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Engage!

Creating Vibrant Communities

This new book, *Creating Vibrant Communities*, is the story of a movement that has grown into cities across the country, from Victoria, BC to St John's, Newfoundland.

The writers tell the remarkable story of people who are hosting unprecedented community conversations - with citizens (no matter what their income), community developers, business people, and representatives from all levels of government – to determine needs, community assets, and strategies.



They're putting plans into action with astonishing results.

In Canada, "poverty reduction" is no longer a "wouldn't it be nice" dream discussed after yet another failure to make a dent in an age-old problem. It's a living, breathing, exhilarating reality.

Al Hatton of the United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada describes the book as "a motivating and practical read for those of us committed to reducing poverty and revitalizing communities."



He adds that those who are committed to improving conditions in local communities seldom have the “time, space or capacity to document and share the remarkable work of individuals and organizations committed to improving conditions in local communities.”

Creating Vibrant Communities pulls together the stories and the information, documenting this remarkable movement in a way that is both accessible and inspiring.

[More...](#) Learn more about *Creating Vibrant Communities*, including how to order the book

Related Links:

- [Read exciting Vibrant Communities updates](#)
- [For more stories and reflections on Vibrant Communities, visit the Caledon Institute for Social Policy's website](#)

By: Paul Born

Inspiring Communities

Formed in part through partnership with Tamarack, *Inspiring Communities* is a nationwide group of communities in New Zealand committed to supporting local communities. Those who have attended Tamarack's annual *Communities Collaborating Institute* have benefited greatly from this exchange.



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Inspiring Communities is a catalyst for change in communities and operates an *Exchange* that links communities with others who are involved in community-led initiatives, offering information, advice and support.

They support local communities to reach their vision and goals by:

- Promoting the power of working collaboratively
- Supporting leadership and learning for community-led development
- Linking people, projects and places
- Developing and sharing resources, tools and new knowledge
- Being a catalyst for change in communities of place.

They recently announced that Mark Cabaj has been confirmed as one of three speakers for next year's Philanthropy New Zealand Conference.



[Read the whole *Inspiring Communities* newsletter](#)

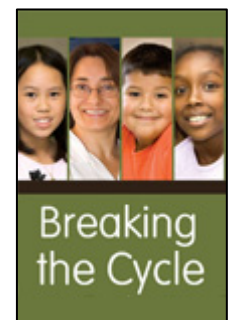
Related Links:

- [Read Mark's reflections from his last visit](#)

By: Paul Born with files from the *Inspiring Communities* Newsletter

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Ontario

A recent survey by Angus Reid reports that the majority of Canadians think poverty continues to be a problem and governments – often pre-occupied with modest tax cuts or incremental adjustments to overly rigid welfare programs – are not providing the right solution. An overwhelming number of respondents (92%) in an *Environics* poll said that if Sweden and United Kingdom can substantially reduce poverty, so can Canada.



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Communities

Is anyone listening?

The Government of Ontario showed that it is, when it released its [Strategy to Reduce Poverty](#) on December 4th. The highlights of the strategy include:

1. A confirmation that reducing poverty is both morally important and a smart way to reduce taxes and strengthen the economy.
2. A focus on improvements in employment, housing, education, etc.

3. Special attention to people who experience higher incidence of poverty – including women, Aboriginal peoples, seniors, and persons with disabilities.
4. A smarter government which includes – among other things – getting rid of rules and regulations in the welfare system that trap people in poverty rather than helping them in their journey out of poverty.
5. An innovative set of indicators to track the Province's progress towards its goal.

How big an impact does the Government want to make? Big – their goal is to reduce the child poverty rate by 25% in five years.

At a time when public leadership is so important, Ontario's bold initiative confirms that governments are up to that challenge.



[Read all about Deb Mathews and the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction](#)

Related Links:

- [Download the report *Breaking the Cycle - Ontario's poverty Reduction Strategy*](#)
- [Read the Angus Reid report on Poverty in Canada](#)
- [The Ontario Association of Food Banks confirms that poverty is costly. Read the full report](#)
- [Sherri Torjman's ten major policy areas for comprehensive poverty reduction strategy](#)
- [John Stapleton's solution to reduce the number of working-age adults](#)
- [Concrete targets for reducing poverty/Campaign 2000](#)

By: Mark Cabaj

Vibrant Communities Updates

Trois Rivières - *Économie communautaire de Francheville* (ÉCOF) is becoming the latest **Vibrant Community**. They work in eleven neighbourhoods in Trois Rivières, Québec, focusing on housing improvements, increased employment incomes, development of a learning culture, and support of the social economy. Read more about ECOF initiatives [here](#).

Calgary - Calgary City Council recently confirmed long-term funding for a "Universal Low Income Transit Pass," largely a result of **Vibrant Communities Calgary's** "Fair Fares" efforts. Calgarians living on a low income are now assured of access to affordable transportation.

