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# Building Inclusive Communities

International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres





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The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS) gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the **Ford Foundation** and the Multiculturalism Program of **Canadian Heritage**, which made this publication possible.

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## BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a research project examining how neighbourhood centres in Canada and around the world engage their neighbours to create opportunities that foster inclusion and promote diversity. The “Community Living Room Research Project” was initiated in October 2003 by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS).

A brief review of the settlement house movement (or “neighbourhood centres”, as they are now often called) notes that these locally directed community organisations have been in the business of building bridges across differences for more than a hundred years. Settlement houses that were established around the world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reached out to people as neighbours working with neighbours, in the belief that it is through personal contact that people best promote mutual development.

Settlement houses apply this value of inclusion by opening their doors to everyone and creating a “community living room.” The research presented in *Building Inclusive Communities* suggests that settlement houses and neighbourhood centres continue to play a central role in promoting inclusion, and offer a tested approach to

combining service delivery, community engagement, and working for change that can be adapted across communities and nations.

The project posed two key questions:

- What steps do we have to take, at every level of society, to nurture human differences as ingredients of cultural vitality?
- How can we promote social change so that people of all ages, religions, racial and cultural backgrounds, classes, abilities, and sexual orientations are able to participate fully in building and improving our society?

In the report, certain key practices have been identified that enhance social inclusion in communities and within local non-profit organisations themselves. These practices are presented as a Community Inclusion Checklist, along with extensive observations from practitioners, and a selection of international case studies detailing promising initiatives and key learnings. The checklist highlights six practices: organisational commitments to inclusion and change, creating welcoming and safe environments, promoting civic engagement and opposing exclusion, strengthening supports in diverse constituencies, using the arts and

multifaceted strategies for communication and expression, and establishing networks for learning and exchange. For each of these categories the report presents community voices that offer comments from around the world.

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### THE AIM OF INCLUSION IS TO RENEGOTIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NORMS FROM THE GROUND UP

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Along with local initiatives, the report reflects upon the diverse national policy contexts within which community organisations practise. Practitioners observe that it is critical to work towards entrenching anti-oppression and human rights in policy and laws, and to uphold such intentions at all levels of institutional practice. Community initiatives that engage residents and advocate for inclusive policies are considered key to this ongoing process, as is the forging of links with other groups to promote such policies at the local, national, and international levels. The aim of inclusion is to renegotiate social and economic norms from the ground up – with excluded members of society fully participating in this discussion to determine the practices and policies of our evolving communities. Like the promotion of human rights and democracy, the promotion

of social inclusion requires a constant dedication to confronting injustice and discrimination and the readiness to champion more hopeful futures.

Building Inclusive Communities concludes that there is a critical need to expand our opportunities for international dialogue and analysis, and for working together to understand how local practice and national policies strengthen or inhibit inclusion in our communities. It also urges those dedicated to the objectives of inclusion to continue to champion the importance of civic society and engagement, not as a cheap substitute for government services or the promotion of common welfare, but as a core mechanism for mobilizing diverse community members to learn together and enlarge our capacity to live in harmony and justice.





## PREFACE

Upon seeing my name, fellow Canadians have asked me countless times, “So where are you from anyway?” In Canada today, hundreds of thousands of citizens and newcomers are being asked this question because they look or sound “different” somehow. I often react a tad defensively when asked because what I hear is: “Are you a *real* Canadian?”, a sub-text that implies that I, a naturalized Canadian, am an outsider in this, the most multicultural country in the world.

Other perceived differences in our societies around the world are sometimes marked with far less subtlety and, in some cases, with hostility: differences in ability, age, gender, or sexual orientation. And individual and public reaction to differences between people – exclusion of immigrants, racial profiling, civil conflict in the name of religion, controversy around the rights of minorities or of gays to marry – seems to be increasing in every country.

At the same time, this era of complex international trade agreements, enlargement of the European Union, and the creation of other global compacts has given rise to a growing interest in the concepts of “social inclusion and exclusion” and “promoting diversity” in specific national and international contexts. But while the thinkers and the legislators struggle with these concepts to define political, social, and economic policies that promote inclusion, grassroots organisations are creating and testing practical responses to the rapid changes happening in our neighbourhoods, where people experience inclusion or exclusion in their daily lives.

Among the many types of organisations working to build inclusive communities are the settlement houses or “neighbourhood centres,” as they are now often called. Neighbourhood centres have been in the business of building bridges across differences for over a hundred years since the first settlement house was founded in London, England in 1884. The settlement houses that were established around the world reached out to people as neighbours working with neighbours. This idea was echoed by the founder of the Finnish settlements, Sigrid Sirenus, who said:





“The settlement movement is based on the conviction that personal contact is the resource through which people best influence each other and promote each other’s development.”

These values, articulated over a century ago, resonate strongly in our world today. At the most basic level, it is through human relationships that we learn to appreciate rather than fear our differences, and develop an understanding and empathy for each other that transcends our differences. Settlement houses apply this value of inclusion by opening their doors to everyone and creating a “community living room.”

Within the Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS), we try to recreate the “community living room” on a global level by promoting the exchange of best practice and by supporting many emerging community-based organisations around the world. This report, written with the generous support of the

Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Ford Foundation, looks at how neighbourhood centres in Canada and around the world engage their neighbours to create opportunities that foster inclusion and promote diversity. Through our research, we have also identified certain key practices that enhance inclusion in the community and within the organisations themselves.

IFS has been fortunate to have the skills of Rob Howarth, Coordinator of the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, to undertake this unique research. Rob was ably assisted by Robyn Young and Alexandra Horsky in preparing the case examples, by Lawrence Hill in stylistic editing, and by Suzanne Needs in copy editing. Bernard J. Wohl, Christa Freiler, Luke Geoghegan and Paul Vlaar also gave valuable suggestions. Mark Hathaway addressed the challenge of designing an attractive web site with great energy and Katy Dockrill prepared our “neighbour to neighbour”

illustration. Many of our photos were taken during the 20th IFS International Conference in Toronto by Jo SiMalay while others were provided by IFS member organisations. And finally, hundreds of staff and volunteers within the IFS network responded enthusiastically to our search for their practical experiences and thinking on the topic of social inclusion. Our thanks to the whole "team"!

The findings and the stories related here constitute the beginning of an ongoing IFS project to share the learnings of hundreds of community-based organisations in Canada and around the world. We welcome your comments and examples to

this endeavour to understand how community organisations contribute to building inclusive communities and can champion diversity as the true source of our common wealth.

Agnès van 't Bosch  
*Executive Director*  
IFS



## I) INTRODUCTION

"Politics is a road. It has a final destination and usually a clear direction with specific milestones. The destination is invariably power. Toynbee Hall and the Settlement Movement was not, and is not, a political movement with political objectives. Toynbee Hall is a bridge, not a road. It exists to bring unlikely people together in a common task – not to proselytize ideology."

– Luke Geoghegan. *The Barnett's: Christian socialists? In Selected papers and presentations, Toynbee Hall and social change.* London: Toynbee Hall, 2000

"Historically, neighbourhood centers were able to address needs for literacy and education, for the health and welfare of children, and even for the concerns of workers. They helped the immigrants accommodate to and meld themselves into the dominant culture, but even in their best efforts were not able to stimulate a desire for the richness of difference among diverse cultures. It was primarily a one-way bridge." – Bernard J. Wohl, *Goddard-Riverside Neighborhood Center, New York. Bridges Not Oases.* Paper presented at the 15th International IFS Conference, Berlin, 1988

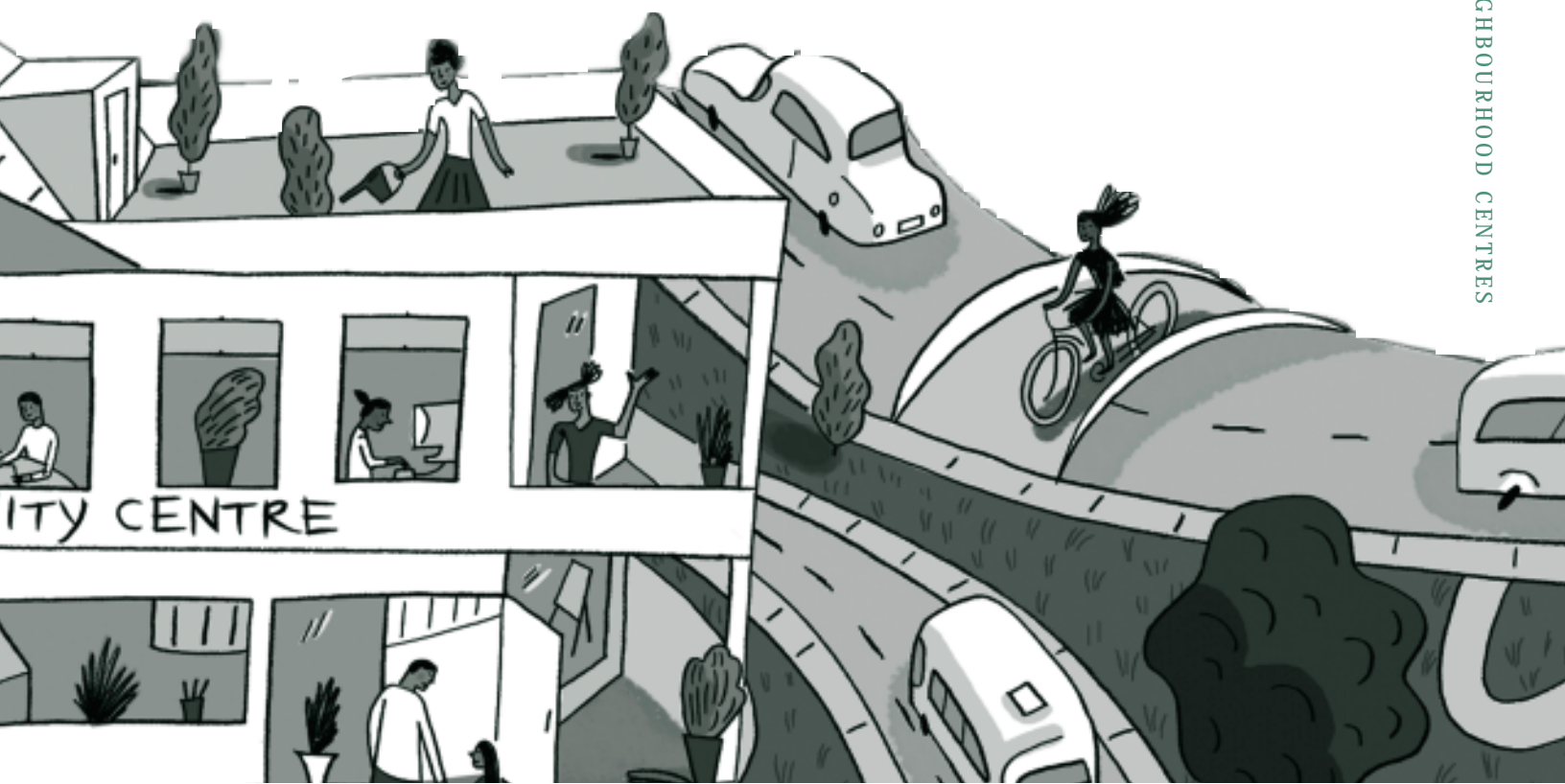




Photo courtesy of Toynbee Hall

In October 2003, the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS) decided to undertake a project entitled the Community Living Room Research Project. The goal was to examine how social inclusion and diversity were being promoted on the ground in Canada and around the world, specifically within the IFS network of community-based organisations.

In a world often marked more by a fear rather than an appreciation of our differences, the topic proved timely. All over the world, nations and communities are divided over the issue of social inclusion and questions of how we – as persons with different beliefs and cultural traditions – should live together. Within the IFS network, European member organisations have expressed alarm at the rise in public hostility toward newcomers in their countries that sometimes leads to violence or repressive legislation.

“Today Europe is full of contradictions as far as attitudes and concepts towards diversity and integration, shared or imposed values, tolerance or prohibitive measures to protect one’s own identity against alienation. In a situation where the *New Europe* is emerging there is some nervousness. Each country, each region seems eager to protect its own special characteristics against *the Others* – other countries outside, foreigners and immigrant minorities inside. Difficult times, it seems, for multicultural tolerance.” – Herbert Scherer, German Federation of Settlements. Headaches from Old Europe. Plenary address, 20th International IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004

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## NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IN THE BUSINESS OF BUILDING BRIDGES

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The disquiet voiced by Dr. Scherer in this quote has been echoed by concerned groups and individuals around the world. Much research is currently being undertaken to define what is meant by social inclusion within the context of our globalizing world (please see examples posted on the IFS website at [www.ifsnetwork.org/resources/inclusion.asp](http://www.ifsnetwork.org/resources/inclusion.asp)).

But research at the neighbourhood level is also important because, as community workers are acutely aware, it is there that people first experience exclusion or inclusion.

Based on the experience of local community-based organisations, the authors of this report believe that to promote social inclusion we must move beyond discussions about increasing levels of accommodation, access, integration, adaptation and other important but partial conceptions of belonging and participation. The aim of inclusion involves a renegotiation of social and economic norms from the ground up – with excluded members of society fully participating in this discussion to determine the practices and policies of our evolving communities. Like the promotion of human rights and democracy, the promotion of social inclusion requires a constant dedication to confronting injustice and discrimination and the readiness to champion more hopeful futures.

As highlighted in the two quotes at the beginning of this Introduction, neighbourhood centres have always been in the business of building bridges. One hundred and twenty years ago, a group of social reformers founded the first settlement houses, Toynbee Hall and Oxford House, in London, England. These reformers were reacting

to the industrial revolution, which had created slums where workers lived in poverty and abysmal conditions. During this time of marked social divisions, people of distinct classes lived in separate neighbourhoods and had very little awareness of each other's daily lives.

The social goal of the settlements in 1884 was to bridge the gap between social groups and to promote ideas such as

- Every person has the right to grow and to enjoy the best of life.
- Effective change is evolutionary.
- Strong communities and social reform depend on relations of “neighbourliness” – personal communication and bonds across social and economic lines.



The settlement house was conceived as a method of improving community conditions outside of the direct control of any particular organized religion or creed. In this regard, it intentionally set itself apart from the practices of charity and the religious missions of the time. Following the example of Toynbee Hall, hundreds of settlement houses and neighbourhood centres were established by the turn of the twentieth century, in areas of urban distress in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, continental Europe, and elsewhere. These organisations were started by faith-based Christian and Jewish groups, university faculty, students, and sometimes local philanthropists – all wanting to use the settlement model to break down class and cultural barriers, provide community services, and promote neighbourly cooperation.

To carry out the Community Living Room Research Project, researchers collected reports from IFS settlement houses, interviewed dozens of neighbourhood centre staff, and reviewed materials from more than 100 presentations

delivered at the 20<sup>th</sup> International IFS Conference, titled Building Inclusive Communities, held June 18–23, 2004, in Toronto, Canada. This report presents our findings.

### During our research, we posed these key questions:

- What steps do we have to take, at every level of society, to nurture human differences as ingredients of cultural vitality?
- How can we promote social change so that people of all ages, religions, racial and cultural backgrounds, classes, abilities, and sexual orientations are able to participate fully in building and improving our society?



