Belonging in Community, Matters!

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CLASS

Why Community

What do all people want for themselves
All People Want:

- To have a job/participate in things
- To live with people they want in their lives
- To travel around the community
- To have friends to participate with

YET

These basic wants/needs are not available to many vulnerable people in our society!
Consider this: If you are poor, old, have a disability or are a minority you are more at risk to be:

- Unemployed
- Homeless, or substandard settings
- Limited in travel
- Socially isolated

WHY - we tend to focus on difference

This is a complex issue, but one reason is that society sees ones difference first.
### Key Aspects of Difference

- It pushes people apart
- It leads to labels or negative identities
- It creates stereotypes
- It baits fear
- It leads to segregation/congregation
- It promotes vulnerability
- It can create social isolation

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When people see other people from a framework of difference there will always be gross inequities.
What Can We Do?

- Citizens
- Organizations
- Governments
- Neighbors
- Systems

“Unreality is the true source of powerlessness. What we do not understand we cannot control.”

Charles Riech
"Fundamental questions must be raised about what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interest and towards what ends. Such arguments begin to demand the creation of a new paradigm and organization of science – one that is not only for the people, but is created with them and by them as well."

John Gaventa

We must get beyond difference and promote a sense of similarity between people. We need to understand and build “Social Capital” through active community engagement.
Social Capital – What is it?

Coined in 1914, and studied since then, social capital refers to the relationships in your life and how these relationships promote positive by-products that enrich your life.

Social Capital is associated with:

- Healthfulness
- Happiness
- Longevity
- Pro-social behaviors
- Tolerance
- Achievement
Value added by social capital

- Instrumental – direct things
- Emotional – supports that are indirect
- Informational – knowledge we gain

The Chemistry of Social Capital

- Serotonin – hormone of happiness
- Oxytocin – belonging and trust
- Endorphins – pain masking
- Dopamine – goal achieving

- Selfless – Serotonin/Oxytocin
- Selfish – Endorphins/Dopamine
“What we do with our lives individually is not what determines whether we are a success or not; what determines whether we are a success is how we affect the lives of others.”

Albert Schweitzer

Understanding Community

Community is a network of different people, who come together on a regular basis, for something in common.

Key aspects:
• Commonality
• Difference
• Regularity
Various types of Communities

- Families
- Churches
- Neighborhoods
- Worksites
- Clubs, Groups, Associations
- Informal Alignments
- Virtual

“So I wondered, what does it take to become fully human”

Oliver Sacks
Building Social Capital
- Find or promote aspects of similarity
- Find ways/means for people to engage
- Understand how communities behave
- Find or promote gatekeeping
- Understand “social intelligence”
- Deepen key relationships

Similarities
- Interests
- Hobbies
- Passions
- Skills
- Hopes
- Dreams
- Shared perspectives
SIMILARITIES through CONVERSATIONS

☐ Acknowledge others as equals
☐ Stay curious – be interested
☐ Work hard to listen – reduce distractions – attend to people
☐ Slow down – be other centered
☐ Think together – assist
☐ Expect messiness

Every person has things they are excited about or interested in. When we find these things we not only bring out the best in that person – but we now have some ideas in helping that person build more social capital.
Human beings are social animals – we love to engage, especially around the things that we have in common. All of us belong to communities where members have commonality.

How can we find these communities?

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Places that people can engage

- Meetup.com – social networking
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Bulletin Boards
- Web searches
- Great, good places
There is a place for each of us!

“Belonging, not escape, is the imperative human value”

Robert Nisbit
How Communities Behave

- Regular meetings/gathering
- Rituals
- Patterns of engagement
- Jargon/ways of communication
- History and legacy

“People do not come together, just to be together – they come together to do something in common”

Gassett
The Gatekeeper

A valued member of the community who other members find to be influential or powerful. When this person endorses or acknowledges a new person, their influence affects or motivates other members to do the same.

Image Juxtaposition

When the value or influence of one thing affects the value or acceptance of another.
Gatekeeper Attributes

- They are usually positive about things
- They reach out
- They take social risks
- They smile and engage
- They are open and supportive

KEY FEATURES OF GATEKEEPERS

- Values
- Personality
- R/L Brain Influence
- Emotional Intelligence
Social Intelligence

How we behave in social situations determines if others want to spend more time with us.

How would you rate this list?

Deepening Relationships

The most satisfying social capital in our lives are those deeper, more covenant relationships that bring intimacy, trust, and love.
“All good things which exist are the fruits of originality.”

J. S. Mills

Building Community

Is not so much about fixing disability or changing vulnerability as it is about finding similarities and engaging each other toward a common goal or objective.
Organizations/Systems

- Find the common links
- Stop using labels
- Build opportunities for engagement
- Think inclusively
- Lessen or stop congregative programs
- Reject silo-oriented policies
- Think about functional needs of all people
- Stress that which bond people

“Man is truly great when he acts from the passions.”

Disraeli
“There must be a beginning to any great matter, but the continuing into the end, until it be thoroughly finished, yields the true glory.”

Sir Francis Drake

“The most important thing we face in the 21st century is a rediscovery of community.”

Willard Gaylin
An Aztec Story

A long time ago there was a great fire in the forests that covered the Earth. People and animals started to run trying to escape the fire. Our brother owl, Tecototl, was running away also when he noticed a small bird hurring back and forth between the nearest river and fire. He headed toward this small bird.

He noticed that it was our brother the Quetzal bird, running to the river, picking up small drops of water in his beak, then returning to the fire to throw that tiny bit of water on the flame. Owl approached Quetzal bird and yelled at him: “What are you doing brother? Are you stupid? You are not going to achieve anything by doing this. You must run for your life.”
Quetzal bird stopped for a moment and then looked and the owl and answered: “I am doing the best I can with what I have to save a place I love.”

It is remembered by our Grandparents that a long time ago the forests that covered our Earth were saved from a great fire by a small Quetzal bird, and owl, and many other animals and people who got together to put out the flame.
Building Community

Community is out there – just waiting for us to engage.

Go now – and make it happen!

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