Making Cities Better
PartNershiPs For better Cities

As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. And as Susannah Bunce and Malcolm Campbell are proving, it takes a village to raise a neighbourhood out of decline.

Bunce and Campbell are both researchers at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) — she’s a professor in the Department of Human Geography’s City Studies Program and he’s a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences as well as UTSC’s vice-principal, research. They, along with others, are among the leaders of a project to renew and reinvigorate the Kingston Galloway/Orton Park (KGO) region in Scarborough. One of 13 “priority neighbourhoods” across Toronto, KGO is facing many complex and vitality-draining challenges of modern urban life, including poverty and the widespread decampment of residents and businesses.

As KGO fights the deterioration of its physical and social infrastructure, Bunce and Campbell have launched a partnership between UTSC and the community group East Scarborough Storefront (ESS) to build on existing community revitalization efforts. The overall goal of the partnership: to strengthen the KGO neighbourhood, improve residents’ quality of life and create a sense of belonging in the community.

“We want people to see KGO as home, not just a transient space,” says Bunce.

On that note, the UTSC-ESS collaboration, which has received funding from the United Way and the Galin Foundation, has spurred a number of progressive initiatives for KGO community members, including several educational and recreational programs. Additionally, through hands-on learning and volunteer work with local charities and service agencies, UTSC students are gaining a nuanced view of everyday realities in underserved neighbourhoods. From these, students’ resulting feelings of engagement and compassion are serving them well as they conduct research on issues of importance to community residents and organizations, including housing, public transit and green space.

“This is about more than giving back. It’s about understanding communities,” says Bunce. Indeed, with support from CERIS/The Ontario Metropolis Centre, she has studied housing and newcomer settlement issues within KGO.

It’s not just the local community, however, that benefits from the myriad programs, activities and research initiatives of the UTSC-ESS partnership, says Campbell. The relationship not only enables the university as a whole to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to the surrounding community, but it will also help lessons learned locally to be applied in future partnerships with other communities across the city, country and world.

“Collaborating hand-in-hand with our neighbourhood partners, we conduct the research and create the social innovations that positively transform communities,” says Campbell.
Planning around pollution
Greg Evans and Roberto Guardiani are improving air quality in Toronto and São Paulo by Andy Torr

Greg Evans and Roberto Guardiani may be separated by more than 8,000 kilometres, but that hasn’t stopped them from pursuing an ambitious collaboration to improve the air quality in their home cities of Toronto and São Paulo, Brazil.

Few people mention these cities in the same breath, and for good reason — they have little in common in the way of geography, population demographics and size. But by celebrating those differences, Evans and Guardiani hope to clear the air at home and abroad.

“The ultimate goal is to develop a set of tools, measurement techniques and methods for data mining and analysis that can be transferred and scaled to mega-cities around the world,” says Evans, a professor of chemical engineering and applied chemistry, and director of the Southern Ontario Centre for Atmospheric Aerosol Research (SOCAAR).

“A native Torontonian, Evans studies the air we breathe, tracking pollution from major city streets as it spreads through urban neighbourhoods and into backyards and homes. The air quality data he collects could help city planners to determine, among other things, where best to position schools, retirement homes and hospitals,” says Evans. “How does air pollution vary in neighbourhoods across the city? How does air quality in Toronto compare with, say, Windsor? And how can we monitor and protect vulnerable members of our communities, such as lung transplant patients?”

Encouraged by U of T’s recent partnership with Universidade de São Paulo, Evans reached out to Guardiani to propose a collaboration that would benefit both cities.

Evans believes much can be accomplished by exchanging knowledge and sharing facilities with researchers from other parts of the world. “Our facilities here at SOCAAR rival the best air quality labs in the world, and our combination of on-site equipment with mobile and field instruments is a huge draw for collaborators and students from a wide array of disciplines,” he says. “There are also some excellent research facilities, both at São Paulo’s university and its hospital, that can serve as platforms for collaboration.”

