



The Youth Engagement in Rural Communities Project

Final Report

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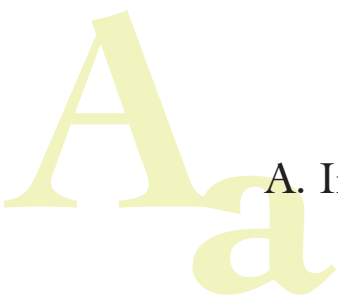
HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development

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A. Introduction

i) The Model Proponent

HeartWood was the model proponent for the Youth Engagement in Rural Communities (YERC) project. HeartWood is a charitable organization founded in Nova Scotia in 1989 to offer outdoor and environmental programs for youth. It is now the leading organization in Canada helping communities and organizations strengthen their youth engagement. The organization facilitates innovative ways for young people to contribute their enormous potential for leadership, volunteerism, innovation, decision making, and economic and community development. HeartWood excels in partnering with clients, including community organizations, youth agencies, schools and universities, and governments.

ii) What is different about HeartWood's approach?

Over the years, HeartWood's approach has matured from successful youth leadership programs to the engagement of young people in the renewal of neighbourhoods, schools, agencies and organizations. HeartWood believes young people are at their best when making meaningful contributions. For youth, this is the focus of their work.

We call this approach, Community Youth Development (CYD) which is to say, the process of young people being engaged in planning, decision-making, and community action through links with communities and organizations. While encouraging the gifts and talents of individual young people, CYD places equal focus on the investment of these assets in formal and informal community systems (eg. neighbourhoods, schools, organizations, associations).

There are thousands of hard working and skilled

youth-serving professionals across the country who, like HeartWood, are providing life-enriching programs for youth. HeartWood niche is in taking this commitment one step further; seeing youth not solely as service recipients but as service providers, working with youth rather than just for youth. HeartWood facilitates innovative ways for young people to contribute their enormous potential for leadership, volunteerism, innovation, decision-making, and community development and community economic development. HeartWood excels in partnering with clients such as community organizations, youth agencies, schools, universities, and governments.

HeartWood's added value lies in its team of youth and adults learning together, supported by research, evaluation and resource development. After 20 years and 30,000+ youth, adult, and organizational participants, HeartWood has gained unparalleled skills, experience and knowledge with multiple levels of youth-serving systems. While our work is expanding to points across the country, in our home province of Nova Scotia we have led the development of hundreds of innovative programs, strategies, partnerships and collaborations.

iii) The History of YERC at HeartWood

The Youth Engagement¹ in Rural Communities Project (YERC) was a 2 1/2 year participatory research project. The impetus for this project goes back to 2004 when the Director of the Rural Secretariat of the Department of Agriculture (RS) was in attendance at a workshop this writer led on HeartWood's CYD Framework at the Canadian Parks and Recreation Conference in Montreal. A conversation ensued, and HeartWood was invited to apply to the Secretariat's newly minted Models Program. The Models Program was the RS attempt to restructure the way they had traditionally provided community development funding to rural communities. HeartWood would be one of the first to go through this new funding program. This in itself made for

1. youth engagement – the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement).

some interesting challenges, which I elaborate on in Section I of this document.

iv) The evidence on Community Youth Development

The results of HeartWood's CYD approach have been clear and consistent: real input and participation of youth, along with the development of the capacities that engage them in decision-making for the long term. HeartWood's interventions have opened channels between youth and adults to promote understanding and shared action.

Research has established that by encouraging young people to share their gifts, skills and passion, the capacity of organizations and community increases. Across North America, stories of renewal of social causes, organizations, and communities fueled by young people are mounting. A leading project in North America, the Kellogg's Leadership for Community Change project, shares this finding, "Engag-

ing young people brings fresh ideas, new talents and critical perspectives to the table. In turn, this inclusion and respect can act as an antidote to alienation, antisocial behaviors, and the tendency to leave their community to seek better opportunities" (<http://theinnovationcenter.org/newsletterNov2007/klcc.asp>).

The evidence is telling us that if a community increases the interconnections between people working on shared initiatives for others - what the academics call 'social capital' - the community will benefit economically, socially, and culturally (Burgess, J. 2000; Checkoway, B. et al, 2006; Golmbek, S. 2006; Hart, R. 1992; Zeldin, S. 2004). If we are to build social capital, it is significant to note that it is young people that consistently demonstrate an ease with building connections to diverse social groups in a community (Chinman, M., 1998).

Considering the facts, the reasons to invest in youth become clearer. Quite simply, it makes good economic and cultural sense to consider youth not simply as leaders of tomorrow - but as leaders today.

B. The Research Design

The evaluation approach was a blending of practices from the school of grounded theory¹, participatory action research, and utilization-focused evaluation. The evaluation was designed to invest at least equal energy on observing how HeartWood approached implementation of its CYD Framework as it did on its impacts in the community. The key areas of observation for the evaluation were: HeartWood's intervention, youth involvement at an organizational level, the process of young people connecting to others in a peer group, and to the broader community, the dynamics of youth's service contribution to a community, and finally, any action in the community as a result of YERC.

The study was primarily a qualitative one, though some quantitative methods (survey and structured interviews) added to the rigor. An evaluation approach was required that would accommodate highly emergent conditions. What was hoped for was an ongoing rhythm of action and reflection. It was considered imperative to provide rapid feedback to help community partners find the right path for action in the community. The effects of intervention

2. Grounded Theory – The practice of grounded theory has gained much credibility in research circles as a strong, qualitative method, perhaps in light of its quite specific procedures for fieldwork and analysis. The approach blends rigor and creativity through an ongoing back and forth between the data and fieldwork to verify and clarify findings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

3. Participatory Action Research - Action research is an iterative inquiry process that balances problem solving actions implemented in a collaborative context with data-driven collaborative analysis or research to understand underlying causes enabling future predictions about personal and organizational change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

4. Utilization-focused evaluation - Utilization-focused evaluation focuses on "intended use by intended users" (Patton, 1997).

efforts by HeartWood were to be tracked as they unfolded. There were hopes for quick integration and adaptation by HeartWood and the sites, to what was learned through the evaluation. For that reason, methods of grounded theory were applied to analyze the data as it came in. Themes were developed in an iterative fashion throughout the project. Many of those themes can now be recognized in the new emerging HeartWood Model.

In reality the project's feedback loops resembled more an interrupted beat, than a recognizable rhythm. There were difficulties that had more to do with a slow response time from HeartWood to the needs of the Coordinators and Administrators at the sites, than the evaluation design. This later conclusion will be expanded on later in this section. In fairness to HeartWood, their response time as an intervener was on par with what has generally become acceptable in the community development field. A much quicker method of evidence-based feedback is required. On that note, the seeds of a strong participatory method did emerge during YERC and a parallel project, Youth Scape (www.youthscape.ca) this author has been involved with (see Appendix).

Data during the evaluation was collected through frequent participant observation, surveys, and structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. There was an evaluation assistant with as much as twenty hours per week at each site. Throughout the length of the project there were five different people in these three positions.

The following is an outline of the themes of inquiry and indicators we set out to track at the outset of the research project. The themes of inquiry - based on evidence in the field and HeartWood's experience - were identified as those the evaluation should keep a watch on. The indicators in the table below are those that were addressed with more formal methods such as survey and structured interviews.

Elements of the model being measured	Indicators and themes of inquiry being watched	Measuring Change
The development of youth-adult partnerships within a youth-serving org. (formative and summative data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the qualities of listening between young persons and adults the reasons adults get involved, stay involved or end their association reciprocal qualities of respect and appreciation, sense of support provided by the organization to youth leaders levels of commitment to org. vision and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participating adults perception of the youth and adults, before and after the program renewed commitment to org. vision and values
Building of community networks in support of CYD (formative and summative data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new community relationships young people have generated initiation or support of new youth engagement initiatives adults' sense of meaningfulness of youth contributions youth sense of meaningfulness of their community involvement. levels of involvement of youth in community-building initiatives. the process of identifying and engaging the community network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased sense of meaningfulness of youth contributions amongst adults increased sense by youth of meaningfulness of their community involvement increased levels of involvement of youth in community-building initiatives increased social capital community impacts of new relationships i.e., community event, shared planning, organizing, support
Capacity building for individuals in the best practices of CYD (formative data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new skill attainment related to CYD - facilitation, listening, activities links in the community community resources recruited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sense of confidence and understanding of CYD principles and practice demonstrated by community proponents
HeartWood's intervener role (formative data)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comprehensive change in Model sharing practice new resources created new means to communicate the Model capacity building related to sharing the Model

The evaluation team was successful in collecting much of the data intended in the original design. On a weekly and often daily basis this writer was in close contact with HeartWood's work in the sites, and the fieldwork of the Evaluation Assistants. I reviewed the data as it came in, and visited each site three or four times. During these site visits I had an active role with the community proponents. From the perspective of the sites, these visits considerably strengthened the participatory element of the evaluation and the program development. In the case of Nain, the field visits were extended visits of five days or more.

