

10 STEPS TO COMMUNITY ACTION

AS AN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY FOR YOUTH AND SENIORS IN NORTH DUMFRIES



Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

As in other rural communities, social isolation is an important issue for youth and seniors living in the Township of North Dumfries. During Phase 1 of the Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII), researchers conducted extensive interviews with residents and community partners to discuss their perspectives on the issue. Their conclusion: "The rapid changes taking place in informal structures, formal systems and local governments are creating an environment of reduced social support and citizen involvement for youth and seniors [in North Dumfries]."¹

In January 2005 an Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program was created and implemented as part of Phase 2 of the SEII. The purpose of the program was to provide seed money for local projects aimed a "closing the distance" between youth, seniors, and the larger society. Well-received by the community, the mini-grant program stimulated proposals from formal and informal groups alike. The five projects that were funded encompassed very different types of activities, ranging from youth serving seniors to seniors serving youth to youth and seniors working together for the benefit of the community. In total, over 300 people took part.

The Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program achieved its original goal and more. The various projects provided opportunities for exploration and discovery, enabled competencies to be recognized, and led to positive relationships between different age groups. Participants experienced a sense of accomplishment, new linkages were formed, and in at least one case these linkages ensured a project's

continued viability. There were some physical improvements in the community as well – a park was cleaned up, a garden was planted, and a mural was painted.

The success of the Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program is attributable to the fact that the power and decision making processes were owned by the community - youth and seniors defined the need and worked together on projects of their own choosing. After the program was finished, we began looking for other ways to encourage natural leadership and provide opportunities for youth and seniors to develop the skills necessary to influence and manage change.

OBJECTIVES OF THE 10 STEPS PROGRAM

10 Steps to Community Action is a program for emerging rural leaders first offered through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) over a decade ago. With a flexible curriculum that takes into account community context and resident need, the overall goal is to enhance leadership effectiveness.

Building on the natural abilities of participants the program provides information and training in the areas of communication, community awareness, working with others, and problem solving. In terms of specific objectives, 10 Steps to Community Action seeks to achieve the following:

- To increase individual, organizational, and community leadership skills;
- To increase awareness of local issues related to inclusion and population health;

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- To create a skilled network for community action.

TARGET GROUPS

While 10 Steps to Community Action has historically appealed to a wide range of people, we specifically targeted youth and seniors and focused our initial efforts on participants in the Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program. Although youth and seniors were our priority groups, applications from other individuals living within the Township of North Dumfries were also considered. In order to maximize small group work and facilitate communication in the large group, enrolment was limited to a total of 25 people.

ACTIVITIES

Implementation was facilitated through the North Dumfries Community Development Network, an informal association of local groups and individuals. A subcommittee was struck to identify needs, help develop the curriculum, identify resources available, and evaluate the results. A coordinator was hired to oversee planning and implementation.

An advertising campaign was undertaken for a dual purpose: to report the results of Phase 2 of the SEII and to promote this new program.

The speakers that participated in the program were selected after researching, talking with people in the community, and asking interested speakers to submit a proposal describing the presentation they would like to make.

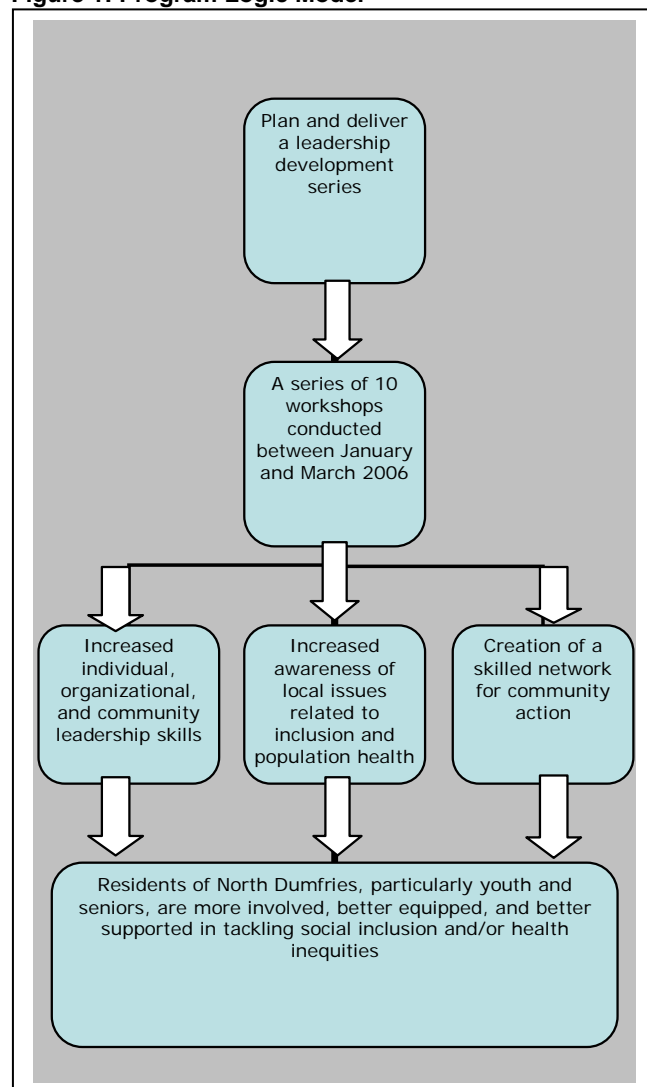
The basic flow of the sessions moved from personal development to organizational development, to community development. The ten two-hour weekly sessions covered topics such as leadership styles, team building, speaking effectively, working with the media, and local issues. By participating in 10 Steps to Community Action, organizers hoped that youth and seniors would be better prepared to plan and implement the community projects identified during

