

# Citizen-led innovation for a new economy

Learning materials:  
Case summaries

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# Citizen-led innovation for a new economy

## Introduction and acknowledgements

In June 2012, the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department and the Coady International Institute hosted the forum *Citizen-led sustainable change: Innovations in North American community development*. For this event, eleven case studies were commissioned and these became the discussion starters for rich dialogue about citizen-led change. Further details about this forum, along with interviews and webinars by case study authors, can be found at [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/). The full case study collection will be published in *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*, edited by Alison Mathie and John Gaventa.

The materials in this package are designed for teaching purposes. Two-page summaries of the eleven cases are provided in the following pages. These accompany five discussion papers each covering one theme emerging from the cases:

- Using local assets to build wealth;
- Citizens organizing for social change;
- Leadership styles for citizen-led change;
- Developing partnerships, understanding power and securing identity;
- Pathways and levers for systems change.

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None of this would have happened without community organizations and community members giving their time so generously during the case study research. Their stories illustrate the extraordinary tenacity of people acting at local levels for a fairer and more environmentally sustainable world. Some were able to attend the forum and inspired us with their insights into how citizens organize, how they orient the economy to building multiple forms of wealth, and how they chip away at the project of changing systems – our laws, our institutions, and our worldviews – if sustainable local economies are to be achieved. Sharing their stories and helping to multiply and deepen their connections is how, as educators, we can play a part in keeping that momentum going.

Our thanks also go to the authors of the cases, the participants at the forum and the many others who helped in the final production of this package.



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## Ecotrust Canada: Building the conservation economy

Ecotrust Canada (EC) is an enterprising nonprofit that has been developing an innovative economic model “at the intersection of conservation, community economic development, and community service” in coastal British Columbia since 1994. EC was born into a contentious debate over the fate of old-growth forests in Clayoquot Sound, on Vancouver Island. The polarization between environmentalists and businesses ran deep, feelings were intense, and constructive ways forward had yet to be created. Into this divide, EC emerged. The current EC President, Brenda Reid-Kuecks, explains:

EC came up the middle . . . and said, “Let’s look at this, it doesn’t have to be either/or. We already know that protection won’t work, we already know that mass industrial-scale resource extraction won’t work. Is there any way to marry the interests of Aboriginal people, local communities and industry to design an economy for this place that works: for the environment, for the citizens and for financial success?”

EC’s activities during its first decade fell into two broad areas: mapping for information democracy and decision making, and economic development through supporting enterprises with a conservation economy approach.

EC’s mapping work was marked by two guiding principles that distinguished it from many other mapping projects. First, it relied exclusively on open source software, thus ensuring that the communities using the mapping tools could retain the ownership of the results as well as access to the tools themselves. Second, EC’s intention was to build the capacity of communities to manage the

mapping themselves. In contrast to conventional maps, the maps created by EC and its First Nations and non-Aboriginal community partners were to “lay out not only what existed but what their vision of the future was.”

Mapping enabled EC to build relationships of trust with many communities across coastal BC, uncover community knowledge, ideas and visions, and support a sense of community agency. Yet EC leaders always saw that maps don’t stand alone but are part of the process of shifting the ground towards the conservation economy, enabling communities to see they have assets and to think about how they want to use these assets.

Parallel with helping communities recognize their assets and envision a new future, EC developed a business support strategy to help “activate that vision and . . . deploy these assets” (Ian Gill, founding president of EC). “The innovation required to trigger this kind of economic transformation – everything from proof of concept pilots that require incubation instruments, to large-scale, established businesses positioned to attract commercial impact investment or mainstream conventional financing – cuts across the entire spectrum of social finance needs.” A key part of this innovation was the Coastal Loan Fund (CLF) that “brokered technical expertise and new forms of capital” to businesses that incorporated environmental and social practices conducive to the conservation economy. Over its ten-year existence, the Fund provided 87 mission-related loans, disbursing \$10.7 million and leveraging an additional \$40 million in loan capital. EC estimates that these loans have created “cost effectively almost 900 jobs, while suffering default rates and loan losses at the low end of the scale

for comparable organizations."The Fund's clients ranged from First Nations to small scale entrepreneurs, from cultural and heritage tourism businesses to high value-added wood products manufacturers and community-owned fishery operations.

In the years between 2005 and 2010 EC began to branch out into projects aiming to demonstrate another way of doing business. Demonstrating the shift from support to action, in 2005 EC brokered over \$1 million to purchase the Trilogy Fish Company, one of the last remaining fish processing plants on the Tofino waterfront and the only place on that section of the BC coast to sell fresh seafood supplied by local fishermen. This more direct involvement in enterprises subsequently spread to sawmills and fishing licence banks, managing forests, and an enterprise to help businesses measure, reduce, and offset their carbon emissions (Climate Smart).The global financial crisis of the late 2000s provided both challenges and opportunities for EC to demonstrate the conservation economy in action. Some of its initiatives had to be closed (such as the Coastal Loan Fund) or were hived off (such as Climate Smart). Other opportunities opened up as the financial crisis generated a public searching for new economic models.

EC continues to develop projects that demonstrate "proof of concept," but with increasing levels of scale and influence. One of the most promising is ThisFish, a traceability tool to map seafood from the boat to the plate that has the potential to be expanded to other commodities and to redefine the relationship between producers and consumers

in Canada and around the world. Another initiative EC is "incubating" is a forest carbon sequestration project in a community forest "that will document carbon stored in the forest, link this stored carbon to the company's forest management plan, and take the carbon to market for sale. If successful, this initiative promises to open a whole new discussion in Canada about how to maximize and diversify revenues associated with forestland management."

Since its inception, EC has been citizen-led in the way it has been responding to the desires of citizens and their organizations for a different kind of economy. Issues that EC focuses on originate with the organizations, communities, and producer groups with which EC works. Building relationships of trust with local people ensures that the movement for a different kind of economy is collaborative.