There was been a great deal of data collected during YERC in the form of interview transcripts, field notes and several surveys. The quantity of data is significant. Over the next six months the analysis of the data will continue, and this writer will be directly involved in assuring the learning's from YERC are applied in HeartWood's dissemination work, including continued formal and informal support of the YERC community partners. Additional documents will be produced based on the YERC evaluation. A list of works in progress can be found in the Appendix.

C. Case Studies

1. Introduction

As stated earlier in this report there were three official sites and Community Proponents for this project, four in practice. The Quebec (QC) site had two separate organizational partners, one on the books. Within these four sites there were 5 additional sub-systems (organizations formal and informal) engaged with YERC. These systems have been identified with guidance from HeartWood based on the opportunities they presented for sustainable Community Youth Development activity. The evaluation helped HeartWood clarify the importance of addressing each of the total of nine systems as a unique organization, requiring a unique approach to intervention.

2. The Four Community Proponents of YERC

- i. Youth in Action, Prince Edward Island
- ii. Townshippers' Association, Quebec
- iii. Quebec 4H, Building Outstanding Partnership group, Quebec
- iv. Division of Youth Elders and Recreation, Nunatsiavut Government, Newfoundland/Labrador

The five additional sub-systems YERC engaged were as follows:

- Youth Action Team¹ in Scotchfort, PEI
- Youth Action Team in Mount Stewart, PEI
- Townships Link, (a network of youth centre leaders) Eastern Townships, QC
- Rising Youth Council, Nunatsiavut, NL
- Search 19 (participants of the Search Conference, young and adult citizens, and youth-serving professionals in Nain)

i. Youth in Action, PEI

Youth in Action (YIA) was developed three years prior to the YERC research study as a project under the auspices of the Hillsborough River Area Development Corporation (HRADC).

5. Youth Action Team – a group of youth and supported adults taking action together on personal and community development.

Just prior to YERC coming to their community, YIA made a decision to develop a new youth run project. It was this initiative that attracted HeartWood to Mount Stewart. The HRDAC provided in-kind support to the Youth Action Teams by providing volunteer hours, locations to host community events, and opportunities to partner with other organizations within the HRDAC. The Coordinator of the YIA project extended her work to initiate and coordinate YERC activity in PEI. The Mount Stewart Youth Action Team (YAT) was established first, the Scotchfort group was introduced one year into YERC.

Scotchfort:



Scotchfort is a First Nations community located on the Hillsborough River. It is a part of the Abegweit First Nation, a small

Mi'kmaq band consisting of three reserves: Morell Bear Reserve, Rocky Point Reserve, and Scotchfort Reserve. The Chief and his council currently govern the Abegweit Band. The population of the area is approximately 105, with 43 per cent of the population between the ages of five and sixteen years.

Though a large percentage of the Band population is made up of youth, it has been difficult to find opportunities for them to participate in programming and projects developed specifically for them. In the last two years, new programs have been developed for the youth to participate and offer their insight into ways the community can better itself for its current and future members. One of those new programs has been the development of the Scotchfort Youth Action Team. The focus of the team is to develop and deliver new ideas for the betterment of youth in the community:



Mount Stewart is situated at the opening of the Hillsbor-

ough River. There are 315 residents with approximately 25 per cent of members between the ages of 5 and 19 years.

Mount Stewart is governed by a municipal council, which works in partnership with the local development corporation to ensure future sustainability of the community. The two groups have developed a strategy to decrease vandalism and other crimes in the area and to increase the activity and engagement of children and youth in community projects and programs.

Much like the Scotchfort Youth Action Team, the Mount Stewart team strives to make their community a better place to live, and to decrease the negative stereotypes of youth in the area through positive programming and projects delivered within their community.

ii. QC – Townshippers' Association, QC

The Townshippers' Association is a not-for-profit association led by a volunteer board of directors, who represent different sectors of the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships. The head office in Lennoxville and a branch office in Cowansville are staffed by nine employees who work with volunteer committees to carry out various aspects of the Association's plan of action to achieve its mission and objectives. The Association currently has almost 4,000 members. Members receive a number of special benefits and play an important role in maintaining the Association's grassroots links. Any interested individual or group is eligible for membership. The English-speaking community in the Townships covers a very large geographic area.

The Association is engaged in several key issues in the Townships English-speaking community. These issues include:

- An attitude that to be successful, a young per-

son must leave the region.- A community that has dropped in numbers to just six per cent of the total Townships population.

- A community with a high proportion of seniors, and relatively few young adults.
- Youth with lower level of employment and lower incomes, on average, compared to their French-speaking counterparts.

iii. QC 4H, QC

Quebec 4H is one, if not the, longest standing conventional youth serving organization in Canada that is youth-led. In the organization's attempt to engage its senior youth in an innovative way, and encourage their continued involvement, the Building Outstanding Partnerships (BOP) team was formed during YERC. BOP was comprised of six dynamic senior youth members determined to improve the youth and adult partnerships (YAP) in their organization through training and possibly, coaching.

iv. Nain, NL

In Nunatsiavut, Northern Labrador, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the research was focused on the engagement of youth in the future of the community of Nain. There are seven communities that comprise Nunatsiavut. Nain is the northernmost municipality in the region, and province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is approximately 230 air miles north of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and has a population of 1160. It is a beautiful place with great-spirited and caring people, but there are problems.

Though YERC focused on the hope and possibility of leveraging the assets of the community, it seems important to share the picture we came to know of Nain in order to convey a sense of what the people of this site deal with every single day. There were 62 suicides in Nain over the last 13 years, three during the research period. There were approximately 90 children on the local social worker's case loads during the research period. Drugs and alcohol is reported as a serious issue in a high majority of households.



There were two primary partners in Nain, the Division of Youth Elders and Recreation (DYER) in Nunatsiavut, and the primarily youth-led Rising Youth Council (RYC). The DYER is a branch of the Nunatsiavut Government, which is also based out of Nain. The DYER's mandate, as defined by their title, is to provide recreation services to youth and elders, and bring the two population groups together. The RYC, a service of the DYER, has a mandate to represent the voice of young people in the region with the government, and outside the region.

3. Review of Anticipated and Actual YERC Activity

In the following review along with the four Community Proponent, I have included HeartWood, and the RS.

Model Based Activity -Actual HeartWood facilitated	Model Based Activity Anticipate	Outcomes 0 – 12 mo.	Outcomes 12 – 24 mo. Anticipated	Outcomes 12 – 24 mo. Actual
4H Training and coaching support for senior youth members on developing youth and adult partnerships (YAP) in the organizations community clubs.	Training and support for senior youth members on developing youth and adult partnerships (YAP).	A group of senior youth trainers identified and in training related to YAP. Improved YAP with-in QC 4H organization.	Serve as a resource to community organizations in QC Eastern Townships in the development of YAP. Improved YAP in 4H QC and other participating external organizations.	Senior youth trainers to serve as a resource to community organizations in QC Eastern Townships in the development of YAP. A new program established for senior youth in the 4H organization as an alternative to governance work for the organization.
Townshippers Association (TWN) Distance and in-person training, and coaching to support strategy development, and understanding of youth inclusion practices, and CYD strategies for the region and organization.	Training, coaching, and strategy development with staff and volunteers of TWN related to meaningful youth inclusion. Building a network between youth centre Coordinators, youth participants, and volunteers. Youth and adult leader training. Dialogue session(s) between adult volunteers, staff, and volunteers.	Increased awareness of means to increased youth involvement in decision-making at the organization. A network of youth centre leaders in the Eastern Townships.	Effective youth inclusion practices within TWN. Increased membership within TWN. More effective practices and structures that contribute to the resilience of the youth centres in the network. A network of youth leaders. Increased leadership capacity of youth and adult leaders, and staff.	Explorations at staff and board level of governance structure changes to encourage youth engagement. An informal network of youth centre leaders in the Eastern Townships.
Community of Nain Search Conference (intensive 2.5 day community process for planning and action) Update meetings with the Search Conference participants Publications of 3 Acts of Kindness Newsletters. Coaching in person and distance Co-leadership of a Spring Camp for the RYC and Government Ministers	Search Conference (community process for planning and action) Youth camp(s) Youth forum(s)	Increased awareness of the role of a community network in youth engagement, and in the practices of CYD. A shared community action plan for youth involvement in the future of Nain.	Established community network of youth and adults supporting CYD New youth engagement initiatives.	Establishment of new small community network, 8 – 12 youth and adults supporting CYD. Formal dialogue between Rising Youth Council, its members, and Nunatsiavut Government. Coaching relationship established between the Division of Youth, Elders and Recreation and HeartWood.

