

Overcoming Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness

Report on the first Symposium on
Global Innovation and Local Practice
Toronto, Canada | October 1-3, 2014

Acknowledgments

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The symposium was held from October 1 to 3, 2014 in Toronto, Canada.

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Foreword

Excerpts from the Opening Address by Kim Samuel, President, Samuel Family Foundation; Policy Advisor and Scholar in Residence, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford

I have long believed that isolation underpins many of the challenges in our world today. But because it is so difficult to quantify and, perhaps also, because it seems so nebulous, it all too easily escapes notice, or, if noticed, is dismissed.

If it is considered at all, it **tends to be seen as a consequence of problems**. But I have come to see that **it can also be very much the cause of them**.

There are questions we need to ask, because isolation is a problem we can no longer afford to ignore – for its impact can literally mean life or death. It's that vital, that elemental. We thrive in community and we struggle if we are cast adrift.

Isolation takes an excruciating toll on individuals, families, and communities. And even though it is too often invisible, that suffering exists all around us.

Among people with physical or intellectual disabilities, too often excluded from society's mainstream.

Among victims of domestic abuse, as we've heard so powerfully in recent weeks – like one woman who, when asked why she stayed with her abuser, said "Because I no longer knew who I was."

Among elderly people – our fastest-growing population here in Canada, where one in five say they are not frequent participants in *any* social activities.

Among those who are economically disadvantaged or displaced by the harsh winds of our volatile world.

In marginalized populations, from refugees to Roma... Indigenous peoples to Indian Dalits...people who for reasons of community or caste are locked outside all circles of concern.

Even the way we design and build our communities can influence isolation – with spaces and structures that bring people together... or that drive them apart and keep them that way.

In trying to focus and define the challenges we face, I have tried to characterize them at least broadly, in the hopes that we might begin to address the problem in a meaningful, sustainable way.

One aspect is the painful link between **isolation and poverty**. A second is the **impact of isolation on communities**. And third is the **need to foster a sense of belonging and community**.

I invite you all to reflect on these themes from your unique perspectives. With the tremendous spirit of partnership exemplified in the planning and convening of this Symposium – we will have the chance to weave these threads into new understanding and vision for the future.

My dream for this Symposium is to give vision and voice to the person who feels as if they are sitting at the bottom of a well.

The vision to see a way out. To see a future of inclusion. The voice to sing out. And to get others to join in a chorus of inclusion.

~ Toronto, October 1, 2014

Introduction

“We all come from different directions, with our own gifts. When you come from different directions you can bring a different view on things. We come together as one unit to share, using our different strengths and experiences for the common good of mankind.”

– excerpt from the Opening Ceremonies led by
John Sawyer, Nipissing First Nations

This report reflects the discussions held during the first symposium on Overcoming Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness. Over the course of three days participants shared their own experiences and perspectives, exploring three key themes:

- I. Tracing Linkages between Social Isolation and Poverty
- II. Learning from Stories of Community Resilience
- III. Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Reciprocity

Participants came from across spectrums of society, sectors, and the world, including representative from indigenous communities in Canada, the Special Olympics, personnel of programmes being run in developing and developed countries, and academics, government, civil society and business representatives.

Through dialogue and creative sessions, participants started to build a collective understanding of isolation and the actions – local and global – that could be used to build connectedness. This report synthesizes the resulting discussions by looking first at our understanding of isolation, and secondly, at solutions and ways to build social connectedness.

At the end of the symposium, participants committed to undertake post-symposium

actions. The last part of this report captures these commitments.

The symposium was more than a gathering of different voices and perspectives. It was the beginning of a movement of understanding and of action for change focused on social connectedness.

We hope that this report will act as a base from which we can build new bridges – bringing our ideas to others. Quotes of participants, links to associated publications, and photos capturing our key themes and commitments are included throughout the report.

We want to encourage others to contribute to the dialogue and to join us in our efforts to further the social connectedness movement. Postings and ongoing dialogue can be found at:



@socialconnectedness
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www.socialconnectedness.org/updates/

Video and transcriptions for portions of the proceedings are also available online:
<http://www.socialconnectedness.org/program/2014-sessions/>

For more information:

Visit www.socialconnectedness.org, follow us on Twitter @sconnectedness and #sconnectedness, or contact Jennifer Brennan at info@socialconnectedness.org



Social Isolation

“Social Isolation comes because you are: different, disabled, new comer, minority, poor, oppressed, alone, women, too old, too young, live in the slums, less powerful, less educated, have difficulties to express yourself, you have to transition, and many many other ‘because’.... And at the end comes ‘because of YOU’. But it’s not like that: ‘Because of YOU.’ It’s because circumstances are so, and because majorities expect the isolated to make the steps to become less isolated. But it’s a mutual process.”

- Radosveta Stamenkova

Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association

What is social isolation?

Social isolation can be described as the experience of profound, sustained loneliness and disconnection. It has also been described as a lack of bridges, reciprocity, trust, shared values, and a sense of belonging and love. It can create barriers to accessing support and assistance for physical, emotional and other needs.

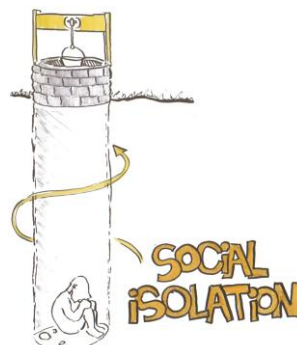
Through dialogue at the symposium, we discussed the ways in which social isolation significantly impacts individual and community health, well-being, and livelihoods. At the same time, we noted that few programmes and policies currently address this issue directly. Although social isolation has been identified as a potential cause and consequence of multidimensional poverty worldwide, its impact and importance continue to be under-recognized by programme designers and policymakers working with vulnerable populations.