EC's projects have been important in testing and validating an alternative approach to business. Its impact is slowly extending beyond its home territory of British Columbia and some of its projects are being taken up in other parts of Canada. By working with communities to create their own stories about themselves and their future, EC makes the case for a different approach to the stewardship of natural resources, for collaborative associations of producers, and a new type of entrepreneurship integrating and balancing economic development, environmental protection, and social equity. Through these stories, communities see themselves, their assets, and their agency, in a new way.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Cunningham, G. and Merrifield, J. (2015) Ecotrust Canada: Building the conservation economy. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/))



## **A vision of flipping the iceberg of power: The Greater Edmonton Alliance faces Big Land and Big Oil**

In the Canadian prairies, the Greater Edmonton municipal region consists of over 1 million people, a region strongly connected to the oil industry. Since 1997, a city-wide alliance, the Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA), emerged in response to neoliberal government reform, which profoundly reshaped the relationships between the public and private sector and civil society. As a broad-based organization comprised of over 40 different institutions - faith groups, unions, community organizations, professional organizations, immigrant and ethno-cultural organizations, and small business - it is multi-sector and multi-issue, working across many facets of diversity. GEA has achieved significant policy changes, particularly related to affordable housing and the creation of a comprehensive local food strategy. It has spawned a spin-off social enterprise that addresses local sustainability through green retrofits of existing housing stock, contributing to the municipal goal of a carbon-neutral city. Most importantly, it has contributed to a shift in the public's political and environmental consciousness. Through exemplary leadership training, it has fostered much higher levels of civic engagement, holding government and private sector leaders accountable to citizens.

This case offers insights into a deliberate strategy to apply Alinsky-style organizing in a Canadian context. Core organizers from inner city, union, local neighbourhood and aboriginal community settings in the Edmonton area first explored the characteristics, strategies and formation of broad-based organizations. They then fanned out to do 'relationals' or individual meetings with a wide range of people who in turn did their own relationals, building a

network of citizen power in the city. Their conversations expanded into church social action communities, labour unions, and inner city organizations. Consistent with the first steps in traditional Alinsky organizing, the goal was to identify people who were moderates, had large informal social networks, would be effective public leaders, and could bring in the support of their organization.

Regional and national leadership training was provided by the Industrial Areas Foundation for all members, with the goal of strengthening organizational life in member organizations. As the alliance grew, the need for paid leadership became more urgent. A windfall donation made it possible to hire leadership who could in turn attract dues-paying institutional partners. The organizing momentum led to a Founding Convention in May 2005, with over 1000 individuals and 50 institutions attending, including the Mayor and other city councilors. The publicly launched Greater Edmonton Alliance would double its dues-paying members over the next five years.

GEA demonstrated its mettle first by negotiating successfully for social housing, brokering a three-way conversation between tenants, a local developer, and a government-funded nonprofit corporation to devise a workable solution.

Inspired by "green" job creation schemes in the US, GEA created SustainableWorks in 2008. With solid support of the trades, government, financial sector and power utilities, they undertook five renovation pilot projects and hundreds of home audits. Eventually, through the support of a new Social Enterprise Fund and with the assistance of several local

eco-business people, SustainableWorks evolved into a spin-off social enterprise called C>Returns. It was launched in 2012 to help homeowners “see returns” in terms of community revitalization, carbon savings, cash savings, comfort and increased resale value. While contributing to the city’s zero carbon vision, they are also injecting millions of dollars into the local economy and providing an avenue for GEA organizing among community leagues.

In 2008, Edmontonians had little local food or sustainability consciousness, yet many congregational people remembered growing up on the perimeter of the city, now paved-over farm land. One GEA member congregation began identifying people interested in local food and concerned about the encroachment of developers onto farmlands with Class One soils adjacent to the city. Through various local food meals, surveys, and workshops, GEA developed a vision of generating a vibrant local food economy.

This vision was translated into the goals of protecting prime agricultural land, ensuring local control over food supplies; ensuring access to quality food for citizens over multiple generations; promoting environmental stewardship by reducing the transport of food between field and fork; promoting the strength and sustainability of local farmers and producers as part of the local economy; and strengthening citizen leadership in civil sector organizations and communities. They wrote their own detailed analysis of local food systems calling it *The Way We Eat*. They launched a campaign called *This Land is our Land* and hosted numerous public events, such as “Shake the Hand that Feeds You”

where urban eaters purchased hundreds of baskets of food from local farmers, “The Great Potato Giveaway” where city folk jammed roads for the chance to pick 50 pounds of free potatoes, and bus tours of the threatened farm lands. The City was in the process of developing their 10-year Municipal Development Plan and Area Structure Plans, which involved the farmland in question. After turning out over 500 people for numerous hearings, the first time that citizens had been mobilized to attend a public hearing in these numbers, GEA scored a significant victory - the city administration passed a progressive policy that included a full chapter on food and urban agriculture in the Municipal Development Plan, the first time that local food and food security were included within planning parameters, and where rezoning of agricultural land needed to adhere to a new City Wide Food and Agricultural Strategy.

GEA has five key tools – relational meetings, in depth leadership training sponsored by the parent IAF as well as individual mentoring, house meetings or listening campaigns, power analysis and research, directed and disciplined action, all followed by evaluation. While there is no room for complacency (“it’s about organized money; they’re stronger than us still”), the quiet, behind-the-scenes relationship building has created a web of citizen power that becomes boldly visible at times, showing the passion and brilliance of ordinary people to challenge and create systems level change for the greater good.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Lange, E. (2015) A vision of flipping the iceberg of power: The Greater Edmonton Alliance faces Big Land and Big Oil. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*.

(For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/))

## Humility and audacity: The story of Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé (VSMS)

This case documents a 10-year history of some ordinary citizens doing some extraordinary things. The results have been gradual, honest and humbling at times, but the real innovation lies in the process of stimulating and supporting citizen engagement. It is a story of collaboration, compromise, and confrontation if necessary, by a group of new and established immigrants. It offers practical lessons for those working in urban, multi-cultural contexts, which is increasingly becoming the new face of Quebec and Canada in general. The case also provides an interesting window into a hybrid model of organizing strategies from both Quebec - a province that has historically had to act in solidarity to uphold its unique French heritage in Canada - as well as strategies from around the world.

Saint-Michel is a neighbourhood of 56,000 people located in the northeast of Montreal. When it became a ward of the city 45 years ago, it was known for all the wrong reasons: high crime rates, street gangs, poverty and unemployment. It was a neighbourhood in rapid decline. But this is only part of its story. Over the past ten years, residents have articulated a new vision with an ambitious and concrete action plan to turn Saint-Michel around:

Saint-Michel: a pleasant neighbourhood within which to live, supportive of family life and multicultural exchanges, an active and unified community, which takes charge of its affairs and also contributes to the vigour of Montreal.

Those involved in this movement are a dynamic and diverse mix of immigrants who genuinely want to make a life for themselves and their families as active citizens who are respected for their cultural

heritage. These individuals are all part of an organization called Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé (For a Healthy Saint-Michel), which is an umbrella organization established to support the neighbourhood's revitalization strategy and vision. The organization itself is also diverse, including several community-based organizations and external institutions that support VSMS in a professional capacity.