PEI Youth Lead Event (youth forum) Conference Workshop (Youth: An Abundant Community Asset) Coaching in person and distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing development of Youth Action Team(s) (YAT) • Youth Forum(s) Youth engagement activity for senior young people	Establishment of two YAT's in two communities in the district. Personal and community development through CYD.	Increased capacity to support youth engagement by Community Proponent.	Establishment of two YAT's in two adjacent communities in the district.
HeartWood	Site interventions (sharing the Model – practices, values, and tools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new means to communicate about the Model - identification of effective practices and gaps in Model sharing practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive Model sharing practice - new resources created - capacity building related to sharing the Model - evidence on the Model's effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new CYD Model created - evidence on the Model's effectiveness gathered
Rural Secretariat	Increased youth engagement capacity at each site - HeartWood Model ready for broader dissemination Reporting: - _ly reports - Model Proponent meetings communication - site visits by RS communiqués - final report	process changes in program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HeartWood Model ready for broader dissemination - improved practices for the RS Model Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HeartWood Model ready for broader dissemination - final report - site visits - Model Proponent meetings Increased youth engagement capacity at each site

4. General Activity

Youth in Action, PEI

Activity initiated and facilitated by the community partner:

Youth Action Team video, youth volunteers at the Canada Day celebration activities, youth volunteers at the 1st Annual Eagle Festival, Fundraising adult trivia event, host a youth dance, Karaoke and music night, volunteer leaders at Tracadie Day camps, Community Youth Development Conference meetings, Youth Engagement Workshop, Summer Overnight Event, Heritage River Festival, hosted a children's Haunted House for Halloween, a Christmas party for themselves and other youth within the community, Christmas dinner, weekly gym sessions, karaoke dance off/board game evening host a basketball seminar, pen pal with youth in Quebec, make a short film.

The YAT's in this community were working to build stronger relationships with their communities so as to break down negative stereotypes and foster new growth. Youth in Action (YIA), the Community Proponent at this site, is an organization run mainly by one person, and not unlike a very small rural recreation department, operates various children's and community programs. The two YAT's initiated at this site were managed and mentored by the same person, who had become the YERC Coordinator at this site. As YERC developed at the site the Coordinator also considered leading an effort towards creating regional linkages and support of other YAT's in PEI. She also expressed interest in youth involvement at a provincial conference focused on youth engagement. All of this activity was evaluated as to the appropriateness of YERC's involvement.

Model Based Activity-PEI
HeartWood co-facilitated
Youth Lead Event (youth forum)

Conference Workshop - Youth: An Abundant Community Asset

Coaching of the Coordinator in person and distance

QC 4H, QC

Initiated and facilitated by the community partner:

- Workshops for the Townshippers' Association on youth and adult partnerships, 4H Leadership Conference participants, Community Learning Centre, and the Community Against Drugs action groups,
- assistance to a 4-H Club to resolve a major conflict and in developing positive goals for the future

Model Based Activity-QC4H
HeartWood facilitated

Training and coaching for senior youth 4H members on developing youth and adult partnerships (YAP) in the organizations community clubs.

Townshippers' Association, QC

General Activity initiated and facilitated by the community partner:

Townships Leaders of Tomorrow Awards • Townshippers' Day • Youth Link, Youth Centres network meetings • activity day Youth Link • wellness and career fair with the local high school

The focus of YERC within the association was initially youth inclusion within the organization. This strategy expanded with the notion that if enthusiastic young people in the Townships were to get involved in the YERC project, they might also consider becoming active in the Townshippers' Association and inject new life and ideas into it. Based on previous



experience and study, the Townshippers enacted a strategy of assisting young adults to connect with one another in order to help one another. The community component of that objective evolved into assistance to young people who wanted to make a difference in their community, and find other young people who wanted to do the same.

A plan was developed but not fully executed, to link other community agencies and provide a supportive foundation for sustainable youth inclusion across the region. Collaborative activities were to be focused on building these relationships. For example, the senior youth of the local Quebec 4H chapter would facilitate a professional development workshop for adult volunteers and staff of the Townshippers' Association. Another important initiative was the formation of a training and support network with various youth centres in the Eastern Townships – Youth Link. This work intended, though it never materialized, to develop Youth Action Teams as well as site-specific training, coaching, and programming focused on creating community-wide engagement.

Model Based Activity-Townshippers HeartWood facilitated

Training and coaching for senior youth members on developing youth and adult partnerships (YAP) in the organizations community clubs.

Nain, NL

General activity initiated and facilitated by the community partner:

Started a website • assisted the Division of Youth Elders and Recreation with the planning of the Celebrate Life symposium • held a fundraiser • helped with Nain Easter Games • land based-camp Tikkoattokak • drum making workshop • Graffiti Project • assist the youth participants for preparation and departure to a summer camp • Kattilautta Music Festival • assisted the Recreation Department with Halloween Dance

Activity in Nain initiated and directly supported by HeartWood:

Model Based Activity- Nain

Search Conference (intensive 2.5 day community process for planning and action)

Update meetings with the Search Conference participants

Publication of three Acts of Kindness Newsletters.

Coaching in person and distance

Co-leadership of a Spring Camp for the RYC and

D. What Were the Questions One Year Into the Project?

Government Ministers

HeartWood's CYD Framework – helpful, but for YERC, not enough.

As expected it quickly became evident during the project that HeartWood's CYD Framework was not sufficient in and of itself as a guide to the work with the community sites. The level of organizational and community development work HeartWood faced at the sites was extensive. With the intensities of a time schedule, available financial resources, and the complication of working with distant sites, the Framework left too much to the imagination. There was little to guide HeartWood or the partners on how to formulate specific strategies to activate the Framework's principles (core values) and to apply what the Framework referred to as Tools for Growth. The challenges of moving forward with the CYD objective in each of the sites was complex.

The process of discovery between HeartWood and the YERC sites became one of emergence and innovation. For all parties concerned, the two and a half year journey had, at various times, the characteristics of being easy and free flowing, complicated, difficult, frustrating, unclear, and exciting. That much was to be expected. YERC was to take what HeartWood had learned from its work over the years - as described by the Framework - and while building the capacity of community partners, shape it into a format for sharing with others. To take these goals seriously meant developing a strong level of relationships between HeartWood, this researcher, and the sites that would encourage shared discovery. This principle of strong relationships remained a top priority.

This section offers a glance at some of the activity and corresponding questions HeartWood grappled with halfway into the YERC Project.

i) PEI

Two slowly developing YATs with four to eight members each, were meeting every two to three weeks. One shared service project at Halloween was conducted by the two teams. This experience was significant both in it being a tangible action, and that the two teams came together for it.

Question: Should HeartWood 'nudge' the YATs into further service action? If so, how? If not, then what should we do, if anything? In other words, does HeartWood let them go where they naturally go?

Question: How might HeartWood continue to assist the YIA program? Considering that without the Coordinator, who was also the originator of YIA, YERC would have a diminishing legacy in PEI. How might HeartWood help build the capacity of YIA?

Question: Should HeartWood assist YIA with their desire to build a regional network of other youth action teams (youth groups) and if so, how?

ii) At the Townshippers

Despite a concerted effort at the one-year mark little obvious progress had been made towards the objective of youth involvement at the Townshippers. What had been accomplished seemed to have had little to do with what the YERC project had contributed, beyond keeping the question of youth inclusion in the forefront. The Executive Director and Board of Directors appeared committed to the objective, but what changes might be required were difficult to determine. It was not yet clear at this stage what change to their structure, if any, might be required to meaningfully involve youth. The BOP training at Townshippers, which was pending at the halfway point of the project, was anticipated as an opportunity to educate the Board about the project and its

potential for the organization.

In a follow-up to a December 2006 interview, the Executive Director wrote in an email to this evaluator discussing a new approach and focus to the Townshippers youth inclusion efforts. The e-mail is one example of the strategic juggling the site grappled with.

"We discussed the new Coordinators forming a Youth Action Team, separate from the Townshippers of Tomorrow Committee [internal youth services committee]. The team could be given a budget to use as they see fit, say \$5,000. Possible project: Youth Forum or other. The role of the Coordinator would be to protect the 'container' for the youth action team. Thus, the youth action team(s) is about youth engagement in the Townships, not just in Townshippers' Association."

Noteworthy is that at the halfway point of the project this site was on its third Coordinator.

Question: Should HeartWood advise the Townshippers to form a new youth-led structure?

As part of YERC the Townshippers initiated a youth centre coordinators network - Youth Link. At the halfway point in the project there was a network of youth centre Coordinators that met informally every other month. At this stage of the project, the Coordinators were happy to just be meeting and getting to know one another. They expressed little interest in any training or shared action. However there was a shared recreational day planned for interested youth from the centres. There was though, only limited support for the suggestion of being strategic about sending youth that might have a leadership role of some sort with their respective centres.