Returning from an exploratory trip to Brazil, Evans is excited about the nascent collaboration. “The trip was really useful. We established relationships with talented researchers from São Paulo and made new connections with colleagues here at U of T and our affiliated hospitals. After exchanging presentations, we identified opportunities to integrate air quality and cardiac health that we believe will evolve into exciting collaborative research studies.”

The University of Toronto’s work in examining the urban experience is stronger than ever before. Last year, U of T announced its participation as a lead university in the Southern Ontario Smart Computing Innovation Platform, a collaboration of seven universities, IBM, and the Governments of Canada and Ontario. One of the project’s priorities is cities. The supercomputing power at the heart of SOSCIP will enable researchers to harness the big data associated with cities to tackle urban challenges such as aging infrastructure and rapid urban growth.

And U of T is the only Canadian university in an important new partnership called the Centre for Urban Science and Progress (CUSP). Led by New York University and the Polytechnic Institute of New York University, CUSP will focus on research and technologies related to the challenges facing the world’s cities, such as energy efficiency, public health and transportation congestion.

These are only two examples of the expertise U of T is devoting to research and scholarship on cities. This issue of Edge offers even more. Of note is our feature Profile: Making Cities Better. We know, all too well, the problems cities are facing. In this issue, we have asked 15 professors to tell us how we can transform cities so they work better for people. And, as is so often the case with a societal problem, our experts show us how we need a multitude of perspectives to create the cities we want.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Professor R. Paul Young, PhD, FRSC
Vice President, Research and Innovation

Cities demand examination from many angles
PROFESSORA PAUL YOUNG

This issue of Edge is about cities. Many of us understand cities because more Canadians than ever before are living in them. On a visceral level, we experience both the problems and pleasures of urban life. But cities have an impact at more than just the individual level. We’re starting to understand that as our cities go, so does our nature. As engines of an increasingly-competitive global economy, we rely on our cities to help us win talented labour. Cities present us with a multitude of challenges — and opportunities.
Money can’t buy happiness. But it can buy libraries, garbage collection and parks.

The question is, how? Municipal finance is about the services cities deliver — fire, police, parks, libraries, water, public health — and the ways they pay for them. This can include property taxes, user fees, transfers from other levels of government and development charges.

Enid Slack, director of the Institute for Municipal Finance and Governance (IMFG) at U of T’s Munk School of Global Affairs, has made a career delving into the fiscal health of cities, which she defines as more than just whether cities balance their budgets.

“At the IMFG,” Slack says, “we look at cities’ needs, not just what they’re actually spending. Needs are a function of demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, age of infrastructure and geography. Needs have to be balanced against cities’ ability to raise revenues — not the taxes cities actually levy but their ability to levy taxes or collect fees. This is a function of the wealth of the community.”

Slack and colleagues have conducted dozens of studies on everything from whether Toronto’s 1998 amalgamation saved costs (no) to whether there are economies of scale in providing police and fire services (yes, but only until cities hit 50,000 people).

Cities, says Slack, are increasingly important to national economies. “It’s become commonplace to say that cities are the engines of the economy, but they are.” Cities have to compete globally for talented — and mobile — labour, and so they must offer services. Toronto, she says by way of example, “not only has to provide basic services like sewer and water, it also has to provide good parks and cultural facilities. To thrive, Toronto has to be a place where people want to live.”

How do we pay for libraries and police?

Enid Slack says strong nations need well-financed cities by Jenny Hall

One of Slack’s primary research interests is the property tax, which she calls “the tax everyone loves to hate.”

“For most people, income taxes are withheld at source. If you ask someone what they paid in income taxes last year, they probably don’t know. With sales tax, people know what they pay on each item, but nobody can possibly know how much sales tax they pay in a year. But if you ask how much they paid in property taxes, people know. Because they get a bill for it, it’s a visible tax, even though it might be much smaller than the other taxes they pay.”

At the same time, she points out, municipal services are also visible. You get up, take a shower, take transit or drive on streets to get to work, perhaps eat lunch in a park.

“The services are visible, the tax is visible. I think that’s great. It makes local governments accountable. But it also makes it a difficult tax to increase or reform.”

