

HOUSING NOT WAR

Popular Education Toolkit

A Resource Guide for Mobilization & Action

February 2009



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INTRODUCTION

Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) is a group of health care providers, community workers, policy experts, business people and poor people who provide advocacy on housing and homelessness issues. TDRC declares homelessness a “National Disaster” and mobilizes public pressure for the government to implement both immediate emergency relief (such as homeless shelters) and long-term solutions (such as investing in housing, “The 1% Solution”).

This manual is a guide for people who want to facilitate workshops around issues of poverty, militarization and activism. It provides workshop facilitators and participants with resources to connect these issues to a broader social justice framework in order to encourage mobilization of communities and organizations.

The Housing Not War campaign has developed a series of popular education activities to inform and mobilize different communities around social justice issues. You can use these activities in workshops focusing on the problem of government cuts to housing and social programs while increasing spending on war, the question of political accountability, and the role of social movements and activism in winning change.

The workshop aims to draw from the participants’ lived experiences as activists, union members, low income, precariously housed & homeless individuals, educators and students in efforts to create a comprehensive plan for coalition building and action.

This manual contains all the materials required for delivering a workshop, as well as educational background resources, activities and suggestions for facilitators. The material is designed to be a popular education and anti-oppression resource. This requires that facilitators be committed to create an atmosphere that is conducive to inclusive participation.

The workshop was developed by a group of diverse young anti-poverty activists with advice and guidance from veteran colleagues. Its development was a learning and capacity-building experience for us, and we hope that this spirit of learning from each other and learning by doing is picked up by those who will use this manual. We hope you find it valuable, and welcome any feedback – you can reach the developers through Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

Read more about TDRC’s history on our website, www.tdrc.net, or contact us:

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Some choices for facilitators

This workshop is designed to suit a broad range of participants: adults, workers, activists, youth; those new to the social justice movement as well as experienced campaigners.

Some of the activities may be substituted for others to create an experience more relevant to different groups. These programming decisions may be made by the facilitator or together with the participants.

We encourage you to treat the entire workshop as something to be creatively adapted to your needs. However, we also have some recommendations of our own as developers – certain points in the program when different options are available:

In the Introduction: You may want to choose between the “Bingo” or “Quotes” activities. We suggest that Bingo may be more engaging and fun for youth or those new to social justice movements – the quotes activity starts political discussion in front of the group right off the bat.

Activities on identity and privilege: Consider choosing among the “Power Flower” and “Take a Stand” activities. Both these activities address the identity and political-economic location of participants themselves. Take a Stand, however, is often found to be more challenging. While it has great educational pay-off, it can be a difficult experience in highlighting differences among participants, especially for those new to critically thinking about privilege, and requires especially careful and respectful effort.

Activities on taking action: At the conclusion of our program are two pairs of activities that engage the group’s creativity in taking action. You may choose to go with the first pair for groups of involved activists, or the second for those who are looking for an accessible, immediate way to get active:

- “Top 2 Actions” & “Dotmocracy” focus on next steps for activists, ie. future actions – suited to those actively involved in organizations or campaigns
- “Making a Banner” & “Musical Number” are more accessible to those new to social justice movements or activism, and draw on skills everyone can use to do something tangible, immediate – and fun.

Some guidelines for facilitators

Some things to consider before you begin.

Knowledge of your participants

- Where are they coming from, school, union, organization, community
- What does their group or organization hope to get out of the workshop, why were you asked to run a workshop
- **Accessibility:** some of the workshops require certain kinds of physical mobility (eg., moving from one chair to another) – do participants have disabilities that might impact their participation? What about hearing or visual impairments? Literacy? Arrange for accommodations ahead of time if possible.

Facilitator/participants relationship

- How is power, privilege, oppression experienced by the facilitator and how could this potentially affect a group dynamic
- What steps will you take to address these issues in your workshop

Develop a set of accessible definitions and concepts

- Be aware of any language or educational differences; eg, inaccessible academic language
- Try having a set of concepts outlined for discussion or developing your own during the workshop to help get the group on the same page

Introduction and Setting guideline:

When introducing your workshop spend some time outlining:

- The goals and intentions of the workshop
- Participants' expectations, what people hope to learn or do
- Speaking guidelines: don't interrupt; question issues not people; don't dominate the discussion; listen before responding; etc.
- Spend time developing a group understanding of definitions and language use
- Get to know your participants, their names and reasons for participating

Model Workshop Outline

Full-Day Workshop

TIME		OBJECTIVE	METHOD	DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS	STUFF
9:00	30	Settle, focus, intro	Set-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post agenda on board • Arrange supplies • Music 	Agenda on Board
			Option A: Bingo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute sheets as people are coming in 	Bingo sheets
			Option B: Quotes Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give everyone opportunity to check-in 	Quotes on the Wall
9:30	10	To orient people to the process of the session and the reasoning behind the workshop.	Framing the Workshop and Setting Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review agenda • Setting the guidelines for participation/communication 	
9:40	35	To look at who we are in relation to those who wield power in society.	Option A: Power Flower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange the petals of the flower • Participants walk around and fill in the inner and outer petals • Discussion: How are participants reflected within the flower? Who are the public decision-makers in society – where do they fit into the Power Flower? 	Flower petals
		Discuss issues around privilege, identity, and voices within the group	Option B: Take a Stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate activity with everyone standing in a line across the room, while reading out descriptions. • By the end of the activity, follow-up with discussion: what does the configuration of the room tell us? Who is not represented in the group? How will this inform further action? 	
10:15	20		Meaning of Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants identify items that represent what “home” means to them on paper. • Go through the process until all the pieces of paper are gone. • Discussion 	Paper, pens
10:35	10		Break		
10:45	30	Illustrating the inequitable distribution of wealth.	10 Chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line up chairs and have volunteers sit in them. • Explain how wealth is distributed, while volunteers move accordingly. • Discussion. 	Ten chairs

