Making Spaces: A **Fictional** Account of the Change You Wish to See

This story takes place in any community, anywhere, that is emerging from crisis and into success during any time of deep and sustainable change. This story is based on a broad range of information gathered from and about many communities over the course of the Momentum Project and past experience in the Social Sector and community development. It has been included here to provide a vision of what can be by sharing the story of how it could happen.

Gage moved in today. When I left him, the last "homeless" person in our region was sitting in his new apartment, after eating some celebratory take-out with his support team and getting ready to settle in for the night. It's been quite a journey for him and his cohorts, and on a broader level, quite a journey for our community.

The way we were

Seven years ago we were in a deep crisis, and in spite of numerous "plans to end homelessness," there seemed little hope of being able to do so. Increasing numbers of people were ending up on the streets, or at risk of being so, and the opioid crisis was in full swing. Daily tragedies and broken systems were wearing us all down. It was a time when the standard "tactics" and programs seemed to be becoming less effective for a new population of people in crisis. After decades and billions of dollars, homelessness was still occurring. It was big business, but the problem persisted. In our area, as in most, we didn't have enough units, or the right kind of housing, and not enough capital on the horizon to provide all that we needed. We were siloed, within and between sectors, and the community was fractured by emotional and political responses and pressures, philosophical differences, and damaging assumptions about the social needs at the core of the crisis.

It was easy to try to lay the blame on government, our municipality, lack of resources and leadership, an uncaring community, even the people in crisis. The truth is, none of us were at fault, and all of us were. There were numerous reasons things weren't working, and most seemed beyond our control. So many people were working hard and burning themselves out trying to do more with less, isolated, alone, overwhelmed. It felt as if, no matter what resources, frameworks, opportunities were found or thrown at the problem, it was never enough. We couldn't seem to connect the dots. We were drowning, and couldn't navigate to the surface to find our way to shore.

Historically there had been, and even at that time there were, bright spots, but they hadn't seemed to make enough of a ripple or last long enough to make a permanent or comprehensive difference. There were also blunders; strategies, policies and practices that seemed to contradict each other and perceived solutions that ended up making things worse after a while. There were numerous projects being enacted in isolation which split precious resources.

 We were in serious crisis and could see no way out, and it was affecting everything, and everyone, and not just our community. Provincially, nationally, globally, a growing sense of injustice, a wider connection to broader but still relating issues, was, for many of us, creating a point of intentional self-reflection. "There must be, should be, NEEDS to be, more, and better, than this, for everyone." Priorities were shifting for many, across sectors. Realizations about what truly was important were being had in the face of so many "givens" that we had come to expect and had previously settled with, even if we had never truly made peace with it.

Breaking point

Frustration levels mounted to a breaking point, and then… it broke. After another wave of management retirements and front line shuffles, and a year of increased social disruptions, overdoses and suicides. After what seemed like years of dialogue and mulling over strategic frameworks, best practice fads and breakthroughs and still more research, surveys, dialogue, I guess enough of us had had enough of the same old. Maybe we were finally in a state of mind and heart that pushed us close enough to the edge to feel like we could climb out of the box.

"We've got to do things differently!" We all knew it, we all said it, every time anyone got together. There were still differing views as to what that meant, but concepts and philosophies, researched best practices, and the humanity in all of us was mulling and mixing and spilling over boundaries and into the spaces between. There were great things happening, don't get me wrong! Amazing people and organizations who were working to make things better in various ways. But it was generally accepted that all of these things were still too disconnected, siloed, hard to navigate, and sometimes creating problems for each other. There had been a reluctance to engage in these potential "fixes" for a number of reasons:

