

NORTH DUMFRIES COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

A CASE STUDY

Prepared for:

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March 31, 2006

BACKGROUND

The Township of North Dumfries is one of four rural townships in the Region of Waterloo. Unlike many other rural areas, North Dumfries has experienced significant population growth in recent years.ⁱ The driving factor behind this growth has been its proximity to southern Ontario's Technology Triangle, and to Highway 401 which attracts increasing numbers of homebuyers from neighboring urban centres. Offering the pleasures of country living just minutes from urban amenities, the township is becoming a popular place to live and the population is expected to continue to increase over the next decade.

While growth brings opportunity, it also presents challenges. In 2002 and 2003 the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries met with various groups to "check the pulse" of the community and better understand emerging capacities and challenges. The results were published in a report titled *Social Environmental Scan and Development of an Integrated Plan for North Dumfries Township*. In that report the authors noted that many groups appeared to be overburdened, especially smaller groups that relied on a few key personnel. They concluded, "Clearly there is a need to increase community capacity to meet the needs of residents...through promoting the sustainability of existing groups and by fostering new group development."ⁱⁱ

The report's findings were shared at a community forum held in April of 2004 and it was there that a network model of community development was first discussed. Although a volunteer steering committee was struck, no funding was available at that time to launch a network. An opportunity finally presented itself early in 2005 with funding received through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). PHAC remains a major funder of the North Dumfries Community Development (NDCD) Network to this day.

NDCD NETWORK ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The NDCD Network is an informal association open to local groups and individuals. It provides a forum for community members to talk about needs and share information and ideas leading to positive community change.

The NDCD Network has the following organizational structure:

The Network Coordinator is a paid staff resource who is responsible for managing the network's day to day operations, coordinating and implementing network training activities, securing funding and resources, monitoring compliance with funders, and participating in policy and planning efforts.

The Network Steering Committee is a voluntary committee composed of representatives from local groups and organizations. The steering committee is responsible for developing the strategic direction of the network, reviewing proposed initiatives, monitoring the progress of existing initiatives and reviewing results. This is done in part by receiving written progress reports from the network coordinator. The steering committee is accountable to the general membership.

Working Groups are created from time to time for specific projects or purposes. One example is the group that was struck to develop the Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program, set grant criteria, review applications, and choose grant recipients.

The Network Coordinator, Steering Committee, and Working Groups work to meet the needs of the community in the following ways:

- By facilitating the sharing of knowledge and by enabling people to work together to find creative solutions to community problems.
- By bringing groups together and keeping them connected and by helping groups coordinate their efforts with respect to planning events and achieving common goals.
- By promoting a learning environment.
- By encouraging community involvement through increased awareness of activities and events in the township and by researching and sharing information about models of best practice from other communities.

CORE ACTIVITY: CREATING RELATIONSHIPS

THE INTERGENERATIONAL MINI-GRANT PROGRAM

Description

Social isolation has been identified as a significant problem facing youth and seniors in the Township of North Dumfries.ⁱⁱⁱ The Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program was created and implemented in January 2005 with funding from PHAC. The purpose of the program was to provide seed money for projects aimed a “closing the distance” between youth, seniors, and the larger society. The Intergenerational Mini-Grant Program had the following stated goals:

- To foster positive relationships between different age groups by providing opportunities for youth and seniors to work together on local projects.
- To mobilize as many segments of the community as possible by promoting the formation of new partnerships and collaborations.
- To showcase the competencies of youth and seniors by publicizing these projects throughout the township.

Process

A working group was struck to establish criteria, review applications, and choose grant recipients. The working group included a representative from the NDCD Network Steering Committee, a Township resident, and a board member from the Cambridge and North Dumfries Community Foundation who, with experience and expertise in the funding process, acted in an advisory capacity.

Results

The call for proposals was met with a good response - more applications were received than could be funded. A total of \$10,000 was distributed to five local organizations. The five projects that were supported 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 in these projects.

There is no doubt that this program achieved its original goals and more. The various projects provided opportunities for exploration and discovery, they enabled competencies to be recognized and led to positive relationships between different age groups. Participants gained an increased sense of empowerment, 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.

Learning

The success of this program was directly related to the fact that the power and decision making processes were owned by the community. Youth and seniors were able to define the need and work together on projects of their own choosing. Small grants programs are become popular in communities across North America. We found a manual from the Community Health Academy in Oakland, California very helpful as we developed our program. It can be viewed at <http://comhealth.home.igc.org/minigrants/manual.pdf>

CORE ACTIVITY: CREATING LINKS

COMMUNITY VISIONING DAY AND SERVICE PROVIDER WORKSHOP

Description

With significant population growth in the township's future^{iv}, a group of local service providers felt it would be timely to develop a long-term vision for programs and services in North Dumfries. A task force was struck to plan and host two events: a Community Visioning Day and a Planning Workshop for service providers and policy makers.

