



The Windsor / West Hants Project

A Case Study

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Executive Summary

The Happy Community Project

The Happy Community Project™ is a trademarked and proprietary process that has been operating in Windsor and West Hants for eighteen months. In that time, it has initiated and developed 10 major projects that have had the impact of engaging 600 citizens in working on or supporting the projects and 5000 citizens (40% of the adult population) in active conversation or participation in their community.

The Happy Community Project™ was initiated in Windsor and West Hants with two main goals for the community:

- 1. Strengthen and create social connectedness across diversity**
- 2. Turn social connectedness into a culture of trust and self-reliance**

And two main goals for the Happy Community Project™ process:

- 1. Prove the viability of the process**
- 2. Develop a foundation for scaling the process anywhere in Canada.**

We have been recognized for our innovation and results by many institutions including the Nova Scotia Legislature and several universities including: Dalhousie, St Marys', Acadia, Yale and University of Dundee.

We have confirmed the process works repetitively and consistently. In Windsor / West Hants Nova Scotia, we have been able to change the cultural story from 'down -in-the-mouth', 'nothing happens here', 'this is a dying community' to one of pride, confidence and energy reflected in people seeking the community as a place to live and raise their families, new business starting up, the downtown gaining a vibrancy and a general 'buzz' in the community. Citizens are regularly stepping up to initiate new projects that are about taking care of each other. We are nearly complete in making the process self-sustaining within the community with minimum further support from the Happy Community Project™.

Windsor / West Hants has enabled us to prepare for scalability. We have been licensed to use a 'best-in-practice' measurement tool: Sense of Community which we have made into a customized app. We have developed a strong network of professionals who can provide us advice and support. We have formalized a unique operating structure for social enterprise that enables us to take advantage of the governance and fundraising for a not-for-profit and the nimble, results focus of a for profit Community Interest Corporation. And we have documented our process so that we are ready to package it as an easily transferable product.

The Happy Community Project provides an innovative and effective way of strengthening community self-reliance, wellbeing and resiliency.

The Project

Develop within Windsor / West Hants greater economic, social and health wellbeing and resiliency by strengthening social connectedness and belonging across diversity and develop a more robust culture of citizens taking care of citizens.

Using the Happy Community Project™, create a cultural shift within the community of Windsor / West Hants from a conflictive, fear based and scarcity mindset to a mindset of shared optimism, trust and sense of responsibility to the wellbeing of fellow citizens.

This project is successful when the community can self-sustainably increase economic prosperity and opportunities, improve social capital, and bridge the urban and rural divide faced by Windsor and West Hants. This is a 36 month project and is in its last 12 months at the time of writing this.

The Challenge

Windsor / West Hants has a long history of creating divisiveness between the two communities. Historically this has left a scar on the two communities that has resulted in underperformance both economically and socially. The communities have developed a culture over time that manifests itself as – ‘if I can’t have it, then you can’t have it either’.

Yet Windsor / West Hants represents a huge opportunity to be a dynamic, socially and economically vibrant community. It is rich in historical, cultural, educational, infrastructure and economic resources and it enjoys the geographic advantage of being only 20 minutes from the outskirts of Nova Scotia’s main city, Halifax, and only 20 minutes from Wolfville, a cultural and educational centre.

The biggest limiting factor is a deeply rooted cultural divide between urban and rural that once released, represents huge potential for being a community of wellbeing, prosperity and resiliency.

The Process

The Process is Founded on Five Principles

1. The Happy Community Project turns “they should...” into “we will...”

Most citizens want to make a difference in their community, but in our high stress, busy, modern, risk averse world, people want to do it on their own terms. The traditional way of creating top down organizations that direct the activities of ‘volunteers’ is no longer as appealing as it was. Instead, citizens want to make the kind of difference that is important to themselves while choosing the time and money commitments that make sense to them.



2. The foundation for self-reliant, wellbeing, resilient communities are strong social connections across diversity

Research shows us (Appendix B) that social connectedness is the foundation for mental well being, creativity and innovation. When a community has strong social connectedness, it also has the foundation for trust, optimism and releasing creative energy.