In addition to conducting evidence-based research, hosting events and providing advice to policymakers, Slack hopes the IMFG is changing the way students think about the cities they live in.

“Like the rest of us, many of them are uncomfortable with numbers. But, she says, the numbers are what it’s all about.

“We want better transit — that’s a classic example. To think we can get it without paying for it is naïve. At the end of the day, we can talk about better transportation, we can talk about more affordable housing, we can talk about more police services. But we have to find a way to pay for them.”
Toronto’s tree-lined streets are getting a makeover. Contractors replace windows and sagging porches. Real estate signs dot elegant gardens. Gentrification makes the city a better place to live.

Or does it?

“Canadian cities are growing more unequal,” says Alan Walks, an associate professor in the University of Toronto Mississauga’s Department of Geography. “Over the last 50 years, a series of working-class neighbourhoods has been redeveloped for higher-income residents, and in recent times at quite rapid speeds.”

In the traditional model of gentrification, which Toronto experienced from the late 1960s through the 1980s, working-class areas are first colonized by artists, who provide the cachet that attracts tenure conversion and eventually high-income purchasers. The original inhabitants are displaced.

More recently, Walks says, gentrification has become so well established that almost any area in the inner city is fair game for speculators and higher-income individuals. The process is fueled by easy credit, which in the 2000s was driven by low interest rates and government mortgage policies.

Walks points out that gentrification involves distinct winners and losers. Municipalities encourage gentrification because it increases tax revenue. Speculators make money. Those with higher incomes have pleasant, accessible places to live. Gentrifying neighbourhoods enjoy ever better services and more diverse retail.

That’s the winning side. Gentrification also means younger families take on higher debt to afford a house, and become involved in bidding wars that further drive-up prices. Those with lower incomes find themselves priced out of inner cities entirely and compelled to live in cheaper neighbourhoods with poor transit. These newly displaced citizens can experience isolation, difficulty accessing employment and services and a lowered quality of life.

“There’s a social justice issue here,” says Walks. “Who deserves to live in the high-accessibility, transit-friendly, walkable neighbourhood?” he says. “It shows factors such as the movement of credit and debt from areas where debt is high to those where it is lower.”

Walks says gentrification is not inevitable. Locating heavy industry in the inner city and building more social housing are two important factors in maintaining a social mix in the city and providing poorer households fairer access to jobs, transit, and other inner city benefits.

“There is definitely an argument to be made for having a balanced mixed city, and this requires housing for low-income renters.”

**The innovative city**

David Wolfe says cities offer special opportunities for change by Mark Witten

Innovation is a social, interactive process and geography matters. Researcher David Wolfe’s studies of successful urban regions have shown how cities are the optimal sites for innovation because of the proximity and concentration of skills, knowledge, people and research capabilities. “Innovation is a contact sport and face-to-face interactions between people are often where new ideas come from. Cities offer multiple opportunities for contact, interaction and the exchange of ideas among highly skilled people,” says Wolfe, a professor of political science at U of T Mississauga and director of the Program on Globalization and Regional Innovation Systems at the Munk School of Global Affairs.

In today’s global economy, these inherent advantages make cities more important as sites for innovation — the translation of ideas and inventions into new products, processes and services that drive economic growth and prosperity. “Innovation is important for countries, economies and people because it is the source of an improved standard of living. If we can’t innovate, we’re not going to maintain or improve our standard of living,” says Wolfe.

Canada is a country of predominantly medium-sized and small cities. In his book *21st Century Cities in Canada: The Geography of Innovation*, Wolfe examined how successful large cities and medium-sized ones, like Saskatoon, have built upon and leveraged existing strengths in specific sectors to develop their innovation capacity and capitalize on emerging business opportunities.

Saskatoon built on its traditional agricultural strengths to become a centre of innovation and home to a large and fast-growing agricultural biotechnology cluster. The city developed and became the world leader in canola, now Canada’s second-largest crop.