11:15	35	To share information and experience	Power Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have participants read out Power Play Discussion 	Power Play script
11:50	45	Sharing knowledge and experience about events (and trends) related to an issue.	Political Weather Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the Political Weather Report – focus on events or trends Have people come up with items to post on the Political Weather Report After everything's posted, discuss. 	Large chart paper on wall, post-it notes, markers
12:35	50		Lunch Break		
1:25	25	Examining government spending	The Transformer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have volunteers take cards. Volunteers walk through Transformer and read out what's on the cards. Discussion 	Cards
1:50	25	Making the link between housing and war	Video: "Housing Not War"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video & Discussion 	Video
2:15	50	Looking at shelter system, discussion about strategy and opportunities for collaboration	Activism: Strategies & Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewing of video Discussion about how people feel about video Sharing the rest of the story Discussion 	Video
3:05	40	OPTION A: Brainstorming next steps for the group to take action	Top 2 Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm possible next steps. 	Chart paper, sticky notes, markers
			Dotmocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting a straw poll of what people are most excited about. 	Markers
	60	OPTION B: To use the creative ability of the group for something tangible	Making a Banner A Musical Number	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let people freely organize and indulge in either creative activity. 	Canvass, paint, pencils
3:45 – 4:05	10	Conclude and wind-down	Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review what was done and follow-up with commitments from participants during the session. 	
3:55-4:15			Adjourn		

Ending Poverty Bingo

Source: *Ending Poverty in Ontario: Building Capacity and Organizing for Change*, 2008.

Objective:

- To give early arrivals a structured activity to use their time well, by meeting other people and learning something about them.
- To help identify ways people participate in the economy on a day-to-day basis.

Materials: Bingo activity sheet (1 copy per participant [See Appendix A]), pens or pencils, small prize (optional)

Estimated Time: 15 minutes

Description:

1) Participants go around the room with a bingo card [See Appendix A] to find people who have connected with the economy in similar ways as written on the card. Have people sign each other's cards in the appropriate space. Participants cannot have someone sign a second square until they have approached everyone else in the room.

2) The square descriptions include: provided child care, attended a workshop, provided elder care, bagged groceries, planted fruits or vegetables, cooked meals, attended a demonstration, told stories, gave a presentation to a group, made a piece of art, worked a temporary job, volunteered for something, worked in a school, learned a skill from someone, cut hair, taught someone a skill.

3) The person with two filled lines (or the entire card – depending on the number of participants) wins. They can be congratulated (with a small prize if available).

Notes/Resources:

- This exercise works best as a warm-up in case people show up early and as participants trickle in. It's best to wrap up the activity before convening the session formally.
- The bingo sheet can be customized for any audience. If you have the time, designing a bingo sheet to represent what you know about the group could be beneficial.
- Small prizes like candy can enliven the activity. Having additional candy for the rest of group to share could complement the prize(s)

Quotes Introduction

Source: *Ending Poverty in Ontario: Building Capacity and Organizing for Change*, 2008.

Objective:

- To learn the name of and something about each participant.
- To introduce the topic of the workshop using quotes and definitions that addresses the key issues.

Materials: Quote descriptions (Appendix B), copies of quotes posters

Estimated Time: 10-20 minutes

Description:

- 1) Copy a selection of quotes and print on coloured paper if possible.
- 2) Take the selection of quotes to the walls around the room. Make sure that there is a diversity of quotes from different sources (consider gender, class, race, age, culture, etc.).
- 3) As participants arrive, many will naturally be attracted to reading the posters. The facilitator should watch for this and recommend that they take a moment to read some of the quotes.
- 4) When the group is ready to begin, ask the participants to a) choose one quote they connected with – either because they agree or disagree with it *or* b) think about an expectation for the workshop (i.e. something they hope to get out of the session). The facilitator should read out 1 or 2 as examples and introduce themselves with a quote.
- 5) Ask each person to introduce him/herself and read the quote they chose or share their expectation, then briefly explain why. This should only take 1 or 2 minutes each.

Notes/Resources:

- Consider that participants may have various language and visual abilities.
- The facilitator could read out some sample quotes to introduce the activity to people – this could help with people who have difficulty seeing or reading or if English is not their first language. People can also be paired up if desired.
- Don't post the quotes too high – chest-height is a reliable measure
- Including controversial quotes may inspire or provoke a great deal of discussion. However, keep in mind that it is good to keep introductions brief in order to keep the energy moving. Be aware of potential controversy and discussion and if needed, remind participants that there will be time and space during the workshop to get more deeply into the issues.

Framing the Workshop & Setting an Agenda

Objective:

- To orient people to the process of the session and the reasoning behind the workshop.

