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Anne Kubisch and the Aspen Institute By: Mark Cabaj



The idea of tackling all the inter-related factors of complex community issues - improving physical and mental health, homelessness, education and poverty - has been around for quite some time. Central governments began to design and fund 'comprehensive' efforts of neighborhood renewal in the late 1950s to early 1970s.

Though these early attempts did not produce the ambitious changes their designers anticipated, the inability of the "siloed" approaches that followed to fix these wicked challenges by focusing only on symptoms or pieces, means that working holistically and cooperatively is the only real way forward.

Today, there are a bewildering number of local efforts across North America employing holistic, integrated and comprehensive approaches. More recently, foundations, municipal and provincial governments and non-profit groups are increasingly interested in understanding more about these approaches and the potential they offer for impact.

Anyone serious about deepening their understanding of this approach to community building has important questions. How do different communities and networks approach issues comprehensively? What are the ingredients of effective comprehensive responses? How deep and durable are the results of these efforts, and is the cost worth the effort? What are the implications for policy makers, funders and evaluators? In the face of these important questions, it would be nice if someone would come along to help make sense of it all.

Beautiful thinking for
March
In this issue you'll find...

- Anne Kubisch and the Aspen Institute - By Mark Cabaj
- Peter Block a Big Hit with Tamarack Learners - By Sylvia Cheuy and Paul Born
- Practical Ideas for a Stronger Canada - By Markus Stadelmann-Elder
- Portraits of Child Poverty in Canada - By Sylvia Cheuy
- Volunteerism and Community Engagement - By Lori Gotlieb with Sylvia Cheuy
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Anne Kubisch and her colleagues at the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change do just that. The Roundtable on Community Change originated out of an ad hoc group of foundation representatives that met informally to discuss new comprehensive, community-building approaches to poverty and distressed neighborhoods in urban America. It became a Policy Program of the Aspen Institute in 1994. Since the beginning they have excelled at observing the large and diverse range of community change efforts, looking for patterns and principles that help change makers better understand and document their findings through resources such as *Voices from the Field I* and *II* and *Building Knowledge on Community Change*.

They are also relentless. The Aspen Institute is currently working on the latest summary of what it takes to improve the well-being of communities based on some of the most instructive community change efforts and leaders from across the United States of America.

Interested in getting an early peek at their findings? Join us at Tamarack's 2010 Communities Collaboration Institute.

Related Links:

- Listen to Mark's [Interview with Anne Kubisch](#)
- Download *Voices from the Field I* from the Aspen Institute for a modest fee
- Read *Voices from the Field II*
- Read *Building Knowledge About Community Change: Moving Beyond Evaluations*
- Check out the Aspen Institute's [Community Building Resource Exchange](#)

Peter Block a Big Hit with Tamarack Learners By: [Sylvia Cheuy](#) and [Paul Born](#)

On March 16 Paul Born will be interviewing Peter Block in a live tele-learning. This event has prompted huge interest from Tamarack's learning community with all 200 seats "sold out" almost a month before the event. The good news is that you can sign up to be the first to receive the post-interview summary of the seminar. This tremendous response suggests that Peter's work and insights have "touched on a nerve" that is resonating deeply with our learners.



To put this interview into context, it's helpful to recognize that 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 interview, Peter Block will further explore an idea outlined in his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 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.

Related Links:

- Register here to receive the audio seminar of the [Tele-Learning with Peter Block](#)
- Read some of Peter Block’s [Thoughts on Community](#)
- Find more resources at Tamarack on [Community Capacity Building](#)
- Find Paul Born’s book, [Community Conversations](#) here

Ideas we're following...

Practical Ideas for a Stronger Canada By: Markus Stadelmann-Elder

Maytree recently released a document which is a must-read for policy makers and practitioners who are interested in solutions that reduce poverty and promote a more prosperous and inclusive Canada.

Entitled *From Insecurity to Prosperity: Practical Ideas for a Stronger Canada*, it presents ideas that have been prepared by Maytree’s policy partners. The ideas cover issues such as employment insurance, caregiver benefits, community engagement, diversity in the arts, immigrant job training and refugee policy reform.

While economists are suggesting the worst of the recession is behind us, it will take much longer for the average Canadian to feel the effects of the recovery, and many will continue to be excluded from the prosperity of our society. The recession revealed intolerable gaps in our social safety net and highlighted the challenges that newcomers, Aboriginals and others continue to face in Canada.

The ideas presented by Maytree’s partners move beyond analyzing these problems to presenting solutions. Maytree’s partners share our belief in the power of public policy to transform our society and generate prosperity.

