

**THE STORY OF SOMEWHERE:
A NEW NARRATIVE FOR COMMUNITY**

Remarks by
Eric Young

at

The National Conference of
Community Leadership Organizations

Calgary, Alberta
October 24, 2003

Eric Young, President
E.Y.E.
50 Prince Arthur Avenue, Suite 121
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B5
416-967-1034

© Eric Young, 2003

May not be reprinted without permission of the author.

The Story of Somewhere: A New Narrative for Community

It's good to be back in Calgary. I feel very privileged to have been asked to speak with you today.

I gave a speech here two years ago, at a luncheon organized in celebration of Philanthropy Day. It was in November, just a couple of months after the events of 9/11. A very unsettling time. In that speech, I made the claim that good community was the most valuable thing human beings can create. It is our highest calling and should be our highest aspiration. Despite the deep insecurity of our times, that community was more important than ever. And I offered my simple vision for Canada in the 21st century: that this should be a country where communities thrive.

I want to pick up on that theme today.

In fact, let me jump to my conclusion right from the get-go: We need a new narrative about community – in our communities and for Canada. That is a job for leaders – to begin to craft and tell that story. And *this* is a conference for community leaders, a gathering of really exceptional people from communities right across the country. People who have decided not to sit on the sidelines, who want to use their talent to make a difference. It's true that we don't have our hands on the levers of power. We don't control the political and economic forces that shape so much of our lives today. But stories also have the power to give shape to our lives and our future. And *we* have the power to create a new story that can ignite what is hopeful and human in the hearts of others. And *that* can ignite a new movement for community in Canada. The time is right for this to happen. And the place for this to begin is right here. The seeds of change are within this room.

Let me start with a small story of my own: Last month I participated in a symposium in Ottawa called The Sport We Want. There were about 120 people there – people representing a broad spectrum of sport and from a broad spectrum of Canadian communities, large and small; some champion athletes; some coaches; some parents; some government policy makers; and a whole contingent of young people. The event was designed as a dialogue to explore the future of community-based sport in Canada. It was a values-based dialogue, and the participants worked hard (over 2 full days) to get to the heart of the matter. What was the true value of community sport? How was it falling short of the expectations and aspirations of Canadians? What values did we want to see undergirding our sport in the future? And what value did we want sport to impart to both our youth and our communities?

(There was some interesting research tabled at the symposium, by the way. It indicated that there was very strong agreement among most Canadians that sport has the power and potential to be a highly positive influence in the lives of our youth. In fact, comparing sport to other influences like school, religion, and the entertainment industry, only the

family rated higher as a force in the development of today's youth. However, fewer than one in five Canadians feel that sport is actually living up to its potential as a shaper of positive values and character.)

The dialogue was focused mostly on organized sport. But something became very apparent early in the discussion when we were sharing our own personal experiences about the role sport had played in our individual lives. For everyone over the age of about 25 or 30, the sport of our childhood had been, at least in part, *disorganized*. We played on the street, with other kids. It was natural and easy and self-organizing.

Certainly, that was the case when I was a boy growing up in Toronto. From the time I was about six, when I wasn't in school, or at home eating or sleeping, life was on the street, with my friends. And all life was a game of catch with a ball or a puck passing among us. I expect that our parents glanced out their windows occasionally to keep an eye on us, but there was no real adult supervision. We were just a swarm of kids in some sort of game of our making. And every game was a classroom in the politics of fairness. We wanted to win. And we wanted to hold the game together. It strikes me now that those competing ambitions did not just apply to our play, but to all of life.

The street was our place and our playground. Our safe haven. The memories of that active life on the street are fond ones indeed.