The concentration of federal and provincial research facilities, including the National Research Council’s Plant Biotechnology Institute, and early establishment of Innovation Place, a thriving research and industry park deliberately located next to the University of Saskatchewan, enabled the city to develop its innovation capacity in a targeted and commercially viable way. Large agribusiness multinationals also moved R&D programs to Saskatoon to be close to the publicly funded infrastructure and specialized expertise.

“Saskatoon has really focused on building its research assets, and local firms have capitalized on this dynamic research infrastructure to develop commercial biotechnology applications. Much of the collaboration that happens in the city seems to be done informally through personal contacts and brief consultations,” says Wolfe, noting that it’s common for individuals in firms to turn to a knowledgeable friend or acquaintance at the University of Saskatchewan or other research facility to gain knowledge to solve a problem.

Larger cities like Toronto benefit from greater density, economic diversity and the vitality of new human capital and talent gained through international immigration. But medium-sized cities may find it easier to bring together key players in research, industry, education, civic associations and government to collaborate on, advocate for and implement new innovation and economic development policies and strategies for their community.

That social and civic engagement is key to successful innovation in cities. Says Wolfe: “People tend to think of innovation as a private activity, but there is a large social dimension too.”

**Neighbourhoods for everyone**

Alan Walks says gentrification creates a social justice issue by Lanna Crucefix

"There’s a social justice issue here: Who deserves to live in the high-accessibility, transit-friendly, walkable neighbourhood?” says Walks. "Gentrification takes those neighbourhoods away from those with fewer means, who can’t afford a car and who must rent, and hands them to the wealthy.”

To delve further into gentrification and the economic relationships between neighbourhoods, Wolfe turns to a concept he calls the “urban delirium,” which examines hidden flows of debt across space and their unequal and unequal impacts. "It’s a conceptual tool that can help explain why there is decline in one neighbourhoods and gentrification in another,” he says. “It shows factors such as the movement of credit and debt from areas where debt is high to where it is lower.”

Walks says gentrification is not inevitable. Locating heavy industry in the inner city and building more social housing are two important factors in maintaining a social mix in the city and providing poorer households fairer access to jobs, transit, and other inner city benefits.

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Did you know that Toronto is covered in green roofs?

Well, it’s covered in roofs that were once green. No one is sure if they still are. This is the problem that motivates Professor Liat Margolis of the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design.

Thanks to a 2009 bylaw that mandated green roofs for new buildings over 2,000 square metres, developers city-wide are blanketing their buildings in plants, but since the city has no power of inspection, no one knows if the roofs are thriving. Worse, no one knows if they’re doing what they’re supposed to: help with water retention and cooling in the urban jungle.

Cities, with their miles of impervious surfaces, aren’t able to absorb water when there’s a storm. They’re also hotter than the surrounding countryside. Green roofs have the potential to help with both these problems. Soil absorbs water, and plants, through the process of evapotranspiration, act as mini-air-conditioners.

Sounds great in theory, right? But the problem is it’s all theory. No one has comprehensively tested green roofs in Toronto. “Toronto has a very particular climate,” says Margolis. “We have a much bigger range between hot and cold and a lot more rainfall than most areas that have done green roof studies.”

Margolis is the director of an ambitious project situated on the roof of the Daniels building, where she and a multi-disciplinary team of professors, students and representatives from industry have constructed 33 test beds designed to hit upon the ideal recipe for optimizing green roofs in Toronto. The group is testing four variables: soil content, soil depth, amount of irrigation and type of plant.

“What you might design for Toronto,” she says, “is different from what you would design for Dallas, Texas.” And yet green roofs across North America are largely the same. For example, the dominant practice is to plant a species called Sedum. It comes in mats that are unrolled — like sod — for an instant green roof. Its drought-tolerance, says Margolis, may actually be a disadvantage when it comes to cooling. Sedum has evolved to hold onto as much water as it can, and it doesn’t evapotranspire during the day, which is exactly when the cooling effects of green roofs are needed. And because it’s a functional monoculture, made up of plants having a similar growth habit, when it’s struck by pests or disease, the whole roof dies.

