

The World We Want: A Community Dialogue on Citizenship **Celebrating Community: Learning and Living Together**



March 10th & 11th, 2006
City Hall, Edmonton, Alberta

This public dialogue is third in a series presented by the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network's (PLAN) PHILIA Dialogue on Caring Citizenship and PLAN Edmonton

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**Thanks also to our Speakers, the Philia Table Hosts,
and the 150 Participants who joined us.
And a final note of thanks to the Philia Dialogue Planning Committee**

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**THE WORLD WE WANT: A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE ON CITIZENSHIP
CELEBRATING COMMUNITY: LEARNING AND LIVING TOGETHER**

**KEYNOTE
SPEAKERS**

Alan Broadbent (Chairman, The Maytree Foundation)
Al Etmanski (President, Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), Vancouver

**COMMUNITY
PERSPECTIVES
SPEAKERS**

Mike Kroening (City of Edmonton Office of Diversity and Inclusion)
Kim Krushell (Edmonton City Councillor)
Paula Simons (Edmonton Journal)
Paul Freeman (Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts)
Debbie Coulter (City of Edmonton's Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative)
Lewis Cardinal (City of Edmonton Office of Diversity and Inclusion)
Paul Bellemare (Self Advocate/Artist)
Nyambura Belcourt (Edmonton Multicultural Society)
Martin Garber-Conrad (Edmonton Community Foundation)
Janice Melnychuk (Edmonton City Councillor)

**WELCOMES,
FACILITATORS,&
HOSTS**

Stephen Mandel (Mayor of Edmonton)
Don Risdon (Edmonton Regional Community Board, Persons with Developmental Disabilities)
Denis Bell (PLAN Edmonton)
Kathie Bell (Edmonton Community Foundation)
David Kahane (Department of Philosophy, University of Alberta)

**ARTISTS,
PERFORMERS, &
SPECIAL
PRESENTATIONS**

iHuman (iHuman Youth Society)
Asani (Musician)
Reza Sherkat and Arzhang Naderi (Musicians)
Alice Major (Poet Laureate of Edmonton)
Jane Steblyk (Graphic Artist)

The third annual Philia dialogue in Edmonton, Alberta was held in City Hall, and centred on the theme of *Celebrating Community: Living and Learning Together*. A two day event, each morning began with some introductory remarks to frame the discussion, followed by a musical performance. A keynote address by one of our distinguished speakers was then followed by four commentaries. In the afternoon, participants were invited to participate in a World Café, where everyone engaged in dialogue on questions about making Edmonton a more inclusive city. Following the dialogue, the key issues and insights that emerged from the discussions were shared by each table. Each day ended with performances by talented artists.

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.

~Theodore Zeldin~

"We're very lucky to live here where tolerance is a given, and peace and good government are enshrined rights. The world we want is mere degrees from the one we have and to some in our society those few degrees are an incredibly vast gulf. It is for these people that we need to continue the difficult work of bringing those two worlds together".

~Mayor Stephen Mandel~

INTRODUCTION

David Kahane, Master of Ceremonies, opened the Dialogue with background information on the Philia Dialogue on Caring Citizenship. The Dialogue was initiated by the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) in Vancouver. It was founded on a simple belief: that the well-being, health and strength of our society requires the presence and diverse engagement of **all** citizens.

Philia is a Greek concept for neighbourly love. Neighbourly love is synonymous with caring citizens. Caring citizens are the foundation of a healthy democracy.

Through dialogue and in coalition with others, PLAN wants to:

- explore the nature of citizenship and reconstruct a grassroots definition compatible with the diversity of our communities and of our contributions;
- understand more deeply the forces that bind us together in community and our responsibilities to each other;
- reflect more deeply on such values as resilience, trust, hospitality, courage, friendship, love and justice, and on how these values guide our actions;
- learn from each other – from the writings of public thinkers and the insights and action of us all.

PLAN's inspiration for the Dialogue stems from its roots within the disability community. Central to this is the conviction that welcoming the presences and participation of individuals who have been labeled and marginalized will transform our society. The wisdom, talent and experiences of the disability community are reflected in all of PLAN's discussions and action.

PLAN Edmonton is an affiliate of the parent PLAN organization in Vancouver.

SUMMARY MARCH 10, 2006

WELCOME

Mayor Mandel began his welcome to the first day of the Philia dialogue, with the reminder that Edmonton is our city, and that within this room exists citizens, professionals, politicians, and activists all focused on the same issue. It is an exciting opportunity to generate ideas about how to shape our city to be more inclusive, and he hoped that the ideas that emerged from this Philia Dialogue would be shared with City Council.

The world we want is not very different from the world we have, according to Mayor Mandel. He urged us to remember that for every terrible story reported by the media, there are also thousands of *unreported* stories of people helping one another, and that these are the stories most representative of Edmonton. There is a level of engagement in Edmonton that we should find inspiring. Mayor Mandel offered some examples of recent successes that we ought to be proud of such as the creation of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, our Aboriginal efforts and the Capital Clean

My happiness is what I got to retake, self respect is what I got to take. I know I'm going to remain in the gate but now I'm not carrying the shame and the guilt. I overcame. My life won't ever be the same. And why I still remain a mystery. Will my future be affected by my history? Will I ever go back to the industry or end up dead or locked up in the penitentiary?"