Question: Should HeartWood do anything further to support the professional development of this youth centre network? If so, how should the subject be approached?

iii) At the Quebec 4H:

At the midway point of the YERC project, the 4H BOP team had successfully facilitated one internal workshop for the 4H on youth and adult partner-

ships, and had plans to deliver a second for the Townshippers' organization. The team also had identified interest in being a resource for building youth and adult partnerships within QC's Eastern Townships for other community and youth-serving organizations. The Townshippers' organization offered to help facilitate the establishment of the latter.

Question: What form of support can HeartWood provide the 4H BOP team in their effort to become effective trainers on youth and adult partnerships?

Question: How might HeartWood support the BOP team and the 4H organization in their effort to improve youth and adult partnerships overall in the organization?

Question: How might HeartWood support the Townshippers' organization in facilitating the BOP team to become a resource in the Townships?

iv) Nain, NL

At the one-year point three months had past since the Search Conference (SC) in Nain. The group of 19 (Search 19) that originally participated in the SC had grown to include a few new members interested in acting on plans for a desirable future of youth involvement in Nain. With this group having formed a plan and a way to take action on it, things at this point in Nain with the YERC project at first appeared rosy. However energy appeared to be waning. The four action groups that came out of the SC, were meeting sporadically at best. HeartWood was encouraging the Coordinator to spend more time encouraging the action groups to meet, and assuring that their meetings remained in the democratic form in which they practiced at the SC. Plans were laid for a meeting of the SC 19 to look at the SC report and to take it as an opportunity to re-visit the spirit they had all found during the event. The HeartWood YERC Program Coordinator was to be in Nain for that meeting.

Also at this stage of the YERC project a school-led newsletter was in process, with a focus on 'random acts of caring.' The newsletter was to be used as both a research tool and a way to raise the youth voice in the community.

E. From Framework to Model

I think it is important to note that HeartWood went into YERC with its own evidence-based Community Youth Development (CYD) Framework (figure 1). This fact is significant as the Framework shaped YERC's evaluation and offers a point of reference to provide the RS feedback on their own participatory practices (see section I).

To the staff at HeartWood, and perhaps many practitioners, the term 'model' suggests a predetermined way of working. HeartWood's CYD Framework on the other hand, offers a way to focus attention on the necessary components of the task at hand, and like the work of puzzle making, determines how best to bring the pieces together in an intervention. The Framework describes a dynamic set of skills, competencies and practices.

As the Executive Director of HeartWood during the negotiation process with the Rural Secretariat for the YERC project, I remember having tense discussions with the RS's then Research Director, regarding HeartWood's CYD framework. Her insistence was that HeartWood's framework was actually our 'model' and that it is what was to be tested, in its entirety. Her interpretation was that HeartWood was to test a model on how to initiate and support Youth Action Teams (YATs). It seemed to the RS, that the YAT's were a tangible product outcome of a practice-based model.

For HeartWood, the YAT's had become just one outcome of their Framework, and certainly not representative of the Framework's greatest contributions to CYD. HeartWood's Framework is for CYD, not to develop YAT's. In the case of YERC, outcomes and strategies also address organizational development, youth leadership training, and community planning.

figure 1



HeartWood had identified the Community Resources component of the Framework as the component that required investigation. Based on its previous research and field experience, the Tools for Growth component of the Framework – essentially, the practice of youth development and its byproduct, YATs – did not require further investigation. The Research Director at the RS seemed to disregard this history, and the original YERC proposal went forward with objectives of developing YAT's.

History of HeartWood's CYD Framework

From 1999 - 2002 with the support of the J.W. McConnell Foundation and collaborating partners, HeartWood began to develop a framework for their practice. HeartWood brought to the process a solid set of skills and competencies in youth development and adult education, a celebrated reputation, and rich community and government relationships. The 'laboratory' of the framework development lived dynamically on multiple levels with volunteers, youth, adults, community organizations, institutions and government. The period with J.W. McConnell's support concluded with HeartWood building on its reputation as a learning organization and the completion of the first version of the CYD Framework (figure #1).

In 2002-2003, funded by Social Science and Humanities Research Council, HeartWood, Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University, and the community research group, Sharing Strengths, embarked on an exploratory assessment of the Framework. The research team completed intensive interviews with participants from YATs in 12 communities across Nova Scotia. Stories were gathered from 28 young people, 17 key adult support people, and 9 community agency representatives who had supported a team or received service from one. HeartWood spoke with an equal number of young men and women. Most participants were from rural areas, though two teams were drawn from a large urban centre. The result were identification of what the youth considered to be the core values and motivating factors for their engagement (Dummond, Langlois, Warner, 2003). These core values live today as principles central to the emerging Model that comes out of the YERC project.

The Framework's components and processes continued to evolve, as did the way in which it is both communicated and practiced. For their part, practitioners have been highly receptive to it and see in it a very useful conceptualization of ideas and tools to move the challenging work of youth inclusion forward. The Framework fast became a focal point for over 100 different community collaborations in Nova Scotia (NS) including: rural communities, teen health centres, government departments, youth/adult dialogues – territorial wide to neighborhood focused, city recreation departments and library services, youth employment programs, grassroots groups, community economic development conferences, research projects, youth-in-care peer support programs, and youth leadership camps.

The Framework has served as a vehicle for HeartWood to frame a significant body of knowledge and experience. This work over the last 9 years has been difficult, challenging and rewarding for community partners and HeartWood. There are many attributes to an organization or a community - power dynamics, prejudices, and policy restrictions to name just a few - and in the work of youth engagement one is likely to experience most of them. In HeartWood's perspective, its work, though continually greeted with enthusiasm in the field, was producing mixed results. It was true that in NS more young people were being engaged, and people in organizations and government were having more focused policy and program discussions, but these systems operated primarily in the same ways they always had. HeartWood still required a more efficient way to guide youth-serving organizations on how to meaningfully involve youth for the benefit of all.

It was this rich history of experience that HeartWood carried into the YERC project. The RS's Models program coincided with HeartWood's readiness to develop their Framework into a more systematic model to guide their work in an expanding and diverse market.

In the end, YERC was guided by the CYD Framework the same way HeartWood's work in every other system over the last number of years had been; only this time there was an evaluation to capture the learning. Although the learning's from YERC go well beyond the original conceptualization of YATs,

two of the four partners did emerge with YATs as a central strategy.

The evaluation verified the Tools for Growth from the original Framework, but most of the richest learning concerned the context of community organizations trying to initiate YATs, versus the dynamics of the YATs themselves.

Ff

F. YERC Findings

Summary of Findings

1- The evidence from the YERC research supports the Tools for Growth identified in HeartWood's CYD Framework.

2- To share knowledge and experience through a comprehensive project such as YERC, a broader footing with community leaders is required than what is traditionally achieved through the coordinator, and steering committee model.

3- Though children and youth are ready to engage, involving adults and elders requires more careful attention.

4- A Search Conferencing is an effective means of community planning, but more targeted follow-up is required.

5- There is a need for regional leadership to align fragmented youth services and encourage strength-based approaches.

6- A more responsive research and evaluation method is required.

1) The evidence from the YERC research supports the Tools for Growth identified in HeartWood's CYD Framework.

HeartWood went into the YERC project with identified Tools for Growth (youth development) from its Framework. These tools were based on previous HeartWood research, and 20 years of applying them in the field. The YERC evaluation used a survey and a structured interview to clarify these tools further, and to verify their continuing relevance. The tools remain a central means of communicating HeartWood's CYD Framework. The Tools blended with the Core Values of the Framework, have shaped the new articulation of Principles of Intervening as part of the emerging new HeartWood's Model for Youth Engagement outlined in this document. The Principles of Intervening are as follows: Connections, Meaningful Contribution, Passion, Adventurous Learning, and Action.

2. To share knowledge and experience through a project such as YERC, there is a need to establish broad footing in the community through strong relationship with a diversity of community leaders.

Attempting to transfer HeartWood's considerable institutional knowledge through one organizational representative (HeartWood YERC Program Coordinator) to primarily one community representative (Community YERC Coordinator), was a weak knowledge transfer structure. In two of the four community sites, there was a great deal of re-thinking old ways of doing things. It is well documented that in situations such as these, requiring complex structural change, the more channels of open communication and understanding, the better (Wheatley, M. Frieze, D., 2006). During the YERC project in Nain, the Search Conference increased the channels of communication and understanding considerably, significantly impacting HeartWood and the community's ability to seek solutions together, and establish a broader footprint in the community.

3) Children and youth are ready to engage; adults and elders require careful attention.

