

## The Role of Community, Civic Society and Community Development: Implications for CLBC

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This paper provides a brief overview of the important roles that community, civic society and community development can play in helping CLBC to achieve its mandate under the *Community Living Authority Act* and considers of the strategic implications for how CLBC conducts its work. What is a key for CLBC is that individuals, families, support networks, service providers and the broader community are seen as full partners who play a vital role in helping people to enjoy full citizenship in the communities where they live. The paper identified ways that CLBC can support this process, while recognizing that community remains the most critical catalyst for change.

### CLBC Values

Values are the beliefs that we hold dear and that influence the actions we take. During large scale change that we are now a part of, it is essential that we have the "right understanding" and the "right action" with each of our stated values. CLBC is guided by values and upholds the following commitments in every thing it does.

1. Respecting the rights of all people
2. Supporting people to make their own decisions
3. Supporting people to achieve their dreams for the future
4. Respecting the important role of family and friends in people's lives
5. Promoting people's ability for life-long learning, development, and contribution
6. Being open, honest and fair in all aspects of our work
7. Working cooperatively with others
8. Promoting a culture of responsibility, respect and trust
9. Supporting our employees to do their best
10. Inspiring creativity and innovation
11. Striving for quality in everything we do
12. Being accountable to the people we serve

### CLBC Vision

The vision for people with developmental disabilities is full citizenship. People with developmental disabilities are leading good lives, have rich relationships with friends and family, financial security, choices in how they live their lives, employment opportunities and are accepted and valued as citizens. CLBC is a steward of the vision and a leader in social change; fostering the growth of inclusive, supportive communities where people with developmental disabilities live good lives. The vision for CLBC is: ***Good lives in welcoming communities.***

## CLBC Mission

CLBC works with individuals, families, support networks, service providers and the broader community to develop a system of flexible supports and services that will meet the life-long *needs* of children and adults with developmental disabilities. The mission statement for CLBC is: *Community Living BC responds to the life-long needs and goals of individuals and families by recognizing their abilities and contributions, sharing leadership with communities, and funding supports that honour individual choice.*

Community, civic society, and community development are both phrases and values that we want to guide our work. But, what do they mean, and how might we act to insure that they are appreciated and implemented correctly? Albert Einstein once said, "*we cannot solve the problems we face today with the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.*"

For decades, our planning for individuals and programs has started with the assumption that services should be the first resort in the lives of individuals and families. As individualized planning, community support, and more flexible funding arrangements become the core of our work, we can no longer think of services, programs, and buildings as the first response to people with disabilities.

Right understanding suggests that each individual will have a unique set of dreams, needs, and goals that can only really be met by being part of a community, a family or set of valued relationships. Dreams do not fit into programs; rather, they are alive and connected with people and places in community. In addition, research shows that focusing only on disability limits our understanding of the person and their context. Rather, broader aspects of diversity such as age, gender, income, ethnicity or race, and sexual orientation all influence people's access to participation and citizenship.

## Why has the idea of community grown in significance in the last two decades?

Sometimes more broadly called civic society, community refers to all the voluntary activity that exists beyond government and formal institutions. There are four main reasons that interest in community has grown so much in recent years.

1. The expansion of human rights in the last thirty years has created conditions for community. If people with disabilities have the right to access public spaces, then communities need to address how this can be made possible. New definitions also relate rights to equity and solidarity, implying that people need conditions that enable them to have relationships in community.
2. In recent years, a focus on family and personal empowerment has created energy for participation. When individuals and families understand and experience having control in their lives, they generally choose community options. Interestingly, it is participation that enhances the values of community. When people participate fully in community life, they are living "citizenship in action".

