

## Basics of Community Development

---

Effective community work is created through relationship building with like-minded community people around a specific social issue or need. High-minded ideals and political agendas do create policy, which does affect community development however it is not necessarily responsive to communities needs, or ideals.

The ability of a small group to effect change depends to a great extent on their ability to build coalitions, alliances, networks and progressive political lobby groups with all people in the community, policy makers through to grassroots inclusive.



The following information on social policy and community development is intended to assist individuals and groups in various communities to better understand social organizing and to engage in the work of community development.

### What is social policy?

**Through lobbying, communities or citizens can often effect changes and new developments to social policy, which meet their needs on both the community level and the individual level (Gil, 1992, 1-6).**

Social policy is a set of regulations implemented by government, industry, voluntary associations, and other professional bodies to meet social objectives. Social policy is used specifically to govern individuals' relationships to each other, the government and other service providers, by maintaining existing social systems, which reflect societal morals and values and which, govern our lives (Gil, 1992).

Often the intent of specific social policy is to create equal access to resources such as the economy, labour market, services and participation in community life (Ife, 1995). However, because social policy is created from the top down, by politicians or legislative bodies, to be carried out by practitioners and to be accessed by clients or service users, the original intent of the social policy is often lost and at times does more harm than good.

Social policy is generally created by policy makers, senior bureaucrats and legislators, who represent a government with very different needs than the average citizen, who is most often affected by the policy (Wharf & McKenzie, 1998).

In order to create policy, which is both effective and relevant to a community it should be developed and implemented by that community.

### What is community?

### **Community Is:**

- **Viewed differently by everyone.**
- **May or may not be based on common geographical location.**
- **Made up of individuals, families associations, neighbourhoods, and organizations.**
- **Components may include a common history, geography, general environment, or economic base.**
- **Based on formal relationships or informal relationships.**
- **May form out of a common interest.**

We all want healthy communities in which to raise our families; stay connected with others and achieve our dreams and goals. The community is the context in which we have health and well being so we need to have a common understanding of what community is. Community has been defined in many ways yet the definition we have found the most effective to work with is by Francis Rick, (1999), in which community is defined as "simply a collection of relationships". In using this definition, community can be understood as a geographical entity (a place), an institutional or organizational entity (an agency or university) either combined with the relational element of community members or participants in that community.

### **The Internet as a Community**

The Internet demonstrates many of the traits described as a community. It is made up of both personal and group communities sharing common interests, work, etc. and has enormous potential to influence discourse and actions. It could be considered a safe and familiar environment and does help to bring together like-minded individuals. This makes it possible to learn from others and create change and social action while considering the larger context of the issue. For these reasons we find the Internet a positive and useful method of facilitating community development.

We believe that this form of community development and communication can build greater social interaction, encourage wider participation in discourse on the issue, greater honesty and a focus on the person not on the status he or she might present. When you can not see the context of the person with whom you are "networking" it is more difficult to be judgmental of them or their environment. Instead we must base our opinions on their work or critical thinking ability, their creativity or their presentation style. It is possible that given access to computers and the basic training in manoeuvring this often times mysterious domain, that we are actually levelling the playing field for those with less social status. It might even lead to a more egalitarian form of interaction. "Networked communications will usher in a renewed era of democratic participation and revitalized community" (March, 2000). The distribution of information and interconnectedness of communities can be enhanced by this new technology.

### **What is Community Development?**

**It is a grassroots process by which communities:**

- **Become more responsible**

- **Organize and plan together**
- **Develop healthy options**
- **Empower themselves**
- **Reduce ignorance poverty and suffering**
- **Create employment and economic opportunities and**
- **Achieve social economic cultural and environmental goals**

**(Frank & Smith, 1999)**

### **What is community development?**

*"...an incremental process through which individuals, families and communities gain the power, insight and resources to make decisions and take action regarding their well-being."* (Saskatoon District Health Community Development Team and Dr. Ron Labonte, 1999)

- A process that empowers communities to create sustainable programs, which are meaningful and useful to them.
- Focuses on full participation of all community members in all stages of the work being done, it recognises that each individual is an asset and brings a specific skill to the developmental work.
- The process of community development is set up to eliminate power imbalances so that the relationships with in the group are not only equal but also equitable.
- Allows all members of the community access to the same resources and opportunities.
- Incorporates a holistic perspective by analysing the impact of decisions in all areas of the community such as economic, social political, environmental and health.
- Is accomplished by changing the existing relationships between communities, individuals, organizations and institutions from imbalance to one of partnership. (Saskatoon District Health community development Team and Dr. Ron Labonte, 1999).