Though children and young people were more than ready to engage in three of the four sites, there was low involvement of supportive adults. The evaluation made it clear that it will take a more concerted effort, personal attention and clear tasks to involve supportive adults and elders in a CYD initiative. The young participants of the Search Conference in Nain demonstrated the most significant action following the event, but were disappointed with what became low post-event adult engagement. The PEI site suffered from very low adult support beyond the paid Coordinator position, throughout the project. The 4H BOP team, though very competent leaders in their own right, was also wanting for more adult support of their learning and actions.

4) A Search Conferencing is an effective means of community planning but more targeted follow-up is required.

The reviews on a Search Conference conducted in Nain were very positive from both the participants and the community. It was successful in bringing together professionals, youth and adult citizens to plan

how they could make Nain a better place. The evaluation demonstrated the power of community change tools like a Search Conference, and others that apply a whole system change process. However, a better means to maintain the momentum and increase contact between those that begin to get involved in community action is required. Though Search Conferencing, and the follow-up Participatory Democratic Workshop (to create a structure for the action), is designed to limit the external follow-up support required, that was not the case in Nain. Though participants continue to speak highly of the event and its impact, the action teams that flowed out of the event were mostly inactive within four months of the event. The Search Conference is a well-researched method based on Open Systems Theory⁶. The point of significance for future practice is the idea of whole systems change tools like Search Conferencing being important to community planning.

5) There is a need for regional leadership to align fragmented youth services and encourage strength-based approaches.

In every region which YERC operated there was a high number of other youth services, including project-based, youth service organizations, and government supported initiatives. It is my hypothesis that in most regions all the financial and human resources required to address youth concerns already exist in most regions. However, as was discovered during the YERC project, services are fragmented and have a focus on youth as recipients of service rather than considering their potential also as providers of service. If there is to be progress towards CYD in rural communities, it will require every existing youth service organization and institution to consider what more they can do to fully engage young people in meaningful ways in their own operations, and how they might better collaborate with other existing public and private service providers.

6) Developmental Action Research and Evaluation

People in Environment and System Today ~ Product, Engagement, Tools, Training, Strategies
DARE: PEST to PETTS

A daring new participatory methodology
The YERC research and a similar research project Youth Scape, (www.youthscape.ca) which this writer is also a lead evaluator for, has helped identify the need for a new kind of participatory research and evaluation. The objective is to develop a process such that, "Research becomes a tool to support the self-discovery of individuals, build community, and more generally serve as a catalyst for change (Hall, 2003; McTaggart 2000; Reitsma-Street, 2002)."

One that is:

- applicable to innovative and comprehensive circumstances
- embraces emergence
- utilization focused
- timely feedback
- address ambiguity
- pays attention to process
- shows caring for the people involved

One that recognizes that:

- People reside in systems
- Every system is dealing with a different environment
- What is today is not what is tomorrow, and is different than yesterday
- Systems engaged in a systems change process can create new
- Products and services
- Diffusion planned for through increasing Engagement
- Tools are created to support the systems change initiative in a timely
- Training that is timely, experiential, and relevant
- Data gathered that can help develop smart Strategies

6. Open Systems Theory - OST contextualizes a system in environment (Emery, F.E., Trist, E.L., 1965)

G. An Emerging Model for Youth Engagement

Introduction

In this report I have attempted to align the lessons learned during YERC with the essence of the original HeartWood CYD Framework. I herein describe an emerging HeartWood Model for Youth Engagement that has developed in an iterative manner during the evaluation process as the YERC project unfolded. It has been this evaluator's recommendation to HeartWood that together the original CYD Framework, and with the new Model for Youth Engagement, create a strong tool to guide youth engagement work in other rural and urban jurisdictions.

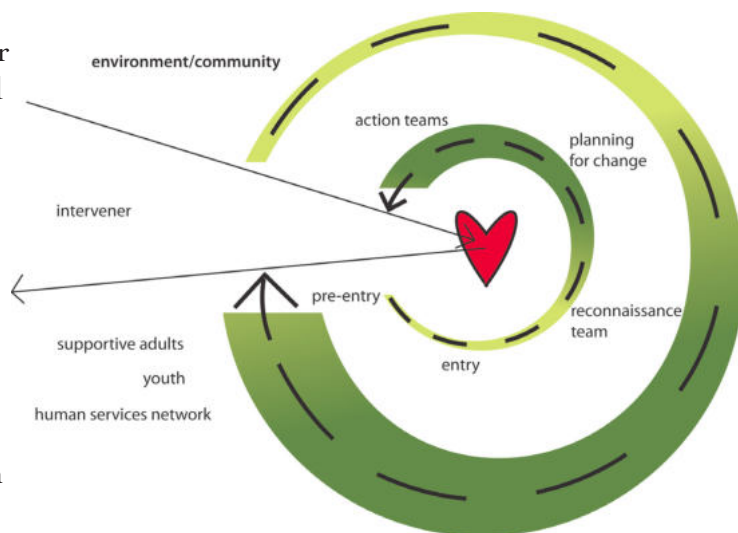
This emerging Model is based on countless field notes of interactions between HeartWood and the sites, surveys, and interviews. The Model manifested through comparative analysis of all the sites. In addition, HeartWood's previous experience and a review of evidence from disciplines including youth development, community development, change management, experiential education, and eco-system management have helped bring the new Model forward. Finally, this Model has evolved in various visual formats over the last two years. It has been reviewed and adjusted in three workshops with HeartWood staff, and at various times with community partners.

The evidence is well established that youth engagement contributes to the positive development of young people. However that evidence alone has not been sufficient to shift most every form of youth development service in Canada. Most of these organizations and systems stubbornly hold onto a deficit-based approach⁷. The emerging Model is built on an assertion that to influence youth development you need to influence those systems directly influencing young people. The Model suggests to do this well is to engage young people with those systems.

As stated earlier, HeartWood's emerging Model for Youth Engagement builds from the foundational concepts put forth in its original CYD Framework. What has been added is a systematic path that guides the movement of youth-serving systems into new or improved practices that encourage youth engagement.

The Model's theoretical underpinnings are rooted in Open Systems Theory (OST). HeartWood has long spoken of the importance of treating youth development in the context of the community in which the youth reside. OST contextualizes a system in its environment. This can be articulated as youth in environment and hence the term Community Youth Development. The emerging Model being put forth herein is inherently an appreciative one. Systems - henceforth referring to organizations, agencies, groups, associations, and families - are constantly trying to adapt to pressures from an external environment. OST provides compelling evidence that systems with participatory structures better adapt to their environment and achieve their common purpose.

The Emerging HeartWood Model for Youth Engagement



7. deficit-based approach – an approach that focuses on needs, deficiencies, and problems, or what is 'out of place.'

Principles of Intervening

Connections - gaining inspiration, support and guidance through relationships of mutual caring and respect.

Meaningful Contribution - individuals acts of giving with personal meaning to another and/or the planet.

Passion - interactions that inspire strong feelings arising from inspirational exchanges with others.

Adventurous Learning - in the form of engaging, firsthand experiences that challenge individuals to step outside of their comfort zone to learn and grow.

Action - taking tangible actions on a regular basis as opposed to the traditional weighting of more planning and less action.

Community/Environment

People have the choice to look at pressures in their life in one of two ways, as a problem or an opportunity. The HeartWood Model suggests an appreciative approach, focusing attention on strengths, potential, and possibilities. In a community development context this means considering readily available resources and assets to create solutions, before seeking outside expertise to fix problems (see Appreciative Approach resource www.heartwood.ns.ca/tools.shtml).

The Model suggests those systems that serve or involve youth should reach out to engage with three particular forms of resources in their immediate environment – youth, supportive adults, and a human service network. Every community and youth-involved organization can identify these resources within their environment. Any one of these three forms of community resource can initiate a youth engagement effort, but engaging all three establishes the richest conditions for sustainable change. It is important to note that the perspective of most youth-serving organizations is a positioning of young people as clients to be served, outside of their organizational system. The HeartWood Model encourages movement from youth as service recipients to becoming service providers. These resources have proven significant in moving a youth engagement initiative forward:

Youth brought into meaningful roles within the community and/or organization.

YERC: There was an attempt to involve youth as a resource in all of the sites. Two of the four sites successfully established YATs. In these two cases the teams will sustain activity beyond the life of the YERC project. In two of the sites there was a concerted effort to involve youth in combination with the other two forms of community resources suggested by the Model. These two sites can claim the most significant community development outcomes and possibility for sustainable activity. The site that required the least intervention from HeartWood not surprisingly, had the highest level of self-motivation, and was entirely youth led.

Wicked Question⁸ : If community development initiatives focused on youth issues ignore the option of ‘entering’ into a youth engagement initiative through a system organized and led by young people, are they contributing to youth disengagement?

Supportive Adults brought in as partners with youth, to help those young people taking action within systems navigate through services, policies, and processes.