And it wasn't just the street in front of our home. When I was about eight, on weekends in the warming days of spring, my best friend and I would set out on our bikes at daybreak and ride as far as our legs could carry us. It was our adventure, journeying to unknown places blocks away from home. It never felt dangerous (we had to invent stories to charge it with that kind of appeal). Though we were traveling through unfamiliar streets, deep down we had certainty that the strangers we encountered were not monsters. They weren't all kind-hearted. Some were pretty grumpy. But we were pretty sure that they didn't eat eight-year olds. We knew we would return home. And so did our parents.

The street didn't threaten our childhood. It enabled it.

What became so clear at The Sport We Want symposium was that just about every adult there could recount childhood experiences like these. But if they were parents now, it became equally – and disturbingly – clear that these kind of opportunities were hardly available in our communities today.

My sense, as I listened to people talk, was that the nostalgia for former times was also coupled with a significant sense of loss in our current times. And it went far beyond sport, far, even, beyond lost chances for childhood.

What a very significant change has occurred over the last two or three decades. For so many Canadians (a very large majority, I suspect) 'the street' is no longer perceived as a zone of comfort – a zone of community. This was made vivid in Toronto when we

suffered the blackout this past summer. Except “suffered” is the wrong word. Because everyone had a good time. When the electricity went out, so did the people. They were on the street in droves – some making their way home on foot, some stepping in to lend a hand by directing traffic, some just hanging out to watch the action and share stories with one another. The streets were alive. It was as though the electric current that had stopped running through the wires had started running through the people. As though the inconvenience of the blackout had become a *generator* of community. Neighbours talked and strangers met and good Samaritans popped up on every block. And when it was all over and the power was back, people kept talking about how different it had been, how special.

The street had become hospitable. But of course, that was just a moment in time.

The perceived inhospitality of our streets today is a symptom of a deeper malaise about what our communities have become – about where and how we live.

Several years ago, I tried (unsuccessfully I’m sorry to say) to mount a project called Community in Canada. The intention was to conduct and share ongoing research about Canadians perceptions of, participation in, connection to and isolation from community. (If anyone here is interested in resurrecting – i.e. funding - this, please see me after the lunch.) We did, however, manage to conduct a small initial survey that included a few open-ended questions about what changes people would like to see to make their communities better places to live. Reading through the responses – some two thousand of them – it quickly became clear that ‘the street’ was a dominant theme. So much so, in fact, that I considered entitling our report “A Street Runs Through it”. Wherever they lived, from British Columbia to Newfoundland, people were concerned about the streets in their neighbourhood – not about potholes, but about noise and traffic and safety and crime, about a growing lack of friendliness and the increasing presence of homeless folks...about the fact that their kids couldn’t play out there.

Thirty years ago, if we had asked ourselves about the community we want projecting ahead to the start of the 21st century, we would not have described a place where we were afraid to let our kids play on the street. Our aspiration would not have been widespread public apprehension about the places outside our doors.

Does it matter? This after all is the busy modern world. We’re on the move. And the streets are there to take us where we want to go. Well, I think it matters tremendously. The street is not just a medium for conveying us from Point A to Point B. It is also a message.

The message is that a significant shift has occurred in our communities – that there has been a slow erosion of trust and comfort in the places we inhabit.

Our communities are not just backdrops for our real lives, not just backdrops for work and shopping and life behind the closed doors of our homes and cars. Our real lives are not elsewhere.

The *nature* of where we live and *our* nature are inextricably linked.

I said I wanted to talk about the need for a new narrative about community for the 21st century. Let's look first at the narrative we've been telling for the last decade or so. I call it "The Story of Nowhere". It's a story where the characters – all of us – are living in a vast and fast-paced nether-space. Where distance is dead. Where economies are global, information is digital and connection is virtual. "Location, location, location" no longer matters, according to this story, because we are all bound up in the global economy, and bound together by the world-wide web. If Alice stepped into her Wonderland through a looking glass, we step into ours through a computer screen. And now, with the extraordinary recent advances in wireless technology, we are no longer even tied to our desks.