3. In the last decade, there has been growing concern with quality of life and the rich possibilities of genuine community. Determinants of health research indicate clearly that people who have personal networks and who participate in civic life are much healthier than people who are isolated and lonely. These research findings correspond with the growth of suburbanization, which has reduced a sense of community. These conditions have led to a desire for more genuine community.
4. The community living movement and other social movements have emphasized the need to build inclusive communities. The healthy communities' movement, for example, stresses the need to create communities that include everyone. The call for inclusion is both a goal and a process, and it is recognized that it will take time to make this a reality throughout Canada.

## What is community?

How do we come to understand that community is critical to how we see possibilities for people with disabilities? There are five ways we can understand community and civic society.

1. Community can be understood as hospitality or welcoming. Hospitality has a long history related to people inviting others to share of themselves and what they can offer. Citizenship is one of the bridges between community and hospitality. Philosopher Mark Kingwell describes citizenship as "*a way of meeting one's deepest needs, the need to belong; it gives voice and structure to the yearning to be part of something larger than ourselves. By the same token, citizenship is a way of making concrete the ethical commitments of care and respect, of realizing in action an obligation to aid fellow travelers . . .*"
2. Community can be understood as neighborhood. Local neighborhoods are often rich with possibilities for building relationships and finding ways for people to contribute.
3. Community can be understood as personal networks. Each of us has a network of people who are part of our lives. Although many people with disabilities have small networks, the potential for community lies in facilitating the expansion and connection of those networks.
4. Community and civic society can be understood as the hundreds or thousands of informal community associations that exist in every community. These places of common interest create potential welcoming opportunities to match people's strengths and interests, as well as their gifts. Such settings enable participants to express who they are as people, and to develop a wide array of social relationships.
5. Community can also refer to a cultural group that gathers around common cultural or religious beliefs or background.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough review of the importance of community and community development, see John Kretzman and John McKnight (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.

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## What are the capacities of caring, inclusive communities?

In recent years, an increasing number of projects and research efforts have gone into understanding the capacities of caring, inclusive communities. In summarizing this work, Julie White from the Ontario Trillium Foundation notes that caring, inclusive communities:

- Have an abundance of social capital, which include community assets, opportunities for engagement and belonging, and wide range of informal community associations and formal infrastructures
- Have strong connections and networks within the community and with other communities, which create opportunities for dialogue and partnerships. Because these communities are not isolated, people bring ideas back to their community from other places
- Have a willingness and capacity to welcome and integrate newcomers, which includes volunteer efforts at inclusion. These communities also reflect diversity in terms of age, race, and abilities, and there are programs and community initiatives that “work across differences” and “work to find common ground”
- Have the ability to adapt and innovate. Whether supporting refugees from other countries or people returning from institutions, these communities figure out how to make inclusion work better for everyone. There are many little innovations, and citizens have confidence in their capacity to address local issues
- Have the capacity to collaborate. It has been shown that communities who collaborate can respond more effectively to both crises and opportunity. Collaborative relationships and community partnerships reflect a new value by recognizing that social issues are the concern of the entire community, not just government or agencies

The capacities of caring and inclusive communities can serve as a bench-mark for what we might like all communities in British Columbia to look and feel like. In supporting inclusion for people with disabilities, we can use community development to contribute to building more caring communities.

How does community development contribute to community building for people?

Community development can be seen as a perspective, a principle, or a set of strategies. Regardless of the way we think about community development, essentially it is a way to make communities stronger, more connected, more caring, and more welcoming.

Community development can be initiated from the goals of an individual and his or her network, or from a group. When community development is initiated from an individual or network, we are building community connections that support the person’s dreams and goals. When community development is initiated from a group, the group itself is addressing an issue that can best be resolved in community.

Community development contributes to community building by helping us work from a “community lens.” Whether from an individual’s or group’s perspective, community development contributes to seeing capacities and strengths in neighborhoods, networks, and local community associations. People’s dreams and issues often find a space for resolution in these neighborhoods, networks, and community associations.