3. Meaningful Social Connections are made when people do things together.

The best way for people to build social connectedness is do things together.

The Happy Community Project process causes or enables citizens to initiate and then support ongoing projects where people can repeatedly do things together. We provide background infrastructure support, leadership and guidance that develops leadership and ownership within the community. It is normal for citizens to initiate, launch and manage major projects that provide sustained opportunities for citizens to ‘do’ things together.

4. All voices have influence.

We create environments where citizens have equal voice and community decisions are made through collaboration. We are very careful to reflect the voices of citizens in our stories and trust the wisdom of the community as to what will be the best solutions.

5. Transparency Builds trust

We communicate often about what we are going to do, why we are doing what we are doing, what we are doing and what happened when we did it. In this way, citizens can know what to expect, why it is important and decide on their own whether they want to opt in to be part of the Happy Community Project™.

The Details

Why is it important

A community of citizens who are confident they can proactively make difference without fear of repercussion to themselves personally, expresses its initiative in surprising and creative ways.

A trusting community releases the potential of the community. It is the foundation on which confidence, creativity and initiative are built that result in economic and social wellbeing and resiliency.

The Overall Objective of the Happy Community Project

The purpose of the Happy Community Project is to create a culture where:

- Citizens take greater self responsibility for the well being of their community
- Founded on a culture of trust between citizens
- Who are strongly socially connected across their diversity

In our modern world – these objectives run counter to the narrative that citizens are exposed to every day. The narrative is:

- our government knows best and will enforce their knowing with regulations and laws that restrict citizens from taking actions independently and
- if anything goes wrong, someone needs to be blamed either as, social embarrassment, a lawsuit or a criminal action. This narrative creates a culture of fear.

This creates a culture of fear and impotence often expressed as “they should...”

Fortunately, there exists enough common sense amongst citizens who have a desire to contribute meaningfully to their community that there is an opportunity to shift the culture from fear to trust and from impotence to agency.

But shifting culture is not simple. It defies top down, strong procedural processes which are the normal blunt instruments used by bureaucracy. Instead we use a nuanced, organic process that always starts where people are, incrementally shifts their collective beliefs through their personal experiences and develops the stories that are built up around their collective experience.

The Process Strategy – How We Do This

The process strategy provides enough citizens with experiences that the community can reach a tipping point for shifting culture. These experiences demonstrate to citizens that making social connections across diversity develops well founded trust and a sense of agency. With our guidance, citizens can create a new community narrative that shifts the culture towards greater self reliance and confidence in taking care of each other.

Our strategic goals are:

- CREATE STRONG SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ACROSS DIVERSITY
- DEVELOP CULTURAL MEMORY
- CREATE SUSTAINABLE SELF-RELIANCE

What we did in Windsor / West Hants

CREATE STRONG SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ACROSS DIVERSITY

- We Initiated and/or support ongoing projects that provided opportunities for people to do things with each other and in the process build social connectedness
 - Examples of successful projects in Windsor / West Hants are:
 - Avon Community Farmers Market, makers space, Welcome Newcomers, Ellershouse Community Breakfast, community garden, Community Farm for the Food Bank, Grab a Meal, Movies in the Park, Greatest Picnic Ever, My Community Kitchen Party and Corn Boil Challenge.
 - How we did this:
 - Hold town hall meetings to catalyze ideas

The Ellershouse Breakfast

The Ellershouse Breakfast had been successfully going for 20 years but the volunteers were now between 75 and 85. After 2 years of unsuccessfully recruiting replacements, they put up a notice to shut it down. We applied the Happy Community Project™ process and recruited 45 new volunteers between 8 and 50 and developed a new 8 person leadership team. The Ellershouse Breakfast continues to attract between 250 and 300 patrons a month.

- Provide process and training to community leaders on how to manage projects for success
- Help projects find and engage the community help support to implement projects (both material and people)
- Provide technical support in professional communications, leadership, project management, community relations, marketing support, professional oversight
- Helped minimize barriers like simplify regulatory hurdles, provide liability insurance and create a common vehicle for grant applications.

