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WHAT'S WORKING IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Personal Reflections

This is not a summary of the conference. It is the personal reflections of a member of the IACD Executive, a community development worker, and a visitor to Nova Scotia.

In thinking about how to frame these comments, I found myself focusing on what makes a good event.

You may have your own criteria, but see how many of these boxes this event has ticked for you.

Relevant content/topic

The topic was interesting enough to get us all here. The relevance of the topic has, if anything, increased throughout the last few days. We need to keep asking the question - what is working in community development?

Good speakers/interesting/challenging/provocative content

The inputs both in the plenaries and in the breakout sessions have been varied. You did not have to agree with all of the content to recognise the passion behind what was being said and much of it was very interesting.

An event which engages you aesthetically and emotionally

If there is one thing we can all learn from the organisers of this event it is the importance of putting the arts, theatre and music into a conference. The event started with a fantastic opening which grabbed attention and which was emotionally engaging. Jean, Dan and Melissa gave one of the most powerful welcomes I have witnessed and a reminder of our debt to traditional societies whose wisdom we have for too long neglected. This was built upon by the excellent presentation by the Two Planks and a Passion theatre company, and throughout the event it is the theatre, art and music that I will perhaps remember most, particularly the social evening with JP Cormier.

The setting/environment

This is a great theatre. Whoever designed this space designed it well. It is not a theatre in which you sit back in and feel remote from the action; it comes out towards you and you feel engaged. The campus of Acadia is also wonderful and I felt it was a restful setting for the conference. The hill might not be everyone's cup of tea, but I enjoyed having to stretch my legs up the hill to the restaurant.

Good food and hospitality

The University caterers did a first class job and our evening event at Halls Harbour will be remembered by many for the good food and the good music. As a visitor to Nova

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Scotia, I can say that I have felt warmly welcomed to this country. People have been interested in why we are here, where we come from and have even helped us when we got lost to find our way!

Good administration and organisation

The administration has quite simply been superb. The attention to detail reflects a level of care and love for the work. Whether you are organising a community meeting, a training programme or an international conference, it is the attention to detail that makes the difference between a competent event and a great event, and this one had attention in bucketsful.

Dialogue

If people don't engage, an event like this will not succeed. Over the last three days there has been excellent dialogue and I have felt privileged to have been part of many stimulating conversations. It does not have to all be about new stuff - it is important to reinforce what we know is working and what we believe works.

Outcomes

Finally, an event will be judged on whether it results in good outcomes. That comes down to each of us personally.

I would invite you to reflect on some of the challenges that contributors set out for us.

What if?

What if, as a role Ron Colman proposed, we adopted a more relevant and meaningful set of indicators?

What if, as Nick Wilding challenged, we all "amplified success" instead of highlighting failures and challenges?

What if, as many speakers suggested, people did become positively and actively engaged?

What if we used new technology to create that new media and a new discourse?

What if, as Joanne Linzey proposed, local government really "got it" and wanted to enable and to create the conditions to support communities, involving them in setting priorities and delivering services?

What if global vulnerability and the conditions highlighted in the Wiser Earth video and Paul Hawkin's lecture results in a new point of departure, the conditions for positive social change. The environment creates a powerful ground for re-examining our democracies. As Dr. Hamm reminded us: "We have a responsibility as heirs of the past and guardians of the future" (Robert Borden).

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I am sure you will have your own what if's? I am also sure you will have a few magic moments - those things that you will remember the 2008 IACD conference at Wolfville for.

For me, it will probably be the Raging Grannies, or might be Ron Colman's suggestion that we need to replace trickle down economics with trickle up social change.

Or it could be the entrance of the enigmatic dinosaur - Iquanadon - and the very gentle touch of the Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia.

I suspect at the end of the day, we remember events for the personal contact and friendships made. As a visitor, a worker and on behalf of IACD I simply want to say thanks to all who have contributed to make this event the success it has been.

If your complaint is that there was not enough time - I would suggest to you "there is so much to do, and so little time" - this is the positive epitaph of the socially engaged, environmentally concerned community activist or worker - it is our responsibility to use what little time we have well - "go to it".

Stewart Murdoch
Treasurer - IACD

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