Practitioners ask these questions to understand how our work might contribute to moving our communities and societies toward a more equitable and inclusive future. How can our day-to-day actions best promote inclusion? How can we tell when we are doing better? What local practices have established common ground across class, gender, race, and other lines? And how can we influence changes in the laws, policies, and practices of our national and international institutions? This report documents some of the practices and ideas for promoting inclusion and diversity implemented by neighbourhood centres around the world. The voices of many community workers are included in the text, as it is felt that their musings and thinking vividly illustrate the day-to-day action required to promote diversity and inclusion.

In the first section of this report we briefly discuss social inclusion and the role of settlement houses and neighbourhood centres in promoting inclusion. We then move into a discussion of conditions and policies that promote inclusion, and follow this up with a Community Inclusion



*Toronto Mayor David Miller with participants at the 20th International IFS Conference in Toronto*

Checklist of practices and strategies tested by neighbourhood centres. Subsequently, we present challenges and opportunities for building inclusive communities, and we conclude with case examples of lessons learned by neighbourhood centres and residents in promoting inclusion. Our examples of neighbourly collaboration from around the world are offered not as comprehensive solutions, but as initiatives where neighbours are striving to build bridges across differences, and to embrace the diversity that nurtures and sustains humanity.

## II) SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE ROLE OF SETTLEMENT HOUSES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

“Social inclusion refers to the extent that individuals, families, and communities are able to fully participate in society and have control over their own resources. It is a matter not only of an adequate share of resources, but also of participation in the determination of both individual and collective life chances [...] Social inclusion does not ignore the role of class but recognizes that a broad array of other variables help shape how class forces interact.” – Anupama Sahu. NYSASDRI (National Youth Service Action and Social Development Research Institute), Orissa, India. IFS interview, 2004

“Inclusion is messy. It is about constant vigilance, constant negotiation, learning to deal with diversity, and questioning things we have taken for granted. ... It is not about bringing the outsiders into the existing mainstream culture – it is about creating a new and negotiated culture together.” – Uzma Shakir. Plenary address, 20th International IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004

“When working with individuals and families, we have tried to shape the delivery of our services not only to meet their common human needs for food, clothing, shelter, education, equity and justice, but also to enlarge their capacities for



participation, strength and leadership in that struggle.” – Bernard J. Wohl. Paper presented at the 18th International IFS Conference, Jerusalem, 1998

The task of defining “social inclusion” has been the topic of many conferences and much research. For the purposes of this report, we agree with Christa Freiler's view that “social inclusion does not have only one meaning; it can mean any or all of the following: a process for “closing the distance” between people (distance can be social, economic, physical); a state of individual or collective well-being; a metaphor for how we are alike as human beings; and/or a vision of where we want to be as a society. Social inclusion points to needed changes in public policies, attitudes,

and institutional practices. Equally important, social inclusion speaks to people's lived experiences, as well as to policy and program solutions." –

Christa Freiler. Plenary address, 20th International IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004

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### WE MUST MOVE BEYOND PROXIMITY TO CONDITIONS WHERE PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS ARE ENGAGED IN COMMON PURSUITS

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The building blocks of inclusion result from interactions where people feel secure and appreciated, and at the same time have opportunities to reach out to those who seem less familiar. Mere physical proximity – consider, for example, the mixing of diverse inhabitants in a single housing development – does not guarantee that individuals will freely reach across traditional boundaries to connect with one another. Indeed, closeness can exacerbate divisions within groups and entrench an unwillingness to move beyond existing stereotypes.

As one British academic has observed, we must move beyond proximity to conditions where people from different backgrounds are engaged in common pursuits that encourage them to connect honestly. These settings, often mediated by local community

organisations, appear to hold the greatest promise of promoting inclusion.

Inclusion requires that we encounter and learn about differences, then work together to develop mutual respect and common action. This process cannot be imposed. On the contrary, it stems from ongoing deliberation and negotiation.

"Habitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange. Cultural change in these circumstances is likely to be encouraged [by ...] placing people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments [...] Communal gardens and other ventures run by residents and community organisations [...] can become sites of social inclusion and discursive negotiation, through the application of organisational and discursive strategies designed to build voice, arbitrate over disputes, inculcate a sense of common fate or common benefit, publicise shared achievements, and develop confidence in proposals that emerge from open-ended discussion." – Ash Amin. *Ethnicity and the multicultural city, living with diversity. Environment and Planning A, 34(6), 959-981, 2002*



For many, the act of joining others to pursue common objectives can generate a change in attitudes and understanding. In these conditions, new learning can overcome negative stereotypes and misconceptions and strengthen a community's capacity to honour humanity in its full diversity.

Founding settlement houses such as Toynbee Hall led the way to "building voice" and inspired a global network of local groups that offer key services and opportunities for neighbourhood residents to build their own communities.

The Settlement House concept was developed in mid-19th-century England when such social thinkers as Thomas Hill Green, John Ruskin, and Arnold Toynbee urged university students to "settle" in poor neighbourhoods, where they could study and work to better local conditions. These settlements taught adult education, organized job clubs, offered youth and adult recreation, sports, art and music programs, public health services,

and advocated for improved living and working conditions for the poor and working class. In countries such as Canada and the United States with large immigrant populations, settlements also started English language classes and schooling for immigrant children.

The contemporary term, "social inclusion" embodies the ideals of the early settlement house movement, established to promote inclusion through delivering services to the poor while reflecting diversity in the very structure of the settlement:

"[...] It may be further said that because a settlement is a microcosm of cultivated society its residents should represent various forms of opinion, religious and political. [...] A mission with its clearly cut program, its workers welded into one army, is very effective to its purpose of teetotalism, evangelicalism, ritualism, but a settlement with its residents teetotal and non-teetotal, its churchmen and chaplains, its Catholics and Jews, its believers and agnostics, all concerned in different ways to serve other needs, is effective to make people recognize that they are not called by a party but by humanity – by God – to turn from evil and be good." – Samuel A. Barnett. *Letter to the Chicago Conference from the Rev. Canon and Mrs. S. A. Barnett. Commons 4 (2), 17-18, 1899*

Today, thousands of community-based organisations – in their own ways, cultures, and languages – embody these core values. Sometimes known as social settlements, they are also called neighbourhood houses, neighbourhood centres, or community centres. They maintain their distinction from other social welfare agencies and government departments; the latter are solely focused on the provision of services, while the former are aimed at improving neighbourhood life as a whole.

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### SETTLEMENT HOUSES LED THE WAY TO “BUILDING VOICE” AND INSPIRED A GLOBAL NETWORK

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Professor Miu Chung Yan of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, identifies the central elements of the settlement house model as “a functional integration of service delivery, community building and social change” and notes that

“Such integration is further characterized by four distinctive features: its neighborhood-based focus; historic commitment in nurturing a sense of ownership in the community; multigenerational emphasis, and strong sensitivity to and respect for diversity. These characteristics indicate strongly that the settlement house is not only a multi-service organisation but also a community-based organizing agent that can nurture an effective

local governance structure through which community members can participate in issues and policies that affect the community.” – Miu Chung Yan. *Bridging the fragmented community: Revitalizing settlement houses in the global era. Journal of Community Practice, 12, 51-69, 2004*

Neighbourhood centres and settlement houses are actively encouraging people of vastly different backgrounds to understand each other and work together. Naturally, other incubators of inclusion exist as well. Our workplaces, schools, libraries, public spaces, and residential developments all have the potential to improve connections between community members. But one of the most potent strategies for promoting inclusion involves facilitating voluntary community encounters in settings that support respectful interaction.





### III) CONDITIONS PROMOTING INCLUSION

“We need to work together in a framework which joins our specific programs to an understanding of the broad political, economic and social forces which support or destroy our initiatives. If the destructive ideas and values which raise up the LePens of France prevail and immigrants are driven out as scapegoats for unemployment, the separate programs crumble to dust. Each specific struggle is valuable and we treasure our hard-won single victories, but they can only be stretched into bridges if there is a framework international in concept and free of denigration and threat in practice.” – Bernard J. Wohl. *Bridges Not Oases. Paper presented at the 15th International IFS Conference, Berlin, 1988*

“Just before I left Barcelona for this conference on inclusion, we had a situation where 1,500 immigrants, mostly of Pakistani origin, had sought refuge in our local churches. These people were supposedly illegally in our country, and the Barcelona police removed them violently from the churches. This is completely contradictory to how you are to act in churches. I am excited to come from another country and share ideas, but I think the European context is very different and rather alarming. Until we abolish discriminatory laws, and unless there are real social and economic

reforms in immigrants’ countries of origin, I see little hope of inclusion.” – Maria Mas, *Associacio de Veins del Casc Antic, Barcelona. Contribution to plenary discussion, International IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004*

Neighbourhood centres around the world have emphasized that broad social and economic realities influence a community’s ability to promote and sustain inclusion. As the quote above suggests, it is critical to work towards entrenching anti-oppression and human rights in policy and law, and to uphold such intentions at all levels of institutional practice. For instance, inclusion cannot flourish if immigrant and refugee populations are denied full citizenship or kept in conditions of inequality. Nor can inclusion take root in a society that fails to support laws and procedures ensuring minority rights, freedom from oppression, and the self-determination of aboriginal peoples. Community initiatives that engage residents and advocate for inclusive policies are key to this ongoing process. And, as highlighted by the quote by Bernard J. Wohl, forging links with other groups to promote these policies at the local, national, and international levels is key to building inclusive and sustainable communities.



What does social inclusion depend on?

### Legislative and Policy Frameworks

- Human rights legislation and fair legal systems;
- Definitions of citizenship that reflect a diverse population;
- Policy commitments to social justice and wealth redistribution;
- Universal services that support the basic health, economic, and social needs of all citizens;
- Freedom from persecution;
- Support for strong civil society, local control, and the capacity for self-determination.

### Voice and Empowerment

- Create opportunities for vulnerable community members to strengthen their voice and for civic engagement;
- Oppose stigma, discrimination, and systemic causes of exclusion;
- Promote democratic practices and sustainable development;
- Develop local communities' capacity for self-definition and intervention;
- Promote diverse and equitable representation at all levels of government and institutions.

### Making Inclusion Intentional

- Reinforce democratic process and human rights;
- Safeguard pluralism, including the independent traditions of minorities;
- Ensure that excluded citizens have opportunities to help shape new societal norms;
- Change processes are in place to shift established values and practices;
- Resolve conflict via understanding and mutual respect;
- Institutions and organisations can assess and adapt to changing communities.



## IV) KEY PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE INCLUSION

“Social inclusion is representation, ensuring diverse communities are brought together, providing tools for people, and the opportunity to understand the system. It’s about empowering people to make connections so that their voices are heard. I didn’t see social inclusion at first but discovered it at the IFS Conference. The first step of social inclusion is breaking the isolation [of women]. Connecting with other cultures leads to understanding.” – Noemi Garcia, North York Community House, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004



“Much of the most powerful learning takes place through giving people opportunities to participate in programs with others who start out “different,” but end up expanding the notion of “normal.”

– David Myers, Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Expanding Access at Birchmount Bluffs)

“Inclusion is an externally imposed concept. It is a mechanism for organisational change and is a constantly relearned piece. When you think settlement houses have acquired this knowledge, it seems that new generations have to learn it all over again.” – Michael Zisser, University Settlement, New York. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Accepting Youth at The Door)

“Inclusion is a difficult concept in Finland because we don’t have a word for it in our language. But we do have a word for exclusion. Social inclusion (in relation to our social housing project) is when a person feels that they’re living in a community in which they have a place and can be an active member. It’s when people feel valued and safe but where they can still be “their own person” with their difficulties and issues.”

– Risto Pontela, Finnish Federation of Settlements, Helsinki. IFS interview, 2004



Led by volunteer boards and local residents, settlement houses and neighbourhood centres are non-profit agencies that offer services and supports in their neighbourhoods, while paying particular attention to their most vulnerable residents.

To strengthen local communities, settlement houses and neighbourhood centres use a range of approaches, including social services, health and recreational programs, community development, and economic development activities. Acting as local hubs of activity, they convene residents, volunteers and other stakeholders (such as business, faith communities, and funders) to identify objectives, translate plans into action, and to work in tandem with efforts to achieve broad policy reform.

In examining a broad canvas of community initiatives by neighbourhood centres in the IFS international network, we have identified key practices that promote inclusion. We have divided these practices into a checklist of six categories:

### Community Inclusion Checklist

- ✓ Organisational commitments to inclusion and change
- ✓ Creating welcoming and safe environments
- ✓ Promoting civic engagement and opposing exclusion
- ✓ Strengthening supports in diverse constituencies
- ✓ Using the arts and multifaceted strategies for communication and expression
- ✓ Establishing networks for learning and exchange

In this section, for each of the categories listed above, we present community voices offering personalized comments from around the world, as well as a summary of inclusion practices.



## Organisational Commitments to Inclusion and Change

Truly inclusive organisations are willing to alter their own structures and practices to meet changing community needs. Such organisations deliver on commitments to inclusion and change through

- board and management leadership
- ensuring neighbourhood diversity is reflected in staffing
- the modelling of inclusion
- effective conflict resolution

### Community Voices:

“[Our] organisation was propelled by strong leadership at the board level when first they set out to achieve this vision. Numerous focus groups were held in the community, to give people a chance to respond and to voice issues. The agency implemented the program through test programs. At times, staff needed to implement dispute resolution processes as conflicts arose.



It took some time for people to work through issues and grapple with a new way of understanding and living out inclusion.