Throughout the symposium, participants shared their own stories of isolation. Although the reasons why they experienced social isolation varied from a consequence of war, poverty, disruptive transitions, disease, abuse and neglect, the commonality experienced revolved around the deprivation of social connectedness and inadequate social relations.

For some, it was a lack of quantity of relationships, being cut off from others they could interact with, or being unable to access social groups that could help with problems or challenging transitions.

For others it was a lack of quality of relationships, having no shared values with your family or community or no one you could trust. An absence of meaningful relationships meant that isolation could happen even when surrounded by others. Resonating images of social isolation were described as:

“Sitting alone at the bottom of a well.... A circumstance in in which coldness, not the warmth of connection with others is the defining sensation, and darkness, not light, is the norm. What little hope there is and what little light creeps in feels small, distant, and diffuse.”



It is like a birdcage in which people find a false sense of security, leading to paralysis:

“Even when the door is finally opened, the act of flying is so alien that the cage itself often represents the only security.”

- Kim Samuel, Opening Address

Social isolation can occur at an individual and community level.

Isolation, at an individual level, was recognised as being a product of weak or destructive relationships with those who are supposed to provide care and love, and with whom people are supposed to have close ties, such as family or friends.

For children, neglect and abuse can have profound and lasting psychological consequences. As Florence of Kids Company explained:

*“Abuse and neglect, especially neglect, means that some parts of the children’s brains are just missing or they do not work properly... **These things are not just soft psychology. It’s wiring of the brain.** The parts of the brain that usually light up in social situations don’t light up in these kids’ brains. They don’t get the same pleasure and rewards that we would get from social interaction...*

And it can play into a vicious cycle.

Because you’ve been abused you find it difficult to relate to other people. You find it difficult to interact with people, especially if you’ve been neglected... It makes you quite hostile and paranoid... And you are more likely to have a mental health issues. If it’s depression or anxiety, those become worse the more isolated you are. It’s an effect of an early trauma that could have been lessened if the person wasn’t socially isolated.”

Yet isolation can also occur at the social group and community level. At this level, social isolation can occur because of a lack of power, access to resources, or wealth that would enable a community to shape its own destiny. For example, Ovide Mercredi of the Misipawistik Cree Nation explained that the indigenous people of Canada, as a community, have become isolated as a result of colonization:

“Our way as a people was disturbed. It was not extinguished, but it was disrupted, deliberately and intentionally, to ensure that we never rise up as a people. We are subjected and assimilated.

And these are the experiences that cause isolation. The loss of traditional knowledge and spirituality. The loss of our lands, territories and resources. The loss of our way of life and culture.”

Within communities, members may feel no shared sense of belonging or purpose, which can have multiple effects. As Lidia Kemeny of the Vancouver Foundation described about Metro Vancouver:

*“People’s relationships are very shallow: they know each other but that depth of relationship is missing. People don’t trust each other. They no longer invite neighbours over or ask each other to look out for their home or bring in their mail. **And they are choosing not to get involved. The most frequent reason was, ‘We don’t get involved because we have nothing to offer’.***

When people don’t feel they have something to offer, whether it’s money, or their energy, or volunteer hours, a helping hand, a loving hug... then we as a community foundation also cannot do our work.”

“The built natural environment can foster community consensus and bring it together and create spaces for people to flourish or it can do the opposite: it can isolate, it can denude the environment, it can destroy communities and the sense of well-being.”

- Dominic Richards
Prince’s Foundation for Building Community

Social isolation can be caused and perpetuated by structural and systemic designs.

As was reiterated throughout the symposium, getting the ‘hardware’ of structures and systems right is just as important as the ‘software’ of human connection. As a quote from Winston Churchill so adeptly captured:

“We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”

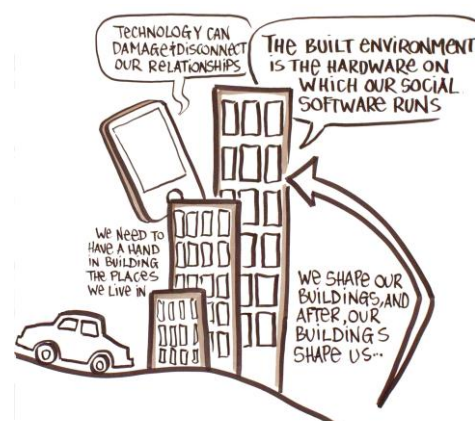
The importance of city structures came to the fore as we recognised how the trend of urbanization will continue to define this century: it is forecast that by the end of this century 3.4 billion people will be added to the swelling urban population. And, as the urban footprint grows, the potential for people to become isolated in cities increases.

With the growth of urban sprawl, our connection to nature and to each other is under threat of becoming lost. Subdivisions are giving people their own house and landscape, but in pushing for seclusion of our lives, we are losing the sense of community. We are no longer engaged citizens. As Geoff Cape, the CEO of Evergreen, in Toronto noted:

“We mostly think about cities being done to us.”

The environments that are being constructed so often result in a general sense of dislocation rather than belonging. As Dominic Richards, from the Prince’s Foundation for Building Community, described:

*So much of what is built today is not rooted in local identity or respect to a sense of place. And that can create a kind of **artificial jet lag** for people, in that if you are Shanghai or if you are in London or if you are in Toronto, and what you see all about you is not related to the earth, the local, and the sense of place, I feel that you will be **disconnected from your culture and community** in a way that makes you feel that you are not respecting or engaged with where you come from.*



Our cities are perpetuating isolation by preventing human interactions. As Dominic described:

“Urban sprawl is a very isolated way of developing a city. And one of the reasons is because when you rely upon a car to get from place to place you lose the miraculous moments where you just bump into people on the streets, where you connect with your neighbours, where you are mixing with different kinds of people.

Sprawl is something which detracts from visible activity... Those types of residential forms are what we call closed. They are not open. They are not spaces where people congregate and mix and pass through. They are closed suburbia, which are very privatized and isolating.”

