AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

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Abstract

A child's view of their community and what they identify as community issues can offer useful knowledge in community organizing. This involvement is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts that children should have an opportunity to voice their opinions in matters that affect their lives. Unfortunately, children are rarely included in community organizing. This thesis explores ways children can be involved in community organizing. Focus groups with children ages 5-10 were conducted in the North End community of Hamilton, Ontario. In these groups, children spoke of ways they viewed their community and communicated these issues through art, photography and play. The study shows the potential of this method as a means to facilitate the authentic involvement of children in community organizing

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" I want to get rid of black flies and mosquitoes and have more butterflies."

Table of Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to explore how children view their community and what they identify as community issues. The project asks two important questions; should children be involved in community organizing and if yes, how does one effectively involve them in this process? The research employed a participatory approach in order to engage children, ages 5 to 10, in beginning a process to involve children in community organizing. One of the main ideas underlying this research is that children have unique perspectives and beliefs that can contribute to community decision-making processes. Therefore, children's personal knowledge and experiences were used in order to assess some of the community's needs and strengths.

This research study highlights effective ways to involve children in community organizing. Moreover, the knowledge produced by this project will assist community organizers and others (i.e. social workers, politicians, educators, and parents) in understanding and incorporating children's views when making decisions that affect children.

The policy basis of this project is derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is a policy that seeks to establish a standard for global children's rights. More specifically, this project seeks to support the goal set by article 12 of the Convention and apply it to the involvement of children in community organizing. Article 12 asserts that children must not only be seen, but heard and listened to in all matters that affect them. In light of article 12, this project asks children, instead

of asking parents or other adults, to articulate what they think would benefit children within their community. This directly counters the traditional view that adults know what is best for children, since historically these areas have been controlled by adults even though many community decisions and changes directly or indirectly affect the lives of children.

This research study is largely written from a Western perspective and was conducted in the North End Community of Hamilton, Ontario. Despite these factors, this analysis will hopefully provide a foundation for a continued discussion around the involvement of children in community organizing on a global scale, although it would obviously take on different forms and levels of participation depending on the community's cultural and financial context.

Children were involved in participatory action research through focus groups and were given the opportunity to express their perspectives through a variety of mediums. It is the intent of the researcher that the findings of this research be disseminated to service providers and other community organizations, so that some of the issues raised by the children participating in the project can affect some sort of change within their community. Furthermore, through the participatory action of the children within the research process, this project will hopefully result in a change in the way that children are viewed and listened to within their community.

Chapter 1
Involving Children in Community Organizing

This research originated from two starting points; my passion for working with children and my interest in community work. It has been my experience when working with children that they often have experiences and insights that are overlooked by adults. Therefore, as I started to consider the importance of listening to the views of children, I also began to question how one should communicate with children, since I had worked with children who were better able to communicate through means such as play, art, or writing. Furthermore, through my education about and my experience working with communities, I have come to value the strength, unity and holistic approach that can emerge from community centered work. Unfortunately, when I tried to bring working with children and community organizing together, I realized that the voices of children were not recognized in most community organizing agendas.

As I began to further research this dilemma, I realized that the absence of children's voices in community organizing contradicted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Since this was an international policy, it opened up my research to a whole new level of global analysis that I had not originally anticipated. I then began to question issues of culture, financial means, and politics when involving children in community organizing, which led to a more in depth critique of the CRC on a global scale.

In order to establish a background for this study at both a global and local level, there are several key areas that must be discussed. First, since the CRC provides the

policy foundation for this research, it is imperative to examine the Convention's purpose and some of the dilemmas surrounding this Convention. This discussion will provide a larger context for the Convention and the issues surrounding human rights, and more specifically children's rights. Moreover, it will also help to identify some of the difficulties involved in and questions surrounding the implementation of the CRC at the community level. Second, the connection between the CRC and the involvement of children in community organizing is central to establishing a framework for the purpose of this research project. Finally, in order to determine some of the complications and challenges of applying the CRC to community organizing, it is useful to discuss some of the critiques of the CRC and how its goals may fail to meet the needs of children. Since the research conducted for this project is centered on a Canadian community, most of the examples provided will be from the Canadian context; however some international examples will also be included to help provide a larger global perspective concerning the CRC and the research conducted in the area of children and community organizing.

<u>Child Rights</u>: Finding Support for Children Across the Globe

Globalization has been a process that has impacted the world on a number of different levels. Trade, labour, media and global economics are some of the more obvious areas that have been impacted by globalization. These areas of change have incurred various responses as many individuals have come to view local or national issues as part of a global struggle. People have become increasingly aware of the realities faced by countries in terms of debt, famine, war and poverty, and therefore there has been a movement toward establishing some form of universal rights standards. In many cases

4

these human rights standards have been met with mixed reactions; however, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all but two countries (exceptions being Somalia and the United States). This Convention was based on ideas such as anti-discrimination toward children, the best interest of the child, the child's right to survival and development and the importance of a child's participation in decision-making. The Convention was initiated as a response to high global rates of child mortality, child poverty and child labour. The articles of the Convention cover a number of areas, including health, education, recreation, and participation.

How the CRC Relates to the Involvement of Children in Community Organizing

This project looks primarily at how the Convention can be used as a tool to further the involvement of children in community organizing. Although the Convention does not specifically state that children should be involved in community organizing, the principles implied by the Convention's goals clearly support this idea. First, the participation of children in community organizing upholds the rights of the child as outlined by the CRC in Article 12 which states that:

> parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Ottawa, 1991, p.6).

According to this portion of the Convention, children should be able to participate in community organizing initiatives which have an effect on their lives. This may include issues such as education, child abuse, housing, intimate violence, and homelessness. If children are restricted from participating within the community they are denied their "fundamental right to be listened to and taken seriously in decisions that affect them in

legislation and policy" (Lansdown, 2001, p.7). Therefore, "as a result of this exclusion, they are denied the right to influence the exercise of other rights" (Lansdown, 2001, p.7).

Second, the participation of children in community organizing and decision-making not only supports this statement, but it also upholds the foundational premise of community organizing, which is a "process anchored in the conviction that all affected by a particular action or decision should have an opportunity to participate" (Wharf & Clague, 1997, p.387). Like adults, children are often affected directly or indirectly by decisions that are made about their communities, however children are rarely asked to participate in decision-making processes (Melton, 1991).

Third, Article 13 of the CRC also states how children should be involved in these decisions, which is a very pertinent issue when attempting to involve children in community organizing. Article 13 asserts that children should be provided the:

> freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all
> kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print,
> in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice
> (Ottawa, 1991, p.7).

This article identifies the right of children to not only be included in decision-making processes that affect them, but also states that this involvement must be authentic. If children do not have the opportunity to express themselves in a way that they feel comfortable, then a form of ageism is occurring, since the child's form of communication is not incorporated, recognized, or respected. Some alternative forms of communication with children may include writing, photography, painting and sculpting (Stith, Rosen, McCollum, Coleman & Herman, 1996). In general, when working with children, researchers have found that the incorporation of non-verbal elements is essential, since it

increases the participation of children by four times when compared to verbal interactions (Johnson, Bruhn, Winek, Krepps & Wile, 1999). One must be wary, however, of extending this generalization to all children, since various forms of expression are valued in different ways depending on the child's cultural context (Combrinck-Graham, 1991).

Although the involvement of children in community organizing is supported by the goals of the CRC, there are some important issues that one must consider when implementing these goals. Despite the fact that all but two countries have supported the Convention, there are many critiques concerning the relevance of the CRC's goals in various countries. Therefore, in order to effectively involve children in community organizing, one must be aware of these critiques and be ready to address them when needed.

Critiques of the Convention: Does the Convention Really Represent Children in All Communities?

Several important changes have resulted from the Convention in areas such as disease reduction due to immunization, a decrease in the child mortality rate, and an increase in primary school attendance. Despite these changes and the economic growth experienced in many countries (especially Developed countries), many children's lives in states that have ratified the Convention remain the same. One of the main reasons the goals of the CRC have not reached the needs of children within their communities is because the voices of local people, and specifically children, were not heard in the drafting of the Convention's goals. Although, a more connected partnership between the Convention committee and the community members and leaders will not solve all the

7

issues concerning the improvement of children's lives, it may help to generate more feasible solutions that will be successful in specific contexts.

First, community leaders and members have been excluded from the very beginning of the Convention process. The drafting, implementing, and evaluation of the CRC is an international policy process which is "based on the 'society of the states' in which the voices of the local and particular are effectively silenced" (Harris-Short, 2003, p.134). Therefore, state leaders are those whose voices are acknowledged in this process, and often the perspectives of state leaders from Developed countries are given more recognition than leaders from other countries.

Second, the articles of the Convention express desired outcomes, but do not specify how these outcomes should be enacted in concrete ways (objectives). Ultimately, objectives are to be outlined by specific nation states in accordance with their resources and approach to implementing the goals of the Convention. Unfortunately, the detailed follow-up of the implementation of the Convention's goals did not consider the various problems that many communities encountered in implementing the CRC especially in areas such as culture and finance.

As a result of the lack of people at the community level involved in drafting the goals and the challenges that have risen during their implementation, there are several areas of tension around various issues such as cultural views of childhood and individual rights, as well as, economic resources in both Developed and Developing countries. These issues are very important to consider when involving children in community organizing, since this involvement is supported by the CRC. Therefore, in order for

children's involvement to be successful it must be carried out in a way that respects the community's cultural context and is financially feasible for the community.

Cultural Context: Does the CRC Fit in Any Community?

Although the implementation of the Convention's goals are decided by the leadership of each specific country, and the CRC outlines that one must recognize "the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child," it is difficult to implement these goals in a culturally relevant way if the goals themselves conflict with the country's cultural context (Ottawa, 1991, p.2). The socialization of childhood is conducted within a specific cultural context, and therefore if these cultural values are to be respected, this context must be taken into account in the Convention's goals; this however, is not the case (Boyden, 1996).

The very purpose of the CRC, to establish human rights standards, is a Western concept, which was introduced to the non-Western world through the process of globalization (Bauer, 2003). More specifically, the Convention addresses the rights of children, and its goals are tied to specific views of childhood, family and community. Although childhood is universal, the experience of childhood is very "culturally specific" (Fass, 2003, p.964). Regardless of this reality, the values of the Convention are largely based on Western neo-liberal notions of individual responsibility and "separate uniqueness" (Murphy-Berman, Levesque & Berman, 1996, p.1260). Children are viewed as individuals who have rights that are separate from their families and who, because of their vulnerability, are entitled to provisions that will ensure their development (Boyden,

1996). For example, the preamble of the Convention states that "the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society..." (Ottawa, 1991, p.2). Furthermore, Article 15 of the Convention states that all children should be allowed the "freedom of association" and "freedom of peaceful assembly," and that "no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society" (Ottawa, 1991, p. 7). The view of the child proposed by the Convention also "stresses the innocence and frailty of children, thus discursively ejecting children from the world's of work, politics, and sexuality..." (Stasiulis, 2002, p.512). Ultimately these values do not address the structural realities that force many children into labour or prostitution at a young age in order to survive.

Moreover, the Convention does not account for the different views of childhood in various cultures. For instance, many cultures value the collective interdependence of the family and the community, instead of the independence of the individual (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996). In these cultures, the idea that children have rights and a private life separate from their family or community conflicts with their core cultural conceptions of children (Harris-Short, 2003). Furthermore, Article 12 of the Convention which states that children should be given the right to express his or her own views "freely in all matters affecting the child," could directly conflict with cultural traditions which value parental guidance and instruction as paramount to a child's development (Ottawa, 1991, p.6).

Many people also resist this push toward Western change because they view it as the 'brainchild of intellectual elites" or they resist it because they see it as an invasion of

Western culture which cannot be reconciled with their own cultural values (Harris-Short, 2003, p.145). Community members in some countries fear that their communities will be recreated in the image of the West and they are concerned about the effect this will have on their children (Harris-Short, 2003). The Convention goes beyond the infiltration of Western capitalist ideas into non-Western economies, trade, and labour, and forces Western values into the intimate core of societies, therefore dismissing their cultural views of childhood, family and community.

The dominant discourse of the CRC promotes Western values of childhood and human rights, and therefore covertly asserts an "us versus them rhetoric" between Western and non-Western countries (Bauer, 2003, ¶ 2). The dominance of the Western values of childhood and family in the CRC indirectly assumes that the Western perspective is the most appropriate view of childhood and fails to acknowledge the conflicting ethical perspectives of this Western view, as well as, the liabilities that may accompany this perspective (Bauer, 2003).