Gradually, however, with constant opportunities for feedback, staff support, and the backing of leadership in the organisation, participants were able to adjust to new ways of relating and participating in programs. Through simple exposure to what were once unfamiliar people or populations, participants learned to trust and open themselves to others." – [Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto](#). IFS interview, 2004 (see case example [Expanding Access at Birchmount Bluffs](#))

“Our staff represent many different cultural, religious, ethnic, and/or racial groups. They model an attitude of acceptance and openness that is contagious. As a result of consistent staff training and their diversity, this has become part of the organisational culture. These staff create safe and supportive environments for our new immigrant learners." – [Forest Hills Community House, New York](#). IFS interview, 2004 (see case example [Common Ground Across Cultures](#))

"We believe that if people come to the centre and want to participate they should be able to. The board members and upper management have been a critical force in leading this thinking and moving the organisation to one that is more open, inclusive, and accessible to non-status persons [persons without legal immigration status]. We now make conscious decisions to ensure that new and existing programs are accessible to non-status people as well. We are committed to not hiding the fact that we work with the non-status population." – Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example [Working With Undocumented Immigrants and Refugees in Toronto](#))

"People cannot choose to avoid conflict. They can only decide whether to participate in helping to determine its resolution or leave that determination to others. Conflict cannot be resolved without struggle. We consciously use conflict in order to create the conditions for learning, movement and change. Our agency is an arena where ideas are consciously introduced across lines of difference. They are then to be examined, rejected, refined and yet again examined in order to unleash the potential for meaningful social change and reduction of alienation." – Philosophical Framework of Goddard Riverside Community Center, New York, 2004



"It is a challenge working out how to do harm-reduction housing while continuing to work on a community development model and supplying the necessary supports to people. This takes time and education with our client community and staff. It is critical to be responsive and recognize new issues and new needs. For example, the Harm Reduction program is a core value of the Fred Victor Centre. Initially, the centre was a leader in working with alcoholic men, now the new reality of crack challenges us to shift attitudes in terms of dealing with crack users, as we puzzle out how to balance the right to housing versus crack addiction, and resistance of the long-term tenants not wanting crack users in the building. It is a work in progress." – Fred Victor Centre, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004



“Recently, a young girl got into a fight with another and threatened to expose the girl and her family, who did not have [legal immigration] status. The agency intervened and mediated between them. We used our authority as an agency to defuse the situation and encourage new standards of behaviour and acceptance.” – Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Working With Undocumented Immigrants and Refugees in Toronto)

### Organisations committed to inclusion and change

- ✓ Entrench principles of respect, anti-oppression, and inclusion in policies and procedures;
- ✓ Choose leaders who champion inclusion and pursue it tenaciously;
- ✓ Respect and accommodate difference (including differences of race, religion, culture, ability, and sexual orientation) continually in their workplace and programs;
- ✓ Commit resources to supporting new and emerging groups;
- ✓ Conduct ongoing staff and volunteer training processes to guide day-to-day practice and opportunities for self-reflection and learning;



- ✓ Ensure that program staff, managers, board members, and volunteers reflect the community’s diversity;
- ✓ Involve program participants in planning and decision making;
- ✓ Show a high capacity for responsiveness, commit resources to support new constituencies, and adapt infrastructure and resource allocation to address new community issues;
- ✓ Identify and address conflicts and practices of exclusion in a positive and timely fashion;
- ✓ Resolve conflict in ways that emphasize problem solving, and that treat mistakes, tensions, and imperfections as opportunities for learning.

## Creating Welcoming and Safe Environments

Inclusive community spaces do not simply happen. They require a combination of physical and human supports. When properly established, these spaces become “community living rooms” that allow for interaction, learning, problem solving, encountering difference, and discovering common ground. They can also become sites for innovations that no single individual or group could achieve alone.

### Community Voices:

“As an authentic model of constructive human relationships – working with other adolescents and staff in whom they can place confidence – The Door has won the loyalty and trust of young

people. A spirit of acceptance is promoted through The Door's membership process. As members, youth can be suspended from programs if they do not uphold rules and protocol ensuring mutual respect and safety (for example, no gang colours/symbols are to be worn at The Door). In this way it is a privilege to be a member. All youth can join and no one who accepts these ground rules of membership is excluded. The physical space has several floors, with an open design, few walls and lots of glass affording transparency. The large space allows for easy movement, visibility, and interaction. Youth can roam from program to program. Spaces are not segmented and don't belong to any one program for long.” – *The Door, University Settlement, New York. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Accepting Youth at The Door)*





“Fostering a climate of acceptance is intentional. [Through our integrated housing project] our main objective is to create a community where different people can live together and support each other. We are trying to build a good, peaceful community where the community can support each other and where acceptance and respect is normal. All prospective tenants are interviewed and told honestly about who is living here, and about the diversity of homeless and mentally challenged occupants. Tenants make informed decisions about joining this mixed housing program or not. With one social worker assigned to each building of 200 tenants, we have seen some success. Autistic young people living with their challenges have developed good relationships. Disabled young people are now taking care of the Tenant’s Café, and feel that they have found a good place to live, where they are respected.” – [Finnish Federation of Settlements, Helsinki. IFS interview, 2004](#)

“It is important to work on making changes in the community to create space where people can participate. Then the key is to create an atmosphere where youth have resources and support to gain the necessary skills to go out and make a difference in their community.” – [For Youth Initiative, Toronto](#)

“It was the beginning of December, cold – and the whole point was to simulate the homeless situation of *The Little Matchgirl*. With the theatre performances we made the street into our inclusive space. Through the theatre production, a form of art for the privileged was taken into the street, traditionally the realm of the under-privileged.” – [Oxford House, Oh Art! Program, London. IFS interview, 2004](#)

“One of the most thorny issues in the Czech Republic is the inclusion of the Roma population into “mainstream” Czech society whilst conserving the unique Roma culture. Long an object of exclusion, the Roma are among the most





marginalized of society. Very few Roma have overcome the barriers of discrimination and poverty, and it is said that those that have, have had to “reject” their Roma culture to do so. In Pilzen, one community centre, Společensui Začít spolu (“Let’s start together”), along with parents, founded a centre in a housing estate where many of the Roma of Pilzen had been displaced after eviction from their homes in the centre of town. Activities were created, including school mentoring, a drug prevention program, a family centre and recreational activities for children (dance, music,

sports, art). However, an important challenge remained: the lack of interaction between Roma and other Czech children and parents. The centre is based in a Roma apartment building and open to all. But, although the housing estate includes other buildings with non-Roma residents, few of these wish to come to a centre serving Roma children.” – IFS Executive Director, Field Report, 2001

### Community spaces that promote inclusivity

- ✓ Create physical settings, staff supports, and leadership that encourage (but don’t dominate) community agendas and creativity;
- ✓ Ensure the emotional and physical safety of participants at all times;
- ✓ Offer opportunities for everyone, including vulnerable and isolated people, to engage in the community;
- ✓ Are located in neutral spaces that are inviting to all intended members;
- ✓ Welcome all participants by offering barrier-free access, translators, translated signs and symbols, and culturally appropriate materials using clear language and design.

## Promoting Civic Engagement and Opposing Exclusion

Communities that are committed to building inclusion must recognize injustice and speak out against systems and practices that maintain exclusion. Such communities work together to entrench their inclusion, anti-oppression, and human rights in policy and laws, and press for these principles to be upheld at all levels of institutional practice.

### Community Voices:

“We are necessarily concerned with the macro policies which impinge on local communities. We can trace their effects in detail and can in turn assess those policies afresh. We also speak from an acute concern at the effects on community life around the world of social and economic disruption and destabilization.” – *IFS statement to the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen*

“A lot of local residents are better community organizers than staff.” – *Workshop participant, IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004*

“We developed the Goddard-Riverside Family Council, where staff and community members meet monthly to work on issues together, and have mounted various issue campaigns where community members are supported to lobby government regarding tenants rights, social security, healthcare, immigrant rights, employment and training, public education, and funding for local community services. We also work extensively on voter registration. Elected officials know that we are the gateway to a large voting public, and now vie for opportunities to attend monthly community meetings.” – *Goddard Riverside Community Center, New York. Workshop presentation, IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004*

“We are producing one-meal solutions. That is not what the settlement should be about. We should be helping people to become self-sufficient. How do we get people involved in the community? People want to explore what their talents are and what they can do to help. Instead, settlement houses have become service stations. In New York every program we had that was service oriented was being cut to the bone. We had forgotten to talk about our raison d’être with the community.



So I said that we needed to get everyone together and talk about this. We invited folks from local apartments and were expecting a small group, but 300 people showed up, including local politicians who stayed because they knew there were a lot of votes in that room. People said that no one had ever called them together to discuss anything beyond the next funding project." – [Goddard Riverside Community Center, New York. IFS Conference delegate, workshop discussion, Toronto, 2004](#)

"We are going back to our historical roots because we did do a lot of direct service provision and it was valuable work. On its own it is not enough but it can be creatively integrated with an intentional agenda to educate people and build solidarity around common issues. For example, we have a free service legal clinic where 50–60 corporate lawyers volunteer their time for 2–3 hours per week, and handle cases of eviction, racial harassment, and immigration. The majority of these volunteer lawyers are under thirty years



of age. Many of them feel that the volunteer work is changing their lives and stretching their conception of a world outside of the institutions of global capital." – *Toynbee Hall, London. IFS Conference delegate, workshop discussion, Toronto, 2004*

“St. Christopher House identified many policy problems resulting from the large gap between the development of policy by “experts” with no input or feedback from community members. So we brought policy experts to the community to dialogue with diverse low-income community members, front-line staff, volunteers and partner agencies. The result was improved sensitivity and awareness on the part of policy experts about the diversity and experience of low-income people. One resulting success was that low-income community members worked with agency staff

to point out to the federal government that upward of 200,000 low-income Canadian seniors were eligible for the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement but were not receiving it. The government knew who these seniors were through income tax files. As a result of this work, the federal government contacted these seniors, and at least 70,000 of them are now receiving the income support to which they were always entitled.” – *St. Christopher House, Community Undertaking Social Policy Program, Toronto. IFS Conference workshop presentation, Toronto, 2004 (see case example Linking Social Policy and “Real Life” at St. Christopher House)*

“Based in Oradea, in the west of Romania, the Bihor-Oradea Women’s Organisation has been developing social programs for over ten years.



Each year, the Women's Organisation organizes a campaign opposed to violence against women. The campaign is undertaken in cooperation with the local media in order to help women learn more about gender equality and non-discrimination according to universal and national laws. Activities organized by the campaign make women aware that they can eliminate violence and claim their rights and liberties. The local newspapers publish reports and interviews with victims of violence. The results of a questionnaire distributed to women have been centralized to develop statistics for a database regarding the phenomenon of violence in the family and in society." – Bihor-Oradea Women's Organisation, Romania. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Civic Engagement in Romania)



- ✓ Link program participants with broader advocacy efforts to oppose marginalization and to develop inclusive policy alternatives.

### Strengthening Supports in Diverse Constituencies

Inclusion is not simply about bringing diverse groups together. A complex interplay exists between efforts to link diverse communities, increase peer group supports, and strengthen capacities within marginalized constituencies. Inclusion involves building up communities of common interest (for example, those sharing common cultures, gender, ages, abilities, or sexual orientation). Communities need to be able to participate from a position of strength and negotiate confidently with more dominant constituencies. At the same time, connections

### Organisations that oppose exclusion

- ✓ Work sensitively with vulnerable populations (such as undocumented immigrants and refugees) in ways that publicly demonstrate their exclusion but safeguard their security;
- ✓ Help marginalized groups develop the voice and ability to present their perspectives to policy-makers;
- ✓ Identify and confront stigma, discrimination, and systemic causes of exclusion;



and openness across constituencies need to be nurtured. Approaches that may be enabling at one point in the life of a community can later become barriers to interaction, or even worse, justifications for their continued marginalization.

### Community Voices:

“Several community animators developed a work plan to restructure their processes. For example, the Bengali community divided its process up into a men’s process, a women’s process, and a youth process, feeling that respondents would be more comfortable dealing with their own gender and age group. The Bengali women went to parks and kitchens where Bengali women normally gathered, while the Bengali men preferred to call special meetings. The Chinese and Vietnamese outreach processes merged to facilitate more effective management of overlapping community groups. The Tamil team modified its approach to ensure gender-sensitive outreach. The Somali community preferred a few large meetings; the Vietnamese community preferred to visit ESL classes and service programs or interview



one-on-one through a door to door canvas. In the Hispanic and Native communities, data was gathered door to door, but the door to door visits were also used to promote large meetings that provided for a different type of discussion. In the Anglophone community, in-depth, one-on-one, hour-long interviews with prominent residents proved most appropriate. For youth, small informal meetings worked best.” – *Regent Park Redevelopment Community Consultations, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004*

“The use of volunteering is a central strategy in community building. Volunteering is a strange concept in some cultures. However, in Canada, it is a formalized process of giving time and talent

instead of money. It is the glue that holds the fabric of Canadian society together. Civil engagement is the most fundamental human right, and the best way to build social capital in a society is to build networks among its individual members. By helping others, we are helping ourselves, meeting the needs of the larger society, investing in the social safety net, and helping those who are most vulnerable. Through this work we are also practicing the most practical form of social inclusion. Groups that normally would not be working together come together to help out on something larger than oneself." – WoodGreen Community Services, Volunteer Program, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004

"It is not always about involving everyone together all of the time. In the beginning we encountered many challenges to promoting the need for sex education in the schools, and were greatly opposed by the teachers, parents, and media as well. We lacked cooperation from all sectors of the society, including the local non-government organisations. When we formed the groups with different stakeholders irrespective of sex and age, the output was not solid and the

young girls felt particularly shy to express their feelings and the real problems they were facing. So we learned to begin discussions with more homogeneous groups in terms of age and sex." – NYSASDRI, Orissa, India. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example *Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Orissa*)

"The particularity of Centrum Wspierania Aktywnosci Lokalnej (CAL) is in its approach to community development in Poland. Often, the CAL approach does not establish new organisations. Instead, it trains senior staff working in government-affiliated institutions such as culture houses, social welfare centres and neighbourhood clubs. The idea is to transform these organisations, which have very limited mandates, into local activity centres that respond to the needs of the entire community. This approach constitutes a radical change in the way these institutions normally work. For instance, in Gdańsk, one centre that has participated in this approach was established to work with young people who had been released from institutions for the disabled. However, no consideration was



given at the outset to working with the neighbourhood to promote the integration of the disabled. This centre was established in a poor area of the city with high unemployment, inadequate housing, high alcoholism, and few social services. Despite initial apathy within the neighbourhood and resistance from the governing bureaucrats, the centre created a meeting place for children and youth of the neighbourhood in order to facilitate contact between disabled youth and other young people." – IFS Executive Director, Field Report, 2001 (see case example Mobilizing for Institutional Change in Poland)



### To encourage diverse communities to participate confidently in shared initiatives, neighbourhood centres

- ✓ Strengthen social support networks within and between distinct groups;
- ✓ Link diverse constituencies (for example, residents, government, local business, and schools) in shared community-building efforts;
- ✓ Build upon the contributions, skills, and capacities of all community members;
- ✓ Promote skills development, self-reliance, and peer support;
- ✓ Build the capacity to identify, challenge, and transform structural barriers that perpetuate exclusion in their communities;
- ✓ Use integrated strategies (such as a family systems approach, working with all ages, and cross-generational programming) to adapt to complex and dynamic communities.

## Using the Arts and Multi-Faceted Strategies for Communication and Expression

Neighbourhood centres and settlement houses employ a range of strategies to build community. In addition to more traditional social service programs, organisations have long realized that theatre, dance, film and video, community festivals, music, and other arts, along with radio, print, and electronic communications are all powerful vehicles for engaging diverse constituencies. These forms of expression and communication can be used to transcend boundaries of language, space, and culture. At the same time, artistic expression gives people room to use their own voices to relate their unique experiences.

