



View Engage online at: <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/newsletter/engage.htm!>

## Engage!

### Transforming Community

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With poverty on the rise across Canada, business as usual in the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors is not possible – a change of strategy is necessary.

Longer term interventions to reduce poverty and social exclusion have become the responsibility of community-driven initiatives in partnership with organizations and those who are willing to commit on a long-term basis.

But, what role can an organization play in a community? And what is the implication of that support, for the organization itself, and for the citizens of the community?



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Stefanie Timmermann

In Montreal's Saint-Michel neighbourhood, Centraide United Way of Greater Montreal (Centraide) intentionally set out to demonstrate and test a new way of working with communities. Along the way, they also explored a new role for Centraide.

A new Tamarack paper by Dal Brodhead details Centraide's transformation into an advocate for and partner in community building.

The paper will be released in conjunction with *Transforming Community*, a Tamarack tele-learning seminar on July 15 featuring Lyse Brunet, Vice-President for Social Development at Centraide.

Joining Lyse on the line will be Ira Barbell, Senior Associate at the US-based Annie E. Casey Foundation, and a key player in the Foundation's flagship neighbourhood-based initiative *Making Connections*.

Register for the seminar now to join the conversation on community transformation and receive an e-copy of *Neighbourhood Change and the Role of Centraide/United Way of Greater Montreal in Saint-Michel*.



Register now to be part of the conversation!

## Learn More:

- [Visit the Making Connections website](#)
- [Visit Centraide's website](#)

By: Louise Kearney

## What does it mean to belong?

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Thanks to the 501 people who responded to last month's Community Meaning Survey!

462 people responded to the question: What does belonging mean to you?

Jean Vanier says that belonging does for human beings what soil does for plants: it nurtures us, and enables us to grow and to blossom.



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That's certainly what came through in the survey responses.

"Belonging," wrote one respondent, "means feeling safe to be who you are without fear."

Most of all, belonging is about being – it's about sense, emotion, relationship - it is at the essence of where we all want to be. It's a place and a feeling we yearn for. And, when we feel as though we belong, we are in community.

As Paul continues his research and writing for his forthcoming book *Seeking Community - Finding Belonging in Chaotic Times*, he'll share his thoughts on his blog. Join him [there](#), or [email us](#), with your responses and thoughts on belonging.



[What does belonging mean? Read the responses.](#)

## Learn More:

- [Visit the Belonging Initiative – a national collaboration to end isolation and loneliness](#)
- [The Quilt of Belonging reflects the fabric of society](#)

By: Louise Kearney

## Integrating Strategies

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Although Newfoundland's economy is booming, many in the province are being left behind.

To start to change that, Vibrant Communities St. John's (VCSJ) has identified five strategies to reduce poverty in St. John's lowest income neighbourhoods.

The focus will be on integrating strategies – so a single mother might be part of the Citizens' Voice Network that helps guide poverty reduction efforts in the city while she benefits from child care, high school completion or education-to-work assistance.



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Integrating initiatives has already paid dividends for Vibrant Communities' newest Trail Builder.

The pilot project, Makin' It Work, connected willing workers with well-paid permanent jobs by bringing employers, community agencies and people living on income support together.



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Ashok Rodrigues

Even VCSJ's proposed staffing plan connects initiatives – while a coordinator will work for the convening agency, the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador, other employees will work directly with partner groups involved in the initiative.

 [Read about VCSJ's three year plan in Caledon's story, Vibrant Communities St. John's: Engaging Citizens and Changing Systems](#)

### Learn More:

- [Check out VCSJ's webpage](#)
- [Visit Newfoundland's Community Accounts website to learn more about St. John's or other Newfoundland communities](#)
- [Learn more about Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

By: Brenda Doner with Mark Cabaj

## Vibrant Communities Updates

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**Niagara** – On August 20th and 21st, 2008, Opportunities Niagara Region is offering a [train the trainer workshop on Step Up to Leadership](#), a curriculum to build the capacity of low income people to participate as leaders and board members of organizations in their communities. Step Up to Leadership was recently featured in a tele-learning seminar called [Learn to Include, Include to Learn](#). Learn more about the training [here](#).