*~Leah Malley~
iHuman Youth Society*

"Let me take you to a place called iHuman... just be yourself, you don't have to ask why, just help yourself".

*~Jazzy G., Jelly Bean,
and Mother Peach~
iHuman Youth Society*

*The Safer Cities,
Vibrant Communities
Edmonton, and
Edmonton Urban
Aboriginal Accord
Initiatives are but a few
examples of how the
City of Edmonton is
working together with
community to effect
change on this issue.*

~Mike Kroening~

Up Campaign. He suggested that Philia is another example of an initiative of which we should be proud. He hoped that the dialogues this weekend would give birth to creative and viable ideas for both PLAN Edmonton, and 'plan Edmonton' (City program).

OPENING PERFORMANCE

The welcome by Mayor Mandel was followed by a presentation by some of the talented singers and dancers of iHuman. iHuman Youth Society is a non-profit organization that works with high risk and at risk inner city youth, drawing them into the creative arts, and in doing so changing the way they are viewed by others and changing the way they view themselves.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR INCLUSION

Mike Kroening began by speaking about the motivation behind the creation of the new Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the city of Edmonton. There is a recognition that the make-up of Edmonton had changed dramatically over the years and that the business sector had not been keeping pace with the changing demographics of the community, in the sense that it was not sufficiently inclusive. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion was created because strategies were needed for including a broader range of Edmontonians in the work force, recognizing that a more diverse workforce will better ensure that services reach a wider range of citizens. Edmonton's growing diversity must be recognized as a source of strength and sustainability in an increasingly competitive global market.

Mr. Kroening then turned to discussing the economic realities in Edmonton, pointing out that although the economy of the city has grown remarkably over the last nine years, many people are excluded from this prosperity, and the consequences of economic exclusion are deep and vast. The estimate is that 14% of Edmonton's population lives in poverty. Although poverty levels have dropped since 2001, the gap between rich and poor appears to have grown, with certain groups such as recent immigrants and aboriginals suffering poverty at higher than average rates. Economic exclusion has many dimensions, according to Mr. Kroening, but there is ongoing work being done with the community and partner organizations.

More evidence of the City of Edmonton's commitment to issues of inclusion is the very recent creation of the Office of Public Involvement. Its mandate is to ensure that all city departments consistently and meaningfully involve communities on issues that impact them. Another example that demonstrates the commitment to inclusion is the new Access to Recreation Strategy, which provides opportunities for increased participation in recreation for people on low income. Mr. Kroening pointed out that while all of these examples speak to a move in the right direction, there is still a need to take a comprehensive approach to inclusion, and create cultural change. This can only be done, he believes, through a long-term, multi-sectoral, multi-government commitment to fostering public engagement.

The Maytree Foundation focuses primarily on poverty in Canada and especially on support programs for refugees and immigrants

“When you look at something as a problem to manage you look at ways of containing its impact, containing its effects, and limiting spillovers to the rest of society. If you look at it as an asset, you embrace it, you look for the spillovers, and you look for the positive benefits that come from it”.

~Alan Broadbent~

So, how do we actually intervene in this process, in what sometimes appears to be an impenetrable system? How do we recapture part of the public discourse for ourselves?

~Alan Broadbent~

“We all have our orthodoxies and things we believe in....But we deal with groups, we deal in groups and the group develops an orthodoxy. Then, very often, we’re afraid to betray that orthodoxy, even if we see very clearly that it’s getting in the way of making progress on issues”

~Alan Broadbent~

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Alan Broadbent gave the first keynote address. He talked of immigration and urbanization, and the effects of the convergence of these two trends. The federal government is legitimately concerned with what they call “the hollowing out of the rest of the country”, in that there isn’t a significant settlement between the Great Lakes and Calgary. Young, educated, professionals are moving from small towns in order to flourish in urban areas, and new immigrants to Canada are all settling in these urban centres as well. The government, he told us, views immigration and the tendency of immigrants to settle in urban centres as a problem, and has considered initiatives that would force immigrants to settle someplace other than these urban centres for at least five years before they could move to a metropolitan area. Mr. Broadbent sees this approach as problematic. Instead of looking at immigration as a problem to manage, we need to adopt a different mindset and see it as an asset.

The difference in these two approaches is described by Mr. Broadbent as follows: Diversity is an asset. This is apparent if you think about human diversity in the context of an analogy to nature: in the same way that diversity of species fosters resilience and strength in an ecosystem, so are we strengthened by immigrants who offer us diverse knowledge, perspectives, and ways of being in the world. We need to ensure that governments--at all levels--take this positive attitude toward immigration and see new Canadians as assets.

