



Strengthening Canada's Communities / Des communautés plus fortes au Canada

Aboriginal Storytelling

April 2009

By Meghan Mergaert

Understanding Aboriginal Community Economic Development

Community development in First Nation communities has many differences than non First Nation community. To understand community development in First Nation communities we must be informed of First Nation and non First Nation history in Canada. It is from this history that Aboriginal communities in Canada have grown more resilient over the years since aboriginal and non aboriginal have lived together. First Nations people have relied on each other to collaborate and have become more committed to their communities.



Kris Archie is the Community Liaison Manager at Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team (VIATT). She shares the story of Aboriginal Communities using circles. The middle circle is the children, families and communities. All the other circles revolve around this circle, because it is the heart of the community.

The second circle supports the centre circle by offering services such as food, support, shelter and emotional support for the middle circle.

The third circle is the local decision makers which make decisions for the betterment of the middle circle.

The fourth and furthest circle is the external decision makers. These decision makers are furthest removed from the centre circle of children, families and communities. Often decisions are made by the fourth circle, which directly affects the centre circle, the heart of the community. One

example of this affect is the decision of residential schools in Canada.

Administrative Office - services administratifs : 211-620 View St., Victoria BC V8W 1J6

Phone - téléphone: (250) 386-9980 Fax - télécopieur : (250) 386-9984

Toll Free - sans frais : (877) 202-2268

info@ccednet-rcdec.ca

www.ccednet-rcdec.ca

Residential schools took aboriginal children away from their communities to attend these schools. A huge number of aboriginal children were taken in the 60's commonly termed as the "60's Scoop" to live and learn from non First Nation people in school outside of their communities.

The "60's Scoop" scooped the children away from this centre circle and took away the heart of the community. All the other circles were affected because the children, the main motivation, for their actions were taken away. As a result the other circles lost capacity and commitment. The women stopped cooking, the men stopped getting food, and community services had to refocus their goals or shut down services entirely. Their central focus of life was taken from them. It is through this story of the 60's scoop and the circles of aboriginal community we are better able to understand the challenges that they face and that they continue to rebuild from.

Community Economic Development Lens

It is assumed that community economic development (CED) is an effective approach to working with first nation and aboriginal communities. Many CED concepts do prove to be effective methods of working, including identifying solutions from the ground up, local decision making, building sustainability, addressing multiple issues however it is suggested that another model may be more effective for First Nation communities.

Community Economic Development is the interconnection of three aspects, social, environment and economy. The theory believes that these three sectors are all interconnected and interrelated. When working with First Nations we need to look at the three wheels of CED and prioritize them differently. Many First Nation people rely on their environment for their livelihood for example fishing, hunting and trapping. The environment needs to be fruitful and bountiful for fishers and hunters to have an income. It is through the fertile rich environment that the economy becomes stronger and the society becomes more integrative and meaningful.

Another aspect of the CED model is the assumption of organizational capacity, however many groups and organizations First Nation and non First Nation have steep learning curves before they are able to effectively work in a CED model. Many First Nation communities acknowledge the community economic development model but feel more comfortable working with a tool that has been developed for First Nation communities in the 90's.



Development Wheel

The Development Wheel was developed in 1990 by the Centre for Community Enterprise (CCE) as a coaching and planning tool for First Nations. It was used as a framework for community enterprise development and community economic planning. The tool was designed to increase the capacity of community development in First Nation communities. The concept of the development wheel has become commonly accepted among First Nations community development.

The Development Wheel has 6 components; 1) Pre-planning, 2) Organizational Development, 3) Venture Development, 4) Community Participation and Strategic Networking, 5) Technical Assistance and 6) Organizational Prerequisites

This tool helps to build organizational capacity for community organizations. It identifies potential challenges that many organizations face as they develop and implement projects so they can prepare and set themselves up for success. The Development Wheel provides a process for First Nations organizations and individuals to work in the community development field and be successful. When the community capacity is built, the organization becomes the initiator and the stabilizer of the economic development in the community. It is from this tool that community economic development flourishes in First Nation communities.

Through learning and understanding First Nation history in Canada and the long term effects these decisions have had on First Nation communities we can better understand the challenges and needs of First Nations people today. The Development Wheel understands First Nations organizations and movement towards adopting a community economic development approach and connecting to the larger movement of CED. To learn more about Aboriginal CED Initiatives in BC and in Canada visit www.ccednet-rcdec.ca. To learn more about the Development Wheel visit www.cedworks.com/files/pdf/free/Perfrom_03_DevtWheel.pdf

“Transition is about understanding where a community is at, where the basic needs are at, then talking about where it can fit for the people, not being preoccupied with oil and gas, heavy equipment. At the end of the day there is money being made, it’s not flowing from a community development model.”
-Reg Whiten

Leaders in Aboriginal Community Economic Development Reg Whiten, Boreal Centre for Conservation Enterprise

Reg Whiten has a unique job title. He describes himself as a community resource stewardship agrologist and planner. He specializes in integrated community development and planning for rural groups and First Nations.

