back from Canada Metals.”

## **D. Roles and Initiatives of the Community Health Centre (CHC)**

### **1. Roles**

In addition to responding to problems and issues in the community, the CHC has developed its own roles and initiatives in Riverdale. The health centre's dual roles were described as: (i) health promotion and prevention activities at the community level, and (ii) provision of primary health care at the individual level. "The mission statement of the CHC is to provide specifics to community's needs, and to address the determinants of health of the community. At the same time providing some family care services."

#### **Community health workers as catalysts**

In terms of the CHC's role at the community level, community health workers act as catalysts. They promote community members' abilities to manage their own issues. To develop the community's own activist efforts, community health workers also need to withdraw once the building blocks are put into place. As the director explained: "We look at different issues and presenting problems. We are the catalysts. We bring people together, and let the synergetic energy take over. We guide and we process, hopefully to pull out."

As described earlier, community health workers acted as catalysts in the food access issue by facilitating the People's Food Market initiative. The CHC is in the process of ending its staff involvement with the food market. Woodgreen Community Centre has become involved with the food market, giving the food market sufficient leadership to continue.

The CHC has also been instrumental in organizing coalitions such as East Toronto Organizing Against Racism and Hate (ETOARH), and Greater Riverdale Economic Action Together (GREAT). With respect to GREAT, it was felt that it was time for the community to use its own strengths: "One of our staff is still involved but I'm hoping that he will pull out of that soon. There's enough leadership there. That's the way to do it, go out and develop leadership."

### **2. Initiatives: Services and Programs**

The CHC has developed a number of services and programs to address the specific needs of residents of South Riverdale. Some of their target groups include: seniors, the Chinese community, women and children, teenage mothers and their children, and new immigrants and refugees. These groups have specific health issues which have been identified and addressed by the CHC through programming and service provision, as outlined below.

#### **Seniors**

The CHC provides primary care services staffed by family physicians, nurses, and social workers. As well, there are staff chiropodists who provide foot care management to address seniors-specific health needs, such as diabetes. On the health promotion and prevention side, the CHC has developed education programs for seniors. For example, Injury Prevention is a program which teaches seniors to watch for environmental hazards around their homes. Also mentioned was the success of the Safe Medications program which has received national, and to some extent international, recognition. Staff are also developing a program to promote seniors looking out for

other seniors: “Developing informal care infrastructure within buildings. People taking care of each other.”

### **Chinese community**

Having Chinese-speaking staff in both the clinic and health promotion programs has greatly facilitated access to culturally sensitive services for this target group. “We've got several Cantonese-speaking staff. We're very glad that we now have a Cantonese and Mandarin-speaking doctor as well. She's part-time.” The CHC's Chinese community health worker has made links with this community. One health promotion program is a Chinese women's health education and support group. The CHC is fortunate to have the only Chinese-speaking community nutritionist in the City of Toronto.

### **Violence against women and children**

In the area of violence against women and children, the CHC has been working on several levels, from education to support groups: “We've developed videos, and worked with physicians in helping them understand what their role is in preventing violence. We've come up with clinical protocols on dealing with wife assault, support groups.”

### **Maternal and Newborn Child Health:**

#### **Baby's First Week Home, Teen Moms, and Newcomers Prenatal programs**

Within their Maternal and Newborn Child Health program, the CHC provides obstetrical, prenatal and newborn care at an individual level. Additionally, the CHC has collaborated with other agencies in developing programs to meet the unique needs of residents in this community. One of the CHC's partnership programs is with a local hospital: “With the Toronto East General Hospital, we've launched Baby's First Week Home program which is post-partum care.”

Teen Moms is a program that the CHC developed to meet the unique needs of teenage mothers. The director explained: “Very specific interventions are necessary to help teen moms with the challenge of adolescent parenthood. To allow them to reach their own full potential, as well as helping the child to develop in a healthy way.”

The Newcomers Prenatal program is a partnership program between the CHC and the Department of Public Health. The Newcomers Prenatal program also developed out of a need in the community. At the Red Door Shelter, a local refugee reception centre, there were unique health needs among the pregnant, refugee women. “We see a lot of people come into this country late in pregnancy. They leave their homeland for the dream of having their child over here. We used to have a transient community of pregnant women, and there was no help available for them. To meet their needs, we've designed a Newcomers Prenatal program that runs right through the year.”

### **Other Programs and Services**

The director listed a number of other programs and services that the CHC offers South Riverdale residents: Environmental Health, Urban Planning and Land Use, Chiropody, Social Work, Quit Smoking program, Metamorphosis and the Nutrition Ambassador programs (nutrition

education). Additionally, the CHC has developed reader-friendly educational resources to facilitate access to health promotion and prevention materials.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Committed staff**

The CHC staff are committed to their work, and share a common belief system: “We seem to attract people who are progressive thinking. People who believe in equity.”

#### **Partnerships with social service agencies**

This progressive thinking was also seen in other local organizations. The director explained that having this shared belief system allows the CHC to collaborate easily with these community agencies. She acknowledged the current political focus on vertical integration with secondary, tertiary and quaternary health care providers. However, she emphasized the importance of working with social service agencies: “CHCs and other primary care organizations must pay a lot of attention to the horizontal linkages with social service agencies, because this is the population we work with. This is our common population.”

#### **Supportive elected representatives**

The local representatives were also seen as a support to the CHC’s work: “The local representatives have been good friends of the centre.” She pointed out that funding for the health centre’s new building was announced during NDP times.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Community awareness of the CHC**

The Program Director described the CHC's limited exposure in the community as a barrier to its work. She felt that the CHC was well-respected among community residents who were aware of its programs and services. The difficulty lies in reaching people in the community who are not connected to any services. “The centre has not been very good in telling its story. The people who come to know us, really come to know us well, and they love us. But those who don't know us well, don't know us at all. We've been able to penetrate only a small slice, a small population in this community. I think we could do better.”

#### **Limited resources**

The director also mentioned lack of time and resources as a barrier. She identified that there were not enough staff and volunteers to meet the complex needs of the South Riverdale community. This is indicated in her statement: “I wish I could clone myself. There are too many issues. There are too many battles to fight. Because it's an activist community, people want to get involved in everything but they cannot.”

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Community Minister  
United Church  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. History of Community Involvement**

South Riverdale's history of community involvement was viewed as a strength of this community. According to the Community Minister, local organizations such as the Ralph Thornton Community Centre were established through the commitment of a church member. She also described the enormous support from the community towards the establishment of Woodgreen Community Centre: "When they were fundraising for the building next door here, 95% of the homes in this area had little red stars in the windows as having contributed to the community centre."

**2. Sense of Community**

South Riverdale was viewed as an area with a strong sense of community, particularly among the area's long-time, English-speaking residents. She described these residents as survivors who are able to relate to each other because of common issues and struggles. This is indicated in her statement that "There's a connectedness among them, partly because of the struggles and the problems that they have to contend with. There's a pride of being along Queen Street."

**B. Issues and Problems**

**1. Food access**

A major challenge in South Riverdale has been the issue of food access. It was felt that access to affordable, fresh food was a poverty issue for some residents due to their limited incomes, as well as the limited number of places in the area where one could purchase healthy foods. The Community Minister's work with Riverdale Partners for Food reflects this concern: "Food access is one of the major issues that we've identified in this coalition that I'm in, and all of that leading to poor health."

**Church and Community Responses**

**Community Meal**

In response to the food access issue, the church provides its free Community Meal, which is open to anyone. The Community Meal takes place once a month, and serves 120 to 130 people per meal. The Community Meal is also an opportunity for community members to help and care for each other: "The volunteers, many of them came first just for the meal, and now they along with our key lay people serve the folks who come."



### **English as a Second Language (ESL) Cooking Class**

The church also facilitates food access by providing kitchen facilities for an ESL cooking class operated by the Toronto Board of Education. Thus far, most of the participants have been Chinese. It was felt that this cooking class allows participants to make healthier choices on their limited incomes: “It's trying to help them learn skills, so that they can cook at home and not have to spend money eating out.”

### **People's Food Market**

The church also facilitates access to affordable, fresh food by providing building space for the People's Food Market, a Riverdale Partners for Food program. The Community Minister described the rationale behind this and other initiatives by stating: “The People's Food Market came out of a concern about lack of inexpensive, fresh fruits and vegetables. The development of the community kitchens and community gardens is also saying we need to teach people how they can live economically, but on good food.”

## **2. People who are vulnerable**

The Community Minister expressed concern for people who are vulnerable or socially isolated. In South Riverdale, some may live in one-room apartments at Woodgreen Community Centre or the YWCA. She described some of the issues of this group with her statement: “Some are schizophrenic, some just haven't been able to make it. So they not only don't have employment, but they also are emotionally very fragile.”

### **Church and Community Responses**

The Community Minister felt the church was able to make its first contacts with many of these vulnerable people through their monthly Community Meal. Beyond this, the church has maintained contact with some through a group program that follows the meals. This group has helped the 20 to 25 members to reconnect with their community. The minister described her role as facilitator of this group: “We do a check-in every time. I really have tried to help them care about one another. We talk about what's happening in their own lives. We talk about what's happening in the community.”

## **3. Poverty**

It was felt that there were a number of issues related to the high degree of poverty among residents. Several residents must manage on social assistance. Others face significant issues such as problems with alcohol and drugs, and homelessness. The Community Minister described her observations of the difficult situations of some community members: “As you look at the folks up and down Queen Street, there are the drunks that you see on the street. You often see folks sleeping in the streetcar shelter out here at the corner. That's the ultimate when you have to sleep in a bus shelter.” Food access was also identified as a poverty-related issue which is discussed separately.

## **Church and Community Responses**

### **Facilitating advocacy / Promoting activism**

The Community Minister identified the church's role in helping community members to become politically active and advocate for themselves, as one way of fighting poverty. She described how the church as a congregation aligned itself with the Riverdale Against the Cuts Coalition, to protest funding cuts from the provincial government. The church also shared its protest against provincial funding cuts with the broader community: "When we had the Metro Days of Action last fall, we held a service outside, so that folks coming along the street could join us. Many of those people were part of the Coalition that went on the March to Queen's Park."

### **Links with other organizations**

The Community Minister has been involved with making links with other community organizations that share concerns about poverty in South Riverdale. She described the strong commitment to the community that she shares with these agencies: "I think I'm the only minister that's been regular at the East End Network." Among the coalitions which work on poverty issues, she mentioned Riverdale 2000, Riverdale Partners for Food, and Greater Riverdale Economic Action Together. More specifically with the Riverdale Partners for Food Coalition, the minister identified a number of partnership agencies that are involved: "There are folks from the Woodgreen Community Centre, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, YWCA (Pape), Ralph Thornton Centre."

### **Operation: Economic Concern**

The Community Minister also identified Operation: Economic Concern as an organization that helps residents manage poverty issues. Operation: Economic Concern operates two programs from the church site, a free income tax clinic and Share-A-Christmas. The Share-A-Christmas program organizes the collection of funds and toys for families in need.

## **4. Sense of Dislocation**

Ethnic diversity is evident among South Riverdale's residents. Many Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants have moved into the area over the last several years. The Community Minister explained that despite an overall sense of community, some long-time residents have experienced feelings of dislocation with the many newcomers to South Riverdale: "For the English-speaking folks here, there is that awareness that the community has changed. It's not theirs in the same way as it used to be. I think it's true whenever there's a mixture of cultural groups or language groups in an area."

## **Church and Community Responses**

To reduce feelings of dislocation among long-time residents and promote positive interactions with their Chinese and Vietnamese neighbours, the church has tried to involve new residents in community activities such as their monthly Community Meal and an annual Community Meal sponsored by the Riverdale Partners for Food. The annual event included not only the meal but also information about food resources and a discussion of community food

access needs. “When we had the last Riverdale Partners for Food Community Meal, we had two tables for the Chinese and one table for the Vietnamese, so they could have interpreters.” The minister reported that despite their efforts to involve Chinese and Vietnamese residents, they preferred to socialize with each other.

## **C. Roles and Initiatives of the Church**

### **1. Roles**

The Community Minister compared the unique role of the church with other community agencies in South Riverdale that address health and social welfare issues. She offered that, in addition to these roles, the church tries to meet the spiritual needs of individual members and the community as a whole. This is indicated in her statement: “The unique piece that we bring in is the spiritual component. We believe that spiritual health is very connected to physical health and emotional health. We see ourselves as having a special concern for the spiritual health of the community.”

She also described changes at the church within the last five to six years that have allowed development of this unique role in South Riverdale. One change was a decrease in the size of the church’s congregation. Several older members passed away or moved to the suburbs, leaving a small congregation at the church. Another significant occurrence was the church’s receipt of a large capital legacy. The church developed a number of initiatives to build beyond its small congregation of long-time residents and reconnect with the community. These initiatives are discussed below.

### **2. Initiatives**

#### **Community Meal Group Program**

As mentioned earlier, the Community Meal initiative brought out several members of the community who were vulnerable or socially isolated. For the 20 to 25 people who stay for the group program which follows the meal, the approach of focusing on social interactions has helped these members stay connected. Regarding these group members, the minister stated that: “A lot of them are not church people.” As such, she felt it was important to have an open, non-denominational program to best serve the spiritual and emotional needs of a diverse group.

#### **Red Door Shelter**

In addition to its initiatives to care for the spiritual health of this community, the church operates a major outreach project for refugees. The church houses the Red Door Shelter in its adjacent building. Refugees come from several countries including Nigeria, Zaire and the Congo. They are served by multilingual staff. Funding is received from several sources including the federal government, municipal (Metro Toronto) government, and the church itself.

The Community Minister described the history of the Red Door dating back to Reverend Ray McCleary, the minister of the church in the 1930s. Reverend McCleary painted the door of the parsonage red so that neighbourhood children knew that this was a place where they could come and play. In the late 1970s, Reverend John Hilborn envisioned the Red Door as a first

stop for refugees. The Red Door provided refugees with temporary housing while they made financial arrangements and found more permanent housing.

The Red Door Shelter has evolved, and the church in partnership with other community agencies such as the community health centres and St. Michael's Hospital Clinic, has developed programs to meet the complex needs of newcomers. Among this refugee population, the high needs of women and children have warranted the development of specific interventions. For example, "We've had a newcomers prenatal group for women in the community who don't have a health card and for women who come into the shelter." Other programs at the Red Door include: a floor for abused women and their children, a family floor for families who have been evicted, and an elaborate program for young children that addresses issues of post-traumatic stress.

The success of the Red Door Shelter and continued need for services for refugees are evident by requests for services in other areas of Metro Toronto. According to the Community Minister: "They've now been asked to open a second house which is up at Lawrence and Pharmacy for families who are evicted and have no place to go."

### **Spirit Happening**

Another initiative of the church is Spirit Happening, a Saturday night service which serves as an alternative to the church's Sunday worship. "Spirit Happening is not explicitly Christian. It's for anyone who sees themselves as on a spiritual journey. Again, it's that sense of caring among that group." This service has also attracted many community members who attend the Community Meal, and helped them stay connected with others.

### **Women's Group**

The Community Minister also leads another innovative program, the women's group called "Miriam's Sisters." She described the members of this group: "It's a mix of the older, established congregational members, and women from the community. It's a wonderful group."

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Church's capital legacy**

The Community Minister identified the capital legacy given to the church eight or nine years ago as a support. She stated that this legacy allows programs like the Community Meal to be provided free of charge to community members.

#### **Committed congregation**

Another significant support is the congregation itself and its vision. While some established members of the church were initially reluctant to open up the church to more vulnerable members of the community, the congregation eventually welcomed new members. The minister explained some of the reflections of older congregation members: "It was an amazing thing to see this little remnant of a congregation, feeling sorry for itself that people were moving

away or aging and dying. There were not new people coming into the congregation, which had kind of led them to look inward. [The legacy] led them to start to look outward again.”

### **Committed Staff**

It was felt that the church’s community work has been supported by the commitment and vision of its staff, including the Minister and the Community Minister herself. The leadership and vision of these two ministers have created innovative programs such as Spirit Happening, the Community Meal and the Women’s Group. Through these programs, the church has been able to rebuild its involvement in this community, and to assist members in a meaningful way.

## **2. Barriers**

### **Limitations in staff and volunteers**

Part of the church's struggle to stay actively involved in community issues are limitations in people-power, both volunteers and paid staff of other organizations. While the church’s capital legacy has provided sufficient material resources, promoting volunteerism among its congregation has not been easy. “One thing is that we are so small in our lay leadership here. We've got more money and more facilities than we have people. The issue of volunteers is a concern.”

A related barrier is the loss of momentum that occurs when paid staff can no longer continue with coalitions and their related projects. The minister saw this decrease in volunteer energy occurring with organizations such as Riverdale 2000, Citizens for a Safe Environment, and Riverdale Against the Cuts. She stated: “In these coalitions, once the funding ran out and there was no staff member, there wasn't the energy to keep it going.”

While the minister was able to identify a solution to this barrier, she recognized that the solution itself is not easy: “We know that the answer is to get the community involved, but people don't have a lot of extra energy to work on community issues. It's all they can do to keep their own lives together and to survive.”

### **Provincial funding cuts**

Although provincial funding cuts to social services have not affected the church directly, the minister saw the cuts as a barrier to the work the church does with other community agencies: “The cuts to agency budgets have meant that people are working so hard on the specific programs of their agencies, that it's hard to find staff time to also give to these coalitions. Everybody is suffering from staff burnout and overload because of the agency cuts.”