Mr. Broadbent then addressed the issue of government becoming inaccessible to its polity. One reason for the inaccessibility of government at all levels is that process has overtaken content. The job of government has become difficult, the scale of government has become big, and there has been a tremendous resort to process. The political focus is on the electoral process--the necessity of getting elected and staying in office. Mr. Broadbent suggested that we all share the view that having access to politicians every four years in the electoral cycle is not sufficient. He indicated that the Vibrant Communities Project is one initiative that is attempting to foster more public engagement in government. This project, in a structured way, creates community collaborations that bring in the key sectors and players to identify community issues, and formulate solutions around the problems and the gaps that exist.

An obstacle that stands in the way of making social and political progress is the ‘culture of complaint’. This culture, Mr. Broadbent argued, is one that focuses on defining problems and assigning blame. Although, it is important to define problems properly, he suggested it is more important to focus on coming up with creative and viable solutions. It is not useful to simply harangue those in government and decision-making position with problems. We need to propose solutions that fall within their capacity, and fit into the existing policy framework. Dealing in a public policy context is crucial because of the scale of change that you can bring about. We will be most effective if we understand the political realities of the decision-makers we are trying to influence, and come up with policy-ready solutions to which they can say ‘yes’.

“Every part of our community needs young people to be stepping up to the plate and getting mentoring from those who are in positions of power, to foster them so we have future leaders for the city so that we ensure that our city continues to grow and becomes an even better city than what it is today”.

~Kim Krushell~

“If we don’t work now to create a tolerant and inclusive world, what will happen when we become inconvenient and intolerable?

What’s going to happen when we need a wheel chair ramp, a nursing home bed, or a little extra time to cross the street?”

~Paula Simons~

“We’re really all different, and the deeper you go, the more different we get. If we were really all the same, then inclusion would be easy. If we really all had the same values deep down, then we wouldn’t need to have dialogues like this one. The problem is that tolerance is just the bare beginning. The brave and exciting and difficult challenge is to accept and to embrace and to celebrate our differences”.

~Paula Simons~

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Councillor Kim Krushell

Kim Krushell shared the work being done in Edmonton in terms of youth initiatives, particularly Edmonton’s Next Generation Task Force. We need to be concerned with Edmonton’s next generation, according to Ms. Krushell, because successful cities are those that attract young people, and young people attract business because companies flock to cities with a youthful, educated workforce. She indicated that we are doing relatively well with our young population in terms of attracting them to Edmonton, but need to improve in certain areas. We need to make an effort to ensure that young people become involved in leadership roles in the city. To realize this goal, Ms. Krushell suggested that we need to promote mentorship of youth by political and social leaders of this city.

The Next Generation Task Force was created to look at what our city can do to become a city of choice for young people, and offer concrete suggestions to City Council. The Task Force has gathered together several young people and involved them in working groups that address important issues in the city of Edmonton: image, human capital, business opportunity, arts and culture, sports and recreation, and urban living. These working groups are currently attempting to generate creative and concrete suggestions to offer City Council on all of these issues.

Paula Simons

Paula Simons launched her commentary by discussing a letter she received from a young mother who, when on a dinner outing to a popular restaurant, with her husband and infant, was told it had a ‘children not welcome’ policy. This prompted Ms. Simons to write a column. The unwelcoming attitude toward children, exemplified by the restaurant and those who responded to her column, is a microcosm of a much larger social phenomenon. According to Ms. Simons, today’s culture has precious little patience with anyone who is “inconvenient or unproductive.” This includes children, seniors, people who are mentally ill, those with physical or cognitive disabilities, the homeless, those wrestling with addiction, and immigrants who don’t speak fluent English.

Healthy and inclusive communities must make room for “the inconvenient.” We must accept people with all their blemishes and all the difficulties they create as part of our larger human community. The problem is not that we are racist, ageist, or sexist. Rather, we’re just impatient; we don’t like to be inconvenienced and dislike having to change to accommodate people whose needs are different than our own. It is part of the mythos of Alberta that anyone who works hard enough can succeed. Ms. Simons believes that for Albertans who like this myth and what it says about us, meeting people who are “inconvenient”, whose imperfections have meant that they don’t “achieve”, creates discomfort because it is an indictment of this social myth that we want to embrace. She reminded us that all of us are, and will be, inconvenient at points in our lives. Therefore, perhaps the quest for inclusion, she suggested, is less about a quest for social consciousness and more about tapping into

“I remember...my first impressions which were mostly shock and a kind of awe about the level of difference that I hadn't been exposed to before and this discovery of people who....had been in a sense kept away...This was an important epiphany—that there was this experience that people were having that was radically different from my own. This offered me a tremendous amount of insight into my own life and what it meant to be a person within my community or culture”.
~Paul Freeman~

He took me to the banks of the river and showed me all the rocks in the river and said: “See my girl, all those rocks, all the different colours, all different shapes, all different sizes, but they're all rocks”.
~Debbie Colter~

a highly developed sense of enlightened self-interest.

Edmonton has been a multicultural community from the moment of its inception, and we have learned important lessons about how to live with differences in peace. She reminded us that although it is easy to see our imperfections as a city, it is important to pause and recognize the miracle that we've accomplished in making Edmonton a thriving multicultural community that can model tolerance, excellence, and inclusion for the larger world.