### Community Voices:

“HATS (Health Action Theatre for Seniors), a community theatre project, encourages multicultural seniors (speaking Portuguese, English, and Vietnamese) to use action theatre techniques to identify health issues, participate in debate, and solve problems. Action theatre relies heavily on non-verbal methods to promote involvement across languages and with community members who have low literacy skills. The philosophical underpinnings of this work were pioneered by the Brazilian cultural activist Augusto

Boal as part of his development of the Theatre of the Oppressed. This approach to community discussion and action is fundamentally participatory, enabling the sharing of diverse perspectives, and positioning the participants’ knowledge and experience as central. Audience members become the actors, stepping in to re-enact a role from their own perspective, and suggesting alternate resolutions to conflictual or complex challenges. We have used this process to explore issues of elder abuse, access to health and social services, racism and discrimination, community safety, home care, and medical challenges facing seniors.” – St. Christopher House, Health Action Theatre for Seniors, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004

“For the TARSHI (Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) Project to work in rural India, we use technology to reach people. We developed the TARSHI Telephone Helpline, which offers information, counselling, and referrals on reproductive and sexual health. This program is now reaching people of all classes, communities,



ages, and sexual orientation." – NYSASDRI, Orissa, India. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example [Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Orissa](#))

"Local kids were fantastic. At the outset, gangs were fighting, but one of the actors decided to integrate some of the street language of gangs into the script. This attracted young people to the performance – they felt accepted." – Oxford House, [Oh Art! Little Drummer Girl Community Theatre Production](#), London. IFS interview, 2004

"The Children's Peace mail project was started in 1998 by a twenty-two-year-old Mexican engineering student. With the assistance of the United Nations Information Centers, he was successful in engaging children in fifty-two nations to conceptualize ideas of peace envisioned for the world. The project held an exhibition in Mexico City that included art, dance, and drama with children of Mexico City and invited youth staff members of the partner organisation, Goddard Riverside Community Center in New York. What has come out of our involvement and excitement in coordinating the United States participation in the project has been creating connections between children of the world and their longing for peace. We have gained a greater commitment to generate possibilities for children

to understand the instrumental role they may play in carrying out their wishes and hopes for the future of our world." – Goddard Riverside Community Center, New York. Workshop presentation, IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004

"In the 1980s, a civil war drove people from Somalia to Great Britain for refuge. Oxford House became a home-away-from-home for the early arrivals because it was in the heart of the East End, had a café already run by a Somali woman, and provided office space for Somali-run organisations leading the relief campaigns. The Somali projects developed through the work of volunteers and a few staff, mostly Somalis, who assisted the newcomers. At the outset, Oxford House provided a safe home for Somali refugees, and yet, being understaffed and beset with increasing numbers of refugees, much of the work was also disorganized and unfunded. A key development came from an initiative by one of the Oh Arts! workers, who





helped the Somali volunteers to organize and run a Somali arts and cultural festival in 1989 – the first of fifteen successive annual Somali arts festivals. The Somali festival served as both a cultural celebration and also a vehicle for helping people reflect on what they left behind. The arts work with the Somali community formed the foundation on which Oxford House has been able to secure funding for a development worker, an employment project, and a network of Somali-led community groups, and has helped many Somali projects to become more established and to reach beyond the basic needs for food and shelter." – Oxford House, London. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example [A Somali Home-Away-from-Home in East London](#))

“The building of a mosaic encourages an exploration of diversity and lends itself to inclusion. There are both individual (or personal) and collaborative (or collective) aspects to this

workshop, which encourages a multi-faceted understanding of diversity and one’s place in the larger community. Collaborative work on the pieces promotes direct communication and forges personal relationships. When the pieces are brought together and mounted, a new reflection of the collective emerges, which, in turn, can spark further dialogue. Participants are encouraged to see multiple points of view and expressions, and thereby gain a greater understanding of their fellow community members.” – [Beyond Words, community sculpture workshop, Toronto IFS interview, 2004](#)

### Neighbourhood centres that facilitate communication and expression

- ✓ Use a range of arts and media to engage community members who are isolated and experience language, culture, age, or ability as barriers to participation;
- ✓ Stage community celebrations and events that weave together forms of expression involving diverse constituencies, and that build understanding and shared visions of inclusion.

## Establishing Networks for Learning and Exchange

Community building requires great commitment and an unwavering attention to local conditions and possibilities. Paradoxically, this local focus can lead to a narrowed viewpoint that limits opportunities to build upon the lessons learned by other practitioners. Networking stands out as a vital antidote, offering a means to gain a broader understanding of community work.

### Community Voices:

"Neighbourhood Centres have no objection if other social institutions steal their ideas. Just the opposite. We are pleased when this happens because it is good for people when these ideas become more and more common in the field of social work. And this is what IFS is all about: learning from each other, sharing good practices worldwide." – Herbert Scherer, IFS 2003 EuroGroup Seminar, Kaunas, Lithuania

"The development, structure, and objectives of Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea have been shaped through a process of international networking facilitated by the IFS. Using the IFS forums for discussion and exchange, and drawing upon the international examples of effective relationships between community-based



organisations and government, Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea has been most effective in promoting the necessity for local governments and authorities in Romania to collaborate with and encourage the growth of the NGO (non-governmental organisation) sector. Through this work, Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea and other community-led organisations are being

recognized for their capacity to deliver important services, mobilize and support volunteers, and facilitate civic engagement." – Bihor-Oradea Women's Organisation, Romania. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Civic Engagement in Romania)

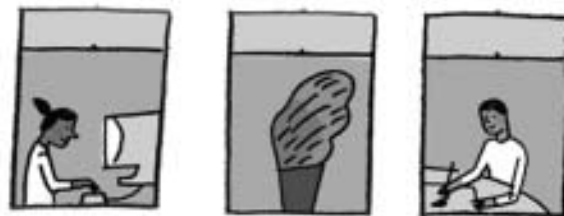
"All of us who are working separately need to find one another to work together for strength in struggle. We also need to recognize that our work loses force and meaning if it is only palliative for the moment and does not involve us with others, at home and abroad, in organizing to fight the social injustice which inflicts the blow."

– Bernard J. Wohl. Paper presented at the 18th International IFS Conference, Jerusalem, 1998

"The Livani Foundation "Balta Maja" works extensively with excluded populations, including Slavish minorities and persons who have special needs, such as mental and physical disabilities, with the goal of enabling their direct involvement and control over service planning and the development of policies that will facilitate their inclusion in economic and social spheres. One process we have used in this regard was an extensive social mapping process that documented the needs and capacities of community members. Through this work, the foundation generated

significant connections with local residents and a detailed understanding of local realities." – Livani Foundation "Balta Maja," Latvia. IFS interview, 2004 (see case example Civic Engagement and Change in Latvia)

"Our association works as an umbrella organisation for over 500 Jewish community centres in Israel and worldwide. The Jewish community centres worldwide are dedicated to the common purpose of Jewish continuity through educational, cultural, and recreational activities. The goal of the Israel Federation of Community Centers (IFCC) is to unify, strengthen, and enrich individuals and organisations involved in the field of community work in Israel and worldwide. The association with the IFS is an integral part of this strategy [...] it is our window to what is happening in international communities. This connection builds partnerships and networks that are used to share information, to learn from past experiences, and develop joint working programs." – Israel Federation of Community Centers, Jerusalem. IFS interview, 2004



"You can't just focus on your own agency. You need to work with other agencies to effect change because all the agencies are experiencing the same problems to different extents. When agencies get together, the city listens much more to them. Community is about doing things together."  
 – Bernard J. Wohl. IFS Conference workshop discussion, Toronto, 2004

"In our country [Germany] and in the Western world in general the perception of these [political] changes was that the people in the East would just have to adjust to our Western system and learn from our experience in this system in order to learn how to cope and how to live with it. What we did not expect was the impact this process would have on our own situation and how it would force us to undergo changes ourselves. What we experienced [...] happened in Europe on

the whole. What was put under scrutiny was our concept of democracy, of participation, and the whole question of the role of the state in relation to the individual, to economic forces, and to civic society." – Herbert Scherer, Verband für Sozial-kulturelle Arbeit, Berlin

### To build inclusive communities that value collaboration and networking, neighbourhood centres

- ✓ Share knowledge, expertise and resources, and disseminate lessons learned;
- ✓ Develop collaborative organisational models;
- ✓ Reach out to emerging communities that have new capacities and needs.



## V) CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



“Globalization requires us to think more strategically about the relationship between the state and voluntary organisations. I can see patterns of two scenarios emerging [...] In the first scenario, the voluntary sector becomes a low-cost delivery agent for public services. Sometimes this happens because governments – under pressure to reduce the financial burden of state services – consciously choose to contract non-state organisations that constitute a cheaper, more flexible delivery mechanism [...] often, the state vacates an area of service, and the voluntary sector feels compelled to meet the needs of the most vulnerable [...] but there is another scenario that is far more hopeful. In the second scenario, the voluntary sector does not do what governments won’t do; instead, we

choose to do what governments do very poorly, that is, promote an active, critical, and engaged citizenry with the capacity to fight for social solidarity and inclusive communities.” – Frances Lankin, CEO and President, United Way of Greater Toronto. Keynote address, IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004

“Unfortunately, it is becoming harder to sustain the integrated approach to programming that fosters relationship building. Public and private funding sources target discrete problems and populations, leaving little flexibility to pursue initiatives that focus on building or reinforcing the strengths of a community, which start with relationships between neighbors.” – *Connecting Neighbors*, United Neighborhood Houses of New York, New York, Preface, p. 4., 2001



Inclusion is both a process and an objective. As an objective, it suggests the possibility of social norms and institutions that allow diversity to be celebrated and that enable all peoples to shape a society based on respect, justice, creativity, anti-oppression, and self-determination. Ultimately our identities would be constructed without degrading any other person or group.

Although we can attempt to define inclusion, the practical challenges involved in pursuing it are formidable. This report has attempted to identify key elements and approaches that hold some promise of promoting inclusion in communities. But our analysis also suggests that there is no single path toward inclusivity. The process has to reflect the complex nature of any given community.

“Toronto has the only high school for gay, lesbian, and transgendered young people in Canada. Is this a celebration of diversity and an example of social inclusion or is it a sign that something is wrong in the public system – that social exclusion has driven some young people to seek a safe haven outside of public schools?” – [Christa Freiler. Plenary address, 20th International IFS Conference, Toronto, 2004](#)



“Erasmus University’s Han Entzinger admits to being surprised at the speed of the transformation in Dutch attitudes [changing negatively towards immigration]. But he also believes Canada may be insulated from the same kind of backlash because, unlike Holland, it has [...] practised a different kind of multiculturalism, he says, one in which institutions such as schools and political parties embrace immigrants. “We in Holland called it multiculturalism but it was, at the same time, a form of exclusion,” he says. “What is more multicultural? To open up your own institutions to newcomers or give them their own institutions as we did?” – [Andrew Duffy. "The Dutch transformation", Toronto Star, October 1, 2004](#)

“Another factor throughout the period was the balance between small, Somali-led community groups and the larger multi-purpose agencies

such as Oxford House, who delivered services for the Somali community as part of a wider range of work. In the late 1990s there was an emphasis on capacity-building for small community organisations that could be more accountable to their communities than the larger charities. Funding was diverted to this capacity-building but they were generally too dependent on key individuals, so the organisations were, generally speaking, not as effective as Somali staff working within larger organisations such as Oxford House. This debate about effectiveness and accountability continues in all parts of the voluntary and community sector in the UK and a balance now seems to have evolved where the strengths of each type of organisation can be harnessed through increased partnership and consortium working." – Oxford House, London. IFS interview, 2004

"The development of the Bengali Women's Group was astounding. Women were inventive, supplied good information, got involved, and maintained a high standard throughout the process.



Consultations about housing redevelopment also enabled a process where the Bengali Women's Group went from being isolated and disorganized to being a functioning association. At the same time, their success resulted in tensions from other constituencies. What was perceived as unequal assistance to the Bengali community created some strain and resentment among other cultural groups in the community." – Regent Park Redevelopment Community Consultations, Toronto. IFS interview, 2004





As we explore the topic of inclusion and community, the following significant questions emerge:

- Under what conditions are secular institutions and multicultural religious practices compatible?
- Can the rule of law in a given country encompass different processes for applying and defining justice for different communities?
- How can the rights of newcomers be reconciled with the rights of indigenous or aboriginal peoples?
- How can the unique identity and capacity of minority constituencies be strengthened in ways that do not promote ghettoization?
- How should universal services and entitlements be supplemented by special supports to achieve the outcomes and not just the conditions for equitable access?

The challenges of promoting inclusion have always been significant, but today's globalized world presents new complexities and an urgency to learn how we can build community across diverse interests. Professor Miu Chung Yan contends that in such a context a "communitarian approach, which relies on the benevolence of people's goodwill, is necessary but not sufficient for nurturing citizen participation."

The professor goes on to observe that contemporary settlement houses "can be a useful bridge across diverse interests in the community." Yan argues that this bridging role "is particularly important for the post-traditional community, a fragmented condition in which we cannot assume a unitary identity of belonging to the community." Yan feels that people's interests and images of community are more diversified than ever, and that the achievement of inclusion "requires constant dialogue for transitional consensus and strategic solidarity among fragmented interest groups." – Miu Chung Yan. *Bridging the fragmented community: Revitalizing settlement houses in the global era. Journal of Community Practice, 12, 51-69, 2004*

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## WE MUST CONTINUE TO CHAMPION THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC SOCIETY AND ENGAGEMENT

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Settlement houses and neighbourhood centres have a central role to play in promoting inclusion, and offer a tested approach to combining service delivery, community engagement, and working for change that can be adapted across communities and nations.

To understand more about how we can promote inclusion in local communities, we will need to examine more fully the interactions among the policies and practices of our social institutions, and determine how they can most effectively encourage inclusion. We believe that there are some helpful and transferable lessons that could

guide people's work in this regard, though the application of any principles will always need to change to accommodate the unique realities of each circumstance.

It is also critical that we expand our capacity for international dialogue and analysis, and work together to understand how local practice and national policies strengthen or inhibit inclusion in our communities.

Finally we must continue to champion the importance of civic society and engagement, not as a cheap substitute for public services and promoting common welfare, but as a core mechanism for mobilizing communities to learn together, and to build our capacity to live in harmony and justice.





## VI) CASE EXAMPLES

This section presents seventeen examples of neighbourhood centre and settlement house initiatives from around the world. The case studies are drawn from Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, India, Israel, Canada, and the United States. Each case presented here illustrates key practices of inclusion identified in the Community Inclusion Checklist outlined in section IV. Here they are again:

### Community Inclusion Checklist

- ✓ Organisational commitments to inclusion and change
- ✓ Creating welcoming and safe environments
- ✓ Promoting civic engagement and opposing exclusion
- ✓ Strengthening supports in diverse constituencies
- ✓ Using the arts and multifaceted strategies for communication and expression
- ✓ Establishing networks for learning and exchange

Every country, and indeed every neighbourhood centre and settlement house, faces its own challenges. This section begins with a special

introduction to the unique situation facing community organisations in Eastern Europe, which is followed by case studies involving Latvia, Poland and Romania. The section continues with case studies from western European countries, namely Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Next, the section presents case studies from Israel and India. The section ends with reports from North America; five from Canada and three from the United States.

### COMMUNITY BUILDING AND INCLUSION IN EASTERN EUROPE

The implementation of new political and economic policies in central and eastern European countries since their independence from the former Soviet Union has resulted in significant changes that are only gradually being addressed by these societies. In particular, the transition to market economies resulted in job losses in the industrial and agricultural sectors. In some cities, these job losses have been offset by service sector growth. However, in rural areas, state farms were dismantled and little assistance was provided for small farmers to buy equipment and resources for their land.

As a result, many rural people are limited to subsistence farming, and many old collective farm buildings stand abandoned in the fields.

