

Belonging: Inspiring Community

Newsletter of the New Story Group of WR

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to facilitate conversation that helps us see the best in people & encourages questions of possibility.

“Belonging is about full inclusion in the community where you are seen, known, welcomed, accepted, included, connected & valued.”

John Lord, 2013

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Building a Community of Belonging: It Starts With Conversation

On October 15, 2013, the New Story Group of Waterloo Region hosted the day first of a two day event, *Building a Community of Belonging: It Starts With Conversation*, the 2nd day to be held on November 25, 2013. Funded by the **Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation**, this community conversation has many sponsors who are identified on the last page of this newsletter.

Using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, facilitator D’Arcy Farlow, led the 89 participants, representatives of a number of diverse community sectors, through an interactive process to:

- Create momentum that moves us toward this ideal future; and
- Sustain communities of belonging through leadership and innovation.

- Discover what it means to belong in a diverse community;
- Imagine an ideal future where all citizens experience a sense of belonging;

Appreciative Inquiry values the act of recognizing the best in people and the world around; it is the act of asking questions, opening us up to new possibilities.

What is Belonging?

Many organizations and individuals in the not-for-profit sector have been striving for social inclusion of the community’s diverse populations for some time. More recently, The New Story Group has been engaging in conversations about belonging. Belonging is the heart of social inclusion.

diversity and inclusion in the mission statements and values of many for profit organizations.

- access to affordable & social housing is down; and
- the number of people requiring emergency shelter is up, especially in relation to families.

While belonging is grounded in social inclusion, it also embraces diversity and difference. Today we see the language and concepts of

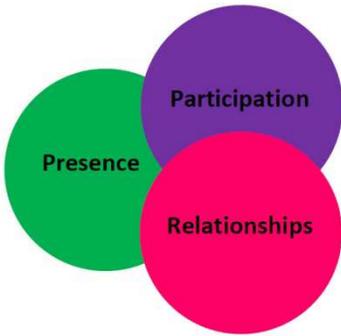
How are people locally feeling about belonging? *Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs Report 2013* has informed local research on belonging:

- people’s sense of belonging in their community is down, especially among new Canadians and immigrants;
- volunteer rates are down;

Both the not-for-profit and private sectors understand that diversity makes a community a better place to live. It is time to take the idea of creating a “community of belonging” seriously!



The Key Elements of Belonging: A Belonging Lens



In his keynote address, John Lord outlined some fundamental elements that must exist before people can experience a sense of community belonging. They are:

1. Presence

This is as simple as showing up—you have to be present in the community to feel you belong. But we have to make it easy for people to show up.

2. Participation

When we are present, participation becomes easier. Research shows that participation in associations of common interest increases our health and well-being.

3. Relationships

As humans, we have a strong need for affiliation and relatedness. Research on social networks demonstrates

the power and potential of relationships.

For more on A Belonging Lens visit johnlord.net.

“Ninety percent of success is showing up.”

Woody Allen

“Today I realized that I can’t feel I belong if I’m not out in my community.”

Participant Observation
October 15, 2013

Pathways to Belonging and the Elements of Leadership



Building a Community of Belonging is strength-based work. We must build on the assets of individuals, neighbourhoods, and the wider community.

Creating a community of belonging means paying attention to some specific pathways:

- Recognize the **gifts** that people and organizations possess and bring to a group or community.

- Offer **invitation** to people in a way that makes it easy for them to show up.
- Provide **hospitality**, such as greeters, a comfortable and pleasant setting, and food. This helps people feel welcomed.

The Elements of Leadership & Belonging

1. Intentionality
Communities & individuals must be intentional about belonging. Be intentional

in invitation, hospitality & recognizing people’s gifts.

2. Belonging Lens
Use a belonging lens as a guide to policy.

3. Connections
Identify connecting/bridging opportunities to enhance belonging.

4. Judgment Free Spaces
People must be able to enter community spaces and not feel they are being judged.

“To belong in a diverse community...it’s complicated! I need to make space in my life for this.”

Participant Comment, October 15, 2013



Learnings from the Belonging Event October 15, 2013

The majority of participants at the Belonging Event held October 15, 2013 had a positive experience.

Did you feel welcomed?

- 98% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed ;
- 89% strongly agreed.

Did you feel heard?

- 96% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed;
- 82% strongly agreed.

Was the conversation valuable?

- 98% strongly or somewhat agreed;
- 76% strongly agreed

Did Appreciative Inquiry help facilitate the conversation?

- 96% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed;
- 75% strongly agreed.

Does belonging cross different sectors?

- 96% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed
- 87% strongly agreed.

Did you learn something new about what it means to belong in a diverse community?

- 86% said they learned something new, e.g.:
The power of intention;

Different perspectives from different people;

Use bridges instead of barriers;

The 3 pillars model;

The difference between inclusion and belonging;

It can be simple things—we all have a role to play;

Being invited to belong;

Many people need to participate to make change;

There are different perspectives about the word “diverse”;

There are already things being done—I can be a part of that.



Tanya Williams drawing
POSSIBILITY at the October 15th
Belonging Event

Emerging Themes on Belonging

It is often said that language precedes change. During the fruitful conversations on October 15th, it was clear that there was a common language being used by participants. During the Discovery phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process, several themes emerged which highlighted this common language and awareness of the concept of belonging.

Common themes included:

- Respect, kindness, and caring are central to belonging.
- Hospitality means being welcomed *and* being really listened to.
- Learning to appreciate each other's gifts and capacities takes time.
- Being intentional and generous creates space for inclusion.
- Walking in each other's shoes can be a powerful community experience.

Our conversation included some powerful 'possibility questions' in three areas:

1. Engaging the individual
2. Creating a community of belonging
3. Addressing system issues that often get in the way of genuine belonging.

“To nurture a ‘community of belonging’ we need to build on our common themes and begin to shift our thinking -- to see barriers as bridges, and to move from silos to collaboration”

John Lord



Belonging Event Day 2: November 25, 2013

If you missed Day 1 of the Belonging Event you can still attend Day 2.

Register on-line at kidsability.ca *Belonging Community*

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Gandhi

Building a Community of Belonging: It Starts With Conversation is a two day event hosted by the New Story Group of Waterloo Region. Day 1 of the event was held October 15, 2013. On **November 25, 2013**, we will continue the conversation.

D'Arcy Farlow, will facilitate Day 2 by building upon the "Discovery" work begun October 15th. Continuing with the Appreciative Inquiry

process, the insights from Day 1 will lead to the creation of shared dreams and aspirations and designs for a future of "belonging" that moves participants to action.

Registered participants will receive a *Reminder Email* on November 18th. It will include the Agenda and other important details for Day 2.

Note: Time and location for Day 2 have changed.

Time 8:30. – 4:00

Doors open at 8:15

Arrive early for coffee, muffins and conversation!

Location

The Family Centre
65 Hanson Ave
Kitchener, ON N2C 2M3

Free Parking is available on site off Hanson Ave.

Bus/Walking Directions will be included in the *Reminder Email* Nov. 18th.

Funder and Co-Sponsors of Building a Community of Belonging: It Starts With Conversation



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