Materials: Chart paper, markers

Estimated Time: 5-10 minutes

Description:

1) Introduce the concept of the workshop:

- a) Why are we here?
- b) What is "Housing Not War"?
- c) What can be done about poverty, affordable housing, and Canada's participation in war?

2) Review the agenda for everyone.

2) If some participants voice expectations, then you can point out where those expectations will be met.

3) In reviewing the agenda, explain how the agenda can serve people's needs and expectations.

4) It can be good to introduce some consensus guidelines for group interactions and respect. Some sample guidelines may include:

- a) Speak for yourself, don't volunteer other people to speak.
- b) Share the available time.
- c) Attack the issue and not the person.
- d) Try not to interrupt when someone else is speaking

Notes/Resources:

- You need to be cautious about how much room for flexibility you present with the agenda review. Most questions and concerns raised can be respected with further elaboration of what will happen during the workshop. If someone raises an issue that is not included in the agenda, one possible response is that that point can become part of the next steps or later discussion.

The Power Flower

Source: *Educating for a Change*, 1991.

Objective:

- To look at who we are in relation to those who wield power in society.

Materials: Chart paper or construction/cardboard paper cut in the shape of flower petals.

Estimated Time: 35-45 minutes

Description:

1) Introduce the Power Flower

- Each flower “petal” represents – or names – an aspect of social identity. The blank petal(s) exist to encourage people to add an aspect that may have been missing because of limitations in our perception. Each petal can be used to situate the participants (including the facilitator) in a way that helps to predict where differences and tensions may emerge.

2) Note that:

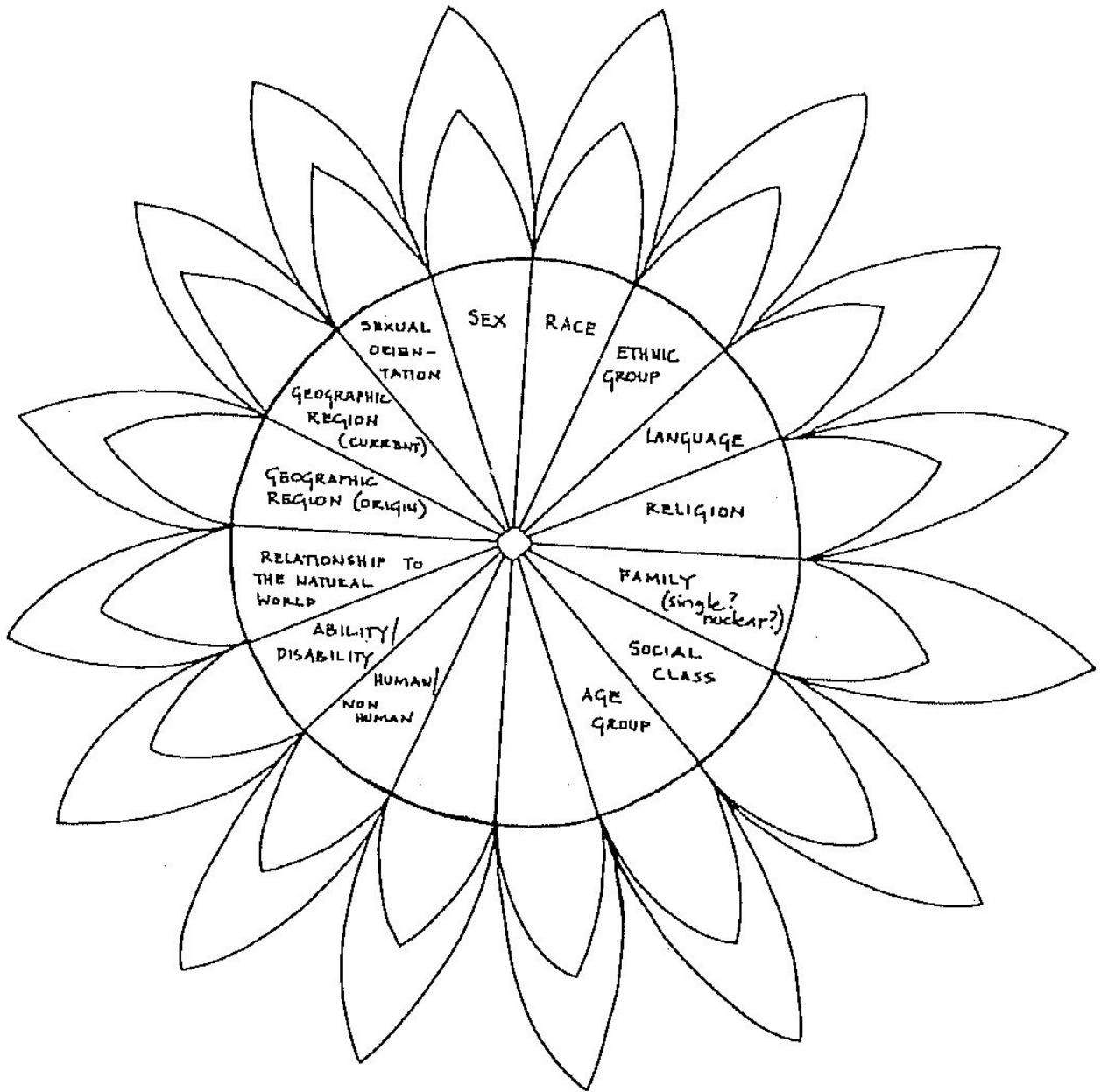
- The outer circle of petals describes the dominant social identity in society.
- The inner petals describe the social identity of the individual.