In 2000 Reg founded the Boreal Centre for Conservation Enterprise in Moberly Lake, BC. It is a non-for-profit of approximately 50 members concerned with sustainable community development in the Peace River Region. The goal of the centre is to help improve the livelihoods of marginalized northern, rural communities. The centre’s goals and objectives are supported from producer groups, all levels of government, elected representatives, First Nations leadership, academic institutions, community development groups and financial organizations.

Boreal Centre services community members through business planning, community based environmental assessment, cross-cultural education, community sustainability auditing, business development, eco-tourism market research, First Nations resource-access negotiations, Inuit work place education, youth environmental projects, traditional ecological knowledge studies, community land use planning, resource management, forest stewardship planning.

“Seeing individuals feel the spark of making a difference in their lives and the lives of others.

Connecting with people with innovative ideas and energy. Watching young people get the skills and ideas and seeing it through all aspects of their lives. That’s the real satisfaction.”

-Reg Whiten

Biography

Reg Whiten has been working in the community development sector for over 20 years. He completed his Master’s degree from the University of Calgary in the faculty of Environmental Design. He has worked through various lenses including ecosystems based community development, community development, and strategic planning, micro lending, and social enterprise.

In 1986, Reg visited the Philippines and worked closely with communities practicing the concept of sustainability. As he worked with people that lived in impoverished situations he was impressed with the effective and innovative used resources in a sustainable way. The innovation and resourcefulness of these practices led Reg towards more sustainable and eco-friendly approaches.

In the early 90’s Reg started working in Moberly Lake in the field of community development. It was from working in the community and being part of a network of people that were committed to this type of work that he started the Boreal Centre in 2000.

Boreal Centre is based in Moberly Lake a small rural community in the Peace River region of BC. The population is 1000 people with almost 50% First Nation members. Many people are low income, and less educated and continue to face barriers to employment. There are high rates of substance abuse, violence and property crime, which many believe is a result of unemployment and limited resources in the community.

The Boreal Centre for Conservation Enterprise is one of the resources that support First Nations and non First Nations become better connected to the land and provide opportunities of employment. Reg talks about the focus of the centre and highlights that there is a primary focus and a secondary focus. The primary focus is on building capacity for entrepreneurs through different experiences especially focusing on eco-enterprise. He says it is about “**stimulating people that are most in need, marginalized, including helping single moms and youth**”. He says that they always start with the community need is first, and deal with “**stuff that is important**”. As an example they may need to build more adequate housing for seniors. From the building project individuals learn skills that they can transfer to other areas and become empowered by this learning.

The secondary focus is bringing people together that are interested in similar areas. The centre gathers people and creates awareness around the opportunities that they have in micro and small enterprise. Through the network, Boreal Centre has developed strong community support and partners to do their work that they rely on when individuals are ready to work on their own enterprise. The unique aspect of the centre is that it evolves and shifts to the needs of community members and what the community needs. By shifting their focus with the needs of the community and support those needs the centre’s vision is being realized as individuals, families and communities discover new, environmentally-sustainable business opportunities.

Value of Work

Reg talked about the importance of rural communities having a champion for community work. It takes the efforts of a few key people to keep the energy flowing and optimism of community members. Someone needs to take the initiative and stimulate the action plan, and provide the support needed.

Administrative Office - services administratifs : 211-620 View St., Victoria BC V8W 1J6

Phone – téléphone: (250) 386-9980 Fax – télécopieur : (250) 386-9984

Toll Free – sans frais : (877) 202-2268

info@ccednet-rcdec.ca

www.ccednet-rcdec.ca

Challenges

Boreal Centre, like many non profits, faces the challenge of seed funding and the lack of core funding. Reg recognizes that during this tough financial time it will be important to learn the balance of community sustainable development and feels optimistic about the next cycle of programming and opportunities. Reg knows that “keeping the momentum” in the community it extremely important to connect other to opportunities. Boreal Centre works with individuals that are new to the community development field and many don’t realize what they could do especially around micro or small enterprise. They need maintain the loop and know all the community resources not only in Moberly Lake but also in surrounding areas.

Reg also highlights some other challenges of working in community development such as seeing the big picture, building strategic partnerships and support from local level.

For more information about Boreal Centre for Conservation Enterprise visit www.peacriverwatershed.ca/borealcentre or email Reg interraplan@gmail.com.

Check out Reg’s book called **Boreal Forest Bounty: A Botanical Species Resource Guide for Conservation Enterprise Development**.

