

Belonging: Inspiring Community

A Publication of the New Story Group of WR

The New Story Group of Waterloo Region is committed to partnering with people and organizations in Waterloo Region to seed and support change that will enhance belonging.

www.newstorygroup.ca

Inside our Newsletter:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Indicators Project | 2 |
| Attention and Intention | 3 |
| Waterloo Region | |
| Belonging News | 4 |

The Power of a Caring Community

On the surface, Roseto, Pennsylvania was not so different from its neighbouring towns, Bangor and Nazareth. Both Bangor and Roseto were populated largely by Italian immigrants, the townspeople shared similar trades and income levels, they had the same water source, and they even used the same hospital. So why did Rosetons have a heart attack fatality rate less than half that of neighbouring communities?

Traditional views on health would immediately point to lifestyle factors. Yet researchers in the 1950s and 1960s were astonished when they studied the lifestyle factors of Rosetons: many of the men worked in slate quarries that exposed them to long-term health hazards; they smoked unfiltered stogie cigars; rather than milk, wine was drunk with abandon; and instead of a diet of lean meats and vegetables, they fried up meatballs and sausages in lard. The researchers came to a striking conclusion that challenged traditional thinking—the social

structure of the townspeople was the key to their health.

While the people of Bangor and Nazareth had shifted to a more Americanized, individualistic culture, the people of Roseto maintained the close family and social bonds that they had brought with them from Italy. Most people lived in intergenerational family homes. Homes were also close together, and people stopped to chat with friends every day, cooked with neighbours, and gathered regularly at church.

The town of Roseto poignantly demonstrates why social isolation is a major determinant of health and well-being. When we look at groups of people who are most often marginalized and socially isolated—newcomers to a community, people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty—we see a strong correlation between their connections in the community and poorer health outcomes.

The negative impacts of social isolation are being recognized and addressed in new and innovative ways in Waterloo Region. The City of Kitchener and United Way KW are both actively working to strengthen neighbourhoods, since vibrant neighborhoods drastically improve the health, safety, and well-being of residents.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation has identified a low sense of belonging in our Region, and has tasked any organization seeking community grants to focus improving belonging. Roseto reminds us that our efforts must aim to be fully inclusive—to move the needle on health and well-being we must try to interweave everyone.

At Facile Waterloo Region, we support people to reduce isolation and create a good life in the community. The key to this work is creating authentic, two-way relationships. With a

(Continued on Page 2)



“We know we live in history. We know we can shape it, although far less than we would like. And when we do intervene, it is inseparable from the great force with which history moves, surging across generations with ease. The full impact of that intervention – of getting it right or getting it wrong – is something that will slowly unfold over decades, even centuries. So history constrains and demands of us a great deal.”

John Ralston Saul,
The Comeback

A fearless narrative of how Aboriginal people's are empowering themselves to rebuild their communities

collective community-wide recognition of the power of social networks, we can move the needle on health and well-being—and be happier for it too!

Cameron Dearlove

Executive Director, Facile Waterloo Region, and Member, New Story Group

Adapted from a piece published in The Community Edition:
<http://communityedition.ca/blog/2015/08/06/the-town-that-ate-lard/#sthash.DlprZMGk.dpuf>

New Story Group Indicators Project

The Indicators Project of the New Story Group has moved into a new phase. For the next few months, members of the New Story Group will be hosting focus groups with a range of community stakeholders. The purpose of these gatherings is to review the draft indicators and to obtain feedback on their usefulness. The goal of this project is to create a tool that can enhance the intentional work of facilitating ore belonging and inclusion in our community.

If you are interested in being part of an Indicators Focus Group, contact Earl Walker at e7walker@uwaterloo.ca To view the draft indicators, see: <http://www.newstorygroup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NSG-Newsletter-Spring-2015.pdf>

Seven Things Mindful People Do Differently

In a summary of research on mindfulness, author Elisha Goldstein highlights how we can increase the attention of being more present in our lives. This awareness can enhance our sense of connection and possibilities for belonging. The seven things are:

1. Approach things with curiosity – and savour them
2. Forgive mistakes – big or small
3. Show gratitude for good moments – and grace for bad ones
4. Practice compassion and nurture connections
5. Make peace with imperfection – within ourselves and within others
6. Embrace vulnerability by trusting others and ourselves
7. Accept – and appreciate – that things come and go

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead



Attention and Intention: The Art of Belonging

It is hard to keep cultural traditions in times of transition. This is especially acute when these cultural traditions are ones that have played a key role in nurturing welcome and belonging. I had the opportunity to reflect on this with a friend of mine who, with some effort, attempted to keep his grandmother's traditions of hospitality from India. He extended himself, offered lavish welcome to friends, cooked delicious food and attempted to knit together networks of belonging. Yet, for all his effort, my friend ran into barriers. The cultural traditions of hospitality my friend inherited had embedded within them an implied reciprocity and shared understanding that simply was not shared among his Canadian friends – which meant they were not ultimately sustainable. The habits, customs and attitudes that could foster belonging could only do so if there was a good probability that they were shared by those around him. My friend and I had intense conversations on this experience where he expressed both frustration at the lack of reciprocity he received and resignation that to keep these traditions in an urban, multicultural Canadian context is much more complex and challenging than one might hope.

