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Beautiful Thinking for April

Community Stories: Telling Tales that Inspire

By: Anne Makhoul

The Caledon Institute of Social Policy's first 'community story' was written in 1997 by Lance Evoy, now the Director of Concordia University's Institute in Community Development. It described work under way at the Montreal Community Loan Association (MCLA). The series was established because Caledon's Ken Battle and Sherri Torjman recognized the importance and power of allowing people the chance to tell their stories in their own words.



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Both Lance and the MCLA continue to thrive, and their activities and interests have evolved alongside the growth in our collective understanding of community development. Today, most of Caledon's community stories are written collaboratively by community representatives working with a Caledon writer, but the series' intent – to highlight inspiring work – remains unchanged.

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Why do these stories matter? They provide both a glimpse of what others have accomplished and a launching pad for new ideas. They demonstrate that with a collective will, imagination and an abiding concern for the welfare of others, communities can do great work.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was recently highlighted in a [community story](#), as was one of its partners – [The Hamilton Spectator](#). For Liz Weaver, Director of The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, working with the Caledon Institute to tell their story was a valuable experience not only because it helped them to capture their own learning but also because “the Roundtable benefited from the increased profile.” In turn, The Spectator story was re-printed in [The Nova Scotia Policy Review](#), an independent quarterly of politics, culture and justice.

One act of story writing inspired others, just as the ideas they contain will inspire community organizers in many parts of the country. A community newspaper in St. John’s, Newfoundland, that focuses on good news stories in high-poverty neighbourhoods led to the creation of a similar paper – [Around the Block](#) – in Saint John, New Brunswick. In the space of three issues, *Around the Block* has included stories from 120 citizens living in five high-priority neighbourhoods – areas of Saint John where residents and community groups are working to create opportunities for people living in poverty.

In this era of layoffs and closures in mainstream newspaper and broadcast outlets, community newspapers are filling information and relationship gaps in ways we might never have imagined. Caledon’s *Around the Block* [community story](#) affirms the importance of giving people an outlet for telling about the things that matter to them.

Stories have always been an effective way to enter into the rich past and the imagined future, and the best ones engage both our minds and our hearts. Caledon is proud to have the chance to chronicle the truly amazing efforts people have put into making their communities more equitable, safe and cohesive. Our community stories offer ‘mental hooks’ for people to hang complex problems and ideas upon in order to imagine – and help shape – their own future.

Related Links:

- [Access: Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Setting the Table for Change](#)
- [Access: Around the Block: A Citizen-Generated Community Newspaper in Saint John](#)
- [Visit the Caledon Institute of Social Policy Website](#)
- Learn more about Concordia University's Institute in Community Development and its Summer Program in Citizen Engagement – June 16th – 18th, 2009 [here](#) or email Director Lance Evoy [here](#)

Leading from the Future as it Emerges

By: Mark Cabaj with Sylvia

Albert Einstein argued that problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them. In the same spirit, Otto Scharmer suggests that a new collective leadership capacity is needed to meet the complex social, environmental and economic challenges we face today.



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To better frame this new leadership, Scharmer describes a “blind spot” in our collective understanding of leadership and transformation. “We know a great deal about *what* leaders do and *how* they do it. But we know very little about the inner place, the *source* from which they operate.”

Successful leadership depends on the quality of attention and intention that people bring to any situation. Two leaders facing the same circumstances and doing the same thing can bring about completely different outcomes, depending on the inner place from which they each operate. Scharmer explores this inner place in leaders – he calls it the “source” – in this “Theory U” model.

Scharmer says, those who are in touch with this source “experience the future as if it was “wanting to be born.” He calls this “presencing” and says the result often generates “ideas for meeting challenges and for bringing into being an otherwise impossible future.”

The journey through *Theory U's Five Movements* shows how the capacity for presencing can be developed. It is a journey that also develops the following seven essential leadership capacities:

1. *Holding the space of listening* - The foundational capacity of the U is listening: to others and to oneself. And listening to what emerges from the collective. Effective listening requires the creation of open space in which others can contribute to the whole.
2. *Observing* – The capacity to suspend the “voice of judgment” is key to moving from projection to true observation.
3. *Sensing* – The preparation for the experience at the bottom of the U – presencing – requires the tuning of three instruments: the Open Mind, the Open Heart, and the Open Will. This opening process is not passive but an active “sensing” together as a group. While an Open Heart allows us to see a situation from the whole, the Open Will *enables* us to begin to act from the emerging whole.
4. *Presencing* – The capacity to connect to the deepest source of self and will allows the future to emerge from the whole rather than from a smaller part or special interest group.
5. *Crystallizing* – When a small group of people commit themselves to the purpose and outcomes of a project, the power of their intention creates an energy field that attracts people, opportunities, and resources that make things happen.
6. *Prototyping* – Moving down the left side of the U requires the group to open up and deal with the resistance of thought, emotion, and will; moving up the right side requires the integration of thinking, feeling, and will in the context of practical applications and learning by doing.
7. *Performing* – A prominent violinist once said that he couldn’t simply play his violin in Chartres cathedral; he had to “play” the entire space, what he called the “macro violin,” in order to do justice to both the space and the music. Likewise, organizations need to perform at this macro level: they need to convene the right sets of players front-line people who are connected

through the same value chain) and to engage a social technology that allows a multi-stakeholder gathering to shift from debating to co-creating the new.