1. There had been too many hopeful attempts to do change work in the past that didn't last, didn't stick, or just weren't comprehensive enough to make a lasting difference, but still took a lot of time, energy and resources. Twice bitten, thrice shy, the saying goes. There were low levels of trust.
2. The current funding model for social support services created a threatening atmosphere, intentional or otherwise, where funded organizations were nervous about heading in directions that might lose them "grace" in the eyes of those holding the purse strings. An unfortunate power dynamic was at play in which the obvious leadership entities were not as effective as they could be, didn't really know what to do, but seemed unwilling to relinquish control. Their view seemed limited, and even if they were working out amazing solutions, it was being done behind closed doors, with little engagement or even communication to the rest of the community. And the not so obvious but potential leaders and community champions were not feeling like they could step into that role. Levels of trust were low. People had been burned too many times.
3. With a competitive funding model in place, leading to a lack of coordination between organizations, there was so much effort being needed to just keep things afloat in key community organizations, that there was little room for extra-curricular activity that may or may not produce desired results. It was a false sense of efficiency that, ironically, compounded inefficiency and taxed limited resources even more. It is easy to see this in hindsight, but at the time, without sanction, mandate, and authority to produce motivation for collaboration, any attempts to make changes were disjointed, difficult to inject, and sometimes seemed to get in the way of individual, siloed mandates and operational strategies.
4. The interaction within and between sectors was spotty and disconnected, creating competing demands on limited pockets of willing collaborators in some sectors, while other sectors carried on merrily toward their own purposes and within their own spheres. There was a lack of understanding of the full scale of the crisis and its creeping effects on the community. And up to then, very little exposure for the broader population to the community and social challenges whose symptoms were beginning to threaten the peaceful enjoyment of everyone.
5. Uncertain economic conditions had created a dearth or at least constriction on the kind of government and private spending for what could make the most difference: more affordable

housing units. New, emerging concepts were being considered and tried, but not enough funding was making it to communities like ours. Disconnection and siloism plagued all levels and sectors, so that promising solutions lost their impact or couldn't be adequately scaled up to provide a broader relief. It seemed that, for the most part, a dogged clinging to broken systems and old ways of doing things resulted in continued treatment of symptoms, rather than solutions aimed at core causes for lasting change.

6. And honestly, but not so easy to hear, the community had become dependent on government supports and was not connected enough to recognize or mobilize local resources. Learned helplessness, enablement, caused by systems "fixes" had ended up decreasing the self-reliance of communities. What happens to people that puts them in crisis, can happen to sub systems and communities, too.

There had been brief points of light and efforts that made sense here and there, and I guess the situation finally reached a tipping point. The urgency, the hope, the despair, the hope again, and the sense that *now was the time* seemed to be getting stronger. "If not now, then when?" and, " If not us, then who?" At the same time that things seemed to be getting worse, there were also some concepts that began "gelling," and you could hear it and feel it. But there was still no real leadership, no sense of a way to create an effective framework from which to move forward. Then the call came.

Leadership at last, but the right kind

Our local Community Housing Advisory Board was looking for input for a new plan to tackle homelessness, in the wake of the previous 10 year strategy to end it. There was a recognition that the landscape of homelessness and community capacity was changing. They, very rightly, wanted voices from multiple sectors. This included lived experience, the Indigenous community, social support services, the public sector, government, and business and industry as well as community and religious service organizations. With everything that was going on, going wrong, and going round and round, it was easy for us all to roll our eyes, at first. "Here we go again!"

 But something was different this time. Like maybe all the pieces might be falling into place and an opportunity that could not be passed up was on our doorstep. There were concepts and ideas being floated, discussed, toyed with. People were ready to innovate, do things differently. There was an authentic intention not to proscribe the process, but to support a true community effort. And we knew that whatever was decided on as a plan had to include input and perspectives from the whole community. On the "Stages of Change" spectrum, we realized we were moving from a state of precontemplation into contemplation.

Successes in other places, and the best practice research that was happening at the time, pointed toward finding a way to connect all the disparate parts of our community and begin a course of action that could really change things. But it still felt like the desperate flailing and reaching of an addict, hoping that maybe, this time, things could finally be different, while wondering how it really could and preparing for inevitable relapse. Maybe we were just desperate enough, had hit rock bottom finally. But all of those things combined with a leadership group that was ready to engage all of us in creative, permanent solution-making set the stage for community action. There was no win in wasting the opportunity to introduce real change. As the saying goes, we had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Some change was better than doing nothing and whatever we could do would get us closer to being able to doing more.

Gathering the group and laying a foundation for change

Our "brief" was two fold: First, to use systems thinking strategies and creative, out of the box thinking, to assess, map, re-imagine, and effectively mobilize existing resources across sectors (including but not limited to people, places, organizations, dollars, opportunities and even just stuff) toward ending homelessness and its contributing factors. Second, to develop a cohesive community plan to that end that would make the best use of those resources in an integrated housing and supports model, and make a powerful business case for additional resources from outside the community.

As a multi-sector effort to form a team began, there were some clear "mandates" and "criteria" that emerged. If we all, within our silos, continued to perform as we were, we would expect to see the same frustrating results and trajectories. We knew we had to be humble, we knew we had to be honest, open, creative, forgiving, and have equal measures of patience as well as dogged, passionate, determined energy toward action.