Paul Freeman

Paul Freeman shared his story of how his career in working with individuals who have a developmental disability converged with his interest in art. As a volunteer with the developmentally disabled he realized that he had never been exposed to this group of people before. After formally studying art, Mr. Freeman decided that he wanted to turn his work with individuals with disabilities into work that could be done via the vehicle of art. He sees art as a tool for inclusion and bringing people together.

At the Nina Haggerty Centre, Mr. Freeman, tries to foster an aura of freedom and cultivate the autonomy of its participants. The Centre is a place where members of the disability community can come together to develop artistic skills and confidence, as well as have the opportunity to mentor each other. Mr. Freeman pointed out that the while the environment at the Nina Haggerty Centre is protective and somewhat exclusive, they always try to go beyond the Centre and share their gifts with the wider community. Most importantly, the work done at the Nina Haggerty Centre dispels the idea that adults with developmental disabilities are a social problem to be managed, and fosters the idea that they have tremendous assets that can be enjoyed, celebrated, developed and then shared with the city of Edmonton.

Debbie Colter

Debbie Colter offered a personal perspective on diversity and inclusion, based on her experience raising her mentally challenged, young Métis son. She was taught that her responsibility, as an Aboriginal parent, was to cultivate the character of her children. Ms. Colter shared with us the teachings of Dr. Martin Brokenleg, showing how his philosophy serves as a guide to cultivating character, and how the concepts and values that ground Philia, are reflected in his writings. In Aboriginal teachings the medicine wheel is used as a map of life, and from it Dr. Brokenleg derives what he calls the “Four Directions of Self”. The east direction corresponds to “belonging”; we all need to belong to something, someone, somewhere. Ms. Colter pointed out that in a lot of the aboriginal youth, you see a loss of identity, and lacking a sense of belonging is an unfortunate consequence of this. The south direction corresponds to “mastery”; we want to teach our children to be masterful at something. In the Aboriginal teachings, according to Ms. Colter, every human is born with a gift, and our responsibility as parents is to help our children discover what this gift is, and let them become masterful at it. The west direction corresponds to “independence of thought”; as human beings we want to have the ability to choose

The wisdom we need to explore our questions is in this room; When we connect with each other in creative ways, the answers will emerge; By honouring one another's contributions, synthesizing ideas, and recognizing patterns, we will end up with collective insights.
~Denis Bell~

"We need to recognize our own capacity for darkness".
~ Dialogue participant~

Edmonton needs to become a community of aware and thinking citizens.
~ Dialogue participant~

for ourselves our own directions, and as parents we need to nurture the independence of thought that every human being needs. The north direction corresponds to "generosity". Ms. Colter told us that we all have generosity of spirit. When we see someone who needs help we reach out to them, we offer assistance; it is in our nature to help each other.

THE WORLD CAFÉ

In the afternoon, participants engaged in a dialogue using the World Café process. Denis Bell provided an introduction to the World Café, reminding us that it is through conversation that we make sense of the world, discover our values, share knowledge and imagine the future.

To facilitate dialogue, and the exploration of questions and ideas, paper table cloths and crayons were provided for participants to draw or write. In addition, a bulletin board was made available, and was divided into two sections: Food For Thought (for those who wanted to post ideas that they wished to share), and Take Out (for those who wanted to do some follow-up from the dialogue, connect with like-minded others, and do something action-oriented). The dialogue centred around two questions, and participants moved to a different table for each question, in order to bring and receive fresh perspectives. Following the dialogue, table hosts reported to all participants on some of the most salient issues and insights that were discussed at their respective tables. While table hosts reported on the conversational activity at their table, an artist created a graphic interpretation of the ideas. David Kahane and Kathie Bell summarized the reports of the table hosts on flipcharts.

The two questions that oriented today's dialogue were:

Why is it important that the City of Edmonton be an inclusive city? If it were more inclusive, what would this look like?

What does "learning and living together" mean to you? What do we gain as a city from "learning and living together"?

Some of the insights that emerged from the dialogue, framed by these two questions, were as follows. One theme was that we need to make inclusion personal. We need to immerse ourselves in sub-communities, and take personal responsibility for blurring borders, rather than waiting for institutionalized change. In order to do this, we need to be willing to be uncomfortable and overcome fear. We may have to acknowledge that we have prejudices and biases that we are scared to admit that we harbouring.

Another theme was that exclusion clearly breeds anger and resentment in the excluded, but less recognized is the damage done to those who are actively excluding, or even mere bystanders. Pain and psychic damage are created by our quiet complicity, by knowing that members of society are rejected in small and large

We need to abandon naïve idealism and, as one participant put it, “become warriors in fighting marginalization”.

~ Dialogue participant~

Terms like “inclusion” imply a powerful and a powerless party. The question that arises then is: who gets to control inclusion, and who gives them that power to decide?

~ Dialogue participant~

ways from community, and feeling we are unable to do anything about this state of affairs. In order to live in a ‘mainstream’ with suffering on the ‘margins’, we often find ourselves psychically dissociating in some way in order to preserve our conception of ourselves.