Social policy and planning has responded slowly to these new realities. It has been difficult to make the transition from a top-down system, where the state provided all services and denied the existence of social problems, to the newer free market context. The promotion of community work has been restricted by a lack of financial resources, a lack of trained practitioners, the resistance of many bureaucrats to change, and historic attitudes of distrust and dependency. As in other countries, the decentralisation process shifted many national, regional, and state responsibilities (such as health, education, and social services) to the local level, with few additional financial resources. As a result, many vulnerable people became isolated and neglected.



The legislative framework governing the non-profit sector in these countries is being developed gradually and does not always support the sector. For example, before 2000, volunteerism itself violated labour laws and was therefore illegal in Lithuania.

The IFS member organisations in Central and Eastern Europe have begun to build social infrastructure and assert the central role of the non-profit sector in promoting inclusive communities.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CHANGE IN LATVIA

[www.baltamaja.lv/en/indexe.htm](http://www.baltamaja.lv/en/indexe.htm)

“Promoting civic engagement in Latvia and many other Eastern European countries is a challenge. We need to change the way of thinking. The old way said: “I am a small piece, I have no value, I have no strength to change anything.” To change this way of thinking, the most important thing is to take the first step! Everything starts from an idea: even a crazy, strange, unrealistic idea!”

– Irina Kulitane, Director, Balta Maya



Irina Kulitane founded the Balta Maja foundation in Livani, Latvia. She had no training in social development but wanted to “change things.”

Latvians had maintained their language and culture through centuries of external domination, but the fall of the Soviet Union brought rapid economic changes. Livani's industrial base collapsed, leaving widespread unemployment. There was little social support for young or elderly people or for those with disabilities.

In this context, Balta Maja which means white house was established in 1996 to promote social foundation between society and individuals. The foundation works extensively with excluded

populations, including Slavic minorities and people who have intellectual and physical disabilities. The goal is to help these people participate in planning services, programs and policies that facilitate their social and economic inclusion.

Balta Maja's work has involved recruiting community volunteers, opening a dialogue with local authorities and business leaders, and celebrating success. Intellectually and physically disabled persons are among the most excluded groups in central and eastern Europe. In Livani, the major hurdle to overcome was the attitude of the public – and the families themselves – that these persons could not learn or achieve anything. Balta Maja established a program for persons with learning disabilities who were isolated at home.

Balta Maja staff and volunteers went door to door to persuade families to allow these family members to participate in an arts program. Soon after, Balta Maja invited residents, families, and the mayor of Livani to an art exhibit featuring works by the program participants.

This celebration helped to change negative stereotypes and resulted in increased enrolment.

Modelled on neighbourhood centres in the Netherlands, Balta Maja has built positive relationships with local government. In fact, the white house from which the foundation operates was donated by the local government. In turn, Balta Maja provides important services to the government through its support to the community. In 2002, it agreed to complete a seven-year development and strategic plan for the local government.

Balta Maja also influences social policy at a national scale. It vigorously promotes the type of civic engagement necessary to include vulnerable and isolated people in the development of new social policies.

For Irina Kulitane, NGOs *absolutely must* reach out to governments. “We must make dialogue with those who do *not* think as we do. That includes government. After all, civil servants sit in their offices in Riga [the capital]; how can they really understand what is going on? So, we can plan the best things, but if there is no supportive legislation and no support from local and national governments, our actions will not be durable. NGOs need to show reality, to make dialogue. Governments are not necessarily

unwilling but they don't always see that change is needed. Freedom to think and talk is the best we have for now. If you understand this, all gates are open.”

Through dialogue, NGOs now have the opportunity to make their views known and to act as intermediaries between local citizens and national decision-makers. Balta Maja believes that the more developed NGOs must maintain contact with the grassroots and support smaller organisations. That is why it is supporting the development of sixteen new community centres in the rural countryside around Livani. As Irina Kulitane says, “If we want to win [in our social development work], we need an army, and our army is the other organisations, working everywhere, keeping us strong.”



## MOBILIZING FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN POLAND

Centrum Wspierania Aktywnosci Lokalnej (CAL), are local activity centres, first established as part of a pilot project in 1997. The aim was to respond to citizen alienation in Poland, including

- lack of identity of residents with their community
- lack of feeling of responsibility for local needs
- reluctance to get involved in local problem solving
- absence of organisations or structures that promote civic activity
- lack of civic support for local government

In response, CAL initiated a unique approach to community development in Poland. It focused on training staff in existing institutions, such as



culture houses, social welfare centres, and neighbourhood clubs. The idea is to transform these organisations, which have limited mandates, into Local Activity Centres that meet broader community needs. The long-term goals include

- developing local solidarity
- creating strong and integrated local communities
- mobilizing local government institutions

CAL's two year training course, organized on weekends and in a summer session, instructs staff groups in all aspects of community work, including assessing community needs, mobilizing residents, participatory planning, creating partnerships with other groups and institutions, and developing volunteerism. The course also uses consultants from Oxford House in England, a study trip abroad, and continued support after the training provided by CAL "coaches," who maintain support networks and assist with fundraising for local activities. The project is funded by foreign donors and the Polish regional and national governments. Some one hundred local centres across Poland now use the CAL method.

For example, eight years ago, a centre in Gdańsk was established to work with de-institutionalized, disabled young people. Initially the Gdańsk centre was established with no consideration as to how the centre would work with the local neighbourhood to promote the integration and inclusion of community members with disabilities. The centre was also situated in a very poor area of the city with high unemployment, inadequate housing, and few social services.

The director of this centre participated in the CAL training initiative and decided to implement some of its principles to change attitudes about the disabled and to promote civic engagement and a holistic approach to social development. Despite initial apathy within the neighbourhood and resistance from the governing bureaucrats, the centre has succeeded in broadening its work to create a meeting place for children and youth of the neighbourhood that facilitates contact between disabled youth and other young people. This process was begun by first reaching out to groups and institutions within the community, including the local Catholic Church, and collaboratively mounting a summer festival of

culture and arts. By planning an activity that interested the whole community, the centre won the trust of partners and local residents. Over time, these relationships led to a network of support for disabled children and generated more programs and activities for young people in the community.

Across a number of centres, the training initiatives have shifted the participants' way of thinking, and created networks of holistic community work. These centres are taking the lead in assessing needs of the community, promoting partnerships with other groups (local institutions, churches, police, and other NGOs), and reaching out to previously excluded residents.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ROMANIA

With the end of dictatorship in 1989, as centralized economic structures crumbled without new systems in place, Romanians faced unemployment and a lowered standard of living. NGOs emerged to meet growing social and economic challenges. Formerly, the Romanian state had claimed total



responsibility for delivering services and ensuring economic and social well-being. Now these responsibilities had to be assumed by means of new collaboration involving individuals, families, communities, and government.

Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea was formed in 1993 as an organisation dedicated to improving the lives of families in Romania, with an emphasis on supporting women's and girls' capacity to engage fully in society's economic and social realms, and to expand their representation politically. Its objectives include

- eliminating violence against women and girls, youth, and small children
- respecting universal human rights and ensuring that mothers, children, and families get protection and essential social supports, such as home care for the elderly
- promoting women in the economic, cultural, social, and political life of communities
- increasing women's access to education and professional training

Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea responded creatively to Romania's new realities. Its Open Windows Towards the Sky project established local networks of volunteers who donate time and resources and work with local health departments

to deliver social and health care services to the elderly. As well, its Equal Opportunities Political Program aims to increase the number of women who hold elected office and leadership positions in business and cultural institutions. This work has involved extensive community education, political awareness campaigns, study circles, negotiations with political party executives, and encouraging women to run as candidates in elections. As a result, the representation of women in the local and county councils of Bihor-Oradea has grown. In 1996, no women held elected office in these governments. In the elections of 2000, four women were elected to the local council and two to the county council. In the elections of June 2004, eight women were elected to the local council and ten to the county council.

Aided by more than eighty volunteers, Women's Organisation Bihor-Oradea has demonstrated that





## ARTISTS OF CHANGE AT UFAFABRIK (GERMANY)

[www.ufafabrik.de](http://www.ufafabrik.de)

“The main thing is to do things together, to live together, to make arts together, and to have the power to change things.” – [ufaFabrik community member](#)

In 1979, West Berlin was one of the most expensive cities in Europe. Many people, especially youths, could not afford housing. Consequently, some individuals took to squatting – the practice of occupying and living in abandoned buildings.

One building taken over in this way was the former Universal Studios film studio in Berlin. The studio, famous for many productions throughout the 1930s and 1940s, was abandoned after the Second World War. In 1979, a group of young artists moved into the dilapidated facility, shortly before the planned demolition of the buildings. This action was referred to as the Big Post Office Robbery as Universal Studios had sold the buildings to the local post office. Once the youth moved into the facility it was not possible for the police to order them out, because it was not clear

education and engagement help develop the social and economic structures required in a democracy – a significant accomplishment, given that volunteerism and NGOs had not previously existed in Romania.

To a great degree, the development, structure, and current objectives of Women’s Organisation Bihor-Oradea have evolved as a result of international networking facilitated by the IFS. Using IFS forums for discussion and exchange, and drawing upon international examples of effective relationships between community-based organisations and government, Women’s Organisation Bihor-Oradea has promoted the NGO sector in Romania.



whether the building belonged to the post office or the local government. Instead of evicting the youth, the government eventually ceded the facility to the ufaFabrik, a group of young artists working together to realize their dreams and visions.

This was the beginning of a one-of-a-kind European experiment in creating community. Old film studio buildings and their extensive grounds were transformed not just into an artists' residence, but also into a local artistic, social service, and ecological centre. Many lower income families living nearby were initially skeptical of the artists' intentions. But over time, this unique redevelopment process used the arts to engage, include, and ultimately revitalize the entire community.

New ideas have been implemented at the ufaFabrik over the past twenty-five years, involving ecology and sustainable development, the testing of concepts for producing culture, and approaches to social development and neighbourhood work. Today the activities of the thirty residents and over 150 co-workers continue to be informed by the vision of shaping a meaningful integration of living and working with culture, creativity, and community.



At the moment, the programs and activities at ufaFabrik include

- the International Culture Centre that offers free space for performances by international artists, festivals, in-house productions, comedy, cabaret, dance, world music, children's programs, and professional theatre presentations, as well as a guest house for visiting artists
- the Neighbourhood and Self-Help Centre, that provides assistance with social, health, and family matters. Services include family care services, a daycare centre, ecology programs for local school groups, and a Medical Centre
- The Children's Circus School, which is committed to the development of talented young performers

- a variety of Ecology Projects that combine food production and alternative energy systems on the grounds of the ufaFabrik. These grounds remain a green space within the metropolis
- the Children's Farm, where children are invited to get to know and care for domestic pets and farm animals
- a private school with an enrolment of forty children
- the in-house Organic Bakery, natural foods store, and confectionery
- the Café Olé, which serves as a relaxed breakfast café during the day and as a romantic site by night

UfaFabrik, which celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004, now operates ten additional community centres across Berlin.



## DANGEROUS MINDZ DEBATES (THE NETHERLANDS)

Research conducted by Stedelijk Jongerenwerk Amsterdam (SJA) – a youth foundation in the Netherlands – has shown that it is important to offer activities to youth that are related to their own cultural and ethnic identity. Factors that influence the choice of leisure activities for youth include: ethnicity, age, income, level of education, and gender. Lifestyle choices and identification with sub-cultures have less influence on the choice of leisure activities. Youth are also generally interested in large spectacles, festivals, and events. Ethnic minority youth in Amsterdam participate minimally in the commercial and cultural activities of the city, and therefore need special attention if they are to become involved.

Dangerous Mindz was initiated five years ago by a group of young people who came up with the idea of forming a debating club to discuss day-to-day issues of concern to youth. These issues included school, politics, society, and lifestyle topics such as music, love, and sports. The assumption was that youth have opinions but sometimes lack the skills to articulate their thoughts and engage others in respectful debates on topics of importance to them. Youth represent the future of the society in which they live and



need support to present themselves to others. The program seeks to build communication and presentation skills, increase self assurance, and foster respectful engagement across differences.

Dangerouz Mindz needed a location to stage debates for young audiences of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. SJA's Youth Information Centre, The Site, was not only willing to accommodate the debating club but also appointed a project manager to support the youths in the development of their project and assist them in raising funds to organize the debates. In 2003, Dangerouz Mindz began holding monthly debates at The Site and celebrated its first anniversary on January 30, 2004.

The program was designed to be entertaining and informative at the same time. It aimed to provide a way for youth to remain active, and to learn skills they could use in dialogues with people of all ages. In addition to smaller debates, the model

includes larger scale events with hundreds of participants staged in neighbourhoods across Amsterdam. These events involve debates, along with music and live performances.

Youth representing the diverse cultures and interests across the city are involved in the development and implementation of these programs. This ensures that their interests and skills are continually promoted and that they determine the agenda. The program content reflects the interests of diverse youth, and the events then become opportunities for mutual learning about different practices, cultures, belief systems, and for sharing varied perspectives on complex issues.

Politics can be a contentious and confusing terrain for many youth. Dangerouz Mindz has set out to demystify political issues by organizing debates concerning the European Union and current events in Europe. When the war in Iraq began in 2003, many youth did not understand the background issues. Through a series of debates, many youth gained a greater understanding of the war and its impact on their lives.

During its first active year, Dangerouz Mindz has attracted the attention of other institutions, and is being recognized as an effective way to engage youth. Many initiatives are emerging that will see the model applied in other venues.

## A SOMALI HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME IN EAST LONDON (UNITED KINGDOM)

[www.oxfordhouse.org.uk](http://www.oxfordhouse.org.uk)

In the 1980s, civil war drove Somali refugees to Great Britain. There were historical ties between Britain and Somaliland (the north of Somalia), and many Somalis came to the East End of London because some Somali seamen had settled there earlier. The influx of Somali refugees and the desire to aid them in their settling process inspired the founding of various Somali projects at Oxford House, a multi-purpose community centre in Bethnal Green, London. Bethnal Green serves a diverse community. More than 50 per cent of residents in the area are ethnic minorities, particularly Bangladeshis and Somalis. Oxford House became a home-away-from-home for the early arrivals because it was in the heart of the East End, had a café run by a Somali woman, and provided office space for organisations leading relief campaigns in Somalia.

Activities for Somali newcomers were developed through the work of volunteers and a few staff, mostly Somalis. At the outset, Oxford House provided a safe home for Somali refugees, and yet, being understaffed and beset with increasing numbers of refugees, much of the work was also disorganized and underfunded.

A key development involved an initiative by one of the Oxford House arts workers, who helped the Somali volunteers organize an arts and cultural festival in 1989 – the first of fifteen annual Somali festivals. The Somali festival served as a cultural celebration and a vehicle for helping people consider what they had left behind.

Eventually, more secure funding was obtained, which helped the Somali projects to become well established and to reach beyond the basic needs for food and shelter. Programs focusing on interpretation and translation, advocacy, and advice were developed. English language lessons were provided. Arts and cultural programming expanded. Funding came from a number of national and local government programs and from charitable trusts, all of which made it possible to fund a Development Worker, an employment project and a network of Somali-led community groups.

Oxford House has also achieved the Quality Mark of the Legal Services Commission for its Immigration Project, which provides advice, advocacy, and representation for refugees and asylum-seekers from Somalia and the Horn of Africa. The Immigration Project greatly increases their chances of getting a fair hearing at their appeal and therefore people who face great disadvantage have an opportunity to significantly improve their quality of life.



