Panel Proposal – 1919 Winnipeg General Strike Centenary Conference

We propose a panel of three to highlight different examples of coalition-led advocacy work in Winnipeg related to the struggle against poverty and the fight for a material existence. Each panelist will speak to a different issue: poverty, social housing, and migrant workers’ rights.

These coalitions have taken a similar approach in partnering with CCPA MB to facilitate and disseminate research around their issues with policy recommendations agreed upon by the community. They have then successfully used the research as a tool for public policy change.

Presentations will outline the advocacy campaigns that have been developed around each issue, the role that research played in informing the campaigns, efforts to engage the community, the opportunities and challenges presented along the way, outcomes, and lessons learned.

Panelist 1 – Kirsten Bernas

1. Putting poverty reduction on the provincial agenda: the experience of Make Poverty History Manitoba.
2. Make Poverty History Manitoba is a multi-sectoral coalition working to change public policy to achieve a Manitoba without poverty. Its activities have contributed to the development of a provincial poverty reduction plan, poverty reduction legislation, and Rent Assist - the most universal housing allowance program in Canada. This presentation will tell the story of how community organizations worked together using research, organizing, and advocacy to build a powerful community voice calling for poverty reduction to become a provincial priority.
3. Kirsten Bernas is the Director of Housing at the West Central Women’s Resource Centre in Winnipeg. Prior to that she spent 8 years as a Research and Policy Manager at the Canadian Community Economic Development Network – Manitoba. Over that period, she was seconded to the Province of Manitoba as a policy analyst in Manitoba Housing and Community Development where she worked on the government’s provincial poverty reduction strategy. She also worked as a Project Manager on strategic initiatives related to social policy with the provincial government’s Priorities and Planning Secretariat. Kirsten has been an active member of Make Poverty History Manitoba and the Right to Housing Coalition since 2009. She has published commentaries and reports on a variety of topics including poverty reduction, a living wage, social housing, social enterprise, and community economic development.

Panelist 2 – Shauna MacKinnon

1. The Right to Housing Story: Research and Advocacy to Increase Housing Options for Low-Income Manitobans.
2. R2H is a Winnipeg-based advocacy coalition made up of 58 organizations and roughly 250 individual supporters. It is a case example of how policy analysts, researchers, and activists can join forces to have an impact on public policy. What eventually evolved into the R2H coalition had its genesis in 2004, when a small group of citizens became concerned about a particular housing issue in their neighbourhood. A series of events quickly steered the group to focus more broadly on the state of housing in Manitoba and to call for an increase in the supply of rental housing for low-income individuals and families. And the rest, as the saying goes, is history.
3. Shauna MacKinnon is Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies at the University of Winnipeg.  Prior to joining the University of Winnipeg in 2013, Shauna held a variety of government and non-government positions including an 8-year term as Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Office and a 5-year term as senior policy and program manager with the Manitoba Community and Economic Development Committee of Cabinet.  Prior to this Shauna worked as a mental health worker and as a community development worker in both Urban and First Nation communities. Shauna has spent much of her adult life advocating for public policy change to address systemic social and economic justice, and she continues to do so as an activist academic working with grassroots organizations and through her contribution as a co-investigator and research stream leader with the Manitoba Research Alliance. Her 2015 book titled Decolonizing Employment:  Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada’s Labour Market, published by University of Manitoba Press was nominated for the Alexander Kennedy Isbister Award for Non-Fiction in 2016.  Her most recent publication, an edited collection titled: Practising Community-Based Research: Stories of Engagement, Empowerment and Mobilization will be published by UBC Press-Purlich Books in the spring of 2018.

Panelist 3 – Lynne Fernandez

1. The Migrant Workers Solidarity Network and the fight for migrant workers rights’
2. The Migrant Workers Solidarity Network (MWSN) coalition adopted similar strategies used by Right to Housing and Make Poverty History Manitoba in its advocacy efforts to improve migrant workers’ rights. The MWSN coalition was much smaller, but importantly it is an example of the local labour community collaborating with a grass roots organization, and vice versa. This presentation explains how the campaign worked, the limits of local advocacy in the face of global trends, and considers the possibility of a national campaign to improve migrant workers’ rights.
3. Lynne Fernandez holds the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives where she has worked for 11 years. Through the CCPA she has published commentaries and monographs on a variety of issues including the provincial economy; how austerity is being unfolded in Manitoba; environmental issues as they pertain to Manitoba Hydro; Manitoba Hydro’s role in regional development and its value as a crown corporation; government support for social enterprises in Manitoba; the role of unions in maintaining and promoting democracy in Canada; migrant workers in Manitoba;  unionized Indigenous workers and CUPE 500;  and, on the social determinants of health.