For example, one of the core values of the neo-liberal ideology is individual responsibility and "separate uniqueness" (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996, p.1260). In Canada, this value is accompanied by neo-conservatism, which advocates a more "hierarchical, patriarchal, authoritarian, and inequitable society" (Knutilla & Kubik, 2000, p.151). Although these two values usually compliment one another, they come into conflict when addressing the best interests of children. On the one hand, the neo-liberal value of individuality supports the notion that children should be able to participate in decisions affecting them, and in its strictest sense, neo-liberal ideology

would oppose the role of the government in investing in policies and programs that influence the market or citizen lives. However, in the arena of policies affecting children, it is imperative that the government does intervene on their behalf, so that children are able to effectively develop, grow, and actively participate in society. It is imperative that this intervention is conducted only in conjunction with the adults and children of the community, so that the best interests of the children are ensured and effective solutions, which are supported by the community, can be implemented.

On the other hand, the neo-conservative value of patriarchy, does not recognize that children are political beings with citizenship rights. Instead, children are seen as "only partially human" because they are governed by their parents and other adult authorities, and therefore their voices are silenced (Stasiulis, 2002, p.512). Consequently, when the government intervenes in order to protect these vulnerable children (i.e. child protection policies), the perspectives of children are rarely considered paramount to these decisions. The conflict between these two ideologies and the resultant controversy over the notions of the protected child, the best interest of the child, and child participation are hotly debated in communities, and many people feel that these perspectives are incompatible (Stasiulis, 2002). As a result, children's voices continue to be silenced at the community level because Western values view the goals of the Convention as conflicting with one another.

Another conflict of values can also be seen in the cultural perspective of indigenous persons in Developed countries in comparison to the dominant cultural values. For instance, in Canada most First Nations cultures view children as an integral

part of the community. Children are placed in the center of the community with the elders, women, and then men encircling them (Anderson, 2000). People are seen as being woven together in the community, and therefore the idea that children would have separate individual rights, as outlined in the Convention, is foreign to this concept. However, the community does acknowledge the importance of listening to and caring for children, which are values that clearly coincide with the goals of the Convention. Nevertheless, the Convention goals are written in terms of individual rights and it does not acknowledge the concept of community rights in its goals. Therefore, the goals of the Convention do not respect or value local community cultural practices.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all but two nations, however it is evident from the preceding discussion that many of the goals of the Convention are contrary to the values of the citizens themselves in both Western and non-Western countries, and therefore many communities have resisted the implementation of the Convention. If a community does not see its own values in the goals of the Convention, it is unlikely that these goals will be implemented at the community level. Therefore, when working with communities to involve children in community organizing, it is imperative that one considers how the Convention may compliment or conflict with the community's cultural values in order to determine how best to involve children in community organizing.

No Money Where Their Mouth Is: How Can Children Benefit If Their Communities Have No Financial Support?

In addition to cultural factors, the allocation of economic resources toward the implementation of the goals of the Convention is also a major reason why these goals

have not reached the community level. Article 4 of the Convention claims that the state must realize children's rights "to the maximum extent of their available resources" (Ottawa, 1991, p.4). All state leaders who ratified the CRC promised to make the best interests of children their main priority and give them the 'first-call' on all resources "in good times or bad, in peace or in war, in prosperity or economic distress" (Part 1, 2001, p.2). The leaders made this promise to both the present generation of children and the generations which would follow (Part 1, 2001). The Convention asserts that resources given to children can no longer be considered an act of philanthropy carried out by the 'caring patriarchal leadership', but is instead a fundamental right that must be granted to all children (Albanez, 1990). Despite these profound promises, many of the goals of the Convention have not been reached, not because the goals are unattainable, but because of a lack of investment (Our Children, 2001). The amount of money most countries spend on "armaments and luxury consumer items" make the resources needed to provide for the basic needs of children "modest and affordable" (Our Children, 2001, p. 43).

Western countries who arguably possess the funds needed to meet the CRC's goals often do not meet the mandates of the Convention. For instance, in order to justify why many of the Convention's mandates have not been met, Canada has used its own economic situation as a 'smoke screen.' Canada hides behind their budget deficits and high national debts, claiming that "the government acted to review public expenditures and to establish targets for the reduction of budget deficits" because they "represented a risk to social programs and to the quality of life of Canadians" (National Report, 2000, p.2). In their explanation, the government failed to articulate that this review of public

14

expenditures resulted in a series of major cuts in the social service sector, which greatly affected community resources. Although some service providers and community leaders sought to demonstrate how these cuts negatively impacted the lives of children and their families, most 'taxpayers' had already bought into the government's deficit propaganda.

In terms of financial investment in the goals of the CRC, the Convention does not address the major inequalities in the economic resources of Developed and Developing countries, as well as, the impact globalization has had on the ability of Western countries to influence how non-Western countries budget their national economy. Although Developing countries, like Developed countries, often prioritize spending on armaments and consumer products, their economies are often further restricted by other factors of globalization such as trade agreements and debt burdens (Our Children, 2001). For example, many countries have been subject to structural adjustment programs by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a means of debt relief. These programs promise both economic growth and debt relief, but most often fail to achieve either of these outcomes (Sanders, 1999). Ultimately, these structural adjustment programs "turn over the control of the country's economy to the World Bank and the IMF" (Bello, n.d., ¶ 5). Moreover, they not only fail to assist countries in meeting the needs of children, but often work directly against the goals of the Convention. These adjustment programs raise interest rates, increase the country's reliance on cheap exports, and eliminate or at least greatly reduce "spending on education, health, and other essential services (which costs the lives of millions of the world's poorest children every year)" (Sanders, 1999, ¶ 3).

Moreover, although the Convention asserts that the 'best interests' of children in Developing countries must be achieved through the "international co-operation" of all Developed and Developing countries, it does not establish how Developed countries should support Developing countries (Ottawa, 1991, p.2). Consequently, many Developed countries have decreased the amount of aid given to Developing countries, since the ratification of the CRC.

The inadequacy of the CRC in addressing the limitations of several countries' economic resources has serious repercussions in its ability to address other structural issues faced by many countries. The Convention addresses problems specifically pertaining to children such as health care access, education, child labour and participation. However, the CRC does not link these issues to structural issues such as high rates of unemployment, low adult wages, and unstable national economies that have been further magnified by impacts of globalization and capitalist values of profit and consumption (Knuttila & Kubik, 2000). Therefore, the Convention is demanding that countries attempt to address these issues, but is not acknowledging that these issues are deeply rooted in economic policies, international trade agreements, and capitalist ideals. Consequently, countries are expected to resolve problems that they are ill equipped to address, and that are also rooted in much greater structural problems that are not recognized by the Convention.

Furthermore, the Convention's lack of acknowledgment of structural issues results in many of the realities of children's lives being silenced in the name of international children's rights. For instance, in many countries, children work in harsh conditions

because their income is needed in order to provide for their survival needs. The child's income may be needed in order to maintain family survival, since adult wages are so low and therefore do not provide an adequate income, or because the child is not part of a family unit and this labour is their only means of survival (Save The Children, 2003). Moreover, any improved working conditions that are supported by the CRC must be the shared responsibility of companies who are often affiliated with Western corporations in order for legislative and policy changes to be effective. Therefore, the implementation of the CRC and the addressing of structural problems, such as low adult wages, is left in the hands of private enterprises who often value profit above addressing major structural issues and child well-being and who do not ask questions about why children have to work in order to survive (Save The Children, 2003; Redbarnet, 2002).

In light of these challenges, one must recognize the difficulties that many countries face in implementing the goals of the CRC. For example, if a country is struggling to feed its population, then the involvement of children in community organizing may not be high on their political and community agenda. Furthermore, in every community, issues of economic resources and cultural context must be carefully considered. However, one must also ask the question that in light of these critiques should the Convention be supported as a global policy

Should the Convention be Supported ?

On the one hand, the majority of the tenets of the Convention adhere to the dominant Western view that children are separate individuals from the family identity, and therefore they neglect many cultural, social, and economic realities facing other

nations. As a result, many community realities of Developing countries were not represented in this process. The Convention does not recognize the diversity of cultural values that construct childhood and human rights, and therefore its goals conflict with the cultural values of citizens in many countries. The Convention also fails to acknowledge structural issues which reinforce circumstances which are harmful to children. Therefore, countries are unable to achieve the goals of the Convention because these underlying issues are not addressed. Moreover, one would assume that communities in Developed countries would have benefited since Western values were the driving force behind the Convention, however this is not the case. For instance, in Canada neo-liberal ideology has dominated the developing of objectives and implementation of the CRC. Therefore, the voices of the nation's local communities have been ignored on this level and those suffering the most as a result are the children who are most in need.

On the other hand, the CRC offers a response to a growing problem, that "in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions and that such children need special considerations" (Ottawa, 1991, p.2). The Convention has prioritized the long hidden needs of the world's children and made a global statement that something needs to be done to better their lives. Not only has the CRC brought this issue to the forefront of international politics, but its ratification is a clear statement that the world feels that something should be done about these issues. This form of advocacy for the well-being of children appears to be a very beneficial outcome of the Convention.

In the future, however, it is imperative that the United Nations committee on the Rights of the Child considers the impact of "globalization of human rights in the context

18

of continuing diversity" (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996, p. 1260). To accomplish this they must first question whether one formula for the well-being of children can be appropriate for all cultural settings (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996). Addressing the needs of the world's children and providing them a place to have their voice heard can be commendable goals, but they must be carried out in a way that is actually beneficial to the children, the families, and the communities involved. Therefore, in light of this analysis one must consider these issues when seeking to involve children in community organizing. These issues are not simple and are not always easily answered, but in order for children's participation to be authentic and changes to be effective these issues must be considered.

Chapter 2
Why Should Children be Involved in Community Organizing?

Now that a policy foundation for the involvement of children in community organizing has been established through an analysis of the CRC, it is helpful to examine the definition of a community and community organizing in order to further assess if and how children can be incorporated into this process. Moreover, it is also useful to examine previous research and projects which have been based on the perspectives of children, the contribution of children in various change efforts and the involvement of children in community organizing.

Communities are collectives made up of individual citizens. Communities can be diverse and may consist of people of different ethnic backgrounds, ages, gender, occupations, and levels of education. Community organization seeks to legitimize the concerns and needs of marginalized communities and motivate social change that is beneficial to the community. In addressing the needs of communities and working toward social change it is imperative that community organizers attempt to ascertain all voices of the people in the community that wish to be heard. The problem, however, is that in some communities certain voices are more easily heard than others. This can be due to position within the community or societal norms which determine whose knowledge is considered legitimate. Often these relationships are shaped by factors such as power, status, age and class. Although many issues confronting communities directly affect the lives of children, they are often invisible within communities and their voices are ignored in

community organizing. Children are, by definition, important citizens of communities and they must be included in the community organization process.

One of the most basic definitions of community is that it represents shared relationships and common interests among people (Wharf, 1997, p.9). Other definitions include "a grouping of people who reside in a specific locality and who exercise some degree of local autonomy in organizing their social life..." (Wharf, 1997, p.5) and "the social place used by family, friends, neighbours, neighbourhood associations, synagogues, local unions, local government and local media" (McKnight, 1995, p.164). According to these descriptions there is no reason why children should be excluded from the definition of community. Children exist within these shared relationships, are included in the common interests of the people, reside in the specific locality of the community, and embody the titles of family member, friend, and neighbour. Although most people would probably not dispute the belief that children are part of communities, many may reject the notion that children have a place within the social and political arena of community organizing.

In order to determine whether there is a place for children in community organizing, one must begin by examining the very basic definition and purpose of organizing. Community organization can be defined as "...a social intervention which seeks to maximize the ability of disadvantaged people to influence their environment..." (Lee, 1999, p.55). This influence on the environment is brought about through community solidarity and citizen participation. Solidarity and participation are manifested through organized action in order to acquire needed resources, address

21

community concerns, transform existing institutions or legislation to benefit the community, or implement new institutions and legislation that more adequately meet the needs of the community (Lee, 1999; Stoecker, 1999; O'Kane, 2002). Moreover, community organizing is a "...process anchored in the conviction that all affected by a particular action or decision should have an opportunity to participate..." (Wharf & Clague, 1997, p.387). These definitions provide several reasons which support the view that children do have a place within community organizing.

First, since children are a part of these communities and are also disadvantaged, it should be imperative that they too are able to benefit from community organizing and maximize their ability to influence their environment. Second, community solidarity and citizen participation are two key aspects of community organizing, and therefore in order to achieve this unity, community organizing must allow all members, including children, a place in which to participate. Finally, if one of the main elements of community organizing is that all persons in the community affected by a particular problem should have an opportunity to participate in organizing, then it would be against the fundamental purpose of community organizing to exclude children from this activity. In some cases children are those most affected by the issues being addressed by the community, but their voices are never heard in the community organizing effort.

If the community refuses to hear the voices of children, or deems their knowledge illegitimate due to their age, development level, or maturity level, this results in marginalization and discrimination of these members of their community, which is the very thing the community is working against. Therefore, according to the definition and

purpose of community organizing, children have a place in this effort and should be allowed the opportunity to actively participate in the development of the community. Despite this apparent place of children in community organizing based on definition, one may still ask the questions; Why would you involve children in a process which has been largely dominated by adults and deals with complex structural issues? Is community organizing a place where children should participate?