By contrast, she and her team are testing a native mixture of meadow grasses and flowers that are diverse and known for their ability to release moisture into the air. The team is doing the same thing with their other variables. By testing various combinations, they hope to improve on the industry standard. How will they know they’ve succeeded? Each bed is outfitted with eight sensors that measure everything from rate of water runoff after a storm to moisture of the soil to air temperature. A weather station collects data on wind speed and direction, temperature, solar radiation and humidity. The instruments take readings every five minutes, and data are combined with field observations of the plants.

The test beds are monitored year-round to assess change over time. Armed with results from their lab in the sky, Margolis hopes the team will be able to influence the establishment of a made-in-Toronto green roof construction standard.

Margolis wants people to understand that green roofs are living systems. “It’s a mistake to think of green roofs as a one-size-fits-all product that you can cut and paste from one region to another like a tile.”

Her bigger goal is to get people asking the right questions about sustainable cities. “The problem with sustainability is that everyone thinks there’s a downloadable checklist, a quick answer for everything. But we’re talking about complex, comprehensive dynamic systems. There are no easy answers.”
“Why do cities have to be bleak, cemented, glassed-in places?”

It’s a rhetorical question, and Sandy Smith seems exasperated at having to ask it. As a professor of forestry and one of only a handful of urban foresters in Canada, she’s a tireless advocate for trees in city settings. It’s a difficult task. After all, for decades, legions of city planners and landscape architects have treated trees as mere decorations, or worse, removed trees altogether to make way for more glass and concrete, manicured lawns and decorative flowerbeds.

But those old attitudes are changing, Smith says, and she believes the urban forestry profession has come a long way since it was pioneered by U of T’s Erik Jorgensen in the early 1960s. Today, city planning bureaus around the world are making room for urban foresters, and experts like Smith are playing a key role in multidisciplinary teams of city planners, landscape architects, engineers, developers, geographers and sociologists.

“It’s not just about planting pretty flowers and grass,” Smith explains, “it’s about planting things that provide services. Urban forests combat air and water pollution, they reduce water runoff, and they provide shade and protection. We estimate the trees on U of T’s St. George campus alone generate $170,000 each year in these soft services. If you consider our heavily forested Scarborough and Mississauga campuses, that dollar amount increases significantly across the U of T system.”

This figure also doesn’t consider the biological or human benefits of trees, Smith says, noting that human brains are literally wired for trees. Studies have repeatedly shown that forests are vital for our health, finding correlations between a loss of tree canopy and a rise in cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, for example, or charting a dip in gun violence in urban areas where trees were found.

Still, urban foresters must navigate a bewildering array of considerations. What type of trees should be planted, and where? How large will they grow, and how long will they live? What services will they offer? Even a decision to plant native or non-native trees has implications: a recent study by U of T forestry graduate student Eric Davies found that native city trees contained 25 times more bird and insect activity than their non-native counterparts.

It’s this kind of science, Smith says, that ultimately helps policy-makers, planners, developers and architects to make more responsible and sustainable decisions: “We’re using what we know about the natural world to inform how we design cities.”

Sandy Smith pinpoints the value of trees in urban areas by Andy Torr

PHOTO: ROB WAYMEN

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Do you let your kids walk by themselves to school? If not, Ron Buliung of the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto Mississauga wants to know why. Buliung is a transport geographer who examines the relationship between children and cities, with a particular focus on how kids get around.

“I’m interested in children, mobility, activity and health,” he says, noting that some of the decisions adults make about children’s lives relate to the politics, design and structure of cities — from political decisions about user fees for city-run programs to the layout of our roads and decisions regarding speed limits — and are informed by their beliefs about whether children are capable of navigating the city alone.

Children, however, might have a very different way of looking at things. Consider the journey to school, something Buliung and colleagues have spent a lot of time thinking about.