A number of other examples demonstrated the impact of malfunctioning or errant systems and structures:

Government benefit schemes, for example, can encourage exclusion behaviour if, as a consequence of getting a job, people lose their benefits. Many people in these circumstances choose to refrain from participating in the job market. In doing so, they close themselves off to opportunities for personal growth and interacting with other people. They remain withdrawn from society.

Transportation systems that fail to reach impoverished communities can also reinforce isolation and cause these communities to remain excluded from empowering opportunities.

Although **remote geographical locality** can sometimes contribute to isolation because it can limit access to resources and

opportunities, examples demonstrated that **within these communities it is social connectedness, not isolation, which defines people’s lives**. Small communities often abound with deep relationships and embeddedness. It is why people chose to live there rather than move to urban areas.

However, when transitions outside of the community are required, so often these rural areas struggle. As Laurel Steinfield from the University of Oxford noted, their experiences highlighted how there are two aspects to social connectedness:

*“...there is depth, which can be experienced in deeply embedded communities, but you also need breadth so that when you make transitions out of your community, you can find a sense of community. **You can find social isolation in either instance – if you do not have enough depth or breadth.**”*

Technology and social media were recognised as both potential enablers and inhibitors of social connection.

Social media enables when it is used to support human relationships, allowing people to reach a wider community of people, or as a parallel way for people to share pictures, experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Yet, as is so often the case among today’s youth, **social media can also act to inhibit social connections**. It is dangerously **replacing the human interaction and physical touch** that is necessary for the proper development of children’s brains. Additionally, social media makes people vulnerable to profound experiences of shame and humiliation.

Social Isolation

Tracing Linkages between Social Isolation and Poverty

“Without meaningful social connections people often feel unsafe and as if they do not belong, which weakens the social fabric that holds us together and enables us to develop inner resilience and the ability to thrive.”

- Graça Machel

Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique

Poverty can create and reinforce isolation.

The first core theme explored how social isolation can be a consequence of, and contributor to, a person's and group's level of impoverishment.

A lack of social relations can negatively affect well-being by leading to feelings of shame, humiliation, profound loneliness and disconnection from society. A vicious cycle of marginalisation and neglect often occurs as isolated people learn to not participate in society and others learn to exclude them.

Although social isolation can occur for any individual, regardless of economic status, it was recognised that isolation can be severely detrimental for those who are poor. It is harder for poorer people to access resources that may help them combat isolation.

Additionally, the stigma of being poor and the shame of having to ask for help can cause people to withdraw further, preventing them from accessing help and support.

At the core of social isolation are issues of identity, dignity, belonging, agency and voice.

Discussions concluded that a lack of social connectedness should be considered as a component of poverty measurements.

A multi-dimensional perspective on poverty extends poverty indicators beyond material living standards (income, consumption, wealth) to include health, education, political voice, governance, environmental conditions, security, and ability to conduct personal activities.

Examples demonstrated how social isolation could affect a person's ability to improve their livelihoods in any of these dimensions: a lack of social connectedness can cause exclusion from employment or educational opportunities, or limit access to government health services and benefits; a person who lacks a sense of belonging may lose the incentive to express their political will or be involved with community-building initiatives.

Kennedy Odede, founder of Shining Hope for Communities in Kenya, described his personal experience with poverty and isolation, noting that:

“The reason poverty is there is that there is no opportunity. There is no link. So there [are] walls. In my life I saw walls. I saw lack of opportunity. And I just felt hopelessness. When you are isolated, you believe you cannot do it... Social isolation makes you not connect.”

“When people don’t trust each other there is a ripple effect that tends to happen: in communities with less trust there tends to be much greater poverty.”

- Lidia Kemeny
Vancouver Foundation

An individual may also experience multiple and compounding factors that can cause and reinforce isolation. For example, a disabled woman in an impoverished rural community may be ostracized by the community and neglected by her family because of her disability, have a higher likelihood of being a victim of abuse because she is a woman, and have limited access to resources because of her locality and poverty.

Isolation can have pluralistic and cyclical repercussions, entrapping and affecting individuals, families, social groups and communities.

“When there is social isolation, there is misunderstanding, there is no communication... We don’t know how to build bridges to reach each other.”

- Kennedy Odede
Shining Hope for Communities

“Isolation [can best] be worked on in a partnership-like setting where trust is built, connections are strengthened.”

- Peggy Dulany
Synergos

The discussions revealed that although social isolation can have profound impact and consequences, it is an issue that often remains unaddressed by policy makers.

Sabina Alkire of Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) surmised why those working on poverty issues have

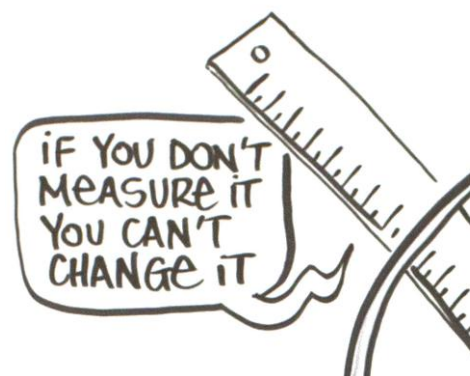
been afraid to ask about social relations and social isolation:

- 1 - The complexity
- 2 - The implications it has for responsibility.

*“Social isolation is at the individual level with family and the care burden or difficulties with the people with whom you are close, but also at the level of the group. So **measurements of social isolation require these different levels and it can come into different domains of a person’s life.** Which is why the complexity seems to be a challenge for policy....*

*The other question that it raises – why is it so difficult to push this issue forward, is who has the responsibility of address it? **The easiest [answer] is not structural change but really grassroots work.** So the question is how can that be brought up?”*

- Sabina Alkire, OPHI



Social Connectedness

Learning from Stories of Community Resilience

“A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are...”