Process

The Community Visioning Day was publicized as widely as possible and a total of 22 local residents signed in as participants. The format was highly interactive. During two small group breakout sessions, attendees had the opportunity to interact with each other, exchange ideas, and create a shared vision of their community. In the first breakout session participants were asked to address three questions:

- What is it like to live in North Dumfries?
- What has changed?
- What is needed?

In the second breakout session they were asked to prioritize community needs. The results of each breakout were reported back to the whole group. A graphic facilitator was on hand to capture these words and ideas using images and colour.

Participants in the Service Provider Workshop included representatives from both formal and informal community organizations, foundations, government funders, and local political leaders. They were presented with a summary of the previous evening's Community Visioning Session as well as the priorities generated at that event. Participants then discussed priority areas and suggested a number of strategies.

Results

The community visioning process was a success. Achievements to date include funding to hold a youth visioning day, and a trail development partnership between a local citizen's group and the Cambridge and North Dumfries Community Foundation.

Learning

The visioning session was well attended and a plethora of ideas were generated. We found that the use of small breakout sessions ensured that everyone the opportunity to give their input. Ultimately, the success of any visioning exercise depends on the extent to which key stakeholders become involved. Graphic facilitation proved to be a powerful tool that was very well-suited for communicating information from the visioning event to service providers the following day.

CORE ACTIVITY: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES

10 STEPS TO COMMUNITY ACTION LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Description

The idea for a leadership series came out of a public forum where participants articulated a need for more training for volunteers, especially around leadership development.^v The NDCD Network Steering Committee took it upon themselves to try to address this need. *10 Steps to Community Action* is a program for emerging rural leaders that is offered in several locations provincially. Tailored to the needs of individual communities, its broad goals are to develop leadership skills, improve organizational management skills, increase community awareness, and encourage community involvement.

Process

The program was planned and the curriculum developed by the NDCD Network Steering Committee. Financial support included participant fees, local sponsorships, and contributions from PHAC and the Wellington Waterloo Community Futures Development Corporation. In-kind support was provided by Family Counselling Centre of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the local CTV affiliate, and the Township of North Dumfries. The ten weekly sessions covered topics such as leadership styles, team building, speaking effectively, working with the media, and local issues. The series ended with a wrap-up dinner and celebration.

Results

10 Steps to Community Action generated a great deal of interest in the community. A total of 24 people of various ages and backgrounds participated in one or more of the sessions, with 8 people completing the program in its entirety. Different forms of assessment were used to measure program outcomes - a feedback sheet was completed by participants following each session and a rating instrument was administered at program end. One hundred percent of respondents rated the overall program as useful or very useful.

Learning

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

While the program was relatively successful, it wasn't without challenges. Possible causes for the high attrition rate (43% of participants did not continue past the 5th session) may include the level of program fees charged as well as the difficulty of satisfying the needs of a very diverse audience. One important lesson we've learned: the target audience needs to be clearly defined to ensure that information is appropriate.

SUMMARY

The experience of the NDCD Network shows what can be achieved with a community building approach. In the short span of our existence we have successfully built knowledge and skills (10 Steps to Community Action), fostered relationships between residents (Intergenerational Mini-Grants) and created links between institutions, both formal and informal (Community Visioning Day and Service Provider Workshop).

Lessons we've learned:

- Problems (and solutions) need to be defined by the community
- All communities have assets and resources they can use
- More can be achieved by working together than by acting alone
- Community building is multi-faceted - no single initiative can make a fundamental difference to people's well-being

In future we will continue to support the community by providing information and resources, facilitating communication, and encouraging the development of local skills and abilities.

ⁱ Statistics Canada. (2001). *Community Profiles*. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/PlaceSearchForm1.cfm>

ⁱⁱ Allison, K. and Pye, A. (2003). *Social Environmental Scan and Development of an Integrated Plan for North Dumfries Township*. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, p.1.

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

^{iv} Burton, S. and Hare, S. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Community asset inventory report for Cambridge and North Dumfries*. Cambridge, ON: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer and Information Cambridge & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries, p.11.

^v Pye, A. (2004). *Strengthening Community in North Dumfries: Community Forum Summary*. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.