# 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.

*Inside our Newsletter:*

## Indicators Project highlights Five Key Belonging Themes

The Indicators Project of the New Story Group has developed five major themes of Belonging. These themes emerged from the Belonging Conversations of 2013-14 as well as from a number of local, national, and international reports and research studies on inclusion and belonging. New Story Group volunteers and graduate students from the University of Waterloo conducted an extensive review of all of this material, looking specifically for consistent patterns and common themes.

Recently, 16 local leaders from the non-profit sector, researchers, and community developers met to confirm the themes and begin to develop insights and ideas that point to key indicators of belonging.

The themes that can lead to feelings of belonging include:

➢ Importance of being welcomed and acknowledged, meaningfully with authentic hospitality

➢ Place (physical) and space (emotional) matters as they encourage accessibility and non-judgement

➢ A catalyst, connector, inviter, or leader models and assists others to be included and belong

➢ A shared identity, theme, focus, or purpose can unite and create sense of belonging

➢ Participation, engagement, and contribution enhance personal and collective connections

These themes can operate at the personal/family level, the community/ neighbourhood level, and within organizations/ workplaces.

Future issues of this Newsletter will highlight insights from the Indicators Project.

In our research, we saw that belonging benefits individuals and communities. People generally agree on what it feels like to belong: happy, safe, content, relaxed, supported, valued and accepted. Based on what we heard from participants, belonging is associated with good outcomes, such as relationship building, self-growth, helping others, collaborating, being cared for, and having fun.

*How We Can Design Belonging*
**Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation**

## Judgement Free Spaces Enhance Belonging

In recent months, our media has been dominated by stories about bullying, suicide, murder of aboriginal woman, and whether the niqab is appropriate in Canada. What do these issues have in common? How do they relate to belonging?

A recent research study highlights the importance of creating judgement free spaces where everyone can belong. University of Waterloo faculty members Dawn Trussell and Heather Mair recently published *Seeking Judgment Free Spaces: Poverty, Leisure, and Social Inclusion* in the Journal of Leisure Research. This study explored the experiences and meanings of leisure for individuals living in poverty and who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Results show that a key component for moving toward leisure that addresses our most challenging social ills rests with its power to create judgment free spaces. Three themes emerged: (1) the significance of vibrant organizations where acceptance is fostered; (2) a need for increased opportunities to become, and remain, connected to the broader community and to choose how this connection is manifested; and (3) the importance of personal and private spaces that are both safe and appropriate.

## The Power of Generosity

The United Nations Report on Happiness shows that people who are generous, caring and giving tend to be happier. This is good news for people who care about belonging and who want to build caring communities. According to the report, happy people "live longer, are more productive, earn more, and are also better citizens." This report highlights the importance of well-being as a key social and economic indicator.

# Building Caring Communities
## A belonging Initiative

The Building Caring Communities Project is a collaborative of several organizations in Vancouver area of British Columbia. The mission of Building Caring Communities is to nurture more connected neighbourhoods where people are known and have relationships with others. He project is trying to do two things: (1) build unpaid networks of support (friends) around people and connect individuals to activities and associations in their neighbourhoods and (2) grow and thicken the ties of connection wherever we go.

Joe Erpenbeck, the project director, notes that many people that the project supports are lonely. "There is much research that shows how very important social relationships are to our physical, mental, and economic well-being," says Joe. "Our goal is to facilitate relationships that may deveop into friendships."

The project uses the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework that was created by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at Northwestern University. This method focuses on the "glass half-full" rather than the "glass half-empty." The question is not "what does someone need" but "what are the gifts or assets that are available in this person and this neighbourhood." Joe emphasizes that they work in neighbourhoods in search of places of hospitality and look for ways to support people in sharing their gifts with others.

See www.buildingcaringcommunities.ca



### Belonging is being intentional about creating welcoming and hospitable spaces

*We heard this from someone who moved to a new community and was instantly invited out to neighbours' homes suppers and evening visits. Often someone would get out the guitar and there would be a sing along or people would share stories about local lore. She reflects on this experience when trying to be more intentional about creating social networks in her current neighbourhood. Today she sees belonging being intentionally fostered though Porch Parties, neighbourhood walking groups, moms' groups, and other such local associations of common interest.*

# Waterloo Region Belonging News!

- The **New Story Group** has launched a **web site**, in order to make it easier for people to access our work on belonging and inclusion. The site also includes stories of belonging and other resources. Soon, the site will be hosting reports and insights on the Indicators Project. See www.newstorygroup.ca

- **Facile: Independent Facilitation Waterloo Region,** along with six other Facilitation organizations in Ontario, has been awarded funding for a 24 month demonstration project. Funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, this project will provide excellent support for the growing number of individuals and families that now have individualized funding for their disability supports. Facile has already shown strong outcomes, including expanded relationships, increased work and volunteer positions, and enhanced choice and control. Facile was launched by the New Story Group in 2012. See www.facilewaterlooregion.ca

- **The K-W Community Foundation** has released its report, **We Can Design Belonging**. Based on the Foundation's research and interviews with a range of citizens, the report highlights the importance of belonging and some of the ways we can nurture it in our communities and neighbourhoods. The report also outlines some of the key global changes that challenge belonging, including technology, mobility, and diversity. This important local research identified engagement and authentic interactions as key elements of belonging. See http://www.kwcf.ca/investing

- Three young people from Waterloo have won a **UN Youth Award on Diversity, Community, and Inclusion** for their video on issues related to inclusion and belonging. Congratulations to Michael Born, Mathew Steinman, and Nathan Martin. This positive video is based on Paul Born's book, *Deepening Community*. See, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujYTi74ICuI

- The **United Way of KW** has initiated a **Strong Neighbourhoods Project,** a place-based prevention strategy that aims to enhance neighbourhood capacity. Using an asset-based community development strategy, the United Way will seed and support change in selected KW neighborhoods. See http://www.uwaykw.org/how-we-help/strong-neighbourhoods-strategy/