The minister also commented on the direct effects that these funding cuts have had on community members who receive social assistance: “It's a vicious circle that the people we are trying to help are hurting more, and the helpers are hurting because of the same issues.”

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Community Dietitian  
Community Health Centre  
May, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Community Agencies and Resources**

It was felt that the most important strength of the community is the support people receive from agencies like the community health centre or other groups, such as free exercise classes at a local church. People have access to inexpensive or free support that is easy to travel to. "By having that support they feel that their situation isn't unique . . . hearing other people going through the same thing, whether they're positive or negative, really helps."

**2. Community Involvement**

Many of the people with whom the dietitian has contact are very involved in the community. This is a positive aspect of life for them in this community. On the other hand, the dietitian noted that there are many people "that we know we're not reaching, but do need some kind of support."

**3. Safety**

The dietitian felt that the community members she is in contact with feel safe in the neighbourhood. "They know that they are safe in their community because they might know their neighbour who lives down the street. They're in an apartment; they feel comfortable in the complex."

**B. Problems and Issues**

**1. Poverty**

Money is the "number one" problem reported by the dietitian. She explained that other issues are connected with low income: "There are other things that come out of that. Lack of education because they don't have the money to get educated, lack of transportation because they don't have the money. Inadequate housing. The list goes on and on and on." As a community health worker, she expressed some frustration in dealing with a problem of this magnitude: "You know that you can't change [it], you can't give them more money, so what can you do to help them cope with the situation that they have."

**2. Social Isolation**

The dietitian also felt that isolation was related to the poverty community members experience. It was felt that their poverty limits their opportunities to get out in the community and socialize with others.

## **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

### **1. Roles**

As an agency, the community health centre designs programs to alleviate some of the dominant risk factors in the community, including low income and unemployment. Related to nutrition and food issues, the dietitians aim to help people “to live a healthier life by focusing on disease prevention and the whole health promotion model. And living a healthier life by having access to affordable healthy food.” Some specific initiatives are described below.

### **2. Initiatives**

#### **Food Access Initiatives**

To increase access to healthy, affordable food, the community dietitian is involved in a People's Food Market, and a food buying co-op. Cooking demonstrations and a menu contest to generate interest in vegetarian cooking have also been held.

Another initiative is the Partners for Food group, started two years ago by South Riverdale Community Health Centre with other agencies. They focus on food access issues in the community and have organized two annual community dinners. The dinners are vegetarian; the last one fed 250 people for \$300.

#### **Healthy Weight Programs**

The community dietitian facilitates two programs to support people around issues of weight and body image. The My Weight, My Plan program includes three components: healthy eating, active living and feeling good about yourself. People who have participated in My Weight, My Plan can continue in the Metamorphosis support group.

#### **Individual Counselling**

The other dietitian at the health centre provides clinical one-on-one counselling.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Collaborations with Other Agencies**

Linkages with other community agencies was identified as a key support. The dietitian was aware that one agency cannot meet all the community's needs. She specifically mentioned this as a positive aspect of the Partners for Food coalition, which has “support from a wide range of agencies and community people.”

### **Community Health Centre**

The dietitian reported that the community health centre supports her work in two different ways. Firstly, her supervisor and other staff are supportive of her work. Secondly, she felt that her work is supported by the fact that the CHC is well known in the community. She explained: “To have that name behind you, you're representing them and this is the service that you have to offer. So it helps with the promotion.”

### **Involvement of Community Members**

Listening to the community and having their active involvement was identified as another support. “Knowing the community helps, so it's not just the agency saying, this is what we should do.”

## **2. Barriers**

### **Maintaining Activism**

The dietitian spoke of Riverdale's history of community activism and some of the changes she observes. She commented that many of the people of Scottish and British descent who filled the community previously were strong community activists. Yet she wondered: “How do you keep the momentum going? How do you get the people to continue on with that spirit which Riverdale has been known for for a long time?” While there are a few key people who are very involved in the community now, and they are very much valued, it was felt that they also “need different people representing the community, not just the same core group.”

### **Reaching People Who Need Support**

Concern was expressed about identifying and reaching people in the community who are felt to need support but are not accessing services. “How do you get these other people that you know need access to affordable healthy food and they just aren't, for some reason, coming out?” From information obtained following the last community supper, the answer appears to centre around “a whole coping issue. People are just finding out how they can cope from day to day.”

### **Volunteer Issues**

Finding and keeping volunteers can be problem for community agencies. For example, it was felt that volunteers with the People's Food Market are “getting burnt out and it's at the point where they will need more support from agencies to get them back on their feet and to get new volunteers out.” The food buying co-op has also had difficulty finding committed volunteers.



**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Coordinator, Literacy Program  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Community Agencies and Resources**

The coordinator identified the presence of services in the area as one of the community's strengths. An added advantage is that many of these services are within walking distance, including Woodgreen Community Centre, Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre and the Ralph Thornton Centre.

**2. Inexpensive Stores**

The coordinator felt that having inexpensive stores in the area helped many of the people on low income who participate in the literacy program. For example, there is an inexpensive grocery store across the street, which allows people who come to the program to combine it with a grocery shopping trip. There is also an inexpensive café and a used clothing store nearby.

**B. Problems and Issues**

**1. Crime and Safety**

Crime was identified as a problem in the area and it has affected the people who attend the literacy program. For example, there have been break-ins in the area, including the theft of items belonging to the literacy program. The coordinator reported that many of the women who attend the program are afraid to come to this area of the city in the evening.

**2. Drugs**

Another problem in the community is drugs. The coordinator noted that there is a crack house just around the corner from where the literacy program takes place. One of the people from that house, who had an obvious drug problem, created some problems at the program.

**3. Poverty**

Poverty was also seen as a problem in the South Riverdale area.

**C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

The literacy program has been running since 1992, after surveys indicated a need for such a program in the area. The program provides free one-to-one tutoring to adults who have trouble reading and writing. It is the only adult one-to-one literacy program in South Riverdale, although there are similar programs north on the Danforth and west of the Don Valley. Most of the people who attend are from the South Riverdale area; many are social assistance recipients.

The program's capacity is 45 to 50 learner-tutor pairs. Presently, the program has forty learners, many of whom have been attending for over two years. The coordinator felt "that is

proof that it is doing well.” The coordinator’s job is to recruit and match volunteers and learners, train volunteers, and provide referral and support to volunteer tutor pairs. She also tutors learners, due to a lack of daytime volunteer tutors.

Tutors need to be fluent readers and writers; they are expected to form a peer relationship with the learner, not to act as a teacher. Tutors focus on the interests and needs of the learners: “The tutor helps the learner learn what they want to learn.” Described below are some of the specific roles and benefits of the literacy program, as identified by the coordinator.

### **Addresses Issues of Unemployment and Crime**

The coordinator discussed how improving literacy skills can benefit individuals and communities. She commented that “there is a real connection between poverty and illiteracy and lack of employment and crime.” She felt that by building literacy skills, they are also addressing these other issues: “The improvement in literacy skills then impacts on the quality of life and employment possibilities.”

### **Provides Referrals**

The literacy program provides information about other educational opportunities and refers people to vocational or employment counselling. If a learner feels that this program is not appropriate for them, for example if the learner needs the structure of a classroom or wants to attend full-time, or if they are ready to move into a different educational opportunity, they are assisted in finding the appropriate place. “We help raise people's awareness about what their options are, especially relating to adult education.”

Other options for adult learners include a local school that provides an adult day high school and another that has a class that focuses on adult literacy. People can also earn a high school diploma by correspondence courses at the independent learning centre on Bay Street.

### **Provides a Social Network**

The coordinator noted that the literacy program provides people with the opportunity to make friends. She explained: “Another thing people say they like is that they see the same people here every time that they come to the literacy program. People come here once a week for two hours, but they choose the same day and the same time every week. There are people who have been coming here for a couple of years and they get to know each other very well. It has created a sense of community, in that they are making friends.”

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **In Kind Supports**

In kind supports were identified as a key support to the literacy program. The Ralph Thornton Centre provides the space free of charge. The Metro Separate School Board provides the staff and the Toronto Public Library supplies books.

#### **Volunteers**

Volunteers are an essential part of this program. There is only one staff person during the day and one in the evening. It is the volunteers who provide the tutoring and make up the board of directors.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Child Care Issues**

The coordinator reported that sometimes people will say they cannot attend the program because of child care issues. Although there is an agency that provides free visiting homemakers to care for children in their own home, people are often uncomfortable leaving their children with a stranger.

#### **Funding**

It was felt that the literacy program could use more funding. For example, the coordinator explained that they “like to provide coffee to create a welcoming environment.” In order to raise money for coffee and subway tokens, they have had to do some outside fundraising, which is time-consuming.

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Youth Worker, Community Centre  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Caring Community**

The youth worker characterized the neighbourhood as one “in which people care beyond the ordinary.” The example was given of a youth who had been very active in the community and at the centre, and he became mentally ill. People visited him, took him to the doctor, asked the community centre to find him a job, and offered him a place to stay. “What struck me about it was the concern,” he said. “People in the neighbourhood really go beyond the norm . . . There's a sense of community spirit.”

**2. Community Centre**

The youth worker mentioned the community centre as one of the positive things in the neighbourhood. “For many of them it's like home, they can come here, they get support.”

**3. Local School**

Also mentioned as a positive factor was the school being close by, so that children can go to school in their own community.

**B. Problems and Issues**

**1. Drugs**

Drugs were seen as a problem in the community. The youth worker reported that some youth experiment with drugs, mainly because they want to see what they are all about. He reported that there are a lot of drug dealers and misuse of drugs in the neighbourhood. He felt that more programs are needed to address “the whole issue of drugs. Maybe we could improve in that area, in the sense of giving people more meaningful choices. Let them know that this is not a lifestyle that is healthy for you. In other words, be more aggressive about prevention programs in our area.”

**2. Unemployment and Poverty**

This area of the city has a very high rate of youth unemployment, partly due to its high youth population. There are no industries in the immediate community. The local mall can only employ a few people. In a needs assessment conducted by the community centre, the youth said they need meaningful long term jobs, not just short term jobs. The high unemployment rate has led to what the youth worker calls “spin-off problems”, including low self-esteem, skipping school and a high pregnancy rate. Nonetheless, the youth worker reported that many youth like their community. He felt it was unfortunate they could not find employment in the community.

Related to the unemployment in the area is a high rate of poverty. Because they cannot find work, many residents receive social assistance, live in subsidized housing and depend on the food bank. The area has two major subsidized housing projects.

### **3. Youth Hopelessness**

The youth worker felt that many of the youth have a “general sense of hopelessness” resulting from the unemployment and drug use in the area. He felt that the crime and graffiti problems were a result of “the central problems of unemployment and drugs.”

## **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

### **1. Roles**

In their youth program, the community centre serves people aged 12 to 24. Approximately 90% of the youth served are black, 5% are Chinese and 5% white. Many of the black youth have recently immigrated from Somalia. There are three youth workers at the community centre. They connect with the youth in the community, assess their needs and create programs for them, and find funding for those programs. “All the funding that we get in this centre is to design programs to alleviate these problems that face the community. That's what our mandate is: to help people within our catchment area . . . to use all the resources we can to alleviate these problems.” The centre recently received an award from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada for their innovative, creative programs.

The centre works closely with other community agencies. Close to the community centre is a youth outreach service that provides counselling, advocacy for youth around the criminal justice system, housing and welfare issues. For youth who need immediate shelter, the community centre refers them to another youth service. This summer the centre formed a partnership with Pape Adolescent Resource Centre and they offer programs for youth in care. If youth are interested in a program which is related to their own ethno cultural background, the community centre staff will refer them to the appropriate agency.

### **2. Initiatives**

The community centre provides counselling, an employment program, a teen mothers program, a site for a food bank and a good food box program, a women's safety committee, a children's after school program, music programs, a steel band program, piano classes and citizenship classes. The centre is also hoping to start a youth computer program. The Toronto Board of Education runs an Ontario School Program in the centre. The centre's specific initiatives for youth are presented below.

#### **Art**

The centre is trying to diversify its youth program to include more arts and creative activities. A new arts-based program is being developed because it was recognized that there are youth who are not interested in athletic activities, but who would like to develop their artistic

talents. The youth worker described this as “inner city youth doing their own stuff.” Without this type of new program, lack of money to do so may be a barrier.

### **Cultural Festivals**

The centre holds festivals to recognize people's cultural heritage in a tangible way and to enable people to learn about other cultures. For example, the Chinese Youth Program, the Chinese Heritage Seniors Program and Riverdale School hold a large festival to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The community centre hosts a large dinner to celebrate Black History Month. Last year over 400 youth attended and everything was donated by the community. Muslim holy days, particularly Ramadan, are recognized. Other groups in the neighbourhood are encouraged to use the centre to hold cultural celebrations. There are special programs for the Somali, Chinese and Vietnamese youth on Saturdays. The youth worker felt it is important to empower youth with these types of celebrations and programs.

### **Funding for New Programs**

The agency works hard to secure government grants for relevant programs. They recently received funding for a youth employment program and their teenage mothers program. They also recently received a small grant from the City's drug abuse prevention program to run a program next year for young women between 15 and 20. “This program is designed to help them look at the issues that affect them and then to go out into the community and hold workshops for young women who are facing similar issues: date rape, sexual assault, issues that young women face in this community.”

### **Recreation**

The centre provides recreational programs including gym, soccer, basketball, and games such as pool and table tennis. Youth may become members or participate on a drop-in basis. The recreation programs can act as a springboard for youth to obtain other services if necessary, “a good way of getting youth into the building.” Staff are trained to notice problems and provide someone the youth can talk to. They will also refer youth to programs at other agencies if necessary.

### **Youth Employment**

The centre has a youth employment program, designed to help youth with their first on-the-job experience. The program is run, as near as possible, to a real work situation. Youth report to a supervisor, fill out a time sheet, structure job descriptions, participate in an interview and do a written test. The youth worker also sees a need for an employment program for people over age 24.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Volunteers**

It was felt that the community centre is helped in its efforts by enthusiastic volunteers. The youth worker expressed pride in the centre's volunteer programs and he commented that there is a "high spirit of volunteerism in this community." At the centre's recent volunteer appreciation night, approximately 35 volunteers were recognized.

#### **Community Goodwill**

The support and good will of the community was also mentioned as a support to the centre's work.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Insufficient Staff and Funding**

It was felt that the community centre needs more staff in order to have additional one-to-one contact with the youth and the community at large. More funding is also needed.

#### **No Immediate Access to Public Transportation**

The centre is somewhat hampered by a lack of immediate access to public transportation. The area is isolated because of the presence of a large graveyard on one side [and train tracks on the south].

#### **Stigmatization of the Neighbourhood**

Another barrier is the stigmatization of the area, because it is a low income community and because it has a poor reputation: "Word has gone out it's a bad area."

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Nurse, Public Health Department  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Neighbourhood Familiarity**

For many of the young mothers the neighbourhood is familiar to them. This was viewed as a positive factor: "If you're born in a specific area of Toronto, you just sort of see that as an area that's comfortable for you to be in."

**2. Parks**

The nurse also noted that there were several parks in the area and this was also seen as a positive feature of the community.

**3. Programs for Mothers and Children**

It was felt that the mothers' support group makes the neighbourhood good for these women because it puts them in touch with people who are going through the same experiences that they are. The group is held at a parent drop-in centre (within a school) with activities for babies and toddlers.

There are also other programs in the area to support mothers and their children, such as Healthy Beginnings at Eastview Community Centre. This program is primarily for prenatal support, but parents can attend until their babies are six months old. Healthy Beginnings offers education and support, as well as a food bank component.

**4. Public Transportation**

The nurse described the neighbourhood as one where it is "reasonably easy to get around." Many of the teen mothers live close to the Danforth so they can easily access the TTC and amenities located on the subway line.

**5. Supports for Education**

There are some school programs in Riverdale that enable young mothers to go back to school. For example the S.O.L.E program at Greenwood School is "flexible and therefore well-adapted to a young mother with a child." In this high school education program, students usually take two credits at a time. Once a week they can meet with their advisor to have assignments marked, receive some teaching and obtain new assignments which can be completed at home.

It can be difficult for mothers who want to attend regular high school to find daycare, especially in a convenient location. However, some of the young mothers have been successful in getting subsidized daycare so that they can go back to school.



## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Housing Issues**

The nurse commented that several of the young mothers “have problems with housing.” She explained that young mothers often “live with their mother or their parents right after the baby is born, but then they want greater independence in bringing up their child.” The young mothers are often on social assistance, so do not have a lot of money to spend on rent. “In some cases, they're underhoused. They're living in basement apartments with high rents.”

### **2. Lack of Community Feeling**

Many of the young women in the group live in the Coxwell and Danforth or Greenwood and Gerrard area, however it was felt that they did not have a strong sense of community there. “I'm not really convinced there's much of a community feeling for them.”

### **3. Limited Services in Immediate Area**

It was felt that community services were somewhat limited in the Coxwell and Gerrard area, where many of the young mothers live. Using services a short distance away, such as Pape Recreation Centre, requires money for transportation and possibly child care, which can prevent the young mothers from participating.

### **4. Negative Comments from Strangers**

The nurse remarked that strangers often make comments to the young mothers, which she feels can have a negative impact. For example, people may comment on the mother's age or the race of the parents. “Generally their self-esteem is not that great. They certainly want to be good parents, and they're wondering whether or not they can be, and to have this occur is not the greatest.”

