



HRSDC



Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction



*“One Thing We Learned”
Alberta’s “Seven Cities” Partnership
September 23, 2008*

In the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy teleconference on September 23, representatives from the City of Red Deer and Medicine Hat outlined the history of the “Seven Cities” committee, some of the key factors that keep it alive, and a review of social policy developments that have their roots in this collaborative effort.

Since 2001, municipal leaders from Alberta’s major community entities (an identification coined by the National Homeless Initiative) have participated in the Seven Cities group. Representatives from Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and Wood Buffalo (Fort McMurray) originally established the committee to share lessons related to the administration of federal homelessness funding, but soon recognized the power of collaboration and networking. Participants shared their expertise and developed strategies that took a broader view of housing and homelessness. Provincial and federal government representatives were invited to join the discussions and share in the group’s learning.

The work of Alberta’s Seven Cities has been instrumental in building collective understanding about housing and homelessness in the province, and influential in establishing Alberta as a leader in the development of 10-year planning strategies to end homelessness.

The September 23 session was hosted by:

- Scott Cameron, Social Planning Manager, City of Red Deer
- Pam Ralston, Community Facilitator II, Social Planning, City of Red Deer
- Tracy Flaherty-Willmot, Coordinator, Homelessness and Community Housing Department, Medicine Hat Community Housing Society

One thing Sherri learned from the presentation:

The collaborative acts as support to participating members and as a way to share evidence about the problem of homelessness and its root causes. It is also a significant way to learn about effective interventions.

The bigger impact is impressive in terms of: a) influence upon municipal by-laws, b) strategic planning across the province, c) how municipalities work in related areas such as social services and d) consultation with the province around homelessness policy.

*Sherri Torjman, Vice-President,
Caledon Institute of Social Policy*



The Caledon Institute is the lead organization for the “Community-Government Collaboration on Policy” project.

Caledon’s ongoing mission is to

The small scale of the effort in terms of participation likely has contributed to the success of this effort. Relevant perspectives were invited to the table as required. An inspiring example – thank you!

One thing Anne learned from the presentation:
Finding ways for the various levels of government to work together on common issues presents a challenge for people inside bureaucracies, just as it does for those on the ‘outside.’ Hearing about how seven municipal and community organization representatives went from information sharing to influencing policy and funding decisions in Alberta affirmed the importance of trust, relationships and the power of the group.

One thing Marc learned from the presentation:
I really enjoyed hearing about the candid nature of the discussions that go on among the Seven Cities and government representatives. Front-line organizations do not usually have an integrated approach to their relations with government. It was a privilege to hear about this type of discussion and to recognize that we can’t always be at the table all the time. I also realized that communication breakdowns can occur because we don’t have the time or the opportunity to get a better understanding of one another’s needs.

assist in the development of sustainable, practicable social policy. Our interest in establishing a community of practice around community-government collaboration grew from a number of previous initiatives. These included our work with Vibrant Communities to establish Policy Dialogues with government partners and subsequent Government Learning Circle initiatives.

*Anne Makhoul, Principal Project Officer,
Caledon Institute*



*Marc Nisbet, Meals on Wheels Director,
Santropol Roulant*



Santropol Roulant is a youth-led organization that lives its mission: to break social isolation and increase the food security of Montrealers living with a loss of autonomy. We keep one foot in the world of daily front line services and the other in the realm of long term social change. Experimenting with ways to magnify our work, particularly through shared learning and peer exchanges around the policies that impact our membership is what attracted us to this innovative project. Our particular policy focus will be to track the reorganization of the provincial Healthcare Network (launched in that 2004 with bill 83), and find a relevant way to share this information with our peers in the “community care” sector in Montreal.

One thing Maria learned from the presentation:
I was interested in the way the Seven Cities partners were careful to limit the number of people involved in the group but also to keep their communities informed about the issues raised. Finding the right people and keeping the group small but inclusive is particularly important when bringing the federal community into the discussion.

One thing Caroline learned from the presentation:
The presentation made clear the potential of federal programming for addressing complex issues like homelessness. But the real lesson for me was how cooperation itself effects change. The process of engaging in regular discussions helped participants go from talking, trusting and enjoying each other to a point where they could up the ante from technical management to program improvement. Involving people from the communities and municipalities built a bottom-up understanding of the impact of their work on people in need which segued into the possibility of achieving better solutions for all.

*Maria Basualdo, Community Research Liaison,
Community-University Institute for Social
Research (CUISR)*



CUISR facilitates partnerships between the university and the larger community in order to engage in relevant social research. This work supports a deeper understanding of our communities and reveals opportunities for improving our quality of life. Community-government collaboration has been present in several CUISR initiatives including Monitoring Quality of Life in Saskatoon. CUISR engagement in this project contributes to rethinking the three Rs (research, relationships, and reflexivity) of Community Visioning.

*Caroline Andrew, Dean, Social Sciences,
University of Ottawa*



The Centre on Governance is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. It defines itself as a research centre that works primarily with partners outside the university and is interested in the ways universities and university researchers can work with communities, civil society organizations and governments to work on the “wicked problems” of our society – those problems that require the combined action of a very large range of actors – public, private, civil society. We are therefore extremely interested in better understanding how to learn to collaborate across sectors and levels and how social policy development can best emerge from these processes of collaboration.

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1390 Prince of Wales Drive, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON K2C 3N6 CANADA
Phone: (613) 729-3340 Fax: (613) 729-3896
E-mail: caledon@caledoninst.org Website: www.caledoninst.org