**St. John's** – St. John's is the latest Vibrant Communities Trail Builder and has received financial and technical support from Vibrant Communities Canada to support a multi-year plan to reduce poverty. Peggy Matchim, coordinator of Vibrant Communities St. John's and Aisling Gogan, director of the poverty reduction strategy of the government of Newfoundland and Labrador, visited with Opportunities Waterloo Region and the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries recently to discuss Newfoundland's approach to poverty reduction.

**Montréal** – Vivre St. Michel en santé (VSMS)'s Table Aliment'action is working on access to fresh fruit and vegetables for St. Michel residents. Solutions could involve citizens, organizations, businesses, and elected officials. VSMS also expects 300 people to be involved in "Le grand rendez-vous", a celebration and evaluation event in September.

**Hamilton** – 430 people participated in the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction's (HRPR) June 5th Report to the Community, and 150,000 received the Hamilton Spectator newspaper insert that summarized the report. The 53 groups who promoted their early successes in posters at the event will now have the opportunity to participate in a media boot camp at Mohawk College that includes the chance to pitch their stories to local media.

HRPR is also working with partners to provide 1000 backpacks this fall to Hamilton children facing the challenge of poverty. They have challenged businesses, city government, and social agencies across the city to provide the resources to purchase and fill these backpacks. Read more [here](#).

## Shaping Policy for Communities

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One of the major lessons to emerge from Vibrant Communities – and many other similar initiatives – is that significant improvements in our quality of life almost always require public policy and that better public policies result when they are shaped in collaboration with “community.”

The challenge for communities and governments is not “why” to work together, but rather “how” to work together.

The Caledon Institute of Social Policy is heading up a year-long action-research project to combine government and community knowledge and experience on shaping policies to improve the economic and social well being of communities.

Partners in the project include five communities, Caledon and representatives from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa.

The project will generate two major products: a web-based policy tracking document and a bilingual manual on community-government collaboration.



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roberta casaliggi*

The task of communities and government collaboration is about to come just a little bit easier!



[Visit the Caledon website for more on the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy](#)

### Learn More:

- [Learn how the public sector is engaged in Vibrant Communities initiatives](#)
- [What's the role of government officials in providing leadership in communities?](#)
- [Creating policy change from the ground up](#)

By: Mark Cabaj

## The Great Debaters

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There is something about the victory of the underdog that is inspiring. To triumph by overcoming adversity is the ultimate success story.

Loosely based on a true story, *The Great Debaters* depicts just that – the ultimate success story for a group of African American students in the midst of a racially-charged debate.

This story is driven by debate coach Melvin Tolson (Denzel Washington) at the historically black Wiley College. Challenged by the social milieu of his time and under constant fire for his unconventional leadership and radical views, Melvin uses his drive and the power of words to turn a group of African American students into an elite debate team.



©<http://www.thegreatdebatersmovie.com/site.html>

At a time when Jim Crow laws were common and lynch mobs were a daily fear for African Americans, Melvin fights to place his debate team on equal footing with whites in the American south.

But, *The Great Debaters* tells the story of more than a determined debate team, it showcases the potential impact of powerful leadership, collective passion and an intense will to overcome.



[Get more Tamarack movie reviews!](#)

### Learn More:

- [Visit The Great Debaters Official Website](#)
- [The Great Debaters at Wiley College](#)

By: Rachel Gainer

## Featured Resources

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**Primer on Public Engagement** - This primer from Public Agenda explains how public engagement helps create civic capacity for public problem solving and offers 10 core principles of effective public engagement. Learn more [here](#).

**A Gathering Storm** - A new report released by the Ontario Association of Food Banks, reveals that the recent rise in food, gasoline, and energy prices is beginning to affect low-income families and food banks across the province. OAFB has also produced an accompanying online video. Download the report [here](#).