- Desmond Tutu, as quoted in the symposium proceedings

How do we build social connectedness?

On the second day of the symposium, participants heard and discussed numerous examples of the ways communities and people can promote social connectedness through art, culture, landscapes, and shared work. At the essence, two themes emerged:

1. Finding ways to **tear down walls** and to create open spaces where people could be vulnerable and interact
2. Finding ways to **draw upon existing community assets**, whether it be nurturing identity-instilling traditions or grassroots movements, to build a sense of belonging, care, and reciprocity.

The walls....

In so many cities, physical walls acts to constrain social activity and intermingling. Yet as Dominic Richards of the Prince's Foundation for Building Community described, razing current structures is not the solution as this can destroy social bonds and people's sense of belonging. Rather, citizens have to be engaged and shown the benefits of the way other successful communities live. Exemplar cities could be built that support social interaction, which may help unlock others who are entrapped by the old way of living.

“The only way you can answer fear is through people seeing the benefits of a different way of living. What you need to show is, what is it about really successful communities that make people feel happy, fulfilled, and have a sense of well-being. They tend to be cities that are not segregated. They tend to be communities where you have the chance to bump into people, they tend to be cities where you use your two feet rather than a car. They tend to be cities which are beautiful and have a sense of belonging.”

- Dominic Richards
Prince's Foundation for
Building Community

Tearing down walls is, however, not only about the physical walls we build, but also the invisible walls we build between each other out of fear and ignorance.

For Canadian indigenous people, being vulnerable and open to sharing about the atrocities done to their people, their families, their culture and traditions, has started to address the walls that have repressed their identity for so long. As Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo of the Ahousaht First Nation described, **fear has**

created physical walls in the places we live, but also walls in policy and in our own perceptions of each other. So often the ability to build connection has been inhibited by the fear that one people's success will result in taking away something from another. To foster social connectedness, internal fears need to be addressed; the walls we build around ourselves need to be taken down.

"The idea of having connectedness really means going and being connected with yourself first. And being vulnerable is a way of overcoming or challenging directly the fear that we have... the shame of who we are, where we come from, the inability to do things in life. Recognising that we are human too. We have the potential for genius and tomfoolery. That's what connects us."

- Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo
Ahousaht First Nation

The journey towards vulnerability can start internally, as Chief Atleo shared, but also through creating a sense of a safe space through shared work. Lisa Delong, of the Prince's School for Traditional Arts, described how shared work can lead to moments of connectivity and openness:

"I think we can all think of times when we've had our most important, our most vulnerable, our most deepest conversations when we've been sitting next to someone working on something together, whether its cooking a meal, maybe we're at a campfire together, or maybe we're working in the garden together, or just something like that where we have a shared work... shared work can be incredibly healing."

Using traditional art, which draws upon forms of commonality in our environment – the sun, the moon, the stars – Lisa works with communities to help people re-discover the similarities in our human experience and the joys of shared work. It reminds us that we are all apart of nature, and that we can build something together that we could not do as individuals. Art is one medium through which we can tear down walls and create space for social connectivity.

The assets...

So often when communities undergo assessments, the focus tends to be on their deficiencies; rarely do we look at how we can leverage their assets. Yet in some poorer communities and non-Western communities, there is a sense of social connectedness that we could draw upon and learn from.

Indigenous communities of South America, for example, have been able to use their traditional culture and knowledge, passed down from generation to generation, to preserve their identity and to foster a sense of belonging. Laurie McLaren of the Aboriginal Initiative at Nipissing University, Canada, recalled how:

"The images and ideas about connectedness, about partnership, about reciprocity, about relationships with the land, about knowing, having place-based knowledge given to you by your grandparents, it was very much alive and well in these communities.... I believe it is those very things that make us, that give us our identity as indigenous people. Life education and life experience is very critical."

For Canadian indigenous people, **practicing and celebrating once outlawed traditions** has started to re-establish the identity of their people and community.

The capacity of communities to initiate grassroots movements and to bring about change in their own localities was described by Zeni Thumbadoo in her work with the National Association of Child and Youthcare Workers in South Africa. She recounted how, in a rural village in Limpopo South Africa, access to clean water for schoolchildren was brought about through unqualified yet dedicated childcare workers whose:

- Activism started the movement;
- Passion and energy encouraged local stakeholders to contribute their expertise; and whose
- Ability capitalised on synchronicity – a meaningful coincidence of an inspector's visit.

Within six months the community had set up boreholes.

As Zeni explains, **there was breadth to their social connectivity:**

"[The child care workers] were able to capitalize on the opportunity. They were able to see the moment. They were able to seize the energy in that. And they were able to be responsive in the moment."

And **there was depth through firestones:**

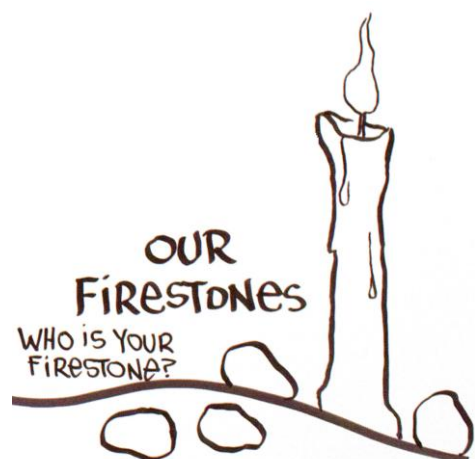
"In meetings that we have we gather people around and put a candle, and say the candle represents a child. We collect stones from local areas and put them around the candle. And we say these are firestones."

In the olden days, people used to hold firestones and when they travelled nomadically they would light the fire much more quickly. They were able to ignite in different communities.