The organization has deliberately sought out resources to support citizen participation, which was not a straightforward task in a transient and diverse neighbourhood with high levels of poverty. In addition, while many residents were activists in their countries of origin, they had little experience in community-building and civic leadership in the Canadian context. However, VSMS has helped to move citizens from acting as individuals ("I") to acting as a group ("US/WE") and then to acting as a neighbourhood ("together"). They have created the spaces and provided the resources for residents to learn democracy through practice in a fun and vibrant environment. They have nurtured relationships and achieved tangible results.

Today, there is a constant buzz and flurry of activity. The neighbourhood's self-initiated committees and associations involve people from different ethnicities and backgrounds to address issues related to poverty, income, employment, housing, security, culture, sports and recreation, neighbourhood beautification, and education – to name only a few. Over time, these associations have complemented the increasing number of services that have been established in Saint-Michel. As a result, a once highly transient population has begun to stabilize and residents are choosing to stay.

This is not to say there have been no tensions. Residents of Saint-Michel have been described as being 'pragmatists, not ideologists'; 'modest and humble negotiators'; 'non-militant'; 'respectfully conflictual'; 'willing to compromise'; and 'relatively apolitical'. They have lived through the practicalities of budget shortages and understand bureaucratic requirements very well. As a result, citizens and organizations have cultivated positive relationships with donors and government, and this explains part of their success.

However, this kind of collaboration introduced ethical dilemmas for some of VSMS staff, who admitted to finding themselves in uncomfortable "ideological grey zones" as a result of their engagement. For example, in the case study interviews, some members felt that the organization had become opportunistic at times, and linked with partners that compromised their original collective vision. Some felt that engaging with some donors and government departments with rigid priorities and objectives had led to mission drift and an increased dependence on non-profit institutions as the conduit for community activities. These organizations are often staffed by people living outside Saint-Michel who are experienced in managing project funds and are able to follow external reporting requirements. Some wondered if this had the effect of professionalizing a grassroots movement, driven by staff instead of citizens. Furthermore, accepting funding opportunistically may have made VSMS dependent on "soft" money to drive their projects forward,

and unintentionally overburdened volunteers and members who were already stretched to achieve the ambitious mission of the neighbourhood.

This ten year process has left people inspired, but also very tired. As fun as those involved admit their participation is, collaboration in process-oriented change places heavy demands on human resources, whether coordination and execution are funded or not. Some members are concerned that volunteers and staff are going to burn out. This is often what happens during periods of change.

Saint-Michel citizens have demonstrated that community organizing, as a concept, can be quite simple. It does not always take years of education to understand, nor does it always require a rich natural resource base, political clout, adequate physical infrastructure or financially stable citizens and institutions – although this would certainly help. However, it does take people with experience, patience, passion and heart, both inside and outside the neighbourhood, who are willing to invest in a deliberative process over the long term, oftentimes outside of office hours and above and beyond what resources will pay for or job descriptions can possibly capture. It's the irreplaceable 'x factor'. It's messy, heavy, ever-shifting, and requires constant face time, phone calls, emails and attention to process. There is no substitute. The good thing is that this is replicable in any community, even in those with diverse backgrounds facing challenging situations.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

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## New Dawn Enterprises: Becoming a “community instrument through which the people can do for themselves”

This is the story of an organization that started small, with a big idea. New Dawn Enterprises started 37 years ago in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia with a vision to be a “community instrument through which the people can do for themselves” (MacIntyre 1995: 79)<sup>1</sup>. Working in industrial Cape Breton, the poorest area of one of the poorest provinces in Canada, New Dawn has grown into a not-for-profit company employing 175 people in a network of 19 companies, enterprises and projects including real estate, health care, social care, vocational training and local business support. As the oldest Community Development Corporation (CDC) in Canada, some of its staff and supporters treat its survival with some surprise, even as a “miracle.” But New Dawn has done more than survived: it has created jobs, services, is a trusted partner in a wide range of community projects and an increasingly strong voice speaking on behalf of community assets.

New Dawn traces its ancestry to the Antigonish Movement of the 1930s and 40s, in which adult education mobilized people to form credit unions and co-operatives as part of self-generated community economic development. Under the leadership of Rankin MacSween, it sees itself carrying those traditions forward with an emphasis on co-operation and the “potential of each community to determine its economic destiny” (MacIntyre 1995: 80).

Wealth in communities is more than money. Throughout its history, New Dawn has created economic enterprises directed toward the good of

the community rather than private profit. Viewed through the lens of the Ford Foundation’s wealth creation framework, which places value on all forms of wealth, this case illustrates how, responding to community needs and opportunities, New Dawn’s work has created built capital, financial capital, individual capital, social capital, and political capital.

First, New Dawn invested in real estate: the “built capital” of affordable housing developments such as the Pine Tree Park Estates, a \$3.5m redevelopment and re-purposing of a former military radar station to residential, healthcare and commercial use catering, especially to under-served people such as seniors, disabled, and mentally ill people. Second, it took advantage of provincial tax incentives for creating financial capital through Community Economic Development Investment Funds (CEDIFs), a vehicle for keeping investment dollars close to home and for providing a pool of capital to fund the type of projects and investments the organization had become known for. Third, New Dawn’s leadership understood that real estate and financial capital alone were not enough, but they also had to help people build capacity and confidence, creating “individual capital.” New Dawn’s creative approach to meeting the requirements of people who need caregiving, whether seniors or those needing emotional support, is an example of how New Dawn’s social enterprises respond to complex community needs. At the same time, opening New Dawn College ([www.newdawncollege.ca](http://www.newdawncollege.ca)) created opportunities for job training in the services New Dawn was providing. For example, it offered Community Care Assistant training when New Dawn developed its home care programme, and established

<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, G. A. (1995). *Active partners: Education and local development*. Sydney: Cape Breton University Press.

a Guest Home and senior care living centre at the Pine Trees estate. Early in 2012, New Dawn College moved to a downtown campus and is expanding into other skills training areas including hospitality and tourism.

Fourth, New Dawn's purpose from its beginning was "the goal of community building" (MacSween 1997b: 16), and building community requires development of social capital. Much of New Dawn's own social capital has been created as part of their involvement with large numbers of local residents through the services it provides. According to its website New Dawn companies and projects service some 600 people each day (<http://newdawn.ca/about/>). Also, its long history, and its partnerships with other organizations have also created an "orbit" of people who have connections with New Dawn through other community activities, organizations and projects.