## **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

### **1. Roles**

In her work with new mothers, the public health nurse facilitates a Young Mothers Support Group. As well she provides support around breastfeeding, participates in the Babies First Week Home program and clinic, and does health promotion activities in a variety of community locations. The Public Health Department also participates in the East End Young Mom's Project with South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Woodgreen Community Centre. This federally funded program provides a variety of services for young mothers including cooking, shopping, outings with their children and a drop-in centre.

The primary role of the public health nurse is to provide information to mothers so that they can access existing services. She explained: “It may not sound like too big a thing but when all of a sudden you're a parent, your learning needs are high, both in terms of parenting and in terms of resources available.” In addition to providing information, the nurse may provide

support by accompanying the mother to a new program or to apply for subsidized day care, for example. Peer support is a lasting benefit for those in the group.

## **2. Initiatives**

### **Young Mothers' Support Group**

The Young Mothers' Support Group is for women up to age 21 and they meet once a week. "It's primarily a support group and has a health and parenting focus." The group is ongoing and "most mothers stay connected for their first year." When their children are older, some mothers will still drop in to visit or attend the program's annual picnic.

Programs such as the Young Mothers Support Group provide a support network with other mothers in the same area of the city. The nurse explained: "It's supportive to be able to talk to other mothers who are young and therefore face some of the same issues. They feel that they are not alone and in fact sometimes they come up with solutions to some of their concerns. For example, they share babysitting, which provides one mother with an opportunity to make a little money and an opportunity for the other one to pursue whatever they want. They exchange clothing and baby gear. They plan outings together. The friendships that develop are very important. Now that they have an infant, it's not uncommon for them to lose touch with their school friends."

The nurse saw a need for a young mothers' group because the mothers in the regular parenting groups were often in their late 20s and early 30s and the younger mothers do not feel comfortable. It was felt that these women "needed something in their own community . . . I think it is important they have things right here." To ensure that the young mothers can come to the program, the public health department provides TTC tokens. They also provide snacks. "We certainly make it part of our policy to provide programs for high risk parents which do provide transportation and food supplementation." She hopes the program can be expanded to more locations to ensure programs are close to young mothers.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Agency Support**

The nurse felt she is supported in her work by the public health department. For example, she was supported in her efforts to have the new mothers' program extend beyond the standard six weeks.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Connecting with Teenage Mothers**

The nurse described two barriers to connecting with young mothers: identifying who they are and once this is done, continuing to encourage and support them to use the available services. "Those are the two pieces, knowing who they are and having the time and the commitment to stay with them until they're settled and connected with some support."

The nurse explained that it has been difficult in the east end of the City to identify new young mothers. This may improve in the future because the public health department is participating with several hospitals in a service to try to fill the gap left by the early discharge of postnatal patients. Toronto East General, for instance, refers all women who have given birth to the health department and a nurse contacts them within 24 to 48 hours after they leave the hospital. “So that in fact will ensure that we know who these young people are.” Once the health department knows about an individual, “getting her to use some of the supports that are available is a really hard process. It’s very time-consuming and as a nurse you have to be very, very committed to keep trying.”

### **Culture**

It was felt that cultural diversity can present a barrier to young mothers participating in programs. It was felt that young mothers “would feel more comfortable coming out if they could be assured that there were people in the group of their own ethnic origin. And sometimes there are, but sometimes they aren’t.”

### **Time Constraints**

The nurse described the time pressures she felt, especially since her role is very diverse. “It takes a lot of time and commitment to make a young mother feel comfortable enough to come out to one of the services.” This can be difficult when other things are competing for the nurse’s time.

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Community Health Promoter  
Community Health Centre (CHC)  
May, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Active Community of Seniors**

The health promoter characterized the senior people in the community as being strong-minded, fiercely independent and durable. She says, "In South Riverdale there's a certain amount of spunkiness, particularly among the people that have been here a very long time . . . They're not going to be defeated." The seniors are also politically active and knowledgeable. For example, the health promoter spoke of them writing letters to the local politicians to register their concerns about issues or problems.

**2. Community Agencies and Resources**

The community services in the area were seen as a positive factor. The health promoter felt that the service providers do good work that complements each other's efforts, rather than overlapping. She also felt that there is "a lot of tenacity among service providers."

**3. Opportunities for Community Involvement**

It was felt that there were many opportunities for community members to get involved, and this was seen as a positive feature of the community. "For anyone who's motivated to go out there, there are a large number of opportunities, for socialization, recreation, church, and an ability to contribute to one's community."

**4. Sense of Community**

Many of the seniors who have lived in the area for a long time feel a strong sense of community in South Riverdale. They are very familiar with the area and with many of the people in it, both now and in the past. The health promoter has enjoyed the seniors' stories of their lives in the community: "They'll point out that there used to be a little lending library here, and there was someone who had a bird store here, and so and so's father-in-law had the brickworks that built the houses, and they'll tell me about . . . everyone." The social networks or "connectedness" the seniors have developed over the years also contributes to their sense of community.

**5. Supportive Housing Environments**

The supportive housing offered by Woodgreen was seen as a positive feature in the community. The housing includes some rent-geared-to-income units. There are units for younger families, older people, people with disabilities, and people who may be experiencing health problems. Close by is a retirement residence which provides supportive care, including meals. Although there are several cultural and linguistic groups, it was felt that the Woodgreen staff "try to support the sense of community within this diversity."

## **B. Problems in Community**

### **1. Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Alcoholism was seen as a problem in this community. Also mentioned were problems with crack houses a few years ago.

### **2. Availability of Fresh Foods**

Access to affordable fresh foods was seen as a problem in South Riverdale. As the health promoter commented: “If you look up and down the street, there's just not a lot of places where you can quickly pick up affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.”

### **3. Crime and Safety**

Concern was expressed about crime and incidents of violence that have occurred in the neighbourhood.

### **4. Housing**

It was felt that there were housing issues in the community that affected seniors. The health promoter commented on gaps in housing for seniors, as well as slum landlords who allow properties to deteriorate. She also noted that the system to apply for seniors supportive housing can be very complex and difficult.

### **5. Limited Access to Natural Amenities**

It was felt that the area's natural amenities are difficult to access. “I sure would like to see some green space. In this community, how do you know there's a lake down there? . . . Certainly there are pockets of green space, but immediately here you have to sort of look for it.”

### **6. Low Literacy Levels**

The health promoter described how the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy found that South Riverdale had a high need in the area of literacy: “There was this tremendous need and as somebody said ‘All you need to do is to go up to the employment centre on the Danforth and you find out how many people can't fill out their forms.’”

### **7. Mental Illness**

The health promoter felt that mental illness was an issue which needed to be addressed in the community.

### **8. Mobility Issues: Safety and Transportation**

Problems related to seniors' mobility in the community were discussed. “I think the infrastructure, the actual streets, the ability to move, transportation, is a very large problem for older people.” It was reported that some transit commission drivers will assist seniors, but others will not. “It really depends on the individual driver . . . I've actually seen the TTC driver get out and escort somebody through snow and slush over to where the post office was. And yet you see other people just drive on by.”

## **9. Police Response**

It was felt that the police could be more responsive when called by residents: “I don't think the police have always been attentive to people calling about people in the backyard or whatever.”

### **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

#### **1. Roles**

The health promoter described her work with seniors: “The goal is to keep people independent and living within the community under their terms for as long as is feasible.” In addition to specific initiatives described below, the health promoter offers support, especially to gather people together around issues. She also makes referrals, for example to the CHC’s social workers or to the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, and provides some “crisis intervention . . . so there is an individual component.”

#### **2. Initiatives**

##### **Clear Language**

For the last five years, the health promoter has been working with a group of seniors on clear language issues. They received a Health Canada grant to examine printed material from both health and social services, including government services. This group of seniors have developed expertise in this area and have become a consulting group around clear language and design issues. For example, they helped design a poster for Home Care.

The health centre develops printed information in clear language about problems experienced by seniors. In the past years they have addressed ear wax, cost codes and constipation. The pamphlets are used by the clinical staff at the CHC and disseminated in the community. The health promoter was also very involved in starting Literacy for East Toronto.

##### **Hearing Day**

The health centre hosts a Hearing Day once a year. Hearing screening and education are provided and the clinical staff from the CHC remove ear wax.

##### **Injury Prevention - Home Safe Home Project**

The CHC received Health Canada funding to address safety issues. As the health promoter explained: “There was a gap there. There's a lot of people running around telling people what to do to keep safe and there's not been a lot of community input, what's accessible, what's even relevant . . . it was about finding out what the issues were and then creating some sort of educational approach and then sharing it.”

In seniors' residences people decided they needed to provide their own safety net in case a resident became ill or injured. After a recent incident, the seniors became motivated to start checking up on each other on a regular basis. The health promoter helped by calling someone in Scarborough with a similar program and then “have senior talk to senior and then they're on a roll. They designed their own way of checking on each other to make sure that they are all right.”

Seniors have a tag for their door. If it is still there at 10 a.m., someone will knock and get help if there is no answer.

### **Safe Medications Project**

The CHC also received Health Canada funding for a project on the wise use of medication. The Safe Medications Project involved different groups, including the local pharmacists, working together on the issue of safe medication use.

### **Seniors Wellness Group**

The health promoter facilitates a Seniors' Wellness Group. She spoke with pride about the group: "Groups like the Seniors Wellness are just a testimony to what sort of capacity the community has."

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Agency Support**

The health promoter valued the support of her agency and its staff. She felt it gave her the "opportunity to be responsive to the needs of the community."

#### **Partnerships with Other Agencies**

Collaboration with other agencies also supports the health promoter in her work. Good relationships with the public health department, Woodgreen Seniors Centre and other agencies have developed. They do programs together, as well as complement and support each other's work. The health promoter has also worked with East Toronto Seniors, Ralph Thornton Centre Group, the Home Safe Home Project in Metro Toronto, and the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging.

#### **The Seniors**

The seniors themselves really support the health promoter and her initiatives. For example, she described how they will "do things like wave materials or causes under the noses of their doctors or their hospitals . . . 'Why aren't you doing this, get involved' and that type of thing. They're really good social marketers."

### **2. Barriers**

No barriers were mentioned.

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Manager, Community Support Services  
Community Centre  
May, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Community Agencies and Resources**

The manager spoke about the numerous resources and services available in South Riverdale. “The comprehensive provision of support services for seniors in South Riverdale enhances the quality of life of seniors.” These services include the Riverdale Hospital, Toronto East General Hospital, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, and Jimmie Simpson and Pape Recreation centres.

**2. Cultural Diversity**

The cultural diversity in South Riverdale was also identified as a positive factor. “The position of different cultures supports the community’s identity. For instance, Chinatown creates a focus and provides the seniors with a cultural identity and security. Greek town also provides a sense of identity to Greek seniors.” Thus, these areas allow members of South Riverdale to maintain their various cultural identities while enjoying the neighbourhood’s diversity simultaneously.

**3. Public Transportation**

Another positive factor of living in South Riverdale is easy access to public transportation. “The TTC system runs on all major roads and is convenient for seniors.” The convenient transportation system increases seniors’ ability to be mobile within the community.

**4. Sense of Community**

The manager felt that the South Riverdale area has a strong sense of community that enhances the quality of life for residents. This is indicated in his statement that “Riverdale has a tradition of community, as people have a lengthy residency in this area, and have a sense of attachment to this community. There are few new residents so this nurtures a sense of commitment, belonging and security in this community.”

**B. Problems and Issues**

**1. Lack of Government Funding**

Lack of government funding was identified as a major issue that has many effects on the community centre’s programs. These effects include increasing waiting lists for many support services and under staffing. For some programs, funding has been frozen for over ten years. “There are just not enough services to meet the needs of the seniors in this community. For example, for our Client Intervention Assistance Program, 400 to 500 cases have to be divided



among three case workers. We are also unable to address the needs of some ethnic groups due to limited resources.”

### **Agency Response**

The community centre has had to respond to lack of government funding by implementing a cap on their services. They do not consider caps on services as the best solution, but feel they have no other options. “We are no longer able to serve the entire local community as we have a cap on our services. Thus, we can no longer accept new clients. We are trying to increase our government funding in order to meet the demands for services in our catchment area.”

## **2. Limited Mobility**

Limited mobility was also identified as an issue for many of the seniors. “Frail seniors have difficulty accessing the services and programs at the community centre due to limited mobility.”

### **Agency Response**

The community centre responds to seniors’ limited mobility by making their programs more accessible. They have begun to develop satellite programs that are offered in seniors’ apartments. “We have satellite programs at Greenwood Towers, 1070 Woodgreen seniors’ apartment and at 80 Danforth. This makes it easier for them to participate in the programs as the seniors do not have to travel.”

Developing satellite programs is a growing trend. The community centre is currently in the process of exploring a project with Metro Housing that involves setting up permanent satellite offices in all of the seniors apartments.

## **3. Need for In-Home Supports**

According to the manager, there is a need for increased in-home supports due to the aging population in South Riverdale. “There is an increasing number of seniors in South Riverdale who are becoming frail. These seniors need more in-home supports to maintain their independence. Many of the seniors live alone because younger generations are not prone to stay in South Riverdale. This creates problems related to caregiver support.”

### **Agency Response**

The Community Centre has responded to the issue of caregiver burden by offering a Day Program to provide respite care for caregivers. The centre also assigns a case-worker to seniors to assist in taking care of their needs. The case worker has a number of roles. These include providing counselling services, helping to plan for the future, linking seniors up with in-home services, and coordinating all of the support services. The manager explained that the community centre attempts to provide comprehensive services including social, emotional and tangible supports.

#### **4. Poverty**

The manager stated that there are various issues and problems related to high levels of poverty among seniors. “The socioeconomic status of this community is comparatively lower than other parts of the city. Most seniors are on some type of assistance. The financial burden causes them to consider whether or not they should join programs at the centre. They can barely afford the minimum fee of four dollars. They will reject programs like Meals on Wheels which have nominal fees even though they are entitled to the services.”

#### **Agency Response**

The community centre responds to issues related to low-income by adjusting their fees for programs and advocating for increased funding. “We try to charge a nominal fee such as one dollar which includes transportation and meals. We treat seniors with respect and provide services in a dignified manner. We also try to advocate for increased financial support from the government to respond to the needs of the seniors.”

#### **5. Social Isolation**

A major challenge that the community centre faces is reaching seniors who are socially isolated. It was felt that many seniors are unaware of available services such as Meals on Wheels or home-making. Also, many seniors are reluctant to have strangers coming into their homes. “Many referrals are made by a concerned third party suggesting that an individual in the community requires assistance. Many seniors feel lonely and anxious when their friends pass away but they still do not go out. They are hesitant to make new friends, which makes it a challenge to get them involved in community activities.”

#### **Agency Response**

The community centre responds to this problem of social isolation by educating seniors about available services and programs. “We try to develop a relationship with seniors and provide them with the appropriate services. However, it takes time for seniors to develop a relationship with the staff and trust us.” The centre also offers a wide range of different programs for active older adults such as Tai Chi, fitness, music, bingo, and educational/health-related programs.

### **C. Supports and Barriers**

#### **1. Supports**

##### **Partnerships**

The manager identified partnerships with other community agencies and health care facilities as a support to the community centre’s efforts in carrying out their mandate. “We see a growing demand for partnerships with local agencies. Our role is more challenging with earlier discharges from hospitals, and with long-term care reform that pushes to keep seniors in the community longer. We are building strong linkages in order to establish a comprehensive and coordinated service model for seniors.” Some of their partners include: the Riverdale Hospital,

Toronto East General Hospital, Applegrove Community Centre, and the South Riverdale Community Health Centre.

## **2. Barriers**

### **Lack of Funding**

The manager reiterated that the lack of government funding is a barrier to carrying out the community centre's mandate to meet the needs of the seniors in South Riverdale. One impact of limited funding has been insufficient staffing. "There is only one staff member working on all of the programming for active older adults."

### **Community Care Access Centre Policy**

Another barrier is related to recent policy changes regarding the establishment of the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC). This policy creates competition among community agencies where competition did not exist before. The CCAC will be responsible for allocating the funding for community-based agencies. "This policy requires us to make a proposal to the CCAC. The CCAC determines whether or not we receive appropriate funding. As a result, we do not have any guarantee of whether we will receive the same amount of funding as before." This makes it difficult to plan for programs that seniors in the community need.

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Community Development Worker  
Housing Company  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Community Centres**

Two community centres, Woodgreen and Eastview, provide services to the residents of the building. For example, programs for the Chinese residents include lunches and information sessions, as well as singing. There are also celebrations for Chinese New Year and the Dragon Festival. Additionally, English as a Second Language classes are offered; primarily the Chinese community participates. Tenants bring mail that they have received and the teacher helps them translate. The classes also become a time for socializing for Chinese residents.

**2. Community Kitchen**

The community development worker spoke very positively of the community kitchen that is held in the building twice a week. "That's been our biggest positive in the building." The kitchen is run by one tenant who sets the menu, shops for the food and cooks it in the building's kitchen. Only a minimal fee is charged.

**3. Cultural Diversity**

Another positive feature is the building's cultural diversity and its proximity to these ethnic communities. Many of the people in the building are either Chinese or Greek. The building is close to these ethnic communities, where people can access shops and services.

**4. Public Transportation**

The building is located on the Bloor-Danforth subway line and on the Greenwood bus route. This provides the seniors with accessibility to shopping and medical appointments.

**5. Safety**

The worker described the neighbourhood as relatively safe, with not much criminal activity, except for the occasional break-in.

