

Global Village Square

Six Case Stories

Champions for Youth in Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia, Canada

In the rural communities of southwest Nova Scotia, as in so many rural communities around the world, social stresses and small-town dynamics leave many young people feeling cut off from a sense of belonging and possibility. Yarmouth County has the highest teen pregnancy rate in Canada, as well as a high incidence of substance abuse. Young people who are especially vulnerable, such as single parents, homeless teens, Aboriginals, recent immigrants, and high school dropouts, feel frustrated and alienated, while barriers to meaningful employment—or any employment at all—reinforce the cycle of despair.

In Yarmouth County a few individuals have responded to these challenges by creating Youth Services Centres, which is dedicated to removing barriers and helping youth achieve their potential. A small team of youth workers and mentors provides skill building and job/labour market knowledge. They also provide advocacy for young people who are often judged or misunderstood, and who cannot articulate because their pain is so great.

When our youth are in crisis, so are our communities. The questions we bring to the Global Village Square: How can our communities overcome the tendency to push away or judge youth in trouble, so that we can reach out with the support and healing they need? What will it take for us to begin working together, to show these kids they are worth it, and to help them develop more positive ways of thinking? How can we engage more community leaders in an advocacy role on behalf of youth issues?

Inner-City Networking and Transformation in Johannesburg, South Africa

In the inner-city of Johannesburg there is a neighborhood called Hillbrow which is infamous for overcrowded accommodations and high unemployment and crime. In the midst of the intense urban hustle there is a lovely park that has become an oasis for the people living nearby. It has also become a focus for several projects in the neighborhood that have arisen to serve the various needs of the community.

What makes the park extraordinary is the approach some of these organizations have taken to see the communities they serve as an integrated whole. While one organization has the passion and expertise to teach simple practices for growing a green city (The GreenHouse Project) and another to support families through arts (Lapeng), they each know that everything that happens in the neighborhood is linked to everything else. Gardening is connected to nutrition and income generation, which is connected to healthy children and families.

In particular, two organizations have seen the need to consciously collaborate and support the community as an integrated fabric. Located in the northeast corner of the park are The GreenHouse People's Environmental Centre Project and A Child and Family Resource, Lapeng. These projects are each run by dynamic young African

women. When Dorah Lebelo from GreenHouse and Mathibedi Nthite from Lapeng speak, the African concept of *Ubuntu* comes through. Ubuntu is roughly translated as "I am because we are" and reflects the deep culture of interdependence in African people.

For Dorah and Mathibedi there is no question that everyone serving the community needs each other to truly support the growth of people living in the city-centre of Johannesburg. There are many resources for the community to utilize (an Art gallery, a job creation center etc.) and they all need to be talking to each other and sharing their resources and knowledge. They are taking part in an interconnected social world and it is only logical that they work that way.

These interconnected projects, which have been functioning informally as the Joubert Park Neighborhood Network, will be brought into the Global Village Square.

Creating New Futures at the Llano Grande Center in South Texas, USA

Late in the 1980s, a number of young people who had grown up in south Texas, gone away to college, and returned wanted to put their newly acquired expertise at the service of their community. Operating over more than a decade as an informal network of teachers, students, and interested community members, the group that would evolve into the Llano Grande Center (LGC) was intent on restructuring the educational process in the local schools and responding to what its members perceived as a vacuum in progressive leadership and the neglect of yet another generation whose latent talents were undiscovered, whose potential was untapped, and whose future was bleak.

The group sought alternatives to the educational models that perpetuated the endless treadmill in which generation after generation was denied the opportunity to gain either the crucial perspective or the necessary skills for breaking the cycle, and thus returned to the ever less-rewarding seasonal migrations and casual labor. Neither the schools nor the employment patterns provided opportunity for self-realization, either for working adults or working children.

The LGC is an educational organization that works on issues of leadership development for the purpose of creating conditions for youth and adults alike to grow and work. These conditions have been nurtured by a value system that includes honesty, trust, respect, dignity and continuous inquiry—all these values have proven to be essential in the education of youth.

These values alone, however, do not create change; LGC staff have built on these values and intersected them with a set of practices that have yielded positive power. LGC works on issues of pedagogy, research, policy development, and economic and community change. We do this work from our classrooms both in public school and university. The space and times where these values and practice cross is when we see life at its richest. Indeed, this is a place where teaching and learning come to life and where new knowledge is created. The work of the LGC has been grounded in pedagogy of place, where youth and adults alike learn about the outside world, just as they learn about themselves and their community.