the program and/or achieve personal goals using the knowledge and skills gained.

INNOVATIONS

Leadership education is not readily available in the Township of North Dumfries. 10 Steps to Community Action offered residents the opportunity to explore basic leadership skills in a safe and supportive environment. As an alternative to signing up for the entire series of 10 workshops, participants had the option of attending individual workshops on topics relevant to their particular needs or interests.

Figure 1: Program Logic Model



RESOURCES

Funding for the program came from a number of sources including participant fees, local sponsorships, and contributions from both the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Wellington Waterloo Community Futures Development Corporation.

In-kind donations were also received. The Township of North Dumfries donated meeting space at its municipal offices. The other two facilities used, Waterloo Police Association Recreation Centre and Cedar Creek Church, did charge a fee although at a reduced rate.

Speakers from Family Counselling Centre of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the local CTV affiliate, and Volunteer and Information Cambridge all donated their services, greatly reducing the cost of the program.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Factors that contributed to the program's success included: wide-spread support from the level of Township Council to the level of grass roots organizations, maintaining a local focus, and the use of local speakers.

RESULTS

From mid-January until mid-March 2006, ten two-hour sessions were held. Twenty-four people in total participated in the program. The average number of sessions attended was five and the median was three. Seven people (29%) completed the program in its entirety. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 73, with nearly a third under the age of 25 and 17% aged 55 or older. Slightly more participants were female (54%) than male (46%).

Program participants included students, retirees, and people in the workforce. Those who were working held positions in both the public and private sectors.

Figure 2 Participant Age Ranges

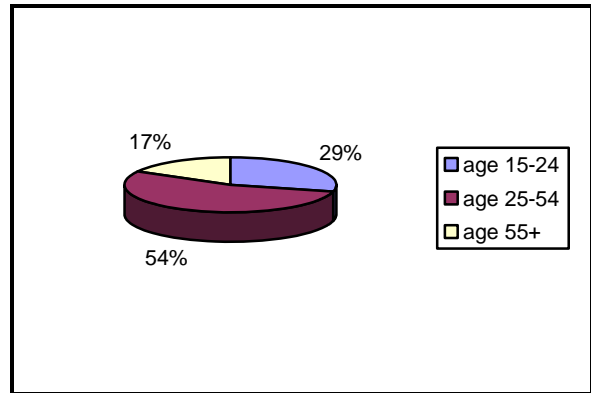


Figure 3 Total Attendance

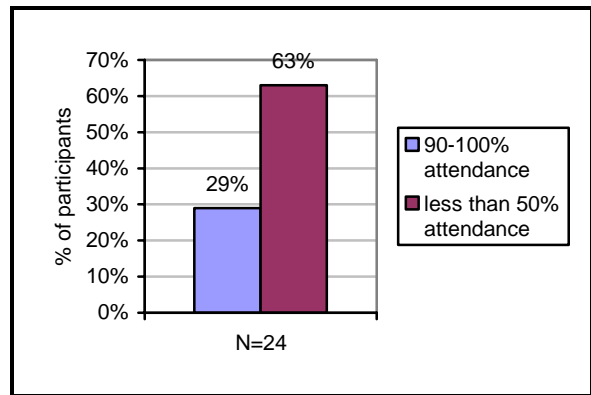
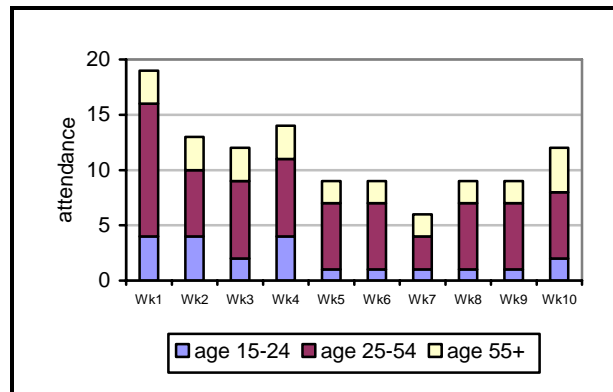