*So we say, pick up a firestone. Think about your own life. Think about who was a firestone in your own life. You wouldn't be here as a community member if you didn't have others who were with you and who helped you on your journey. And **in actually remembering who was a firestone in your life, think about how you will be able to be a firestone in the lives of children...**"*

Firestones remind us that:

- *"Random acts of kindness do matter."*
- *"Being present to other people's pain, being able to see other people's pain and **responding in the moment** matters... respond straight away. There is an energy and a magic in the moment."*
- *"**Connect the dots.** Make a positive meaning of out the situation."*
- *"Firestones reflect the South Africa philosophy of **Ubuntu... I am because you are. We are together and our own personal growth and the growth of our community contribute to the whole.**"*





“There is something beautiful about working together and experiencing success together... It helps build bridges to people who thought they were isolated. Shared work can bring disparate people together. Look for places where you can find that shared work, whether it be with a family member or a neighbour down the street.”

- Lisa Delong

Prince’s School for Traditional Arts

Social Connectedness

Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Reciprocity

“If you are isolated you don’t have a voice; you don’t have a sense of belonging, you don’t feel like you belong anywhere. Your self esteem hinders you from being the best you can be. But as soon as you connect with someone... kids become their best because they know we have created that environment [where] they’re accepted, whether they come from the poorest homes or don’t look like other kids, they are accepted. It gives them a chance to be themselves and to be the best they can be.”

- Simangele “Smash” Shoyisa
City Year South Africa

How We Can Foster Social Connectedness

In the final sessions, participants looked at specific interventions and thought about what they could do to foster social connectedness. Volunteering, engagement, telling personal stories, education, and advocacy, were examples that resonated through this last session.

Volunteering can create an opportunity for isolated people to become involved. It can create a system of reciprocity and a sense of belonging in communities.

Engagement of people and communities in decisions can be an empowering process that can build a sense of involvement and value, and increase participatory actions.

Sharing stories, a theme that emerged in numerous sessions, has the power to be a vehicle for raising awareness around isolating practices and a mechanism to help ourselves and others overcome isolating circumstances.

Education offers a point of access to reach out to marginalized children, and a way we can teach others to appreciate differences rather than to isolate people with differences.

Advocacy, a theme underlying many of the interventions, calls for us to engage in deliberate actions to raise awareness and to push for change. It is through the personal dedication and commitment of an advocate and their exemplar strategies, shared message and leadership, that a movement for connectedness can thrive.

For example, Loretta Claiborne, a Special Olympics International board member and athlete, is an advocate for social connectedness. Using her personal story, she brings to light the importance of engaging people with disabilities – giving them a choice and an opportunity to get involved rather than sidelining them or telling them what to do:

As Loretta recounted:

*“I was supposed to be one of those people who was to be institution-
alized... But I had dreams too. I wanted to give back. Could I give back as a person with intellectual disability because society viewed us as nobodies? Would I have that opportunity? ... That wasn’t going to happen until I met some people along the way, people outside of my*

“My dream is for everyone, not just people with disabilities, but everyone in society to feel valued and to know that different doesn’t have to be a negative thing. It can be a positive thing, an advantage for us to move forward in the world.”

- Matthew Williams
Special Olympics International

community... Now when I look at myself, my dream is becoming a reality. I can give back. I volunteer in my community. That breaks my isolation.”

Loretta’s story reminded us that a key to social connectedness resides within each one of us:

“Volunteering, giving back, you can start with yourself... everyone has something to give.”

Her story reiterated the idea that Lidia Kemeny of the Vancouver Foundation raised: the power of giving can unlock our self-isolating perspectives:

“So many people have this idea that we never have enough, you know, we are not enough – we’re not thin enough, we’re not rich enough, we’re not educated enough... How do we move from this place of thinking that we are not enough to feeling that we have enough? ... That feeling of having enough, implicit in that is the sharing of resources, of those gifts, of that time, of that love.”

A key theme running through Loretta’s story and a challenge others put forward, was the need to change societal perceptions of those with disabilities.

“A lot of people with intellectual disabilities are told what they can’t do, but if you... get out there and show them or put them in the community... that’s a good feeling and that breaks down the isolation...”

- Loretta Claiborne

A critical component of building social connectedness is thus recognizing how we intentionally and unintentionally limit other people’s inclusion.

As Shantha Rau Barriga, the director of the Disability Rights Program at Human Rights Watch, acknowledged:

“In the case of people with mental or intellectual disabilities there’s often this sense of, ‘We know what you want. We know what’s best for you.’... whether that’s family members, schools, governments, doctors that are often making those decisions for them. Instead, by engaging and consulting with people, it would go a long way in addressing the isolation that they experience and [bringing] them more into the community.”

One mechanism for challenging perceptions of those we often marginalize is to use personal stories. Loretta uses her speaking engagements at school to share her narrative, in hopes that she can engage others’ minds:

“If I can change the life and the mind of one child [about] how he or she thinks about somebody else... my dream will become a reality.”

Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International, has used stories to help women affected by war to connect. As she recounted, based on her own personal experience in Iraq and the experiences of many women to whom she has talked, stories can be a mechanism to overcome the isolation caused by war:

“What war does it makes you feel that you’re alone, that the people have forgotten, that the world has forgotten about you...”

How do you come out of that isolation? For me personally it was a transformative journey. [It] was the journey of a very personal truth-telling because in telling your truth then you show vulnerability. And in the showing of vulnerability then you actually allow others to join you and say, ‘Oh, I am not the only one who’s feeling that feeling.’ And when you do that then you start creating a ‘we’ story.”

Zainab tells the story of a woman in Congo whose family underwent the trauma of rape during war. Owning her own story, which ended up being shared at a global level, resulted in two profound shifts:

“The neighbors changed their attitude towards her. She shifted from being the victim that they isolated and they embarrassed because she’s raped and homeless to she’s the person who they are proud of because she spoke about the violations that she’s gone through and about what’s happening in their country.