Healing and Empowering Youth in Asia

Dreamcatchers is a nonprofit foundation based in Mumbai, India, that helps young people cope with loss, confusion, desperation, overwhelm, or grief. Dreamcatchers recognizes that unless and until one has learned to walk through the war within, one cannot become instruments of peace, balance, and harmony in the world.

Through reflective exercises and life-affirming conversations, Dreamcatchers creates a safe, non-judgmental space for healing and self-reconciliation among girls rescued from prostitution, street children in drug rehabilitation, young girls and boys who have taken shelter from situations of violence and physical abuse, and tsunami survivors.

Dreamcatchers, which was founded by Sonali Ojha, has worked with children, youth groups, and youth workers in India, Nepal, and Vietnam. Sonali has developed a life transitions program that empowers young people to recognize the power of their choices.

Through this program, a young person comes home to the realization that there is always a choice between a path that will create violence and another, which will bring balance and peace; a choice between walking the path of risk and responsibility; a choice between creating life and destroying it.

Core questions being brought to the Global Village Square: How can Dreamcatchers create a deeper space of reflection and compassion for young people? What practices will help us hold, foster, and nurture powerful spaces for learning and transformation? As Dreamcatchers grows, how can we consciously introduce a culture that is committed to critical thinking, the search for inspiration, and fearlessness over transience, change, and failure? How do we hold a powerful, inspiring space for the people who will work with us? How do we make the power of reflective practice and transformative work less threatening for organizations and individuals? How do we help our adult workers connect with their own authentic selves?

Breaking the Cycle of Tragedy in Israel/Palestine

It began in 2003, when a Palestinian, Zoughbi Zoughbi; an Israeli, Yitzhak Mendelsohn; and an American, Whit Jones, together dreamed the possibility of breaking the cycle of chaos, trauma, and revenge being acted out between Israelis and Palestinians. In a region where people are "victims of victims," this founding group envisioned a resource with no political agenda that exists to help all victims on a path of recovery and reconciliation.

The Center for Individual Recovery and Reconciliation has since become a reality, and is now led by a widening circle of more than thirty individuals. These people, from Palestine, Israel, and around the world, have begun to create multiple partnerships and projects in two areas: Bet Lechem and Nablus. Each project is motivated by the immediate personal needs of the people living in the conflict and is led by local individuals. Some of the initial projects are listed below:

- a women's cooperative for widows in two Palestinian villages to produce crafts to market in the Middle East and in the U.S.

- Provide computers and internet connections to villages and Palestinian NGO's to facilitate email exchanges between Israeli, Palestinian, and European school children, and to support the autonomy and effectiveness of Palestinian organizations.
- a "sister city" relationship between a West-Bank, an Israeli, and an American city
- (in progress) a playground for the 4,000 children living in the Al Aroub Refugee Camp who now can play only in the streets

The spirit of the project is to create partnership to create political change and not to wait until the political change brings partnership.

Fostering Community Health in Columbus, Ohio, USA

A deep yearning for fellowship, education, and community service were the DNA materials that gave rise to a county medical society 113 years ago in Columbus, Ohio. In the early years, the physician members of the medical society were the backbone of massive community-wide voluntary efforts to vaccinate the citizenry against smallpox and polio. In more modern times, the physicians' entrepreneurial spirit gave rise to the formation of a physician-owned health insurance company, whose subsequent sale helped endow one of the largest medical society affiliated health foundations in the United States—the Columbus Medical Association Foundation.

It is the nature of DNA to pass on its strengths from generation to generation, and thus the current Foundation possesses much of the DNA material from the society's early founders. Through its leadership and funding, the Foundation has stimulated the development of a community organization solely dedicated to the issues of the uninsured. Through this organization, a network of 550 physicians volunteer their services for the uninsured, with support from hospitals, other foundations, and city and county governments.

It is thus not a stretch to understand how this health care Foundation would sense the potential for stimulating the community's self-healing capacity by training community leaders in the art of hosting conversations that matter. With very few questions asked, the Foundation gave its staff the freedom and resources to make this happen in Columbus, Ohio. It is also not a stretch to understand that 36 community leaders, who spanned the generations, would respond to an invitation to spend three full days in March 2005 learning the practice and methods of convening strategic conversations.

Through this training, the initial seeds of shared learning were scattered through important sectors of the community. As these seeds land and grow, where next will the DNA be carried? What does the care, watering, and feeding of those seeds look like? How can we sustain what we have begun? These are the critical questions that will be brought to the Global Village Square at the Shambhala Institute this summer.