Every community has differences as well as commonalities. While we had reams of best practice information, and examples of programs and projects that worked in other communities, we still needed to make sure that what we did worked well in ours. Our ultimate community plan had to be comprehensive enough to cover the needs of enough stakeholders (at least well enough to get initial buy-in. And it had to provide adequate focus on key issues to see meaningful solutions, produce greater engagement and increase capacity for more action. It had to stand the test of time and succession, and be sustainable, no matter who was in leadership, key community and sector positions, or political power. It had to be able to flex with us on our journey as a community.

I don't know how many people really could see it or thought about it at the time. But we felt that we were on the verge of a whole new way of being, as a community, that was going to open up possibilities that we had never collectively envisioned before. It was hard to have faith in that, to step out into the darkness of doing things differently. Were we up to the challenge? Could we really make it work this time?

Finding Community and Sector Champions

From accepted and emerging literature and our amalgamated experience in change management, we knew we needed sector champions who were well connected into their sectors and able, or at least willing, to understand the perspectives of the others. They had to be able and willing to commit the time and energy required, and we needed to support them. Just that initial exercise of coming to that conclusion, figuring out how to justify and/or pay for people's hours and giving them space on their plates to do this work, began a process of collaboration and collective activity toward mutually beneficial outcomes. It was a small, relatively simple and reachable "leverage point" and "collective victory"that offered some immediate gratification and gains to help spur us on to see what more we could do.

It was important that we enter into this process as equals, collaborators, and representatives of all community members that had much to lose if we failed, and so much more to gain of we succeeded. We also understood that we had to mutually lead the process, rather than allow ourselves to be led through a preconceived and orchestrated process to a predetermined outcome. We needed to discover a shared agenda and vision, connected into and representing our various sectors, and bringing all of our understanding and ingenuity to the table. We didn't want to limit the possibilities for powerful, organic solutions. But we also had to find common ground from which to start to build. We needed a framework

to work within that would prepare us for the work, help guide and organize our efforts, leave us the room we needed to explore fully and find the best solutions, and provide a way to see the big picture and potential next steps.

Creating Space for Safe Conversations

Using the work of Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph.D. and Harville Hendrix, Ph.D, who are interested in developing a more "relational society," we learned about and employed "communal dialogue" working on creating "safe conversations." In their work with couples and family therapy they stopped focusing on the "problems" people thought they had and instead focused on helping them to talk to each other in a way that their needs to be heard, understood and feel safe were met. Talking without judgement, helps us connect beyond our differences. They have been working on the Dallas Project as part of the Mayor's Task Force on homelessness in Dallas Texas, where they are trying out these concepts between cultural groups and across socio-economic levels.

 Our facilitators took us through a few first exercises that helped us to create a safe space to do this work. We were being required to be very vulnerable, the process was emotional and often painful. We began with work to define or envision the kind of community we each wanted to be part of and what problems needed to be solved for that to happen. Then we engaged in conversations to understand each others' individual and representative sectoral motivations, needs, goals, challenges and barriers in order to move forward in a good way, toward mutually viable, beneficial, and equitable solutions. But it was about more than solutions. We were modeling a new way of operating together, trying out a new way of being. A more authentic and honest, and ultimately safer and more productive way of working together.

Just the act of improving our communications with each other- with that shared vision of hope, with assumptions that everyone was doing their best, and with an intention toward increasing understanding between sectors, seemed to eliminate a number of "problems" we all thought we had. It helped us focus on the things that mattered most and had the greatest impact toward the solutions we were looking for. We were able, as a community to start letting go of both the "small stuff" that was feeding mistrust, cynicism, and creating unhealthy dynamics, as well as some of the "big stuff" that we weren't able to tackle quite yet. We began to find creative ways to work with where we were at, in the best ways, with what was available.

The City of Dallas, Texas, had experienced this through their Safe Conversations project and we were seeing it duplicated in our community, in our particular dynamic and set of circumstances. Rather than using up precious energy, head space, and time on negativity, pessimism, and the "blame game," we were able to create an environment where people were willing to step back from assumptions and roll up their sleeves in hope. Contemplation had led to commitment and now we were ready to enter into the preparation stage.

Gathering Tools

We had some training and discussions about different tools and ways and means to create a shared "language" and common base of understanding which could help us develop a framework for the work we were doing. We talked about some of the tools and processes in our own areas of expertise around leadership, change management, communication, systems thinking, determining and measuring outcomes, strategic planning and economics. And we gathered and adapted some exercises, tools and templates we felt would help us in this work.