But she also changed my life... I realized she has a consciousness between the connections of her individual story of isolation and between the collective narrative, that ‘If I break my silence maybe other women will be helped.’”



Throughout the symposium, we recognized that **vulnerability, authenticity and trust** are critical components of **making safe spaces** where we can foster a sense of connection and belonging. This is not only for ‘those other people’ who we see as suffering from isolation, but also a personal journey we all need to make. As was reiterated from a breakout group discussion:

*“There is a component of healing that has to happen at the individual level, the collective level, at a national level and at a global level, where we each have to recognise that there are many wounds in the world, and we have to find the space to find the vulnerability to share that and heal that. There is a personal piece we all need to play: **the extent to which we can tackle [isolation] is going to be as good as our courage to look in the mirror and find our own wounds and see the role that we all play in preventing us from moving forward.**”*

In conjunction with promoting the creation of safe spaces and need for open dialogue, we also recognized the need to create **learning environments** that can teach future generations the importance of valuing and accepting each other. Nureddin Amro, for example, has pioneered a new approach to education for the visually impaired at the Siraj al-Quds School in the Palestinian Territories. He advocates that:

*“**Education** can be used as a pluralistic environment that brings together people with different disabilities, with different problems. **An environment that fosters the sense of understanding, fosters the sense of mutual respect, the sense of reciprocity...**”*

Through education you could generate new generations, new people with new thoughts, and ideas, and attitudes. And you could change the negative perception of those people towards people with disabilities in general.”

- Nureddin Amro
Siraj al-Quds School

Matthew Williams, a board member and the international global messenger for Special Olympics, promoted the idea of using the education curriculum to teach children that differences can be positive:

*“In society we’re told we have to act a certain way, talk a certain way... We gotta get away from that **and look at being different as a skill.**”*

Yet education can also begin in our homes, with **lessons of harmony and acceptance that we can promote within our own families and through intergenerational teachings**. As John Sawyer, from the Nipissing First Nations, expressed:

“Regardless of our cultural background, the main thread going through every culture and country is how we conduct ourselves as humans... I think the great vision is that we all need to come to an agreement in how we conduct ourselves. To put everything back in order we may have to use the classroom to teach everyone how to get along. Yet you have your own rules of conduct, your own belief systems that make you who you are. Those were passed down from your ancestors to your culture. They are all universal. But we have to start rethinking a lot of things. We are getting too far away from where we came from. I think the grandfathers, the grandmothers, and the kids need to be reunited again.”

For those children who lack positive family structures, we need specific interventions that can reach out to them. Schools and nurseries are settings that could be tapped to create safe and nurturing environments for children affected by neglect and abuse.

In South Africa, two programmes – the Gogo Grannies at Othandweni Children’s Home and City Year South Africa – demonstrate the power of such interventions.

The Gogo Grannies programme builds connectedness to marginalized infants and children up to the age of six, through the affection, care and attention of grandmothers. Every weekday, the grannies spend two hours bonding with the children, one on one. As Patience Mokgadi of Othandweni described:

“You find children who have experienced such social disconnect that upon your first interaction with the child they are withdrawn, sad, blank, and unemotional. It goes back to social interaction or social connectedness that is consistent and [as being] very important in a child’s life, especially in the early stages... They [can] open up. They become trusting, especially if it’s done on a consistent basis.”

The two hours allows the grannies to not only establish a deep level of connectedness with the child, but to also identify and intervene if the child has any problems in meeting their age-related development milestones. Often these problems are overlooked or left unaddressed, and can perpetuate the child’s marginalization from the community.

“The potential for paralysis is great and the problem is so enormous – many bridges is probably the answer.”

- Cara Smyth
Glasgow Caledonian University

City Year South Africa is another programme that focuses on marginalized children. It combines helping unemployed disadvantaged youth gain skills and confidence by giving them paid child care work experience; and helping children in grades four to seven who are having difficulty succeeding at school. Often these schoolchildren come from poor neighbourhoods and unhealthy household environments, which contributes to their difficulties in focusing at school. They are often victims of parental neglect, responsible for caring for themselves and their siblings, and are consequential vulnerable and exposed to sexual abuse. As Portia Seatlholo explained:

“The main component of our programme is boosting the self-confidence and the self-esteem of learners so that when they start grasping their academic work already we have laid the foundation where they believed in themselves and they believe they can do it and they can make it out there on their own even if City Year is no longer there.”



The youth that work within the schools help within classrooms, and strategically reach out to troubled children, assisting them with their schoolwork, including them in activities, and enveloping them in a sense of acceptance and belonging. As Lindiwe Sibiya, a site leader, expressed:

“As soon as I walk into the school gate the classes open and kids start running out to jump at me. And I don’t [do] anything... [Just] every day, every single day when I walk into that school the simplest thing I do is put my bag down, give a child a hug and say, ‘You’re looking good this morning.’”

Lindiwe’s actions remind us all that creating small bridges to each other is just as important as creating big bridges to policy makers and governments.

“The world might not see the difference that I’m trying to make, but if one child sees it... for me I’m doing something.”

Programs such as City Year have ripple effects. By touching one youth’s life, that youth can go back into their community and create change, which in turn can improve the connectedness others feel and inspire them in turn to contribute.

As the programmes and the stories shared throughout the symposium demonstrated, change can start with us. **Small miracles do matter.** Invite people to dinner. Offer help. Engage others in shared work. Have compassion and empathy. Be aware of other’s pain and respond. Give someone a hug. Value your own and other people’s differences. Build social connectedness.



Fostering Social Connectedness through...

“What resources do you have? It doesn’t have to be monetary. It can be skills. Take these resources and design change that works for your community or channel support into what is already there.”