In addition to the important reality that involvement in community organizing is a fundamental right of children, there are several additional reasons as to why children should be involved in this decision-making process. First, participation in community organization provides children with an opportunity to learn about citizenship and become involved in their community (O'Kane, 2002). Organizing also teaches children to "...challenge discrimination, and to work together cooperatively and democratically in a manner that transforms and challenges much of their existing experiences of exploitative relations" (O'Kane, 2002, p.706).

Second, historically adults have represented children, since the dominant view is that adults know what is best for children (Lansdown, 2001). As a result of this attitude, the voices of children were silenced and despite the good intentions of the adults involved, many initiatives to change policies and practices failed to help children and in some cases harmed them (O'Kane, 2002). Through participation in community organizing, children will have a visible arena in which to voice their concerns, and hopefully assist in creating changes that will benefit them instead of causing them further harm.

Third, the involvement of children in the direction of community organizing initiatives will provide the community with a more comprehensive knowledge resource from which to make their decisions, since "children have a body of experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation" (Lansdown, 2001, p.4). These experiences provide children with specific "views and ideas," which will hopefully lead to more beneficial decisions being made and actions taken by the community (Lansdown, 2001, p.4). Moreover, children will be empowered and mobilized as their knowledge and experiences are recognized and legitimized, "thus challenging dominant narratives about who they are and transforming personal troubles into political issues" (O'Kane, 2002, p.703). These various arguments provide several reasons as to why children should be involved in community organization. In order for this participation to be meaningful, however, it must be "directly linked to their own first-hand experience" and the children themselves must recognize the issues as areas of concern (Lansdown, 2001, p.9).

Meaningful Participation: Making Children's Views Count

In order to achieve meaningful participation, it is imperative that one considers the elements needed for and the factors limiting the participation of children in community organization. In this discussion these elements have been defined as the child's level of participation, the 'best interest' of the child, and the issue of tokenism. These factors are very complex and may change depending on the context and circumstances of the community. Moreover, each factor is accompanied with its own set of ethical issues, which community organizers must carefully navigate.

24

First, it is imperative when involving children in some form of community organizing that the community organizer(s) consider the level of participation the children will have, as well as, what is in the best interest of the child. The involvement of children in community organizing can be divided into two broad categories; participation and non participation. Participation may have several degrees of involvement depending on the nature of the work the community is undertaking. For instance, certain projects may be child-initiated while others would be adult-initiated with shared decision making between adults and children. Moreover, children may have a major influence on the direction of a given project, while other projects may be assigned (Hart, 1992). In all levels of participation children's views must be "given weight and inform decisions made about them" as is outlined in Article 12 of the Convention (Lansdown, 2001, p.2). Furthermore, it is imperative that children are well informed of the processes involved and are given the information needed to both "form and express their views" and decide whether they wish to voice these opinions and actively participate (Children's Participation, 2002, p.5). Children must also be well prepared for the possible outcomes of the activities of the community, have a clear sense of what decisions can and cannot be made, and be aware of who is able to make these decisions (Children's Participation, 2002, p.10; Lansdown, 2001, p.10).

There are two main factors which must be considered when deciding the level of participation children should have in a specific community organizing endeavour. These factors can be summarized in two questions; Will the child's voice be heard? Is this participation in the child's best interest? First, one must assess whether there are factors

which may discriminate against the children involved in the participatory process and subsequently silence their ability to voice their concerns in the participation process. For instance, are there any reasons why children "to whom an initiative is relevant" are not able to participate based on factors such as age, ethnicity, gender, situation, or ability? (Lansdown, 2001, p.10).

Second, the best interest of the child must be paramount in any work involving children. This includes protecting children from being exposed to risks such as psychological or emotional damage that could result because of their participation. For example, a community working with issues of intimate violence must consider how much and in what forum children are asked to share their perspectives in order to avoid re-traumatizing the child through discussion of these painful events. This may result in excluding children from certain aspects of the project or withholding harmful information from them (Children's Participation, 2002). Discerning the "best interest" of a child may be extremely difficult, since there are many different views of the "reality and meaning of childhood," what participation means, how to discern what a child is able to understand and how one decides what is 'best' for a child (Children's Participation, 2002, p.1). Various communities and cultures may have differing views on what is in the child's best interest. For instance, some cultures may be based on a hierarchical relationship in which values of obedience and duty of the child are prioritized above freedom and assertiveness (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996). Therefore, the need for children to individually assert themselves in order to attain their own 'best interest,' is not seen as important as the value of teaching children to fulfill duties that are in the best interest of the community.

In order to continue to maintain the 'best interest' of the child, community organizers must also balance the incorporation of children in the community organizing process while stopping children from taking on too much responsibility and allowing 'kids to be kids.' Again, this balance will vary depending on the cultural context, since child development and the distinction between childhood and adulthood may differ depending on the context of the community (Boyden, 1996).

Furthermore, when community organizers include children in the organization process they must carefully consider the implications this may have on their role and the cohesiveness of the community. For example, if a child discloses neglect or abuse, how can the community organizer fulfill their duty to protect the child as outlined by law, while maintaining a trusting relationship with the community? Although there are several complex factors that must be negotiated when involving children in community organizing, the benefits of this involvement are worth the effort.

Finally, an additional aspect which must be considered when involving children in community organizing is the danger that instead of allowing them to affect decision-making processes and voice their concerns, these efforts will be tokenistic (Children's Participation, 2002, p.2). Tokenism occurs when children "seem to have a voice but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, or no time to formulate their own opinions" (Hart, R. as cited in Genuine Participation, 2003, ¶ 1). The difficulty with tokenism is that it is often carried out by adults who are well-intentioned and wish to give children a voice, but have not carefully considered how to accomplish this task. A more potent version of tokenism is when children are used as

decorations for a community organizing event. This takes place when children "are asked

to take part in an event, but are not given any explanation of the issues or the reasons for

their involvement"(Children's Participation, 2002, p.2). This can occur when children are

brought to demonstrations, but are not informed about the concerns being raised. Finally,

children can be manipulated to support the agenda of adults which is "at best tokenistic

and at worst exploitive" (Lansdown, 2001, p.9). Although there is a danger of

manipulating the agenda of a child to further the objectives of adults, this does not imply

that adults cannot be actively involved in facilitating the participation of children in

community organizing. Contrarily, "children cannot and should not be left alone to fight

their own battles." (Lansdown, 2001, p.1). Adults need to learn to work more closely in

collaboration with children to help them "articulate their lives, develop strategies for

change and articulate their rights" (Lansdown, 2001, p.1).

Children are often termed 'the future' and yet their views are often ignored in the

present. It is imperative in community work that children are not underestimated

(Lansdown, 2001). The concepts of "collective strengths" and the promotion of "values

such as democracy, justice, non-discrimination, critical awareness and solidarity through

action" are ones that are valuable to learn at any age (O'Kane, 2002, p.708). Instead of

having to unlearn old ideals of the oppressors and the oppressed, children are taught

ideals of anti-oppression and equality and are encouraged to be a part of this process

when they are young (Friere, 1970). Children's participation in community is something

that can be incorporated into many contexts on a local, national, and international scale to

improve the conditions of the marginalized in a particular society. Children have a

legitimate voice that must be heard. How can a community seek to resist the oppression

they are facing if they continue to oppress members of their own community by silencing their voice? Children occupy a distinct position within communities. They are often affected by issues facing the community in both direct and indirect ways, and yet their voices are not acknowledged. The experiences and views of children are unique, and can offer new insights into the problems in a community and the possible solutions to these issues. The involvement of children in community organizing is not only beneficial for them, but can ultimately benefit the entire community.

Research with Children: Finding out about their Perspectives

Although the Convention and the definition of community organizing clearly support the involvement of children in community organizing, community organizing and decision-making has historically excluded children (Lansdown, 2001). Overall, there is not a lot of writing and research that discusses how to effectively involve children's perspectives in discussions concerning community issues. In approximately the last ten years, however, there has been an emergence of an increasing number of organizations that are committed to providing a voice for children. These organizations take various approaches and address different issues facing children around the world. Some of these organizations are largely "organized by, of and for children" (Free the Children, 2003). Although these organizations are open to children at any age, those with the most input are usually above the age of 12. Other organizations consist mainly of adults working on behalf of children in order to provide them with a voice in policy making decisions and in other arenas that concern children (McCain Family Foundation & The Development Institute, 2004; Active Matter Inc., 2003). Although these organizations work on behalf of children, they do not necessarily seek the input of children themselves in their change

efforts. Forums and conferences concerning the lives of children have also been conducted on both local and global levels. Some of these forums have actively sought the input of children, while others have not consistently included this as part of their agenda (McCain Family Foundation & The Development Institute, 2004). In general, these various organizations often focus on international issues and are usually not focused on issues at the community level. Moreover, many of these organizations focus on specific issues such as health, education, and parenting.

Recent writing and research has begun to explore the involvement of children in research not as objects of socialization, but as social actors who can contribute throughout the research process (Prout & James, 1990). This research has been largely centered around issues of involving children in research and decision-making, methods that are useful in involving children in decision-making, the right of children to be involved in decision-making and the importance of valuing children's voices and experiences (Lansdown, 2001; Thomas & O'Kane, 2000, 1998; Mauthner, 1997; O'Kane, 2002). Unfortunately, most of this research has not been specifically directed at children's involvement within community decision-making and organizing, but has focused primarily on issues that directly affect children (i.e. HIV education in middle school, experiences in foster care, and healthy eating in schools). Moreover, much of this research has been done in Britain or through international organizations such as UNICEF, but has not been as extensively undertaken in Canada. Consequently, there is a need for researchers to begin to explore how to effectively involve children in community organizing and decision-making. Ultimately, the role of the researcher and of adults

30

involved in community organizing is to work with children in order to help them to "articulate their lives, to develop strategies for change and exercise their rights" (Lansdown, 2001, p.1).

Chapter 3
The Research

Thus far the policy foundation for this research has been established through a global analysis of some of the conflicts that may arise from implementing the CRC and more specifically the involvement of children in community organizing. Furthermore, the reasons for and issues surrounding the involvement of children have been discussed. The focus of the remaining research will now center on Canada and in order to further develop my concept of the involvement of children in community organizing, I decided to conduct primary research and concentrate on one community. The community I focused on in my research was the North End of Hamilton, in which I had volunteered, worked and attended church.

Exploring Children's Views of Hamilton's North End

The North End of Hamilton can be described as the geographic area bordered by Wellington street, Cannon Street, James Street, Stewart street and the Hamilton Harbour., which covers approximately 1 km² (Asomaning et al., 2002, p.8). These boundaries roughly describe the area covered by Census tracts 063 and 066. Moreover, the description of these boundaries may vary according to community members, service providers and government records.

The North End community is very unique. Although it is situated within a large metropolitan city the community itself is very close-knit. This "proud and still tightly-knit community" atmosphere greatly differs from its "tough image as lower class, crime-ridden, polluted and dangerous" (Foley, 2003, p.G06). This community bond is

especially prominent amongst people whose families have resided in the North End for several generations. The tight community atmosphere of the North End is also very evident in the community's pride in their neighbourhood and the community centered focus of the agencies and schools in the area.

In addition to the 'close-knitness' of the North End, the community is also unique because of its diversity. This diversity is evident in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, and income. For example, there are a number of families residing in the North End who have immigrated to Canada. This is evident in the Statistics Canada (1996) data which states that there are a large number of families in the North End who speak other languages besides English in the home when compared to Hamilton's overall statistics.

Table 1

	Hamilton	*Census Tract 063*	*Census Tract 066*
English	42.8	49.7	76.1
Chinese	0.53	43.3	18.6
Portuguese	1.1	8.7	2.7
Spanish	0.66	12.3	9
German	0.64	4.1	1.2

(Chart from Asomaning et al., 2002, p.41; Statistics Canada, 1996).

Furthermore, Statistics Canada has also found an overall low level of education, high levels of unemployment and an overall low income level in the North End community (Statistics Canada, 1996). However, when observing the neighbourhood there is a diversity of housing including large homes, waterfront homes, apartment buildings, government housing complexes, townhouses and duplexes. All of these factors contribute to a community that is very diverse and unique.

Since this project is focusing on the involvement of children in community organizing, it is also important to examine the population of children living in the North End. The statistics on this population describe a higher level of children under the age of 15 residing in the North End than the percentage of children this age in all of Hamilton (Statistics Canada, 1991). The community has several educational and recreational programs that focus on this age group and there are two elementary level schools (one catholic and one public) which are within this catchment area. The high number of children in this community and the obvious focus of many community programs for children further supports the idea that children must be included in community organizing and decision-making if one is to make positive and effective changes on their behalf. The North End is often viewed as a community by its residents (although this is not true for everyone), and therefore it provided an ideal setting to conduct my research. Moreover, many of the service providers in the community were interested in the results of my research, which increases the chance that the children's views will invoke some sort of raised awareness and change within the community.