Finally, New Dawn has recently taken a much more visible role in the politics of the Sydney metropolitan area, initially through public debates about Sydney port lands and subsequently through the publicity associated with its director running for the position of Mayor. Whatever the cause, as one observer explained, New Dawn has moved from a focus on the social aspects of development to the more mainstream economic and therefore political side of development.

At the heart of any form of community wealth is the community's sense of itself, "the stories we tell ourselves", and New Dawn's stories have been as important as its activities. In Cape Breton those stories have generally not been about empowerment or community self-reliance: they have more often been about dependency and looking for outside leadership (from the coal barons, the steel mill

owners, the federal government). A former board member said, "The stories that we tell ourselves, in the context of Cape Breton, are either that there's no hope, abandon ship, move to Alberta ... or we grasp onto whatever hope we can find and wait for the next political announcement for a ribbon to get cut. New Dawn's story from its beginning was a different one, about self-reliance and community values."

New Dawn Enterprises has faced many challenges over the years, some unique and others common to other community development organizations. One challenge is how to build community: how to engage the community, how best to encourage it and what New Dawn's role should be in community leadership. The second is how to manage the tension between financial sustainability and a social vision, which includes organizational development and leadership within New Dawn itself. The third is how to build multiple partnerships in the community, with government agencies and for-profit companies, as well as other not-for-profits, while maintaining autonomy. Its own leadership has been a crucial element in its ability to form partnerships but remain true to itself.

Much of New Dawn's history, like that of many CDCs and social enterprises, has been in what a community partner called the "white space" - filling in the gaps in the social fabric that the market and state do not cover. Usually those white spaces are at the margins, in the areas that provide too little profit for private entrepreneurs and are too difficult for governments. Only recently has it started to move into the mainstream economy. Throughout, however, it has been consistent in building a case for community ownership of its assets, calling for a "new model of economic development; a model where wealth created here stays here."

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Merrifield, J. and Toner, A. (2015) New Dawn Enterprises: Becoming a "community instrument through which the people can do for themselves" In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/)).

# Everyday good living and the Two Row Wampum: The vision of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres

The story of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Friendship Centre movement is a story of the coming together of urban Aboriginal people, it is a story of healing and it is a story of returning Aboriginal people to themselves.<sup>2</sup> For the OFIFC, returning Aboriginal people to themselves means creating the space for “everyday good living” – the OFIFC definition of culture. Everyday good living places the emphasis on what a person does, rather than what a person says, and on one’s interrelation with others in a spirit of trust, friendship and respect.<sup>3</sup> Everyday good living reflects wholeness and peace, and living in balance with the natural and spiritual worlds. It is this everyday good living that was all but destroyed through the atrocities of colonization and assimilation, contributing to maladaptive behaviours and urban migration, and resulting in the need for Friendship Centres and services grounded in Aboriginal culture.

Prior to contact, Aboriginal peoples in Canada had a strong oral tradition and rich culture. Creation legends and other stories taught people about where they came from and their role in the world – that we are all spiritual beings who have entered the physical realm and we need to learn how to be human. These narratives taught people how to live appropriately, with gratitude, and to “fulfill the sacred

responsibility back to creation.”<sup>4</sup> At each stage of life, there is responsibility to one another, from the infant who brings joy to others, to the elder who becomes the teacher for the people. This worldview was as at the core of everything; land provided the space and place to realize the good life; and cultural practices were vehicles for expressing gratitude, teaching how to behave, and marking important occasions. The OFIFC integrates this worldview into all its work, and supports the Friendship Centres and other service providers to do the same.

An important aspect of the OFIFC’s work is the role it has played in furthering the healing movement for Aboriginal people in Canada. The cultural idea of healing – achieving balance and wholeness – is the central principle that OFIFC programs and services are organized around. And with the OFIFC’s sphere of influence this impacts the programming of Friendship Centres, women’s shelters, literacy programs, Elders and traditional people’s gatherings, court worker programs, the Healing and Wellness Strategy, and so on – many of which are supported by funding from government.

In the case of OFIFC, the story of healing cannot be separated from the story of Aboriginal women’s leadership, and the critical role that women have played in the Friendship Centre movement. This represents another aspect of Aboriginal cultural heritage – the balance between female and male. Women were central in pre-contact Aboriginal life, as were men, and the two genders had different spheres of responsibility that complemented one

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Lawrence, B. and Anderson, K. (2003) “Introduction: for the betterment of our Nations” in *Strong Women Stories: Native vision and community survival*. Toronto: Sumach Press. (p.12)

<sup>3</sup> Chacaby, M. (2013) Personal communication. April 19, 2013.

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<sup>4</sup> Chacaby, M. (2013) Personal communication. April 19, 2013.

another. This case study highlights the leadership and contribution of one woman in particular, Sylvia Maracle, the current and long-time Executive Director of the OFIFC. Sylvia has played a pivotal role in mobilizing the healing movement and unifying disparate Friendship Centres into a force for change from the individual and community level to the broader institutional environment. Indeed, through the growth in the number and scope of the Friendship Centres, their programs and outreach, and the role that the OFIFC takes in engaging with donors, government ministries and a range of partners, the healing has not been among Aboriginal people alone. There are also changing attitudes in mainstream society, not only about how to engage with Aboriginal people, but also about the value of an Aboriginal worldview and how this can contribute to a broader understanding of harmony and peace in our common future.

Success can be a challenge. As Sylvia Maracle herself states, “As the numbers of Aboriginal people on the healing path increases, there will be questions and challenges about we will do after the healing

is completed.”<sup>5</sup> Some Aboriginal thinkers, such as Calvin Helin or Tom King, offer potential next steps. For Calvin Helin it is economic development;<sup>6</sup> for Tom King it is, at least in part, educating non-Aboriginals<sup>7</sup> so that they understand Aboriginal history and the reason for events such as Oka, Caledonia, Askwasasne and the Idle no More Movement.

Fundamentally, this case study is about us all – for in the infinity of creation, the dividing line between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal is an illusion, and the violence committed by one against the other is a violence that destroys us all. This case teaches us that we must all learn to live in gratitude, trust, friendship and respect – in balance with our natural and spiritual world – to achieve everyday good living for our children, and their children, and their children’s children.

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5 Maracle, S. “The Eagle has Landed: Native Women, Leadership and Community Development” in *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*. Toronto: Sumach Press. p.79.