Although the Somali community in the UK now numbers more than 100,000, the largest concentration remains in London, and particularly in the Borough of Tower Hamlets where Oxford House is situated. The number of Somalis is growing, and the nature of the community is changing as young Somalis who were born and educated in the UK now start to outnumber the immigrants.

The core staff team of Oxford House is now broadly representative – ten are Somali, four are Bangladeshi, five are African-Caribbean and eleven are White European. The youth work team includes five Somalis. The majority of Oxford House staff live in the local area. Oxford House features a Somali café and the Somali language is spoken by ten of its staff and by around twenty volunteers and four of the trustees. In addition to being sensitive to language, Oxford House respects and provides for the spiritual and religious practices of Somalis, all of whom are Muslim, with a prayer room at the centre.

In the late 1990s, there was an emphasis on capacity-building for small community organisations that could be more accountable to their communities than the larger charities. Funding was diverted to this capacity-building; however, these small community organisations were too dependent on key individuals and were, generally speaking, not as effective as Somali staff working within organisations such as Oxford House. Oxford House is a long-established charity and its one-hundred-year track record has helped it attract funding. The size and structure of the organisation meant that it could invest time and resources of its own in the early days of the Somali projects.

The debate about effectiveness and accountability continues in all parts of the voluntary and community sector in the UK, and a balance now seems to have evolved where the strengths of each type of organisation can be harnessed through increased partnership and the development of consortia.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN ORISSA (INDIA)

People aged ten to nineteen account for more than one-fifth of India's population. Youth have limited access to any form of sexual and reproductive health education, and almost no resources of this kind are available in rural communities. At the same time, young people in developing countries such as India are at increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, and unsafe abortion, and suffer high levels of abuse and sexual violence. Recent UN figures for India indicate a significant increase in HIV/AIDS cases – 4.58 million at the end of 2002, up from 3.97 million the previous year.

In response, the National Youth Service Action and Social Development Research Institute, a non-profit development agency in the state of Orissa, established its Sexual and Reproductive Health initiative. The program helps young people understand physical and social issues concerning sex and reproduction, and raises awareness among key stakeholders in the community about the need to include sex education in the school curriculum.

The institute's initial work involved a number of workshops and educational camps on sex education and reproductive health. Despite initial resistance from parents and school personnel, a total of 9,000 participants participated in the workshops, seminars, and orientation meetings.

While effective in raising awareness and generating some momentum for policy change, these events did not reach a number of diverse youth populations. Consequently, the institute developed a telephone help-line called Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues. This service for youth offers information, counselling, and referrals on reproductive and sexual health issues. This strategy was found to be extremely successful in reaching youth populations across diverse classes, communities, ages, and sexual orientations.





As the institute implemented these sexual and reproductive health initiatives, it encouraged youth participants to take key roles in driving the work and making decisions.

In conducting this advocacy and community education initiative, the institute learned important lessons about the strategy and goals of inclusion. For example, initially it invited all stakeholders to attend programs together. However, this limited the participation of youth and women, who felt less confident to speak in the presence of others. This condition



was heightened by cultural taboos inhibiting discussions about sexuality. Safe spaces for discussion necessitated the use of separate spaces, for a period of time, for youth, women and girls, and for parents.

The organisation also learned the importance of persevering in the face of negative reactions, and maintaining links with all the stakeholders, especially those who were most resistant initially. Success in forging social change depends on keeping both the allies and less supportive constituencies in the loop.

Finally, it became clear that the advocacy initiative needed to “get the science right,” and to use clear analysis to support the changes it sought. Without this information, and the ability to put it in a popular form, the project would not have been successful in generating agreement among educators, parents, doctors, government officials, and other decision-makers.

## YOUTH, ARTISTIC EXPRESSION, AND INCLUSION: THE CITY AT PEACE PROGRAM (ISRAEL)

[www.matnasim.org.il](http://www.matnasim.org.il)

[www.cityatpeace.org](http://www.cityatpeace.org)

The City at Peace program began in 1994 in Washington, D.C., by encouraging young people to use the performing arts to build communities and to practise cross-cultural understanding, non-violent conflict resolution and community leadership. In 2000, the organisation expanded its programming across the United States and initiated partnerships with organisations in other countries to develop and apply the concept internationally. Beginning in 2003, the Israel Association of Community Centers partnered with City at Peace to bring this initiative to communities across Israel.

The core program supports teenagers who are committed to personal and community change through a program of self-examination and training that culminates in the creation and performance of an original musical.

Youth of different backgrounds engage in a ten-month long creative process that uses the performing arts to explore their personal, social, and cultural differences, as well as their commonalities. They examine issues of power, self-awareness, mutual respect and understanding, creativity, and conflict resolution. From these trainings and discussions, youth participants work with professional artists to write, produce, and perform full-length theatrical works about their lives, exploring the ever-changing complexities of growing up in their country.

The City at Peace program combines four distinct features

- programmatic direction is jointly decided by youth and staff
- concentration on group process with primary attention on relative power, violence, cross-cultural understanding, conflict resolution, and community building





- participation in the arts to develop skills of analysis and synthesis
- creating personal and social change

Over the past two years City at Peace Israel has engaged twenty-five communities. Coordinated through the Israel Association of Community Centers, community centres across Israel have identified the dominant cultural conflict in their community or region and mobilized youth participants embroiled in these conflicts. In many instances two or more community centres collaborated to include participants from different cultures and perspectives.

Some examples of performances in 2003 include:

- Religious and secular youth worked together to produce a play called "A picture in black and white," a story of two families – one secular, the other religious – living next door to each other. At the centre of the story is a black and white picture, through which the families see colour (staged by Shmulik Hadagas on July 10, 2003).
- Jewish and Arab youth produced "Abandoned Building." A group of Arabs and Jews meet in an abandoned building where they seek shelter from a storm. Trapped together, they are forced to explore the heavy load of their



feelings (staged by Eduardo Kaufman and performed on September 23, 2003).

- New immigrants and old timers produced the "Street of Dreams," where a meeting between street gangs raises all the stereotypes that separate the two populations (staged by Shirley Oded and performed on July 14, 2003).

Young people who participate in the City at Peace program become catalysts for social change in their communities. Through their performances, workshops, and individual actions they communicate and disseminate their vision of a "city at peace" to parents, teachers, siblings, peers, and other community members.

## BEDOUIN BUILDING UPON TRADITION (ISRAEL)

[www.matnasim.org.il](http://www.matnasim.org.il)

Some 1.3 million Israeli-Arab citizens live in Israel. They are a large minority, comprising 19 per cent of the overall population of 6.7 million citizens. The Israeli-Arabs live mainly in the north, in the centre, in mixed towns, and in the Negev, where the Bedouin have recently settled in permanent communities.

Israel ensures basic civil rights to all citizens; however, the majority ethnic group continue to enjoy a preferred status. For example, on a per-capita basis, the government spends two-thirds as much on Arabs as it does on Jews. This creates inequities in terms of local community resources and access to services. Community conditions thus vary greatly across the regions of Israel. The Bedouin are among the most marginalized and poorly supported communities in Israel. Such circumstances present significant impediments to advancing levels of inclusion in Israeli society.

In acknowledgement of these inequities, the government of Israel initiated a number of programs aimed at increasing supports to under-resourced areas. One of the most promising initiatives to date has been its commitment to establishing a national network of neighbourhood centres, and the propagation of this locally managed model for community development and service delivery in all communities. The Israel Association of Community Centers was established in 1969 to provide support and direction to the local neighbourhood centres.

The association prides itself on offering the same range and level of services to Israel's peripheral areas as to the centre, and it emphasizes services for disadvantaged populations throughout the country. Its network includes over 180 community centres, with forty located in the Arab sector. In a country marked by social and religious divisions, the association promotes greater equity and inclusion for all citizens.





The flexibility and adaptability of the neighbourhood centre model has enabled the association to achieve significant successes with programs in disadvantaged communities. One telling example involves its work in the Bedouin communities in the Negev desert.

The Bedouin were a nomadic people, and have only settled in towns in the last generation. Their traditional tents now rest beside modern computers. Significant tensions exist between traditional lifestyles and the younger generation's experience in Israeli society. Many youth leave home to study at university but later do not return to their communities. This is especially striking in the case of women, who were not previously afforded such freedoms in Bedouin communities.

In Hurrah, male elders still direct village life. They meet in the Diwan, the traditional communal and public meeting space, to debate issues and make decisions. The elders work collaboratively with the director of the local neighbourhood centre to develop and support program initiatives in the best interest of community. This presents interesting challenges and complexities, as a

traditional tribal and patriarchal system intersects with a secular model of service delivery. For example, it was realized that young girls needed English language training and computer classes to take advantage of education opportunities. The elders were in full support of the new initiative, even though such educational opportunities would have had no place in their traditional patterns. Similarly, the elders have supported economic development programs where women's embroidery skills now provide them with levels of economic independence that they would not previously have enjoyed.

These program successes in Hurrah result from a neighbourhood centre model that affords local control and leadership, combined with the special skills of its current director, Ali Abu Akean. Ali was once a Bedouin herder. Upon returning from university he saw the urgent need to improve community life so that youth would choose to stay and thus enable valued traditions to flourish. With this commitment, he has been able to build connections with all generations to support positive change, and he has been able to weave together the traditional and new realities faced by the Bedouin.

## WORKING WITH UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN TORONTO (CANADA)

Toronto has a number of non-status immigrants and refugees living without formal documentation. Some of these families are now second-generation residents who have no legal status or rights and are exceedingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre (DPNC) is working to educate government, foundations, and the community about the importance of addressing the needs of this vulnerable community. The centre wants to reduce the stigma attached to this group, to debunk destructive myths, and to create a more open and accepting climate in which undocumented people can receive the support and dignity they deserve as they work toward greater integration into the fabric of Canadian society.

The neighbourhood centre believes that all community members who come to the centre and want to participate should be able to do so. The centre's leaders have helped create an environment for this way of thinking, moving the organisation to a stance that is more inclusive and accessible to non-status persons. The organisation now makes conscious decisions to ensure that new and



existing programs are accessible to non-status people. DPNC is committed to no longer hiding the fact that it works with the non-status population. In a truly healthy community, every person counts.

Government funding for settlement is very restrictive in terms of this target group. For example, certain provincial funds allow DPNC to work only with newcomers who have been in Canada fewer than five years, and do not permit assistance to those who are not officially in the immigration process. The centre therefore decided to seek funding that would allow it to officially work with immigrants without legal status. Having secured this kind of funding from several foundations, DPNC is now one of the few agencies that is able to work with this population

in a more open manner. Prior to this funding, the centre's work was hidden and very much like the life of an undocumented person.

The centre is creative and flexible in the ways it works with non-status people. For instance, in Canada, non-status people cannot work. However, anyone can register a business. The centre has encouraged and assisted one group of non-status women to register a catering business. These women have opened a bank account, registered the business, earned money, and paid taxes while learning skills and participating in meaningful work.

Some undocumented newcomers hesitate to receive support because they are fearful they will face deportation. In some cases, children in these families face difficulty in attending public schools in the area. These families require ongoing support based on trusting relationships to undertake the process of becoming documented.

The programs are also sensitive to the fact that many undocumented newcomers live with a great degree of instability and require specialized services that address their unique challenges. Counselling, information, referral, and advocacy services are particularly important because



undocumented newcomers experience fear, instability, and potential emotional abuse as a result of their lack of official immigration status.

The centre's programs already maintain a high degree of inclusion. Non-status people send their children to the same summer camp as do people with status. The Community Arts project brought together diverse groups and the culminating theatrical event included themes that humanized and highlighted what it is like to be a person without status.

There are challenges to overcome too. In one case, a young girl got into a fight with another girl at school and threatened to expose the girl and her family, all of whom did not have status. The agency intervened, brought them together, and mediated a solution. In other cases, the centre has advocated for non-status workers when

employers have failed to pay their salaries, taken advantage of their immigration status, or threatened to expose them to government officials if they “made trouble.” The centre has used its authority as an agency to advocate and support community members’ rights and set standards of behaviour and attitudes in the community.

The centre is also focusing on establishing links with other partners across the city and advocating together for policy reforms, including promoting a general amnesty that would help end the structural exclusion and exploitation of non-status community members. In advocating on behalf of those without status, the organisation is striving to change the way the general population thinks about this group, and ensuring that they are not forgotten or abused. As one staffperson at the centre observes, these community members “pay sales taxes, and lead active, if anonymous, lives in our community, and they deserve the same respect and access to services as people with [legal immigration] status.”



## LINKING SOCIAL POLICY AND “REAL LIFE” AT ST. CHRISTOPHER HOUSE (CANADA)

[www.stchrishouse.org](http://www.stchrishouse.org)

Over the past decades, Canadian social policies and programs have undergone profound changes, particularly in the area of social assistance. When making these changes, policy-makers in and outside government did not consult with affected community members, or with service-providers. Several years ago, staff and volunteers of St. Christopher House in Toronto noted that they had become increasingly disconnected from the policy-making changes that profoundly affected their community.

Social agencies have had trouble staying abreast of policy and program changes. National, provincial, and local associations have lost core funding and have not been able to provide either sustained leadership or the transfer of knowledge.

In response, St. Christopher House initiated the Community Undertaking Social Policy program. It involved bringing a senior policy-maker into the front-line agency for a few months. The model is based on an “artist in residence” program.



The goal was to establish a dialogue between the policy world and the front-line and community worlds. This work has led to some important successes in shifting social policy in the country, and has underscored the importance of linking policy-makers with the recipients of the programs they construct.

For example, with the help of the program's first "fellow," the agency pointed out to the federal government that upward of 200,000 low-income Canadian seniors were eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement but were not receiving it. The federal department then started to contact these seniors, and at least 70,000 of them are now receiving the supplement to which they are entitled.

The Community Undertaking Social Policy program has also raised public awareness about poorly coordinated income security programs and tax policies. In some circumstances, poor coordination among various government programs and policies resulted in low-income people facing marginal tax rates approaching 100 per cent.

St. Christopher House is now working to design a more appropriate alternative, a form of Tax Prepaid Savings Plan called a Registered Development Savings Plan (RDSP) that would protect the assets of low-income people who are moving in and out of paid employment and welfare programs.

In consultation with policy experts, St. Christopher House has also learned more about the process of policy development and policy change within government. The Community Undertaking Social Policy program fellows have been particularly effective in demonstrating the futility of some of the past advocacy strategies used by the social services sector.

St. Christopher House came to understand the importance of looking for and articulating the "second hand smoke" angle of a social policy issue. In the case of advocating around issues of poverty and income, this means figuring out how to help the broader community understand the ways in which economic inequality affects their lives directly, so that they have some self-interest in poverty reduction, and will support changes to government policies and programs.

St. Christopher House now better recognizes when and how to communicate with people who have different interests, including people far removed from the reality experienced by low-income individuals. At the same time the organisation still recognizes the value of advocacy that aims to break down individual isolation and create solidarity among communities.