YERC: Two sites made a concerted effort to involve supportive adults from the community with youth groups, one was successful. In this site, the adults disengaged well before the youth. These two sites made the most significant progress advancing from a youth development focus to a community youth development focus. All sites relied primarily on paid staff from within their system for supportive adults as a resource. In three of the four sites, the YERC Coordinator filled this role.

Wicked Question: Is the model of hiring Coordinators flawed? Is reliance on temporary paid staff in key roles reducing the sense of need for community ownership?

8. Wicked Question – Wicked questions do not have an obvious answer. They are used to expose the assumptions that shape our actions and choices. They are questions that articulate the embedded and often contradictory assumptions we hold about an issue, context or organization. (Zimmerman, Lindberg, Plsek, 1998)

A human service network of organizations and individuals, networked within the system and the environment.

YERC: Two of the sites made a concerted effort to inform and involve the human service network in their community. In both sites the individuals in the professional network had limited involvement in the project. In some cases, attempting to engage the professional network limited progress.

Within each of the three forms of resource suggested by the Model, it is HeartWood's experience that there are individuals that when given the right conditions, will act as initiators, innovators, and connectors. Ideally these individuals are positioned in an organization or community such that they can influence others in the community and youth-involved organizations, and are ready and able to influence change for improvement within current patterns of youth services.

Intervening Resource Agency or Person

The HeartWood Model highlights a fourth resource external to any system attempting a youth engagement initiative. This agency or individual takes the first steps outlined by the Model, and at various times during the work may fulfill the role of facilitator, coach, trainer, and evaluator.

YERC: The Site Coordinators have assumed this role. As it does with all initiators, HeartWood has been working closely with these Coordinators to identify current patterns of service in the systems and to explore how these might be influenced to uncover opportunities for CYD.

HeartWood as Intervener

It is this role of Intervener that HeartWood assumes directly, or acts as a primary support to an agency or individual assuming the role from within the system. HeartWood's role becomes one that provides guidance in the form of coaching, training, facilitation and offering tools, resources, and evaluation. HeartWood believes the success of an intervention with a system, is dependent on the level of respect the intervener practices. To be respectful, HeartWood believes, is to craft interventions in a manner that best serves the core of what the group is truly searching for.

In the early stages of the Model implementation, the intervener is focused on mapping the system before moving into the work of guiding a Reconnaissance Team. The Model's Principles of Intervening guide these interactions. A research and evaluation plan will instill a rigor of accountability to HeartWood's support.

The HeartWood Model encourages frequent and tangible action towards the objective of youth and system development. Not only does action motivate, teach, and builds group capacity, it is far more engaging than simply planning for action! The Model also call for a structured reflection process to accompany action. The reflections will generate lessons to be incorporated into teaching, evaluation, and celebration of the change process.

Change work in human systems is complex with high potential for learning and innovation. HeartWood has developed a participatory research and evaluation practice designed for this context. Developmental Evaluation and Participatory Action Research form the basis for reflection and learning with the HeartWood Model. The methods are applied in a manner that encourages integration at all levels of program development - planning, action and reflection. The focus stays on the people, their processes, their engagement, and what they are learning as it unfolds. The desired result is development of the system including individual empowerment, tools to aid in shared learning, and stories that capture the lessons of the change process. The information generated needs to be relevant and timely for the people in the field with youth. HeartWood refers to this methodology as Developmental Action Research and Evaluation.



The Change Process

Pre-Entry

This stage of the Model is about starting off on the right first step. The first step of the HeartWood Model is to - step back. It is essential to get familiar with the system interested in a youth engagement initiative and its external environment.

This assessment identifies an individual(s) who can act as a type of independent tour guide to the system, making introductions, showing the physical landscape, and informing the Intervener on some of the history and nuances of the local power structure. This process will help to identify how an Intervener might best enter the system. What part of the system, in a sense, has a welcome mat out? Which of these would be best to accept? Which perhaps, to gracefully turn down?

In HeartWood's earlier attempts to do community-based youth engagement work, mixed results raised the question, "What indicators at the outset of a CYD initiative lead to a higher probability of sustainability?" In addition to the system's boundaries, the pre-entry stage of the Model determines the resources available for the proposed initiative, its potential for impact on the system and environment, and the level of intent for change among the decision-makers. The objective of this assessment is to determine the degree of impact each may have on sustaining or constraining CYD activity (see Appendix re upcoming works).

YERC: In one site the Community Proponent changed. In all sites the strategies adopted by the Community Proponents changed, in one site it

changed five times, in another, three. At the outset of YERC, HeartWood instituted what was thought to be a careful, value-based site selection process that seemed beyond the standard. However, in every case the initial assessments failed to surface important information that may have led HeartWood, at the very least, to 'enter' the systems differently.

Entry

The system in which the intervention is to take place must be clarified. There are many systems within systems. Every organization has for example, various special initiatives, departments and groups. In a community a youth engagement initiative might be, for example, focused on a sports program, exchanges with a municipal government, or a youth choir. Identifying those individuals to be directly involved with a particular youth engagement initiative, whether by position or design, will determine the initiative's ultimate objectives, and in turn, its boundaries

To help identify starting point boundaries for an initiative, Interveners explore the questions:

- What draws the system of people together?
- How do the people organize?
- What are its cultural elements?

This mapping will bring forward the history of the system bringing it to a conscious level to help find a path to the future.

Once clear on which individuals and/or entities constitute the initiative, the trends, opportunities and challenges the system faces from its environment become evident. The HeartWood Model's strength-based and appreciative approach emphasizes that not only do environments impact a system but with concentrated effort, together the people of a system can learn to better adapt and in turn change the environment.



We help you build a resource team and they find the best people to take action.

various strategies for moving the initiative forward within the system. The team is trained and coached by HeartWood with an objective of establishing themselves as a learning organization, in essence an eco-niche within the larger system.

YERC: The steering committee's function was situated with pre-established community committees in all sites. In all sites these committees failed to materialize as a vehicle for networking or advisory support.

The 4H's youth-led Building Outstanding Partnerships Team were given the 'room' to develop and act on their ideas within the 4H structure. They made fast progress on their objective and felt empowered as individuals and as a team by the process. In another site, the original Committee YERC was assigned to, failed to materialize as a strong reference point for the change initiative. Centralized leadership of the committee seemed to limit its ability to adapt or even consider fully the changes being suggested by the YERC project.

Wicked questions: Does the usual model of establishing steering committees for reasons of community participation actually limit community participation, and the discovery of other forms of accountability? Is a funder's insistence on establishing steering committees as an early step in a project's life, disregard the emergent characteristic of new community development, and unduly effect the manner which the intervening agency enters the system (see section I for more on this topic)?

Reconnaissance Team

The intent of the Reconnaissance Team is to act as a reference for the change initiative for the rest of the system. Its primary task is to find the best people within the system to participate in a planning event that addresses the whole system.

Many new change initiatives get their start as an inspiring idea or urgent response to a need. The people connected to the original idea or action tend to have the highest level of intent and clarity for the project. However, in the case of community initiatives, once they get their formal start the first order of business either imposed by a funder or assumed by the organizer is often to establish a community steering committee. In organizations, the parallel process might appear as action committees made up of personnel from within the same department. In either context the original intent of the idea or need very often gets slowed, twisted, misrepresented, co-opted and sometimes needlessly abandoned. The original idea or vision falls victim to the inefficiencies of bureaucracies and committee work.

The right people to make up the Reconnaissance Team and the planning event needs careful consideration. Contrary to the practice of establishing steering committees, the HeartWood Model suggest the right people are those persons who care about the initiative, not simply representatives of partnering organizations or other departments.

The Team is structured such that they have the freedom to move around in the system. The Reconnaissance Team inevitably will run interference, applying



We introduce ways to help you plan together, looking at yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Planning for Change

It is important to get to know the history, assets, opinions, ideas, fears, and goals of those in the system ready to take some leadership of the change initiative. This Planning for Change phase broadens the number of people engaged with the initiative beyond the Reconnaissance Team. The objective of the phase is to build collective vision and consensus on actions, and address any ambiguity or conflict. By connecting people, ideas, resources and skills, new sources of energy are released to fuel the change process and guide strategic choices for action.

Planning events are based on Open Systems Theory's evidence-based Search Conference tool. The core of the process is a two-day Search Conference and a follow-up half-day to structure the action. The design components of the Search Conference are a review of the history of the system: what is going on in the environment, what is desired by the system, an assessment of constraints and opportunities, and an action plan. The Search Conference format can be modified but the components remain the same. An assessment is also carried out to uncover the skills and assets of those committed to take action, and others that can contribute to the common vision.

Action Teams

At the centre of most successful change efforts in an organization or community you will find a team of committed people with a vision. Based on the work of the previous phase, Action Teams self-organize around the components of the work of most interest to them. Effective teamwork between youth and adults on these teams is central to managing the complexity of new and innovative approaches to involving young people in the system. Time is allotted for the group to build as a team in order to effectively establish generative ways of working together.