Leaders in Aboriginal Community Economic Development

First Nations Training & Consultant Services, Edith Loring-Kuhanga, Owner and President

First Nations Training and Consultant Services (FNTCS) based in Brentwood Bay are in their 16th year in business. **“We’ve been in business for 15 years for a reason”**, says Edith the owner and president of the business. Edith and her staff travel all across Canada delivering over 50 different trainings specific to the needs of each community. The way Edith and her team offer services are unique. They work with the community sharing their knowledge and teaching community members how to do the work, rather than doing it for them. The trainings are based on the philosophy of leaving skills and capacity in the community to empower and teach the community how to do it themselves. As a business owner it seems ironic that Edith does not want communities to become dependent on their services.

“We don’t want return customers, year after year after year; if this happens then we haven’t done our job. If we haven’t heard from a community in three years—that’s great.”

Edith is Gitksan First Nation, she grew up in Hazelton, a small rural community in Northern BC. In her teenage years she shares that she dropped out of high school and was a teenage mom. She reflects on her early education and speaks of the challenges of attracting quality teachers to her rural community. Edith went back to school as a mature student, and received her high school diploma, then later went on to college. As a single parent she moved her family to Victoria, BC to earn a Bachelor degree in Education from the University of Victoria.

In 1972 a policy paper was released by the National Indian Brotherhood that gave opportunity for parents to have more input in their child’s education. She finished her degree with distinction in 1986 with a focus on policy. Edith became more interested in how to get educational resources into small communities and improve the quality of education for First Nation communities.

Indian Control of Indian Education is a policy paper that was released by the National Indian Brotherhood (now Assembly of First Nations) in 1972. The document, approved by the Canadian Government, gives rights to parents to choose the type of education they want for their children. The paper states:

“Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.”

Administrative Office - services administratifs : 211-6
Phone – téléphone: (250) 386-9980 Fax – té
Toll Free – sans frais : (877)
info@ccednet-rcdec.ca www.c

Edith started working in Saanich in the early 80's as a First Nations consultant while she was finishing her degree. After graduating she continued to work full time until 1992, and then went on to complete her Master's degree in Education. Edith continued to work full time and started focusing one day a week on her own business facilitating training seminars in Vancouver for school administrators. The demand was so successful that she quit her job and decided to start her business full time.

Scope of Services

First Nations Training and Consultant Services were started by Edith Loring-Kuhanga in 1993 and are now in their 16th year. First Nation communities all over Canada hire Edith and her team to provide training and consulting services.

“I get real satisfaction when I see the growth and development in the community. I'm empowered, I can see the growth and pride and confidence in the community when they realize “we can do this”. It is worth everything that you do, because it doesn't have to be a complicated process. They do have the capacity in their communities to do it. That's what keeps us going.”

*-Edith Loring-Kuhanga,
President of First Nations Consultant
and Training Services*

The services range from everything from running your own school, policy development, program development, proposal writing, administration, budgeting, quitting smoking, teenage suicide, holistic approaches, community economic development, and women leadership. While it may seem the list of trainings is broad in scope, Edith is clear on what they will and will not do. **“Our intent is to build community capacity; the community are the people that are going to make it work, because after I leave someone is going to have to implement it.”** The vision and philosophy of the business is to leave skill in the community and build the capacity from within. Staffs often work with community members co-facilitating the trainings and aim to find people that will carry on the skills after they have finished the training.

Edith believes **“that if it doesn't come from the community and the people that are going to use it, it will not get used.”** This is the reason why all trainings

and services are adjusted to meet the needs of each community. She assesses each potential contract and asks herself **“When I leave will the community be in a better position than when I found it? If the answer is no, I won't take it.”**

Challenges

Edith says “Often the community just wants the job done”. The challenge, says Edith, is convincing the community that they can do it themselves. They have relied too much on consultants to do it. In fact staff at, First Nations Training and Consultant Services, advise communities not to hire consultants on an ongoing basis. When communities continually hire consultants the financial resources are eaten up so quickly by consultant wages. In the long term is it more sustainable to invest in staff training than hiring consultants. The community realizes that it isn't such a complicated process and that they do have experts within their community.

For more information please visit www.fntcs.ca or email edith@fntcs.ca. **Please note:** New website launch is expected in June 2009.

Leaders in Aboriginal Community Economic Development

Nancy Oppermann, Consultant & Community Economic Development Practitioner

Eco-tourism attracts thousands of travellers all over the world wanting to experience history, culture and the natural environments of unique places.

Imagine being surrounded by 5 valleys, with over 1000 freshwater lakes, all ideal for fishing, hunting, hiking or horseback riding. Learn from your local guide as they share the traditional First Nations methods of tracking and trapping. Or visit one of the 6 provincial parks, you may even discover a 50 million year old fossil, with over 6 biogeoclimatic zones in the Xení Caretaker Area visitors are sure to come back wanting more.