Related Links:

- Download [From Insecurity to Prosperity](#)
- Visit the [Maytree](#) website

A Crisis of Opportunity for Canada's Community Sector

By: Tim Brodhead, reviewed by Sylvia Cheuy

In this article, Tim Brodhead, President and CEO of The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, explores the implications of the current economic crisis on Canada's community sector. He suggests that, rather than being a short-term anomaly, the current economic crisis in fact signals a more significant – and permanent – change to Canadian society. Taken from this view, the community sector's response must therefore move beyond traditional, short-term coping strategies. Instead, the sector must "become leaders in making Canada and Canadians more resilient, adaptable, and creative in finding sustainable solutions to long-standing social challenges."

Tim Brodhead suggests that the current economic situation offers a call to the community sector to fundamentally re-think its role and its operating models. Instead, the sector must embrace innovation and re-assert its role as "catalysts, community-builders, and creative problem-solvers." So, what does innovation look like in the community sector? Some of the ideas explored in this paper include:

- *Funding Innovations* - The community sector's traditional funding paradigm – government grants augmented by private donations – could be replaced by an integrated (and entrepreneurial) approach to financing *all* of an organization's needs and financing. Community organizations delivering services largely funded by governments will need to demonstrate that they are highly professional, competitive, and efficient by providing "solid evidence of their superior efficacy, not just lower costs..." Community organizations could also diversify their funding by taking full advantage of new interactive technologies to engage donors.
- *People Innovations* - Innovation within the people side of the community sector includes a "crucial shift" in the distinction between paid and unpaid staff until ultimately "both are considered to be equally important parts of an organization's human resources and will receive equal management and attention." Organizations will also need to respond to the reality that volunteers "today are less motivated by loyalty to an organization than by commitment to a cause and by a desire that their contribution be meaningful."
- *Structure Innovations* - Changes in funding models and staffing patterns will open up new organizational forms that will blur the boundaries between for-profits and not-for-profits. Technology will require the development of new skills but will also extend the reach and lower the costs of the sector. And finally, new technologies and social process tools will create the possibilities for "a new operating system for the social sector" which could include: common impact metrics and reporting platforms that enable funders and grantees to "speak the same language"; shared collaboration platforms, so that funders, grantees, academics, and policy makers can better track interventions and share learning; *Change Camps* and other facilitated methods will bring together ordinary citizens with bureaucrats and technical experts to design service improvements; and, back-office collaboration, such as the one offered by TIDES Canada, will lower the cost of start-ups and creates multiple efficiencies.

Tim Brodhead believes that responsibility to “unleash the creativity” of Canada’s community sector is a shared one. The community sector a “new self-image, not just as the *caring* sector but as the *creative* sector. How those working *in* the sector conceive of its role, what it does and how it works, and how they articulate it to others actually goes a long way to determining what it can do.”

Government needs to provide “an enabling infrastructure that levels the playing field between social enterprises and small and medium-sized businesses. This would include a high-level institutional link responsible for actively strengthening, not just narrowly regulating, the sector; a legal framework that encourages social enterprises, and a range of policy measures that promote the contribution by Canadians of time and money to the public good.”

The business sector needs to make “facilitating time off for staff to pursue projects in local neighbourhoods or overseas; encouraging and matching staff donations; and, collaborating actively in community building” the norm. It also needs to offer encouragement to social entrepreneurs with as much enthusiasm as it does to business entrepreneurs. Finally, donors and foundations “should be at the forefront of encouraging innovation.” One way to do this would be for them to leverage their assets to explore the establishment of a social finance market.

Ultimately however, the most significant challenge may not be generating new ideas, but “to create systemic supports for a *continual* process of social innovation in Canada: identifying promising initiatives, rigorously testing their efficacy, and then investing in those that demonstrate results so that they have real impact.”

Related Links:

- Download Tim Brodhead’s [On Not Letting a Crisis Go to Waste](#) paper
- Visit [The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation](#) website here
- Find more resources on the [non-profit sector](#) here

Portraits of Child Poverty in Canada By: Sylvia Cheuy

Just over twenty years ago, MPs in the House of Commons voted unanimously to “eliminate poverty among Canadian children.” Today, one in six children in this country is still going to bed hungry. *Four Feet Up*, a powerful documentary by Canadian filmmaker Nance Ackerman, brings the issue of child poverty to life through the eyes of a wise 8-year-old boy named Isaiah.