Think for a second how this world is romanticized in advertising: Someone is sitting on a dock by a lake, or on a mountaintop, but they are oblivious to the beauty of their surroundings because they are staring at a screen that connects them to elsewhere. There's a TV ad I saw last week depicting a woman caught in a traffic jam, glancing anxiously at her watch. We discover that her young child is about to give a piano recital. But the day is saved, because her husband is in the audience, and he manages to beam the performance from his mobile phone to hers. The ad's message is clear: thanks to the marvels of modern technology, *you don't really have to be there to be there*.

It's not just in advertising. The themes of globalization and virtualization dominate the economic and political domains of our life today. We are participants in a global economy. And citizens of a global world. But where exactly *is* the global market? And where is Cyberbia (my word for cyberspace)? In a world that has become increasingly globalized and digitized, it sometimes feels as if the real world of *place* has been quietly vaporized.

But we abandon the idea of place at our peril. And we're beginning to realize this. We can't turn our backs on the economic and technological transformations of the modern world. And I'm not saying we should. But The Story of Nowhere is starting to lose its appeal. Why? Because it has distracted our attention from something fundamentally important to us as humans – our somewhere, our *here*, our home.

Indeed, in this era of globalization, a profound longing for community is beginning to reassert itself. I don't see it as a retreat from the modern world, but as a bold exploration in the right direction.

A generation ago, we began to develop an ecological view of life – an understanding of the connectedness and fragility of the environment, and, given its sorry state at our hands, a reawakening to the sanctity of nature. I believe we are witnessing the beginning of something similar around the idea of community. There is a reawakening – you can feel it – to the importance, fragility and life-giving qualities of community. Maybe even to its sanctity.

It expresses itself as concern and as desire. Concern is more pronounced because it's easier to point at what we see as wrong. Harder to give voice to qualities we only sense through their absence. But we know in our hearts that something is missing. Rich and fortunate though our society is in so many ways, we feel the enriching bonds of community eroding away. Our society drives forward in pursuit of the twin ambitions of economic success and individual wellbeing. But somehow, 'the common good' is no longer a common idea. Or ideal.

Yet, as I said, there is an undercurrent of public longing for community. My sense is that it is wide and deep and starting to swell. I see it in research studies of Canadian values. I hear it in gatherings like The Sport We Want symposium I mentioned earlier. I hear it from some of the top leaders of Canadian business who come to me to help develop their corporate citizenship programs, and who are genuine in their desire to make a difference. I hear it also in the voices of young people who are just embarking on their careers and who are determined to find a meaningful path. In fact, I think this upsurge in longing for community is more vigorous than anything I have observed in twenty-five years. The people in this room – community leaders from across the country – are a testament to it.

What is this longing trying to tell us? It is that community is essential – not incidental – to our true nature. That you can't have a successful society – or a satisfying life – in the absence of community. That we are social creatures, and that our *social* ecology demands our care. That community is not just a nice-to-have but a necessary-to-have. And that it is not just a moral idea about the good we should do for others, but also about the good we should do for ourselves. We, each and every one of us, need community – just as community needs each and every one of us. Now here's the interesting thing: It turns out that this longing from deep within is a storehouse of wisdom. Studies by social scientists have been confirming what we know in our hearts.

Back in the fifties, a team of medical researchers started to pay attention to a small Pennsylvania town called Roseto. They were intrigued by the fact that Roseto's death rate was substantially lower than in neighbouring communities, and, in particular, that the rate of heart attacks there was a full 40% below what science would have predicted. This phenomenon could not be attributed to a particularly healthy local lifestyle. The citizens of Roseto smoked just as much as people in neighbouring towns, they consumed just as much fat in their diets, and were just as overweight and sedentary. But there was one distinguishing feature of life in Roseto that the researchers did notice. And that was the close-knit relations among the community's residents. Social cohesiveness and an ethos of egalitarianism made Roseto special.