Rather than doing more research and gathering more information we need to cultivate skills of critical thinking. Intellectual exchange needs to stop being viewed with such suspicion. We should recognize that an unexamined personal worldview is fertile ground for others to recruit us to their worldview.

Groups that are being marginalized shouldn’t wait to be invited. Rather they should actively agitate for status, and we should agitate along with them. Hopes, dreams, and well-articulated visions of an inclusive society will not cause change; only courage, conviction, and sustained action will achieve this.

We need to cultivate more empathy for one another. The route to empathy is relationships. Consequently, we need to create a sense of interdependence among citizens, and the City of Edmonton can help foster this by creating spaces and places for building relationships. There was also discussion about how we can increase the creation of natural and spontaneous relations (e.g. in one’s local community), as opposed to artificial relations (e.g. task forces).

Finally, power and its role in inclusion was discussed. It was suggested that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion needs to look very critically at itself, and understand that, despite its noble mandate, it is an institution with the power to invite some in, and leave others out. Related to this, was the idea that to empower the excluded in decision-making, we need to have the courage and willingness to let go of the power we may possess.

CLOSING PERFORMANCE

The day ended with a wonderful performance by Juno Award nominee, Asani. Asani is a contemporary a cappella Aboriginal women’s trio from Canada.

SUMMARY MARCH 11, 2006

Organizations that work with people with disabilities need to cultivate an ethic that promotes the gradual emancipation and autonomy of those being served.

~Don Risdon~

WELCOME

Don Risdon began today's dialogue with a discussion of the changes he wants to see in the disability sector. He remarked that often people are brought into the service system without a plan of how they will exist. This simply fosters a dependency industry. The way out of this, according to Mr. Risdon, is to focus on the assets and gifts of individuals with a disability, instead of on their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Other changes he would like to see are the increased promotion of self-advocacy as an engine of change, and ensuring that citizens and their families have more control in terms of how best they can be assisted.

Mr. Risdon indicated that they have included persons from the disability community on the Edmonton Regional Community Board. Not surprisingly, their presence at the table has had many positive consequences. The board members see their jobs differently now, and have a real concrete reminder of the effects of their decisions. He reminded us that part of inclusion, is ensuring that those on the margins have the power to control the shape of their lives and to that end, are invited to be part of the decision-making processes.

OPENING PERFORMANCE

Reza Sherkat and Arzhang Naderi are students at the University of Alberta, and talented musicians. We were treated to a wonderful musical performance featuring two rare instruments: the daf, an ancient drum of Asia and North Africa, and the santoor, a Persian string instrument.

"What we do today has an effect on our great, great grandchildren. What do you want to leave for the future generations is a question that we have to ask ourselves. And will they think kindly of us is another question that we have to ask ourselves. Our actions today will determine that outcome".

~Lewis Cardinal~

SETTING THE STAGE FOR INCLUSION

The theme of Lewis Cardinal's discussion was the Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative. He indicated that while his reflection is Aboriginal specific, it is encompassing and respectful of all those who share this city. We don't live alone, and we are not alone, therefore to move in a sacred manner in this world, we must be considerate of others, of plants and animals, the earth, as well as the past, present, and future.

Mr. Cardinal likened "setting the stage for inclusion", to preparing for an Aboriginal spiritual ceremony. In such ceremonies, people come to find direction and a renewal of their spirit. The Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative *is* that preparation for Aboriginal people, according to Mr. Cardinal: "We're getting ready. We're preparing ourselves to engage with the wider community and work in the spirit of peace and friendship".

The Accord Initiative has several requirements. First, traditional forms of governance and community decision making processes must be used when going before the communities to seek consultation. In addition, the decision-making process had to be from the grassroots up. Further, there must be balance in terms of gender, when it come to representation in the elder circles. Dialogue and decisions

“Talking together is perhaps the most underutilized strategy that we all share. Through the process that we’ve developed through The Accord, we have learned much about the power of community and the power of a common vision. It has been reasserted to me that we are more the same than different and that we must relearn to live in peace and friendship and to celebrate each other and the gifts that we bring to the larger interconnected community that we call Edmonton”.

~Lewis Cardinal~

“I actually think that neighbourly love is ethics in action. It’s a moral statement; it is virtue in action. Neighbourly love gets at the spiritual roots of our community and if we’re not careful about attending to the spiritual roots of our communities it is going to be hard to preserve our humanity let alone take on the challenges of pollution or terror or the other more immediate challenges we have in our home communities”.

~Al Etmanski~

must move along the lines of consensus. Consensus is about relationship-building and coming to a collective understanding of the common issue before you, and not about exercising the power of veto. In addition, the ways and needs of the city of Edmonton must be respected by recognizing *existing* commitments that the city has made.