Isaiah knows that his parents don’t make a lot of money and his thoughts about what “less fortunate” means emerge through his voice and his beautiful drawings. What Isaiah is unaware of is his parents’ constant worry about putting food on the table, affording any after-school opportunities, and keeping stereotypes at a distance. *Four Feet Up* invites us into the lives of this determined family, and reveals a heart-breaking experience of child poverty in one of the world’s wealthiest nations.

Nance Ackerman and her partner, Jamie Alcorn, have also combined screenings of the film with a photo and art exhibit entitled *Broken Promises*. "Each portrait is acting as a journey, a portal, into the issues surrounding poverty in our country: food security, dental care, education, stereotypes, crisis health care...." Ackerman says. The exhibit puts a face and a voice to child poverty in Canada. Let's hope that these pictures will inspire collective action in the interests of our children and our future.

Related Links:

- Watch video clips from [Four Feet Up](#) on their website here
- More about poverty reduction in Canada at the [Vibrant Communities](#) website

Volunteerism and Community Engagement By: Lori Gottlieb with Sylvia Cheuy

Do you volunteer? Those of us currently employed by not-for-profit agencies know the important role that volunteers play for our clients, our organization and our community. We may even be aware of the research confirming the benefits of volunteering to the volunteer's own health and well-being, but many of us don't volunteer ourselves. Presently, about 67% of all volunteering is done by only 5% of Canadian adults - leaving a huge amount of work on the shoulders of a very few.

The changing nature of volunteering in Canada has been explored in research entitled, *Canada: Who Cares?* In it, co-authors Linda Graff and Paul Reed describe the impact of volunteers this way, "The richness of life leaches away with the departure of volunteers. Without the connections and caring that is the essence of volunteering and community involvement, our communities become sterile. The organizations we've been counting on to help us, to enrich our lives, cure our illnesses, and support us when we're in need, will falter."

The article below was sent to me by Lori Gottlieb. Lori is a consultant and the Manager of Community Engagement for The Arthritis Society in Ontario. She is an expert in community and corporate volunteerism and has worked in the field for more than 20 years. Here are her recommendations for how to find a volunteer opportunity that's a good fit for you. It also offers a great perspective for those of you responsible for recruiting volunteers to your own organization.

What to Know and What to Ask: Finding a Volunteer Position That's Right for You

The concept of community engagement can hold many meanings depending on how you are connected to your community. For some, it is engaging as a group or individuals to build relationships for the purpose of benefiting a community, for some it is about becoming engaged individually for the purpose of getting involved, making a difference and learning....this can also be called volunteerism.

In Ontario alone, based on the 2004 *Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, 50% of Ontarians aged 15 and up volunteered for a total of 819 million hours. Individuals and groups volunteer for many different reasons but one thing they have in common is finding the right position for their needs. So, if you are considering volunteering, you need to be armed with the best tools so that you can make an informed decision before committing to any organization.

Let's look at some things you should know before you connect to a volunteer program. Ask yourself "why do I want to volunteer?" What is your motivation? Are you looking to build skills, network, socialize, give something back, and share an expertise? What is your schedule like? How much time can you give? What type of organization do you want to be affiliated with?

Once you have a better sense of what you want you can start asking the organizations what they can offer. Here are some questions you may want to consider asking:

- What is the minimum time requirement?
- What is the application process?
- What types of positions are you looking for?
- Are there any prerequisites to volunteering? Criminal check? Medical?
- Where is the volunteer work located?
- How flexible can it position be?
- How long do you have to volunteer before getting a reference?
- What type of training and orientation is required?

Other questions you may want to consider are:

- Can you change positions?
- Are you able to work on short term projects?
- Can you volunteer virtually?
- What are the benefits of the position?

Finally, there are many outlets to find volunteer positions. Most organizations have their volunteer positions posted on their website. There are also a variety of websites that link communities to volunteer opportunities such as [Workopolis](#), [Charity Village](#), [Volunteer Toronto](#), to name a few. Check your local volunteer centre, library, school, as well as your internal company's communications. Many companies have engaged with non-profit organizations on corporate philanthropy and engagement.

Volunteering is a rewarding experience with so much to offer. It gives you a chance to learn, meet others, understand your community, share resources and build on your portfolio and most importantly make a difference.

Related Links:

- Visit the [The Arthritis Society - Ontario](#) website
- Email [Lori Gotlieb](#)
- Visit [Canada Who Cares?](#) and learn more about volunteering trends in Canada
- Find more resources on [volunteerism](#)

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. More about Tamarack at: <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g1s2.html>