3) Ask the participants to walk around and fill in the outer circle of petals together with a marker or pen, while also filling in the inner petals individually.

4) After everyone has finished and settled, discuss what the group had written in the Power Flower.

Questions to consider:

- a) How are the participants reflected within the flower?
- b) Who are the public decision-makers in society? Where do they fit into the Power Flower?



Source: *Educating for a Change*, 1991.

Take a Stand (aka "The Privilege Walk")

Source: Unknown

Objective:

- To identify economic, social privilege, or lack thereof within a group. This exercise helps individuals to find their place within the group and also identifies those voices that may be missing from the group. This will help to inform how a group will proceed.

Estimated Time: 20-30 minutes

Description:

- 1) Participants stand in a line, side by side, facing the front of the room.
- 2) The facilitator reads statements pertaining to experiences of privilege e.g. "My grandparents went to university".
- 3) The participants for whom these statements are true take one step forward and those for whom it is not true take one step back.
- 4) Continue this process for 5 minutes or so. This helps to create a visual picture of commonalities and diversities within the group. Who is at the front of the room? Who is at the back? What does this tell us?
- 5) Follow up with a short discussion relating to the participants reaction to the exercise. Who is not represented in the group? How this will inform further action?

Notes/Resources:

- An alternative to the Privilege Walk is the "Circle of Privilege" - everyone starts in a large circle, instead of behind a horizontal line, and those with the least access to power will take steps forward and end up at the center of the circle.

Comments by Adrienne Maree Brown from American-based WireTap magazine:

"Those who are in the center at the end of this exercise are those who have been most impacted by inequality, and should be on the frontlines of the work we do to create a better society and a safe and healthy planet. When it comes to human rights, or environmental and economic justice, these are the experts. Those further back may have more societal decision-making power and material resources, but need the earned wisdom of those in the center to guide the work itself, and to determine where those resources should flow to promote deep, sustainable change. Both experiences are necessary, but currently the more privileged folks have a bigger influence over nonprofit work."

The Meaning of Home

Source: adopted from various sources (a common activity)

Objectives:

- To explore how it is that many different aspects of life are dependant on secure, decent housing, emphasizing the role of housing as a fundamental human right.
- To identify how participants themselves are personally affected by housing, establishing personal relevance.

Materials:

- Paper, pencils, *optional:* flip chart page, or space on a board

Estimated Time: 20 minutes

Description:

- 1) Ask participants to tear up a piece of paper into five pieces.
- 2) On each piece, participants identify one item that represents what home means to them. For example it could be: family, safety, comfort, routine, anything.
- 3) Briefly discuss a few volunteered examples as a group.
- 4) Ask each participant to choose which of their items is the least important, and throw it away.
- 5) Then ask each participant to randomly select one of the slips of the person next to them and throw it away.
- 6) The facilitator now lists a few common items and tells participants to throw these away. Keep proceeding like this until all the slips are gone.
- 7) DISCUSSION:
 - a) How does it feel to have to prioritize areas in your life, choosing between important things?
 - b) Suggest other items participants may have taken for granted: choosing when, where and what you eat; what time you sleep and wake up; taking off your shoes; choosing who is in your company; etc.

Ten Chairs

Source: Adapted by the authors from *United for a Fair Economy*.

Objective:

- To illustrate the inequitable distribution of wealth in Canada (and the world).

Materials: ten chairs, statistics on wealth distribution

Form of Participants: whole group, 10 participants to volunteer

Estimated Time: 15-30 minutes

Description:

1) Explain that this is an exercise to look at how wealth is distributed among people in Canada and the world (wealth can be defined as what you own minus what you owe).

2) Line up the 10 chairs in the front of the room. Ask for 10 volunteers to come up and sit in each chair.

Explain that:

- a) Each *person* represents 10% (one-tenth) of all households.
- b) Each *chair* represents 10% (one-tenth) of all of the private material wealth.

Explain that if wealth were evenly distributed, this is what it would look like – one person, one chair.

3) Note that (according to 1993 World Bank statistics) that:

- The top 10% of people in the world owned half of the private wealth, and thus, the bottom 90% owned the other half.

Ask the volunteer representing the top (wealthiest) 10% to take possession of five of the chairs. The remaining nine people – representing 90% of the entire world population – need to scrunch into the remaining five chairs.

4) Explain that the situation is similar when we look at the distribution of wealth in Canada. According to 1999 Statistics Canada figures:

- The top 10% of households own 53% of the country's wealth, while the remaining 90% own 47%. Participants stay where they are.
- However, the top 50% own 94% of the wealth. 4 of the remaining 9 people take up an additional 4-1/2 chairs, leaving the remaining 5 people with only half a chair.

5) Optional: To compare to the U.S., in 1997:

- The top 10% owned 70% of the wealth, while the other 90% owned the other 30%. One person moves to take 7 chairs with everyone else taking up the other 3 chairs. If we broke this 90% down, we would have a lot of people on the floor.

6) To emphasize:

The people at the top remain invisible, while the rest battle it out with others based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, etc. for more space on the remaining few chairs.

The Power Play

Source: Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, 2008.