Some of the folks in Roseto were affluent; others were less fortunate. But conspicuous consumption was conspicuously frowned upon. The researchers observed that "Rosetan culture...provided a set of checks and balances to ensure that neither success nor failure got out of hand". In other words, holding together was more important than standing apart – and that kept Roseto remarkably healthy.

But by the mid-sixties, things began to change. Some young people moved away to seek jobs elsewhere; and overall, the community became more caught up in norms of mainstream American life. Some of the richer folks started to display their wealth by driving expensive cars, joining country clubs, and so on. Others were quick to follow. Soon enough, the cohesive bonds of Roseto were weakened. And so was its health. Within the span of a decade, the incidence of heart attacks there was just as high as in neighbouring places.¹

There's been much more recent research investigating how the qualities – and inequalities – of the places we live affect our health. Some of you will be familiar with Robert Putnam and his work on social capital. Well he, and some of his Harvard colleagues at the School of Public Health, have noted very marked geographic differences in health across the United States that are linked to social connectedness. They compared mortality rates with a survey examining levels of civic trust across the country. In those places where the trust between citizens was lower – that is, where the survey respondents expressed a more consistent agreement with the statement that “most people cannot be trusted” – the rate of death from all causes was strikingly higher.

The researchers found similar correlations between civic trust and other important quality-of-life measures – from infant mortality to school performance to crime rates to reported levels of happiness and life-satisfaction. Places where civic trust is lower are places where the quality of life for citizens is lower.

These findings are as troubling as they are fascinating. Here in Canada, we place a high value on trust. 70% of us believe that “trusting is a key part of what it means to be Canadian”. But almost 90% of us also believe that “people are less trusting than in the past.”²

Well, if it's the case that civic trust clusters in different degrees in different places and dramatically affects social and physical well-being, there's some compelling new research that shows that *creativity* also clusters in different degrees in different places and dramatically affects economic well-being.

Richard Florida has brought these findings to public attention in his recent book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. It's getting a lot of attention in media and policy circles and spawning new research studies both in the US and Canada. In a nutshell, Florida's argument is that creative talent – by which he means the human ingenuity to invent and improve, to solve problems and change things – is the driver and decisive source of competitive advantage in the new economy. Now remember, this is the very economy that was supposed to be making geography a thing of the past. But Florida's research (and he's far from alone here) points to a diametrically opposite conclusion:

Place matters profoundly.

The power of a place to attract, hold and breed creative talent is key to that place's economic success. And different places have that power in very different measure.

Why?

According to Florida, certain places have an "attractor factor" for creative people. They want – and choose – to be in places where they can have rich, rewarding and stimulating lives. The old image of the artist alone in a garret or the inventor alone in a lab no longer pertains. Creativity is a social process – both directly through the dynamic collaboration of colleagues working on a specific project, and indirectly through the energy generated when talented people engaged in different pursuits rub shoulders. Indeed, even in the past, famous creative centres like Paris and Vienna attracted aspiring geniuses not just because the garrets were cheap and plentiful, but so were the cafes. Today's talent, as Florida's research shows, is attracted to places that have an authentic and distinctive character. But they all have in common the qualities of recreational vitality, cultural vibrancy and social diversity. In an interesting way, I think, this brings us back to the concept of "the street". It seems that if you want to attract creative talent, you should make sure that your city offers a robust outdoors life – places to be active physically, and places to engage with a thriving cultural and multi-cultural street-level scene. And there had better be a real spirit of tolerance for the broad spectrum of people who populate those streets.

It sounds pretty good. But there is a fly in Florida's ointment: It appears that cities and city-regions – that rank highest in terms of their creative economic strength also tend to demonstrate higher degrees of income disparity among their citizens. And that, as we have seen from the Roseto story, is not a good sign.

What seems to be the case, in fact, is that in the 21st century, both our greatest possibilities *and* our most pressing problems are concentrating in local places.