We settled on things such as the concepts related to Systems Thinking for Social Change, an outward mindset model, and a mandate for flexibility and sustainability (to better manage systems entropy). Armed also with a holistic view of community encapsulated by concepts within the Medicine Wheel, which fit hand in glove with Systems Thinking and the Transtheoretical Model of the Stages of Change, we were were ready to begin our journey of discovery and transformation. We decided we would employ situational leadership in which different people would take the lead based on what was needed at each juncture, and who could best supply it.

Creating a Picture of the Current Reality

Much like the process of intake for a support program, we had to, first, start with a big picture view of who we are and where we were at, as a community. Our strengths as well as our deficits or liabilities. As well, we had to gather multi-sector stakeholder input about what could be, in order to make decisions about who and where we wanted to be and how to get there. Making a conscious decision, as a community, to reject the status quo and commit to change, required that we each take a good look at the cost for remaining the same versus the price for making important changes. Not unlike any human being's personal experience when faced, in a crisis, with a choice to make. This would help us strategically map our next steps for best success.

The prospect of looking at what we might be "doing wrong" as a community and as individual entities, was difficult, emotional, and raw. Discovering that you have been complicit, or even just complacent, in undermining the very things you have dedicated your life, career, and daily energies to, is heartbreaking and gut wrenching. But attitude reflects leadership, and so as a team we had to experience what we expected the rest of the community to do in accepting personal responsibility for the change we wished to see. And we had to do it authentically, compassionately, but resolutely. In order to effectively map a way out of the current situation, we needed to know how we got to this juncture. We knew we needed to be honest about what was worth keeping and what needed to be discarded. We needed to be clear about what was dysfunctional in order to be open to what we could do differently.

Using some systems mapping concepts, readily available from a number of sources, we mapped out how our community was currently operating from the perspective of homelessness and its contributing factors.

- What were the dynamics and interactions and their results?
- How we might be getting in each others ways?
- What important resources were missing to help end-users move out of crisis?
- Where were the missed opportunities and inefficiencies?

This led us to consider what we could actually do right then, what we were in a position, with the will and resources, to work on as a community that would make enough difference to help us move forward in the ways that made sense. As in any change process there are stages of progression that feed into the next. Without the right elements in place to enact certain changes, the process is frustrated and stopped. Working with what is in the environment helps keep the change process moving and it produces outcomes that add elements to the environment which increase capacity for, and support, next steps. We realized that this worked for those we were trying to help as much as it did for us. We are all systems after all, as individual human beings, organizations, sectors, and a community.

Forming a Shared Vision for what is possible:

When considering a uniting vision, we wanted to go beyond what we would do and incorporate how we would do it together. We needed the differing perspectives and "bottom lines" of the various community sectors to inform a new way of operating together. Helping each other climb out of limiting boxes by pooling our individual wisdoms expanded our view and ignited our imaginations toward the possibilities of what could be. It fostered a new sense of unity and cooperation. I know, it sounds very "Pollyanna," but it's true, and it worked. We were able to both reach for new heights and keep our feet on the ground with the practical understanding we each brought from our areas of expertise.

One key insight from our discussions really got us thinking about how we were going about this work. One identified systems story is the "fixes that fail" scenario where, in a limited view, a "band-aid"gets put on as a solution to a problem that actually requires much more than that. It might seem to fix things in the short term (usually because it masks the problem enough that it loses traction for our attention) but the underlying cause still exists. With a multi-sector group determined to find permanent and sustainable solutions, we had an opportunity to examine the root causes of homelessness, rather than just focus on homelessness itself.

We thought, "What if we don't try to solve homelessness at all? What if we go beyond that and look at how, as a community, we can solve or alleviate, at least, some of the contributing factors to homelessness?" What would a community that is able to support people to thrive look like? We examined all areas because we had input from all sectors. What deficits would need to be removed and what assets would need to be introduced or scaled up in order to break the cycles that were leading people into a situation of homelessness, or being at risk of it? How would we need to integrate and interlink those elements in order to decrease gaps and ensure that people could navigate the resources and opportunities.?