Method

This research study can be broadly described as a form of community organizing called "social action" in which one "aims to organize disadvantaged populations to make demands for 'increased resources or treatment more in accordance with social justice.'" (Rothman and Tropman as cited in Lee, 1999, p.32). Community organizing seeks to create change in communities at a structural level and help the voices of people who are often excluded to be heard. Moreover, this research study is based on an interpretive

34

methodology which strives to discover what is "meaningful" and "relevant" to the research participants by studying the themes and messages within their individual subjective experiences of daily life (Neuman, 1997, p.42). This methodology was carried out through a participatory action research approach. The ultimate purpose of participatory research is to attempt to help people who have been powerless to empower themselves through acknowledging and valuing their own experience and understanding (Reason, 1994). This puts people's knowledge, which has previously been ignored, at "the center of the knowledge creation process" (Hall, 1992, p.15). Another important aspect of participatory research is that it allows participants to be involved as much as possible throughout the research process.

Sample

The focus of this research study was on a specific geographic community located in the North End of Hamilton, Ontario. Consequently, all research participants had to reside in the community or attend school in the community. The research was conducted with children from ages 5 to 10, and therefore participants had to be within this age range. Focus groups consisting of children close to the same age and the same sex were the primary forum for the research. The sample size consisted of approximately four focus groups. Two groups were comprised of children ages 5 and 6 and the other groups were comprised of children ages 7-10. The focus groups for the 5 and 6 year olds consisted of three to four members of the same sex, so that everyone was provided a place to voice their perspective. The reason the 5 and 6 year old groups were divided according to gender is that research has shown that at this age, boys "overshadow the

35

girls" and "often talk more, more loudly, and determine the conversation topics" (Mauthner, 1997, p.23). The focus groups for the 7-10 year olds consisted of three to eight members.

Due to the size of the sample, gathering a statistically representative group was not possible; however, efforts were made to recruit participants from various regions of the neighbourhood, income levels, races, schools, and abilities. The recruiting of the sample was also purposeful in including children of various ages between 5 and 10 years old. The diversity of a sample is very important, since various factors may influence how children perceive their community. In order to ensure this diversity within the sample, demographic information was gathered from the participant and his/her parent/guardian when they joined the project (See Appendix A). Selective sampling was used in order to attempt to recruit participants who were not represented in the primary sample.

Several tactics were used in order to recruit participants for the project. Posters were placed in several community agencies and an advertisement was posted in the community newspaper, The North End Breezes (see Appendix B & C). Flyers were distributed at the children's after school club and soccer program at Hughson St. Baptist Church, at the Bennetto Community Centre's swimming lessons and at the Breakfast Club run by the North Hamilton Community Health Center (See Appendix D). If children were interested, parents were approached with information either in person or were contacted by telephone. The research project and the recruitment process were approved by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board.

Focus Group Process

The focus groups varied in size, location, and ages of participants. Originally there were supposed to be four groups, two consisting of children ages 7-10, one group of females ages 5 and 6 and one group of males ages 5 and 6. Since, there were not enough males ages 5 and 6 interested in the study, this group was not part of the research. Therefore, there were three groups who participated in the research project. Two groups consisted of male and female children ages 7-10. The first group met on a weekly basis for four weeks at Hughson St. Baptist Church and the sessions were an hour and a half in length. The second group met at the Breakfast Club for an hour before school each morning for four consecutive days. The final group was comprised of three girls ages 5 and 6 who met at Hughson St. Baptist Church for 2 meetings which lasted an hour and a half.

During the focus group sessions, participants were asked to discuss what they value in their community, their concerns, as well as, changes they would like to see in their community. This information was gathered through various activities which the participants were able to choose. These choices included such activities as storytelling, art, verbal discussion, photography, or games (Mauthner, 1997). The purpose in incorporating these activities is to allow children the opportunity to choose their own forum for expression in order to provide a 'user friendly' atmosphere in which children were able to participate in influencing the direction of the research and deciding on how they would disseminate their knowledge (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998, 2000). The researcher then studied the information provided by the participants and looked for

themes and meanings within its text in order to summarize the participants' contributions. The participants were also involved in this process and were given the opportunity to provide ideas and feedback concerning the meaning of the text.

Confidentiality

In order to ensure that the participants felt they could openly share their thoughts and feelings, the researcher openly addressed the issue of confidentiality. Participants and parents/guardians were guaranteed that anything they shared on the demographic survey or that the child shared in the group meeting or interview would be held in the strictest confidence and would not be shared with anyone (See Appendix E & F). Furthermore, any verbal information or artwork the children contributed to the research project was completely anonymous, and therefore their names will not be identified in this final product. Instead, pseudo names will be used to identify the participants. Finally, since the transcripts and audio tapes used in the session would eventually be destroyed, the children were given the option of having any artwork mailed to them after the research had been completed, so that their artwork would not be destroyed.

Trustworthiness

There are several key issues that must be examined when conducting research with children in order to ensure "trustworthiness" (qualitative concept that is similar to validity and credibility). The first factor is the researcher's interpretation of the child's verbal and non-verbal expression. The researcher's interpretation is affected by several factors including the researcher's own social location and the use of their analytical skills. Therefore, it is imperative that the researcher is mindful of how these two factors affect

their interpretation of the participants' perspectives (Baker, 1998; Cotterill & Letherby, 1996). Although acknowledging the impact of one's personal attributes and analysis on the research is important, in the end the researcher still maintains the interpretive authority, which governs the description of the research outcome. Inherent in this authority is a power differential between the researcher and the participants, and therefore a possibility that the participants and the researcher could interpret various experiences in different ways. Researchers must be aware of "the possibilities for exploitation" in the research relationship and seek to give up some of their power in order for the voices of the children to be legitimized and understood (Baker, 1998, p.41). Furthermore, researchers must recognize that children's unique experiences and body of knowledge is often ignored. Therefore, placing the child's needs and wants at the center of the researcher's analysis and interpretation is a critical first step in helping to balance the power differential between the researcher and the participant and in listening to the voices of children (Baker, 1998; Flekkoy, 1991).

In order to help reduce the risk of incorrectly interpreting or ignoring the participants' views, the children's artwork and other forms of expression, the children were asked to explain any art or stories in their own words, so that they were able to articulate what they wished to express, instead of the researcher interpreting their artwork, so that it supported the researcher's own hypothesis (Baker, 1998). Moreover, the purpose of the research and the final research document were presented to the participants in a way that they could easily understand, so that the children could give their feedback and to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation (Strauss & Corbin,

1994; Children's Participation, 2002; Mauthner, 1997). Moreover, the children who participated in the research project are not held responsible for their perspective on issues they are unable to understand and the researcher takes responsibility for all interpretations presented in this final document.

In order to further ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the three issues inherent in the involvement of children in community organizing as specified in Chapter two, were each addressed in the research process. First, the level of participation of the children in the research project was made as flexible and participatory as possible. The subject of the research project and the questions discussed were decided by the researcher. However, the children had a high level of participation in deciding how they wished to communicate their answers. In order to achieve this higher level of participation, the children were given the opportunity to communicate through various activities. Second, in order to ensure that the project was in the child's best interest, the project was explained in detail to each of the participants and to their parent/guardian. Children were also reminded that they could leave the group at anytime without any consequences. Finally, in order to avoid tokenism in this research project, the children were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher. Moreover, the participants and the researcher decided on specific perspectives, views and ideas that the children wanted to ensure were communicated to adults in the community. This information was then given to several agencies and service providers in the community.

Chapter 4
Findings

As this research project is an exploratory case study concerning what children ages 5-10 think of their community and what they identify as community issues, appropriate previous research examples and findings will be linked to the findings in this research study. In order to provide a basis for the analysis and discussion of the findings, it is helpful to provide some demographic information about the participants, as well as, an explanation of the group format, the participants' experience in the group and the researcher's observation of certain forms of communication used by the participants. The main themes identified by the participants will then be highlighted and discussed in terms of their implications for the community, as well as, for future work with children in community organizing. These main themes can be categorized into four different areas; definitions of community, environmental issues, important places, as well as, money and politics.

Demographic Information

The three groups involved in this study consisted of participants of different ages from various contexts and views of the community. The demographic information for each participant was obtained from the participant's parent/guardian (See Appendix A). Parents/guardians were encouraged to involve the children in this process, although most chose not to.

The focus groups for children ages 7-10 consisted of five males and six females. The focus group for the 5 and 6 year olds consisted of three female participants. All ages

from 5-10 were represented in the focus group sample, although there were a higher number of eight year old participants in the study. Moreover, the majority of the children who participated in the study attended Bennetto School; however two participants attended St. Lawrence School.

The approximate family income of the participants was evenly distributed with the majority of participants having an income less than $20 000 dollars or between $40 000 and $60 000. No family earned more than $80 000. Furthermore, there was diversity in the parents' description of their race and ethnicity. Several parents chose to identify their personal description of their family's race and ethnicity, while other parents described how their child defined their race and ethnicity. Some of the parents identified themselves as white or brown, others described themselves as Canadian, but also identified their family's ethnic background (i.e. German, English, Lebanese etc…), and certain participants described their family as multi-racial. Moreover, some participants used the term WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), in order to describe their race and ethnicity.

The participants resided in various locations in the North End, with the largest concentration of children living close to the church and Breakfast Club where the groups met. Most parents/guardians who responded to the survey stated that they considered the North End to be their community, although one person specified that they had only recently moved to the North End. One parent did not consider the North End a community, but did not identify themselves with a particular community.

Moreover, all parents/guardians identified at least one community resource that they used in the North End, although the children identified several other resources during the course of the group discussions. In order to provide a general overview of some of the resources used by participants in the North end, the following chart outlines the specific community resources identified by the parents/guardians.

Table 2: Community Resources Identified By Parents/Guardians

Community Resource	Number of Participants
Bennetto Community Centre/Pool	6
School	9
Clubs (i.e. after school club)	2
Parks	4
North End Health Centre/Medical	4
Library	3
Church	2
Breakfast Club	3
Welcome Inn	1

The diverse backgrounds of each of the participants and their various experiences in the community contributed to interesting group discussions and one-on-one dialogues. Although their backgrounds and experiences in the community were quite different, the group members enjoyed spending time together and often supported each other's ideas and conclusions about the community.

Group Format and Experiences

Overall, the participants were very enthusiastic about the group process and seemed to appreciate this opportunity to express their own perspective and to spend time with other children. Several participants asked if the group could continue meeting or if we would meet again next year.

The general format of all the group sessions followed a similar pattern. The meeting would begin with a review of the previous week's topic followed by a discussion about a new issue (i.e. What does community mean to you? What are some important places in your community?). During these discussions the participants were given freedom to raise different ideas. The role of the researcher was to manage the discussion by raising the initial topic, helping participants stay focussed when needed, and making sure that everyone had a chance to speak. In order to help with this process, the group members decided on an action that would signal that they wished to talk to the group. Overall, the participants were able to stay focussed on the topic of discussion and listen to one another with few encouraging reminders from the researcher.

After the group discussion the participants were given the opportunity to further explore this issue through a hands-on activity. During most of the activity times each participant was given a choice of several activities which they could use as their medium of expression. These activities included drawing, painting, play dough moulding, lego building, writing, as well as, cutting and pasting. For certain sessions, however, the activity was set out by the researcher (i.e. photography), although the children could choose if they wished to participate. The participants used this time to express new ideas

or to further develop ideas that had been previously discussed with the group. When the participants worked on these activities, the researcher would talk with them individually so that each person was given an opportunity to explain their artwork and how it related to the topic of discussion.

In the initial stages of the group process, certain terms and concepts used, such as neighbourhood and community had to be explained to some of the group members. After the definition of these terms had been established, group members were then able to further develop their ideas around these terms through their discussions together.

Communicating Through Story and Self

As I listened to the participants describe their ideas and perspectives I noticed two interesting elements about their communication that emerged several times during various group discussions. These two elements helped me to further understand how children may communicate differently than adults, and how important it is to acknowledge these differences in order to recognize when a child is expressing a perspective that can be useful for the community.

First, the participants often intermixed their discussion with personal stories and experiences. These narratives were either used to support points that had been made earlier or to make a new point. Sometimes the point they were making or the information they were relaying was explicitly stated, while other times it was inferred by the experience they were describing. This narrative form of communication seemed more familiar to them than strictly conversing about the topic and it often helped them to fully express their perspective and relate this to everyday life. Studies of children's

development have shown that it can be difficult for children to deal with abstract ideas,

although they are capable of problem solving with concrete ideas. The use of story often

helped the group members take abstract ideas and make them concrete and tangible

(Berk, 1998). For example, in a discussion about if adults should ask children about their

ideas concerning big decisions, such as changes being made in the community, the group

began to dialogue about how children sometimes have the right answers when adults do

not. The group saw this as a reason as to why children could effectively contribute to

decision-making processes. One group member expressed her perspective by telling the

following story:

> Leslie: Well, because adults like my Daddy- you know he
> didn't know where the place was and I was trying to
> tell him and he said no it's down Burlington street,
> and that's not where the place is!