6 See for example Helin, C. (2006) *Dances with Dependency*. Raincrest: Woodland, CA.

7 King, T. (2012) *The Inconvenient Indian*. Doubleday: Toronto.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Jones, L. with Sylvia Maracle (2015). Everyday good living and the Two Row Wampum: The vision of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/)).



## A quiet movement: Inuit self-determination

For over 11,000 years, traditional livelihood strategies enabled the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic to thrive in one of the most challenging environments in the world—a harsh region of permafrost, and a prolonged winter season of ice and snow. The technological ingenuity of the Inuit and their “adaptive capacity” (Ford, Pearce, Duerden, Furgal, & Smit, 2010) to the livelihood demands of the Arctic have long been documented by outsiders—for example, early explorers and whalers,<sup>8</sup> and anthropologists (Boas, 1888). Today, their ingenuity continues to be recognized in modern media—movies such as the *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Kunuk, 2001)<sup>9</sup> and art exhibits such as “Arctic Collections—Inuit, Ingenuity, Resilience and Riches” (at the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen) as well as by academic researchers.

However, in recent decades, traditional livelihood opportunities for the Inuit have been rapidly diminished by climate-warming trends along with political forces and new forms of economic development. In just one generation, the Inuit people in Canada have been moved from semi-nomadic hunting households living in scattered camps to settled communities that are increasingly reliant on “the south”<sup>10</sup> for their day-to-day survival. The speed and scale of change has come with a cost to the individual, to the community and its shared

culture, and to the land that has been inseparable from traditional Inuit livelihoods, all contributing to increased vulnerabilities (Ford, Pearce, Duerden, Furgal, & Smit, 2010; S. Watt-Cloutier, personal communication, May 7, 2013). And, although these changes bring new economic opportunities in resource extraction, it is unclear whether the Inuit have benefited or will benefit (Nunavut Economic Forum, 2013), and how economic advances might contribute to reduced vulnerability and improved well-being for Inuit households.

Despite this situation, the general attitude is that the Inuit will continue to adapt and succeed as they have always done. But, when asked about the proverbial Inuit adaptability during discussions in Nunavut, one Inuk woman posed the rhetorical question: “Why do the Inuit need to be so good at adapting?” That is, the Inuit did not choose to live in settlements, go to residential schools, lose hunting grounds, or be affected by the melting of permafrost and ice sheets. Rather, how can Inuit have greater control over the forces that are impacting their lives?

This case study deals with these questions and examines the Inuit response to livelihood threats. As part of exploring these questions, the case highlights the efforts of one Inuk woman in particular, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, who has been fighting for many years to curb environmental threats affecting traditional land-based livelihoods of the Inuit. The case also briefly describes the work of the Inuit Circumpolar Council that was formed in Alaska in 1977 to bring Arctic peoples together in their struggles around land rights, resource extraction, and, more recently, climate change. The Council is the institution to which Ms. Watt-Cloutier was elected to represent Canadian Inuit concerns, and where

<sup>8</sup> For example, the whaler George Comer survived winters in the Arctic with the support of Inuit and was a keen collector of their artifacts and ethnography (Ross, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> As noted by Michael Evans (2010), “When Zacharias Kunuk and others at Isuma created *The Fast Runner*, one of their goals was to show audiences the resiliency of Inuit and the ingenuity with which they have long faced the physical and social challenges of living in the Arctic” (p. 1).

<sup>10</sup> Inuit in Nunavut and elsewhere commonly refer to the Canada below the Arctic which is mainly non-Inuit as “the south.”

she undertook much of her climate change work from 1995 to 2006. Finally, the case describes other ways in which the Inuit are organizing to deal with livelihood challenges, comments on new economic opportunities, and discusses the current situation through the lenses of vulnerability and adaptive capacity.

Geographically, the case is relevant to and references pan-Arctic peoples and activities, but zeroes in on the Nunavut territory of Canada where Ms. Watt-Cloutier has lived and worked throughout most of her time as an advocate for Inuit livelihoods, and where primary research for this case took place.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Jones, L. (2015) A quiet movement: Inuit self-determination. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/))

## Permeating the mainstream: Rural Action for a sustainable future for Central Appalachia

Spanning several decades, this case tells the story of Rural Action's roots in social and environmental activism, from its evolution as a member-based non-profit working with local communities to promote rural revitalization, to its more recent alignment with Ford Foundation's *Wealth Creation and Rural Livelihoods Initiative*. It is a history of championing causes to alleviate poverty and reverse the environmental damage caused by the coal industry, mobilizing a broad-base of volunteers and concerned citizens, and cultivating leadership to take innovation for rural revitalization forward. Promoting local food production systems, sustainable forestry, watershed restoration, environmental education, waste management, and advocacy on local energy issues, Rural Action has moved from the fringes to a position of influence: a central node in a network of local initiatives that are weaving a sustainable economy.

Located in Athens, Ohio, on the edge of Central Appalachia, Rural Action's geographic area of focus is concentrated in one of the most ecologically and socially distressed regions of the United States. Its history is intricately linked to the social and environmental consequences of the boom and bust cycles of an economy driven by industrial demand for the fossil fuels embedded in Appalachia: first coal, then oil, and now shale gas. Cyclical losses of jobs gained have been a feature of the region's economic history, as have the devastating environmental consequences of these industries for water, soil and air quality.

In this context, Rural Action (RA), among several like-minded partners in the region, has written a different economic story for the region's future, one

that builds and preserves, rather than extracts and depletes, the stock of the region's wealth:

Rural Action works with our communities to understand the potential of our assets and begin preparing for this new future. We connect informal leaders with innovation, building a stronger region from the grass-roots. (Strategic Plan, 2013-2017, p1)<sup>12</sup>

Strengthening its capacity to put ideas for a sustainable economy into action is at the heart of RA's current work with the Ford Foundation. The premise of this collaboration is that sustainable development requires growth of multiple forms of capital: financial, built, natural, social, intellectual, and political. The vehicle for such growth is the value chain, adding value locally in all these forms of wealth. Transactions are not just about money and products, but also about transforming relationships in the market place. Producers, traders, aggregators, processors, and consumers all rely on mutual solidarity for the system to work.