**B. Problems and Issues**

The community development worker was not aware of any major problems in the community that cause a problem for the building or anxiety for the residents. The following problems relate to the building itself.

**1. Alcoholism**

Alcoholism was identified as a serious problem in the building. In addition to individual problems, people's drinking can also cause disturbances in the building. For example, sometimes

people get a little out of hand or get loud, although it is very rare that people vandalize the building.

## **2. Long Term Care Issues**

The community development worker remarked that due to government cutbacks that have forced nursing homes to close, some older seniors are staying in the building longer, yet they are less able to care for themselves. For example, sometimes these seniors become forgetful. They have at times forgotten to turn off their stoves and there have been some small pot fires. This causes concern about from other tenants. The worker wants to develop a door sign using international symbols, as a reminder to tenants that their stove is on.

## **3. Need for Leadership**

It was felt that there are very few people in the building who are willing to take on a leadership role, to organize and coordinate programs and activities in building. This is seen as necessary as the community development worker's role is to help initiate a program, and provide people with support to run it themselves. He would therefore like to offer some leadership training to help alleviate this problem.

## **4. New Building Residents**

A changing population of residents is causing some tension in the building. Recently, tenants have been chosen based on a 'points system', with points awarded based on low income and need for housing. For example, if someone was living in a hostel, a shelter or on the street they would be seen as having the greatest need. These tenants are seen as different from some of the older tenants, some of whom have complained that the building was turning into a men's hostel. The new tenants tend to have problems with alcohol, to be very isolated, and to have weak social skills. They are also less likely to participate in building activities.

## **5. Participation in Building Activities**

Participation in building activities is generally low, something which the community development worker aims to improve. "One of the problems that we have in there, is trying to get tenants to come out. Because they see maybe a handful of people participating, they think, 'oh it can't be that much fun because there's only a few people participating' . . . I'm trying to overcome the participation problem and get everyone involved in something." The worker commented that residents tend to be disappointed if only a few people turn out for an event. He advises them to focus on the benefit for those who attended. "A success is if you had eight to ten people and they all got a lot out of it."

## **6. Prostitutes**

The issue of prostitution causes problems in the building for two reasons. Firstly, some residents are uncomfortable with having prostitutes in the building. However, because the prostitute is a guest of a tenant, other people cannot deny them entry. Secondly, there is a stigma associated with having prostitutes visit the building: "The image it creates around the building is not a positive one."

## **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

### **1. Roles**

The building is a rent-geared-to-income building where tenants pay approximately 30% of their income towards their rent. The building provides independent living for people aged 55 and over. The community development worker works in this building, as well as in several others in East Toronto, which does not allow him much time in each individual building. He reflected that “I guess you could make a career in one building.”

The community development worker’s mandate is to maintain a healthy community within each building, with a focus on keeping people active. He described his job as “helping to develop community within the building.” He does this by working with tenants to develop and organize programs and social activities. He refers tenants to services such as Meals on Wheels and Home Care. He also provides assistance with maintenance problems, and works closely with the social worker. “Each individual tenant has their own individual problem that they’re dealing with, whether it’s a problem with the neighbour, or problem with certain maintenance issues around the building.”

### **2. Initiatives**

#### **Long Term Care Issues**

The community development worker and the social worker are currently examining long term care issues with Woodgreen Community Centre. There is a focus on supportive housing and creating the support networks needed for people to stay in their apartments, such as Home Care, Meals on Wheels and medical attention, when necessary.

#### **Resident Involvement Plan**

The housing company has developed a resident involvement plan in all the buildings. This partnership with residents gives them a voice in the day-to-day business of the housing company, within certain parameters. Tenants in each building were asked to elect two people to bring ongoing, unresolved issues to the housing company. In this building, an English speaking and a Chinese speaking representative were chosen, to reflect the dominant populations in the building. However, the English-speaking representative did not become very involved and eventually resigned. Due to a language barrier, the Chinese-speaking representative is only able to serve the Chinese-speaking residents. It was felt that some kind of forum is necessary to ensure all residents’ views are heard.

#### **Tenant Association**

A tenant association was established to deal with issues that tenants want addressed. However, it is not a very strong group due to personality conflicts and poor group dynamics.

## **Workshops and Programs**

The community development worker sometimes organizes workshops for the residents, on topics such as safety, fire safety and herbal medicine. Crafts activities, such as knitting and sewing, are also offered, which in the past have appealed primarily to women. The worker wants to also provide crafts options that may be more interesting to some of the male residents, such as woodworking. Residents also initiate some of their own programs, including Bingo, dinners and a mini pool tournament.

A consulting firm who was hired to conduct a study found that tenants who were active in their communities and their building, and who had a lot of interactions with family and friends, remained healthier longer. Therefore, the community development worker feels strongly that building activities are important. Participation is also seen as an important way to help people gain a sense of ownership in their building.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Feelings of Accomplishment**

Helping people is something that supports the community development worker in his work. “The fact that I've accomplished something, that I've got tenants involved, got their issues addressed, got them the help they needed. That also helps, the successes you've had. Even the smaller ones as well, I think also help.”

#### **Partnerships with Other Community Agencies**

The support the community development worker has received from other people and agencies in the community has facilitated his work in the building. “The fact that there's other people willing to help, to resolve some of the issues that are going on within the building is comforting.”

#### **Staff at the Housing Company**

He also finds the support from the other staff within the housing company to be good. “Generally speaking the buildings are fairly well maintained and looked after.”

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Diverse Building Population**

The population of the building is quite diverse, in terms of culture, socio-economic background, and previous living situation. The community development worker reported that there are some conflicts among the different individuals and groups in the building. For example, older tenants find some of the behaviours of those who have come from hostels or living on the street unacceptable, such as bringing a beer to the community dinners. However, it may be the only way that this tenant can participate. The community development worker explained : “Just

the way that they cope with their daily life is maybe different than others may be used to seeing.” He also felt that this diversity makes programming more difficult.

### **Language**

Language creates another barrier. The different ethnic communities within the building have problems communicating with each other and with the housing company staff. Language barriers also contribute to members of different ethnic communities preferring to do activities within their cultural group.



**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Teacher, Adult New Canadian Centre**  
**June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Access to Natural Amenities**

The school is relatively close to green space. The teacher takes students walking in the Don River Valley, the Rosedale Ravine, and from Edwards Gardens, through Wilkert Creek, down to E.T. Seton Park to the Victoria Park Subway Station. She feels that access to nature is important for her students so that they experience more than just a concrete environment.

**2. Community Centres**

The teacher introduces students to the community centres in the area. Because the students have very limited financial resources, she feels that it is extremely important that they find a place where they can exercise or swim for very little or no money.

**3. Libraries**

Access to libraries was identified as a positive feature. The school is close to the Jones Avenue Public Library and the Pape Public Library. Additionally, the Metropolitan Reference Library was described as “an incredible system.” The fifth floor of the Metro Library is the language floor which has many services for ESL, including newspapers in many different languages. The teacher commented that teaching the students to use the library system is “one of the biggest gifts I can give them.”

**B. Problems and Issues**

**1. Adjusting to Life in Canada**

The teacher discussed how ESL students face a monumental task in adjusting to life in Canada. She described the transition as “culture shock in its deepest meaning: religion, interaction, everything is so different.” A student described it as follows: “when she stepped on Canadian soil she'd been rendered deaf, dumb and blind and slowly, step by step, she regained her senses.” The teacher felt that teaching English is a way of restoring a sense of self-esteem “to people who have had it stripped away by all the terrible events in their lives.”

**2. Garbage and Pollution**

Garbage and pollution were identified as a problem in the community. This was seen as especially unfortunate as it gives the message to new Canadians that this is “a place where people have no sense of the wonder of their environment and wouldn't respect it.”

### **3. Unemployment and Poverty**

The students talk to the teacher about how difficult it is to find a job. They feel they are in a vicious cycle as they are told they need Canadian work experience, but no one will hire them to get that first experience. The teacher felt that seeing homeless people, beggars, and boarded up stores and restaurants in the area can be very disheartening for newcomers to Canada because “most of them came to this country hoping to find greater financial opportunities and better jobs.”

## **C. School Roles and Initiatives**

### **1. Roles**

The school has been teaching English as Second Language to new Canadian adults for almost thirty years. Students come from all over the world and from very diverse educational backgrounds. The school is on the subway line and students travel up to an hour and a half to reach the school. The teacher teaches English to between 25 and 30 students and she has those students three out of four periods in a day. For the fourth period students learn history, geography, literature or computers.

The two main mandates of the school are seen as teaching and helping students heal. The school also plays a role in employment issues, offers guidance services, a library, and a students council, as well as providing a social network.

#### **Mandate 1: Teaching**

The primary mandate of the school is to give students skills in all areas of the English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The teacher felt that teaching in these areas is done well.

#### **Mandate 2: Help Students Heal**

The teacher felt that the school’s second mandate is to help students regain their psychological, emotional, mental and physical health, especially those who have experienced extreme trauma. She believes the school provides a place where students can start taking risks, linguistically, and in other ways. Because the teachers have only one class most of the day, they become very personally involved with their students. “I think that’s probably the way we help them the most.”

The classroom provides an environment where people can express themselves and find their voice. This helps to restore their belief that they are “significant human beings who have something to contribute to society.” The teacher elaborated: “I think we do a really good job of doing what we can to help people who have been traumatized be reintegrated into society. In a school like this, little by little, they begin to feel okay. They begin to figure out what the Canadian way of life is. And they begin to feel like they are going to be okay. So we provide them with the first step in reintegrating into society. We begin to give them tools that allow them to take the first steps toward getting a job, communicating with people, getting around the city.”

## 2. Initiatives

### **Employment**

The teacher encourages students who are having difficulty breaking into the job market to take a volunteer position. She gives them information about how to do that and if she cannot find something she gets assistance from the guidance centre.

### **Guidance Counselling**

The school has a guidance counsellor who the teacher described as a compassionate person with the “practical resources at his fingertips. . . a middleman between the students and the resources beyond this building.” The following example demonstrates the type of support the guidance counsellor can offer: “A woman might come to me because she was beaten up by her husband the day before and shows me bruises. And we go together to talk to the guidance counsellor who puts her in touch with people who will help her, somebody who speaks her language.”

### **Library**

The school is equipped with a library and the teacher spoke very highly of the librarians and the resources the library has.

### **Social Network**

The teacher noted that the class provides students with an opportunity to connect with others. “This space provides them with a chance to start living life normally again. In a room like this, people have made incredibly important friendships because they come to a foreign land which for many of them it is like going to the moon.” At the end of the semester, students often say “that they felt that they have been part of a family and sometimes tears are shed because they have to say good-bye.”

### **Students' Council**

In its first year this year, the students council became very politically active because of the “talk of cutbacks to funding for adult education. So it impacts very directly on a place like this.” For example, the students participated in a rally where they were part of a huge chain formed by adult students around Queen's Park. The teacher remarked that “the school gives them a voice . . . we just truly empowered our students to invite people like Marilyn Churley to come here and speak to them” and to “participate in all sorts of political action.”

## **C. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Family Support**

The teacher's family, especially her husband, are a support, in particular when she has become very involved with a student who is having a difficult time. "Family support is extremely important."

#### **Love for Teaching**

One of the things which helps the teacher in her job is her sincere love of teaching. She finds she has never lost her enthusiasm for what she does. Her "sense of what an incredibly important job this is" keeps her going. She also spoke highly of teaching in this particular school, saying: "I've been really blessed to have had the opportunity to work in a place like this."

#### **Staff at the School**

Other staff at the school were seen as very supportive and dedicated. "We all work together as a family. I've felt it more at this school than at any other school." The principal was specifically mentioned as being "really wonderful" and "really fair." He was seen as someone both staff and students could turn to and speak to very openly.

#### **The Students**

Also supporting the teacher in her work is the fact that her students, for the most part, are very appreciative and "so hungry for what it is we can do to help them get on with their lives." She is also motivated by "the give and take within a classroom" and the feeling that each day she learns as much as she teaches.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Attendance**

One of the primary concerns of the teachers is attendance. Students may stop attending class as soon as they can find work, and may return if they lose their job. "Some of them come and as soon as they have some basic skills, they rush out and try to get a job." Although the teacher understands that students are doing their best to fit all the parts of their life together, she finds it frustrating. Because students attend irregularly it is difficult to have lessons which build on what was learned previously.

All the teachers try to determine what they can "do to enable people to stay just a little longer, because we know that if they can give a year or two years, then the rest of their time in Canada will unfold more smoothly and they'll have a chance to get a decent job, they'll have a chance to get back into university."

**Funding**

Funding creates two stressors for the teacher and her colleagues. First is the actual threat of cutbacks, and second is the “state of uncertainty.” No one is sure how the impending megacity, with an amalgamated school board, will affect the school.

**Students' Initial Apprehension**

At the beginning of the semester, there is an initial barrier related to students “suspicion, uncertainty and fear.” However, the teacher is able to quickly break down that barrier.

**Community Quality of Life Interview  
Community Health Worker  
Community Health Centre (CHC)  
June, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Access to Services**

Within the community, there are a number of services with Chinese workers, therefore access to services is good both geographically and culturally. Examples of such services are Woodgreen Community Centre and the community health centre.

**2. Availability of Chinese Goods**

Because Chinatown is within the community, goods such as ethnic foods and other daily necessities commonly found in China are readily available. This adds to the general feeling of Chinese people feeling “at home” in South Riverdale.

**3. Availability of Senior’s Accommodation**

Another positive factor is that senior’s accommodation geared to Chinese people is available in the community. Elderly Chinese persons prefer the seniors housing in this community because they have their own social communities and social support as a result of shared language and culture.

**4. Low Cost Housing**

Although quality is an issue, it was felt that the availability of low cost housing is a positive factor in South Riverdale. This is partly because rooming houses (houses which are split so that a different family lives on each level) are so readily available. Because of limited financial resources and high unemployment among community members, the availability of comparatively low rent accommodation is appreciated.

**5. Low Costs of Goods**

It was felt that the costs of goods, particularly groceries, are lower in this community than in other communities in Toronto. This is particularly important since many community members have low incomes.

**6. Social Support within the Chinese Community**

It was felt that one of the biggest positive factors for Chinese people in South Riverdale is that there is a large Chinese population living there. Particularly for those who are new to Canada or who primarily speak their own languages, the community affords a similar environment to China, and the opportunity to build a network of neighbours with common interests. They can develop a sense of belonging. Because of this, many Chinese immigrants from Mainland China choose the South Riverdale community as an entry point.

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Crime and Safety**

Safety, in terms of moving about the neighbourhood freely, is an issue in this community. Chinese women feel that it is not safe for them to be out of their homes, particularly at night, and often modify their behaviour accordingly. They are particularly fearful for their teenage children, who want to go out at night. There is some concern in the Chinese community about children from “not good families” and their possible influence on other children. Specific concerns include possible exposure to drugs.

Another concern in this community is the prevalence of crime, such as break and entry crimes. There is a pervasive feeling that perhaps the law and order of the community is wanting; and that there is too much petty crime.

### **2. Crowded Neighbourhoods**

There is a perception among people in this community that neighbourhoods are crowded and that this detracts from quality of life. Houses are very close together. There is very limited yard space for children to play in. The front yards, in particular, are often small and beside busy streets.

### **3. Economic Decline and Unemployment**

The economic decline of the community, in terms of the numbers of businesses that are closing, is evident. The popularity of Chinatown as a place to go to a restaurant, for example, is waning. Accompanying the decline in businesses is less opportunity for employment within the community; people are frustrated at not being able to make a living in their own community.

### **4. Housing Conditions**

While the availability of cheap, rooming-house type accommodation is an advantage in this community, the condition of such accommodation is a problem. In general, houses are old and in some neighbourhoods are very run down. Near Chinatown, some of the accommodation is infested with rats. An additional housing problem is that in some of the houses which are split between multiple families, those families must all share the same bathroom and kitchen.

### **5. Incineration: Concern for Environment and Health**

A major environmental concern for the Chinese community in South Riverdale is the big incinerator at the sewage plant. They note that the smell is bad near it, especially in the summer. There is some indication that for them it is a health concern.

### **6. Incineration: Cultural Issue**

An additional problem with the large incinerator is primarily cultural in origin: many Chinese people consider it bad luck to live near or to see a large chimney. Chimneys are a sign of bad luck because of their association with the jos sticks which are burned for ancestors.

## **7. Lack of Green Space**

In this community, many Chinese people feel that there is a lack of green space and parks, especially for children. There is a general feeling that the community lacks open space.

### **C. Agency Roles and Initiatives**

#### **1. Roles**

##### **Community Health Centre Mandate: Primary Health Care**

The community health centre (CHC) provides primary health care for their patients. A team approach is offered to patients using this service, which includes doctors, nurses, a Chinese social worker, and a psychiatrist.

An important part of primary health care in this CHC is to make services accessible to the Chinese-speaking community. This is done by hiring of Chinese staff, most notably a Chinese physician. Additional cultural interpretation for other staff is provided by the Chinese community health worker. This is seen as an important aspect of services since patients are expected to ask questions and be active in their care.

##### **Community Health Centre Mandate: Health Promotion**

The CHC also has as its mandate to address the broad determinants of health, which it does through the activities of its health promotion team. This team works in the area of health education, environmental issues, seniors issues, women's issues, and safety. "Basically it's to let people know what's affecting their health, and try to help empower them to . . . take things into their hands and really to control their living conditions [and social issues] as well as their physical health." Specific activities which relate to the Chinese community under this mandate include Health Education sessions and a Chinese women's group.