Objective:

- To share information about the government's role in providing social provisions and what people have done throughout history to win victories.
- To promote the sharing of experience.
- To share some historical facts.

Materials: 3 copies of the Power Play (see Appendix C)

Estimated Time: 20 minutes

Description:

1) Explain that we will be looking at the government's role in providing social provisions. We want to share a picture of how the government's decision-making can be influenced by people and how this has been reflected by victories in the past.

2) We will start with some entertainment – a show, like a short radio play. Explain that we call this a "power play" which serves to raise some of these issues.

3) Ask if there are a couple of people who would like to volunteer to read one of the roles. The facilitator could read one role and two participants could take on the other roles.

4) Read out the Power Play.

5) At the conclusion, share two or three of the following questions to prompt discussion:

- a) Does this reflect anyone's experience or understanding of social movements?
- b) Do you agree or disagree with any of the characters' opinions?
- c) How does this inform our own actions and what we can do?

7) Discuss

Notes/Resources:

- It is useful to print the Power Play in 14-point type for easier reading

Political Weather Report

Source: *Seizing the Moment: Analysis & Action for Social Change*, 2002.

Objective:

- To share participants' knowledge and experience about events (and trends) related to an issue (critical questions, concerns, etc.) that a group has agreed to examine.

Materials: Large sheet of paper (or several sheets of flip chart paper), Markers, Index-sized Post-it notes or sheets of paper, Masking tape

Form of participants: Entire group

Estimated time: 30-45 minutes

Description:

1) Identify an issue or critical question or concern about which you want to learn more (e.g. jobs and the economy; public health; human security; youth activism; etc.). It is good to write this issue in the centre of the diagram.

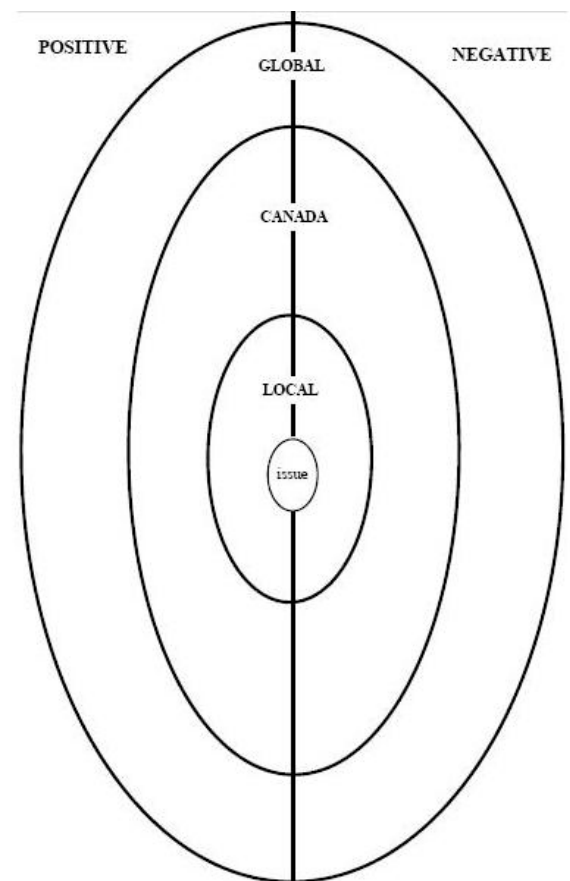
2) Draw a large circle on large sheet of paper and subdivide into section (see model)

3) State that the global economic, political, social/cultural, technological, etc. conditions of the world are constantly changing. Many things have impacts at every level of our life.

4) Explain "We're going to look at the big picture; a political weather report is a way to share some of what we know and to make some connections between our local communities and the changes occurring around the world. We call it a 'political weather report' because it resembles those weather diagrams we see on the evening news and, like the weather, we can use this to see what climate we are in and what is heading our way."

5) Present chart of political weather report with local, Canada and global circles and positive and negative sides

6) Explain that we're going to post events and trends (that affect the issue we identify) that we know about and are experiencing.



7) In pairs, ask participants to “Think about the issue and list events or trends (positive and negative) (one per sticky note)”

8) Model this: For each event make a link to other circle (e.g. if you write a local event, e.g. “lost a job”, then ask, “What is the link in the Canada circle and Global circle?”). There can be more than one link. It doesn’t matter what circle you start in.

9) Have pairs post all their sticky notes and ask each pair to report one thing (showing the links from local/Canada/global links)

Notes/Resources:

- If you have the time & resources you can play with the metaphor of ‘weather report’. You can design the concentric circles to reflect time (e.g. past year, this month, next year). You could also prepare cards (on which participants write their contributions) to resemble weather symbols (e.g. storm clouds, sunny day, light showers, snow, etc.).

Photo taken from:
Popular Education for Social
Change II course at York
University, Winter term 2008



The Transformer

Source: adapted from *War & the Economy*, 2003.

Objective:

- To examine government spending in a particular area (like the military) and to compare this with the resources needed for social needs.

Materials: 2-sided large index cards with military vs. social spending.

Estimated Time: 15-20 minutes

Description:

1) The two-sided cards should look something like this:

<i>(Side 1)</i> 1 cluster bomb \$14,000	<i>(Side 2)</i> Enroll 2 kids in HeadStart \$14,000
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- With one side representing military spending
- The other side representing social spending

(use a Canadian example for kids programs)

2) Ask for volunteers (depending on the number of cards available).

