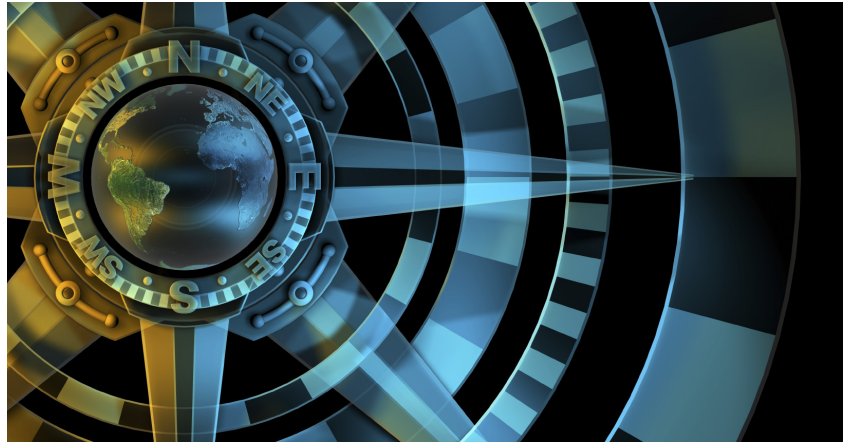


# THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE



BC Healthy Communities  
People. Place. Potential.



## Challenges for Changing Times

Closing my eyes, I hear my grandmother's voice: I just don't understand what's happening in the world – it's going a little crazy! Everything is changing! And it's all happening so fast! Then I hear my own sixteen-year-old voice rising in reply: Yes, isn't it great?

Change is like that – welcomed by some, resisted by others. But change is a constant in our lives. As Heraclitus noted centuries ago, "everything flows, nothing stands still"... "nothing endures but change." So, if change is ever present, how do we learn to not only welcome and embrace it, but to intentionally cultivate healthy change? How can we invest our time and resources in those areas where healthy change can most productively flow and grow? And what are the most effective levers for healthy change?

## The Time Traveller's Lament

To understand some of the changes that have occurred since my grandmother's time, I need look no further than the community in which I grew up. In so many ways – socially, economically, environmentally, culturally – my community has changed. Although it occupies the same geographical space, with familiar roads and buildings, mountains and monuments, my local community is just not the same place in which my grandmother and I had our earlier conversation. Time has travelled on.

And we continue to notice life around us growing a little faster, a little crazier, a little more complex. We've all heard a familiar response to these changes, a refrain that laments the loss of community. Wanting to fill the gap, some folks look to an earlier time, the "good old days" when neighbours were known, when work was close to home, when help was just around the corner. Others look for connectedness a little further from home, reaching beyond the bounds of geographical community, forging friendships in far-away places. Aided by the internet and other technological innovations, for example, social, economic, interpersonal and professional connections now stretch across the world.

While we pride ourselves on global citizenship, however, we don't necessarily know the neighbour next door. We pay rapt attention to political events in other countries. We adapt our consumer habits, knowing that rampant fuel consumption in certain parts of the world threatens food security elsewhere. We endeavour to influence the policies of developing countries, caring deeply about the health and well-being of other global citizens. To some it may seem that we know and care more about what is going on half-way round the world than we do about events and people here at home. But while the ways we connect with others may be changing, let's not be so quick to lament the loss of local community. Perhaps our approach to community is merely in transition. Perhaps our needs for community, and our search for meaning and connection within community, are growing and changing as we grow and change.

## The Seeds of Global Compassion are Sown at Home

Here's one way to look at it: While acknowledging that this is a world of great diversity, there is something that all humans have in common, no matter which corner of the globe we call home. Everyone in the world lives in a local community.

No matter how different the details of our lives, no matter how far our travels may take us, no matter how temporary our current location might be, living in local community is a characteristic we all share. No matter where it's situated on this earth, local community not only influences our health and well being, it also shapes our development. Local community is where we learn about ourselves, and about other people. Local community is where we learn to take our first steps toward independence and, hopefully, toward self-authoring adulthood. Local community is where we learn to build relationships with an ever-widening circle of people, and to consider ever-widening points of view. Local community is where we learn about the social, cultural and economic foundations of our society, and experience the ways in which our decisions and actions affect other people and the environment. Not surprisingly, everything we learn shows up in our approach to neighbourliness, to environmental sustainability, to community engagement, to governance. It shows up as our capacity to build healthy community.



Furthermore, local community is where we sow the seeds of global citizenship. It's where we sow the seeds of global responsibility and global response-ability. While responsibility has a moral and ethical connotation, signifying our accountability to others, response-ability is a little different; it means an *ability to respond*.