#### **2. Initiatives**

##### **Cultural Interpretation**

Health education sessions and the women's group are conducted in Cantonese. However, primary care at the CHC may involve Chinese clients with no English skills interacting with non-Chinese health workers. The community health worker functions as an interpreter, not just of language but of the culture. "For every ethnic community I think health has a different meaning . . . Sometimes if you don't know the cultural background and you don't know the beliefs and the practices there can be a lot of misunderstandings. Part of my job is not only direct interpretation but to explain to both parties where they are coming from and what's the genuine meaning behind the words." The Centre also provides more direct cultural interpretation for some (primary care) services through its employment of a Chinese physician and social worker.



## **Environmental Issues**

Other health promotion initiatives of the CHC have included work on environmental issues, which is a major concern for the South Riverdale community as a whole. The community health worker mentioned that these projects provide good information for the Chinese community.

## **Health Education Sessions**

Health education sessions for the Chinese community are conducted monthly. Some are focused on specific health problems like diabetes and heart health, while others are more general, such as insomnia and stress management. The purpose of the sessions is to involve the community and raise awareness about the issues that affect health, as well as to provide knowledge to people that they have the power to manage their own health better. Topics for the sessions are solicited in each session. In addition, a needs survey was carried out a year ago to identify topics of interest. Sessions are popular and community members frequently call to enquire about upcoming sessions.

## **Networking with Other Agencies**

Networking with other agencies takes place on at least three levels. First, cooperative planning occurs and collaborative projects are undertaken. For example, at Chinese New Year a health fair is organized with all community centres participating. Second, outreach occurs as a result of agencies using each other's expertise. And third, cross-referrals are facilitated because each agency understands the work of other agencies.

## **Outreach**

The community health worker does outreach to the Chinese community to inform them of available services. The health centre also uses networking to extend its outreach ability. Because of their good relationship with Woodgreen Community Centre and other local organizations, they are often called to provide information for other groups. For example, they have been giving health information sessions to senior's groups in one organization.

## **Women's Group**

The women's group consists of 10 to 15 women with children aged 0 to 6 who meet weekly. It is an open membership group and includes a physical activity component. The group is conducted in Cantonese but Mandarin speakers are welcome. The group decides on topics to be covered. Thus far, topics covered have included self-development, voluntarism, and parenting. The community health worker described involvement in this group "as an empowerment process for them not only to manage the family better, but also to help them to reach out, to integrate into society, and also to help them to know their neighbourhood, where to access their services." For example, when the women learned through visits what various community agencies had to offer, they developed a social service list, which they then distributed widely. Similarly, they organized a women's health day and then ensured that the information was shared with other community members. So while the group determines its own focus and activities, the impact of its efforts extend beyond its own membership. "First they try to handle their own needs and then they reach

out to serve the community. It's like a process to help them not only to help themselves but to help others.”

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Chinese Staff**

The advent of the Chinese doctor certainly assisted efforts at meeting the needs of the community. As well, the creation of the community health worker's position about three years ago certainly supported the efforts of the CHC in its provision of primary care to Chinese clients, as well as the other programs in which she is involved.

#### **Cooperative Agency Relationships**

Networking as described above plays a key role in supporting service provision. “In other places sometimes the cutting of funding would lead to a lot of competition among agencies but I feel in this area that there is a better unity, cooperation among the agencies rather than competition.”

#### **Volunteers**

The health centre now has a number of women committee members who are particularly interested in volunteering and supporting other women. They have been a great support for the organization of the health education sessions.

### **2. Barriers**

#### **Isolation**

Isolation is a barrier which prevents many members of the Chinese community from knowing about needed services, and/ or from participating in the available programs. The CHC is aware that there are many people who remain isolated: men and other age groups, who are not targets of current outreach initiatives; people isolated by language; people confined to home because of social situations or housework.

People who speak only Mandarin Chinese may be even more isolated than their Cantonese counterparts. This is because many Chinese people who are trained in health professions are Cantonese speakers. For example, it is difficult to find speakers for health education events who are Mandarin-speaking. The culture of the Mandarin speakers is often different, and Cantonese speakers may not make good cultural interpreters for the Mandarin community.

#### **Limited Language-Appropriate Services**

Even though the CHC employs Chinese staff, there still do not seem to be enough available given the population which the Centre serves. This creates a barrier for both primary care and health promotion activities.

**Resources: Number of Staff**

The loss of one staff member can create the feeling that there is too much to do with the available staff. The community health worker used the example of the recent cut of a staff member whose primary responsibility was women's issues. The staff valued the contributions of this person in the area of safety and family violence, and now feel that it is difficult to fill the gap left by her.

**Transience of Population**

Given that South Riverdale is an entry point to Canada for many Chinese persons, there is a feeling that clientele is transient. They come to the CHC when needs are greatest, and often without health cards. Then, when they are more "settled", they move on. This is good for the people, but can make a barrier for service providers who are taxed by constantly providing services to the members of the community when they are most needy.

# **Findings from Elected Representatives**

**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Peter Tabuns**  
**Toronto City Councillor, Ward 8**  
**February, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Healthy Urban Environment**

Mr. Tabuns stated that the quality of life of Riverdale residents is enhanced by being located within the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto is seen as "still a pretty healthy urban area" such that residents can draw upon a "broad range of cultural opportunities, social services, and employment possibilities."

**2. Cultural Diversity**

Riverdale is seen as a very diverse community in terms of racial and ethnic composition. For the most part this has been a very positive development, making the community "a much more interesting place than it would have been 20 or 30 years ago." "The different European and Asian groups make it a fascinating place to be."

**3. Politically Active Community**

"It's also a neighbourhood and community that is extraordinarily politically active, that regularly has acted as a hot-house for developing connections between individuals within the communities and developing connections between different neighbourhoods." What this translates into is a very active and vibrant community where "People are willing to take stands. They're willing to work to see that their interests are listened to at the political level."

When asked as to the source of this activism, Mr. Tabuns felt that the political culture developed in Riverdale in the early 60's in relation to housing availability, housing costs and other issues. There were also a number of environmental concerns such as air quality. "I think that there has been a large number of issues that people had to fight over and as they fought these issues through they developed their skills and their analysis. It evolved its own leadership over time."

**4. Access to Natural Amenities**

"It has some really good natural amenities. It has the Don Valley. It has good parks. It has access to the lake through Cherry Beach, and the Leslie Spit gives access to people to an urban wilderness which is quite noteworthy in North America."

**5. Social Services**

Within Riverdale "There are a broad range of social services." These include a number of health services, including psychiatric services. Day care is available. Within the schools, there are extensive services for children with learning disabilities. Nonetheless these services "are not adequate to meet the needs of the population in South Riverdale." This is the case because

Riverdale has a "large population of people with low incomes, and the services we have don't make up for the lack of income." It was stated that employment services could be strengthened.

## **6. Recreational Services**

While there are a range of "very good recreational services" it was felt that they are becoming inadequate to the tasks at hand. "We did a needs study for recreation services around Queen/ Broadview. Staff felt that resources were stressed to the limit."

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Poverty and Unemployment**

It was stated that there are clear issues and problems related to high levels of poverty and unemployment in the community. Much of this has been worsened by recent provincial cuts to services in the community: "The most significant thing the provincial government has been doing has been cutting social services. It's been a disaster for us. Not only has it increased misery amongst a large population of people with low incomes, it has also had an impact on commercial establishments in the ward. Gerrard Square noted a significant decrease in retailing the month of the cuts."

### **Monitoring the Effects of Cuts to Social Assistance**

As Chair of the Board of Health, Councillor Tabuns was involved in a number of studies that assessed the effects of cuts in levels of social assistance: "On the Danforth, we found people could not afford a decent meal." This was seen as having a number of both short-term and long-term consequences. In the short term it "increases chances of people becoming sick" by increasing their susceptibility to infection. "You don't want this in a large number of people in a crowded urban setting." In the long-term, these cuts were seen as "reducing peoples' chances of being employable."

### **Government Responses**

At the municipal level, it was felt that there were few "economic levers" that could be used to affect levels of poverty and unemployment. "We can do our best, in terms of local economic development, and help maintain business in the port and downtown."

Some success stories in dealing with these issues involved: "accessing provincial money for non-profit housing in the ward." The community was able to develop 500 to 600 units for housing. This was seen as one of the most successful efforts since "many people were living in atrocious conditions."

Some specific actions had been taken by the City to deal with provincial social policies. "We have taken action at Council on the impact of social service cuts. We allocated \$4,000,000 to a Survival Fund to communities to provide for food programs, underwrite housing projects." Some monies were set aside for "levers for private investment, supporting youth employment, housing, and food."

## **2. Air Quality**

The community was seen as having a chronic problem related to air quality. In South Riverdale this was related to "the polluting industries in the port area" and for Riverdale in general the presence of "expressways on the Southern and Western borders, the Gardiner, and Don Valley Parkways."

### **Government Responses**

The City has a number of means by which air quality issues can and have been responded to. Some of these involve economic initiatives: "We launched a better business partnership to reduce CO2 emissions. First Canadian Place signed up with the program and cut 70 cents per square foot operating costs, a \$5,000,000 project." These initiatives were seen as promoting better air quality while maintaining economic viability.

In relation to air pollution in the port the city has pressed the Ontario Ministry of the Environment to prosecute polluters. There has also been efforts to work with "Ontario Hydro and local district heating corporations to reduce the number of boilers."

"In some instances the City has used its power as landlord to evict polluting tenants, [and use] zoning and bylaw powers to block establishment of new polluting industries like incinerators in the port area." One of the notable successes in South Riverdale was "getting Darling Rendering shut down."

## **3. Traffic Volume and Parking**

One persistent problem in the community has been: "traffic volume and parking difficulties." Riverdale was seen as sitting between the downtown and suburban communities. Additionally, residents are having to commute to suburban localities. All of this leads to a "pretty consistent flow of traffic." In terms of life in Riverdale: "The streets were not built for this number of cars." This is seen as a "chronic source of frustration" for residents in this community.

### **Government Responses**

Traffic volume and parking were seen as complex issues that were not easily resolvable: "There are limited things that can be done to ameliorate the situation. There is no solution that is car related. There are transportation solutions, there are density solutions."

There were however very local responses to assist residents. "We do a lot of work with neighbourhoods almost on a street by street process to find solutions to high speed traffic and give people a place to store their cars. Some potential solutions outlined were: "modified double sized parking and barriers to slow traffic." These solutions were seen as practical because they were inexpensive and received very positively by local residents, especially those with young families.

## **4. Conflict Between Retailers and Residents**

Related to issues of traffic flow and parking, but also involving other issues was a conflict between retailers and residents. This conflict was focused in two areas, the Chinese shopping area on Broadview and the Greek area on the Danforth. "These two shopping districts are successful

as regional districts" involving many people coming to these areas from the outside. This leads to "chronic conflict between retailers and residents to preserve the nature of the environment."

Lack of available parking in the Broadview area was sometimes seen as involving discrimination against Chinese business people. Others felt that providing parking was seen as catering to the Chinese. Sadly, this issue is sometimes seen as an "Asian versus white Canadian conflict." The absurdity of this is seen in that there is the "same conflict up on Danforth, but because individuals' colours are not different, its not portrayed in the same way."

### **Government Responses**

Like the traffic flow and parking issues, there are no easy solutions: "Unless you have higher density or better transit, you can't fit it all in." There has been some success by having "merchants in Greektown bringing in tour buses in partnership with the TTC." Merchants have been "thinking about means of bringing in customers" to these areas using alternatives to personal cars. Some solutions have not been successful such as valet parking which was too expensive.

### **5. Social Policy and Quality of Life**

It was felt that many actions at the federal level are threatening the quality of life of Canadians in general, and residents of Riverdale in particular. "At the Federal level they're cutting at the foundations. That predispose provinces to make the cuts they are doing." In issues of funding for direct health care, "The Feds have been very weak in Medicare. They have not been willing to fund what their rhetoric says." The effects of provincial cuts were outlined earlier.

### **Government Responses**

"The Board of Health has done critiques of impacts of service cuts. Most recently, Council has mobilized against megacity package and the downloading of services. We have been trying to stop radical deterioration in the quality of life."

### **6. Transportation Within Riverdale**

While the "Queen streetcar is pretty reliable," Riverdale is seen as "very weak in the North South bus links. Jones, Pape are terrible. East-West is not bad, North-South is poor."

### **7. Rent Control**

The provincial government is planning to end rent control in the province. The City had been active in mobilizing people against its end. The campaign began in 1996.

### **8. Other Health Issues**

The City had enacted a strong anti-smoking by-law but there was uncertainty whether it would be successfully implemented. The City had not voted to stop purchasing polyvinyl chloride pipe. "In the manufacture and disposal of PVCs it releases dioxin and other toxins, a direct community concern."



## **C. Supports and Barriers to Effective Action Within the Community**

### **1. Supports**

Mr. Tabuns reported many factors within Riverdale and South Riverdale that support his efforts. One of the most outstanding aspects was the "political culture that developed in Riverdale in the early 60's." The extensive political activity "served as a school for hundreds and thousands through all the different organizations and institutions."

"The highly organized nature of Riverdale in Ward 8 has made a real difference in being able to do anything at all." These organizations include a number of progressive social groups such as "Ontario Campaign Against Tobacco, Greenpeace, and other environmental community groups." Around issues of rent control as well as social service cuts, unions and parents groups have been very helpful. "Community organizations, like citizens for a Safe Environment, the South Riverdale Community Health Centre, and Woodgreen Community Centre have also been very supportive."

### **2. Barriers Within the Community**

Within the Riverdale Community the local Liberal Party is seen as consistently been opposed to social housing: "They're a very conservative force within Riverdale. Mr. Tabuns felt that some of his City Council colleagues: "have a very narrow view of what society is and how you deal with its needs." Provincial policies have also not been very helpful when dealing with quality of life issues. Finally, the media is seen as not having been helpful: "The media tends to be quite conservative. The *Star*, *Sun*, and *Globe and Mail* positions on social housing for example."

**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Jack Layton**  
**Metro Toronto City Councillor, Don River**  
**February, 1997**

**Community of Communities**

In response to the question “What makes life good for people who live in this community, Mr. Layton stated: “There is not one community in Riverdale and South Riverdale, but a number of communities.” “Richard Sennett says in his book ‘Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities’ that in cities you have multi-levelled communities functioning in the same physical space.” Some of these communities in Riverdale are seen as having minimal contact with each other. “There are 10,000 people in Riverdale who never read an English-language newspaper. Their source of information comes from the Cantonese press.” Quality of life was seen as being good for these different communities in different ways.

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Vietnamese and Cantonese Community**

For the Vietnamese and Cantonese community, who represent 25% of the population, life is seen as generally good. In many cases there are three-generation households that are found in “reasonable housing.” There is “access to important services, and access to food outlets.” For seniors this is especially important as they can get food that is usually not available anywhere else. There are neighbours around to whom they can speak their own language and this is important as they may not know other people.

“For many of them, they've been able to realize their dreams in South Riverdale. Their kids are on the way to university.” The nature of these successes is highlighted by the observation by Mr. Layton that “There are many boat people in South Riverdale and asking them why their life is good is almost an absurd question.”

The key issues that are seen here are good housing, access to services to food outlets, and people who speak their own language. For many people, they have been able to send their children to universities and build a new life in Canada.

**2. Gay and Lesbian Community**

Another community that exists in Riverdale is the gay and lesbian community. “Why is life good for them? They have been able to buy a house. In a neighbourhood as a couple. That’s cool, to be accepted.” This allows them to be like “other couples in the neighbourhood.” Certain changes have occurred in Riverdale that now makes this possible: “Twenty years ago that would not have happened, not publicly, and not in this neighbourhood.”

Some of these changes that make acceptance more common are ones that were not entirely positive. The closing of the Colgate and Lever Brothers plants led to many people who may not have been accepting of gays and lesbians, either moving out of the neighbourhood or now being more concerned about other pressing issues such as unemployment.

“Life is good for our gay and lesbian friends because they are able to live the kind of life that we are able to live as not-gay or lesbian couples; its normalcy.”

### **3. Traditional Working Class Community**

“Is life good for the traditional working class in South Riverdale? Probably not at all.” Much of this has to do with their having to “undergo all the pressures under the era of globalization.” “The working class blue collar crowd that is the traditional South Riverdale family unit has experienced family breakup, and other major problems. Impoverishment, is the term I would use.”

“If you asked them 20 years ago, it would have been good. Colgate is expanding and Lever Brothers is doing well.” “Now there aren’t many left. They are either seniors who have retired or they are impoverished. There are very few new working class opportunities being created in the port.”

“What makes life good for them? My answer would be not much. They cling to each other, churches, social groups. When you are drowning you grab onto the person near you. And sometimes they are grabbing onto someone else. The only bright lights are the services that are making food banks and community kitchens available.”

### **4. Gentrifiers**

Another identifiable community has been the gentrifiers who have been “buying low and fixing up” houses. Some of these individuals include the gay community. Concerning housing prices “South Riverdale has been cheap and has become the neighbourhood of choice.” “Is life good for them? Mixed, they love their house, but it seems to them that there are more pollution threats. But, actually pollution threats are less.”

## **B. Problems and Issues**

Mr. Layton identified three key problems in the South Riverdale community: “Bad air, bad water, and polarization in the society between those who have and those who do not.”

