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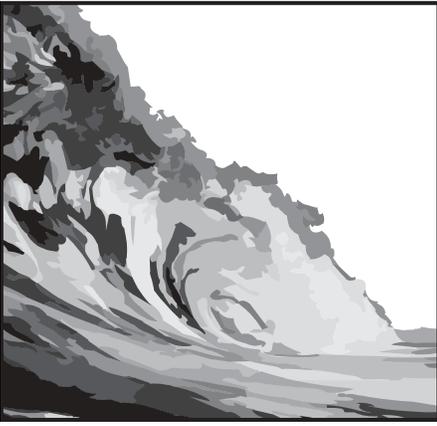
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They're here!

Editorial

BY MARK CABAJ AND DAMON ZIRNHELT

A friend was listening to a leading practitioner of community economic development (CED) the other week. Very competent, very dedicated, very experienced – man, he must be in his fifties with 25 years of community work under his belt. Only Mister X looks like he's over 60, and his enthusiasm is tainted with cynicism and even resignation. Face it guy, thought my friend – you're *bushed*.

Trouble is, we know of several other people who are in the same professional and age bracket, and in the same frame of mind. Unlike Mister X, who will probably die in the saddle, some of these folks say they want to bail. Go do something where they can earn a pension. Makes sense. Yet, as Ted Jackson, one of this country's leading CED thinkers wondered aloud three years ago, "Where is the next generation of CED practitioners and leaders coming from?" Where are the people ready, willing, and able to take the reins once the current bunch of leaders rides off into the sunset?

Guess what – they're here. This special edition of *Making Waves* provides a glimpse of what young practitioners and leaders are doing to revitalize depleted communities. They are full participants of local CED efforts – and future leaders in the CED movement in

Canada. In many cases they are already co-leading, although many of the rest of us just have not woken up to the fact.

Young practitioners have written most of the dozen articles in this edition. Some articles describe initiatives created for youth so they may assume a substantial role in the community's social and economic life. Some describe initiatives conceived, launched, and managed by youth in order to make the community economy more sustainable and responsible. And some are about initiatives that are both for and by young people.

All describe ways, simple or sophisticated, in which young people are engaged in the revitalization of their local way of life and have shaken off acquiescence in exclusive, degrading, and otherwise destructive patterns of thought and action.

Sound like somebody you know?
Sound like somebody you once knew?

The coverage is by no means comprehensive. Without 100 more pages to work with, this edition can't even touch on many of the issues and attributes significant to the engagement of young Canadians in CED. It's really just an appetizer – an indication of the values and interests, the strengths and weaknesses in the ways they are shaping CED.

It's also an invitation. As one of the members of the Saskatchewan Youth Network Against Racism puts it to older practitioners (p. 22), "Many of us are interested in CED and many of us are doing it. Maybe we should do it together?"

Hang on to your Hairpiece

Do this quick survey. Nowadays, if someone were to say to you "better pull an all-nighter," what would be your gut reaction?

- "Shoot me now."
- "Regrettable but I'm up for it."
- "Who's bringing the music?"

Most of the contributors to this edition sound like they would take Option 3. You can't miss the buzz around them as they sort out their solutions to community issues and roll up their sleeves to get things done. Their creativity comes packaged like a fireball.

Consider the spirit and energy that the *Projet Coopérative jeunesse de services* manages to unleash every year in Québec with its strategy for training co-op facilitators, linking them to host communities, and then jump-starting worker co-ops with high school students (p. 5). While most of these micro-businesses are only intended to last the summer, many host communities, facilitators, and cooperants make this an encore performance. That same sustained creativity is also to be seen in *JeunEssor's* homegrown strategy for helping local young people to resist the suction of Québec City and build their lives in Portneuf (p. 37).

Another point worth making about both these dynamic Québec initiatives: young people are engaged as activists, staff members, and leaders in local revitalization, with training and support from interested parties. The initiatives are not strictly "for youth," nor are they strictly "by

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Editorial board for this edition: Angela Bellegarde, Bob Gilson, Brandon Hughes, Shawna Lukowski, Victoria Morris, David Pell, Gary Wilson, Terry Wright.

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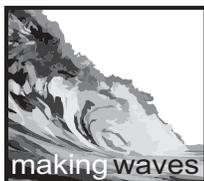
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youth." They are local initiatives in which young people predominate.

Is it trite, to remark for the umpteenth time on the energy and spirit of young people? Not likely. What sets CED apart, after all, is a long-term perspective. Real solutions require a huge investment of time and effort. Sheer physical and psychological stamina is no "option" – it's critical to local efforts and to the CED movement. The initiative, whether local, regional, or national, that does not secure the attention, imagination, and energy of young people now, and has no strategy for doing so in the near future, is essentially on borrowed time.

What's To Learn?

Energy and spirit, sure – but what do the rest of us have to learn from young practitioners?

One thing that's striking is the importance of teamwork and co-operation to the initiatives described in this edition. What people in CED circles often acclaim or demand, these young people practice – seamlessly. Collective governance or management techniques are not ancillary to a project or mere catch phrases for the purposes of self-promotion. These people deliberately build it right into their work. As the cooperant says of the organization she helped found, "We had confidence in one another; everybody supported each other. If something went wrong, we were all responsible We were a team or nothing at all" (p. 5).