The sectors that have lent themselves to value chain development are RA's programs in sustainable forestry, waste and recycling, and local food systems. In **Wealth From Forests (WFF)**, for example, RA is developing a value chain for local Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified wood products stewarding local producers through the certification process, identifying high-end demand in urban markets and linking producers to those markets. This value chain is complemented by other sustainable forestry initiatives, such as silviculture and better forest management for the long-term sustainability of a quality forest. A carbon-offset

<sup>12</sup> Rural Action, Strategic Plan, 2013-2017.

program has been introduced as an incentive for landowners to practice sustainable forest management. More recently, alternative strategies to earn an income from non-timber forest products have been promoted. Ginseng and other botanicals, for example, offer a reason to invest and protect, even as the temptation to lease or sell land in anticipation of high land prices for shale gas development becomes a reality. A "Look before you Lease" program by RA is designed to help landowners navigate these choices.

In **Sustainable Agriculture**, Rural Action is a core player in SE Ohio trying to shake dependence on the global food system and stimulate the local economy by shifting local consumption to locally grown and processed produce. Working towards the goal of increasing consumption of local produce from 3% to 10% of market share, RA has put strategies in place along the value chain to claim that economic space: training local growers, incubating local food processing businesses, creating opportunities for direct sales through new farmers markets, a new produce auction, and formal arrangements with institutional buyers. These and other mechanisms for aggregation, distribution, and marketing are advertised through RA's "Ohio Foodshed", an information service linking consumers to local food producers. As these activities

strengthen, so does the leverage for changes at the policy level to strengthen this change even further. The push for systemic change is orchestrated not just at the local level, but also in regional networks facilitating sustainable agriculture and forestry.

Modeling an alternative economic paradigm is the innovation here: Testing new forms of economic production that pass the test of broad-based wealth creation. This means not only demonstrating economic viability, but also showing that economic wealth building proceeds in tandem with increasing the stock of social, natural, intellectual, and other capitals. The generative community-building work in disadvantaged areas, on which RA's earlier successes and legitimacy were built, is an integral part of this innovation. So too is the history of solidarity and deep networking among players in an alternative economy, the harnessing of passion and civic mindedness by Rural Action's leadership, the success of its membership to push into the mainstream, and its engagement of a younger generation through its volunteer programs. It is these on-going nurtured connections that lubricate every link in the chain, creating the momentum for a viable, long term, rural economy.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Mathie, A. (2015) Permeating the mainstream: Rural Action for a sustainable future for Central Appalachia. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/)).

# Reclaiming land, reaffirming culture: The Deep South Wealth Creation Network

The Deep South Wealth Creation Network works to develop agricultural value chains for the purpose of sustaining the natural resources and improving the livelihoods of rural African American families in Alabama and Mississippi. The Network is comprised of several community-based and institutional organizations including: Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network, Cottage House, MileSton Cooperative, National Wildlife Federation, Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative, Tougaloo College and The United Christian Community Association.

Since 2011, members of the Network have worked in partnership with the Ford Foundation's Wealth Creation and Rural Livelihoods Initiative. Initial research funded by the Ford Foundation identified and assessed the possible and existing components of the value chain, defined a set of investment and capacity needs for growing the value chain, and uncovered the opportunities and challenges related to value chain development. Motivated by the results of this research, the Network is constructing agricultural value chains in rural areas of Mississippi and Alabama.

Value chains use a systems or wealth creation approach to business and are designed to create multiple forms of wealth for all partners. They are based upon shared economic, social and environmental values and they provide the infrastructure for producers, processors, marketers and buyers to work together and derive mutual benefit from meeting a market demand. The focus is on building long term investment for partners rather than only generating short term income.

It is important to understand the context in which this work takes place. Rural communities in Mississippi and Alabama have historically faced persistent

challenges. It is in these two states where the Civil Rights struggle began and where significant historical, cultural and political changes have transformed the United States over the past fifty years. Despite fundamental shifts in the socio-economic and political system, Mississippi and Alabama still experience entrenched poverty, low education rates, and systemic racism. An undervaluing of education, limited local control of resources, continued outward migration of youth, and a narrative characterized by what people *do not have* rather than what they *have* has weakened community capacities and disenfranchised many rural communities. And yet, hope and opportunity are growing.

The Deep South Wealth Creation Network celebrates and continues the Civil Rights struggle by using the vast natural and human assets within the region to create a new economic future for African Americans in the South. Specifically, the organizations see opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods in the region by building upon people's knowledge of the land and strengthening agricultural value chains. When people create good livelihoods for themselves and their families, they build and grow their own assets. They generate and hold financial assets; they acquire new skills, education, and knowledge and they collectively build upon and sustain the natural and cultural assets of their region. Rural communities in Mississippi and Alabama already have an abundance of fertile land and a large number of landowners who are skilled with a generational knowledge of the soil, climate, and environmental assets of the region. The Deep South Wealth Creation Network builds on these existing assets to link farmers into a value chain where they work together to meet the food demands from high-end restaurants, large-scale institutional

buyers, and local schools while investing in a shared infrastructure and receiving the training required to succeed in a competitive market place.

The Deep South Wealth Creation Network aims to establish at least two value chains for members so that local products can be sold into wholesale and retail markets. The revenues earned are re-invested to support the continued development of value chains and to encourage young people and other community members to get involved. The successes include:

- Groups of farmers organizing in the sub-regions of Southeast Alabama, the Mississippi Delta, and a two-state sub-region of West Alabama and East Mississippi
- A Farmers' Cooperative in Mississippi established
- Food handling and processing certification from state and federal departments
- More than 35,000 pounds of produce marketed and sold.
- Growers trained in a universal farming protocols and provided with technical assistance to maximize product yield
- Liability insurance for farmers acquired
- Shared equipment and infrastructure (refrigeration, irrigation, transportation)
- Entry points created to wholesale markets for small farmers
- Mentorship opportunities provided for youth to enter agricultural work

- Job opportunities created on farms that need support with harvesting and planting.

The Network is expanding but several challenges remain. A uniform record keeping system is needed for producers and intermediaries in order to manage work flow and to respond to inquiries for data. More investment is required for small farmers to meet increased demands for their product and to expand into more competitive markets. A marketing and recruitment strategy is needed to encourage youth to view farming as a viable and legitimate career. Farmers need to be encouraged to follow the growing protocols developed by the University and College partners in order to prevent reduced crop yields and/or inferior products. Local and state policies that benefit large-scale commercial farmers but may discourage the expansion of smaller farms owned by African Americans must be challenged and changed.

The Deep South Wealth Creation Network is continuing to develop fully functioning value chains for rural African Americans in Alabama and Mississippi that create access to wholesale markets, increase wealth for all producers, provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, and improve the quality of life for rural communities. The Network has been successful in becoming a vehicle for regional cooperation and innovation. African American farmers see how the collective power of the organization deepens the impact and expands the scale of their individual efforts. By building upon the knowledge of local people and by helping them to recognize the potential of the assets they possess, the Network has changed the previous and disempowering narrative of *have not to have much*.