This Accord process must be driven and lead by the Aboriginal community. It must be given the opportunity to shape the future course of action and be responsible for its part of the ceremony. This process must also be inclusive of others - citizens who are not members of the aboriginal community, for example - who wish to share their ideas and concerns. Finally, a commitment from the city was needed. This commitment is called “The Declaration”. The Declaration was brought forward and announced at City Hall, and stands as the most comprehensive statement of partnership renewal with urban Aboriginals anywhere in Canada. It is regarded as the new way of developing relationships with Aboriginal people.

The Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative is a wonderful testament to the importance and power of dialogue in creating more inclusive communities.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Al Etmanski began with a story. David and Tim were initially two strangers, who had several things in common: classical music, their hatred of dictators, and their feelings of loneliness and isolation. They eventually met through the Vancouver Opera Society, but it wasn’t until later that Tim would really become an integral part of David’s life. When David’s mother was dying, she wanted to ensure someone would be there to look after David, knowing his isolation was his main vulnerability, not his disability. PLAN made a commitment to David’s mother that he would not remain isolated, and so invited those who shared interests and passions with David to a personal support network meeting. Tim came to this meeting and he, along with other members of David’s network, were stalwart friends, helpers, and supporters of David for almost two decades, until his death this past year.

The story of David and Tim evoked three insights for Mr. Etmanski. First, that the common challenge that David and Tim shared was their isolation and loneliness. Second, there is an unwritten rule that we all have an obligation to do our share to contribute, and often the most awkward part of having a disability is that no one requires you to make your contribution. Third, neighbourly love, which is the root of Philia, is powerful and breeds belonging and meaning. It is neighbourly love that the people at PLAN tap into when they facilitate networks.

Mr. Etmanski said that the question that keeps arising for him is: How are we going to preserve this neighbourly love in the midst of the challenges of modern times? What are we going to do to break down the isolation and preserve our humanity in the 21st century? He believes that “the very future of our communities will depend on ending the epidemic of loneliness that exists in our society”, and neighbourly love is the antidote to loneliness and isolation. When we welcome, and show neighbourly

Individuals with disabilities have things to offer, and when David makes his contribution, he gets recognized not as an object of pity or charity, nor as a unit of human rights or a client of rehabilitation, but as a citizen.

~Al Etmanski~

“Bold visions, sentimental stories, and desire, are not enough. If we don’t watch out they will become nostalgia... We want to do something more than that... we want to take this into action...”

~Al Etmanski~

When it comes to Edmonton’s economy, we need to be particularly sensitive to ensure that new immigrants are included in its prosperity.

~Nyambura Belcourt~

“I like that blurring of the lines between work and life, between therapy and art, between what’s good for our community and my own passion”.

~Martin Garber-Conrad~

love for the Davids of this world, for those who have been excluded, our world grows, and compassion, justice, courage, civility, hospitality, and reciprocity are fostered. Mr. Etmanski gave evidence of this by describing the profound outpouring of love David experienced when he became seriously ill. He had a daily roster of visitors, parties and celebrations, walls papered with cards and banners, flowers and greetings from civic leaders and the classical music community. His life and his good death were a testament to the power of neighbourly love.

Mr. Etmanski offered an example of how PLAN in Vancouver is attempting to translate these concepts and values into action. A document called “Measuring Up” has been created, which identifies elements blocking people with disabilities from moving toward full accessibility and inclusion. A conversation will be created through this document between citizens with disabilities and their civic leaders, and strategies for procuring funding from the federal government are being developed. He suggested that we might consider such an initiative here in Edmonton.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Nyambura Belcourt

Nyambura Belcourt focused her discussion on the issue of immigration and exclusion. As an immigrant herself, she suggested that for the most part she, and many of Edmonton’s immigrants, feel integrated and included in many aspects of society, but not the economic life of the city.

Immigrants often experience discrimination when it comes to securing jobs. Often, according to Ms. Belcourt, this is because they have an accent that is difficult to understand, wear ethnic clothing that will make people uncomfortable, or possess other superficial differences that have no bearing on their competency. She observed that these differences are wonderful and make Edmonton a colourful, diverse city. We should remember though that we are all fundamentally the same, and simply have different ways of expressing similar values. She concluded by suggesting several actions she would like to see the City of Edmonton take: (1) more expeditious movement on the creation of an African Accord, (2) the honouring of the professional credentials of immigrants, (3) and increased funding to a more diverse array of community agencies.

Martin Garber-Conrad

Martin Garber-Conrad centred his talk on some unique personal experiences that have challenged his perspective on community. Recently his home was broken into, and although he lost some valuable items, what he didn’t want to lose was how he viewed his community. He is consciously resisting creating a more suspicious attitude about his neighbours, walking his streets fearfully, or buying into the popular view that living in the inner city is dangerous.

In addition, his neighbourhood café has recently begun to be patronized by prostitutes who inject drugs in the women’s washroom. Although he sees himself

“In the scriptures, the opposite of love is not always hate, but fear; the opposite of freedom is not just oppression, but fear; the opposite of life is not only death, but fear. The single most frequent instruction from the scripture is: fear not”.
~Martin Garber Conrad~

I very much enjoy making art, and having the freedom to create what I want
~Paul Bellemare~

No one, she said, asks to be born into a certain family, community, colour, or country. We all deserve the same respect simply because we are alive and part of the human community.
~Janice Melnychuk~

as tolerant, and has spent much of his professional life working with women and children in the sex trade, he found himself occasionally resenting this behaviour. Mr. Garber-Conrad, described how he had to wrestle with the offense he felt in his café, and consciously choose to look at the behaviour of the prostitutes with more acceptance.