 A pragmatic view about what we could manage now, compared to where we wanted to be in order to move us forward to our vision started with "reverse engineering" from the desired outcomes. What needed to be in place for Y to happen, and what had to be done at X for that to be in place, then next and next, along with contingency plans, to see if we had what was needed to get started, present in our environment and what we had to do to manifest it. This would inform each stage of progress. This took some time to accomplish. As tempting as it was to rush out with solutions, we had to hold ourselves back and work on getting a strong, clear picture that would form our roadmap to success and establish a network and community infrastructure to support the action required.

Our new vision: A community that is able to support every member to thrive, in a way of operating together that best uses existing resources, capacities and opportunities for positive change in the core causes of social need, helps sustainably produce more, and presents a united, informed front for seeking external support.

Sharing what we were learning and inviting more engagement

 While we were forming and refining that vision, we shared some of our team's discoveries, to prepare the soil, so to speak, in the community and plant some seeds of insight that would ease the way of change. It also provided us with community level feedback, as we went forward, that helped us to gauge what would be most possible, practical and palatable. And it informed us about those deeper layers of motivation, perspective and assumption, so that we could work out how to support their transformation.

We had to have an idea of who we needed at the table, who was ready to act with us at each point along the way, and what activities we needed to engage in to help get the people we needed ready and mobilized. We also needed to develop an integrated and intentional process and "network" of communication to help us keep everyone tuned into this work.

Collaborating multi-sectorally meant that we had a broader view of what we had to work with. With some creativity and a little bit of faith, trust, and sacrifice, we were able to figure out how to work the three focuses or our vision into our day to day activities. It was hard for many to get their heads around it, but each of these focuses were directly related and mutually influential. We needed to find ways to identify and track the outcomes that would show us we were being successful, hold everyone accountable for their parts, continually evaluate, and share and gather new knowledge.

We had to ask some tough, humbling questions, at first, that included:

- Why, after we have been working on ending homelessness for so long, did it still exist?
- What areas were we falling short, individually and as a community?
- What were our honest motivations and "pay-offs" for being involved in this work?
- What aspects did we feel "called to?"
- What were we prepared to give up or share control of in order to see success in this area?
- What underlying assumptions and world views did we have regarding people who were homeless, or at risk of it; about other entities and stakeholders in our community; about root causes, accountability, responsibilities and roles?
- What did we see as the core contributions to the current crisis?
- What part, if any did we, within our sectors, organizations and as community members, through policy or perspective or practice, play in the perpetuation of the core contributors to homelessness? Of the current condition of siloism?
- What activities were working well and helping people, and how could we scale them up, given the resources we had available?
- What other layers of value could we add to our activities?
- What were we doing, or could we do within our sectors and as a community to be the change we wished to see?

We were developing a new "way of being" as a community, a new standard by which to operate that put the people in need at the centre, had an expectation of mutual responsibility and accountability, incorporated that authentic, honest inquiry, a view to next steps, and always an eye on the bigger community picture. The principles and concepts of healing, change management, outward accountability, visioning solutions and moving forward that are best practices in helping individuals and families, easily apply to organizations and communities. "Physician, heal thyself."

There are a number of approaches available that ask different levels of questions, and have different tools. We explored the material, best practice, our own expertise, and the experiences of other communities to decide how best to proceed with our own assessment and visioning activities. Cross-pollinating, or looking outside of one industry for solutions from others is a recognized practice that has led to successes for others. Applying business models to social benefit work and applying social benefit principles and concepts to business and industry has expanded the effectiveness of all of us toward a community supporting bottom line.

We began with a systems assessment of our community, based from *Systems Thinking for Social Change* by David Peter Stroh and other related material. There are many approaches and tools available, and

we found the ones that worked for us. These included an analysis tool based on the developmental model inspired by the Medicine Wheel, organized according to sectorally related "layers" of involvement. We were able to pinpoint various aspects of systems work as they related to our current issue, and it helped us trace leveraging and engagement pathways, see where the gaps might be, and identify not only who was doing what, but who could do what might be helpful along those pathways.

Oh my goodness, these were rough days. After so long working in silos, taking care of our own business, thinking we had the answers and seeing others as the problem, it took a lot of trust and honesty to tease apart existing tangles of assumption, and dysfunction. To see how all of our activities fed into, affected or where impacted by those key social challenges that had brought us together, and to envision better dynamics.

Discovering and exploiting leveraging activities

We decided that there were some naturally occuring coalitions and alliances in our community that already created a loose network that we could exploit to assist with this process. Establishing a visual depiction, some collaborative terms of reference and some ways and means toward greater intentionality, mutual benefit, and collective impact was another important and revealing "leverage point" that helped increase energy and engagement. We were starting to see how all of the separate pieces of our community could begin to work smarter and with greater synergy.

