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Engage!

Building Community Through Dialogue

A good portion of the final report of the Romanow Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care was shaped by the input of about 400 citizens in 12 locations across the country. The engagement of these 400 citizens reflected their interest and desire to help shape the future of health care in Canada.

People like to be engaged in conversations on solving problems, but many Canadians experience deep feelings of disenchantment, cynicism and distrust of traditional, political and business processes. Engagement processes and new models of communication, such as Dialogue and Deliberation can help to break this log-jam.

"Polarized political debate, opinion research polling and 'shoot from the hip' solutions simply don't work in our complex modern society. Citizens are a resource that must be drawn into effective dialogue on issues facing our country – locally, regionally and nationally", said Sandra Zagon, Co-Chair of the recently held Canadian Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation.

Conference Co-chair Miriam Wyman explains, "Dialogue and Deliberation are ways to engage citizens, employees, business and political leaders in defining public, organizational or business problems, explore what the range of solutions and trade-offs might be, and who should have responsibility for solving them."

Dialogue and deliberation embraces new and more holistic approaches to engagement and communication, like Dr. Joe Schaeffer's model for creative communication, to encourage involvement of all community members and to promote the spirit of community.

Related Links:

- [Canadian Conference on Dialogue & Deliberation](#)
- [The Stone Game model for communication](#)

By: Louise Kearney

Policy & Neighbourhood Revitalization

Virtually every city in the country faces some form of challenge - whether in housing, literacy, poverty, drug use, unemployment or crime. But where does the interested citizen, city councillor, public servant, service provider or voluntary organization go to find out about alternatives to our present methods?

On October 25th in Ottawa, selected experts from various countries, including the UK, US, Australia and Canada, convened for a special invitational forum to explore ways in which government can work more effectively to assist local neighbourhoods in their efforts to grapple with complex local problems.

Organized by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, the forum attracted an estimated 160 participants representing communities participating in Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) and Vibrant Communities, as well as representatives from federal government departments.

The Forum built on the experience of the ANC local sites and was structured around three major themes:

- Making the case for government investment in neighbourhood revitalization
- Working horizontally within government (setting common objectives and the machinery required for complex files)
- Evaluating comprehensive community initiatives.

The [Honourable Joseph Fontana](#), Minister for Labour and Housing opened the forum by welcoming all participants and emphasizing the importance for government departments to break out of their 'silos' and to collaborate. This is necessary, said the Minister, if projects like ANC are to succeed and expand.

Related Links:

- [Action for Neighbourhood Change](#)
- [Vibrant Communities](#)

By: David Pell

Le Grand Rendez-Vous

Fill a bus with 24 key city influencers and show them around your neighbourhood. Bring them to a reception with 100 residents and professionals. Have the mayors of Saint Michel and Greater Montreal speak. Add Pierre Pettigrew (the M.P. for the area and Minister of Foreign Affairs) and things start to heat up!

Then invite 250 neighbourhood residents to a Cirque du Soleil sponsored venue known as TOHU to hear a community report, passionate poets, music and drama. Top it off with a pre-election style speech from the mayor of Montreal and things start to cook!

Bring in Claude Bricault, editor of Journal de St-Michel and Chair of Vivre Saint Michel en santé. Distribute 23,000 copies of the community newspaper. Splash news of the event on the front page and include a four-page community report and things start to boil!



This recent "Grand Rendez-Vous" in Saint Michel was magic but even more impressive was the thought and strategy behind the evening.

Vivre Saint Michel en santé is the convening organization for Saint Michel's Trail Builder effort in Vibrant Communities.

In the last year, under the guidance of Lyse Brunet of Centraide du Grand Montreal, and through the leadership of Pierre Durocher and his fabulous team, a compelling plan to revitalize the Saint Michel neighbourhood has taken root.

This most recent event was evidence of the exceptional process of community engagement that was used to build the plan and the strategic nature by which this group uses celebration to build commitment and buy-in from both residents and key community stakeholders.

 on this unique effort!

Related Links:

- [Local Coverage of *Le Grand Rendez-Vous*](#)
- [Saint Michel's community plan \(en français\)](#)
- [La petite histoire du quartier Saint-Michel](#)

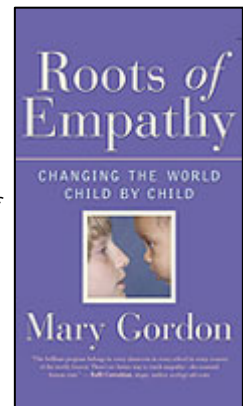
By: Paul Born

Changing the World Child by Child

"Change is often accomplished by altering the lens through which we view the world."
Mary Gordon

Mary Gordon is a passionate, articulate and wonderfully embracing human being with a vision for, "a society of compassionate and caring children who will pass on their legacy of empathy to their own children."

Changing one classroom at a time, Mary and her terrific team at *Roots of Empathy*, have influenced more than 20,000 children. Their program helps children and teachers to create more caring classrooms. The basic premise for their work is that, "When children understand how others feel, they are less likely to hurt each other through bullying, exclusion and violence."



Roots of Empathy helps children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Social inclusion and consensus building act as the foundation that builds caring - and in so doing changes the culture of the classroom - resulting in significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behavior. As empathy rises, aggression falls.

Mary Gordon has just published a new book on her program that needs to be read by every parent and teacher in Canada. It should also be used, in our opinion, to develop and strengthen the curriculum in schools for children of all ages.

Imagine a world in which we took the time to understand and care about each other! Roots of Empathy makes it so.

 [about Roots of Empathy](#)

Related Links:

- [Roots of Empathy website](#)
- [Learn more about the book!](#)

By: Paul Born

Got the November blahs? Here's a fiesta cure!

November plays with my mind. As I mourn the loss of summer and pull out my winter woolies I need a pick me up. My annual tradition is to hold a Mexican fiesta with friends.

I love summer. As for winter, well, I tolerate it. Though my children have taught me to ski again and skating has always been a favourite, winter is the penance I do to get to summer. So at this time of year (or at any point during this long Canadian winter), whenever I start to feel those winter blahs, I invite friends over, crank up the heat, fire up the blender, and cook up my favorite Mexican dishes for a Mexican fiesta. There's no better way to beat those cool-day blues!

Here are the crucial ingredients:

- Friends willing to freeze their butts off by arriving in shorts and t-shirts (The only entry requirement to the party is to dress in your favourite summer clothes).
- Thermostat set to 25 C.
- Some great Mexican music, but anything "hot" will do. I love Cuban Jazz.
- A blender is optional but strawberry margaritas do add a special touch.
- A piñata full of treats for the kids.
- Some great Mexican food.

 [Get your fiesta started! Paul shares two recipes to turn up the heat in your kitchen.](#)

Related Links:

- [Other Tamarack recipes](#)

By: Paul Born