### **1. Bad Air**

There are numerous sources of bad air in the community. Some of this involves the Metropolitan Toronto Sewage Treatment Plant that continues to incinerate waste. Other sources are polluting industries and local highways. In earlier battles, garbage-burning incineration plants were shut down.

Concerning the Metro Plant still burning solid human waste, Mr. Layton stated: “Just imagine the amount of sludge from 1.1 million people? On a daily basis, this is a fairly significant amount of sludge. It could probably fill up half of Metro Hall.” “By and large it is incredibly gorgeous material. What is human waste except organic waste that comes from organic waste? Our solution has been to burn it. It is the most absurd thing we could do with it. It is shocking that this is allowed to happen.”

The nearby highways and some of the new industries in the area were identified as air pollution threats. “The Gardiner Expressway is an air pollution issue and the new recycling industries have significant air pollution issues. For example, the QUNO recycling plant for paper and cardboard has significant emissions.” “There is the beneficial use of sewage experiments at the H.R.T. plant that is creating odour problems; but these are being addressed.”

## **Government and Community Responses**

Mr. Layton reported that significant improvements had been implemented by Metro to deal with the sewage sludge issue: “The amount of sewage sludge has been reduced. We have reduced the incineration of sewage sludge by one half.” Interestingly, he felt that much of what has been accomplished had resulted from community action and pressure.

“There was incredible pressure from the Safe Sewage Committee. Who ever thought that volunteers would start something like the Safe Sewage Committee? But three women who had no technical knowledge, but were concerned about their kids’ asthma went on a mission to find out everything they could about sewage. It was a classic David and Goliath situation. They’ve got our works department to replace everybody’s toilet with a low flow toilet and it got them to take the sewage out to farmland.”

Earlier, the community had mobilized to shut down the Commissioners Street Incineration Plant. “The garbage incineration was shut down by the community’s forceful efforts in the 80’s . And I had worked with the community back then as Chair of the Board of Health. We shut down the Commissioners Street incinerator. And I was also on Metro Council at the time. And we won it by one vote.”

The citizens’ movements have “revolutionized the Metro Works Department, revolutionized the way we deal with sewage in Metro. It has led to the beneficial use of solid waste. It is astonishing. Metro has been dragged screaming and kicking into some new initiatives such as sewage sludge and recycling of trash.”

In relation to one significant source of air pollution, the Gardiner Expressway, Mr. Layton, in his role as Chair of the Transportation and Planning Committee commented: “We’re taking down the East End of the Gardiner. Its going to take a barrier boundary away from between the community and the lake.”

## **2. Bad Water**

“Riverdale is named after a river but most people thought of it as an open sewer” is how Mr. Layton described the Don River which snakes its way along the west end of Riverdale. The natural processes that contribute to its flow “have all been completely disrupted.” “A minuscule portion of it comes from natural river flow. Fifty percent of its flow comes from the Metro North Sewage Treatment Plant. Much of it is storm water that overflows the sewers.” In addition to the disruption of the natural processes the “Ground water has been significantly reduced.”

Another issue related to bad water is the pollution of the local lake Ontario beach. “One of the great tragedies of South Riverdale is that Cherry Beach is no longer swimmable. The Marina that was built there affected the flows and created backwater effects. You often cannot swim in Cherry Beach because of the pollution of the lake. For a lakefront community it is sad.” Metro has been “collaborating with the Don Valley Task Force” to help clean up the Don River.

### **3. Increasing Economic Polarization**

“You've got a portion of the population that is on the move upwards and a portion of those on the way down. As well there are those remaining in place, mostly seniors aging in place.” The portion of the population moving downwards is the traditional working class. Much of this resulted from globalization as outlined above.

“The first thing that is clear is the products that used to be manufactured here are made elsewhere or are not being made at all. When tens of thousands of jobs disappear, that has a large impact on any community. This global transformation of product production has had the biggest impact.”

In addition to these globalization issues there are also the effects on the community by the cutting of funding for services. There has been “the down loading of services that used to be paid for by the feds who are pulling the money off the table.” An example was given of issues related to social housing. It's being cut back “Not because people don't need affordable housing but because there is no program to support it anymore.”

#### **Government and Community Responses**

“Metro has by and large resisted cutting its own budgets for services. We have mainly backfilled the services that were cut by the province. The one exception has been Metro matching the provincial cuts to public transit.” Metro is trying to “hang on to our meagre transit system such as street cars.”

“Dealing with the problem of incoming economic inequality has been the Riverdale against the Cuts organization. It is a network of people which formed up against Metro cuts but has grown to take on all of the cuts issues. We have some great imaginative minds that have organized many things, not just fuzzy stuff but action.”

### **4. Other Issues**

#### **Community Access to Parkland**

Currently, the Gardiner Expressway serves as a barrier between the community and some amenities. Once it is taken down, “McCleary park will become a community park. The Mayfair will become a community facility, a big fitness club near the end of the community.”

### **C. Community Supports and Barriers**

#### **1. Supports**

##### **Community Activism and Support**

Mr. Layton felt that the Riverdale tradition of community activism was essential for any effective action that may have occurred on the part of government. “Any achievement that we make usually results from having worked with people in the local community. That's where the best ideas always come from. If you have a good idea, best take it to the local community to have a reality check.”

For any number of actions, such as developing safe sewage, taking down the Gardiner, saving McCleary Park, putting a bicycle path along the Gardiner, government action is seen by Mr. Layton as having occurred after community leaders have gotten community groups moving.

## **Community Groups**

“Community groups are key. Citizens for a Safe Environment has had an ongoing ever-present positive role. The [South Riverdale] Health Centre is just a great core of positive energy and ideas on the health-related issues and some of the equity issues.” “Woodgreen has been there for 60 years, maybe longer. It is a great institution in the area. The Ralph Thornton Centre has great leadership there. The Business Improvement Association is another layer in the community. They don’t generally live here but have a real interest in certain aspects of the community. They are making a contribution.”

## **Area Elected Representatives**

“Other key organizations that act as facilitators are [City Councillor] Peter Tabuns office, [Provincial Representative] Marilyn Churley’s office, the schools trustees Laura Jones and Soo Wong. We are at the disposal of the community. We are a resource and they have come to see us as a resource which is what we ought to be.” “Metro Council is pretty supportive of what we are trying to do.”

## **Local Economic Initiatives**

Some of the changes that have occurred in the port area are seen as signalling potential opportunities. Since “natural gas, as an energy source has replaced oil” the areas of the port lands that used to be filled with giant oil tanks are now available for other potential uses. One example of this is the recycling industry.

Additionally, there is a developing film industry area in South Riverdale: “The film district has helped down on Queen Street and near Eastern Avenue. Leslie Street has a lot of film-related activities and ancillary businesses: fashion, lighting, and costume companies and specialities have opened up.”

## **2. Barriers to Action**

The barriers to effective action focus on both economic: “We control so little investment that could produce real change” and bureaucratic issues: “Main barriers are bureaucratic mind sets.” And as outlined earlier, globalization has had tremendous effects in reducing employment, and leading to economic polarization, with its associated impoverishment of the community. Bureaucratic mind sets continue to hinder the solution of issues related to air and water quality, as illustrated by the continuing problems of sewage treatment, the Don River, and water pollution of Cherry Beach identified earlier by Mr. Layton.

**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Marilyn Churley**  
**Member of Provincial Parliament, Riverdale**  
**February, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Activist and Caring Community**

Ms Churley began by identifying the unique activist and caring aspects of many of those who live in Riverdale: “Particularly in South Riverdale, but all across the Riverdale area, for whatever reason, and I haven't quite figured it out, it is a very active political community, that has an awful lot of caring folk who get very involved in not just the issues that are of concern to them, but are of concern to the community.”

Even among those who may be doing well there is ongoing concern about the well-being of all those who live in the community. “So that if you have poor children in South Riverdale, there is a lot of interest in the neighbourhood to make sure that they are getting fed.” On any number of a range of issues “People really come together to help each other to deal with problems in the community, as community problems. There is just no limit to which people won't go to help their neighbours, to be politically and socially active.”

**2. Diversity**

Part of what makes life good for people is the diversity of the community. This involves both socioeconomic status as well as ethnicity. “It is extremely diverse and there is a strong Chinese presence in the neighbourhood.” This diversity helps support the community. Concerning the many Chinese groceries within the community, for example, “The Chinese Chamber of Commerce is not only involved with trying to keeping their businesses alive but also tends to be involved in the community as well.”

**3. Progressive Politicians**

Another aspect of the Riverdale community that is seen by Ms. Churley as making it a good place to live is the type of persons who are elected to represent it. “People in this area tend to elect progressive activist politicians. People vote for politicians that are progressive and have come from the community and have proved themselves as being from the community.”

These politicians, Jack Layton, Peter Tabuns, and those who preceded Ms. Churley in the provincial parliament are seen as “Progressive politicians that work well with the community and have good relationships. They work as facilitators, but can take charge when necessary.” Ms. Churley commented: “They all tend to be from the New Democratic Party.”

**4. Neighbourhood Identity**

Ms. Churley felt that the people of Riverdale are able to identify themselves as part of a neighbourhood. This sense of identity, and associated positive quality of life, is seen as threatened by the amalgamation of the six cities of Metropolitan Toronto into one large city: “People see it as a neighbourhood. In the light of all this megacity stuff, people create their own neighbourhoods

and their communities. Because the city [of Toronto] is small, the political supports that are needed are there.”

### **5. Community Agencies**

A number of community agencies and organizations were identified as being part of what makes life good for the people of Riverdale. The South Riverdale Community Health Centre is very important since it “offers that kind of help and support that is absolutely essential to good community living in Riverdale.” Its services are especially important “for immigrants and refugees, who know they can go to the health centre for care.”

The Woodgreen, Ralph Thornton, and Eastview Community Centres and the Jimmy Simpson and Pape Recreation Centres are supported by the City of Toronto and assist people in very many ways. “They really help to bring the community together. There are free services for poor people, recreation, seniors’ dance clubs and choirs, exercise clubs, Chinese get-togethers, and lots of community events.”

These services, always valuable, are now even more important than ever: “All of these things come together to create a very good community in Riverdale despite some of the problems coming out of the recession and the cuts that are coming from the Harris [Provincial] government.”

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Unemployment and Poverty**

“I think the biggest problem that this community has is a certain amount of poverty and unemployment, particularly in the south area of Riverdale where it is high. We have many young people unemployed.” The reasons for this are seen by Ms. Churley as involving the move towards economic globalization. It is made worse by many of the policies of the federal and provincial governments.

While some polluting factories such as Colgate and Lever Brothers have closed in the Riverdale area, Ms. Churley believes this “actually played only a small part in the actual level of unemployment.” She stated that the very high unemployment is resulting from economic changes and federal government policies. “It started with free trade. And the federal government never brought in the transition program they said they would. Unskilled or older workers weren't able to get new jobs.” Older and unskilled workers were especially affected by these policies in South Riverdale.

Another effect of the move towards globalization has been in changing traditional Canadian attitudes of caring and sharing. “The whole global economy, and the era of downsizing and restructuring had led to making sure that the shareholders get their piece of the action, but forget the workers, screw the worker, they don't count in this society.” Canadians are now “living in a very mean spirited, ugly society right now. A selfish society where its every man for himself and I use man deliberately, since it is mostly men at the top who are directing things.” “That's playing a huge part in the poverty and unemployment problem.”



While there are many actions that have been taken, there is still a lot of “poverty and unemployment, and hungry kids in schools.” Poverty and unemployment is seen as a “bigger issue than the community can handle on its own.”

### **Government and Community Responses**

In the discussion of actions that have been, and could be taken by government and the community in response to poverty and unemployment, Ms. Churley first reviewed some of the actions of the former New Democratic Party government. She felt that while these programs were not perfect, they were directed towards issues of unemployment and poverty.

Jobs Ontario, a program of the former New Democratic Party government was “directed to people on welfare. Local business was involved. They would get their salaries topped up. There was a commitment to keep people on. It was highly successful, though it had some problems. Day care places were created which supported single moms.” “Another program that was oriented towards helping communities help themselves was Jobs Ontario Community Action.” It was felt that these programs “had just begun and if they had been allowed to continue they might have been more effective.” As it was, it was felt that it had not accomplished much.” “Being in government, I was able to do more for my community.”

The group Riverdale Against the Cuts was seen as a very active group in the community. It was associated with Riverdale 2000, a community visioning exercise and grew out of a meeting initially convened by Ms. Churley. Another group that also grew out of an initial meeting convened by Ms. Churley was G.R.E.A.T. , the Greater Riverdale Economic Action Team. It was started to “apply for and use new Jobs Ontario and Jobs Ontario Community Action funding. It is a way of dealing with high unemployment and poverty problems. It gets people active in the community to try and deal with our problems.” Ms. Churley felt that government had a role to play in alleviating poverty and unemployment but sees little interest on the part of the present provincial government to address these issues. She feels that some of the “successes such as the hot breakfast at Blake Boulton might be undone.”

Ms. Churley is involved in a number of activities that try to address issues of unemployment and poverty. She is working with community and social agencies on a number of issues. On the day of this interview she had just returned from a press conference with Sue Cox of the Daily Bread Food Bank and Debbie Field of Foodshare related to the new coalition Hunger Watch. The use of food banks had grown during the recession. But “because of the cuts and downloading, they now can’t keep up with the demand. I am working with the food bank to publicize its drive. I want to get people to understand that this is not just so-called welfare bums, that there is a human face to this. [I want people to understand] Why people are there, what causes poverty, and that people want jobs.”

## **2. Environmental Problems**

The statement by Ms Churley that “We have always had environmental problems in South Riverdale” sums up the many battles that have been fought in this community. Some of these involved the movement to close the Commissioners Street Incineration Plant, the Darling Rendering Plant, the Canada Metals Smelter, and deal with the pollution of the Don River.

## **Government and Community Responses**

Ms. Churley commented that: “People come together around environmental problems. People will not put up with it.” Ms. Churley had her start in politics around environmental issues while living in the Bain Avenue Co-op. She got involved in successfully stopping two new huge garbage incinerators from being built. Later she worked with the community to shut down the polluting Commissioners Street Incinerator. She was co-founder of Citizens for a Safe Environment.

“That’s how I got into politics. By fighting pollution in the area. We worked together to fight the older Commissioners Street Incinerator. Then we kept two new huge garbage incinerators from being built in the area. We also got rid of the Darling Rendering Plant which stank up the air for years.

The Canada Metal Battle involved the fight against the presence of a lead smelter in South Riverdale that had polluted the environment and poisoned people’s soil. “It took years fighting and working together to clean it up and replace the soil.[The Provincial Government spent \$8,000,000 to remove soil from South Riverdale after children were found to have abnormally high levels of lead in their blood.] There are endless examples of problems that we take on in this community and fight. Ms. Churley felt that “We have been highly successful at environmental cleanup.” In regards to Canada Metal, “It is still there, it doesn’t smelt any more, but the taxpayers paid for the cleanup. [Canada Metal] was supposed to pay \$8,000,000 and they have been let off the hook. We think they should pay.”

In relation to the pollution of the Don River, Ms. Churley stated: “Jack [Layton] and I started the Don River clean-up. We called the first meeting at City Hall in 88 or 89. Then the community environment movement took it over. In terms of the actual cleanup, its moving way too slowly. An awful lot depends on government support. But it happening.”

“There is a major issue that is coming up concerning polluted lands and properties in the Riverdale area. Its called PAH and its a contaminant. The Ministry of the Environment says its not their responsibility. People are very worried, and it may be a huge public health risk.” Ms. Churley felt that children may be told not to play in yards and people may be warned not to eat vegetables. It may put people’s property values at risk.

### **3. Present Government Policies**

The present provincial government’s policies are seen as a direct threat to the well-being of people in the Riverdale community. Much of this involves the “cuts to welfare and aids to training program. “ Workface is seen as involving “dead end jobs.” People need to appreciate that the “tax cut mentality” will lead to their paying for things out of the “other pocket” and will lead to “less service.”

The plan for the amalgamation of the six metropolitan Toronto Cities into a megacity “makes no sense.” The problems in governance are in the “Greater Toronto Area structure.” Ms. Churley feels the megacity is just a way of “getting rid of politicians in the Metro area.”

Ms. Churley has a concern about the future of social housing. In relation to co-op housing the Federal Government is involved. “The federal liberals are getting out of housing and they want to give to the provincial governments. But the Tories said they would get rid of social housing and give it to the municipalities. This is getting very scary.”

“What keeps our community great is partly the kind of agencies we have and I am afraid we are going to lose them. We are going to lose community health if we lose the kinds of services that are provided by those community centres that are such a big part of what makes our community work. One of the things that I am particularly worried about is that the cities will not be able to provide for these centres. Without the community centres, without the health centres without the community activists, we would not have this great community that we have and that is what we are in danger of losing here.”

“We are no longer fighting to improve things. In my entire political life up until now, things have never been good enough. It wasn’t good enough in my own government. But we moved things forward. The Liberals before us moved things forward. Even the Tories, marginally, moved things forward. We were progressing. This is the first time we are taking a huge step backward. Now we are fighting for the status quo. We’re not saying any more to this government: Restore the welfare rates because people are starving. We’re saying don’t download because they may cut it more. Right across the board, on every other issue, we are fighting to keep what we have, as opposed to saying move the benchmark forward.”