Community development also contributes to community building by identifying, connecting and nurturing relationships, partnerships and capacities. This process connects disability issues with the broader civic society, and leads to the formation of new partnerships and alliances. In this way, community development recognizes diversity and potential alliances that disability groups may have with other groups that have been marginalized. New skills may be required for people working with a “community” lens, but it is vital to be clear on the values, so that the skills we develop fit with the beliefs of citizenship, community, and community development.

In summary, by supporting and nurturing community development, CLBC will be contributing to:

- People finding a sense of personal power, and the capacity to use it
- Support for people to have relationships in community life
- Communities building on the contributions of individuals and associations
- A focus on inclusion
- People working together to make communities more welcoming
- Citizens shifting responsibility for meeting the needs of people who live with a disability to the entire community, away from dependence on services
- A belief that individuals and families can work together to create change in their communities
- The recognition of the value of diversity in communities

## **What are some success factors when engaging communities?**

A review of the literature and lessons from community development projects reveals several success factors when engaging a community in disability and inclusion issues. Community Living Ontario, for example, recently completed a project that identified several of these factors, including:

- Start with the people who want to be included, their families and friends
- Make it an inclusion issue, not a disability issue
- Adopt a broad-based, collective approach with new civic society partners and invitations to others who might care about the issue
- Create a compelling, shared and community-based vision for the future
- Set clear expectations and goals and get some early wins
- Develop strategies that are multifaceted and touch different people and places
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate some more
- Take time to do thorough research – find out what others have done
- Create a sense of urgency
- Build relationships with people and places that are likely to understand the issue
- Be innovative and build on what is unique in that community
- Build in opportunities for continuous learning

There is no easy formula for engaging communities. Each community differs in its history and approach to resolving issues. Leadership in communities can also vary, but every community has opinion leaders and people who work for change. In doing community development, we are building community connections and relationships for the future. As we deepen our individualized planning and support, we need to learn to unlock the capacity of each community, so people with labels can be fully included in community life.

Some of the following *community development principles* can assist organizations to develop effective community development practices:

- Dedicate resources in the organization specifically for community development.
- Ensure that a senior position in the organization can be a “champion” for community development activities
- Engage families and other citizens in learning about and understanding community issues, and their impact
- Work actively to enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community
- Develop the capacity to support innovation
- Incorporate the diversity of community into organizational practice principles and the workforce

Many of these principles have already been built into the functions and structures of CLBC.

## **Challenges and implications for CLBC**

As a learning organization, CLBC staff will have a responsibility to think and act in ways that encourage and facilitate innovation and capacity development at the local community level. Facilitators, in particular, are ideally situated to work with individuals, families, service agencies and other community stakeholders to provide information and practical guidance in this area.

Amongst its various corporate level roles, CLBC is mandated by its legislation to stimulate and encourage community development activities in order to change the way communities respond to people with a disability.

In addition to the work of its own Quality Service Analysts and Facilitators, CLBC will achieve this by supporting the establishment of a Community Council in each of the 17 Community Living Center areas throughout BC.

Councils will be voluntary bodies that operate using guidelines established by CLBC and whose roles include stimulating new service approaches, helping to set local budget priorities and providing feedback on how CLBC and service providers at the local community level are responding to the needs of individuals and families.

The various roles and activities for both CLBC and the community create a number of challenges, as well as certain strategic organizational implications for CLBC, that need to be considered in its work.

## **Challenges**

**1. We need to think about “community as a first resort,” rather than as an after-thought once services are in place.**

If we can learn to start with community as the people and places that can be engaged to be part of individual dreams and collective issues, we will begin shifting toward the values of community and community development. Services and paid supports will continue to be part of many people’s lives, but we will be intentionally building opportunities for citizenship and participation at the beginning of planning for each person and each issue.

**2. We need to learn to use a “community lens” and support families and communities to do the same.**

Many families and communities have a long tradition of using a “service lens” to deal with disability issues. Our historic response has been to match the disability label to available paid services and supports. How do we support and encourage families and communities to use a community lens and community as a first resort? Part of this education will come from the independent planning support that is part of CLBC, and part will come from carefully constructed strategic directions that help create “community thinking.”