He also discussed the experience and feeling of going to the Nina Haggerty Centre and viewing incredible art that he wants to purchase. At such moments, it is no longer just a commendable social program, but it spills into his other life. He also sees that blurring of the lines in the structure of City Hall, in that it lies between downtown and the inner city. Our lives have become partitioned and divided instead of integrated, according to Mr. Garber-Conrad, and this is partly the consequence of how our public spaces are structures. The manner in which we've gated North America—the transformation of streets and sidewalks into malls, where we are only consumers and not citizens--is but one example of this division. We need, he insisted, to create the conditions for living more integrated lives where the line between working and living is blurred.

Paul Bellemare

Paul Bellemare spoke about his work as an artist at the Nina Haggerty Centre. He is thrilled at the accomplishments he has achieved through his work at the Centre, including getting a portrait of himself for the SKILLS (service agency) office, and the creation of a book and a DVD, with Paul Freeman and other artists, focusing on human rights in the context of the disability debate.

He also discussed his passion for sports. Mr. Bellemare enjoys softball, floor hockey, golf, and bowling. Last year, he was very proud to receive a bronze medal at the Special Olympics in Lethbridge, and is excited about upcoming bowling and hockey tournaments, both with the Special Olympics, this spring. Mr. Bellemare has very strong feelings about discrimination, particularly about access to sports and playing on teams.

Janice Melnychuk

Janice Melnychuk, discussed her background and how it fostered sensitivity to, and concern for, issues of inclusion. Her background of living in her home community, as well as having parents who believed in social justice, fostered in her a strong belief in inclusion and the recognition that every human has the right to walk this earth.

Ms. Melnychuk said that the question that interests her most is: how do we change society in the way that it needs to evolve? The federal government has told the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that the issue of inclusion in urban centres needs to become a more salient policy issue. Together with Councillor Michael Phair, Ms. Melnychuk is involved in research with the Social Planning Council on social inclusion. Five cities—Edmonton, greater Vancouver, Burlington, St. John's, and Toronto, were researched to determine the level of inclusion that exists in these

We can't always look to "the system" for answers because human issues can only be solved by human beings. Real acts of inclusion are often small and personal: compliment someone and mean it, say please and thank you, slow down so you can notice people, make eye contact, be courageous in saying uncomfortable and difficult things, and be reflective about your fears and discomfort in situations.

~Janice Melnychuk~

There are already many existing opportunities for engagement in our community, and we don't need to be concerned with generating fresh ideas for opportunities for engagement, as much as we need to be concerned with motivating citizens to participate in the existing ones.

~ Dialogue participant~

urban centres. The results of this study showed that Edmonton does well in terms of public places and civic engagement and, Ms. Melnychuk pointed out the fact that we're having the Philia dialogue in City Hall today is evidence of this. The worst dimension, in terms of inclusion, is living conditions (income, employment, and housing).

Ms. Melnychuk continued by saying that City Council doesn't plan on waiting for federal money before they carry out work to make Edmonton more inclusive, and she reassured us that there is enormous political will on Council to make a difference. She concluded by listing the many concrete steps that have already been taken to make good on this commitment.

THE WORLD CAFÉ

In the afternoon, participants once again engaged in a dialogue using the World Café process. Today's dialogue followed the same protocol, and the two questions orienting the discussion today were:

How would we as individuals need to be different as citizens of a more inclusive city?

What is the one thing that you would do to make Edmonton a more inclusive city?

The table hosts, in their summaries of the discussions at their respective tables, highlighted many issues, concerns, suggestions, and insights in response to the above questions. One host indicated that at her table, that there was a need to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers. We also need to be concerned with changing ourselves, not others, and by doing so we will serve to stand as an example through our actions. There was consensus that having a dialogue in a public space like City Hall was wonderful, and some discussion about how other public venues, like West Edmonton Mall, might be utilized for similar events. Another idea was that it is important to use existing structures to effect change. For example, everyone goes out for coffee every day, so how might we use this existing practice more effectively or differently?! It was suggested that we can make inclusivity manageable and personal by committing ourselves to building community for five minutes each day. This could be something as simple as striking up a conversation on a public bus, or talking to local panhandlers on the street instead of walking by them. The idea of "Coffee with Councillors" was also discussed as a way to encourage more citizen engagement. This would be a casual event where City Councillors come down from the offices above and meet with their constituents in City Hall for coffee and dialogue.

Another host reported that building networks and collectives was seen as important, as was taking responsibility for all our actions. Waiting for funding for initiatives can be a trap, because ultimately it is people, not money who will make a city more inclusive.

We need to be able to talk about our fears of inclusion and our prejudices.