RESULTS

- 12 grass root, community led projects where each project is held weekly, monthly or quarterly.
- 600 citizens, mostly under 45, rolled up their sleeves and planned, managed and implemented the projects.
- Several thousand citizens mingled at each of the event, recognizing their commonality, goodwill and making new Acquaintances.

A Typical Experience

4 people sat at a table to listen the music while dropping into the Farmers' Market. During the interchange they discovered they had lived on the same street for 15 years and never knew each other.

DEVELOP CULTURAL MEMORY

- We Helped develop a compelling story for the community that engaged community members in:
 - action activities within the community
 - shifted the conversation to a sense of community pride, optimism and energy.
 - Developed a sense of citizen responsibility for each other.
- What People say now: we are community where lots of things are happening, people want to live here and are excited about our future because we are a community that looks out for each other and helps each other.
- How we did this
 - Through many small and large group conversations – listen to the language the community members use that describes how they want to be within the context of the Happy Community Project
 - Tell this story every day on many channels of communication – public presentations, small group meetings and through exemplifying it on social media and email
 - Celebrate successes of citizens who have initiated projects and done other acts that are consistent with the story
 - Challenge people to reach out across their differences
 - Generate activities where people develop the experience of helping each other
 - Provide leadership support and coaching to guide project leaders to be consistent with the new community narrative and therefore reinforce the new cultural story

Reg's Story

Reg is a pensioner whose only income is Old Age Pension. Reg owns a property in a village about 10KM from town services like shopping doctors etc. Tragically Reg's Trailer burned down without insurance. He managed to put on his property another trailer without electricity or water. This meant no baths and high odour. To get to town, Reg would walk the 10KM each way. As the Happy Community Project™ developed, it became a source of community pride to pick up Reg and give him a ride and then air out the car afterwards.

RESULTS

- The cultural story shifted to one of optimism, pride and confidence
- Over 5000 people regularly followed or participated in conversations and events
- What was happening in the community became a source of animated coffee shop and dinner table conversations throughout the community
- Citizens started to see that it was normal for people to be actively involved in their community.
- It became normal for younger people under 40 to roll up their sleeves and initiate projects and get involved in their community.

- As a result of the new energy, new businesses started opening up in the downtown core and there were difficulties in finding parking and appropriate rental space. Examples are cultural (School House Brewery and Wine Grunt, Service – Bike shop, Music Shop, Print Shop, and social enterprise - Play Café and Youth Support. As well, 2 major new businesses are opening in the downtown core and many of the buildings are starting to be redeveloped.



- *Before Barry Braun brought the concept and idea of the Happy Community in Windsor, Windsor was a town with low energy, searching itself and trying to define itself as a town. Since the Happy Community Project, there is a new life and buzz in Windsor, where people are proud to say they are from here and where people are trying hard to make Windsor the best town in this province. The best: All of this change in less than a year. Happy Community Project really works.*

- Dominic Kimm July 2018

- *“Talk about making positive ripples! I've never heard so much positive chatter about Windsor in my whole life. I love it.”*
- Adrienne Wood – community leader and business person – Windsor NS



CREATE SUSTAINABLE SELF-RELIANCE

Creating sustainable self-reliance has been a goal since the very start of the Happy Community Project in Windsor / West Hants. With 18 months under our belt, we estimate it will be approximately 12 to 18 months to fully realize this goal.

Our strategy for achieving sustainable self-reliance:

- Develop Leadership
 - There is a Core Leadership Group of 3 to 5 individuals who have been trained, have the skill set and aptitude and can pass the knowledge forward to new members of the Core Leadership Group
 - Actively refresh themselves by being aware of what is happening in other communities, use the User Guide and interact with other community Core Leader Groups
- Create Community Culture

- A critical mass of the community values the principles of the Happy Community Project: “not they should..., It’s we should...”, social connectedness across diversity is foundational to well being and resiliency, It’s every citizens responsibility to do things with fellow citizens, Every voice matters, Transparency builds trust.
- Positive support for new community initiatives
 - New initiatives are celebrated and supported by Core Leadership Group
- Develop the skills for communication support
 - To keep the cultural story robust that it is every citizens responsibility to be actively involved in creating a culture of taking care of each other, we develop habits, infrastructure and process for communicating the story in multiple channels.
 - The story perpetuates itself in daily communication

What we have done so far.