This is the picture that is painted in a report released recently by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, called *Why Cities Matter*.³ The author, Neil Bradford, argues (like Richard Florida and so many others) for the fundamental importance of "local places in a global era". And he worries that Canadian cities, which have been the envy of many in the world, may be living off investments made many decades ago, and that we have not stepped up to the challenge of revitalizing our cities with the same vigour and imagination as some other countries.

It's a compelling report and I won't do Dr. Bradford the injustice of attempting to summarize it here. But there's one insight that I would like to highlight: It's that the powerful dynamics of clusters work in two ways. When you get sufficiently dense clusters of entrepreneurs and creative talent mixing together, it creates prime conditions for all kinds of possibilities for innovation and economic growth. And that phenomenon has got economic theorists and policymakers very excited these days. But equally, when you get dense clusters of disadvantage and social marginalization, it fosters the conditions for a world seemingly without possibilities.

Let me quote from the report: “The poor not only live in poverty but among other people who are also poor, and separated from those who are not, signaling the absence of networks linking to opportunity... This leads to place-specific ‘neighbourhood effects’... Socially isolated spaces do not breed new ideas and partnerships, but feelings of despair.”

Unfortunately in Canada we are now experiencing not only a greater polarization of wealth and opportunity, but also a greater localization of disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods.

The point, I guess, is that cities can be heaven or hell. Or, more precisely, heaven *and* hell. Invigorating, enabling and enriching for some. Marginalizing, degrading and isolating for others.

Our challenge for the future, the challenge that will demand the very best of our intelligence, ingenuity, public purpose and political courage, surely must be to stimulate the conditions for a lot more heaven and a lot less hell. (I’ll go back to the lessons I learned when I was a boy playing on the street: We’ve got to find a way to hold the game together with everyone in it while striving to compete on a global field. We cannot be a successful society if we don’t.)

As Dr. Bradford argues, all the great policy questions of our day – economic, social, cultural and environmental – have now become *urban* questions. Given the fact that Canada is now one of the most urbanized nations on earth, it is understandable that place is fast coming into much sharper focus on the policy landscape. An urban agenda is starting to take shape.

But it’s not just a job for policymakers, economists and technicians.

It’s a job for citizens. We have to give voice to the communities we want. We have to call them into being by drawing on that storehouse of wisdom I referred to earlier. We have to inform and inspire the unfolding policy discussions with our authentic, *legitimate* human desire for community.

The desire for community in Canada is deep. And the moment to capture it is now. And it’s the job of leaders to unleash that desire. To give it shape and meaning and narrative force.

Folks, it’s *our* job. This is a gathering of leaders – leaders in Calgary, and community leaders from across the country. If not us, who?

Now some of you I know, and many I don’t. But what I do know about people who have been working in and for community is that there is a prevalent feeling of frustration and fatigue. The job seems so large, the problems so many, the obstacles overwhelming.

The large economic and political forces that shape so much in our communities are beyond our control. And we're working as hard as we can just to plug the holes caused by them. "What real difference can we possibly make?" you might well ask.

Well, I'm a social marketer. I've been grappling with the challenge of social change for my entire professional life. Working for change – and trying to understand how change actually occurs. Much of the time, I feel woefully ignorant. But I've learned two key

lessons over the course of my work: One is that change is a complex, interdependent and difficult process. Two is that change does happen.

The fact is that we don't live in a static world. Especially now – these are transformational times. Our world – and our communities – will be very different in twenty years. Different *how* depends, at least in part, on how we assert ourselves on the future. We can be shape-changers.

Is it preposterous to imagine a 21st century of great Canadian communities – communities that are creative, cohesive, diverse (vigorous) and fair? That dignify human nature? That all of us can take comfort in – and pride in?

No more preposterous than imaging the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the end of apartheid, or the e-revolution.

I believe we are at an inflection point. The time and conditions are right for a powerful social movement for community in Canada. As powerful in the years to come as the women's movement or the environmental movement. (Not a utopian movement because utopias are places that don't make any room for real human beings or any allowances for the frail complexity of human nature.)