Related Links:

- [Access *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*](#)
- [Access the Theory U Executive Summary, *Addressing the Blind Spot of our Time*](#)
- [Visit Otto Scharmer's website to download the entire *Theory U* book](#)



Canada's Rural Leaders Create Vision for Vibrant, Healthy Communities By: [Sylvia Cheuy](#)

Healthy and vibrant rural communities are an essential part of Canada's future. That is the consensus of 800 rural leaders from across Canada. Their report, *One Vision, Many Voices: How to Build a Sustainable Rural Canada* outlines a comprehensive set of priorities for action – spanning governance, infrastructure, economy and environment – that they say are needed to ensure the sustainability of our rural communities.

The report suggests that current thinking that fragments the realities of rural and urban Canada is counterproductive. Instead, our rural leaders have issued a call to all Canadians to work together to create a healthy and vibrant nation with a greater appreciation for our interdependency. "In order to be successful, rural communities and urban areas must work together and compromise in order to bridge the divide – this is only possible through cooperation and building of trust."

Learn more about building sustainable rural communities:

- ◆ [Read *One Vision, Many Voices: How to Build a Sustainable Rural Canada*](#)
- ◆ [Visit the Rural Matters! website](#)

- ▶ Read *Bearing Fruit: Good Practice in Asset-Based Rural Community Development*
- ▶ More resources on Innovative Ideas

An Equitable Development Toolkit By: [Eric Leviten-Reid](#)

Interested in progressive strategies for neighbourhood renewal? PolicyLink is a US-based research and action institute. It promotes ideas and strategies that foster 'regional equity' - building neighbourhoods *and* creating a regional context that helps neighbourhoods thrive. The Equitable Development Toolkit includes dozens of practical strategies, tools and case studies to:

- Ensure new investments benefit all community members
- Link urban-core residents to regional economic opportunities
- Expand access to affordable housing
- Integrate strategies to avoid gentrification and displacement
- Help people get mortgages and business loans, build savings, increase income and accrue home equity.

As just one example, their *Why Place Matters: Building a Movement for Healthy Communities* document offers several case studies of how organizations are collaborating and using effective place-based strategies to positively impact community health throughout the U.S.

- ▶ Read the *Why Place Matters* report
- ▶ Visit the PolicyLink website for more tools
- ▶ More resources on Community Capacity Building

An Important Pan-Canadian Poverty Forum in Calgary in May

By: [Mark Cabaj](#)

Over the last decade, more and more Canadians have expressed concern about poverty and that communities and government should be more involved in addressing it. Their concern also comes with questions.

What are the causes and experience of poverty? What can provincial governments and businesses and community do alone -- and together -- to address poverty? What is the emerging link between climate change and poverty? What are concrete strategies that lead to improvements in people's lives?

These questions – and many others – will be explored by up to 750 people from across Canada on May 19-22 in Calgary at the Canadian Social Forum organized by the Canadian Council on Social Development.

With dozens of workshops, quality speakers, an innovative use of media, and plenty of room for participants to interact, the forum will likely be a milestone in the growing movement to reduce poverty across Canada.

- ▶ [Access the Preliminary Conference Brochure here](#)
- ▶ [Visit the Canadian Council on Social Development website](#)
- ▶ [More resources on Innovative Ideas](#)

Building a New Story with People and Communities

By: Nancy Schaeffer

In *Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities*, co-authors John Lord and Peggy Hutchison propose a "New Story" for communities. It is a story that calls for the full participation and contribution of people of all abilities in community life.

Three New Story principles offered to guide this journey are:

1. Intentionally build on strengths and gifts in order to maximize life for a person or a community
2. Relationships and networks are central to creating new ways of working.
3. Communities must be engaged in the issues that impact citizens with disabilities. We cannot build inclusive communities unless we collaborate with others in innovative ways

- ▶ [Learn more about *A New Story* from John's address to the Canadian Association for Community Living](#)
- ▶ [Learn more about this book on John Lord's website](#)

- ▶ View this video clip about The R Word Campaign
- ▶ Visit The R Word website to join the movement, “spread the word to end the word”
- ▶ More resources on Social & Economic Inclusion

Engage!

to create vibrant communities

Engage! is published by Tamarack to bring you inspiration, ideas, and the skills you need to envision and create vibrant communities. Learn more about Tamarack at:

<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g1s2.html>