- We invited municipal leaders to be part of the process to reduce barriers and celebrate the new culture
- We shifted the story from projects and social connectedness to also include the community taking care of each other.
- We are developing a Core Leadership team trained in the Happy Community Project Process
- We developed leadership skills and understanding of the importance of the Happy Community Project within community members
- We have offered happy Community project leadership programs
- We have provided communication training

After 18 months, we estimate it is another 12 to 18 months to fully transfer sustainability to grass root community members.

What we continue to do:

- Train leaders to identify and remove risk barriers
 - Our cultural bias is towards risk adverseness. These are reinforced by news and political statements that assert why it is risky to do things including helping neighbours. We provide an alternative narrative and logic that resonates with the community.
 - Provide an overarching framework of providing legal liability protection (Liability insurance) to give community members confidence they are protected from legal consequences.
 - Negotiate with political leaders at the municipal and provincial government to lower regulatory barriers that discourage

community engagement in initiating community projects and reaching out to neighbours with support.

- Develop transferable and sustainable skills
 - Develop the Happy Community project handbook
 - Provide training and experience to community leaders through our Happy Community Project Leadership Program
 - Example the right kind of behavior in everything we do:
 - Make decisions in a collaborative environment
 - Model story telling
 - Take bold, confident actions that come from collaborative decisions
 - Stand up for right when barriers are raised
 - Notice and reach out to help where project leaders are struggling
 - Make social connections when the opportunities arise
- Create confidence
 - We demonstrate by example what happens when you stand up for right and model the behavior.
 - We develop confidence that we will stand by them if and when difficulty arises. We are always within easy reach.
 - Provide a progressive lighter touch to emerging projects in leadership and other professional support services as the community develops greater skill and confidence. The goal is self sufficiency.
 - It requires sustained effort to develop the cultural mindset of self-reliance (“We should...” instead of “they should...”) and to develop the mindset that ‘we are allowed to and can’. We reinforce this mindset with a constant stream of messages and experiences.
 - Provide on going confidence to community members through hand-holding, advice and positive support and recognition for their efforts.

Although it is the goal for Windsor / West Hants to maintain the Happy Community Project process in an independent and sustained way, we recognize that we may have to provide minimal ongoing support.

This support can be in three primary ways depending on what the community wants:

- Provide on going infrastructure support
 - Communication services,
 - Blanket liability
 - Grant application vehicle
- Provide coaching / consulting support to Core Group Leaders.

- Leaders may find themselves in new experiences where they may need occasional consultive services.
- Provide connections to other Happy Community Project leaders in other communities to draw upon their experience.
 - Create a community of Happy Community Project communities.

RESULTS TO DATE

- Community members have spontaneously come up with ideas for and implemented projects independently with minimum support from Happy Community Project. These are ongoing projects that build social connectedness and a culture of taking care of each other.
 - This is exemplified in projects like Movies in the Park, Play Café, Adopt a Grandparent, Grab a Meal and the revival of Makers that are in various stages of development and have required minimal help. These initiatives emerge because members of the community have developed the confidence of “We can do this” from experiencing the many other projects that have emerged and utilize the Success Project Management tool we provide.
- The Community Recreation Director has augmented her knowledge and experience with the Happy Community Project process and forms a solid resource base for others to build from.
- We are developing a well-rounded Core Leadership Group capable of operating collaboratively and independently which includes the Community Recreation Director.
- Existing Core Leadership members are asked to familiarize new members with principles and duties.

Conclusion

The West Hants / Windsor Happy Community Project has proven that a consistent process can rapidly change cultural norms to develop a community that has more well-being, resiliency and a culture of taking care of each other. That in spite of the enormous overarching cultural, legal, economic and social pressures; communities can rise above with self-determination and self-reliance. The Happy Community Project provides an innovative and effective way of doing this.