~ Dialogue participant~

Another table discussed how we often walk by our own neighbours without saying hello, and how these small acts of neglect erode community. We fail to complement each other enough, and need to start recognizing the work and efforts of others. Increasing participation in community rituals (e.g. going out to pubs, gathering around food) was also discussed as a way to build a more inclusive city. With respect to more structural issues, improving public transit so that people have better access to their city, and improving educational policy to reflect a more diverse world were also mentioned as suggestions for creating a more inclusive Edmonton.

We need to find ways to personalize inclusion in order to foster more individual responsibility.

~ Dialogue participant~

Several ideas emerged from the discussion at yet another table. It was mentioned that perhaps events like the Philia dialogue are simply preaching to the choir, and we need to actively solicit citizens, leaders, and decision-makers who are not yet converts to the values and processes Philia promotes. A further concern was that we assume that those who are seeking to be included have the skills to advocate for themselves, yet this is not always the case. We need to cultivate mentorship programs where leaders and advocates could pass down their knowledge and skills in this regard. Another idea was to get city leaders to ‘lose their titles’ and wear the shoes of exclusion for a day to experience first-hand the difficulties that exist when you are marginalized in society.

Citizens need to offer solutions and not just complain about problems.

~ Dialogue participant~

Another host reported these reflections. Sometimes to clear negative feelings it is important to cry. We need to be willing to destabilize our identity, become borderless, and see if we connect better. Our egos need to be controlled and tamed, and we need to breakdown the conceptions we have about our own uniqueness. Another concern was that deep, and pervasive social structures like capitalism entrench the isolation and exclusion that exists in our cities. Finally, it was suggested that we need to be more wholistic about the concept of inclusion, and consider what it might mean for the way we treat animals, plants, and our biosphere.

Tears clean the eyes so you can see better, and laughter cleans the heart so we can connect better.

~ Dialogue participant~

A different set of ideas was discussed at another table. It was suggested that we had to be more courageous and prepare for experiences of fear and rejection and learn to deal with them more functionally. In terms of structural changes, the following ideas were discussed: (1) making the school system less competitive, (2) making public transportation more affordable, (3) creating an incentive for home owners for giving a spare room in their house to a homeless person, (4) creating subsidies and policies to help integrate persons with disabilities into the business sector.

Another host reported that much of the discussion at their table focused on removing barriers—both physical and psychological. We cannot fall into the mindset of seeing inclusivity as the job of the government; rather, we must ensure that we take measures in our own life to create better communities. The film “Pay it Forward” was discussed as nicely showing how kindness and care can spread.

At another table, participants discussed the notion that there are many places that we need to go with Philia’s message, but it is *here* that we find safety and recognize that we’re not alone in what we value and desire for the City of Edmonton and the world.

*We often think
significant change can
only happen through
large, systematic
solutions, but often
small moments of
kindness are more
important. If everyone
performed one act of
care each day in
Edmonton, that would
amount to a million
daily moments of
kindnesses!*

*~ Dialogue
participant~*

*There's a helium
balloon up there. A
puffy silver star
pressing its cheek
against the glass-
peaked ceiling over
City Hall's grand stair.*

*It wants to be included
in the larger air
beyond. That's what
inclusion is – not letting
in but letting out.*

*We're tired of being
kept inside
Our glass-paned
containers, tired of
hardness masquerading
as transparency.*

*~Alice Major~
March 11, 2006*

Opportunities and events like the Philia dialogue result in feelings of unity, and from that unity comes pride, which fosters our sense of power and efficacy to change our communities. We have an individual responsibility to build the community around us, but we also need to take these feelings of efficacy and put them to use in the various organization to which we belong.

The participants at the final table suggested that we need to listen to others, to their requests for support as well as requests to back off. We need to feel vulnerable and do it *intentionally*. In making ourselves uncomfortable we can better understand marginalized groups. A question that was raised during the discussion was: why can't we strike up conversations with strangers just for the sake of talking to them? People frequently approach strangers who are pregnant, with a pet or a small child and engage them in conversation. How can we make this behaviour more wide-spread and find courage to approach those we don't know.

CLOSING POEM

Alice Major, Edmonton's first Poet Laureate, closed the 2006 Philia dialogue by reciting a poem that she wrote about her experiences at the Philia conference, and her reflections on inclusion entitled "Draft of a Poem on "Inclusion""

CLOSING INVITATION

David Kahane, professor of Philosophy and Master of Ceremonies for the Philia Dialogue, left participants with the following closing thought and challenge. The struggle for inclusion can be made to seem very heroic—this massive distance that we need to traverse. Instead, we ought to make inclusiveness less pious and see it as ordinary and mundane. It often amounts to little things you can do with the feelings you feel, and habits you have. He challenged all of us that instead of thinking of something heroic we could do in the name of inclusivity, to simply form one humble intention from what we've experienced over these past two days. Perhaps it is a habit we'd like to shift, a feeling we want to explore, or a relationship that is difficult that we'd like to move into. These modest intentions, these personal changes in our habits of thought and feeling, are as important to the struggle for inclusion, as any "heroic efforts" we might undertake.