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# Reaching back to move forward to a future of HOPE: The story of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association

Grab this land! Take it, hold it...dig it,  
plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy  
it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it,  
and pass it on!

*Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

Unfolding in the Sandhills region of North Carolina, the story of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association (SFHA) demonstrates how cultural connections to the land can be converted into economic, social, and environmental benefit. SFHA is one of the first African American organizations in the United States to combine land protection with community economic development, tying it tightly to a raised awareness of the value of cultural heritage. Symbolized by the West African Sankofa bird, SFHA is guided by the principles “We must go back to our roots in order to move forward” and “It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.”

The seeds of the organization were sown when its founder, Ammie Jenkins, returned to her birthplace in the Sandhills, after spending 23 years living and working in the city of Raleigh. What started as a personal quest to learn about her family’s history soon became a broader endeavor to document the rich history of African American families in the region. Ammie’s interactions with the elders revealed one common thread: the deep connection of local African Americans to the land.

However, African Americans in this region had lost much of the land that they had gained after emancipation. For the American South as a whole, Wood

and Gilbert (1988)<sup>11</sup> estimated a 98% decline in landownership from 1920 -1990. Prior to this, in the early 1900s, the Sandhills region comprised family farms producing a diversity of crops and a variety of small enterprises based on agriculture. It was remembered as a golden era of entrepreneurship, agricultural production and self-sufficiency: sharing was part and parcel of community life. However, with the introduction of Jim Crow laws and the racial and economic discrimination that ensued, landownership began to decline. Migration to cities seemed to be the only way out in the face of racism, segregation, and predatory land purchases. This decline in landownership was further accelerated by expropriation of land for the Fort Bragg military installation, one of the largest military complexes in the world, which now covers 251 square miles and continues to expand. This loss of land was inextricably tied to a loss of livelihood, of security, and of a cultural heritage.

For this reason, following from the oral history project of Ammie Jenkins, land became a core element around which SFHA evolved as a group of land owners sharing a common goal to reclaim their land, culture and communities. Today, SFHA provides programs and services on heritage preservation, land ownership & retention, public education & outreach, and sustainable economic development. Learning from the past achievements of the community, SFHA practices what they call ‘cultural-based philanthropy’, a culture of sharing, grounded in their history.

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<sup>11</sup> Wood, S.D., Gilbert, J. , 2000. Returning African American farmers to the land: Recent trends and political rationale. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, Spring 2000.

The SFHA's mission consists of building communities of **HOPE** through **H**eritage preservation, **O**utreach and community education, **P**rotection of land and natural resources, and **E**ntrepreneurship and economic development."

SFHA recognizes that to preserve the African American heritage in the Sandhills, it is important to educate people, protect land, build on cultural knowledge and practices, and pass this knowledge and land on to the future generations. SFHA's outreach and community education work focuses on African American land stewardship traditions, and organizing special apprenticeship/service learning and community service programs for youth. One example is the "gardening and gleaning" project in which SFHA paired the elders with the youth to transmit knowledge about gardening and the local practice of sharing excess produce with neighbours in need. In 2008, the SFHA partnered with University of Chapel Hill on the "Building the Bridges to Healthy Communities" project in which young people learned to conduct interviews with community members about public health, city planning, and environmental issues to enhance their ability to protect the land.

SFHA promotes land ownership by offering public seminars and workshops on landowner rights and responsibilities, and estate planning; producing publications and toolkits for landowners; disseminating information on government-directed and non-governmental programs for landowners; facilitating preparation of land management plans; offering trainings on sustainable farming practices; and advocating for landowners' rights. Building on a growing base of knowledge and support, SFHA has recently been able to take on the military establishment which is now seeking to expropriate more land for a buffer zone around its Fort Bragg facility. While they were not able to stop Fort Bragg from setting up the buffer zone, they succeeded in having the buffer zone reduced from the proposed five-mile radius to a one-mile radius outside the base area.

Achieving systemic change through its "back to the land movement" is evident in the changes in people's own perceptions and attitudes on land ownership rights and responsibilities, which in turn have resulted in increased access to services for African Americans, support for economic opportunities connected to the land and changes in local policies for land protection and economic development.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

Ghore, Y. (2015) Reaching back to move forward to a future of HOPE: The story of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommddev/)).



# Resident ownership and neighbourhood transformation: The Village at Market Creek

The Village at Market Creek is located in the diverse Diamond neighbourhoods of southeast San Diego, California. Its story involves a risk-taking philanthropic foundation, combined with local determination to achieve neighbourhood revitalization and resident ownership. It is a testament to how assets, equity and community building strategies can combine in innovative ways to realize ambitious goals.

After 10 years of grant making, the Jacobs Family Foundation (JFF) was looking for new and better ways to carry out its mission: “We were putting dribs and drabs of money and time here and there – but as the (funded) organizations got stronger, there were no apparent signs that the conditions in their communities were improving.” (Korten, 2009, p 3.)<sup>13</sup> Deciding on a more focused comprehensive approach in one geographical area, JFF staff got together with local residents and organizations and identified a dilapidated industrial site. A symbol of the area’s abandonment and lack of power, the rehabilitation of this site was a community priority.

The Foundation bought the 20-acre site and moved its offices into the area. It committed to listen to and plan with area residents. An experienced community organizer was hired and along with other staff and community residents, he went out into the community to ask people directly what they wanted on that site, taking care to visit with people from as many ethnic and racial groups as possible (16 different ethnic groups in all). Among the good

ideas that surfaced, a local grocery store soon rose to the top of the list.

Work then began to focus on how to proceed in a way that kept residents in the middle of the multiple conversations underway and, most importantly, allowed them to have some “skin in the game”, as Joe Jacobs, liked to say. Out of this commitment came Market Creek Plaza (MCP), now a vibrant commercial and cultural centre with \$34.8 million in retail sales operating on 10 acres of the once abandoned factory site.

The design and implementation of this project relied on overlapping circles of connection and shared work of community teams. Some existed before work on the Village began, but most have been started, grown and put to good use over the past ten years. The commitment to make Market Creek resident-led has been strong and creative. For example, a rich diversity of cultural traditions was transformed into a vibrant centerpiece of MCP design, style and operation.