According to economist Fred Kofman, response-ability describes the difference between people who view themselves as "victims," subject to forces beyond their control, and those who see themselves as a "player." The player, he says, "is in the game and can affect the result... This power to respond is a defining feature of humanity. Our response-ability is a direct expression of our rationality, our will, and our freedom. Being human is being response-able."<sup>1</sup> Each of us has the potential to be a player – a contributor, a self-authoring adult, a citizen, an agent of positive change. Our capacity as global citizens is highly correlated with our capacity as local citizens to be response-able, or able to respond. In this way, active engagement in local community is the incubator for global compassion and care. Practicing response-ability in our own back yard not only builds our capacity for global response-ability, it supports each of us to stretch toward the peak of human potential.

<sup>1</sup> Kofman, Fred (2006). *Conscious business: How to build value through values*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc. (pp.31 – 32)

## People. Place. Potential.

This now familiar tag line is a key element of the BC Healthy Communities logo. But what does it mean? Community, we know, is more than a mere collection of people. And community is more than shared geographical space. At conferences and in classrooms, the University of Manitoba's Ian Wight promotes a reintegration of people and place, suggests that "place-making," in which planners and community members creatively and collaboratively co-design the physical and social aspects of cities and towns, just might be the next frontier in community planning.<sup>2</sup>

This fits with my own perspective that people and place are inseparable elements of communitybuilding. But how does potential fit in?

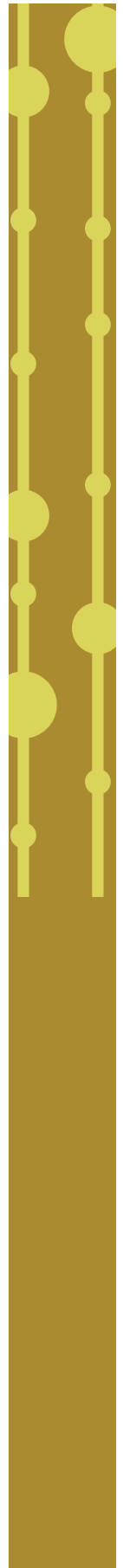
One way we can think about potential is to consider human needs. Community, whether it is found locally or globally, offers opportunities for each of us to have a couple of important needs met. The first need is to belong – to feel connected to others and to feel part of something larger than ourselves. The second need is to contribute, to play our part in community building, in place-making, ensuring that others have the opportunities and resources that enable them to belong and contribute as well.

But there is a third human need that begs our attention: healthy human development. This need, perhaps less well known in community contexts, is each individual's need to develop, to self-actualize, to reach our full potential. We know that children develop. But ample research shows that adults also have the potential to continue developing throughout their lives. Harvard University's eminent developmental researcher Robert Kegan calls this the "hidden curriculum of adult life"<sup>3</sup> There is much evidence that adults not only have the potential to develop, but that our very health and well-being depend on it. In adults, as in children, the failure to develop is the failure to thrive.

Why is this important for community-builders? Think about it. We know that an important aspect of community is to develop systems and structures that serve the entire population. It is a task taken on by local elected officials, planners, policy makers, health professionals and administrators, and committed groups of engaged citizens, seeking positive changes that build healthy community. The issues are many: housing, food security, employment, the economy, health & community services, education & literacy, the justice system, environmental sustainability, and healthy public policy - to name but a few. And, ideally, the people working so hard to address those issues have already successfully negotiated much of the developmental curriculum of adult life. Ideally, their cognitive development, their emotional development, their values development, their moral & ethical development, their interpersonal development – again, to name but a few – is stretching toward the higher levels of human capacity since this will be reflected in the policies and systems that shape our shared lives in community. My colleagues and I often use a simple three-level framework to demonstrate adults' potential for development.

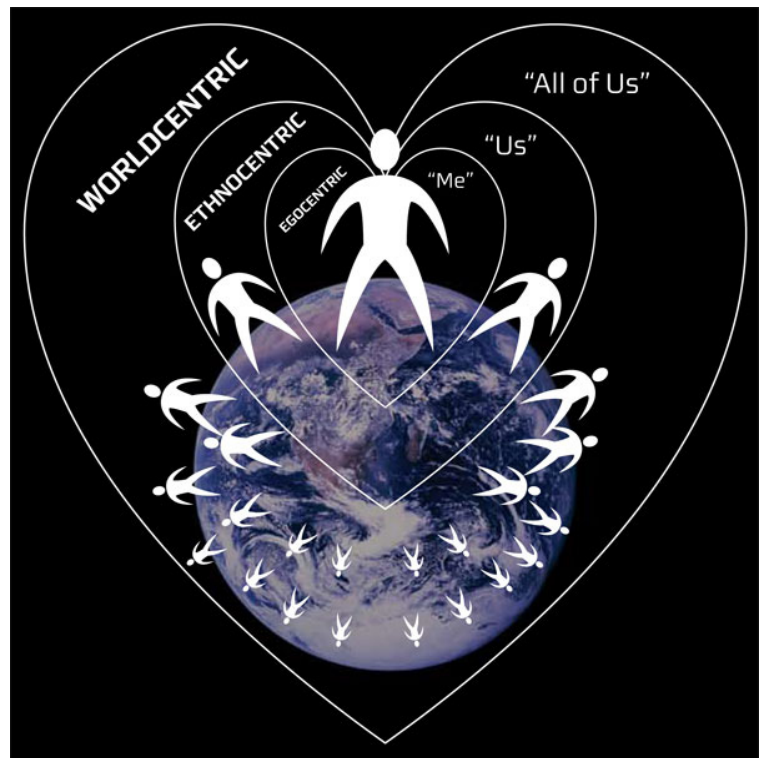
<sup>2</sup> Ian Wight is Head of the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba. For an overview of Ian's presentation on place-making at a 2007 planning conference, see <http://www.mnapa.com/Planning%20By%20Design%20In%20Community%20Handout.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Kegan, Robert (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