This experience lead me to ask – if the traditions that carried belonging so well in the past, the ones that could do the heavy lifting by maintaining complex webs of expectations, customs, habits, and mores that embedded welcome and hospitality into daily life, could no longer do so, what replaces and substitutes for these traditions in times of transition? I would offer two possible responses to this question that could give us guidance as we seek to foster belonging and welcome in our lives and in the wider community. These two responses, simply put, are attention and intention.

In this era, we must pay careful attention to the people around us, to their multifaceted experiences in general and to their experiences of belonging and

inclusion in particular. To hold the space once held by our traditions, the level of attention asked of us now goes beyond what may have been asked for in the past. I am being asked to notice the people around me, to notice their experiences of inclusion, to notice whether or not they feel like they belong, to notice the barriers they may face to belonging, and finally to notice the opportunities I have to welcome and include others. Perhaps in practicing attention we can become better at it - like developing a skill or exercising a muscle.

Attention, however important, is incomplete without intention. We must not only notice, but we must act intentionally on what we notice. If I notice that inviting people over for a homemade meal once a month or dropping by their house once in a while will foster belonging for them I must act with intention to do these things. This may seem obvious but consider that the cultural traditions that formerly held these things did so by making things second nature so that they required little intention in and of themselves. Things are no longer so second nature to us so we are required to be extra intentional.

As finite human beings we cannot give endless attention or be infinitely intentional - this is where the New Story Group with its mission “to nurture inclusion and belonging” comes into the picture. To support the need for higher levels of attention and intention in fostering belonging our work, the New Story Group is providing tools to our wider community so that people can do this work. Although difficult, the work of including others is both joyful and rewarding. Tools like our Community Conversations or Indicators Project can help community members as they seek – with attention and intention – to foster belonging and inclusion in their lives.

Isaiah Ritzmann is staff at the Working Centre in Kitchener and a member of the New Story Group



Waterloo Region Belonging News!

Take the Pledge to
End Bullying



“I believe that everybody has the right to live in a community where they feel safe, included, valued and accepted regardless of differences. I pledge to be respectful of others and stand up to bullying whenever and wherever I see it.”

The Pledge to End Bullying is a multi-media platform that uses, TV, Radio and Digital messaging to help end bullying in our homes, schools, workplaces, and community. Over 225,000 people have taken the Pledge to End Bullying. This year the campaign is showcasing inspirational stories of UPSTANDERS - individuals who stand up to bullying to make a better world for others. From October 2015-June 2016 the campaign will focus on 8 specific topics: Cyber-Bullying, Focus on Healthy Relationships, Sportsmanship, Sexual Diversity, Racial Discrimination, Focus on Abilities, Bullying in the Workplace, and Elder Abuse. Seven local organizations; KW Habilitation, Community Living Cambridge, Parents for Community Living, Sunbeam, Extend-A-Family, Elmira and District Community Living, and Christian Horizons have partnered with CTV, KFun 99.5fm and KOOL 105.3 to sponsor the month of April – Focus on Abilities.

To take the Pledge, learn about valuable anti-bullying resources, or find out about what is happening in our community, please visit www.thepledgetoendbullying.ca

KW Community Foundation has released its Vital Signs Report for 2015. Once again, belonging was a key part of the Report, showing that fewer people are volunteering and that some residents are more likely to feel a lower sense of belonging, especially New Canadians who have been in Canada for 11 to 20 years, people who identify as LGBO, people on low incomes, and single parents. Overall, the research showed that our sense of belonging in Waterloo Region is “lukewarm.” Two other findings were important as we think about how to enhance belonging – residents of Waterloo Region report relatively high levels of stress and our sense of belonging is tied to our satisfaction with mental well-being. To view the full Report, see https://www.kwcf.ca/vital_signs

The Immigration Partnership has developed some resources to assist groups who are sponsoring a refugee family. See http://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/IP_Refugee_Primer_Nov_2015.pdf It is very exciting to see Canadians stepping up to welcome thousands of refugees to Canada. More than 1100 people will settle in Waterloo Region, where churches, neighbourhood associations, and community groups are providing private sponsorships. The Immigration Partnership is also providing presentations to community groups who are interested in being involved. This Canadian response is a powerful example of hospitality – the original meaning of the hospitality was “to welcome strangers.”

“Hospitality is the quality of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way”