### **Government and Community Responses**

In spite of the attempt by the government to pit one group against the other, “This community is very, very good, I’m really proud of it and that it has not fought over the few dollars that are available.” “I think Riverdale Against the Cuts has been successful in fighting the them against us attitude.”

Ms. Churley is also “working in East York and Riverdale on fighting the Megacity, and identifying the ramifications of downloading of social housing, welfare, home care, long term care, sewer and water, and public health.” She believes that the “Implications for our lives will be severely damaging. It will hurt poor people most but will also hurt middle class people since what we have been taking for granted will not be there anymore.”

She is spending “a lot of time against the cuts.” “I’m working with Peter [Tabuns], Jack [Layton], and [the NDP leader] Howard [Hampton] to get the message out, working with non-party groups, even with Liberals and other Tories in a non-partisan campaign.”

She is also working on issues related to social housing. The night prior to this interview she had attended a big rally at the Music Hall. At the meeting was Toronto City Mayor Hall, activist John Sewell, and Federal Members of Parliament. She hopes that they : “Got the message that if they make a deal with this [provincial] government, they are making a deal with the devil and will be abandoning housing and people.”

## **C. Community Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Community Activism and Support**

Ms. Churley related how she had learned about the role and importance of community support for effective action. “I was a single mother in the Bain co-op. I got involved in the Board, and then became President. I became more involved in the community. [At that time] the

incinerators were still burning and polluting. I co-founded Citizens for a Safe Environment. I didn't know much about the issue. We went into it; we wanted to find out about it. David [Reville, the City Councillor] got us \$50,000 intervenor funding from the City of Toronto for a lawyer and expert witnesses. We were able to do research and found that incineration was not a good way to go."

She felt that involvement in dealing with problems and issues are a means by which people come together, to carry out effective action. "These kinds of problems are a good thing; these kinds of problems force people to look at alternatives." "We were behind the very popular 3 Rs [Reduce, Reuse, Recycle] and the Blue Box."

### **Supportive and Facilitative Politicians**

Ms. Churley feels that her fellow representatives are very supportive of community action. "In opposition, it's an advantage that three of the four local politicians are from the same party. We work closely together. We lobby hard for our community. I think that we can as politicians work with the strengths of the community and help the community to create a loud voice if it has a problem that needs to be resolved."

"I learned from having been on the other side of the fence as a community activist how important it is as a politician to work with the community and let the community take on the issues. We're there as politicians to be their voice, to help, to facilitate, to make photocopies, and send out meeting notices. Sometimes, you offer leadership since you know how the system operates."

### **Working with All Sectors**

"If you don't have the support of the community and work together in part with the community you don't get anywhere." Ms. Churley feels that she has formed a good relationship with all parties in the community. "I work with everybody. We don't always agree. I have had fights. But I am straightforward. I'm honest and open. People know where I stand. I work with business, many of whom don't support me or the party. At the end of the day, I believe that most people respect me for that."

### **Community Organizations and Services**

"What keeps our community great is partly the kind of agencies we have and I am afraid we are going to lose them." Ms. Churley works closely with a range of agencies and organizations. They are a strong support to her efforts working towards effective action.

## **2. Barriers to Action**

The main barriers to action are the policies of the provincial government. These have been outlined in earlier sections. The government is seen as having "no vision of community." Their "pitting of one group against the other, their downsizing, their downloading, their policy changes, their cutting" are seen a direct threat to the people of Riverdale and the province. "We have a great community here and we are in danger of losing some of the agencies that make it such a great community."

**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Barbara Hall**  
**Mayor, City of Toronto**  
**May, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Activist and Caring Community**

Mayor Hall felt that one of the most important aspects of Riverdale was the number of activists and caring individuals who live there. "It's a community of people who have neighbours who care about issues and care about them, and have strategies to deal with challenges and problems." Why so many activists live in Riverdale was seen as a function of its proximity to the city core, the relatively low cost of housing there in the 60's and 70's and the specific problems the area was faced with. "It has traditionally been a low-cost neighbourhood close to the city core. I think during the 60s and 70s it attracted a certain number of activists who empowered some people and set up some structures. The other set of things were that there were some particular problems, environmental issues, that truly affected everyone in the community. There were issues of lead in the soil; issues of air quality."

**2. Volunteer Networks**

One result of these challenges was the development of any number of volunteer networks that exist to improve the quality of life in the community. "The area has a lot of volunteer networks." These networks work on a range of issues. "Riverdale has a network of people from all facets of the community who came together to develop a sustainable economic strategy for the future. There are also a number of environmental networks such as Citizens for a Safe Environment." These groups are looking at "environmental issues as means of fostering economic community development."

**3. South Riverdale Community Health Centre**

The South Riverdale Community Health Centre was identified as an important contributor to the community. "There is a community health centre that views health within a broad definition. It has been the central point for a lot of community issues and community organizing." This was especially the case in relation to environmental and other issues. "The South Riverdale Community Health Centre has been very leading edge and has a broad community development component to its dealing with health concerns."

**4. Community Organizations and Services**

Another important contributor to the community are the number of community organizations and agencies. In addition to the provision of services, these organizations serve to support the community in a variety of ways. "The Ralph Thornton Community Centre is a place that makes space available for a lot of groups." The Woodgreen Community Centre, which has been in the neighbourhood for 75 years "started out as a traditional settlement house but has

changed over the years in the kinds of programs and the kind of communities it addresses.” The presence of a local community legal clinic was also mentioned.

But it is perhaps in the manner that these agencies operate that is as important as the services they provide. That is, they operate as a means of empowering and supporting the community. As Mayor Hall commented: “So if you look at a whole range of services in that community, many of them are delivered in a community development kind of model. In most neighbourhoods you may find one or two things that way, but in Riverdale, they are all like that. Which sort of says something about the culture of that area.”

### **5. City of Toronto Funding to Support Community Agencies**

The City of Toronto provides funding for many of these agencies. Recreation centres such as “Jimmy Simpson is a city of Toronto Parks and Recreation Centre. It has a pool, a skating rink, a gym and a lot of different programs all year round.” It also has a number of summer programs and has day care available. “It is totally funded by the City.” “The Ralph Thornton Centre is in a city- owned, historic building. We give core administrative funding to that centre and some support for specific programs.” Other agencies such as “Woodgreen Neighbourhood Centre receive many grants from the City. We give money for their youth employment programs, their Chinese seniors programs, and a range of other programs.”

### **6. City of Toronto Support for Business Improvement Associations**

The City of Toronto provides support to Business Improvement Associations (BIA) across the city. “We’ve done a program with a group of BIAs right across the city to help them with marketing.” In terms of specific projects a BIA might undertake “We have cost sharing with the BIAs for some capital things.” The City also provides some staff support.

In Riverdale the City is supporting the Queen Street East BIA. One specific initiative has been the significant funding of public art by the City. “They’ve been partners with the city with the installation of public art in the area such as the clock on the [Queen Street] bridge. And the poetry on the corners.” The City assists with the street banners used by the BIA.

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Unemployment and Poverty**

“One of the big problems in Riverdale, particularly in South Riverdale, is the high level of unemployment and poverty. It used to be a very solid working class area with a lot of jobs. There were factories and plants in the area, but many of those have closed.” The Mayor commented that one especially unsettling effect of the high levels of unemployment and poverty had to do with children. “A high level of poverty means there are a lot of young people who are experiencing some degree of hunger. This puts their health and their learning and their futures at risk.”

### **Government and Community Responses**

The responses to unemployment and poverty have come from both the community and government. “This community has come together and has had forums where people have come out, a couple of hundred on weekends to talk about strategies for economic development.” The

City has provided funding to some youth employment initiatives and has worked with the local Business Improvement Associations. “The small businesses on Queen Street have worked very hard with the City to strengthen the local business strip.” But the economic work has been difficult: “Working on some of the community economic development things has been hard although I know that we have created some jobs. But it is a slow process.”

## **2. Environmental Problems**

Riverdale has had “environmental issues that truly affected everyone in the community. There were issues of lead in the soil; issues of air quality.” The Mayor was referring to the Canada Metals Smelter and the Commissioners Street Garbage Incinerator. There also is a continuing problem with the pollution of the Don River.

### **Government and Community Responses**

It was around environmental issues that the community rallied. “There was a reason for people to get together. And some real battles around things that were easy for people to relate to. Like what are the impacts on young children of lead soil or badly contaminated air?” The City supported these efforts through some of its departments. “City departments, for example the Public Health Department, did a lot of work with individual citizen and citizen groups.”

The most notable victory was the massive soil clean-up that was in response to findings of dangerously high levels of lead in the soil of South Riverdale. “I think that one of the things where we were successful was the soil clean-up which involved quite a massive organized effort. To remove soil, bring in new soil, plant grass and turf.” The Public Health Department, together with citizens carried out “a lot of education around what you could and could not plant in your garden.” City departments also worked with citizens and by “organizing and advocating were able to close the [Commissioners Street] garbage incinerator.”

In relation to the pollution of the Don River and the neighbouring area, “The city financially supports the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. It has created a large recreational space for running, walking, cycling trails, and a lot of planting of flowers. We’re in the process of building a staircase that will give access to the space from the South Riverdale community.”

## **3. Quality of Housing**

Housing is seen as an ongoing issue in Riverdale and South Riverdale. While the area is seen as going through a process of gentrification, “Some of the housing stock there is quite in need of restoration and repair.”

### **Government and Community Responses**

“Its a community that has been supportive of solving some of the housing problems of its members through non-profit and co-op housing.” This has taken the form of the development of small units of 8-10 that fit in well with the community. “In South Riverdale there are quite a number of these small units.”

#### **4. Issues of Settlement**

Toronto is a destination for many recent immigrants and Riverdale is seen as having many new Canadians. “There is a large Chinese community, a large South Asian community. There are issues of settlement.” It is seen as a challenge to meet their needs; especially for those seniors who have arrived quite recently. City agencies provide seniors’ programs for these individuals.

### **C. Community Supports and Barriers**

#### **1. Supports**

##### **Community Activism**

The Mayor felt that she and government have a responsibility to respond to community problems and issues. “These are all issues that all levels of government have some areas of responsibility for.” Nevertheless, politicians must work in partnerships with these communities rather than dictating solutions. In the words of Mayor Hall:

“Because this is a community that is quite empowered in the ways I have talked about, its a community that takes a lot of responsibility for issues. The role for me as Mayor and for other politicians is to become a part of that process. To support it, and to the extent that we are able to, provide resources to do it within that structure. This isn’t a community where you go and impose something. It is a community where people care about what’s happening, have thought about what the problems are, and thought about what the solutions are. If politicians join that partnership then its a community where there can be real, and I emphasize real, solutions.”

##### **Community Organizations and Agencies**

As noted earlier, “If you look at a whole range of services in that community, many of them are delivered in a community development kind of model. In most neighbourhoods you may find one or two things that way, but in Riverdale, they are all like that. Which sort of says something about the culture about that area.”

#### **2. Barriers**

##### **Unemployment and Societal Attitudes**

The Mayor felt that “Unemployment can be a very painful process for people who have lost their self-confidence and are anxious to earn a living and get back their sense of value. Unfortunately, society takes away [this sense of value] from people if they are not working. A lot of our definition of success is the kind of work we are doing.”



**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Soo Wong**  
**Public School Trustee, City of Toronto, Ward 8**  
**July, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Business and Community Partnerships**

Trustee Wong spoke of the many partnerships that exist among the business community and residents. There are four local business associations, two on Danforth, one on Broadview and one on Queen Street. These partnerships among local businesses and the community take many forms. They include bringing local businesses into schools, having businesses hire students, and having businesses support applications for neighbourhood beautification and enhancement.

**2. Caring Community**

Riverdale is seen as a very caring community. Residents are “supportive of one another” and “look after each other.” This shows itself in a variety of ways. These ways, detailed below include business/community relationships, community members addressing issues together, and parents who are active in the schools.

**3. Creative and Artistic Community**

Some of the residents of Riverdale are associated with the rejuvenation of the “studio district”, an area designed by the City in the southern end of the community. These residents, and others who live in Riverdale, are seen as very creative and “artsy.” These talents contribute to the community.

**4. Diverse and Multicultural Community**

Riverdale is a “neighbourhood that is high in multiculturalism and diversity.” The diversity includes a significant Chinese population as well as members of many other groups. Among many people of Southeast Asian origins, many children are being raised by their grandparents when the parents are working.

**5. Solid and Stable Community**

Trustee Wong described Riverdale as a community that has traditionally been working class and “has a very strong work ethic.” It was seen as a stable community with strong roots. People were raised there, are now raising their children and are “planning to stay” in Riverdale. Ms. Wong grew up in the neighbourhood and being one of only two trustees of Chinese descent she saw herself as “providing leadership” and letting people “know that you care about them.”

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Access Issues**

An especially important issue in Riverdale is that of access to services and neighbourhood facilities. At one level there is the issue of language. There are many residents who do not have English as a first language. Information can be translated into the main languages in the area: "I can get information translated into Chinese, Vietnamese, and Greek, but there is also Persian, Spanish, and other languages." Limited resources can be a barrier. In relation to education issues: "Parents can't call, unless you have a hot line in different languages."

In addition to language issues, there is a general problem of getting information about resources to the community. There are many residents, including seniors and youth, "who can speak the language, but don't have information." It was felt that Parks and Recreation, for example, "doesn't do a good job of advertising." As a result, programs may be cancelled because of low attendance. Unless people go to the library, or "unless you go to the door and pick up the flyer, you don't know about it."

### **Trustee and Board Responses**

Ms. Wong has been active in getting the Parks and Recreation department to communicate to the community about its programs. "We had a special meeting so that the parks people could explain their programs to the children." Ms. Wong felt that these programs were important and that there was a need to work collaboratively.

Community members frequently have questions and problems related to issues of immigration, property tax, and connecting with the right channel. In the past "No one has listened to them; they know I will go to work with them."

Ms. Wong described a partnership whereby a large number of new, modern computers were brought into the Jones, Queen, and Pape Avenue libraries in order to connect with the local unemployment insurance offices. Community members can use these computers to find out what jobs are available. The unemployment office is usually open on weekdays from 8:30-4:30 so now people can benefit by having access during library hours.

### **2. Special Needs of Students**

Trustee Wong noted that there are lots of children who have learning disabilities, but these are sometimes not identified until grades eight or nine. In addition, for many adolescents, "their minds are all over the place." What works well in educating adolescents is peer tutoring.

### **Board of Education Response: University of Toronto Collaboration**

One response has been to work with the University of Toronto's Medical Education program. In this program, first year medical students spend some time in Wards 7 and 8 elementary schools in order to study children in their communities. The schools that are involved in Ward 8 are all considered inner city schools.

The medical students write a report of their experiences and do some assessment of children. In return "Our school staff educate the medical students." We say to them: "What you see in this class are very healthy kids and your job is make sure that they stay healthy." Some of

the questions that medical students are asked to consider are: “None of these children smoke, but how come 10% of this population will smoke at age 17?” Moreover, “there is lots of discussion and sharing of information about what is available in the community.” The program has been successful and there are plans to expand it to the Parkdale area. It is seen as important to raise health issues early with children, otherwise the learning opportunity is lost.

### **3. English as a Second Language**

Since there is a large “proportion of students whose first language in schools is neither English nor French”, English as a Second Language is an important issue in the schools. In addition to this being a school-related issue, it also becomes a problem in regards to issues of access and communications. These issues are considered in a separate section.

### **4. Environmental Health Problems**

Riverdale and South Riverdale in particular has had a history of environmental health problems. Some of these problems have involved “business conflicting with neighbours” where the health of residents and young people in particular has been at risk. It is an ongoing issue that has involved large scale factories such as Lever Brothers but also smaller businesses. Ms. Wong explained that sometimes this is seen as an issue of “who was there first” but “the health issue is the most important piece” and the community should have a voice in these issues.

### **5. Needs of Youth**

Riverdale is seen as having a “large young population of youth” such that the Board of Education “is experiencing a space crisis.” An increase of five percent is expected within the next five years.

Ms. Wong discussed the recreation needs of adolescents aged from 9 to 17 years. She felt that they were a “very tough age to crack.” It is very important to develop “culturally appropriate, but age relevant, recreation activities to meet their needs.”

### **Trustee and Board Responses**

Ms. Wong felt that it is important to be “hands on” and she often visits schools. “It’s the only way that I will know if a policy has affected the classroom. You can’t rely on people telling you these things.”

For example, when the Board was replacing equipment, it needed ideas on what to replace these with. “So we have to find out their needs; we needed to consult with them.” She found these meetings in schools with youth enlightening but also that it was “difficult to reach consensus.” In the end it was found that they were interested in basketball, volleyball, and tennis.

### **Community Responses: Youth Activity**

The Queen Street Business Improvement Association suggested to Trustee Wong that children be asked to paint a mural on Queen Street near Degrassi Street. Some funding was received from the federal government. This was done last year and will be done again. “So we are going to be hiring some young children, school kids in grades 7-8.” The children have been “showing off their arts, and the murals have been up for two summers and haven’t been touched.”

In a second part of the grant the underpaths for the Canadian National will be done over the next two years.

### **Community Responses: Hiring Youth**

The business community has been responsive in helping the youth in the community. For the community festival, the Taste of Danforth, the community hired 25 youth to work for the weekend. These partnerships among business and the community are seen as especially important, “providing services and ongoing resources” that benefit the ward and its residents.