Today, employment is located all over the region, and many households contain two working adults. Parents, in this context, may tend to think of the trip to school as something to get over with as quickly as possible. But when you talk to children, it turns out they consider the journey a place in and of itself. “It’s a place where children, particularly children who are walking, experience the environment in important ways,” he says. “They play games on the fly and socialize. They told us about puddles that freeze over in winter and allow them to slide across. These are moments that adults don’t think about as being important, but it’s all physical activity and learning that can have positive feedback on a child’s health.”

This study was part of the BEAT project, which Buliung works on with colleagues Guy Faulker and Caroline Fusco from U of T’s Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education.

Another study, in which the researchers partnered with Metrolinx, the Greater Toronto Area’s transportation planning body, involved working with schools and communities to increase the use of active modes of transportation — mainly walking and biking. Yet another tracked children’s activities and modes of transportation, and measured this against their height and weight.

One of the barriers working against active modes of transportation is fear of strangers. “It’s a very real fear,” says Buliung, who has young children of his own. Yet, he says, “another way to conceptualize strangers is as community. We don’t know everyone around us and so those whom we don’t know, strictly speaking, could be considered strangers as well. Yet most strangers are not interested in harming our children.”

Statistics bear this out. The RCMP reported only five true stranger abductions over a two-year period from 2000-2001. By contrast, traffic injuries are the leading cause of child death in Canada. In 2010, 61 children died and 9,000 were injured.

“The driving parent, who means well, is more likely, statistically speaking, to harm a child than are strangers,” says Buliung. Nevertheless, he notes, stranger abduction can result in a fatality and so there is a strong basis for parents to fear such events even though they are infrequent.

Most of us think of urban planning as something that changes the way the city is. While Buliung wants to influence policy so that we can make cities better for children and youth, he is also trying to influence the way we think about cities and transportation. If we can get children walking and biking early, he says, this experience might translate into a lifetime of travel choices that are good for each other, the environment, the economy and our health.

His ultimate goal? To give a voice to children. “They’re easy to forget about. Where is the voice of the child in city policy?”

Children on the move

Ron Buliung advocates for the city’s smallest citizens by Jenny Hall
When most people think about urban transportation systems, they focus on infrastructure, including streets, subways and even sidewalks. University of Toronto researcher Paul Hess, however, takes a much broader perspective.

“Transportation touches many issues,” says the geography and planning professor. “It affects our quality of life. It affects energy use and the environment. And it affects social equity — that is, who has access to transportation and who doesn’t?”

To that end, Hess studies how cities are designed and built to accommodate people’s transportation needs. In particular, he is interested in neighbourhoods’ suitability for walking as well as residents’ access to cars and public transit. For instance, in one current project he is studying how immigrants who don’t have driver’s licenses or can’t afford a car get by in the “car-dependent” outer suburbs of Brampton, Mississauga and Markham.

In another initiative, Hess is collaborating with the provincial transportation agency Metrolinx to investigate walkability in areas surrounding transit stations. Specifically, he is looking at whether pedestrians have access to safe, direct routes to public transportation hubs.

 Ease of walking in the urban environment has grown in importance during the last 20 years, says Hess. “At one point, you never heard the term ‘walkability,’ but now real estate listings feature ‘walk scores.’ That’s because walkable places are considered good places to live.”

The problem, he continues, is that walkability now divides neighbourhoods. It may be highly valued within higher-income areas of the inner downtown, but in lower-income communities of the inner suburbs — such as those in Scarborough and north Etobicoke — walking is less a lifestyle choice and more a matter of necessity, since residents have no or limited access to cars. Within these neighbourhoods, however, there are few pedestrian-friendly zones — and changing social patterns may be responsible for the situation.

Originally, inner suburban neighbourhoods were built around schools and single-detached homes. But with more families living in sprawling, high-rise apartment buildings, children are forced to walk long distances and to cross large, busy roads in order to get to school.

Hess is working to raise awareness of these challenges in marginalized communities. “If we can get engineers, planners and pedestrian advocates to work together better, then we’ll shift from the old outcome of getting cars around to a new outcome of increased walkability,” he says.
The Cities Issue

Life on the City Streets

Suzanne Stewart is exploring the causes of Aboriginal homelessness.

