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Beautiful Thinking for March

Signs of Hope – Seeds of Opportunity: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy

By: Liz Weaver

In these very chaotic economic times, citizens and communities across Ontario are facing real challenges but, at the same time, seeds of opportunity now exist to advance a comprehensive, province-wide effort to reduce poverty.



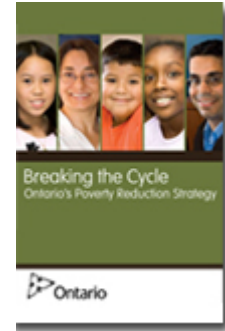
In December 2008, the Government of Ontario released *Breaking the Cycle* their first-ever, comprehensive strategy for poverty reduction. This strategy commits to reduce child poverty by 25% in the next 5 years and calls upon all levels of government and communities to collaborate in developing creative, local solutions to help reach this goal.

The Strategy outlines several funding opportunities to support the work of poverty reduction including *The Community Opportunities Fund* – which commits \$5 million annually to encourage neighbourhood and community revitalization through partnerships between local business, governments, volunteers, community agencies and most importantly, local residents.

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Community response to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy has been largely positive and there is a renewed energy now focused on poverty reduction efforts. Recently, several provincial networks – including the Association of Municipalities in Ontario, Campaign 2000 and the 25 in 5 Network – have released articles, research papers and blueprints for poverty reduction. In addition, the 25 in 5 Network has recently travelled across the province encouraging municipalities to develop community planning tables.



Over the past year, planning tables focused on poverty reduction have emerged in Kingston, Peterborough, and Windsor while many other communities are also exploring how they organize their response. Opportunities Waterloo Region and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, -- two Vibrant Community partners – are often being contacted for advice by several of these roundtables because of their experience and success in establishing comprehensive, collaborative local solutions to poverty reduction.

Poverty is a complex problem with many inter-related root causes – and no simple solutions. Effective poverty reduction strategies require comprehensive collaboration at the community level to find the best solutions. The Government of Ontario recognizes this reality and its Poverty Reduction Strategy offers an important opportunity that communities must seize.



[Read *Breaking the Cycle* here](#)

Related Links:

- [Attend *Reducing Poverty in Ontario: A Place-Based Approach* – a three-day learning opportunity with Minister Deb Matthews, Sherri Torjman, Tim Broadhead, Robin Cardozo, Frances Lankin and others. Learn more here!](#)
- [Reflecting on Vibrant Communities \(2002-2006\) highlights from several place-based, poverty reduction efforts across Canada](#)
- [Learn more about 25-in-5: Network for Poverty Reduction – a group of more than 100 organizations and individuals who are committed to action on eliminating poverty](#)

- View the six necessary ingredients for successful multi-sectoral collaborations

Evaluations That Are Useful By: Mark Cabaj

Almost everyone has a story of a much anticipated evaluation report that ended up sitting on a shelf gathering dust. Sometimes this happens because evaluations do a poor job answering the questions that stakeholders want answered. Some evaluations come too late to be useful: the decisions they were meant to inform were made a long time ago. Yet other evaluations answer the questions of some stakeholders but not others.



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Evaluation mis-fires become more likely and more dramatic in complex change initiatives where there are many domains of activities to explore and a large and diverse range of stakeholders with unique expectations of an evaluation process.

How can people and organizations improve the probabilities that their evaluation efforts will be relevant, timely and helpful? Michael Quinn Patton – a leading evaluation expert – argues that people should embrace the concept of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE):

Utilization-Focused Evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their actual use and by users who have responsibility to apply evaluation findings and implement recommendations. Therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use.

Where to start? Why not a checklist? The UFE checklist describes a series of tasks and challenges in twelve different areas that should be addressed BEFORE an evaluation is designed:

- Who is the 'primary' stakeholder for this evaluation?
- What information do they need and for what kinds of decisions?
- How do they want data collected, analyzed, communicated how?
- When do they need it?

These are straightforward and practical questions are too often missed as everyone rushes to talk about indicators, logic models and questionnaires.

Does embracing a UFE approach guarantee a useful evaluation? No, but it can dramatically improve the probabilities that your group will create and manage an evaluation process that gets you the information when you need it.

Related Links:

- [Utilization Focused Evaluation Checklist](#)
- [Online UFE Checklist](#)
- [Measuring learning with Michael Quinn Patton](#)
- [More resources on Evaluation](#)



Supporting Pioneering Leaders *Reviewed by: Paul Born*

This is one of my all time favourite articles written by Margaret Wheatley. As we are preparing to host a conversation with her in April, I wanted to share this with you as a warm up. Here is an excerpt from the paper to give you a sense of the article.