Saint John - **Vibrant Communities Saint John** has three year funding of nearly \$300,000 for **Framework for Employer Specific Essential Skills Strategy**, in partnership with the **Learning Exchange**.

Meanwhile, *Learn and Go* has commitments for improved lighting and fencing, a better ball park, a homeless shelter and transportation for youth.

Web Redesign for Tamarack in 2009

The Tamarack website has become the primary way for people in our online community to share insights, knowledge, ideas and inspiration.

This year, 91,000 visitors viewed 550,000 pages and downloaded over half a million articles and podcasts from the Tamarack website.



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Emrah Turudu

As one of our visitors you might be interested to know that we have devoted much time and energy this year in gaining a better understanding of what you want and need, and the best possible way that we can deliver it to you.

Watch for an exciting new look and feel on the website as we begin the New Year. Here are just a few small samples of the upcoming changes you can expect to see in the first few months:

- Our popular e-magazines, [Engage!](#) and [Eunoia](#), have been combined. This single publication will be easier to read and will now feature a longer opening article, more “ideas we're following” resources, a well-animated list of upcoming events and a print friendly version.
- The resources and research available on the [Action for Neighbourhood Change \(ANC\)](#) website will be integrated into the Tamarack website, making this exceptional material easier to access.
- We have already improved your ability to search the website using the *Site Search* function, and will be fine tuning the left side navigation to make it not only easier, but also more intuitive to help you find the information you need.

In short, our aim will be to make the website more focused, less cluttered and more accessible.

Related Links:

- [Subscribe to Engage! today for the latest in community engagement thinking and practice](#)
- [We'd love your to hear your feedback or encouragement about the website!](#)

By: Paul Born

Breathing with the Holidays

Winter Solstice, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Christmas may all involve gatherings with colleagues and friends, shopping, buying and preparing extra meals, overnight guests, and travel, not to mention worries about the weather or family members too frail or emotionally fragile to enjoy the season.



As people who may already be struggling with the overwhelming demands of supporting those who are in poverty or working to sustain community initiatives, how are we to cope?

In a word: b-r-e-a-t-h-e. Right now, as you sit at your computer, shut your eyes for a moment or two. Surrender your weight into the chair that holds you, relax your forehead, your shoulders, and your abdomen.

Notice that as you inhale your belly rises and as you exhale it gently falls again. Give yourself a mantra: inhale, silently saying "soft." Exhale, saying "belly." Or inhale... "relax," exhale... "peace."

The wonderful thing about using the breath as your focus is that it is portable. You can breathe when you're sitting in traffic, standing in line at the store, or even holding the line with a feisty teenager.

Bringing your awareness to the breath brings you right into the present time – and away from revisiting the past or worrying about the future. So next time you notice how stressed you are, congratulate yourself on your awareness and take just a moment to rest.

Rest your awareness in the breath.

 [Visit Nancy's website](#)

Learn More:

- [Jon Kabat Zinn's famous Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School](#)

By: Nancy Leach Schaeffer

Featured Resources

Supporting Vulnerable Communities - A new research report released by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) provides evidence that governments, by supporting the capacity of voluntary organizations in vulnerable communities, can bring about sustainable benefits to these communities and help improve their circumstances. Read the full report [here](#).

Social Programs Stimulate the Economy - A just released paper by The Caledon Institute is calling for strong social programs to play a vital part in an economic stimulus package. Ottawa has at its disposal several effective social programs that can play an important part in an economic stimulus package to combat the recession. Boosting three geared-to-income programs – the Canada Child Tax Benefit, refundable GST credit and Working Income Tax Benefit – would put additional money into the hands of lower-income households who are most likely to spend it immediately. Employment Insurance, which now serves only four in ten unemployed Canadians, must be restored and strengthened. Ottawa should also bolster its transfers to the hardest hit provinces and territories so that they do not bear the full burden of social assistance and other recession-linked cost increases. Read the full paper, *The Forgotten Fundamentals*, [here](#).

Canada's World - Shauna Sylvester, one of Canada's leading social innovators, writes in a recently released paper entitled, *Moving Beyond Dichotomies: Canada's Role in the 21st Century?*, "We learned that our country is fragmented - the spaces where we come together to learn and share as Canadians are few and far between. Finding the voices that are not a part of the foreign policy choir requires finding those spaces and playing within them. It also means creating new spaces where citizens can come together as citizens to really hear each other, explore nuances, grapple with complexity, make informed choices and express their desires and wants for their country."

This report was generated by randomly choosing citizens to come together to talk about their visions for Canada, to share their thoughts about Canada's historic contributions to the world, to build their literacy about global issues and to offer their collective perspectives on how to move forward. Read the full paper [here](#).