This story helped other participants recognize times that they were right when adults

were not and they were able to relay these stories to the group. One group member

concluded this part of the discussion by identifying the statement that each story

represented, "well, because sometimes kids, they get it right." This demonstrates how

empowering and mobilizing children through community organizing can transform

"personal troubles into political issues" (O'Kane, 2002, p.703). The participants were

able to use their own personal stories of when they were right when an adult was wrong

in order to understand and explain the importance of allowing children to contribute their

ideas to larger issues, such as community organizing and decision-making.

    This use of story in order to express oneself is consistent with Narrative theory

used in clinical social work practice, which is governed by the premise that stories are

"the descriptions and explanations given to events, interactions, and experiences told in the context of smaller systems, such as families, work groups, neighbors of individuals, families, or other social groups" (Franklin & Jordan, 1999, p.153). Moreover, these stories are often used to describe "the norms or expectations of larger cultural society" (Franklin & Jordan, 1999, p.153). The use of story as a form of communication is recognized in professional settings, but is also an important part of many cultures. Therefore, the group members use of story as a means of expression is a legitimate form of communication and should be heard and respected.

Second, occasionally it was difficult for some of the participants to move their discussion from a self-focussed perspective to a community focussed view. This was especially evident in the younger (5 and 6 year old) group. This is consistent with child development research which has found that children's worldviews are quite self-centred and only begin to incorporate the views of "the relationship between self and others" between the ages of six and eight (Berk, 1998, p.345). For instance, during a session in which the group was identifying and drawing important places in their community one member asked, "Am I allowed to draw how much clothes I have or a picture of my room?" This example demonstrates the difficulty one may have in understanding how this self-focussed dialogue relates to the community topic being discussed by the group. However, at other times the transition from self-focus to community focus seemed both logical and helpful to participants. For instance, when discussing what community and neighbourhood meant to them, one participant stated that, "My house. It has like….it has like my pool in the backyard and um…..the backyard is really big and I get to play in it

47

almost every day." Although this statement was very self-focussed, it was a starting point for that group member in understanding community. Like other group members, she saw her house as the center of her community and from there was able to identify being outdoors and having activities to do (i.e. pool) as important elements of community life.

These two elements of communication added an interesting dynamic to our discussions and were helpful in generating new ideas in the group and connecting individual experience to community experience. Through the discussions with the three groups and the individual artwork the participants completed, the children identified several issues and concerns they had about their community, what they valued in their community, as well as, changes they would like to see in their community. Throughout these discussions four overarching themes about how the children viewed their community and what they identified as community issues clearly emerged.

Seeing Community Through a Different Lens

During initial group discussions about what community meant and places the group felt were important in their community, it became very apparent that their concept of community differed from those most commonly used by adults. Initially, I had thought that the participants did not grasp the concept of community and I continued to reiterate the definition of community that most adults used. I soon realized, however, that the children understood my definition of community, but did not view it as an adequate description of their own perspective.

As outlined in chapter 2, community is usually defined as people's shared interests and relationships, a specific geographical location, or local social places used by

family, friends and neighbours (Wharf, 1997; McKnight, 1995). Although the participants understood and agreed with these definitions and the importance of their local community, their concept of community extended beyond the constraints of this description. Since adults' concept of community is the most dominant voice that is heard, it is inevitable that "a collision between adults' and children's shared environment will occur" (Elsley, 2004, p.156). Children inhabit spaces that are "within an adult-constructed world," and therefore it seems obvious that their concept of community may not coincide with the adult concept which they live in (Ennew, 1994, p.127). In their definition of community, the participants referred both to the intimate environments of their households and extended their definition beyond the boundaries of their neighbourhood and city. Ultimately, the participants viewed their community as something that was connected to each individual, and although aspects of their community were common to all group members, certain characteristics were only considered to be part of one individual's concept of community.

For many of the group members their home was a very important element of their community. When asked what their favourite place was in their community, several group members described their home.

> Kevin: My house…I moved in a couple of weeks ago, I do
> most of my things there, I live there.

Liz: Home. Because I get to enjoy it with my family and kittens.

Participants had various reasons why their home was important including that they had moved their recently, that their room was at home, and that their home had been given to them by a friend. Regardless of the reasons for its importance, many participants saw their home as central to their community. Although many adults would agree that people's homes make-up the community, one could argue that home life and community life are seen as two separate entities. However, the participants viewed their home life as inherently linked to their community life for both recreational and social purposes.

Another difference in the participants' definition of community is that the children in the groups included places and people who were important to them, but who did not reside in a specific location or have particular shared interests in their description of community. Ultimately, the common factor between these places and people was their link to a specific participant and his or her experiences. Generally, the children in the

group included places that they enjoyed or people who were important to them in their

concept of community, regardless of geographic distance. Moreover, when they were

questioned about the large geographic distance between their neighbourhood and the

place they were describing, the participants did not see these distances as a factor because

they were important to their community concept. Two clear examples of this expanded

concept of community can be seen in these two verbal dialogues during a group session

about how the group members described their community or what they thought of when

someone said community:

> Liz: Toys R' Us!
> Anne: Where's the nearest Toys R' Us up the mountain?
> Liz: Ya, I take two buses to get there.

> David: Circle Square Ranch, camp.
> Researcher: Why do you see it as part of your community?
> David: I see it as part of my community because it is so
> near to me, it's by the mountains. I like those
> stuffs that's neat!

Other distant places and people included in their community were summer camps,

horseback riding stables, Zellers, and grandpa's farm. Ultimately, the difference in the

participants' definition of community in comparison to more formal definitions affected

other aspects of the groups' discussions about community.

Since the participants included a variety of specific places and people that were

important to them in their definition they had a more positive view of their community.

Furthermore, it also provided them with ideas and resources beyond their local

neighbourhood which they could use to generate ideas of how to improve their local

community. It is imperative that if children are involved in community organizing that

their perspectives are heard and their concept of community is acknowledged, or else their participation will also be constructed by adults and will be tokenistic. In order to further understand children's concepts of their community it is helpful to look at aspects of the community that they feel are important and what they outline as community issues.

Environment: A Cleaner, Greener Community

One of the main themes which reoccurred during several of the group discussions was the participants' focus on the environment. These discussions covered a wide range of ideas and topics including pollution and littering, as well as, the overall aesthetic appearance of community buildings, houses and grounds. The participants identified aspects of the community environment that they enjoyed and appreciated, critiques of the community's environment, as well as, suggestions for improvement.

Pollution & Littering

One of the main concerns the participants had about their community was pollution and littering. When asked to describe their community one participant said, "garbage dump...dirty city, garbage on the ground, people throw it" to which another group member responded, "it's called littering, you could get a $500.00 fine for that." Another participant then described how a neighbour had left their old roof shingles in the alley way between the two houses. In addition to littering many of the children described the pollution in their community. The children primarily focussed on Bayfront Park. When one participant was describing activities at the Bayfront (a park many of them enjoyed), she did not include swimming, and therefore the following discussion about the pollution in the bay transpired:

52

> Kevin: She forgot one important thing, swim.
> Anne: No, you can't swim there
> Liz: No you can't swim (loudly). The water's
> polluted! The water's polluted!
> Sarah: Ya, I saw a dead fish in the water yesterday.

The children's concerns about the Bayfront are echoed by many adults in the community, as well as, government leaders. In the past two years the federal and provincial governments have put increasing pressure on large industries at the Bayfront to "drastically reduce the toxic chemicals they were dumping into the harbour" (McGuinness, 2002, p.A01). However, serious risks still remain for those who swim or eat fish caught in the Harbour, yet there are no signs warning people of these dangers (Lukasik, 2002, p.A11). The discussion of these group members clearly illustrates the need for these types of warnings, since some children in the group were aware of these risks while others were not.

Furthermore, the group members asserted that littering and pollution were not only bad for the environment and made their neighbourhood 'dirty,' but that it could also be an issue of health and well-being for people and animals:

> Emily: I took this picture because people shouldn't be
> leaving their garbage out like that because animals
> could eat it and be poisoned.

Moreover, when discussing changes they would like to see in their community many of

the participants focussed on the problems of littering and pollution:

> David: I want to change our community so it can be more
> better, and no junk throwing all over the place like
> it is, trash throwing, stuff like that.

Joy: I took this picture because people shouldn't be littering.

Emily: Because people shouldn't litter...

Drawing Title: I Don't Want Anymore Garbage in
My Community.
Liz: This is my town that is dirty. This is my town that
is very sparkly clean.

The group members recognized that in order for this change to occur both money and

additional help were needed. Many of the group members felt that there were not enough

people cleaning up the city:

Sarah: It's two people with their kitty and the kitty
    is helping them to clean-up.
Researcher: Why?
Sarah: Because we don't have hardly anybody that helps
    people clean up.
    (see picture on previous page)

Emily: I took this picture because they should have more
    garbage mans on the job.

The group members saw the cleaning of their community as an effort that involved all community members. However, in community meetings, such as the Bay Area Restoration Council, the concerns and ideas of children are not incorporated into initiatives of how to improve the Bayfront or the community (Cox, 2003, p.A03).

Aesthetic Appearance

Another aspect of the community environment that the group members felt was important was the aesthetic appearance of their neighbourhood. The participants discussed the overall appearance of the community, as well as, the affect this had on their lives.

First, the appearance and location of the buildings in the community was one topic discussed by the group members. In a walk through the community in which group

members were taking pictures of important places in their community, many members took photographs of houses that they thought looked nice.

In another group discussion, one member related how a building had been erected in a location which blocked the view of the sunset from her home. Studies have demonstrated that "the view from a window can constitute an experience with nature and can make a difference" in one's overall health (Wells, 2000, p.780). Other studies have shown the influence that housing quality and the presence of nature in one's environment can have on children's "cognitive functioning and attentional capacities" (Wells, 2000, p.782). The children's discussions within the group meetings clearly demonstrated their awareness of the importance of nature within their community, although they probably did not know its extensive benefits. One member explained the changes in housing he would like to see in the community in this way:

> Manpreet: Population.
> Researcher: What would you change about the population?
> Manpreet: So it would be more like the country, not so many
> houses all packed together

Second, in addition to these changes, many of the members indicated that they would prefer if their neighbourhood had more green space, which is also consistent with

57

studies which have indicated that it is more beneficial for children to live in "a place with more nature" and "with more restorative resources" (Wells, 2000, p.782). Group members indicated that they would prefer if there were more flowers, trees and green spaces in the community. Children described the changes they would like to see to improve the amount of green space in their community and highlighted the importance of the community's existing natural areas.

> Leslie: I would like to change my backyard it's all mud okay?
> No stones, no grass, no flowers, no trees....And, here
> is what I would like in my backyard, roses.

> Victor: I took this picture because someone needs to take out
> the cement and put more grass so we can play.
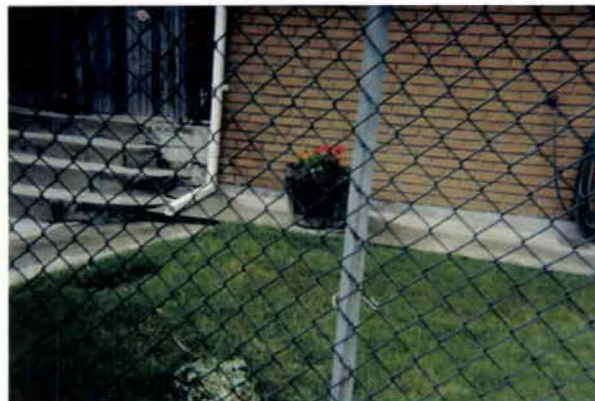
> Joy: It's beautiful and I think that every house should
> have flowers.

Alex: I took this picture because all the trees and weeds looks nice.

Sarah: This is flowers.

Joy: Because trees give us energy and oxygen..

Joy: I took this picture because it had a lot of grass,
      it was healthy.

Third, the children discussed other aspects that could be changed to make their community more comfortable for adults and for children. Several of the children commented on the graffiti in the neighbourhood that was on the sides of buildings (including their school), lamp posts and other areas in the community. The children saw the graffiti, not only as something that ruined the overall appearance of their community, but something that was especially detrimental to children:

Emily: I took this picture because it's graffiti and people
       shouldn't be writing bad words because there are
       little kids here.

Joy: I took this picture because they shouldn't be writing
on there, there's children.