Community members know that they live in pristine environment, the challenge is to spread the word about this idyllic travel location to potential eco-tourists. Tourism has increased in recent years with visitors mostly coming from Asia, Europe and United States, but there is still a long way to go before the economy starts to benefit from the natural wonders of this area.



Xeni Gwet'in First Nation is located in the Tsilhqot'in Territory (tsil-kote-eeen), west of the Fraser River. The area known as the "Xeni Caretaker Area" is comprised of 5 valleys including Chilko, Tsuniah, Nemiah, Yohetta and Taseko.

Up until about 10 years the area had been quite isolated due to the poor quality of roads and transportation methods. This isolation preserved many First Nations traditions and cultural aspects.

With increased access and more focus on the beauty and potential of the land, individuals noticed the environment wasn't being protected in a responsible manner. Community members, business owners, and individuals in the northern part of the community started to gather to look at the needs of their community specifically regarding balancing First Nation traditions and attracting eco-tourism business. These conversations grew to what is now Xení Caretaker Area. They needed people to band together and create strategic partnerships that add value to their efforts.

The goals of the Xení Caretaker Area (pronounced honey) are to increase eco-tourism while preserving the natural landscape and environment of the area.

Nancy Oppermann is one of the community members active in this initiative. She is a consultant in program management and strategic planning. She has been working in the area since 1996 with different non profits and First Nations organizations focused on tourism initiatives and marketing. Nancy has lived alongside First Nations communities since she was a young child. Her parents bought a wilderness fishing lodge in the area in 1957. As Nancy became more active in community planning she realized that the communities weren't talking to each other. She wanted to be part of creating a voice for the members in the community and look at ways they can work together to benefit all the communities. Nancy recognized with more leaders in the community her work became more effective. She works with the community to develop their

Ecotourism only works when it yields economic benefits to local people, supports conservation and reduces the human impact of travel. It requires the active and educated participation of tourists and the travel industry alike, and it involves everyone from the visitor to the tour operator and airline, the hotelier and the local labour force.

--www.conservation.org

Administrative Office - services administratifs : 211-620 View St., Victoria BC V8W 1J6

Phone – téléphone: (250) 386-9980 Fax – télécopieur : (250) 386-9984

Toll Free – sans frais : (877) 202-2268

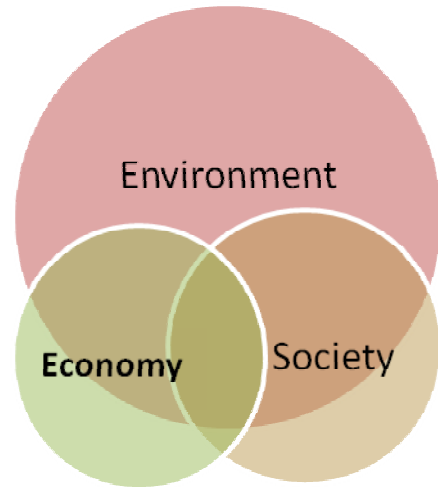
info@ccednet-rcdec.ca

www.ccednet-rcdec.ca

vision and strategies for developing their idea and assists the group with research, marketing, and securing funding.

Community Economic Development through a First Nation Lens

A community economic development approach recognizes that environmental, social and economical aspects are all inter-related and interconnected. Most communities have a balance between the three components. The relationship of community economic development are prioritized differently in First Nation communities. Most community members rely on the land as their source of income and livelihood so naturally environment needs to be prioritized above social and economy. **“The economy is based on the success and wealth of the land”** says Nancy as she describes this relationship. **“Without the environment the economy suffers and social aspects are affected.”**



Challenges

Nancy feels one of the biggest challenges in this type of work is the lack of recognition of aboriginal rights, land entitlement and traditional values. Although some work has been done there is much more needed before the communities see progress. It takes the efforts of the community working together by strengthening the partnerships they have to make the change for themselves.

Nancy talks of the determination, sustainability and independence of the people in the Xení Caretaker Area. She relates the success of this collaboration to the persistence of her community and recognizes that working from a grassroots level change will be slower but knows the results will be more rewarding for everyone.

Advice to other groups undertaking community economic development:

Nancy believes that communities can learn a lot from aboriginal neighbours around the globe that are working in community development. The strategies are often innovative and forward thinking and usually transferable to our communities. Most remote community have similar challenges and it means the community members need to take action to talk to each other and find the ways to solve the problems. Nancy’s closing thought **“it takes having a balanced approach, respect, dialoguing and understanding each other to make it work.”**

To learn about the work of Xení Caretaker Area visit www.xeni.ca or contact Nancy Oppermann at nancyo@shaw.ca.