- Eva Heller, Glasgow Caledonian University

Building our understanding

Learning from other communities

“There are so many poor communities that are rich in culture and relationships, for example, Bhutan. We need to learn from communities that have a value for community.”

- Sabina Alkire
Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative

“Looking for lived experiences and learning how other communities have created resilience and reinforced cultural and traditional ways that build belonging.”

- Laurie McLaren
Aboriginal Initiatives,
Nipissing University

“When you look at different communities and how they respond to tsunamis, sometimes its resilience, sometimes its coming together, and sometimes its not. We need to dig into that.”

- Kim Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation

Making the cause resonate...

Creating awareness: starting a movement

“We need to focus on our common humanity and to build a common vision, which may include ‘the right to be different’.”

- Tim Shriver
Special Olympics International

“What is a movement? A movement is taking every aspect of your life that had limiting realities and changing them... turning a perceived ideal into something with action and movement, which ultimately reshapes the internal and external landscape of millions of people.

We must continue, on all of these fronts to invest in programmes and policy to combat exclusion and isolation, and foster a deeper understanding and celebration of human differences that move us further along the road to social inclusion.”

- Paddy Favazza
Center for Social Development and
Education, University of Massachusetts

“We need to build alliances with other social movements. We can’t continue to work in silos. We need to identify thought leaders working in the same direction that we can work with together.”

- Comment from group discussion

Connecting with the media

“Media can link and connect people. Journalism can be used as a tool for understanding others.”

- M.L. Hale
Rain Child Project

“If we make this news we can reach a lot more people. We can be an accelerator, adding on to a lot of issues and current events.”

- Kim Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation

Developing measurements to influence policy

“Metrics do drive policy; to have good policy we need good metrics.”

- Dr. John Hammock
Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative

“The causes can be very varied, but there is probably some universal concept around what people feel when they are social isolated that we could try to measure.”

- Adele Simmons
Global Philanthropy Partnership

Using different pathways

“If I think of Special Olympics, we use sports as a vehicle to get in to people’s minds, to people’s communities... You want to draw people, and once you get them there and they are ready to stick with you, then you start making a dialogue...”

Special Olympics is going forward to break down isolation, not only towards people with intellectual disabilities but towards people who don’t even have disabilities by educating them that it’s okay to be you, to be unique.”

- Loretta Claiborne
Special Olympics International

We can use many different bridges to reach and connect with people, for example, sports, art, food. Think about different activities that draw people together and use these as a way to start connections with each other.

- Comment from group discussion

Leveraging the education system

“Change the education system so that it looks at being different as a skill... We gotta get it in a curriculum setting early in education. I don’t think we should be waiting ’til people are in their 20s, 30s and then finding out, you know, about these different problems and people with disabilities and their challenges. I think if we can get it early in the school system I think it will be a positive change.”

- Matthew Williams
Special Olympics International

When I look at Special Olympics, I look in the schools. Through education [we’re] breaking down the ‘R’ word. You go to schools now, and you hear someone say, ‘Oh no, we don’t use that word here’. Eventually you’ll be able to go to your community and that word will be non-existent.”

- Loretta Claiborne
Special Olympics International

“I started from education as I believe that education is powerful, and good platform, and that can connect me to people, and that can help many others like me to be connected to community members and to their peers in the society... through education we could generate new people with new thoughts [but] such a strategy should be also accompanied by, or side-by-side with, changing policy.”

- Nureddin Amro
Siraj al-Quds School

Connecting Deeply...

Sharing our narratives

"Sharing that which is most vulnerable in our lives to deepen connection... Some of the deepest ways we see one another is to be open to talking about the shame that could hold us back."

- Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo
Ahousaht First Nation

"When people feel brave enough in a community to share stories of their own lives, of their own poverty, of their own hardships, they are able to understand that it's okay. All of us have problems. All of us have come from the same histories."

- Zeni Thumbadoo
National Association of Child and
Youthcare Workers, South Africa

"...in the showing of vulnerability you actually allow others to join you and say, 'Oh, I am not the only one who's feeling that feeling.' And when you do that then you start creating a 'we' story."

- Zainab Salbi
Women for Women International

Bonding through shared work

"When we're out doing art workshops whether it be in elementary schools, or working with artisans, [or] a community, when we're working on an art or a design project together, we find that really important conversations take place...."

I've been in several workshops where I've suddenly become aware that I might be the first person in a long time who's told a child something good about themselves. They don't have to have it change their life immediately. They just have to know at that moment someone is listening to them and it's safe to be vulnerable.

- Lisa DeLong
Prince's School of Traditional Arts

Showing compassion, love and care

"[People could have] more understanding for [neglected children] and the way they behave... Their brains are actually physically different and they actually can't do certain things or behave in a certain way. So, I think compassion is a big thing."

Which is not to say that if somebody steals your purse kind of say, "Oh, take it," and give them a hug. That's not what I'm saying. At Kids Company we're very firm in terms of, 'You've done something wrong. You cannot do that, but then we, we still love you anyway.' That is the narrative that we have."

- Florence
Kids Company

City Year's list for making a child feel included and cared for:

- Make eye contact with the children when you greet them
- Serve them lunch
- Join in on the games they are playing with at recess
- If they are not playing, ask them what is wrong
- Check to make sure they are feeling well when they come to school and notify the school if the child is not well

Being a firestone

"Think about who was a firestone in your own life. You wouldn't be here... if you didn't have others who were with you and who helped you on your journey. And in actually remembering who was a firestone in your life, think about how you will be able to be a firestone in the lives of children."

- Zeni Thumbadoo
National Association of Child and
Youthcare Workers, South Africa

Connecting Broadly...

Building bridges: connecting individuals

"I created a programme that asks every woman around the world to sponsor one woman [affected by war] by sending her a letter and money... So it creates connection [to] this outside stranger, 'I care about you'."