The children's observations of the graffiti and destruction of property in the area parallels

well documented accounts of "the physical environment of disadvantaged areas," in

which "litter and graffiti are regarded as part and parcel of areas of urban deprivation

with petty crime and vandalism the backdrop to spiralling decline in neighbourhoods"

(Elsley, 2004, p.156; Lupton and Power, 2002). This demonstrates the awareness of

children that graffiti and vandalism are harmful to their communities; however unlike this

study the children did not accept this as 'part and parcel' of their community. It may be

helpful if adults worked with children to address this issue in the community. If children

participated in discussing this issue at a young age it could address their concerns and

reduce the likelihood that they would commit these acts of vandalism when they grew

older, which would positively affect the community's future.

One of the most interesting aspects about the groups' discussions and suggestions

about the environment of their community is that many of these ideas have also been

expressed by adults within the community. The forums in which community organizing

initiatives take place are often only for adults because most people assume that children

are not old enough to understand the concepts and decisions being discussed and would

not have ideas to contribute. However, the children who participated in the groups had

many helpful suggestions to make, yet their voices are not heard in these processes. For

example, in an article in the Hamilton Spectator (city newspaper), about changes being

made in the Downtown and North end areas of Hamilton, they describe future initiatives

by "developers who are planning to convert several downtown buildings and parking lots

into large condominium units" (Hanley, 2003, p.AT03). Although children may not

understand all of the intricacies of business, they do understand how changing abandoned

buildings in the community into places that people could enjoy can be an important step

toward improving their community. Moreover, children know the places that they like

and where they spend time with their family, and therefore they see these places as a

viable alternative to the run-down buildings in their community as seen in this statement:

> Maria: I would change …uh.. did you see that building with
> smashed windows that caught on fire, it's by the Mary
> Street bridge. I would change that into Toys R' Us.

One child also suggested that there needed to be more resources put into cleaning up the

environment of their community:

> Liz: I would give $1000.00 to the mayor if he'd clean-up
> the city, no, to the government if they'd clean up the city.

Although, most children would not understand the amount of money it would cost to

clean-up their neighbourhood, this statement shows that they are aware that it not only

takes a substantial amount of money (since $1000 is a lot to most children), but that it

takes the initiative of government and communities in order to create effective change.

One of the promotional initiatives to bring business to Hamilton's downtown core and the

North end has been to invest in "cleaning the environment to make people feel more comfortable" (Hanley, 2003, p.AT03). It is evident from theses examples that children have the capacity to contribute to suggestions about their communities environment, since many of their suggestions paralleled those made by adults. Unfortunately, the input of children is not included in these decisions.

It is also important to note that the children in the group not only had similar ideas to those of adults, but that they saw efforts to improve their neighbourhood as more of a community initiative in which individuals were involved in cleaning up the environment than adults did. It may be useful for community leaders to consider how the involvement of children and their families could provide more assistance in community improvement efforts and give community members ownership over changes in their environment, which could result in more permanent changes.

"Oh The Places We'll Go:" Important Places in Our Community
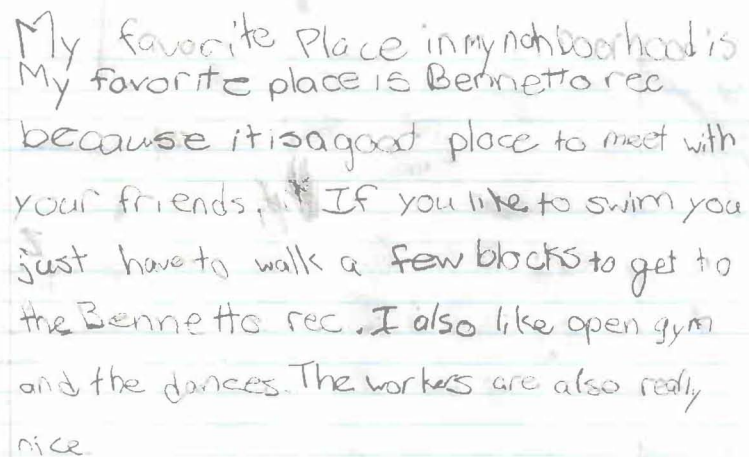
One of the major topics of discussion during the group sessions was the places in the community which participants felt were important. Throughout these discussions the children identified several places which can be divided into three categories; informal spaces, formal spaces, and spaces associated with friends or family. The children explained why these places were important to them, but also offered suggestions of how these spaces could be changed. In addition to highlighting places which were important to them, group members also discussed some places which they did not like in their neighbourhood and how they would change them. They also suggested additional places that could be built in their community, so that certain resources were more accessible.

These discussions helped to highlight some of the possible starting points for involving children in community organizing. If one recognizes the places children consider important, they can then use these resources as a way in which to effectively involve children in community organizing.

Informal Places

When discussing some of the important places in their community the participants highlighted several places where they could go for informal recreation and socialization. Two places which were especially important to them were the Bennetto Community Centre (Bennetto Rec) and the various playgrounds in the community. Many participants highlighted these two places as important or as their favourite place in the community. The group members enjoyed these spaces because they provided fun activities such as swimming, running, biking, and climbing and they were also places that they enjoyed with their family and friends.

Bennetto Community Centre

My favorite Place in my neighborhood is
My favorite place is Bennetto rec
because it is a good place to meet with
your friends. If you like to swim you
just have to walk a few blocks to get to
the Bennetto rec. I also like open gym
and the dances. The workers are also really
nice.
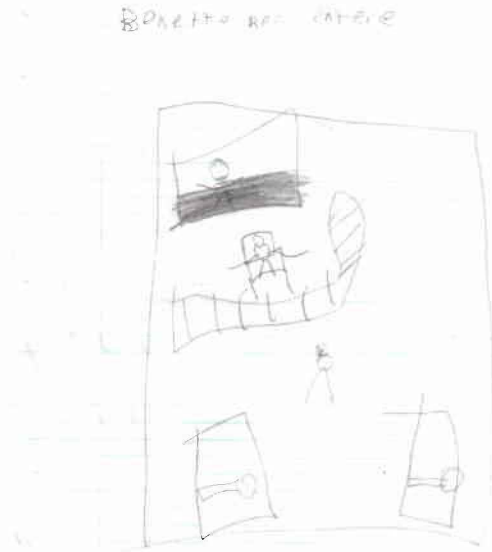
Manpreet: Because they have a pool, gym, park…and you
can do activities in them like…swim..climb, stuff
like that.

Victor: I took this picture because it's a fun place.
Researcher: Why?
Victor: Because we get to swim for a long time.

Joy: I took this picture …because people go swimming there
you do lots of things, you get to swim, you go to do art,
games and it's really fun.

Manpreet: Bennetto Rec Centre. We go there on Friday's for
family swim.

Parks

Leslie: My neighbourhood has two very, very close parks,
Eastwood and they call it ship park, it's a great big ship
they call it the Titanic.

Researcher: So what did you draw Sherri?
Sherri: Me at the park.
Researcher: So what do you like about the park?
Sherri: I like to play on the slide and the swings.

Victor: I took this picture so I can remember the park
because it's fun.

Researcher: So why is the park your favourite place to go?
Leslie: Well, I have two parks and it's my favourite place
to go because we spend family time.

In addition to the parks and the Community centre, the group members highlighted

several other places that they thought were important. The Bayfront was important to the

children because it not only offered green space and a more natural setting, but it was

also a place where they could enjoy outdoor recreational activities. When discussing

important places in their community the participants highlighted the Bayfront, and

outlined several activities that they enjoyed there.

> Anne: There's the bay.
> Researcher: The harbour front, the bay, and what can
> you do there?
> Anne: Um…. You can play at the park
> David: Ride the boats.
> Anne: You can go fishing.
> David: Ride the boats
> Anne: You can ride your bikes, walk, run.

(Photographs by group members of Bayfront Park)

The Breakfast Club was also important to many children. The participants stated that the people who worked at the Breakfast Club and the food they received were two reasons why they felt it was an important place in their community.

Joy: I took this picture of the Breakfast Club because um….
I always come here for tasty treats.

Other places that were mentioned were the library, The Amity, the Donut shop, The Dollar Store, Zellers and camp. The importance placed on informal places and recreational settings by the group participants is consistent with other studies which found that children enjoyed places where they could be outdoors, enjoy nature, and play together (Hart, 1979; Matthews and Limb, 1999). However, unlike Elsley's (2004)

study, "Children's Experience of Public Space," the participants did not think that "there should be more play parks and places to play" (p.161), but they offered suggestions of how these spaces could be improved. Although many of these changes were highlighted in the environment section above, one child mentioned that there were no monkey bars at the park adjacent to the Bennetto Recreation Centre.

In addition to the informal places the children valued in their community, there were also two informal places in the community that the children felt were unsafe or that they would prefer not to have in their community. First, many children said that they wished the Beer Store, located next to the local grocery store, was not in their community.

> Maria: I would like to change the beer store into Toys R' Us!!!
>
> Emily: I don't want a beer store near my home because people
>   always get killed or drunk.
> Researcher: What would you put there instead?
> Emily: A nice little nursing home.

Second, group members described activities that took place under the bridges that are over the railway tracks in the North End. The children depicted drug activity, prostitution, fire lighting and other activities that took place under these bridges close to their house. One of the participants took a picture of the railway tracks under the bridge in order to use it as a way in which to inform adults (in this case the police), of the destructive activities that took place there.

Victor: Under the bridge. So I can give it to the police and
they can yell at the bums down there.

It is possible that adults in the community are not aware of the effect that these two

places have had on the children's feelings of safety. However, if children were consulted

in community initiatives, these issues could be something that adults in the community

could collaborate with children to problem-solve.

The children's extensive discussion of the informal places in their community

provides an obvious starting point for their involvement in community decision-making.

The children not only appreciated these places, but were also able to identify possible

areas of change. It was obvious from the group discussion that the participants spent a lot

of their recreational and social time in informal community places, either alone or with

family and friends, and therefore they had an intimate knowledge of what resources were

available to them and what aspects they did not appreciate. Since many of these

resources, such as the Bennetto Community Centre, are often used more by children than

adults, it seems logical that the input of children would be vital in any decision-making

processes concerning these locations and a starting point for involving children in other

aspects of community decision-making.

<u>Formal Places</u>

Overall, the number of informal places that the participants found important was much greater than the number of formal places they highlighted, although two formal places were outlined by several group members in various sessions.

The two formal places highlighted by many of the participants were school and church. The group members attended two schools, Bennetto and St. Lawrence, and although some of the children felt that school was "boring," they still thought that it was an important part of their community. Furthermore, the group members attended a variety of churches in the community. Some of the children attended after school programs at a church, while others attended weekly services. It was very apparent that the children enjoyed the after school programs offered by the churches in the area and one child suggested that the church increase the number of after school programs from one meeting a week.

i) School

Alex: I took this picture since it's our school.

Sarah: This is my school.

Kevin: This is where I go to learn new things.

ii) Church

Researcher: What would you change about your community?
David: More churches.
Researcher: Why is that?
David: So we could go to church more, church everyday after school

Researcher: What kind of things do you do in your community?
Leslie: Um....At the school yard, I live very close to there, we
        can like go to the church.

Researcher: I want to talk about some of the important places you go.
             Some of the places that are in your neighbourhood that you
             go to.
Kevin: Go to church.
David: Church that we go to here
Sarah: There is one (church) right beside my school
David: Right here!

Manpreet: This is a picture of my church because I go to it
every Sunday.

Emily: I took this picture because my friend goes to the
Church of St. Luke, and she moved, but she used
to go there.

It is important to note that the two formal settings outlined by the group participants

are places in which children and adults regularly interact, and therefore these venues may

be a logical starting point for children's participation in community decision-making.

This participation could start with children being able to participate in the decision-

making of the schools and churches themselves, and then expand to participation in the

community. However, in order for children to participate in the community, adults

within these institutions must also participate in the community, since in order to be

influential children's participation must be supported by adult participation (Children's Rights and Habitat, 1997).

<u>Family and Friends</u>

Another possible starting point to encourage child participation is by recognizing the important role that friends and family play in the life of a child. Several of the places in the neighbourhood that children identified as important were homes of friends and family, or places they had previously lived. These were spaces where the children could visit, spend time with family and friends and enjoy activities together. These insights highlighted some of the close-knit aspects of the community atmosphere in the North End and were an important reminder that children are often closely connected to adults in the community whether they are parents, guardians, or friends. Therefore, in order to effectively incorporate children in community organizing efforts these adults must be involved in the process, since they are often looking out for the best interest of the child. For example, when recruiting participants for this study only one parent called me after seeing my advertisement in the local newspaper and at the request of her daughter who I had spoken to at the Breakfast Club. The remaining parents only agreed to consent to their child's participation after I had initiated a conversation with them on the phone or in person. It was very important to parents to know and trust me and to understand the details concerning my project before they agreed to allow their children to participate. Therefore, the involvement of children in community organizing must be seen as intrinsically linked to the people and places they are connected to in the community. Moreover, the involvement of children in community organizing may also encourage

74

adults to become involved in issues concerning their community. The participation of adults in community organizing could help foster the participation of children in community organizing and into areas of decision-making where they had previously been excluded.