Community development is basically community organizing. Community organizing is a fancy word for relationship building and the foundation of relationship building is primarily communication. If you have the skills to communicate then you have the basis of what is required to do community development work.

**Community development values include: respect, equity, participation, power sharing, meaningful process, integrity, and hope.**

According to SDHCDT and Dr Ron Labonte, (1999) there are seven values which are an integral component to any community development work, and which need to be introduced and developed right from the beginning of the project with any community (SDHCDT and Dr. Ron Labonte, 1999). These are values, which promote basic integrity in the work of community development.

- Respect, valuing the inherent worth, dignity and abilities of all members to ensure positive

- and productive relationships.
- Equity, to treat all individuals with fairness and ensure justice will help to create an equitable environment.
  - Participation, by all members is the only way to ensure the outcomes truly reflect the needs and wants of the community.
  - Power sharing, power imbalances exist with in all communities, working to eliminate these will empower the community and ensure sustainable programming.
  - Meaningful process, the road to the goal is just as important as the final outcome, in order for a community to be empowered all members must have been apart of the whole process, this could be one of the most important aspects of community development.
  - Integrity, the community developer needs to be help accountable to the community.
  - Hope, community development brings the hope of change and progress to the concerns of a community.

There is no magic recipe for people to work together doing community development work. We are not always sure how to integrate the diverse groups that will "come to the table". However there are some common factors that should be attended to in beginning health related community development.

1. One dimension of the work is to ensure that you are working on one practical, concrete proposal. Spend time in discussing what is meant by terms such as 'collaboration' and 'participation'. This will assist your group in understanding a common language and in defining the following factors. [Questions to Consider in Developing Collaborative Relationships](#)
2. Commit to a common purpose or principles. Discussing principles will assist in determining the shared values as outlined above in Ron Labonte's work as well as in having some forewarning about possible areas of conflict that could arise.
3. Understand the internal logic of each discipline that is at the table. This doesn't mean that you have to accept it as yours but that in understanding the beliefs that drive the people involved, it helps you better understand their needs, desires and directions.
4. Make a list of women's health priorities and the context in which they exist. For example the issue of violence against women while deeply ingrained in our culture is an issue of health more than an issue of justice. If the group does not agree with these priorities there could be division and conflict.

In building strong communities of people who are involved and committed to community concerns it is important to demystify the process of community development. Many people around the table will be individuals who have come from disciplines that are strongly institutionalized in their beliefs. Work with this situation not against it. Help the group move from solely conclusion and outcome focus to action oriented processes that will have multi-dimensional outcomes and...

... **Good Luck!**

---

## Bibliography

- Frank, Flo and Anne Smith (1999).  
[The Community Development Handbook; A Tool To Build Community Capacity](#). Hull: Minister of Public Works and Government Services of Canada.
- Gil, David G. (1992).  
[Unravelling Social Policy](#). 5th ed. Rochester: Schenka Books.

- Ife, Jim (1995).  
Community Development: Creating Community Alternatives: Vision, Analysis, and Practice.  
Melbourne, Australia: Longman.
- March, Scott (2000).  
*Community Organizing on the Internet: Implications for Social Work Practitioners.* New Social  
Movement Network. [On-line] Available: [http://www.interweb-  
tech.com/nsmnet/docs/march.htm](http://www.interweb-tech.com/nsmnet/docs/march.htm)
- Ricks, Frances, Jennifer Charlesworth, Gerard Bellefeuille & Anne Field (1999).  
All Together Now: Creating a Social Capital Mosaic. Victoria: Frances Ricks & Vanier Institute  
of the Family.
- Saskatoon District Health Community Development Team and Dr. Ron Labonte (1999).  
Working Upstream: Discovering Effective Practice Strategies For Community Development In  
Health. Saskatoon: Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Center & Community  
Development Team Saskatoon District Health.
- Wharf, Brian and Brad McKenzie (1998).  
Connection Policy to Practice in the Human Services. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.