- Two volunteers form an arch with their hands — the arch represents “the Transformer.”
- The other volunteers, in turn, take one card each.

3) The card volunteers hold up the “military spending” side, reading it aloud.

4) The card volunteers walk through the Transformer, turn around the card, and read the “social spending” side.

5) The facilitator can then start the discussion by saying, “*what our state’s people paid in federal taxes for the war in Afghanistan . . .*” then walks through the Transformer, and says, “. . . could have paid for the needed funds for new affordable housing.”

Notes/Resources:

<i>Spending Comparison</i>		
Military Spending	Social Spending	Cost
One Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV)	60 Teacher's salaries for 1 year	3 million
One C2 105 MM Howitzer Cannon	Avg cost of child care for 180 children in Quebec for 1 year	450,000
One C7A1 Assault Rifle	Average cost of 1 year of college tuition	2,000
One TOW Guided Missile	Rent supplement to an individual for 14 years	180,000
One Cluster Bomb	Average cost of food for a person for 2 years	14,000
One CH-124 Sea King Helicopter	The cost of books for 570,000 university/college students in 1 year	114 million
One Destroyer Ship	1,900 Nurse's salaries for 1 year	100 million
Total projected Canadian expenditure on the Afghan conflict in 2008	3,500 units of new affordable housing	1 billion
Total Canadian military budget per year (2008)	Government's affordable housing spending x 9 years	18.2 billion

SOURCES:

- http://www.deagel.com/Wheeled-Armored-Fighting-Vehicles/LAV-III_a000316001.aspx
- <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/m109a5.htm>
- http://www.army.dnd.ca/35service_battalion/Equipment.htm
- http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=104x69860
- <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/dumb/cbu-87.htm>
- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/cdnmilitary/seaking.html>
- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/cdnmilitary/>
- <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=459806>
- <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/080226/d080226a.htm>
- <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/postsec/costs.html>
- Blueprint to End Homelessness in Toronto, prepared by The Wellesley Institute, <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/theblueprint>
- Nick Falvo, Addressing Canada's Lack of Affordable Housing, <http://www.streethealth.ca/Downloads/NickCEA-0507.pdf>
- Ontario Nurses Association <http://www.ona.org/fag>
- Education Canada Network <http://resource.educationcanada.com/salaries.html>
- CBC News <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/daycare/>

Video: "Housing Not War"

Source: Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, 2008. (Filmmaker: Mike Yam)

Objective:

- To explore the link between affordable housing and Canada's participation in war and militarism.
- To provide facts on housing and Canada's military, while using an alternative media format (video).

Materials: Video on the DVD included in the manual binder, **OR** online at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyT9DkesizU>

Estimated Time: 20 - 25 minutes

Description:

- 1) Show the "Housing Not War" video to participants.
- 2) Discussion. Some prompting questions may include:
 - a) Is there anything in particular that stood out for you in the video?
 - b) What new information did you learn from the video?
 - c) How does the video connect with what is happening in your neighbourhood?
 - d) What is the connection between "housing" and "war"?
 - e) How are these issues impacted by all 3 levels of government?

Activism: Strategies & Opportunities

Source: Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, 2008.

Objectives:

- To inform participants about deplorable conditions in the overcrowded homeless shelter system.
- To explore current cases where political accountability on housing/homelessness is being challenged – examples that are still outstanding, where people can make a difference.
- To identify proven, basic strategies that can be applied to many community activists' work.
- To start an open discussion on strategy and opportunities for collaboration.

Materials:

- The film *Street Nurse* (available from TDRC), *OR*: "Comments on the Secret Video of a Homeless Shelter" (available in this kit's Resource Materials)
- *Recommended*: flip chart/white board for taking group notes

Estimated Time: 50 minutes

Description:

- 1) Introduction: *"To start, we will look at some evidence of the horrific conditions in homeless shelters. Note that we all have strong, passionate reactions to this information. This is a jumping-off point for discussing how we can mobilize these impulses to build more pressure on the government to act."*
- 2) Show the *video or written descriptions*:
 - a. *IF* you have the film *Street Nurse* available, tell participants that you are about to view some hidden-camera footage of a homeless shelter taken in 2002 and queue up the video to **45:25**. Show the next minute or so of video, which shows a winter time homeless shelter with audio narration describing the experience **OR...**
 - b. *If you DON'T have the film available*: hand out "Comments on the Secret Video of a Homeless Shelter", telling participants that the reactions are to a grainy black and white video showing people sleeping on mats so crowded they touch each other, arrayed on the floor of a large room. It is dark, people are coughing, moving about, restless.
- 3) Ask participants how they feel about what they've seen or read. Some prompting questions are:
 - a. How is this allowed in such a wealthy society? What does this say about the discrimination against poor and homeless people, their marginalization?

- b. How can activists mobilize people's strong humane reactions to these conditions, to influence decision-makers?

4) Share the rest of the story:

At first, evidence of these conditions was presented directly to politicians, who did not react to requests to address the issue. Then TDRC tried again, this time using two basic strategies:

- a) **draw together a coalition**, and
- b) **build public pressure**

Activists with TDRC approached a diverse collection of public figures and collected their brief reactions of shock and outrage to the footage. They provided this collection, along with the footage, to media.