We quickly came to realize that there were some smaller projects the community could immediately set about doing, or that were existing and which we could make more effective or scale up. By engaging others in multi-sector task forces to help carry them out, these activities would provide some hope and energy boosting to a waiting community. They would also prove to be very beneficial to the overall task we had set ourselves.

Seeing the fruits of our labours

In one amazing example, we knew we needed more housing units, and the right combination of the right kinds of units. But, even though we had a few things in the works, they weren't enough, they needed some "massaging", and/or they were going to take at least a year or two to get off the ground. So, with our enhanced ability to collaborate, and our growing sense of trust of each other, and the process, we were able to organize some smaller interventions designed just to help take some pressure off a volatile situation. We could meet the solutions that were in development partway.

Once we really began talking on a multi-sectoral level, with a broader, big picture view of the community and some of the core realities that were influencing homelessness, we were able to see a few areas of movement that could help almost immediately. We knew that we couldn't make enough housing available for everyone right away, nor would it be a "silver bullet" solution. There needed to be more and integrated layers to our solutions. We also knew we weren't going to get additional resources any time soon either. We needed to alleviate some of the suffering and bottlenecks, and pave the way to housing success, using what we already had on hand for resources.

A.)Collective Housing solutions: In a community where we had so many who were homeless, there was still a surprisingly significant (but yet not so surprising) rate of vacancy. We decided to see empty units as a collective impact opportunity and began to work on a strategy of communication and coordination that could exploit that opportunity to the mutual benefit of community members that needed housing and some of the landlords with empty units. There were a number of landlords who already saw the

benefit of working with the community to find good matches for some of those units that would mitigate risk, and provide at least some income. This was already being done in a limited way. Unfortunately, due to the competitive nature of funding and outcomes chasing, agencies tended to "hoard" good landlords. The problem with this was that their particular clients weren't always the best match for their landlords, leading to frustration, expensive failures, and landlord burnout. If we could develop a cohesive system of "match-making" and coordinate appropriate supports, we could solve an economic and social challenge at the same time, not to mention improve mental and emotional wellbeing for all involved!

B.) Meaningful Activity and Relationship Building: Research and best practice tell us that a lack of trusting relationships and community connection were contributors to continued mental health and addiction challenges. This was keeping people from engaging more effectively with existing services. We found that we could address this barrier to success and provide a few more pathways to better engagement by creating opportunities for meaningful activity and relationship building. We organized a team made up of lived experience folks, front line workers, and a couple of members each of the business and faith communities. A questionnaire related to meaningful daily activities was sent to all community serving agencies. Then the group assessed the feedback to determine:

1. what meaningful activity options were currently in place in the community;
2. what were seen as needful, that did not yet exist;
3. what resources or opportunities existed that could be cobbled together to provide more; and
4. what further opportunities or added value could be gained from these activities, increasing daily meaningful activity options.

C.) Neighbourhood Capacity Building: We also knew that, while planning new housing was imperative, we were going to be dealing with NIMBY mentality. We had to find ways to increase the willingness of neighbourhoods to welcome these local "refugees" into their hearts and lives. They needed capacity for awareness and understanding, resilience and risk management, and they needed some good "buy-in" incentives to motivate them to be more amenable to their new neighbours. We knew that relationships were key to the change, outcomes, and risk mitigation we were hoping for. Almost every neighbourhood has a community or neighbourhood association, loosely linked in a network and supported on a basic level by the municipality. Here was another potential leveraging point that we could exploit to the immense and important benefit of everyone. So we got another team working on supporting neighbourhood associations, who needed some help to be more sustainable and revitalize their neighbours interest in, well, their neighbourhoods and introduce capacity building activities.

Seeing Initial Outcomes and Victories

We found, over time, that the changes we implemented in order to "just get by" while we waited for permanent housing solutions to be completed, actually led to some more permanent solutions for a number of the folks that were in crisis at the time. The bottom line is that so many things are interconnected, and while it creates problems in other areas when one area fails, conversely, the same can happen when one area is strengthened. For example:

- Well-being, empowerment, and a better sense of connection was improving engagement and success with Housing First programs for many participants. This meant that current tenant/landlord "matchmaking" efforts were seeing greater success, and more landlords were

being willing to extend lower rental rates to support the progress of their, now, most excellent tenants.