EDGE Fall 2013
The healing journey

Suzanne Stewart says easing homelessness among Aboriginal people requires an Aboriginal approach by Paul Fraumeni

Since Canada was colonized by European peoples, it has not been easy being an Aboriginal person in this country. Suzanne Stewart knows this as a member of the Yellowknife Dene First Nation. Her mother and, later, three of Stewart’s younger siblings were forcibly removed from the family and sent to Canada’s infamous residential schools. Stewart understands the tortured past — and difficult present — of Cana- dian Aboriginal people from the more formal perspective of a university researcher and mental health professional. She is a registered psychologist, professor in the department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at U of T’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and OISE’s first Special Advisor to the Dean on Aboriginal Education. With these perspectives in mind, Stewart is now conducting research to find concrete solutions to one of the burning problems facing Canadian Aboriginal people today — homelessness. Stewart points out that since the 1970s, there has been a significant migration of Aboriginal people from rural areas to cities across Canada. Of the approximately 1.1 million Aboriginal people in Canada, more than 300,000 live in cities. While this migration is part of the nationwide trend of urban population growth, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people become homeless once they reach cities.

The primary reason Aboriginal people are moving to the city is economic,” says Stewart. “There are very few jobs and educational opportunities on reserves and in rural areas. And because of globalization and multinational aggressions, Aboriginal people just don’t have a sustainable economy in their traditional communities anymore. So, they need to move to the city. And when they do, they believe life will improve.”

But why do so many Aboriginal people become homeless upon arriving in cities? As is so often the case with homelessness, there are many reasons, says Stewart. She also understands the tortured past of Aboriginal people as creating a legacy of trauma that has disabled Aboriginal people in their ability to progress. And key among that abuse is the residential school experience.

“One of the major issues is that they are in low income situations,” says Stewart. “And low income is a very significant factor in the occurrence of homelessness.”

What is the ratio between those who are homeless and those who are not? In a 2001 study of 11,000 homeless people in Canada, 35% were Aboriginal people. And in a survey carried out by the Canadian Mental Health Association, 70% of respondents said they experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.

“The result,” says Stewart, “is what in Western psychology we call ‘trauma.’ And when people are living with trauma it’s very difficult to function in a healthy way. People do whatever they have to do to survive. Many turn to substances to help them cope. Every Aboriginal person in Canada today has a direct or indirect impact from the residential schools and it will take a number of generations for those impacts to heal.”

Stewart believes that the experience of Canadian Aboriginal people is different from other Canadians that a Western approach to developing concrete solutions to homelessness just cannot work. She has enlisted community partners in her research, in Toronto and abroad. Aboriginal students will be on her team, for example, and she will also work with partners in Hawaii, where native Hawaiians face similar challenges due to past colonialism.

Hwang believes that the healing journey for Aboriginal people is enabling us to be responsible and deal with our own problems. We need to use our own indigenous knowledge system to address contemporary social problems, so we can be healthy and so we can be there to help other people who are on the same healing journey.

The research findings are clear — people who are homeless in our cities have more and worse health problems than people who are in better circumstances. This has been proven by U of T professor and St. Michael’s Hospital clinician and scientist Stephen Hwang and others through numerous studies.

“Homeless people have a higher prevalence of mental illness, addictions and a vari- ety that is much higher than the general population,” says Hwang. “And they suffer from a high level of disability at a prematurely early age.”

But that information leads to a difficult question: do health problems cause these people to become homeless or did their state of being homeless cause them to have the health problems?

“It’s a vicious cycle that includes both forces,” notes Hwang. “Homelessness is an incredibly complex problem.”

The Front Line Housing Project has been at the core of Hwang’s work since he joined St. Michael’s in 1996 to spearhead the Centre for Research on Inner City Health. With these perspectives in mind, Stewart is now conducting research to find concrete solutions to one of the burning problems facing Canadian Aboriginal people today — homelessness. Stewart points out that since the 1970s, there has been a significant migration of Aboriginal people from rural areas to cities across Canada. Of the approximately 1.1 million Aboriginal people in Canada, more than 300,000 live in cities. While this migration is part of the nationwide trend of urban population growth, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people become homeless once they reach cities. One of the major issues is that they are in low income situations,” says Stewart. “And low income is a very significant factor in the occurrence of homelessness.”