Hierarchical roles and bureaucracy can create barriers to innovation and new ways of working. The human, physical and financial resources of organizations and community systems in time become tied up by established patterns of operating. In these circumstances it becomes difficult for individuals to access resources for anything beyond established processes and objectives. This phase of the Model concentrates on identifying strategic actions to manage these barriers and identify opportunities to move the youth engagement agenda forward.

HeartWood supports Action Teams with specific resources, tools and knowledge to help them execute the change they seek. The skills required by the system to achieve their desired changes may be as wide-ranging as from strategy to carpentry and may include topics such as: media relations, facilitation, proposal writing, managing power dynamics, and evaluation.



Teams of youth and adults take action

with these principles

- Connection
- Action
- Meaningful Contribution
- Passion
- Adventurous Learning

Though training workshops are a common means for an organization to acquire necessary skills, this is only one method of knowledge transfer, and can be a limiting one at that. Many of the skills a CYD initiative requires will already exist in the community. The genuine need for these skills becomes the impetus for attracting the engagement of the human service network identified earlier in the Model description. Engaging this network and individual community members multiplies the potential for success of the initiative exponentially. HeartWood will guide clients in establishing the means for acquiring these skills from within their system, to achieve their desired future. HeartWood will also provide Action Teams the necessary training and coaching as well as other knowledge transfer processes such as learning circles, networking, and resources.

Repeat the Phases

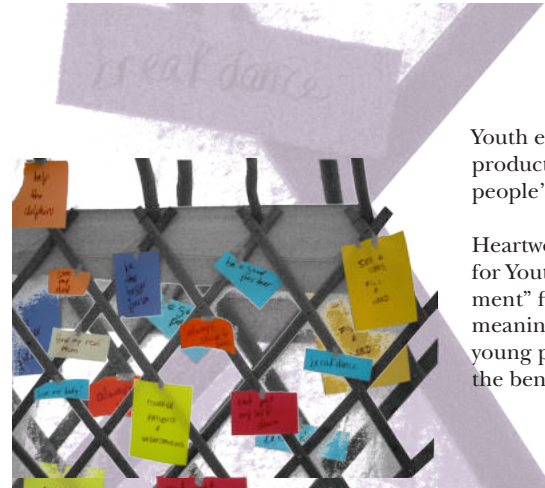
Concentrated and strategic actions will change a system's makeup and if successful, its environment. The boundaries of the system and the people involved will change as the initiative moves forward. It is at this point in an initiative's life, the phases of the Model are repeated again, commencing with Entry.

Outcomes

The HeartWood Model seeks to institutionalize the heart of an organization's service to young people, by doing that service *with* young people. The Model brings forward the unique contributions of young people in strengthening their own, and an organization's, resilience. Whether an individual or a group of people as part of an organization, the Model strengthens capacity to adapt to today's fast changing environments by increasing the quality of social interactions.

Research has shown that young people involved meaningfully in organizations strengthen the organizations' relationships, increase their focus on values and mission, and better align services to those they are meant to serve. Evidence also tells a story of young people as bridge builders between cultures, an essential quality of vibrant organizations and communities.

The Model not only guides the engagement of young people in the immediate circumstance, it uncovers those practices and processes that will sustain the engagement. The results open up channels between youth and adults to promote understanding and shared action, for the benefit of the individuals concerned, the organization and the community.



Youth enrich places, products and people's lives.

Heartwood's "Model for Youth Engagement" finds ways to meaningfully involve young people for the benefit of all.

Heartwood's role is to support the action

H. HeartWood Requires a Different Way of Intervening in Systems

Over the years, HeartWood's approach has matured from successful youth leadership programs to the engagement of young people in the renewal of neighbourhoods, schools, agencies and organizations. The YERC evaluation has been extremely helpful towards articulating ways to carry that mission forward in a Model format. New ways for HeartWood to help youth-serving systems activate the new emerging Model are currently being developed. Following is a summary of what has been learned through the YERC project, and the action HeartWood is taking in preparation for dissemination of these findings.

i) What worked well?

There was a shift in mindset amongst Coordinators, partners, and evaluators. They learned how to apply a new lens towards youth engagement using the CYD Framework and an appreciative approach. More specifically:

- sharing the concepts of an appreciative approach
- inspiring through coaching and stories about the possible of youth engagement
- guiding actions to link with existing youth development service agencies
- building strong relationships with each of the sites

ii) What does HeartWood need to improve?

- Guiding a community to assess the appropriate strategy for youth engagement, and to help them understand the importance of this step. Include a more thorough assessment of a system's readiness for CYD.
- Ways to create shifts in organizational practices with those community agencies HW is engaged with. Inspire and coach program coordinators and partners to implement the principles of youth engagement in a variety of ways i.e. workshops, hands-on tools, story telling, grant making, youth-adult partnerships, communication with their communities, evaluation and action research.
- Use of practical resources and clear processes to



We provide:

- assessments
- resources
- evaluation
- training
- coaching
- celebration

enable clients to apply the new HeartWood Model.

- More timely and specifically directed feedback and coaching, with increased applicability of tools, and sharing of resources (activity-based or written).
- Leveraging HeartWood's experience in youth leadership training and adult training related to youth engagement and CYD.

iii) Recommendations to HW for developing their new emerging Model and its dissemination

As a result of the YERC project, HeartWood is now clear on some of the necessary resources, tools and processes it must create, refine and practice.

Recommendations:

- 1) develop ways to communicate about the new emerging Model,
- 2) develop assessment tools to clarify a community or an organization's readiness for CYD,
- 3) develop mapping tools to clarify systems and their environments,
- 4) develop resources that effectively communicate how to enact each of the HeartWood Models Principles for Intervening,
- 5) exploring ways to strategically identify leaders within a system for training,
- 6) develop web-based links for the client to use-ful resources and tools that are available in the fast developing plethora of youth engagement resources in the world,
- 7) develop an Action Research and evaluation process for HW Model applications.

iv) Appreciative approach, relationships, action research and evaluation

YERC made it clear the HeartWood's emphasis on

building relationships and an appreciative approach though an imperative to good participatory practice, is not enough for effective systems change work. HeartWood requires a more responsive action research and evaluation method to work in the area of systems change. The HeartWood Model emphasizes the importance of establishing an empowering culture from which to spark community change-makers. From that base, HeartWood seeks an outcome of citizen engagement for sustainable and transformational change. With HeartWood then, the participatory component concerns not only what ways to involve the community in delivering the activities based on the CYD Framework, but how to engage the community in deciding what parts to implement and how to do so in their particular community. HeartWood Executive Director Brian Braganza shared his sense of the organizations role early in an intervention, with an air of stating the obvious, “We don’t know the communities so certainly cannot, at the early stage, impose what we will do with them.”

It was HeartWood’s emergent processes, appreciative approach and attention to relationships that allowed them to innovate with partners and share the goal of the project. HeartWood established a participatory culture early in the initiative by nurturing generative exchange, built on trust and confidence between themselves and the sites. In the earliest stages of YERC, the sites came to trust that what they said to HeartWood would be listened to. The sites spoke of, “feeling from HeartWood a real sense of appreciation for the possibilities of youth engagement, and a lot of encouragement.”

Unfortunately the positive approach wore thin. In time the sites required clearer direction from HeartWood than what they were receiving. By a year into the project some at the sites had lost most of their confidence that HeartWood knew how to help them. In some sites it was the Coordinators that sought more clarity, in others, the administrators, and as time wore on in some sites it was both. The sites were dealing with complex circumstances of how to involve young people in previously adult-only territory. One YERC Coordinator shared that, “We didn’t always have the tools or direction we needed when we needed them.” There were questions of structure, form, process and principles.

It wasn’t that HeartWood wasn’t present and put-

ting in the effort, they were, but they too were searching for answers on how best to guide the sites. During the first year of the project most of HeartWood’s time on the YERC project had been spent in unfamiliar territory. Exchanges were defined by working at a distance with community groups unfamiliar with HeartWood, and unclear on their own objectives for improved youth services. This early work of YERC was in sharp contrast to all of HeartWood’s previous experience of being contracted close to home, by agencies having clear strategies, and familiar with HeartWood’s work. In the past when the objectives of community partners required clarification, there had been the luxury of time and close proximity, to achieve clarity together without the time clock or meter running. In contrast, with YERC the important period of goal clarification was condensed, with the added complication of distance and available resources. The available funding for the project meant hiring a Coordinator and the resulting constant pressure to move the initiative forward (see section I of this report for more on this topic). In most cases the Coordinators push to move forward was a greater force than the communities’ preparedness to respond.