- Our efforts to support landlords produced opportunities to create a collaboration between social agencies and existing companies in the private sector to develop small "in-house" social enterprises to provide cheaper maintenance, landscaping, cleaning, and renovation options. These provided the right kind of flexible employment for participants, enhanced skills for taking care of housing, and led to more permanent jobs in those related fields, because we were connected into the private sector.

- We were able to hire a number of our participants in the construction and renovation activities for our permanent housing projects that were beginning to be in development.

- Our organized, clear and communicated strategic activities were attracting volunteers and participation from the greater community, which increased awareness, understanding, tolerance, and integration.

- A growing group of individuals in recovery were able to be more successful than they had been previously, at retaining their sobriety and related it directly to better choices for meaningful daily activity and "safe" spaces to be,with links available to further steps.

- This improved their ability, combined with a willingness of more landlords, who were increasingly confident in our spectrum of supports, to help find mutually beneficial solutions, to get more people into an affordable rental situation.

- Because we were working hard to support landlords, our case management teams and social service organizations had to do some focusing on the neighbourhoods into which their clients were moving. Bringing added value to communities strengthened the case for inclusion and decrease the power of NIMBY.

- So we continued to explore, using existing manpower and looking for other cross-sector collaboration opportunities, what kinds of supportive and capacity building projects and programs could be enacted within neighbourhoods. This action brought health, education, and church organizations together in new and innovative ways. Now we are building capacity on the ground in nieghbourhoods for grassroots support, healthy social networks, and linkages to more specialized and formal services. According to John McKnight, community development guru and co-founder of ABCD Canada (Asset-Based Community Development) "we have many programs focused on policy and institutions but too few focused on enabling citizens and associations to be producers in their neighbourhoods."

- Increased involvement of business in social solutions led to improved levels of sponsorship, especially now that we had an organized, cohesive, way of developing and communicating these activities. But, with lived experience and business involvement in that planning and development, it also created spaces for dialogue between those with lived experience, and social and business sectors. This led to increased networking, two-way mentorship and collaboration to create job pathways and opportunities, which led to more individuals being able to stably rent housing. It also had the added advantage of creating a "grown at home" workforce that was loyal, local and specifically trained.

- With the increased communication and collaboration between sectors it was now easier to see the potential of looking forward to the emerging trends and needs in the other sectors and work together to create opportunities for our vulnerable community-members-emerging-into community-contributors to move to fill those needs.

- Neighbourhood associations were revitalized, and connected into the alignment framework, and as a community we had a better sense of the needs, dynamics and demographics in each neighbourhood. So we were able to use that information to strategize housing development to

the best benefit of the tenants and the neighbourhoods. There was also an increased capacity for neighbours, with better supportive relationships developing, for not only integration, but also prevention of further crisis. Each neighbourhood was its own little microcosm of community care, linking to as well as informing and being informed by the greater continuum of care. There was an increase in our ability to resource projects on a neighbourhood level, because we could see how it could fit into the overall community picture.

Ultimately, the increased communication and collaboration within and between sectors had started to change our community landscape and dynamic in positive ways.

<div align="center">Capturing the momentum of quick victories</div>

Seeing the benefits from our initial, sort of crisis-oriented activity, we were encouraged and began to work together more intentionally on three levels:

1. Using opportunities that were already in process or development, we created a cohesive business plan and strategic alliance toward developing housing which included pooling current and emerging opportunities and resources to create a connected, sustainable, growing system of affordable housing options. With the help and guidance of our partners in business and industry we applied mixed use, mixed income strategies that were designed to provide employment opportunities, create social enterprise business development, and produce revenues. These revenues will ensure the perpetual sustainability of our affordable housing, and boost resources for our community continuum of care.
2. Developing a multi-sector community alignment framework around a shared vision of a community that helps everyone to thrive. We were able to focus on resourcing, improving and enhancing our local continuum of care and intersecting it with next steps and pathways into self-reliance and resilience, moving from a constant state of crisis intervention to prevention and capacity building.
3. Working smarter, and mobilizing the community around reviewing and adjusting what activities we could do now to alleviate some of the identified and emerging needs and pressures and find more leveraging activities to bring more quick victories and help with the other two areas. This would allow us to move deeper and deeper into our community systems and start addressing some of the below the surface elements talked about in the "iceberg analogy" in systems thinking. Basically the idea is that the systems "behaviours" that we see are the tip of the iceberg and the result of other elements far below the surface. Things like assumptions and biases, values, traditions, and cultural or worldviews. It behooves anyone who is looking at change of any kind to examine the underlying elements and contributors to the thinking and feeling that influences today's actions, and the deeper personal, social and cultural aspects the spawned them.