A core goal was always to make it possible for residents to become owners. This required an innovative ownership structure, and an innovative tool for broad-based ownership - a Community Development Initial Public Offering (CD-IPO), that was eventually approved by the State of California. There were many issues to be addressed, such as who would be potential investors, how they could learn about whether to invest, and how profits would be distributed. A state approval process that normally takes 90 days took almost six years in this case, with much negotiation and persistence.

An Ownership Design Team decided owners had to be: residents of the Diamond neighbourhoods,

<sup>13</sup> Korten, Alice E. “Transforming Business Structures for Communities,” Chapter Four in [Change Philanthropy: Candid Stories of Foundations Maximizing Results through Social Justice](#). Center for Community Change: Washington, DC, 2009.

people who own or work in the Diamond, or people who volunteer with an area group. To insure fairness, they negotiated what became known as the 10-10-10 plan, in which anyone could invest up to 10% of their income, no matter what it was; or 10% of their net worth (excluding big items such as homes, cars, and retirement savings), but no more than \$10,000 per person. The team decided that 20% of the total financing (or up to \$500,000) was reserved for resident owners. They developed workshops to explain the opportunity and found 425 community investors from area neighbourhoods. Each owner could purchase shares for \$10, with a minimum of twenty shares and maximum investment of \$10,000. The average investment was \$1,176. Dividends are shared on the basis of residents first, community second, and other investors next; with the first \$50,000 paid to resident owners, additional profits between \$50,000 and \$205,000 paid to several neighbourhood foundations (who are also investor owners), and any profits beyond \$205,000 to be dispersed equally among all the shareholders.

Now up and running, MCP has achieved many of its goals. In retail sales, it has now met or passed its target goal of \$31 million every year since 2008, allowing dividends to be paid every year since 2007. In employment terms, it now provides 92 full-time and 121 part-time jobs, of which 144 (68%) are Diamond area residents. The nearby Jacobs Center employers provide another 63 full-time and 22 part-time jobs, of which 35 (41%) are area residents. The initial high

rate of resident hires sent an important message about the project's capacity to deliver on promises made to residents. It has been shown to be not only viable, but profit-making and growing.

MCP also features social enterprises, such as Where the World Meets (which provides local entrepreneurs and artists with a way to showcase their products) and Writerz Blok (which began as a graffiti arts program and has now expanded into murals projects and a line of clothing). It is also home to Market Creek Events and Venues, a banquet and conference center opened in 2008 and growing fast. In addition to employment for residents, it provides training in the food and hospitality industries, along with working ties to key employers.

The Village is still evolving, breaking new ground. Although environmental sustainability was not an original goal, in March 2012 the Village received LEED-Silver designation from the U.S. Green Building Council for neighbourhood development, only the third such project in the U.S. to be so recognized.

Working before venture philanthropy was in vogue, and grounded in a style that not only listens to but relies on community residents, JFF has developed a network of complementary organizations, associations and informal networks, as well as partner investors. Like all strong community change stories it builds on rather than ignores local history and context.

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Dewar, T. (2015) Resident ownership and neighbourhood transformation: The Village at Market Creek. In Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (Eds.) *Citizen-led innovation for a new economy*. (For details see [www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/](http://www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/)).

# Pushing for green solutions to urban neglect: The work of People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH)

At the turn of the century, Buffalo faced population shrinkage it had never experienced before. Thousands of job losses, vacant lots, and abandoned homes were indicative of the enormity of the economic and social strain in a city that had once been a regional center for industrial and economic growth. Under the leadership of two community organizers and with funding support from the Echoing Green Foundation, People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) was established as a member-based organization to create strong community relationships where people could afford decent housing in Buffalo West, which until then had the greatest levels of poverty in the City.

The emergence of PUSH in 2005 provided opportunities for community members to come together around issues that concerned them. Through continuous dialogue and community mobilization, PUSH was able to apply pressure on government officials to seize control of some vacant land lots in the community. PUSH was then able to secure funding for green construction and weatherization of homes in Buffalo West, establish an inclusive community center as a hub for planning and organizing, obtain funding for the creation of an outdoor community park, and start working with training and contracting agencies to provide employment opportunities for community members. Every initiative in community and housing development has taken green development and environmental sustainability into consideration. In addition, PUSH's engagement with the community has contributed to a heightened awareness of environmental sustainability, and a realization shared by community members of what can be accomplished in local

economic development when the community works together.

From the beginning, PUSH founders aimed to grow neighbourhood leaders capable of gaining community control and of planning together for the future of the neighbourhood. PUSH's core principles include: active member involvement, social inclusion, relevance of development initiatives to a broad community base, and economic and social justice. The economic results are achieved through creating innovative employment opportunities for community members, with a focus on locally owned and controlled financial ventures that will generate local jobs and skill development. The social outcomes are achieved through creating safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces for community members to connect, organize, collaborate, and pursue collective strategies.

From pushing for a green development zone, to pushing for green homes and jobs, to pushing for energy justice, PUSH has linked community members to innovative social and economic programs and public and private financial investment opportunities. For example, PUSH started a community-based energy efficiency program called PUSH Green in 2012. Funded by PUSH and the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA), PUSH Green is a part of a statewide effort to make homes more comfortable, energy efficient and affordable, and also to create local green jobs. PUSH Green builds upon intersecting interests and objectives of the Green Jobs Green New York Act, signed into effect in 2009; the Sustainable Neighbourhood campaign, officially supported by the state government in 2010; the opportunities

within the Green Development Zone; and also the overall mandate and values of PUSH Buffalo. PUSH Green provides community members with greater and easier access to green employment opportunities, and helps bring together contractors and trained home energy efficiency experts.

To encourage community-based economic growth, the stakeholders need to act in unison to gain the resources needed, and this requires aligning the interests of community stakeholders, with contractors and material suppliers. PUSH has been a facilitator for creating a vision amongst all these locally based stakeholders through organizing open forums for the Green and Healthy Homes Initiatives. These open forums have enabled construction, weatherization, and hazard abatement contractors; job

training entities; and workers in green jobs sectors to unite around a common vision of well-being for Buffalo's west side. This shared vision has mobilized the stakeholders to influence policy makers and elected officials: for example, the PUSH-led campaign to secure Green Jobs/Green NY public investment program.

The PUSH magic is not in the volume of infrastructure developments. Rather, it is in its approach and guiding principles that hold the potential to drive community economic growth beyond simply the means to earn an income and afford a home. It is, as PUSH exemplifies, through igniting local leadership, creating open and inclusive community spaces and a culture of participation and civic membership.

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This is a summarized version of the full case study, found in:

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