Figure 4 Attendance by Age and Week



Participants hailed from both west and east North Dumfries. Notably, the program also served 6 participants from outside of the township.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

Two different forms of assessment were used to measure program outcomes - a feedback sheet that was completed by participants following each of the workshops, and a final evaluation form that was administered at program's end. Seventy-one percent of those who completed the program in its entirety filled out a final evaluation form. All rated 10 Steps to Community Action as useful or very useful overall.

Figure 5 shows the average ratings for the ten sessions gathered from participant feedback sheets. Table 1 lists the topics and speakers for Figure 5. The strongest average ratings went to sessions six, seven and ten, while the lowest average ratings went to sessions four, five and nine.

Narrative data from the feedback sheets was used to evaluate success in achieving the objectives of the program. Participants reported a number of new skills or strategies gained. Most responses were related to self-awareness (23%) and working with others (38%) (Table 2).

Among the most valued aspects of this leadership development series was the opportunity to meet people. The sessions brought together youth, seniors, service professionals and elected officials in dialogue and conversation to assess the needs and assets in the community.

There were many comments about how people planned to use the knowledge and skills they had acquired. The most frequently mentioned use of skills was to engage more effectively with others both at work or school and in the community. Particular mention was made of running meetings, fundraising, having more confidence in public speaking, and implementing community change. In fact, several young people have since become

Figure 5 Workshop Ratings

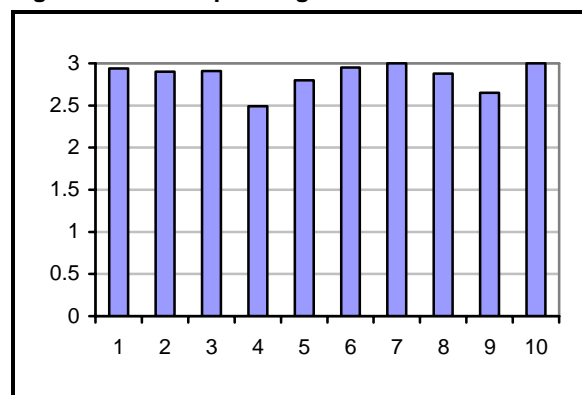


Table 1 Workshop Titles and Speakers

Workshop	Topic/Speaker	Average Rating
One	True Colours: Sue Peterson	2.94
Two	Body Language: Merri Macartney	2.90
Three	Effective Meetings: Diana Drackley	2.91
Four	Working with the Media: David Imrie	2.49
Five	Speaking Effectively: Merri Macartney	2.80
Six	Understanding our Community: Bobbie Goldenberg	2.95
Seven	Team Building: Curt Hammond	3.00
Eight	Dealing with Change: Sabina Santilli	2.88
Nine	Local Issues: Dina Etmanskie	2.65
Ten	A Gift of Wings: Carl Hiebert	3.00

involved in re-establishing the local Youth Council.

CHALLENGES

Although 10 Steps to Community Action received both financial and in-kind support from a number of different sources, it has no permanent funding. To run again, approximately \$10,000 would need to be raised; as a result, seeking additional sponsorships would become extremely important.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

While the program was relatively successful, it wasn't without challenges. The strongest criticism was its inability to satisfy the needs of a very diverse audience. For example, some sessions were conducted in a lecture style which was well enough received by the older people in the audience but which youth found to be unimaginative and boring. One key question we face is how best to serve multiple targets within the community. We believe that future efforts which engage youth with various "hands-on" activities and a degree of passion will be the most popular and useful.

Table 2 New Skills or Strategies Gained (n=26)

New Skills/Strategies Gained	Percentage of Responses
Understanding own personality and learning to appreciate others	23%
Tips for working with the media	23%
Tips on how to communicate when working together	15%
Types of meetings, meeting formats	11%
Ways to relieve nervousness	11%
Asset Based Community Development	8%
Symptoms of stress, self-care	8%

¹ Quader, S. (2003). *Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative: Report to Waterloo CURA and the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo* (unpublished).