COIN's Flexible Venture Development Network goes out of its way to build teams of entrepreneurs around enterprises vetted with the assistance of local business people and colleges (p. 18). Enough of the "cowboy" approach to entrepreneur training, they say. Saskatoon's Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op (CNYC) demonstrates how young, even very young people can work with adults in co-op management – so long as the adults can live with shared authority (p. 24).

Why is this so? Who knows? But if these articles are any indication, a capacity for co-operative action appears very strong in Generation Next. Maybe that concentration of brains, experience,

vision, authority (and ego) in one or maybe two people per CED organization will become a curiosity by 2020, instead of the political fact it is now.

That aside, courage, commitment, and ingenuity in the integration of environmental issues into local revitalization may be the most significant contribution that young practitioners are making to the CED movement.

In Toronto this May, at a workshop introducing basic CED concepts, several young people challenged the presenter to explain his choice of "best practices." Why did his selection only make reference to initiatives involving social and economic issues, not environmental ones? It didn't because the CED movement (as he knows it) doesn't have much to report in that department.

The CED movement as he doesn't know it says otherwise. Sarah Polkinghorne, CNYC's former coordinator, remarks on the combined power of environmentalism and co-operatism to galvanize the desire of youth to learn and to take action. LifeCycles (p. 11) and Grow Young Locally (p. 16), speak to the conviction of young people in Victoria and Smithers, B.C. that a trustworthy food supply is fundamental to local self-reliance. In Pikangikum, Ontario, as part of a strategy for management and stewardship of Traditional Territory, youth work with Elders to record the encyclopaedic knowledge they retain from generations lived on the land (p. 33).

Unmistakable here is not just a respect for the Earth, but a reconnection to it. Whether they use the language of "food security" or "Traditional Territory," as farmers, gardeners, and hunters these people are getting their hands right into the Earth itself – out of a heightened sense of self-preservation, perhaps.

I think it's safe to say the upcoming generation will resist the pull of convention and make the environment a higher priority in their personal lives, as well as that of the CED organizations they run.

The Other Side of the Ledger

What have younger practitioners to gain from working more closely with the rest

The CED movement is far greater than we ever thought it was.... organizations with the greater resources have an opportunity and a need to systematically embrace and foster the talents, energy, and promise of the others. That works both ways across the age gap.



of the CED movement? “Experience” sounds a little vague – and no doubt about it, there’s only so much you can learn from the experience of others. Some things have to be learned the hard way. Still, if it can’t help people to avoid some pitfalls, the voice of experience can help people anticipate or make more sense of dilemmas.

From what we see here, one lesson that older practitioners have learned that would assist younger practitioners concerns the strategic breadth of CED. CED is a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to revitalizing communities and supporting marginalized residents.

Business development is a part of that effort, for sure. But endangered or deteriorating communities generally require a whole range of responses. Housing, job and life skills training, land use planning, and many other sectors will likely require action. Business development alone cannot do the job, any more than initiatives solely of a social, educational, or cultural nature can. It is by asserting – and acting on – the linkage between these different aspects of the community’s dilemma that we begin to see durable, long-lasting results.

That’s what All-A-Board is driving at when it says that the tension between good sales and good training is a strength, not a weakness (p. 28). To build quality chairs and serve upscale food they have to take into account the social and psychological lives of youth@risk, as well as their technical skill. And to train well, the program’s participants need the market’s confirmation of the value of their work.

The majority of articles solicited and submitted for this edition place a strong emphasis on business and entrepreneur development. Only in the cases of Pikangikum’s Whitefeather Forest

Initiative and the Flexible Venture Development Network do we learn about business development that is rooted in a deliberate, broad-based, comprehensive revitalization effort. Even All-A-Board, while multi-faceted, remains an expression of the will and genius of a pair of entrepreneurs, not a community.

This may just be a reflection of the way a large portion of government and foundation resources for “youth initiatives” are allocated – creating small business. CED projects tend to emerge where the pots of cash are greatest. We have to be mindful of the way funding sources can tempt us to think small and narrow, and doubt the possibility of initiatives that are both expansive and community-based.

The YouthBuild article is the best antidote that this edition has to offer to that sort of boxed-in thinking (p. 41). Although it concerns an American model and its replicability in Vancouver, the article really advocates a national strategy to dovetail youth@risk therapy with apprenticeship training, housing, and community development. YouthBuild USA demonstrates how initiatives this big don’t necessarily substitute bureaucratic empowerment for community empowerment. “Small” is beautiful, no question. Careful co-ordination at the sectoral, regional, or national level can make “small” more beautiful still.

Where We are all on the Same Page

Having read all this, two conclusions are for us inescapable. First, the CED movement is far greater than we ever thought it was. Second, organizations with the greater resources have an opportunity and a need to systematically embrace and foster the talents, energy,

and promise of the others. That works both ways across the age gap.

The question is “how”? At least three broad recommendations for the CED movement flow logically from the reports found in this edition.

