

# rhythm, rhythm, Dancing, and old shoes!

Seeking Community – Wonderful Wandering Wondering Conversation

Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo Board and Staff, March 28<sup>th</sup> 2013

For some, the conversations were more difficult than anticipated, working through inner disagreements with others, and having to admit not being able to answer the questions posed during discussion. It was sad at times, since we remember times when we felt let down by the communities we trusted. For others, there was power gained in having a better understanding of what community is, and what community is not, and a realization that we can give a hand to those being left behind.

COMMUNITY is **home** on a larger scale – family, neighbourhood, city – It is our surrounding as we interact at school, at work, in the streets. Being a **tribe** in a small subset of where you lived, where you were growing up and growing **attachment** to places and people.

Being a part of, not necessarily related to, wherever you are integrated and interacting, where you **belong**, and where you are **responsible** for what happens, where you find **interest** and **concern**.

We are community right here as we come together to talk about community.

Geographic communities, family relationships, common interests and affinities, virtual communities...

## Geography

does not work necessarily when you live and move a lot in a metropolis, where one building can harbour as many people as a small town. There is a sense of **pride** and **familiarity** in smaller cities, whereas the larger cities are quite difficult to delimit and build a sense of geography.

Growing up meant being **brave** enough to go out of the gate, across the street and to the next street, and going further each time, until you understand that you can go everywhere and do everything. Feeling of **confidence** growing up and getting to know people, whom to ask and who does what.

GEOGRAPHY becomes important again when we get kids. We want them to feel **safe**, and to grow confident and **comfortable**. Then we reach out to neighbours around us, we need to know who they are, to know their names and if they have children. We would knock on doors, bake cookies and do things for each other. We want our children to know the people in their community so they can be brave and go to the end of the block.

“As children, we would remember how sometimes different communities cohabited a close geography. And we would see the difference in how families on our side of the street kept their tidy lives behind closed doors, or how the flocks of kids were roaming from one open door to the other. Youth would be dropping out of school only on one side of the street. The fact that they seemed to be a much seamless community as kids, did not translate into a greater potential in terms of life opportunities.”

Geography is important when you are young, and when you grow the geography doesn't matter as much, and you can develop more flexible and not geographically bound communities.

## Online Communities

do not work necessarily. And, online communities can work because you can make work related friends on line - your **crew**. And it is a special **thrill** getting to meet all those people face to face that you were meeting through email, forums and teleconferences, and it **really feels** as if you knew them. Wonder if we would lose the **virtual bonds** without face to face contact. Resolving issues is difficult if we cannot see the people on the other end of the line. Technologies are advancing, and we can see other people online and their body language. Technologies will change how we do community

Community grows and shrinks, and we can be a part of many short lived or overlapping communities. What do you do when your life, your identity changes? Would the community follow? Or would it let us down?

## Identities

We have different identities, connected to different **expectations** from our community, and we are called **different names** in different communities. You can be an aunty and play with the children on the street, and you can be the little one for all the aunts and grandmas, and you are the clever one for your **class mates** that turn to you when they have no clue how to answer teacher's questions... And only you know all the faces and personalities that you are. If people from one of the communities get to see you with your face from another community, they are always surprised to see that different side of you. And it is always uncomfortable if the two communities get in contact, because you have no idea if they would get along with each other, or if you can play two **roles** in the same time.

And there are communities where we are really **comfortable**, like young and older, but we can be **out of place** with our own age. Connections across age and generations are fascinating and opens a much wider sense of belonging – **connections** with young and older generation brings confidence and **hope**.

“Similar **life experiences** bring people on the same page, such as immigration, and then we are relieved that we don't have to repeat our story and can be **understood** without much explaining. We just connect to another person, and it feels comfortable, like a **pair of old shoes**.”

If ever we felt isolated, found ourselves rejected, we would never forget that feeling. Next time, when we see another person that is outside, excluded, our purpose can only be help them as we know how they feel.

## Breakdown

What is there to do? If community is **self-serving** and **homogenous**, it will not see the need to explore other ways to interact.

“Moved to a new neighbourhood and wanted to be good neighbours. Just starting to know everybody – suddenly, I ended up being a single parent going back to school. We were no longer like other families, couldn’t afford to do the things they did with their kids, not interested in same things.”

Sometimes, you try to engage and people are too scared, too nervous to accept trust. Sometimes, it is our **culture** and **values** that prevent us from bonding. Understanding where you are at a particular **phase** in your life would determine the way you belong to a particular community.

“And particularly, when you immigrate, you are not here nor there. You have left your communities back home, and haven’t rebuilt community in the new country. It is true as well for the children of immigrant. The parents try to preserve the values through their children, and peers are guided by a very different set of values.”

How do we belong?

How do we deal with stress, identity crisis or with the fact that others may see us as weak?

Can our community, which is equally biased, help us seeing move forward and see things differently?

Communities can be **enabling**, but **limiting** as well. They can suffocate us – so we have to be aware of the down side of being too rooted in a particular community and recognize the need to stay **flexible**.

Sometimes, we would need to go **outside** our “community” and only outside find **support** and help that we need. How often do we get frank conversation in strong affinity groups? **Differences** are there but hidden – and we do not look deeper to understand what the **underlying rules** that keep the community together. When your **investment** in community changes, the reaction of the community changes.

**Emergencies** create communities. Being part of the community, shared experience, belonging, being valued, having a purpose – and communities serve its purpose and dissolve. When the ground is shaking with change to you or external to you, you need to know that things would change eventually – and **accept** that communities break and maybe the community was there just to help you move from one **phase** to another.

We usually idealize communities and struggle when they do not give us what we expect. Things do change and we have to embrace it and accept it. We can build resilience.

# Longevity

How do we stay in touch and keep the relationships and community?

Connectivity – purpose – value.

Having a sense of purpose is greatly important.

“ If I am valued, I am home – I know that my thoughts, suggestions, ideas count.”

Should there be something stable with communities so they could live longer?

Regular opportunities to meet and get together.

Purpose as a core and you can come back to it (relationships and values)

Rules and traditions and shared memories and shared history – we have something in common and that makes us laugh and cry

It has to be physical, with rhythm, dance and movement!

If it isn't dancing, it isn't a community!