## EXPANDING ACCESS AT BIRCHMOUNT BLUFFS (CANADA)

Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre in Toronto involves community residents regardless of ability and background, to promote the enrichment of all. Its mainstream programs are accessible to – and certain programs are specifically geared to – people with disabilities. Community members with disabilities encounter few barriers in accessing programs. They feel welcome and know they may come forward with any issues they may have. Many are surprised and delighted that they may participate in mainstream programs, and their sense of belonging and self-esteem is positively affected.

Seven years ago, when these integrated programs began, many able-bodied people were not accustomed to sharing space in inclusive ways. The centre's leaders advanced the cause of accessibility and inclusion, and community members and stakeholders were invited to join the process. Focus groups gave people a chance to respond to initial proposals. The agency began by testing semi-integrated fitness programs for seniors and people with disabilities.

Over time, the assumptions held by seniors and adults regarding people with disabilities were transformed. Through personal contact, people

lost their fears, adjusted, and had opportunities to participate in programs with others who started out as “different” but ended up expanding the notion of “normal.”

In essence, new norms were defined. The organisation's objectives for inclusion were framed as an issue of rights – the right of all to use publicly funded programs, and the right of all to respect and inclusion. The enrichment potential for the whole community was also highlighted. Inclusion was promoted as a win-win process with the general population, and the organisation worked hard to offset certain tendencies to view change as inconvenient or otherwise negative.



When differences arise, staff approach participants directly to engage them in a process of inquiry and learning, and implement dispute resolution processes if required. Staff deal with difficulties on a case-by-case basis, displaying tact and flexibility. If an individual is still dissatisfied, the agency sets



out to negotiate a new approach. It has taken time for people to work through issues and grapple with a new way of understanding inclusion. Gradually, however, with opportunities for feedback, staff support, and the backing of leadership in the organisation, participants have adjusted to new ways of relating to each other and participating in programs. Through simple exposure to previously unfamiliar people, participants have learned to open themselves to others.

### ONCE A SHORELINE: JUMBLIES THEATRE AND DAVENPORT PERTH NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE (CANADA)

[www.jumbliestheatre.org](http://www.jumbliestheatre.org)

“Going to see *Once a Shoreline* was a magical experience. The play told the story of the community, the history of the area, a poignant tale of an Italian immigrant woman, a 10,000-year-old myth, and the story of a young refugee girl whose mother was afraid to let her use the library, afraid that they would be caught and deported from Canada. A 10,000-year-old medallion tied all these people and events together.” – [an audience member](#)

*Once a Shoreline* was a community play that culminated the art-in-residency initiative with Jumblies Theatre at the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, in west Toronto. Jumblies Theatre facilitated a multifaceted creative process that drew on a range of art forms to nurture public expression, to celebrate the neighbourhood’s diversity, strengths, and heritage, and to create an inclusive, dynamic sense of community that can foster action in many spheres.

Jumblies Theatre and Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre shared a belief in the power and role of live theatre as public celebration, expression, protest, ritual, and testimony, and a desire to

- bring art to people for whom it is not normally accessible, as audience and participants
- explore collaboration between professional artists and non-arts communities
- express local themes, stories, and issues through art
- contribute to positive social change and community development through shared artistic activity

The Arts For All project and *Once a Shoreline* were funded by the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation Urban Issues Program, the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation, the Laidlaw and Harbinger Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, Theatre Ontario, Human Resources Development Canada, Job Connect, and private and business donors.

Frequent workshops, hands-on arts activities, festivals, and events informed the creation of a large-scale “community play” – a form brought to Canada from Britain in 1991 by Dale Hamilton, and a powerful vehicle for artistic expression and social galvanization. This form, adapted by Jumblies Theatre to suit new artistic and urban community contexts, serves as a catalyst for cultural development and social change by exploring and expressing local subject matter, and by creating an experience of community life as it can be, defining “community” not by any limiting category but by inclusion in shared activity.

The Arts for All project spanned close to four years, with time devoted to the artistic and community development process both before and after the production. This generous timeline was an important extension of the traditional community play model, allowing for consideration of the project's long-term positive impact on the community. By establishing multi-year residencies in urban neighbourhoods, Jumblies Theatre and its partners place art and theatre into the centre of community life, empower people, and foster community through collaborative creative ventures.

*Once a Shoreline*, written and designed by Ruth Howard, composed by Wende Bartley, directed by Varrick Grimes, with creative contribution from theatre artists Mara Shaughnessy, Noah Kenneally, Tanya Williams, and many others, told the story of an ancient lake which once extended into the neighbourhood, north to Davenport Road. It used this vanished lake to explore themes of memory, travel, fear, and courage. Three interlocking stories were woven together – that of an old woman who immigrated from Italy in the 1950s, the story of a young girl who has recently moved to Canada and is coping with her lack of official immigration status, and that of a magical lake creature who is trying to find her way home, decoding twelve thousand years of history and change along the way.



Photo by Cylla Von Tiedemann

Community members were involved in all phases of this production – as researchers; as creators of images, ideas, stories, and designs; as makers of puppets, masks, costumes, sculptural props, and scenery; and as organizers, production assistants, performers, and many other roles. More than 300 community members and professional artists collaborated to mount the final production. This level of participation was achieved through the long timeline: a gradual building of trust, nurturing of individual connections, offering accessible and fun events and activities along the way, providing support systems of food, childcare, translation and transportation, and lots of listening and learning.

In addition to staging a weekly arts drop-in, the professional artists recruited participants from a number of social and health programs at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre and other local organisations, including seniors' programs, isolated adults, the Alfa Literacy Program, the Stop Community Food Centre, the South Asian Women's Centre, and local schools. Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese seniors provided pictures and memories to assist with costume design.



*Photo by Cylla Von Tiedemann*

Classes from local schools created an ancient "lake language" that was reflected in the musical score, and designed and made puppets that were used in the show. Many community members were part of the recording process of local voices, stories, and oral history passages.

The play grew out of a collaborative process, with many people contributing to its evolving shape within a framework established by the artistic director and other collaborating artists. The structure was fluid and flexible in order to find a way for everyone to contribute, while maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the whole. The inclusive power of the program derived from its ability to create a community out of disparate

groups and individuals, with no limiting criteria of age, culture, language, ability, economic level, immigrant status, politics, or geographical residency (although activities and outreach efforts related to a specific area, anyone who showed up was included, and some participants crossed the city to take part). Having something meaningful and exciting to work on collectively was a much more important community-building factor than categories created by existing commonalities. In a society that loves to create boxes and boundaries, experiencing this different concept of community, coupled with witnessing the power of art to make something new and wonderful out of nothing, is an experience that opens up new possibilities for how people can live together.

Challenges encountered along the way required creativity, flexibility, and innovation on the part of the directors and participants. For example, the production had a semi-dedicated space in which to work: a church sanctuary space at Davenport Perth Community Centre which is used for services on Sundays. The church space is also available for use by other programs, including Arts for All, during the rest of the week.

The organisers had to juggle to multiple needs for the space while attending to the complicated task of developing the play. This juggling act caused tensions at times. On a couple of occasions, people of other faiths or cultural backgrounds expressed some discomfort with the use of church space. Their concerns were acknowledged, and discussions were held to make all people feel welcomed and included.

Ultimately, the history of shared activities in the space contributed to a sense of belonging and collaboration. In the end, groups were able to negotiate workable terms for the space, and there was cross-pollination across these groups. The artistic director, Ruth Howard, was invited to contribute to church services from time to time and the church ministry and congregations became extremely generous and enthusiastic supporters of the project and production. The space helped create a sense of belonging and ownership for all involved, and promoted partnership and negotiation between groups.

Groups that might otherwise have remained separate came together with the encouragement of the artist-organizers, who sought the participation of all community members. For instance, one group of senior Spanish-speaking women was keen to perform traditional Spanish dances, not initially realizing that the production was an integrated play rather than simply a dance showcase. The artists responded by finding a way to integrate the dance within the story, adapting costumes and music to honour both the original aims of the women, and the aim of the play to reflect and include the diverse experiences of the participants and audience members. The artists also hired a choreographer, Antonio Ramirez, to work specifically with this group. These women would not have ventured outside their own familiar social sphere individually, but as a group they became engaged with the larger community and found a new sense of belonging in it. After the play's run had finished the women decided to take their dance on the road and present it in other venues. A number of these women now also come to weekly Arts For All activities with very diverse participants.

*Once a Shoreline* demonstrated that an extended community arts initiative in partnership with a dedicated professional arts organisation can be a powerful medium to promote inclusion and transform relationships.

## MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMS IN THORNCLIFFE PARK (CANADA)

[www.thorncliffe.org](http://www.thorncliffe.org)

Thorncliffe Park in Toronto is one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods in Canada. The 2001 census indicates that more than 65 per cent of the residents are immigrants, with 30 per cent arriving in the last five years. More than 65 per cent of the residents are visible minorities who are also Canadian citizens. The Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office is a multi-service facility located in the heart of the area.

In the 1980s, the neighbourhood office focused mainly on programs for South Asians and on children's services, though no one was turned away from the organisation. It offered a drop-in program and a children's program for all communities. A number of agencies in the community were focused on serving specific ethnic groups. In 1986–88, the federal government funded a multicultural worker position. This staff member formed a committee to help the agency

plan and evaluate programs, and conduct outreach to diverse communities.





The 1990s was a turning point for the agency, and a time of learning and growth. The neighbourhood office set up processes to engage and listen to the community. As a result, it began to focus on cross-cultural programming.

Through this work, the organisation changed the way it viewed its client population. Initially, it had concentrated on meeting the needs of specific ethno-cultural groups. Over time, rather than focusing on separate groups, the neighbourhood office recognized that needs cut across different cultures. In other words, *unique* community members were *united* through their needs.

The neighbourhood office provides opportunities for community members to meet and socialize with others of different backgrounds who share similar conditions and challenges and who gain support from its programs. No one is excluded by virtue of not knowing English. Neither does the

agency ignore its ethnically diverse client population. The office looks at the neighbourhood through an inclusion lens – seeking to serve people sensitively, in such a way that they will not be separated from other community members.

The neighbourhood office has learned to communicate the fact that tolerance is not enough. Its emphasis is on respect between communities, and on modelling sensitivity to the various cultures in the community, coupled with an attitude that promotes unity through common needs and aspirations.

### BREAKING ICE AT PILLSBURY HOUSE THEATRE (UNITED STATES)

[www.puc-mn.org/html/middle\\_pht.html](http://www.puc-mn.org/html/middle_pht.html)

Pillsbury House Theatre is the arts and culture arm of Pillsbury United Communities in Minneapolis. The programs of Pillsbury House Theatre seek to connect people to one another through powerful arts experiences. The mission of the theatre is to create choice, change, and connection, and, through the larger mission of Pillsbury United Communities, to reduce poverty in the inner city. The theatre is dedicated to promoting diversity and coalition building as a means to undo racism.



Breaking Ice was introduced in 1992 to inspire people to talk to each other about their differences. The theatre program offers customized diversity training around difficult issues.

The Breaking Ice company creates performances, as well as training and workshops for schools, non-profit organisations, community groups, and corporations. The company works with each individual client to create a performance that speaks to an issue that the client wishes to address. The facilitators work with the client group to develop the focus and content of the performance, to plan the post-performance dialogue, and to evaluate the impact of the performance on organisations and individuals immediately and over time.

The performance itself is created using a structured model of improvisation, by a highly trained group of artists with diverse backgrounds and world views. Every performance includes an element of undoing racism, while other social issues addressed in the past have included cultural misunderstanding, homophobia, and violence. Each Breaking Ice performance is followed by a facilitated dialogue that leads audiences through a process of creating possible solutions to complex interpersonal, social, and institutional problems.

Work with a local middle school of 250 students came about through a contact with the federally sponsored "Weed and Seed" agency (weed out crime and seed healthy behaviour). Breaking Ice went into the school to find fifteen students who would embrace the idea of putting together a show about gang violence. During the process, the students worked together for twelve weeks, wrote their own lines, and uncovered stories about each other's lives.

Historical, deep-seated racial tension existed in the school and surrounding community, and during the preparation, two boys – one Native American and the other African American – came to blows. The boys were assigned mentors who worked with them to create a plan for apology,



resolutions, and a set of norms to move the process forward. The performance group supported its peers during this process. During follow-up, teachers and parents noted a change in the boys' behaviour. The performance process and the performance itself helped to resolve tensions.

The success of the Breaking Ice program can be attributed to three elements of its approach: high-quality theatrical performance, customization to the specific culture of the audience group, and the post performance, facilitated dialogue. The theatre has spent the past seven years tinkering with each of these three elements to improve the program. The facilitated dialogue is often the most difficult element because it challenges audiences to talk about things they are uncomfortable discussing, especially in a group setting. Having a skilled facilitator is vital to the overall success of the program.

The Pillsbury House Theatre gets positive feedback from clients, who report an increase in individual awareness and intentions to shift negative behaviour, as well as a positive impact on organisational culture.

## ACCEPTING YOUTH AT THE DOOR (UNITED STATES)

[www.door.org](http://www.door.org)

[www.universitysettlement.org](http://www.universitysettlement.org)

In 1970, the International Centre for Integrative Studies created a task force of young professionals to analyze the social problems affecting America's urban youth. Some of the most serious challenges facing adolescents included drug abuse, crime, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, high rates of school dropout, and unemployment.

The Door was created in New York City in 1972 to address these problems. The Door is part of the youth outreach program of University Settlement, which has worked with the community of New York's Lower East Side since 1886. Each year, over 7,000 young people, aged twelve to twenty-one, come to The Door for a range services in a diverse and caring setting. The majority of these youth come from single-parent families with low incomes, and live in communities with substandard, overcrowded schools and housing, few jobs, and high rates of violence and crime. Many are young women caring for children of their own.



The Door has much to offer at-risk youth, as well as highly motivated and focused youth, and is seen as a trusted, safe, accepting, and effective environment by youth, staff, and funders. The Door's holistic and human approach aims to help each individual member dismantle the complex barriers that stand in the way of success. Youth participate in a wide range of programs, including primary health care, prenatal care, health education, mental health counselling, legal services, ESL and computer classes, tutoring, college preparation, career development and job placement, daily meals, and arts, sports, and recreational activities.



A palpable spirit of acceptance and support has evolved over time, though staff know that it cannot be taken for granted. Programs are subject to constant attention and adjustments, and aim to address the totality of a young person's needs and strengths.

One concrete way that The Door has promoted an atmosphere of acceptance and respect is through its membership process. Youth must accept ground rules if they wish to enjoy the privilege of membership. No gang colours or symbols are permitted at The Door, and youth can be suspended from programs for breaking this policy.

The Door's physical layout reflects its holistic and integrated philosophy. Programs take place on several floors, which feature an open design, few walls, and lots of glass. This allows for easy movement, visibility and interaction. Graffiti is absent because most walls have built-in bulletin boards with space for artwork, notices and messages. Spaces are not formally segmented and don't belong to any one program for long; youth are free to roam from program to program. This environment allows for change and interaction, and enables the development of new initiatives.