Only when the media approached politicians, in a situation where there was a broad public outcry, did the politicians respond.

*This shows how government's accountability to marginalized people often must be forced through mechanisms of **drawing together a coalition** to exert **broad public pressure** (often using media).*

- 5) **Open discussion:** Participants share other examples of where these factors came into play. The facilitator may suggest a current example involving people in the room. Some suggested themes:
- a. How these basic strategies can be applied in different situations, based on our experience?
 - b. How can these be applied to current or future situations?
 - c. What are some other effective basic strategies?

This discussion can be about concrete strategizing for current or up-coming actions by people in the room, or a broader more general questions of strategy, or an opportunity to collaborate among different organizations represented by participants.

NOTES:

A recommended recent case for discussion: The events surrounding Robert Maurice's death in February, 2008. This is a challenging, difficult case where media and politicians alike reacted uncooperatively during an emergency. The issue is still outstanding: at time of writing this manual, in November 2008, the shelters are again full, with people on waiting lists sleeping outside without food as the snow begins to fall. See the March 2008 article "**Media silent as homeless crisis claims lives**", found in the **Background Resources** section of this manual.

Top Two Actions

Source: *Ending Poverty in Ontario: Building Capacity and Organizing for Change*, 2008.

Objective:

- To generate action suggestions that participants could take individually or together with others including any local agencies who support them.
- To generate action suggestions that participants could recommend that government undertake
- To be systematic about creating change
- To prioritize and plan next steps

Materials: Sticky notes, Markers, Flip chart paper

Form of Participants: Pairs

Estimated Time: 10-20 minutes

Description:

1) Start by affirming that a number of action steps have already been mentioned, referred to or implied in the discussions thus far. Now we want to be more systematic and thorough in looking at what could be done, both individually and with others.

2) Form pairs and ask each pair to discuss and identify two concrete actions that could be taken to end poverty. Create new stickies, with one action suggestion on each sticky.

3) Distribute sticky notes and markers.

4a) If there's only a few minutes left then have people share their sticky notes with the group and discuss them with what time is left.

4b) If you have more time left, you can have people share their stickies using the "Clustering Report Back" activity.

5a) To conclude this exercise, you could ask people which suggestion they are personally most interested in. Which could they see themselves doing immediately? And/or which do they feel is most urgent to recommend that the government do?

5b) If time permits you could prioritize next steps using the "Dotmocracy" activity.

Dotmocracy

Source: *Ending Poverty in Ontario: Building Capacity and Organizing for Change*, 2008.

Objective:

- To prioritize goals and actions.

Materials: Markers or sticky dots

Form of Participants: whole group

Estimated Time: 10-20 minutes

Description:

1) Explain to participants that we will narrow our focus by seeing which issues the group thinks and feels are most important. Dotmocracy is a straw poll process to get an initial read on a group's priorities. It is a way to move a discussion forward. It is not the same as decision-making. Dotmocracy merely shows us what the group has the most energy for.

2) Depending on the number of issues from which to choose you can give participants two or three dots (votes). If you have between 10 and 20 issues give participants two dots and for over 20 issues give them three dots.

3) Each participant is given a marker and is asked to put one of their dots next to the issue that they are the most excited about working on RIGHT NOW. (Remind them that this is a straw poll and not a decision).

4) Once everyone has placed their dots, tally the dots and read out the items that have gotten the most dots. Ask the group if this is a fair representation of what the group would like to see happen. Discuss.

5) If time permits, participants can be divided into planning groups – one for each top issue. The task would be to propose the next steps that should be taken on that issue. These could be reported on to the full group.

Making a Banner

Materials: Canvass, paint, pencils

Form of Participants: Entire group

Estimated Time: 45 minutes +

Description:

1) Using the materials, participants are encouraged to use their creativity and imagination to produce a banner with a particular theme – the theme would depend on the nature of the group’s involvement in social change.

2) By producing a banner, the group can bring something they’ve made to a demonstration or protest that is happening locally.

A Musical Number

Materials: None

Form of Participants: Entire group

Estimated Time: 45 minutes +

Description:

1) Participants are encouraged to write lyrics for a musical piece. This can be a:

- Song
- Chant
- “Military” call and response – this is where a phrase is called by one person and is then repeated by the others in the group. The idea is that it would sound like a typical “call and response” that soldiers would recite during their training.

2) By producing a unique musical piece, the group can bring something they’ve written to a demonstration or march that is happening locally. They can then lead their song, chant, or call & response with a whole group of demonstrators.

Appendix A – Ending Poverty Bingo

ENDING POVERTY Bingo

Collect the signatures (or initials) of your fellow participants.

A person can sign or initial a box if they have done what the box asks. E.g. if they have “attended a workshop” they would initial that box. Get as many different signatures as you can. If you are the first to complete two rows you can yell “BINGO.” Also, if you are the first to complete a full sheet, yell “BINGO.”