Though smaller preliminary actions took place in all four sites in the first year, the period of time getting to the core of the action phase took much longer than anticipated. The original plan outlined in the Evaluation Design was to move into community action by July 2006. As of September 2006, the sites had spent a considerable amount of time grappling with what exactly to do with YERC’s broad mandate. Most sites began to discuss or implement plans for a more concentrated action phase. Nain was the lone exception, choosing instead a community planning event to surface the common interest for action.

With comprehensive community initiatives such as YERC, a long period of uncertainty on how an intervener can best engage with community partners, and how partners can best engage with a community development mandate, seems to come with the territory. However, the YERC evaluation has helped to shape a means to order the early assessment stages and later planning stages of an intervention. These lessons have helped to shape the new emerging HeartWood Model and the beginnings of a new more responsive research and evaluation design.

I. Comments on the Contracting Process Between the Rural Secretariat and HeartWood

“The management of the relationship has seemed very hierarchical. Though they as an organization seem in a high chaos mode right now – they are operating with strict controls. The financial piece seems clearly to be the lead influencer.”

Catherine Phoenix, Operations Director, HeartWood

1. Steering Committees – strengthening the capacity of existing structures

We all know from experience that mandating and simply forming a community committee does not assure its dynamism, nor participatory or effective process. HeartWood moves forward carefully with the process of establishing community relationships that respect the distinct character, assets, and challenges of each circumstance in which it is asked to engage. Recognizing the power of group work to foster change in a community is a fundamental component of HeartWood’s work. It is with this knowledge that HeartWood did not impose a steering committee structure on the YERC sites; nor did it encourage the establishment of any other formal accountability committee or group before its time. Executive Director Brian Braganza describes HeartWood’s approach, “With our work, be it a steering committee or the work at the site, we do not want it to be in an artificial situation. HeartWood spends more than usual time exploring what assets in the community that it might help leverage for the greatest impact. Braganza goes on to say, “We are going to build from existing committee’s and groups based in the communities in order that we can better trust that the group will exist post project. We also did not want to burden the sites [Community Proponents] with an administrative function that may not be necessary to the success of the project. This approach is consistent with our desire to work with the capacities that were already there.” In HeartWood’s community practice it places the priority on establishing relationships before determining activity, and only then determines community support structures. Senior

HeartWood program leader John Ure put it this way, “Our work is not about good program development, it is about good relationships.”

The same practice of waiting to establish community structures until after program activity is determined, is relevant to the task of the ‘community proponents’ identifying partners. Though the RS had been determined about getting partners identified at the sites, it is contrary to what HeartWood considers good participatory community practice to impose this expectation at an early point in a project’s evolution. Catherine Phoenix who has been responsible for much of the contracting process with the Rural Secretariat shared this perspective, “...to dictate partners ahead of time, prior to the activity, sets the money, structure, and partners ahead of the emerging project.” Phoenix went on to speak to HeartWood’s intention for identifying partners in the plan submitted to the RS, “in our contracted time line partners were not to have been identified yet [first eight months].”

Though HeartWood fully embraces the need for community-based groups to support the YERC project, the table below will clarify that HeartWood established these groups and committees in an alternate manner.

Expectations of the Rural Secretariat	Assumptions based on HeartWood's Model	How it effects YERC Process
<p>Steering Committee should be established as a very early step in the communities.</p> <p>Partners identified early on in process.</p> <p>Needs of all stakeholders to be identified in advance and accommodated to the greatest extent possible.</p> <p>adapted from RS PP presentation</p>	<p>Look for the opportunity to partner with existing associations, committees, and other community structures as a strategy to build capacities for sustainable youth engagement activity.</p> <p>There is great value in developing project committees that boast good youth and adult relationships. Building effective community committees, especially with youth and adult members, takes time. To rush the process is to compromise the outcomes.</p> <p>HeartWood's research has identified that young people and adults will engage when there is an action to engage in and a means to connect, meaningfully contribute, and to feed their passions.</p> <p>A one-committee steering structure is inclined to be static. The HeartWood model encourages 'group work' at all levels of community youth engagement activity. The foundations of success for group/committee work are a clear reason to come together, action, and strong group processes.</p>	<p>"There have been many what I will call 'previously unspoken expectations'. These have often been about other government partners. These previously unspoken expectations have also included threats of withdrawing funding."</p> <p>HeartWood staff</p> <p>Various committees and groups will emerge throughout the project duration and often not at the beginning of an initiative.</p> <p>It is anticipated that a number of 'committees' will be established that respond to particular actions and focus.</p> <p>These groups will often be informal, highly emergent circles of action and learning. The evaluation process will follow the learning that takes place in these groups.</p>

2. Why not full-time Site Coordinators?

A number of times, the RS has expressed to HeartWood its concerns with the Community Proponents not having full-time coordinators. It seems to HeartWood that the RS's fear centres around a concern that the sites may not accomplish what they might have otherwise. Below was and still is HeartWood's rationale for making the decision for part time as opposed to full time Coordinator positions. The rationale is based on 16 years as architect of many successful community interventions and program developments in Nova Scotia.

HeartWood's Rationale for Part Time Coordinators

- The choice of a PT Coordinator role for YERC was intentional to encourage the broader involvement of existing youth serving and community associations at the sites, and to minimize the risk of a significant 'cliff' once funding ends for the project.
- HeartWood's Model encourages nesting youth engagement activity within existing community systems
- Based on HeartWood's experience it was felt that a full time coordinator would assume some of the functions and hold the energy that might otherwise be taken up by established community groups and leaders.
- The PT Evaluators breathe life into the participatory process at each site, and increases the means to link the youth engagement activity to existing groups and support these groups with their learning and community action.

3. Embracing emergence within a learned framework, not adherence to a static model.

HeartWood Operating Assumptions	Implications for the YERC Project	"No notion that they will bear with us"
Emergence Innovation Priority on Relationships Citizen Engagement	<p>Steering and advisory committees established in response to identified actions, assets, and genuine interest.</p> <p>Incongruence with identifying partners or committee members on artificial externally imposed expectations</p>	<p><i>"There is no notion the RS will bear with us – when of course if the activity shifts – as it invariably does in the early building stages – there are new partner possibilities. They seem to feel that the more government partners that are 'bought' in the more community is bought in"</i></p>

Challenges HeartWood has faced		Implications and Suggestions
Financial strain	<p><i>"We did 7 mo. of work on this contract with no funding. "We did not put this money in the contract on a wish and a prayer". Fourteen months after the contract started we still had no money. We had to float staff time. Staff time was also pulled from other parts of the organizational work – most importantly, fund raising and promotions".</i></p>	Resulted in a Christmas layoff – only layoff in 15 years of operations.
Feedback process	<p><i>"I have tried to and have pushed back, but have also recognized that for every push back there are financial consequences for HeartWood and me – more work, more delays".</i></p> <p>HeartWood staff</p> <p><i>The questions they ask are usually not in context, not with a consideration of what stage we had indicated, from our plan, we would be at.</i></p> <p>HeartWood staff member</p>	Utilize the reporting mechanisms established in the contract in a reciprocal fashion.
Controls	<p><i>"The management of the relationship has seemed very hierarchical. And though they as an organization, seem in a high chaos mode right now – they are operating with strict controls."</i></p> <p><i>"Though we already do quarterly reports they are asking for more information regularly."</i></p> <p><i>"The financial piece seems clearly to be the lead influencer."</i></p> <p>HeartWood staff member</p>	<p>Non-generative relationship</p> <p>Top down approach felt also by the sites</p> <p>Utilize the reporting mechanisms established in the contract</p>
<p>previously unspoken expectations</p> <p>newly imposed deadlines</p> <p>paternal relations</p>	<p><i>"There have been many what I will call 'previously unspoken expectations'. These have often been about other government partners."</i></p> <p><i>"I worked 12 hour days to get it done by the deadline and then when the deadline moved they did not inform me. All the stress around this and the government in-kind confusion was a lot of unnecessary stress for me and HeartWood."</i></p> <p><i>"They seemed worried about our work and show it often."</i></p> <p><i>"There have even been threats of withdrawing funding if partners not found."</i></p> <p>HeartWood staff members</p>	<p>Show some trust that HeartWood deserved its strong reputation with youth, community members, organizations and government.</p> <p>Utilize the reporting mechanisms, activity time-line, and budget established in the contract</p>



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K. Appendix

Appendix

List of the Works in Progress

1. Assessing opportunities for community youth development (forthcoming)

Marc Langlois

A tool to assist in determining the potential for sustainability of Community Youth Development initiatives.

2. DARE: PEST or PETTS

Developmental Action Research and Evaluation,
People in Environment and System Today,
Products, Engagement, Tools, Training, Strategies,

An article on this methodology developed during YERC and Youth Scape (www.youthcape.ca) is forthcoming in the summer of 2008.