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Hwang and colleagues across the country are currently conducting a mammot project called At Home/Chez Soi (AH/CS) that is testing intervention methods to heal their language and they were kept away from their families. And there were high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.”

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Hwang is one of a growing number of researchers and policy makers who emphasize the importance of the healing journey in the context of homelessness. He works with people to help them achieve their goals. This allows people to realize, for example, OK, now that I have housing, my goal is to not use crack every day. Through research, we know that once people have a house, they realize there is a possibility for changing their lives. Having housing makes that possible.”

Hwang notes that getting people housing and support is an important first step in a long road of change. “We see small, gradual improvements rather than miraculous transformations. There is no panacea. But change for these individuals is absolutely possible and real.”

Hwang’s investigation into homelessness is not theoretical. He is a physician who treats homeless men at Seaton House, the largest homeless shelter in Toronto. He uses the front-line knowledge he gains in this work to inform his role as a scientist and U of T professor in the Department of Medicine and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. Early in 2013, St. Michael’s appointed him as its inaugural chair in homeless health and health and housing.

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Mayors of global cities steward the most important economic enclaves on the planet—the cities that are the engines of innovation and economic growth. But they lack the power, tools, data and the broad policy infrastructure to be as effective as they need to be.

We have medical schools and lifelong training for doctors, law schools for lawyers, engineering schools for engineers, business schools for business leaders and professionals.

We need a similar infrastructure for mayors and their staffs to ensure they can govern effectively.

As the American political thinker Benjamin Barber has pointed out in his forthcoming book, *If Mayors Ruled the World*, government is the most democratic and pragmatic and the least ideological at the local level. We need to empower our cities and mayors, and give them the tools, training and infrastructure they need to build better, more effective and sustainable cities. It is the grandest of the grand challenges we face.

Richard Florida is a professor at the Rotman School of Management and director of U of T’s Martin Prosperity Institute. He is also Global Research Professor at New York University and a Senior Editor at *The Atlantic* where he co-founded *The Atlantic Cities*.

Cities are the emergent outcome of decisions of thousands of firms and millions of people, each of whom are trying to maximize their own well-being. Government policies define the “rules of the game” for these agents. To improve the productivity and quality of life of our cities we need public policies that encourage people and firms to make choices that not only benefit themselves but also help achieve societal goals. People need to be enabled to be part of the solution. We can’t just tell people to “behave more sustainably”, we need to provide the means by which their day-to-day activities can actually be more sustainable. Providing better transit services that they can actually use to reliably and quickly get to work each day is but one such example.

Professor Eric Miller of the Faculty of Applied Sciences and Engineering is Director of the University of Toronto Transportation Research Institute. He is the 2012 winner of the Margolese National Design for Living Prize and an internationally recognized expert in transportation planning.

While we strive to build resilient cities, Superstorm Sandy exposed acute urban vulnerabilities in New York, the wealthiest of global cities. In the flooding that besieged Calgary and Toronto in the summer of 2013, business and civic leaders were challenged to maintain the continuity of vital services. How are performance measurement standards helping some of the smartest mayors and city managers build resilient cities? A common set of indicators, globally standardized by the Global Cities Indicators Facility within the International Organization for Standardization framework, builds a data platform on cities globally that generates evidence-based strategies. More informed cities lead to cost-effective solutions for infrastructure investments, and smarter, healthier futures for citizens. Action? Harness the power of metrics in day-to-day decision-making. Embrace indicators to accelerate the transition to intelligent, resilient cities.

Patricia McCarney is a professor in the Department of Political Science and Director of U of T’s new Global Cities Institute, home to the Global City Indicators Facility (GCIF), which she founded in 2009.

The Cities Issue

THE QUESTION:

What do we need to do to make cities better?