A Voice in National Level Institutions

There must be meaningful opportunities for people, younger and older, to participate in the institutions designed to strengthen the CED movement. That way we can ensure that the policies, practices, and priorities of these organizations are rooted in the needs and priorities of practitioners, regardless of their age.

Ten years ago, this might have been a problem. Now there are several pan-Canadian institutions designed for this very purpose: the Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet), the Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program (CEDTAP), the national and regional associations of Community Futures Development Corporations, and the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation, to name a few. There are also local and regional CED bodies, such as BCCEDNet and the Toronto CED Learning Network.

Mechanisms for youth involvement in governance should be tailored to the institution. CCEDNet is currently exploring a way to address youth CED leadership (see sidebar, next page). CEDTAP has taken several measures to strengthen youth skills. These are good starts. Yet much more needs to happen if the movement is to properly tap into potential of a stronger youth participation.

Young practitioners should, of course, be front and center in those efforts. Tokenism will be a big danger, naturally. Any attempts to bring additional practitioners systematically into the governance of organizations must be rooted in a sincere desire to listen to what



The field – and the institutions that are working to strengthen it – require a firm, if friendly nudge to elevate the priority of strengthening the capacity and influence of the next generation of CED leaders.

CCEDNet's Emerging Leaders Initiative

CCEDNet's Practitioner Development Committee recently began thinking more deliberately about increasing the scale and effectiveness of youth involvement in CED and is forming an Emerging Leaders Working Group on the topic.

The initiative is still its brainstorming phase, but has already identified a number of areas for further exploration:

- Promoting CED work and careers to young practitioners in schools, universities, and community development programs.
- Ensuring that existing (and new) skills training opportunities are appropriately tailored to the needs, priorities, and learning styles of young practitioners.
- Increasing the number of grants, scholarships, and bursaries to support formal training in CED skills.
- Creating a mentorship program between young and "formerly young" practitioners.
- Creating mechanisms for youth involvement in CCEDNet's various decision-making bodies.

The Working Group plans to have its first formal teleconference meeting in September 2002 and is currently recruiting young CCEDNet members to join the team.

MARK CABAJ is a staff member of Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement based in Kitchener, Ontario. DAMON ZIRNHELT is a sawmill operator in Williams Lake, B.C. Both are members of CCEDNet. To learn more about CCEDNet's Emerging Leaders Initiative contact them at mcabaj@tamarackcommunity.ca or dzirnhel@stardate.bc.ca. For the text of the CCEDNet policy framework, go to <http://www.canadiancednetwork.org/Resources&Tools/Papers>.

Photo credits, previous page: (left) West Broadway Youth Builders Program, (right) *Coopérative jeunesse de services*. This page: (left) Community Opportunity Innovation Network, (right) LifeCycles Project Society.

they have to say and to adjust the work of organizations accordingly.

Appropriate Funding

If practitioners are to experience and undertake CED as a comprehensive strategy of local renewal, we must change the purpose and shape of funding. Those investing in CED (primarily government and philanthropists) must deliberately move beyond funding primarily business and entrepreneurial development programs.

This is nothing new. The entire CED movement constantly argues for a more comprehensive response to the plight of marginalized communities. We must take extra care to insist that small, sector-specific initiatives for and by youth be integral to larger, more complex strategies. Only then will we all experience more sustained benefits for our communities. Young practitioners can and should join in this chorus.

Skills Development

It is clear that the CED movement needs to strengthen cross-generational learning. Young practitioners want to learn from the successes and failures of practitioners that have gone before them. "Formerly young" practitioners want to benefit from the skills and insights that are demonstrated in these articles.

The articles in this edition do not detail how this exchange might occur. CCEDNet's policy framework for increasing the scale and effectiveness of CED provides an indication, however. Nearly 200 practitioners at CCEDNet's policy forum in Vancouver identified "leadership development" as one of the top five policy priorities for the CED movement in Canada. They also identified a number of measures to make that happen: among other things, mentorship programs, exchanges, production and translation of materials, and educational programs.

This is just a sketch, not a detailed agenda. The field – and the institutions that are working to strengthen it – require a firm, if friendly nudge to build on these ideas and elevate the priority of strengthening the capacity and influence of the next generation of CED leaders.

Serious Fun

CED is a serious business. Farming communities and resource towns struggle to survive amidst poor, erratic commodity prices. Inner-city neighbourhoods cope with an exodus of wealth to the suburbs. Immigrants, the disabled, and other populations wrestle with barriers to economic and social participation that the average person has a hard time even to begin to understand.

A lot of practitioners have given a good part of their lives to rebuilding communities and ensuring that fewer people are marginalized. Understandably, many are tired of the grinding work. Some are even down right grumpy and dispirited.

As this issue of *Making Waves* shows, young people are bringing renewed enthusiasm, energy, new perspectives and skills to CED practice. Is the rest of the movement ready to recognize, embrace, and learn from this rich offering? We think so. The load will surely be lighter and the work more enlightening if we do.

And while we are all busy strengthening the movement perhaps we can tap into yet another gem that emerges from this edition: hope and high spirits. As the prominent social and political activist Emma Goldman put it in her sprightly way, "If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution."