At the end of the day, while many things were starting to fall into place, we still needed more housing units. In the process of and as a result of all of the aforementioned activity and drive, as a community we were able to create a strategic plan for housing that included a number of elements:

1. Better utilization of the government funds that were being allocated for housing projects in our community to provide added value for the community. This meant increased and creative collaboration between benefiting agencies and other community entities to maximize use and decrease expenses.

2. The creation of a housing cooperative to provide a spectrum of ways that community members and entities could contribute to sustainable affordable housing which included:
   - Social benefit housing development and property management collaborations among local non profit organizations with some help from the business sector to provide sustainable builds and set up sustainability opportunities for existing units.
   - Social Benefit and Housing Bonds to create capital and provide small and large local opportunities for investment and return
   - A Greening and Environmental Cooperative to utilize government programs and local investment to improve existing and new builds' energy efficiency for savings on operations costs.
   - Community planning and needs assessment embedded in regular practice as a continual process to stay abreast and even ahead of the needs of particular populations or demographics.

Creating a local development opportunity cooperative helped us widen accessibility to social and economic return on investment and involve more community members in a spectrum of opportunities. We were generating local economic well-being while engaging people more fully and meaningfully in the thrive-ability of the community.

3.   Privately and publicly funded mixed use, mixed income housing and community development projects that provide expanded opportunities as well as revenues to:
   - improve sustainability of housing units through maintenance and replacement contingencies
   - support more financing for more builds, restorations, renovations, and home ownership schemes flexible to emerging community needs
   - help enhance and augment the local community of care
   - support our collective impact framework, and
   - invest in businesses and social enterprises that help create more revenues and supply employment opportunities.

4. Increased and more effective community collaboration around meaningful daily activity, supplementary grass roots activity and linkages to other community resources and supports to help people remain stably housed, and increase wellness, well-being, self-reliance, inclusion and social support.

With a combination of assessment, action planning and deployment we have been able to enact a number of leveraging activities that are moving us into closer multi-sectoral alignment, increasing local resources and building momentum toward sustainable solutions. Do people still become homeless? Yes, it can happen. But, it happens less frequently because we have a system of community care that helps individuals and families increase their capacity and resilience factors which mitigate risk and prevent crisis. If it does happen that someone loses their housing, it is resolved much more quickly. There are more and better options for affordability in housing along a continuum of needs, while we also have a community that works together to increase opportunities for people to thrive.

<div align="center">The way we are</div>

Today, we have a few things in place that we would never have dared to hope for seven years ago:

- Enough diverse and adequate housing and creative housing options that are making revenues for sustainability and perpetuation of affordability and producing added values through mixed use, mixed income approaches. And that include jobs and increased inclusion, among other benefits.
- A responsive and imaginative community way of operating that ensures no individual or family goes without at least basic needs, that respects everyone's right to thrive and supports them in their responsibilities to that process. From neighbours all the way to legislators, people are looking out for each other.
- Economic growth and opportunity, with increased local resources, supportive workplaces and enough jobs for anyone who wants one.
- A multi-sector framework and infrastructure for enhanced collective impact to tackle community needs through a balanced, Big Picture view of what is best for the community, across all sectors, but that puts people in the centre.
- An effective system of communication and planning that helps our community mobilize around emergencies, better anticipate challenges, take full advantage of emerging opportunities, and present comprehensive and effective business cases for the resources we seek from outside.
- A continuum of community care that increases capacity and resilience in our community, helps prevent crises, mitigates them quickly when they occur and can mobilize to assess gaps or emerging trends that might have led to that crisis.
- A connected and navigable community system of care that is connected into and thus supported by all community sectors.

"Everything is impossible, until someone crazy enough comes along and makes it possible."
(C.T. Fletcher- American powerlifting vlogger, recovering from a heart transplant at age 59). Seven years ago, people thought we were crazy to believe that things could be different. Seven years ago we accepted the challenge to bring the vision of a bold new community way of being to life. Today, I think of Gage, and the hundreds of other individuals and families, the organizations, workplaces, policy makers, businesses, neighbourhoods, clubs and congregations that have been transformed and continue to grow, move forward and shape their lives and this community in positive ways. It's amazing what you can do when you don't believe you can't!