**3. We need to frame local community governance as community development that focuses on the capacity building of families and local communities.**

We know that when service development is the focus, community development tends to get pushed off the table. Notwithstanding the creation of Community Councils, how do we build in additional incentives for local community groups so that they see the value of focusing on community development? One way will be to ensure that any guidelines for innovation focus on community development. This could be a powerful safeguard for CLBC values.

**4. We need to build new kinds of partnerships and collaborative relationships that reflect our beliefs in civic society.**

Inter-agency partnerships can sometimes be useful, but we need to expand our collaborative relationships and partnerships. Partnerships with a broad range of community groups, as well as business and local government, become possible when we see community as a resource, not a barrier. Some of these partnerships will emerge from the individual plans of participants, while others will come from collective efforts to facilitate change.

**5. We need to initiate and fund projects that enhance community and innovation.**

By seeding innovative projects that focus on community and civic society, we can enhance capacity building and build linkages with the wider community. This approach will also provide incentives for local community governance bodies to focus a good part of their work on community development. The challenge will be to ensure funding decisions are based on sound principles and best practice.

**6. We need to learn how to map possibilities in people' neighborhoods, networks, and community associations.**

CLBC Facilitators will have a key role in terms of supporting individuals and families to see their community as a source of support and hospitality. Over time, welcoming places will be identified throughout each community. How can what Facilitators learn about mapping possibilities feed into local community governance? We also need to learn how to develop this mapping capacity within the service sector, and amongst professionals, and to share this information widely in communities.

**7. We need to ensure that Facilitators can “connect” individuals with people and places that are welcoming.**

The community living movement has had “integration” as its goal for more than two decades. In recent years, we have learned a great deal about how to connect people with community life. Part of this involves finding people and places that are welcoming. With a community approach, Facilitators [and community support workers] move from the provision of 1:1 support, to adopting “enabling” and “connecting” roles. This connecting work also helps builds the capacity of community associations.

In the last decade, we have learned how to build communities that are welcoming. Community development is now widely seen as a key tool for facilitating this change process.

CLBC has an opportunity to both use and build on the challenges identified here, so that inclusion and community become central to all the work that we do.

## **Strategic Organizational Implications**

Based on feedback provided during the planning and development work leading to the creation of CLBC, key community stakeholders interested in moving the community development agenda forward stressed that CLBC must play an enabling role, but not actually “lead” or “do” all of the needed community development work. This task was seen as ultimately a shared responsibility.

Stakeholders stated that a community lens must be embedded in the work of everyone as a primary responsibility. This requires CLBC to be cognizant of balancing its responsibility to transform the way communities think about and respond to people with disabilities, which will occur primarily through the role of Facilitators and secondarily through the work of Analysts, with the fact that the real source of innovation and change rests with the expertise already resident in B.C.'s diverse communities.

In its enabling role, CLBC can provide resources and training opportunities for communities wishing to pursue community development.

Although stakeholders identified many issues that need resolution, most saw a need for increased community participation from families, self-advocates, providers and other citizens. The challenge for the CLBC is to now develop insight into how capacity development and local governance are interrelated.

## Specific recommendations

1. Continue to host meetings and roundtables with interested stakeholders on the role of community development.
2. As we move into implementation, consider a special action research project to evaluate “How well are we doing with regards to using community development strategies?”
3. Explore how a “community lens” and community development principles and practice can be embedded within all aspects of CLBC’s organizational culture and its job descriptions and in particular ensure that staff clearly understand and support community development practice and principles.
4. Consider how local community governance can most effectively reflect a commitment to community building and community development principles, while exploring how CLBC can best provide fiscal resources and training for those communities that want to pursue community development activities.
5. Explore how CLBC, as a funder of community level innovation and enterprise, can “seed” fund important strategic community initiatives.
6. Insure that all the above considerations be developed in dialogue with, and reflect BC’s diverse communities.