### **Community Responses: Business Responding to Student Needs**

Another aspect of business/community partnerships has involved the raising of money by businesses to support school programs. “There is one partnership with Danforth by the Valley Business Association where the Riverdale Christmas Concert raised \$4,000 which went to a breakfast program.” “In Greek Town, \$10,000 was raised last year for breakfast and crafts programs.” Forming these partnerships is seen by Ms. Wong as “part of the role of the school trustee.”

## **6. Safety Concerns for Children**

A number of issues related to safety in the community were outlined. These extend beyond issues of crime, violence, and mugging. Ms. Wong pointed out that “The number one cause of death among young people is accidents.” Therefore “it is important to look beyond the school and school classroom.” One important issue is that of safety in school playgrounds. Some of this involves equipment in the play areas as well as the general appearance of the areas. There is also an ongoing concern with traffic and the safety of children in the ward.

### **Trustee and Board Responses**

To improve safety much of the equipment in playgrounds is now made of plastic. Ms. Wong explained: “The equipment in schools is now plastic which is more durable and safety conscious.” In addition to the equipment, she felt that it is important that the actual grounds be safe. Since children may “play in school playgrounds at night, having the glass picked up helped make the community a thriving community.”

Ms. Wong described a process by which she and the community worked to install a flashing light and decrease the speed limit along Dundas Street right before the bridge. Since Dundas is a Metro road the speed limit was 50, but she and others worked to get it posted at 40 kilometres per hour since “there are four schools in the neighbourhood, and it was very unsafe.” “The difference between getting hit at 50 or 40 is important.” The issue was taken to Metropolitan Toronto Council and though it took almost nine months, “We got the reduced speed.” “It also took a long time to get a crossing guard, there never was one before, but we have it now.”

## **C. Education Issues and Initiatives**

### **1. Building Community Partnerships**

It was felt that it was very important to have the community involved through the “participation of residents -- whether with children or not, ratepayers, local businesses and churches.” Ms. Wong felt that religious leaders were not as involved as they could be. It was important to “build links with seniors through intergenerational activities.” One example was cited of having seniors come in to read and play with local children. This program benefits both seniors and the children. It is “teaching kids different skills, and getting the seniors away from their apartments.” Seniors were also involved in the children's gardening program.

### **2. Community Gardens**

Another initiative has been the development of community gardens. “There are several schools that have community gardens. Eastdale Collegiate has a rooftop garden. The Broadview and Dundas school has a huge garden.” The area at Broadview and Dundas had previously been used for dogs. It is very successful. Members of the community such as the local day care centre are helping by watching the plants during the times that the schools are closed.

Educationally, “Three public schools have built it into the curriculum. Children plant their own plants, and use it to encourage butterflies and bees. The gardens provide vegetables so people can sell and eat them.” Such activities are “very rewarding to see. They help bring the community together.”

### **3. Identifying Effective Schools**

It was felt that an indicator of what makes a school [good] is the amount of after school activities it has. Schools that are progressive have lots of after school activities, teachers that lead teams, and are available. Children have a role to play also. They can respond to issues and those graduating can report about their experiences.

### **4. Recycling Initiative**

There has also been a recycling initiative in the schools. About one-third of what the school throws out can be recycled.

## **D. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

Members of the community are seen as supportive. “People are very supportive of what we do. I would say a good portion of the ward, even with their limited education, are very sharp and very astute and keen to get involved when they seem fit.” Community members are seen as very issue oriented: “They want me to speak on their behalf.”

## 2. Barriers

### **Attitudes**

Some of the barriers to action are related to attitudes that some community residents hold. As Ms. Wong stated: “Some people don't want to be helped.” They say: “This is your problem, we don't see it as a problem.” Other people are not accustomed to speaking up. They may come from countries where there was danger in speaking out about issues.

### **Access for Hard-to-Reach Groups**

There is also the ongoing issue of access related to language differences. Materials can be translated into Chinese, Greek, and Vietnamese but there are also other languages in the ward such as Spanish and Persian. Limited resources make having all these different translations difficult. “We have to reeducate community about getting information. We have to get information out to people; every elected official has that problem.”

In addition to the language barriers, “people are very busy, they have multiple jobs, working three or four jobs, and are too busy to notice problems.” It is important to work on prevention and prevent these problems from becoming crises.

There are also specific groups that are difficult to reach and may have specific needs. For example, there is a “large number of single moms out there.” And, some people may be “afraid to speak out against their landlord. There are power and control issues here.” There is also some frustration on the part of community members that sometimes things take time to happen.

There may also be “changes in the relationships in the community because of the new government, the megacity. They may not be interested in these issues.”

**Community Quality of Life Interview**  
**Laura Jones**  
**Public School Trustee, City of Toronto, Ward 8**  
**July, 1997**

**A. Strengths and Positive Factors**

**1. Diversity of Neighbourhood**

Ms. Jones saw the diversity of the neighbourhood as a strength. "My kids knew people from all around the world without having to travel around the world." They learned about differences among people: "They learned that people had different lifestyles." She feels that "future generations will be less violent and racist because of this knowledge."

**2. Good Schools**

One of the reasons Ms. Jones chose to live in Riverdale was the excellent reputation of the local schools. She described them as having a lot of "community and parent participation." As a parent, Ms. Jones said that she "was very pleased with education my kids got." However, she does have concerns about the future. "I think the schools are still excellent, but I think that is changing. I am a new grandmother and I am not so optimistic about the education that my grandchild will get."

**3. Neighbourliness**

Trustee Jones stated that she had lived in the Riverdale area for close to 25 years and that "nothing could get me to live anywhere else." She felt that there was a strong sense of community in the area. People know each other, yet they respect each others' privacy. "I feel a real sense of community here."

**4. Parks**

The presence of parks in the area was seen as a benefit.

**5. Public Transportation**

The services provided by the Toronto Transit Commission was seen as another benefit of living in the neighbourhood. This was especially important for people, who like Ms. Jones, did not own an automobile.

**6. A Safe Neighbourhood**

While Ms. Jones felt that Riverdale was still a safe neighbourhood, she did remark that "I think it is changing." "When the kids were little, I never locked the house. We didn't even keep keys to the house."

**7. Stores**

Ms. Jones noted that there used to be a very large number of stores in the neighbourhood, but this also appears to be changing. "When I moved here there was a variety of stores but this is

decreasing due to the increasing number of restaurants. I need to go out of the area to shop when I used to be able to do it here.”

### **8. Housing Costs**

Low housing costs were seen as a positive aspect of the community. But this now applies generally to housing south of Gerrard Street. “I think that south of Gerrard there is added reason to live there because houses are more reasonable.” In the north end of Riverdale, “costs have gone way up.”

## **B. Problems and Issues**

### **1. Concern about Cutbacks and Policy Changes**

Ms. Jones is concerned about the future of the neighbourhood and of the city. “There are so many things that we take for granted that we have, a good city and a good neighbourhood. When I came to Toronto in 1967 I thought it would always be that way. I don't have that feeling any more. I feel that our city is crumbling before my eyes. It's devastating - that is the biggest problem for me.”

### **2. Deteriorating Health Care**

Ms. Jones felt that the health care system and the related social safety net were in peril. “Things were fine for me as a single parent, but my son is starting out and you can see that they don't have the safety net to fall back on now. My daughter-in-law didn't get the care that she needed when she was pregnant. Care that I took for granted. It was so bad it never should never have happened in Canada.” She also related how difficult it had been for someone she knew who was unable to locate his OHIP card to get health services.

### **3. Increasing Crime**

Ms. Jones was aware of a number of break-ins in the area. “We have a place on Gerrard street that has been broken into twice this summer.” She reported that “Now we lock the door - even when we are home.”

### **4. Job Loss**

It was felt that “job loss affects many in the area.” For example, there have been jobs lost from the closing of the Colgate Plant. Additionally, as a result of these losses stores and restaurants closed and “there are lots of empty buildings in that area.” Job losses have also occurred in North Riverdale: “Even up here there are four people on this block who have lost their jobs.” She feels that job losses are widespread and that the differences between South and North Riverdale in job losses are being lessened.

### **5. Lack of Opportunities for Youth**

Ms. Jones related that “When I came to Toronto there were lots of opportunities.” At that time, she was able to get a job by just looking in the newspaper. “There were plenty of things teenagers could do. They may not have been good-paying but at least they were there. Teenagers



need them and I don't think that they have them now.” For example, she feels that her youngest son who is 19, "really doesn't have that kind of opportunity.”

### **6. Possibility of Deteriorating School System**

Ms. Jones is a strong supporter of the public school system: “One of the lovely things about the neighbourhood is that no matter who your parents are or what job they have, you are in contact at the public school.” But she noted that increasingly, people are taking their children out of the public system. “I know eight or ten people who have taken their kids out. As things become tougher greater numbers are making moves towards private schools. As things get tougher those with money will choose the option of taking their kids out of public school.” She feels that people are making that choice “before the school system is deteriorating one bit.” “I am being told that ‘I am taking my kids out now because they are young and won't be able to get in when they are older, so I'm leaving now.’” One new private school is opening and Ms. Jones believes that “this is just the beginning.”

### **7. Provincial Cut-Backs**

Ms. Jones placed the blame for the job losses, deteriorating health care and increased crime clearly at the door of the current provincial government. “I blame it on the provincial government which I think is being completely irresponsible and uncaring in their actions.”

### **8. Violence in Schools**

As a school trustee Ms. Jones has had three serious situations involving violence in schools. In the two most serious cases the children involved felt badly about it. She attributes this, in part, to the conflict resolution education in classrooms. “The message has gotten through that kids have learned about different ways of solving problems.” This is sometimes difficult because “we're dealing with parents from different backgrounds who still believe that it is okay to the bash someone in the head.” In contrast, “the students were willing to express how they felt and promise not do it again.”

## **C. Education Initiatives**

### **1. Alternative Schools**

Ms. Jones was involved in an initiative to set up an alternative grade 7/8 school in the east-end. “I went to various meetings about it, but the parents did the work. The school has been going for two years.” Her involvement involved hunting for space which was found at a local school: “There were empty rooms that were totally unused.” Ms. Jones is also involved in trying to set up an alternative arts school, however this may not happen due to the funding cuts.

### **2. Community Gardens**

A very successful initiative is the community gardens. These include “rooftop gardens in the east end that used to be a volleyball court.” “It was a huge roof that was unused and is now used to grow vegetables.” They received help from the South Riverdale Community Health

Centre as well as from students at Danforth Technical School. There is extensive community involvement, for example, “First Nations residents are growing sweet grass. It’s really nice.”

### **3. Pink Triangle Program**

Ms. Jones was involved with the Pink Triangle Program at Metro Community Church. The program is for “students who have been victims of homophobia or who wanted to be in a more gay-friendly environment. Students may go there for a year or two and then go back to another board program.” The idea is to provide an individualized program for students, but it is difficult to run such a program if the number of students are small at a particular school. “Some of the people running in the election tried to make sure that this didn't happen but the students themselves made sure that it happened. I was able to help since I became a trustee.” Ms. Jones emphasized the importance of these programs: “School should be safe learning environment and we have a responsibility to meet every individual need.”

## **D. Changes to Education System**

### **1. Adult Education**

Trustee Jones is very concerned about the changes to adult education and how this is going to affect new Canadians and others. In Riverdale there is the City Adult Learning Centre and the Jones Avenue Adult New Canadian Centre. Both centres were seen as having excellent resources to assist adult learners. For example, at the Jones Avenue school the program involves much more than learning English. There is an extensive program that assists people with acquiring employment. There is an emphasis on placing their students in co-op and business institutions such that a high level of employment of graduates is achieved.

These programs are seen to be at risk as the current provincial government “after they came to power told the Board of Education not to educate students over 21 at the full education rate.” This involved reducing the rate from \$8,000 to \$2,300 per student.

### **Board of Education Responses**

The Toronto Board of Education, already receiving no provincial funding for education ignored this directive. “The feeling was -- how could they tell us not to educate students over the age of 21 when they don't pay for it.” Through these actions the Board was able to keep the program for an additional couple of years. However, the future seems dark: “But now we don't have control over the funding programs. It may exist for one more year.” Ms. Jones remarked that while “students were told by government representatives that it was not a cut but it was a change in program” the effect will clearly be to destroy the programs that are in place.

“For \$2,300 per student you may be able to have literacy classes, and may be able to have specific courses but not in terms of having a library, a co-op program, computers in the classroom, guidance counsellors, and very experienced teachers who devote extra to their school community. Teachers will be paid to just come in for three hours and will be right out the door. You won't have the sense of having community that you have now.”

The students in these programs “come to the school with every kind of problem that adults have. But the schools help them and everyone gets the needed supports.” The schools makes

appropriate referrals to many places. There are also support groups for abused women. “We cannot maintain these services without adequate funding.”

### **Student Responses**

Ms. Jones has been heartened by the responses of the students in the schools. “The students have been phenomenal. I go regularly to give information about what is happening. I used to be so careful and cautious since people come from war-torn countries, and probably didn't want to hear about cutting their school.” But the students had already organized themselves and had begun to collect petitions to help save adult education. Ms. Jones gave the petitions to the provincial member of parliament and invited her to visit the school. “They have been really involved in letter writing campaigns and going to demonstrations. It is extremely impressive.” “The student graduation was a very moving experience, knowing this may be the last class. The students brought back the head of the Chinese Business Association who had been in the class and who spoke of his experiences.” Ms. Jones added: “This is a very important school, and though we may try and save it, we may not be able to save it.” “These schools may exist in name, but may not be able to achieve this level of success.”

### **2. Bill 104 and the Education System**

Ms. Jones expressed concern about the effects of Bill 104. The “education improvement commissions are a super barrier. It consists of appointed people who have extreme powers to oversee power of elected trustees.” “While the commission has spent over \$4,000,000 so far, it has hired only one person from Toronto on its staff.” It was felt that the commission has “no awareness of inner city problems, the diverse background of students, and the deep love and commitment that exists to education at the local level.”

“I don't have great feelings about how they are going to make these decisions in this short amount of time. There will not be input.” In regards to the local improvement commission with its sub-committee on community involvement, only “one parent from Toronto will be chosen. How do you choose one parent and one student?” While the commission is supposed to save money Ms. Jones feels that “its main purpose is to kill the spirit of Toronto.”

### **3. Creating Large Neighbourhood Schools**

There is also a concern that small schools may be amalgamated into larger ones. “The decisions can be made just on the matter of cost, like taking schools and combining smaller schools. There are 176 schools in this ward, they're small, and from an economic point of view you could combine schools but I would hate to see it.” In a small school the principal and teachers know the students. “There's not a chance that you could do this with large schools. You cannot give individual attention that they need.”

### **4. Effects of Amalgamation**

There was concern that the amalgamation of school boards will reduce public input into the schools. “There will be a trustee for all of ward 7 and 8. That's going from three to one, but there won't be a budget. I don't know where community members would go without trustees.”

## **5. Role of Volunteers**

The issue of the role of volunteers in the school was discussed. Currently, “People feel welcome in the school. In many schools there are parents volunteering, helping, reading to kids, and just helping out.” Volunteers are an “extra benefit”, but Ms. Jones feels that in the future the system is going to depend on these parents. This is problematic: “We can't be dependent on volunteer labour as part of our system for success. Volunteers have to be extra.”

For example, the “inter-generational program is wonderful but it cannot replace serious counselling for people who need it. It's not going to replace those who need extra services.” She commented further that “It sounds like you are against parent involvement, but volunteers can't be expected to discipline, the principal is responsible for discipline. Some parents think they can come in and swat the children. They can't!”

## **6. Secondary School Reforms**

The reform of eliminating grade 13 “if there was an adequate curriculum would be fine.” But Trustee Jones has concerns that if students are forced to make choices too early, they can get locked in. “I don't want to feel that you have less choices. For some people it takes longer to get started; some people need to take courses more than once; and for many kids grade 9 is a write-off. Some kids start to get serious in grade 11.”

### **Trustee and Board Responses**

This is an issue of what school trustees can do to inform people about the effects of these changes. “We have a budget to communicate, but we are not supposed to communicate past June, because of the upcoming election. With all of these things happening . . . you have to communicate. I'm fully intending to write a newsletter.”

### **Community Responses**

In response to the announced changes in the education system, “Soo Wong and I went to everyone of our schools - to the home and school associations.” She also met with a number of other community groups and staff associations. She has been to “over 50 meetings to give out information to the neighbourhood about what was happening.”

Copies of the budgets have been given out so that parents and children can learn about the budget. “We gave copies of the budget to the Home and School associations so that anyone could look at it.” Parents have gotten very involved in the budget process and “have an excellent understanding about what the issues were. Franklin School became a city wide leader in educating the public about the budget.” In relation to the provincial cuts the neighbourhood has responded: “This neighbourhood has always had active parents, the parents came through.”

## **E. Supports and Barriers**

### **1. Supports**

#### **Board of Education Supports**

While in the past there has been a left-right split in the Toronto Board of Education, currently there is a “sense of unity.” People of all persuasions have come together to write a statement about the educational changes.

#### **Community Supports**

The community is seen as a strong support for Ms. Jones' activities. She and Trustee Wong have been working with city, Metro, and provincial representatives. Meetings have been held about the cuts and she has gotten “to know a lot of people, from seniors organizations and other existing groups.” Newsletters have been prepared and all-in-all “the community has been very active.”

### **2. Barriers**

“I am finding it very hard to find a balance between giving information and not be immobilized by it. About having the response that things will take care of themselves, because it’s important to not withhold information, try to encourage commitment that Riverdale has had for many years of coming up with creative solutions.”