PROVIDED CHILD CARE _____	ATTENDED A WORKSHOP _____	PROVIDED ELDER CARE _____	BAGGED GROCERIES _____
PLANTED FRUITS OR VEGETABLES _____	COOKED MEALS _____	ATTENDED A DEMONSTRATION _____	TOLD STORIES _____
GAVE A PRESENTATION TO A GROUP _____	MADE A PIECE OF ART _____	WORKED A TEMPORARY JOB _____	VOLUNTEERED FOR SOMETHING _____
WORKED IN A SCHOOL _____	LEARNED A SKILL FROM SOMEONE _____	CUT HAIR _____	TAUGHT SOMEONE A SKILL _____

Appendix B – Quotes

“Homelessness, in the Canadian case a man-made disaster, increasingly evokes blame, discrimination and stereotypes as an excuse to not do anything.” – Cathy Crowe, Street Nurse

“The practice of violence, like all actions, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world.” – Hannah Arendt

“A \$300 ticket for sleeping outside doesn’t show me the government wants to help.” – anonymous, currently homeless, Toronto, 2008

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“What are we competing for, to see who can steal more money the fastest from the poorest? To make the rich richer?” – anonymous, currently homeless, Toronto, 2008

“Poverty is the worst form of violence.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“Where you have to live, what you have to eat - this is a struggle for power.” – anonymous, currently homeless, Toronto, 2008

“Poverty is to be without sufficient money, but it is also to have little hope for better things. It is a feeling that one is unable to control one's destiny, that one is powerless in a society that respects power. The poor have very limited access to means of making known their situation and their needs. To be poor is to feel apathy, alienation from society, entrapment, hopelessness and to believe that whatever you do will not turn out successfully.” – Canadian Royal Commission on the Status of Woman, Report, 1970

“The government does not notice you unless there's an incident they recognize.” – anonymous, currently homeless, Toronto, 2008

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress - Those who profess to favor freedom and yet renounce controversy are people who want crops without plowing the ground.” – Frederick Douglas, Abolitionist Leader 1817-1895

Activism: Does Protest Work Today? *A Housing Not War Power Play*

SETTING: *Bob and Cindy are volunteers leafleting for a protest that will occur in a few days. On the public transit bus, they meet Carol. It turns out they have conflicting views on the value of activism.*

We are on a bus

Bob hands leaflet to Carol

Bob: March against Canada's war in Afghanistan!

Carol: Seen it before, don't waste your time on me...

Bob: Oh, so you're going? Should be a good action, eh?

Carol: No, I mean I used to be like you – but I've wasted enough time screaming at people –

Cindy: Sorry, waste of time? Canada's been fighting in Afghanistan for 7 years – longer than WWII. Harper's spending \$100million every month on this disaster – what exactly is the waste of time?

Carol: Yeah, war sucks, but don't you understand your crying about it does nothing? You guys whining in the streets - look at the Iraq war: the "largest protests in human history" – the US just invaded anyway, and now they're stuck in that mess. No one took you seriously. I remember; a friend dragged me to those protests – what a waste of time.

Bob: You can't judge protests by a single moment like that – it takes patience, years of work. Look at Vietnam – by the end, the US government was so scared of civil unrest they needed soldiers at home. But for the early years of the war there was no popular movement – it took a long time to build up. Besides, it's not as simple as war or no war: fear of losing public support also limits how aggressively they can fight.

Cindy: Corporations and government certainly think long-term, we should too.

Carol: Long term? Fine – talk about poverty right here in Ontario: a decade of protests since the Harris cuts to social assistance and housing – and what have the protests gained back? The cuts haven't been reversed.

Cindy: But they would have gotten *worse* if our pressure wasn't standing in the way. Besides, there have been gains! Learn your history: all those social programs were won with protests in

the first place. Activist coalitions led by WWII veterans, women's groups and faith groups won us public housing in the first place. Did you know poor veterans actually occupied buildings right here in downtown Toronto and got them turned into housing and shelter? That movement got us Canada's national housing program – similarly with health care. Social movements are the only way we've gained anything.

Carol: And what happened? They got taken away! Things today aren't like when we won social programs: there aren't mass protests the way there used to be. Don't you see with progress, things have gotten easier, there's less 'us and them' now – and yelling isn't the way to change things. You have to work with the system, including the market. People can take care of themselves now: there are more opportunities. That's why the Feds scrapped Canada's National Housing Program in the mid-90s, and scaled-back other social programs too.

Bob: That's disgusting! How could the government destroy the health of the people it's supposed to represent by trading away housing to save money? Decent housing, and poverty generally, are huge determinants of health: people get sick, and they end up in the hospital – costing you more money, not that that should matter. The mortality rate among homeless people is 10 times the average – are you saying that's worth it? People are 'taking care of themselves'?

Cindy: If you were impacted personally by the issue you'd care – you can't appreciate the need, can you?

Carol: Excuse me, I've worked hard to create my own security, and I have a right to maintain it, thanks.

Bob: Your security comes from gains for everyone: you benefit from health care, education, housing and infrastructure – having a decent environment. It's too easy to say "it's a private matter" when you have more than you need. But face it: you depend on everyone having these things. These are social things we need for a healthy society. And they were won socially.

Carol: Show me! Show me it works today. I'm saying it doesn't work today: we don't have the kind of mass mobilizations we had in the past when we won those things. We have to find different ways for change, don't we?

Cindy: Alright: the Federal government was forced to supply over a billion Federal dollars to relieve homeless people in response to protests starting in the late 90s – that's continuing right now, people are depending on that funding. Some housing too: in 2006, we got over a billion for housing – the opposition in parliament forced it into the budget as a one-time spending. You think that wasn't driven by the anti-poverty movement? It's not enough, to be sure, but what we have is what we've won.

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