"Many individuals and organizations, in increasing numbers, are attempting to intervene to resolve the most pressing problems of this time: health, human rights, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, environmental issues, and democracy. Far too many of these well-intentioned efforts are subverted by the lack of talented leadership. Money for projects disappears because of mismanagement, inexperience, or corruption. Change efforts fail because of inappropriate implementation processes. In developing countries we say there's a leadership vacuum. In developed countries, we ask, "Where have all the leaders gone?"

"So the need for new leaders is urgent. We need new leadership in communities everywhere. We need leaders who know how to nourish and rely on the innate

creativity, freedom, generosity, and caring of people. We need leaders who are life-affirming rather than life destroying. Unless we quickly figure out how to nurture and support this new leadership, we can't hope for peaceful change. We will, instead, be confronted by increasing anarchy and societal meltdowns."

- ▶ [Read the full article here](#)
- ▶ [Join for a special tele-learning seminar on April 22nd, *The Promise and Paradox of Community*, with Paul Born and Margaret Wheatley](#)
- ▶ [Collaboration in a Chaotic World](#) online seminar with Margaret Wheatley
- ▶ [Visit Margaret Wheatley's website](#)
- ▶ [More resources on Leadership](#)

Community: The Structure of Belonging

Reviewed by: Sylvia Cheuy

Many of us have a pretty good sense of what a healthy community looks like – and can probably list at least a few successful examples from somewhere else, but that doesn't always mean we know how to create these results in our own community. In this book, Peter Block suggests that in order to address the complex issues facing them, communities must rediscover a sense of connection to one another and an understanding of the common good.

By identifying the dynamics of how communities transform themselves, Block reminds us that "community is created by citizens through the conversations they have with each other; and, the conversation of what we want to create together is the heart of creating a future distinct from the past. And all we have to do to create the future is to change the nature of our conversations and go from blame to ownership, and from bargaining to commitment, and from problem solving to possibility." To create this kind of community transformation, Block suggests that questions become more important than answers; convening is a more critical skill than commanding; and, leadership is about getting the right people together in the right way. Six kinds of conversations that help to create community accountability and commitment are outlined – along with lots of practical ingredients, questions and actions that can be used to restore vitality to your community.

- ▶ [Thoughts on community with Peter](#)
- ▶ [More resources on Community Capacity Building](#)

Working with Businesses to Build Better Communities

Reviewed by: [Garry Loewen](#)

"A growing number of businesses recognize the benefits of getting involved in the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities and that they have a role to play in driving social change. However finding the most effective and sustainable ways to do this can often be a challenge."

This is a very practical resource developed from findings of a U.K.-based project where the private sector and social landlords are working together to benefit communities. It outlines a rationale for why community groups should work with business; some possible opportunities for action; and, a How-To guide for engaging business in community projects.

Its companion document, *A Toolkit for Businesses: Building Opportunities for Business and Social Landlords to Work Together* provides resources for businesses that are "striving for better ways to engage, and most of all better ways to sustain long-term positive impact" in their work in communities. The first section of the report educates about the social housing sector. Section 2 is full of ideas of opportunities for how businesses can get involved, from the familiar to the innovative. Section 3 outlines for businesses how to do it.

- ▶ [Click to access Building Opportunities article](#)
- ▶ [Click to access A Toolkit for Businesses](#)
- ▶ [Visit the Business in the Community website](#)
- ▶ [More resources on Corporate Social Responsibility](#)

Meet the New Editor of *Engage!* By: [Sylvia Cheuy](#)

Earlier this month, I joined Tamarack as the new Editor of *Engage!*. What I love about this role is that it gives me a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the field of community engagement and share these discoveries with others.



In addition to my work at Tamarack, my colleague Holly Greenwood and I are cofounders of Mandala Associates – a coaching and consulting practice that helps individuals, organizations, and communities to realize their potential and put it into action in the world. We are consultants to [Headwaters](#)

[Communities in Action \(HCIA\)](#) – a grassroots citizen group that fosters leadership and action in support of community well-being within Ontario’s Headwaters Region.

My involvement with HCIA gives me an intuitive sense of what people may find useful, but my goal and sincere hope is that you – the readers of Engage! – will help me shape the content of future issues by sharing your thoughts and ideas with me. What questions are you wrestling with? What do you need to learn more about? What breakthroughs and insights can you share? What do you know now that you wish someone had been able to share with you? Please [email me!](#) I’m looking forward to hearing from you!

 [Learn more about the Tamarack Team](#)

Engage!
to create vibrant communities

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