In this framework, the first level is called selfcentric – here, my focus is on getting my own needs met; I’m not yet very skilled at taking into account the needs of others. You may also recognize this level as “egocentric.” We all know children who are at the selfcentric level – for a kid, it’s developmentally appropriate to be egocentric. But when I ask groups if they know any adults still negotiating this level of development, heads nod. You may know some too.

The next level is sociocentric (or ethnocentric). Research shows that most people in the world – including Canadians – are still negotiating this level of the developmental curriculum – in at least some important areas of their overall development. But there is evidence that ever-increasing numbers of people are shifting their perspective to the worldcentric level, gaining the capacity to express care and concern for all life. This is good news for both local and global citizenship since, not surprisingly, responsibility and response-ability are going to look different at each stage of development.



Community development is an important contributor to human development. Building healthy, thriving communities helps to foster healthy, thriving people. And vice versa. For a community to stretch toward its fullest potential, we need to engage our best thinking, our deepest values, our highest morals and ethics, our greatest capacities to solve complex problems. As more of us reach the worldcentric level of development, we expand our capacity to express care and concern for all people, in all contexts, not only in our own community, but all over the world.

### **Developing Community, Developing Ourselves: The Challenge of Change**

When I ask community change agents what draws them to this kind of work, and what sustains them when the going gets tough, I hear a common response; “We want to change the world,” they say. But, increasingly, community developers understand that their own development is an important part of the change equation. They understand that Gandhi’s advice to “be the change you want to see in the world” applies as much to our own inner development as our actions in the world. It’s not just what we do. It’s also how we be. And what we’re becoming. We are becoming the change we want to see in the world. Evidence can be found in our expanding capacity to make meaningful connections with people who live on the other side of the country, or the other side of the world. Let’s celebrate that capacity, knowing that the ability to engage with people much different than ourselves is a reflection of healthy growth and development in our mental models, our values, and our worldviews.

It's a reflection of our growing ability to take diverse perspectives into account. And it's a reflection of our growing capacity for care and compassion for all people, despite our myriad differences. With this capacity we are catalyzed to offer help when war and famine cause children to starve, when tsunamis, cyclones and earthquakes shatter lives on the other side of the globe. This is a good news story. And it's our emerging story. Which leads me, once again, to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper: how do we learn to not only welcome and embrace change, but to intentionally cultivate healthy change? How can we invest our time and resources in those areas where healthy change can most productively flow and grow? And what are the most effective levers for healthy change? In response, I offer six propositions for consideration:

1. Adopt a comprehensive and inclusive orienting vision for fostering positive change: I suggest the orienting vision of "healthy people in healthy communities."
2. Invest in community development as a practical way to foster healthy people in healthy communities. Community development is a vital element of health promotion and prevention affecting health and well-being throughout the country, the continent, the world.
3. Pay attention to the multiple and interconnected determinants of health: social, economic, environmental, physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural. Community building efforts are most effective and sustainable when they address "the whole person in the whole community."
4. Also pay attention to multiple and interconnected dimensions of change: again, social, economic, environmental, physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural. And, again, addressing the whole person in the whole community.
5. Make response-ability both a personal and a community capacity building goal.
6. Pay attention not only to fostering health and well-being, but also healthy human development. Set a goal to become a developmentally-attentive community.

For community leaders, capacity-builders, health professionals, policy makers, and engaged citizens committed to cultivating healthy change - the challenge ahead is personal, local and global. As individuals, we can and must be the change we want to see in the world. To be effective we must pay attention to our own development as well as that of our community. And, together, as a community, we can also be the change we want to see in the world. In fact, grassroots community building – addressing all of the factors affecting people, place, and potential – has never been more important than it is today. By building healthy local community, we foster health, well-being and healthy development in all of our citizens. And, paradoxically, by building healthy local community we can indeed change the world.

Are we up for this challenge?

For more information see [www.bchealthycommunities.ca](http://www.bchealthycommunities.ca) or call 1-888-356-0892.