Politics, Money and Children Don't Mix...or Do They?

Two areas of society which are usually not associated with children are money and politics. Despite this perception, both money and politics were issues raised and discussed by the children in the focus groups. When discussing possible changes they would make to their community many of the children raised and discussed money related ideas. Contrary to neo-liberal ideologies which value individuality and profit-making, the children focussed on using money to provide for the community. The generosity and benevolence of the children was accompanied by tangible ideas about how this money could be obtained and how it could be given to the community.

Although some of their ideas may seem improbable, the underlying premise of their ideas is very plausible. For example, when discussing changes they would make in their community, two participants constructed an elaborate amusement park out of play dough. When asked why their community needed an amusement park, their answer was not self-focussed, but instead one participant replied, "they could make a lot of money and use the money for things useful, like hospitals and stuff." Although the children would enjoy having an amusement park in their neighbourhood, which is a self-focussed benefit, they were able to see their own needs in a larger context of community needs and economics. The participants created a plan to meet multiple levels of needs, including

their own needs (having an amusement park in their community), and the needs of their community (using amusement park revenues to provide community resources). Clearly this participant did not buy into the dominant neo-liberal ideology of individual profit like many adults do, but instead suggested that profit making could be used as a way to provide for the community (Knutilla & Kubik, 2000). Furthermore, although building an amusement park in the North End of Hamilton is not very plausible, the underlying idea to establish something in the community that all ages could enjoy and to use its profits to help finance community resources is possible. In order to turn these ideas into concrete solutions, adults must partner with children and help shape these ideas into realistic goals and objectives. However, in order to achieve a partnership, adults must first recognize the value and feasibility of children's perspectives.

Furthermore, another group member echoed this sentiment when she suggested that a change she would like to see in her community is that "if people are poor you can ask them what they need and you could buy it for them." Contrary to many government policies which decide what people need, this child realized that many times people know what they need and they must be asked in order to provide what is best for them. Another group member gave a more specific example of how children could be involved in providing for community resources stating that, "kids can have garage sales and stuff in the summer. They can sell juice and pop and they can make money for the Breakfast Club." The children not only offered ideas concerning financial improvement of their community, but their ideas directly countered the dominant ideology and offered viable

alternate solutions. Some people may call this a child's idealism, but the ideals of these children may be the start of a new realism.

In addition to their ideas regarding money and their community, the group members also discussed the importance of listening to children in decision-making processes. The group sessions took place during the time of the Ontario provincial election. This coincidence provided new insights into what children know and how they think about politics. Some of the older children in the groups had been discussing the election at school, and therefore knew some of the parties' political platforms. Other children knew about the election through their parents or friends. Certain participants even knew who they wanted to win the election:

Manpreet: David Christopherson, the one that we want to win
           the election.
Researcher: Who's we?
Manpreet: Me and my family.
Researcher: Why do you want him to win?
Manpreet: Because his ideas are mostly what my parents want.

Other children were more concerned about whether people chose to show who they were voting for and they admired those who did express this choice. Many adults feel that one's political choice is a private matter, however these children felt that it was important to publicly show one's political support.

Joy: I took this picture because they don't have it on the ground and their still voting for the person that they're voting for.

Emily: I did this because they actually put their signs up about voting and they had the courage to let everyone know.

Children often know more about political issues than many adults would assume. Often adults become frustrated because they do not feel that their political voice is being heard. Similarly it is important to hear the voice of children concerning political issues both

locally, provincially and federally so that "resources and initiatives meet the real and not simply the perceived needs of children" (Elsley, 2004, p.163). As other studies have shown this also means that children must be involved in various political matters, not only in matters that are seen as related to children (Elsley, 2004). Children must be listened to in "all matters affecting the child," and it is clear from the various issues the children raised, that they feel that they are affected by many aspects of community life (Ottawa, 1991, p.6). The children in the focus groups clearly saw the need for their involvement and consultation in community organization and decision-making, and felt that they could contribute to this process in various ways. The participants thought that they could "help out" and that "adults should ask kids what they think so that adults can get ideas from kids." Moreover, group members were confident that their perspectives and ideas could be very useful to adults.

> Leslie: Adults ideas are boring and kids ideas are fun
> and exciting....ya, because if everybody just asked
> adults then it would be pretty boring

> Victor: Sometimes kids....have good ideas.

One participant gave a concrete example in order to explain how kids could benefit community decision-making processes,

> Emily: If they make changes in the park without asking kids,
> but kids like that stuff they should have asked them.

Although adults may not see the role of children in politics, and more specifically community organizing and decision-making, children definitely see a place where they can contribute in these processes. They do not assume that they have all the answers or that they should do things alone, but they believe that they have something to offer to

adults that will help benefit their community. Although children realize that they have their own unique knowledge and experiences, adults do not always recognize neither this knowledge nor the benefits it could bring to the community (Lansdown, 2001). Children's voices can only be heard if adults recognize this knowledge and its legitimacy and help children to empower themselves and authentically participate in community organizing.

And A Child Shall Lead Them: Listening to Children in Order to Discover How to Help Them Participate.

The purpose of this project was to explore how children view their community and what they identify as community issues. During the group sessions the group participants described some aspects of their community that they value, as well as, areas of possible change. The participants discussed issues such as the environment, important areas in their neighbourhood, politics and money. In addition to this purpose the project asked two important questions; should children be involved in community organizing and if yes, how does one effectively involve them in this process? The findings from the focus groups not only provided insights into children's views of and concerns about their community, but it also provided some plausible answers to these two questions.

First, in their discussions about various aspects of their community such as pollution, community resources, and green space, the children in the groups dialogued about the effect that these areas had on their lives. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children should be heard in all matters affecting them (Ottawa, 1991). Therefore, in order to uphold the principles asserted by Article 12, children must be included in decision-making processes in these areas, since the

participants have clearly articulated the effect that these decisions have on their personal well-being, as well as, the well-being of their community.

Second, the group participants demonstrated that although some of their experiences in the community are similar to adults, many times children experience their community in a different way. Therefore, the unique experience and knowledge of children adds a different dimension to community organizing that is not present when children are excluded from this process. For example, children in the North End community use resources such as parks, the Bennetto Community centre and schools more than adults. In order to fully understand the issues surrounding a specific decision or community organizing endeavour, the input of children concerning these areas is essential in order to have a full understanding of the benefits of these resources, as well as, possible areas for change. Moreover, children's perspectives can provide an alternate outlook to the one proposed by the dominant ideology. For instance, children often see changes in their community, not as an individual responsibility, but as a community responsibility to care for their environment and for each other. Although children's imaginations may offer solutions or ideas that are unachievable, they can also offer possible avenues of change that are outside of societal ideals adhered to by most adults. Thus, the perspectives of children provide useful knowledge and ideas that can help to guide communities toward possible areas of change and outcomes that have not been previously considered by adults.

Third, the group members themselves saw the importance of involving children in community decisions because they felt they could provide different ideas and assist in

certain community organizing endeavours (such as raising funds through a garage sale). The group members viewed their participation in community organizing as something that would be in the best interest of children because they would be able to contribute to decisions affecting them. They also felt that their ideas would be beneficial to the community, since their ideas may be different than those offered by adults.

Although the findings support the involvement of children in community organizing, the question still remains; how does one effectively involve children in this process? The findings from the group session proposed several starting points for this involvement. For instance, children could be initially involved in community organizing in matters that are inarguably linked to them, such as issues involving playground changes. Moreover, the involvement of children in community organizing could also be initiated through formal institutions which can support the cooperative participation of both adults and children, such as school and church settings. Finally, it is also important to recognize that children are often closely connected to family and friends, and therefore in order to incorporate children into community organizing endeavours, it may also be helpful to involve those who are responsibly for the well-being of the child.

In addition to these starting points, the group sessions demonstrated concrete ways in which to engage children in dialogues about their community. For instance, children dialogue through self-orientated stories and experiences, and this form of communication must be recognized in order for children to effectively participate in community organizing. Furthermore, children were given the opportunity to communicate through various mediums of their choice. This helped to generate new

ideas and allowed them to further express their perspective. If children are given various opportunities to express themselves, then it is more likely that their views will be heard. Moreover, if their views are heard then it is more likely that they will be acted upon, which will lessen the possibility that their participation will be tokenistic.

The implications of these findings describe the view that the participants have of their community, as well as, areas of concern. Furthermore, these findings support the idea that children should be involved in community organizing as outlined by the CRC and provide possible ways in which to foster this involvement. It is important to mention that when considering these findings one must recognize that this project was conducted from a Western perspective in an urban community, and therefore these findings cannot be applied in all cultural and economic contexts. However, these findings do indicate that children have unique ideas and perspectives that can be useful in community organizing and decision-making. Therefore, the involvement of children in these processes is necessary, but may take on various forms depending on the community context. In order for this to take place, however, adults must recognize the importance of involving children in community organizing and decision-making and begin to navigate how this involvement can be best carried out in their community context. If this process does not start, children's perspectives and experiences will not be recognized and their voices will continue to be silenced within their community. This silence not only hinders children from sharing their perspectives, but it also inhibits adults from accessing the benefits that the perspectives of children can have for their community.

Chapter 5
Conclusions and Future Directions

The involvement of children in community organizing and decision-making is a relatively new concept that is continuing to be explored. Adults have previously dominated these areas, and therefore the participation of children must be carefully considered so that their involvement is not tokenistic and is in the best interest of the child and the community. This project has shown the importance of engaging children in this process, and has highlighted some ways one can effectively do so. When viewing these findings, however, one must also consider their limitations, as well as, the future developments that could evolve from this area of research. Through examining both the limitations of the research and possible future directions, one is able to place this project in the larger context of involving children in organizing and decision-making, not only in one community, but in communities throughout the world, concerning multiple issues that affect children's lives everyday.

Limitations

Although this research provides several insights into the involvement of children in community organizing and decision-making, the limitations in the scope and depth of this research must be acknowledged. First, this research project took place in a Canadian urban neighbourhood. Therefore, its findings cannot be directly associated with other cultural contexts or rural communities. This project may provide some direction in working with children in these various contexts, but the involvement of children in

community organizing must be constructed so that it is respectful of its contextual surroundings.

Second, although there was diversity in the sample of participants who took part in the focus groups, this diversity did not reflect the entire North End population. There are people from many cultural backgrounds who reside in the North End, but all of these cultures were not represented in the focus group samples. The flyers and posters advertising the focus groups were distributed widely throughout the community in the community newspaper and at various community facilities. Moreover, children from various cultures and backgrounds were invited to join the groups by the researcher through the Breakfast Club and the church after school club. Some of the children were not interested in participating and some parents of children who were interested chose not to consent to their child's participation. In future, it may be helpful to brainstorm ways in which a larger diversity of children can be encouraged to be involved in community organizing initiatives.

Third, the research project focussed on exploring children's views of their communities and assessing if and how children should be involved in community organizing initiatives. The purpose of the project is to research the involvement of children in community organizing, and therefore its findings have not been applied in a true community organizing context. Although the project itself contains some elements of community organizing, since many local service providers have asked to be informed of the findings, and the participants helped to construct a list of issues they want adults in their community to be aware of, its primary purpose was research not community

organizing. Therefore, in order to view whether these findings concerning the involvement of children in community organizing are attainable, community leaders must support initiatives to involve children in future community organizing efforts.

Future Directions

There are many possible future developments in the involvement of children in community organizing and decision-making both in terms of research initiatives and community organizing itself. Overall, the goal of both these areas must be to uphold the principles of Article 12 of the CRC and increase the involvement of children in decision-making processes which affect their lives.

One way to increase the involvement of children in decision-making processes is through the support of adults. In the future, it is imperative that community leaders and professionals who work with children such as teachers, social workers, and medical professionals, take initiative in engaging children in decision-making processes. Moreover, these adults must advocate the recognition of children's views in various community decision-making processes. In order for children's views to be heard, adults must provide a place for them to voice their views, in which their forms of expression are acknowledged and legitimized.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that this involvement is authentic and that it coincides with community and cultural values, research must be conducted in collaboration with community leaders and members. Community leaders and members can work in conjunction with children to develop a way in which they can effectively participate in their community, while continuing to respect cultural values. For example,

in some cultures drawing is considered to be a leisure activity that has no merit, and therefore this medium of communication would not be useful for the children or adults in this cultural context. In order for a community to support the involvement of children in decision-making and organizing efforts, it is imperative that their voice is heard when deciding how best to incorporate their participation.

If adults and children are able to participate together at the community level, this cooperation may provide the foundation for the authentic involvement of children in decision-making processes at multiple levels such as local government or even national and international levels. In order for this to take place, however children must first effectively participate at the community level. Moreover, government leaders must acknowledge the importance of allowing community leaders and members to negotiate how best to involve children in community organizing, instead of imposing their own agenda. If communities are able to effectively engage children in community organizing in a way which is respectful of their culture and allows children's voices to be authentically heard, then perhaps the Convention on the Rights of the Child will begin to become a reality at the community level.