Think about the environmental movement in its early days. There was a dawning realization – a coming to public consciousness – about both how important and imperiled the environment was. It was fuelled by compelling new scientific evidence; by champions and popularizers like Rachel Carson; and by a coming together of people who cared.

Well, we have compelling new evidence about the importance of community – from economists, health researchers and many other domains of social science. We have people who care. And we have an untapped public appetite.

These are fertile conditions for breeding social momentum and social innovation.

There's a Brazilian proverb that goes like this: "When we dream alone, it is only a dream. When we dream together, it is no longer a dream but the beginning of reality."

We need a collective dream to inspire our communal future. That's why we need a new story about community and its possibilities.

And it has to be positive story. The role and responsibility of leadership is to unleash in others the courage to imagine difference and the will to act for it. In my view, leadership is liberation – liberating others from resignation, from *the grips of what is* to the *pull of what's possible*.

Leaders have to step out into that imagined future first. We have to abandon the comfort zone of cultural pessimism that infuses so much of the discourse about community today. I don't mean that we should be blind to problems, but rather that we mustn't let problems blind us to possibilities. Pessimism is a trap. It's a form of passivity. And when it's shared, it's usually in the form of complaining and blaming.

In the end, this is little more than a ritual of self-affirmation that manages to convince some people that they are better than others. We have to get it out of our heads that the most caring people have to be the most despairing people.

Leadership is meaningless without hope. In the corporate world today, one of the best selling and most referred to books is called "*Good to Great*". If corporations talk about going from good to great, why can't communities?

In Vancouver, there's a great community leader I know named Al Etmanski. He and his wife started an organization to work with people with developmental disabilities and their families. As you know, people with developmental disabilities are among the most marginalized in our society. But Al's organization has been remarkably successful at helping to change conditions in a way that vastly improves their quality of life. I asked Al once to describe to me the ingredients of his success. He told me that in the early days, he spent a lot of time talking with families about their frustrations and the problems that needed to be addressed. Then one day, he stopped asking the question "what's wrong?" and started asking "What's a good life?" And everything changed. The question allowed people to speak from a different and deeper place, allowed them to dream beyond the boundaries of their current circumstances, allowed them to see new opportunities for creating the conditions for a good life. (Not an easy life, or a perfect life – but a *good* life: humane, connected and dignifying.)

If people with developmental disabilities and their families can ask "What is a good life?", why can't communities?

The point is that if we want to speak truth to power about the communities of our future, we have to start speaking truth to ourselves about the communities we want. Not just what we want for others, but what we want for ourselves.

If we don't, our communities just become projections of someone else's idea of the good life: The developer whose vision of sprawling suburbs and giant malls sees communities as cookie-cutter replicas of one another. The politician whose vision focuses on urban places simply as engines for national prosperity – who believes, as Margaret Thatcher

once famously said, “there is no such thing as community”. The marketer whose vision of the good life is the *goods* life – individuals cocooned from one another in the comfort of their latest purchase.

In William Blake’s poem, Jerusalem, there is a powerful refrain: “They became what they beheld.” Are these the visions of community we want to behold? To become?

Where are the streets for our kids to play on? Where is the pleasure of conviviality? Where are the slow places to restore ourselves in an accelerated world? Where is beauty? And memory? Where are the unique expressions of particular people in a particular place? Where are the bridges out of the isolating margins for our disenfranchised fellow citizens? Where is the room for us to attempt the noble purpose of creating a good life together? For our pride and confidence to grow?

I’m pretty sure that the communities we want would have qualities like these. If that’s true, then we have to incorporate them and animate them in our new narrative about community.

Finally, our new story about community has to be made not only of large dreams, but of small proofs as well. To strengthen our sense of possibility, we need to show the examples of community effort that has turned into community effect. Examples of citizens who have come together to make things better.