At the Door, youth *are* the centre. The Door was established with the aim of putting youth first, and it thrives because staff and volunteers are committed to building an atmosphere of respect, love, and encouragement – vital ingredients for youth to grow in a healthy way. It has also flourished because of the strong positive intention demonstrated by staff and youth. Every year, thousands of young people come to The Door, motivated to change their lives. The talented and energetic staff are committed to responding to the changing needs of these youth, who, in turn, spread the word about The Door. New youth are attracted, bringing their unique gifts and concerns, and a new cycle of high-impact, effective services delivery begins again – an affirmation of The Door's methods, traditions, and openness to change.



## COMMON GROUND ACROSS CULTURES (UNITED STATES)

[www.fhch.org/index.htm](http://www.fhch.org/index.htm)

The Forest Hills Community House is one of the community organisations in New York City where individuals from all immigrant groups come together to develop a foundation for their new life in the United States. Together, they improve their English language skills, learn about the American political and educational systems, gain access to resources for better jobs, share stories, and build friendships across cultural boundaries. Established in the settlement house tradition, the centre embodies the core belief that all persons can and want to grow, and that everyone can contribute to the community. For many, it is a home away from home, a place to finally shed the isolation and anxiety they experience as newcomers to America.

Forest Hills offers immigrant language programs in the heart of a neighbourhood that is said to be the most linguistically diverse in the world. About 120 languages are spoken in area schools, closer to 300 with dialects included, and 80 per cent of the children in Jackson Heights speak a language other than English at home.

Forest Hills has developed a culture of acceptance and openness that is self-perpetuating and contagious. One aspect of creating a welcoming environment is the care the organisation takes to recruit staff and volunteers from different cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial groups. Forest Hills is also committed to ongoing staff training, which is vital component of creating of a safe and supportive environment for new immigrant learners.

This is not to say that there are no challenges along the way. When people of many cultures come together, moments of difficulty naturally arise. For example, a group of computer students from Colombia threw a birthday party for a classmate. The students brought not only cake, but arroz con pollo (chicken and rice), several other hot dishes, and champagne, along with music for dancing. A large percentage of their classmates were from Bangladesh, and were fasting for Ramadan. Half the class ate, danced and drank champagne while the other half sat politely, fasting, not having eaten since the pre-dawn hours. The Bangladeshi students sat through the entire party, as a way of showing respect to their Colombian classmates. The Colombian students were baffled that their

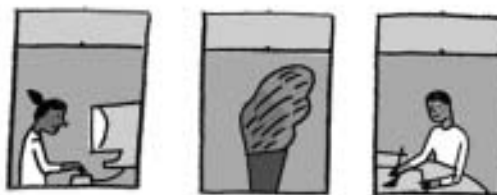
Bangladeshi classmates would not dance, eat, or drink champagne. The event was a learning and turning point for the centre. A variety of strategies were implemented to increase the awareness among staff and students of the cultural issues affecting their lives. This resulted in a number of policies that foster inclusion.

One of these was the policy of learning about and celebrating everyone's religious holidays. In contrast to the current trend of downplaying cultural or religious practices in order not to offend others, Forest Hills now takes the position of observing them all. The politically correct "Happy Holidays" is eschewed in favour of "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Chanukah." With the approach of Ramadan, staff and students alike look out for the crescent moon so that everyone, both Muslim and non-Muslim, can wish each other Ramadan Mubarak, or a Happy Ramadan. The same applies for the Lunar New



Year celebrated by Chinese students and others from East Asia. Forest Hills is not afraid of Christmas trees, menorahs, or acknowledgements of Buddha's birthday. The centre embraces these symbols as a way to open the lines of communication, rather than cutting them off. Participants now ask: "What is this holiday you are celebrating? What does it mean? What do you eat? What do you do?" Inevitably, people from very different parts of the world discover similarities in beliefs and practices, as well as distinctions, and through this dialogue, develop increased understanding and respect for each other.

When immigrants learn the language of their new country, the largest barrier to social inclusion is immediately reduced. As such, English-as-a-second-language programs are natural bridge-builders. Students hail from diverse cultures but have in common the vulnerability and desire for inclusion that comes with being newcomers with minority status in a strange land. In this context, friendships are developed, and links are made across gaps that span age, language, cultural, sexual orientation, and other differences that might otherwise prove insurmountable.



The centre has seen friendships develop across significant distinctions, as for instance the way students in a Level 1 English class received a gay Romanian student who had recently received political asylum in the United States. He disclosed his sexual orientation, as well as the fact that he and his lover had been imprisoned and tortured for being gay. His lover had died in prison, and this man sought to build a new life in the US. A class full of students of varying traditions, cultures, belief systems, and levels of conservatism, many of whom struggled to understand what he was saying, nonetheless accepted and adopted him into their midst. A Spanish-speaking woman was overheard explaining (in English) his story to a concerned Chinese woman. Previously suspicious "macho" men became protective of this newcomer, and young women would vie to sit next to him. This is one of many such stories. It is a story of acceptance, and of people united by common needs and circumstances.



## BÂTIR DES COMMUNAUTÉS INCLUSIVES : SOMMAIRE

Le présent rapport fait état des résultats d'un projet de recherche visant à examiner la façon dont les centres sociaux au Canada et autour du monde, engagent leurs voisins à créer des occasions favorisant l'inclusion et à promouvoir la diversité. Ce projet de recherche a été lancé au mois d'octobre 2003 par la Fédération internationale des centres sociaux et communautaires (IFS).

Un bref survol du mouvement des centres sociaux constate que ces organismes communautaires font des efforts qui favorisent le rapprochement entre tous les groupes de la société et ce, depuis plus d'un siècle. Les centres sociaux établis de par le monde à la fin du 19<sup>ième</sup> et au début du 20<sup>ième</sup> siècle, oeuvraient déjà pour tisser des liens entre voisins d'un même quartier. Ces organismes croyaient fermement que c'est par le contact personnel que le développement de la société devient possible.

Les centres sociaux mettent en application cette valeur qu'est l'inclusion en ouvrant leurs portes à tout le quartier et en créant ainsi un espace ouvert à tous. Les résultats de la recherche présentés dans le document intitulé « Bâtir des communautés inclusives », indiquent que les centres sociaux continuent de jouer un rôle central dans la promotion de l'inclusion, et offrent une approche déjà mise à l'essai pour l'intégration par la prestation de services, l'engagement communautaire et le

travail visant le changement, méthodes qui peuvent être adaptées à différentes communautés et nations.

Le projet posait deux questions fondamentales, à savoir : que devons nous faire pour encourager les différences entre êtres humains comme composantes essentielles de la vitalité d'une culture, et ce, à tous les niveaux de la société? et, comment pouvons-nous promouvoir le changement social de façon à ce que les gens de tout âge, de toutes les religions, de toute origine ethnique ou d'orientation sexuelle, de toutes les classes sociales, ainsi que les gens de différents niveaux de capacités physiques puissent participer pleinement à bâtir et à améliorer la société?

Dans le rapport, certaines pratiques clés sont identifiées qui favorisent l'inclusion sociale dans les communautés et au sein même des organismes locaux. Ces pratiques sont présentées sous la forme d'une « liste de facteurs favorisant l'inclusion sociale » accompagnée de remarques détaillées faites par des praticiens ainsi que d'études de cas internationaux qui décrit un certain nombre d'initiatives prometteuses et des apprentissages clés. Cette liste comprend six pratiques, à savoir: d'engagement organisationnel pour l'inclusion et le changement, la création d'environnements sécuritaires et accueillants, la promotion d'engagement civique et l'opposition à l'exclusion, le renforcement institutionnel, l'emploi des arts et

de stratégies multiples comme moyens de communication et d'expression et, l'établissement de réseaux pour l'apprentissage et l'échange. Pour chacune de ces catégories, le rapport fait entendre les réflexions de travailleurs communautaires venant des quatre coins du monde.

En plus d'examiner les initiatives locales, le rapport commente aussi les différents contextes de politiques nationales dans lesquels les organismes communautaires fonctionnent. Les praticiens remarquent à quel point il est important de promouvoir des pratiques anti-oppressives et les droits de la personne dans les politiques et les lois, et de maintenir ces intentions à tous les niveaux de pratique institutionnelle. Les initiatives communautaires qui font participer les résidents et qui préconisent des politiques d'inclusion sont des facteurs clés dans ce processus continu d'inclusion, tout comme l'est la création de liens avec d'autres groupes afin de promouvoir ces politiques aux niveaux local, national et international. Le véritable objectif de l'inclusion sociale implique une renégociation des normes sociales et économiques à partir de la base, avec les membres exclus de la société participant pleinement à la discussion pour déterminer les pratiques et les politiques qui ont un impact sur nos communautés en évolution. Tout comme c'est le cas de la promotion des droits de la personne et de la démocratie, l'inclusion sociale exige une

vigilance constant pour affronter les injustices et la discrimination ainsi qu'une vision pour créer un avenir meilleur.

En conclusion, «Bâtir des communautés inclusives» constate qu'il y a un besoin urgent d'augmenter le dialogue et l'analyse au niveau internationale, et de travailler ensemble pour mieux comprendre de quelle façon les pratiques locales et les politiques nationales renforcent ou entravent l'inclusion dans nos communautés. Le rapport encourage aussi ceux et celles qui se consacrent à promouvoir l'inclusion, de continuer à défendre la participation et l'engagement de la société civile. Cet engagement ne doit pas être perçu comme simple substitut à bon marché des services gouvernementaux ou seulement comme la promotion du bien-être commun, mais plutôt comme une composante clé qui aide à mobiliser des membres des collectivités à travailler et à apprendre ensemble afin de bâtir nos capacités de vivre en harmonie et en pleine équité.



## CONSTRUIR COMUNIDADES INCLUSIVAS: RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

El informe presenta los hallazgos de una investigación sobre los centros vecinales de Canadá y de otros países y cómo involucran a los vecinos y las vecinas en la creación de oportunidades para promover la inclusión y la diversidad. La Federación Internacional de Asentamientos y Centros Vecinales (IFS) inició el proyecto de investigación El Living Comunitario en octubre de 2003.

Un breve examen del movimiento de los centros vecinales (también conocidos como centros comunitarios) revela que estos organismos dirigidos siempre por su base tienen más de cien años de experiencia en la construcción de vínculos entre diversos grupos. Los centros vecinales que se establecieron a fines del siglo XIX y a principios del siglo XX sirvieron para promover contactos entre residentes de un mismo vecindario. Reflejaron la convicción que la mejor manera de promover el desarrollo mutuo es mediante los contactos personales.

Los centros vecinales implementan el criterio de la inclusión abriendo sus puertas a todo el mundo para crear un espacio a manera de "living comunitario". La investigación presentada en el informe Construir Comunidades Inclusivas sugiere que los centros vecinales continúan jugando un papel central en la promoción de la inclusividad, con su metodología de comprobada eficacia en la prestación de servicios integrales, participación comunitaria y acciones a favor del cambio, metodología que se presta a la adaptación en diversas comunidades y naciones.

El proyecto se basa en las dos siguientes interrogantes: ¿Cuáles son los pasos a seguir, a todo nivel de la sociedad, para nutrir las diferencias humanas como ingredientes de la vitalidad cultural? ¿Cómo podemos promover el cambio social de manera que todas las personas, independiente de su condición de edad, religión, raza, cultura, clase social, nivel de capacidad física y orientación sexual, puedan participar plenamente en construir y mejorar nuestra sociedad?



El informe identifica algunas prácticas claves que mejoran la inclusión social tanto en las comunidades como en las mismas organizaciones de base sin fines de lucro. Se presentan estas prácticas mediante una "lista de la inclusividad comunitaria", junto con amplias observaciones de profesionales y una selección de estudios de caso internacionales que dan evidencia de iniciativas prometedoras y hallazgos claves. La lista detalla seis prácticas, a saber: los compromisos de la organización con la inclusividad y los procesos de cambio; la creación de espacios acogedores y seguros; la promoción de la participación ciudadana y la oposición a la exclusión; el fortalecimiento del apoyo para los diversos actores; el uso del arte y de estrategias multifacéticas para la comunicación y la expresión; y la creación de redes para el aprendizaje y el intercambio. En cada rubro, el informe presenta comentarios en las voces emanadas de diversas comunidades del mundo.

Junto con su reflexión sobre las iniciativas locales, el informe contempla los diversos contextos de política nacional dentro de los cuales las organizaciones comunitarias operan. Los y las profesionales del campo afirman la importancia de afianzar el enfoque anti-racista y de derechos humanos en toda política y ley. También enfatizan que dichas intenciones deben ser enmarcadas a todo nivel de la práctica institucional. Se consideran como imprescindibles para este proceso permanente las iniciativas comunitarias que involucren a las y los residentes al tiempo que promuevan las políticas inclusivas [aquí hace falta una frase que explique el proceso permanente al que se hace referencia, ¿verdad?], como es también imprescindible forjar vínculos con otros grupos para promover este tipo de política a nivel local, nacional e internacional. El verdadero propósito de la inclusión está relacionado con la renegociación de las normas sociales y económicas desde la base, con la plena participación de los grupos excluidos en las discusiones para determinar las prácticas y



políticas de nuestras comunidades en vías de evolución. Tal como ocurre en nuestros esfuerzos por promover los derechos humanos y la democracia, debemos comprometernos permanentemente con la inclusión social para encarar la injusticia y la discriminación y prepararnos para defender los futuros de mayor esperanza.

Al final del informe Construir Comunidades Inclusivas, se concluye que existe una necesidad de ampliar nuestras oportunidades para el diálogo y análisis internacional, y colaborar para profundizar nuestro entendimiento de cómo las prácticas locales y las políticas nacionales fortalecen o debilitan la inclusividad dentro de nuestras comunidades. También insta a toda persona que se considere comprometida con el propósito de la inclusión a continuar promoviendo

la importancia de la participación ciudadana y de la sociedad civil. El compromiso se debe entender no como un sucedáneo barato de los servicios públicos o la promoción del bien común, sino como un mecanismo central para movilizar a los diversos actores comunitarios para aprender juntos y mejorar nuestra capacidad de convivir en la armonía y la justicia.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

Studies, speeches, and reports referred to in this publication, as well as additional resources on social inclusion are listed in the resources section of our IFS Building Inclusive Communities website at <http://inclusion.ifsnetwork.org/resources/index.asp>

Electronic versions of Building Inclusive Communities are available at <http://inclusion.ifsnetwork.org>

## ABOUT THE IFS

The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS) began in 1926 as a movement of settlement houses, community centres, and neighbourhood centres dedicated to enabling neighbours to work together to meet local challenges and create shared approaches to building community. We believe that strong, sustainable, community-based organisations provide a crucial focus and support for community development and change. We aim at a world in which more than a privileged few can call themselves “global citizens,” and where the “international community” is represented not only by governments, multinational companies, and the media, but by people organized in their local communities.

Our members represent thousands of local organisations in more than thirty countries located all over the globe, from North and South America, to Europe, to the Near and Far East. Inspired by the tradition of innovation within the Settlement house movement, today’s community organisations take many forms as they generate local solutions to global challenges. They address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way by integrating services, capacity building, and social reform. We consider this great diversity of practical skills as our key strength in tackling the complex problems facing communities and individuals today.

To contact the IFS, or to obtain more information on the settlement house movement, please refer to our IFS website at <http://www.ifsnetwork.org>

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## Building Inclusive Communities