It is often said that children are "the future" and "the world of tomorrow." Unfortunately, these ideas negate the reality that children are "the present" and "the world of today." Children not only have the right to be heard in decision-making processes that affect them because it is outlined in the Convention, they have this right because they are affected by these issues and they have something to say about them. Just like adults, children's ideas may not always be right, but they deserve the

opportunity to express their views and concerns. If the voices of children are ignored, changes will continue to be made by adults and most people will never realize their silence. However, if their voices are allowed to be heard, perhaps they will lead us to a better understanding of what our communities need.

Appendix A
Demographics Questionnaire

● To be filled out by parent/guardian and child with the researcher after they have signed the consent form. Parent will fill out the questionnaire and will be encouraged to include the child in filling out the questionnaire, as the parent feels comfortable.

Demographics Questionnaire

Researcher will complete the following:

• Assure the participant and their parent/guardian that all information collected in this questionnaire will be held in the strictest confidence, will not be shared with anyone and will be reported anonymously in the final research product.
(Check when completed).

• Inform the participant and their parent/guardian that they can choose not to answer any of the following questions and can still take part in the research.
(Check when completed).

Ask the following questions of the parent and child:

1. How old are you?

2. How do you describe your gender?

3. What school do you go to?

4. How do you describe your race or ethnicity?

5. What street do you live on?

6. What is your approximate annual family income? (Circle one).

    a) less than $20 000   d) $60 000 - $80 000
    b) $20 000 - $40 000   e) $80 000 - $ 100 000
    c) $40 000- $60 000   f) more than $ 100 000

7. What community resources do you use in the North End Community? (i.e. School, health services, clubs, etc...)

8. Do you consider the North End a Community? _____. What community do you see yourself as part of?

Appendix B
Church Announcement Notice/Community Agency Poster

Attention Parents and Children

Is your child between 5 – 10 Years old?
Do you live in the North End or
does your child attend school in the North End?

If you answered YES to these two questions, then you may be interested in taking part in the research project
"And a Child Shall Lead Them."

The purpose of this project is to find out what children think about their communities, through a variety of FUN ACTIVITIES such as artwork, creative writing, photography, and group discussion.
Snack will also be provided.

Children will talk about things like what their favourite part is about their neighborhood or what they may want to change or add to their neighborhood.

Children will be taking part in 4 focus groups during May and June.
The focus groups will be approximately 1 ½ hours and will take place at
Hughson St. Baptist Church.

Individual interviews will be conducted on a volunteer basis with the consent of parents.
This will be a chance for kids to talk about what they think, meet new people, and take part in some fun activities.

This project is being conducted through McMaster University with the support of the Research Ethics Board.
For more information or to sign up please call or e-mail
Melissa Brodie
@ 905-xxx-xxxx, xxxx@mcmaster.ca

Appendix C
Community Newspaper Notice

Children and Their Neighborhood

A research project about what children think about their neighbourhood is being conducted during the months of May and June.
4 Group sessions will be conducted for children *between 5 and 10 years old*.
In order to participate children must *live or go to school* in the North End.
The purpose of this project is to find out what children think about their communities, through a variety of **fun activities** such as artwork, creative writing, photography, and group discussion.
Group sessions will be 1 ½ hours and will be held at Hughson St. Baptist Church.
This project is being conducted through McMaster University with the support of the Research Ethics Board.

For more information or to sign up please call or e-mail Melissa Brodie
@ 905-xxx-xxxx, xxxx@mcmaster.ca

Appendix D
Flyer for Distribution

KIDS

Are you 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 years old?

Do you live or go to school in the North End of Hamilton?

If so your help is needed!!!

I am looking for kids who want to take part in the research project:
And a Child Shall Lead Them:
What Children Have To Say About Their Community.

We will have about 4 group meetings where we will talk, do artwork, photography, and other games and activities. There will also be individual interviews. This will be a chance for kids to say what they think about their neighbourhood. A snack will also be provided.

All group meetings will be held at Hughson St. Baptist Church (383 Hughson St. North).
If you think this sounds like fun then talk to your parent(s) and
contact Melissa Brodie (A McMaster University graduate student) at 905-xxx-xxxx or xxxx@mcmaster.ca for more information.

Appendix E
Parental Information Letter and Consent for Child to Participate In Research

Thesis Title: And A Child Shall Lead Them: What Children Have to Say About Their Community.

Researcher: Research Supervisor:

Melissa Brodie   Dr. Gary Dumbrill
Graduate Student   Assistant Professor
School of Social Work   School of Social Work
McMaster University   McMaster University
Hamilton, ON, L8S 4M4   Hamilton, ON, L8S 4M4
905-xxx-xxxx   905-525-9140 ext. 23791

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research project is to examine the views of children regarding their community, since children are often not included in community organizing and decision-making. Instead of asking parents or other adults what would be best for children in the community, this project seeks to discover children's perspectives.

Procedures:

The researcher will be asking parents some demographic information regarding their involvement in the community, their approximate income, and their cultural background. Parents can choose not to answer any of the questions on this form. The purpose of the form is to help the researcher determine whether the children that are attending the group are from a diversity of backgrounds, so that more than one perspective is represented in the study. Parents are encouraged to include their children in answering these questions as much as they feel comfortable. If do not have to be included in this process. All information on this demographic survey will be anonymous and strictly confidential.

The researcher will meet with children in groups and in one-on-one interviews. Individual interviews will only be conducted if the child volunteers to participate and the parent consents to their participation. In order to learn more about the child's perspective we will play games, do artwork, photography, and other activities to help kids talk about what they think about their community. There will always be a snack provided at the group meetings and interviews.

There will be about four group meetings and we will meet for an hour and a half at Hughson St. Baptist Church. Individual interviews will be set-up at a time that is good for the researcher and the participant and will be one hour long. All of the group meetings and individual interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder. The meetings are recorded, so that the researcher is able to provide an accurate account of what the children have shared. Written transcripts will be produced from these recordings.

Some of the questions we will be addressing include:

-What things do you like about your neighbourhood?
-What things do you not like about your neighbourhood?
-If you could change something about your neighbourhood what would it be?
-Where do you go to have fun in your neighbourhood?
-If you could add something to your neighbourhood what would it be?
-What kind of things do you do with your family in your neighbourhood?
-Where are your favourite places to go in your neighbourhood?

The researcher will talk to all the participants about what they said and the group will discuss some of the researcher's interpretations in order to determine what will be included in the final research product. The final research product will include what the children have shared verbally, as well as, artwork and photography produced by the children. The group will also make a list of some of the things we have discussed and decide what things the group wants to share with the adults in the community, such as parents and community agencies.

Potential Risks:

Children may be afraid or embarrassed to talk about things in a group. Kids might also be worried about what other kids think or if they will tell other people what they have said. Children will be informed that no one has to share anything they do not want to.

Potential Benefits:

Children will have a place to talk about they think about their community. Anything that children choose to share with the group will be listened to and valued.

We will make a list of things that the group has talked about to give to adults in the community to help them know what children think. This might contribute to the community by helping adults to make better decisions regarding the perspectives of children, as well as, helping them to see the usefulness of including children the views of children in their decision-making processes.

This could also help adults who work with children to know how to help kids talk about their community.

Confidentiality:

Anything that you share on the demographic survey or your child shares in the group meeting or interview will be held in the strictest confidence and will not be shared with anyone. Any verbal information or artwork the children have contributed to the research project will be completely anonymous, therefore their names will not be identified in the final research product.

All the audiotapes will be locked in a cabinet at McMaster University or in the researcher's home. Children will be given the option of having their artwork returned to them by mail. Tapes will be destroyed after two years and transcripts and any artwork that children have stated they do not

wish to have returned to them will be destroyed after ten years. The audiotapes, transcripts and artwork will not have the names of the participants written on them and will not identify the participants in anyway.

The only time the researcher will inform an adult what the child has shared is if the child has been hurt by someone or is in danger, or if another child has been hurt or is in danger. In these circumstances the researcher may have to tell the child's parents and/or the Children's Aid Society.

Participation and Withdrawal:

It is the child's choice, with the consent of his/her parent(s), to be part of the study. If the child does not want to answer a question, they do not have to, but can still be in the study. It is always the child's choice whether they want to stay in the project or not. If the child decides to leave the study there will be no consequences. The child can also choose to stay in the group and not be a part of the research process.

Rights of Research Participant:

You do not waive any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB).

You can ask Melissa Brodie (905-xxx-xxxx and xxxxx@mcmaster.ca) any questions about the project.

Any questions about the rights of the research participants can be directed to:

MREB Secretariat 905-525-9040 ext. 23142
McMaster University srebsec@mcmaster.ca
1280 Main Street West, GH306
Hamilton, ON L8S 4Lg

I have read and understand the content of this letter. I have also received a copy of this letter.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date:_____

Appendix F
Participant Information Letter and Assent to Participate in Research

Thesis Title:
And A Child Shall Lead Them: What Children Have to Say About their Community.

Researcher:	**Research Supervisor:**
Melissa Brodie	**Dr. Gary Dumbrill**
Graduate Student	Assistant Professor
School of Social Work	School of Social Work
McMaster University	McMaster University
Hamilton, ON, L8S 4M4	Hamilton, ON, L8S 4M4
905-xxx-xxxx	905-525-9140 ext. 23791

Why are we doing this Project?:

The purpose of this research project is to find out what kids like and think could be better about their community (neighbourhood). Instead of asking parents or other adults what would be best for children in the community, this project wants to know what kids have to say.

What Are We Going to Do?:

The researcher will meet with children in groups and in one-on-one interviews. We will play games, do artwork, photography, and other activities to help kids talk about what they think about their community. There will always be a snack at the group meetings and interviews. There will be about four group meetings and we will meet for an hour and a half at Hughson St. Baptist Church.   Individual interviews will be set-up at a time that is good for the researcher and the participant and will be one hour long. All of the group meetings and individual interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder, so that the researcher does not miss what anybody has to say. The researcher will listen to them and write down what everyone said and did.

We are going to talk about things such as:

-What things do you like about your neighbourhood?
-What things do you not like about your neighbourhood?
-If you could change something about your neighbourhood what would it be?
-Where do you go to have fun in your neighbourhood?
-If you could add something to your neighbourhood what would it be?
-What kind of things do you do with your family in your neighbourhood?
-Where are your favourite places to go in your neighbourhood ?

The researcher will then talk to all the participants about what they said and we will talk about what the researcher is going to write down about what everyone has shared and what artwork and photography produced by the children will be included in the final research product. As a group

we will also make a list of some of the things we have talked about and decide what things the group wants to share with the adults in the community about what they think is good about the community and what they think should change.

What things might be bad about participating? :

Sometimes when people talk about things in a group they may be afraid or embarrassed. Kids might also be worried about what other kids think or if they will tell other people what they have said. Remember, no one has to share anything they do not want to.

What good things could happen if I participate? :

You will have a place to talk about what you think about your community. Anything you have to share with the group will be listened to and valued.

We will make a list of things that the group has talked about to give to adults in the community to help them know what children think. This might help them make decisions that are good for kids and to help them see the importance in finding out what kids think.

This could also help adults who work with kids to know how to help kids talk about their community.

Who is going to know what I say? :

Anything you say in the group meeting or interview will not be told to anyone and will be held in the strictest confidence. When the researcher writes what you said in their project they will not write down your name, so people will not know who said it.

All the audiotapes will be locked in a cabinet at McMaster or in the researcher's home. Tapes will be destroyed after two years and transcripts (when the researcher writes down what the tapes say) and any art work that is included in the final product will be destroyed after ten years, but they will not have the names of the participants written on them and will not identify the participants in anyway.

The only time the researcher will tell an adult what you have said is if you have been hurt by someone or are in danger, or if another child has been hurt or is in danger. The researcher may have to tell your parents and/or the Children's Aid Society because that is the law.

What if I change my mind about participating in the study? :

It is your choice to be part of the study. If you do not want to answer a question, you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. It is always your choice whether you want to stay in the project or not. If you decide to leave the study there will be no consequences. You can choose to stay in the group and not be a part of the research process.

Who says this is a safe project to participate in?:

You do not waive any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). That means that a group of people whose job is to decide if research will hurt anybody, have said that this research project is safe for kids to be a part of.

You can ask Melissa Brodie (905-xxx-xxxx) any questions about the project. Any questions about the rights of the research participants can be directed to:

MREB Secretariat   **905-525-9040 ext. 23142**
McMaster University   **srebsec@mcmaster.ca**
1280 Main Street West, GH306
Hamilton, ON L8S 4Lg

I have read and understand the content of this letter. I have also received a copy of this letter.

Signature of Participant: _____   **Date:** _____

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