Like the story of a woman called Jutta Mason and her transformative work in Dufferin Grove Park, in Toronto. When Jutta moved into the working-class neighbourhood in the city’s west end, this small park was a pretty forlorn place. Almost no one used the park except for some local teenage boys who played hockey there in a concrete bunker-like arena. They were a fairly rough lot of kids and their aggressive behaviour in and around the park scared off most of the neighbours. In fact some of the neighbours wanted to get the kids arrested.

That idea didn’t appeal to Jutta. Instead, she and a small, informal group of local residents got together and decided to try something different.

Essentially, what they wanted to try to do was to revive the park as a community commons – a place that everyone could use. Now here’s the simple genius of their approach: Instead of battling the Parks Department – which was suffering from budget cutbacks anyway – for some standard park amenities like playground equipment, they decided to ask the people of the community what they wanted. It’s a very diverse community, composed of families from Portugal, Italy, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe – and there wasn’t a lot of connection among them.

But the conversations generated a lot of ideas. One of the great ones was to have a traditional wood-fired community bake oven in the park. After all, food is important in every culture.

Because there was no money, they approached a local contractor – and he donated the materials and did the construction work on weekends. Once the oven was built, almost instantly it became a magnet, attracting all kinds of people, young and old, and all kinds of activity.

Over time, the park has become one of the most remarkable community spaces. Everything seems to happen there – community dinners, outdoor theatre and music, gardening, card games for seniors, a washday for the homeless, a weekly farmers' market with organic produce, midnight basketball, other forms of courtship – and yes, even still, some disruptive teenage behaviour. But the community has created community – and it is a wonderful, self-organizing and evolving creation. No one will take that away from them. And now, parks experts from around the world have been studying the miracle of Dufferin Grove as a model for what can be done.

We need stories like this to inform the larger story of community. There are many examples in many places. They inspire a sense of public purpose and possibility. But they are not part of our public conversation.

When stories like this touch a nerve, they tell us something – not only about what happened, and about the protagonists – but about ourselves. That's what stories have always done. If they resonate, it's because they reveal something in us – some truth that simply does not get evoked except through narrative.

And if we respond to a story like Jutta Mason's, it is because we want to see that we are neither naïve nor crazy to have some belief in our fellow human beings. Some belief, despite all the daily facts of life that can lead us to be cynical or despairing, that *good* can come out of the collective human endeavour. That *home* is possible with others, and actually that it is impossible without others. That we can have a creative hand in our collective destiny. That seeds of hope and trust can grow.

Look, the oldest human stories were always about a kind of trust. Trust in the gods – despite their obvious capricious and sometimes cruel nature – that the sun would return after the dark sky obliterated it. That spring would revisit the land with its fertile offerings.

Real life and true stories are odd bedfellows. Real life never unfolds to perfect conclusions (like our most cherished stories do) – and we deceive ourselves and harm ourselves if we believe it should. But we equally deceive and harm ourselves if we suppress our desire for that – and if we neglect our desire and responsibility to try to enact it in the world. That's what the making of authentic community is all about.

We all want great communities. It's our lives after all. It makes sense to want to live in the best place in the world – and to be part of the making of it. Let's bring this idea to life in our communities, in our time, right across our country.

Thank you.

NOTES:

¹ Ichiro Kawachi, Bruce Kennedy and Kimberly Lochner, *Long Live Community: Social Capital as Public Health*, Inequality.org

² Aiming High: Renewing Trust in a Time of Suspicion, report released by the Centre for Ethical Orientation, 2003

³ Neil Bradford, *Why Cities Matter: Policy Research Perspectives for Canada*, Canadian Policy Research Networks Discussion Paper, June, 2002

Eric Young is the founder and president of E.Y.E, an agency that works with leading government, corporate and voluntary organizations to address some of the most pressing issues facing contemporary society. He has been the architect of numerous campaigns for change™, and has written and lectured extensively on the challenge of change and the remaking of community in the 21st century.