- Zainab Salbi
Women for Women International

Encouraging social-connecting activities

"How do we build trust? The way that we've decided to do that is through a grass roots movement where we're literally giving people money to do something, anything in their neighborhood to bring neighbors together - and the only thing we ask of these people is that they do a project with someone that, that's in that geographic neighborhood, that they spend the money the way that they say they will, and that they tell us their stories."

As these stories come to light [they] are like stones dropping in the lake: the ripple effect of these individual projects are having an impact not only on the people who are doing the projects and the people who get involved, but also in the community as a whole."

- Lidia Kemeny
Vancouver Foundation

Promoting a sharing and giving economy

There are many alternative economic models that foster connections and reciprocity that can be explored on a small to larger scale, for example www.impossible.com, an online social giving network where people can post their needs on line and respond to other people's request for needs.

Being strategic about implementation

Engaging the people affected

"I've learned a lot about the importance of listening and consulting with the populations whom you want to benefit, whom you're working with, and how that consultation and that listening helps develop programs, and policies, and systems that are tailored to what they need and what they want."

- Shantha Rau Barriga
Diversity Rights Program
Human Rights Watch

"If anything is planned for a community, or a town, or a village that actually we sit down with the people who come from there and we say, 'How can we serve you, and what can you teach us about what you need and how you want to live?' And it's a very subtle thing but actually there is an enormous amount of embedded wisdom"

- Dominic Richards
Prince's Foundation for
Building Community

"I firmly believe that isolated people have the power, the willingness, and the potential to participate in human development. If they are given the opportunity they will contribute."

- Nureddin Amro
Siraj al-Quds School

Finding someone that can inspire others

"Quite often people are apathetic, they're tired, 'Nothing's really going to happen in our community,' and you need some activism. You need somebody with energy who can actually start processes going."

- Zeni Thumbadoo
National Association of Child and
Youthcare Workers, South Africa

Using partnerships

“Partnership between the government, the communities, the families, [are] so critical to engaging and connecting.”

- Shantha Rau Barriga
Diversity Rights Program
Human Rights Watch

“Community leadership is essential if change is to last.”

- Adele Simmons
Global Philanthropy Partnership

Recognising capacity of community

Do an asset-based assessment for community development, looking at what are the assets in the community that can be scaled up.

- Comment from group discussion

“Indigenous systems of social support exist, but they are not necessarily understood and promoted. Strengthening those systems is central to our work.”

- Graça Machel
Foundation for Community
Development in Mozambique

Acknowledging different approaches

“Overcoming isolation should not necessarily follow one procedure: what may succeed in one country may not succeed in another country. The important point is to work towards achieving that common goal – of overcoming isolation – with different strategies and different methods that can be adjusted to fit in the setting and conditions of each country, city or place in the world. “

- Nureddin Amro
Siraj al-Quds School

Recognizing our respective roles

“This is my own realization that we have to lift up our own people. And that means that all those issues that are there like no jobs, no education, you know, or suicide issues, we have to take charge of those issues. Because we can’t wait for the country to come to help us. They’re, they’re too slow at it and they don’t have the same passion for it as we do, so...”

I think the role of others is not to get in the way... to be supportive where they can in terms of what they can do themselves. [So] we might need you to translate some of our language, some of our thoughts and beliefs to your own people to educate them because that’s what they need the most, is to hear it from you because if they hear a person like myself talk about the issues of our community they just shut their ears down.

We have the same river we have to travel on; we don’t have to be in the same vessel but we need to both be heading in the same direction.”

- Ovide Mercredi
Misipawistik Cree Nation

Supporting community-inspired initiatives

“In a lot of cases it’s really supporting all of the other things that are currently taking place... whether it’s looking at community solutions that have been innovative, or whether it’s supporting young people who are doing, you know, really, really great work.”

- Kluane Adamek
Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship,
Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation

Changing the hardware...

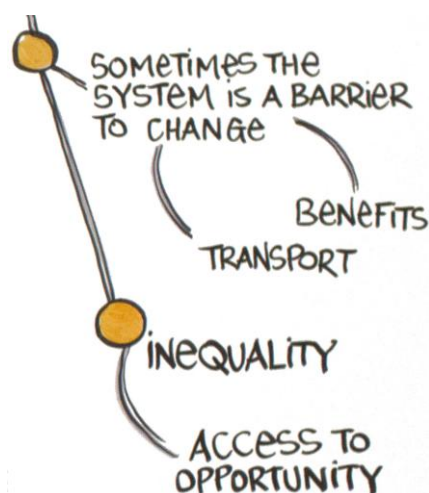
Engaging citizens in restoring community spaces

"Mostly we think about cities being done to us. We need to restore our land and the spirit of communities by getting people involved in thinking about and shaping cities. Naming the landscape is important to this. It gives it a strategic purpose for the city."

- Geoff Cape
Evergreen

"We need to think about how we plan our cities. If you don't have the hardware right it doesn't support the software, which is all the work we do with human beings to create opportunity and to create community, then you're fighting against it... And that means that we can actively design and develop cities thinking about social cohesion, thinking about creating opportunities for on-the-fly community connectedness, thinking about making sure that we have integrated societies."

- Dominic Richards
Prince's Foundation for
Building Community



Creating cities that foster social connectedness

"People thrive in communities that are walkable, where we can walk from place to place; which are mixed use, which means the way that we shop, the way that we study, the way that we work, the way that we live, the way we get culture, are all mixed together and not separated into distinct zones, linked by a freeway."

Communities need to be mixed income, where you have all different ages and income living together. You do not create a healthy community by either creating a ghetto of the rich or a ghetto of the poor...

When you respect the environment and you create a place where we can all mix together, people take care of it and they feel empowered and you avoid many of the social ills that come from treating people like they are less than valuable because they are poor. Their lives [of the poor] can be transformed because they see people coming and going to work, people all working and living together, it will raise their aspiration levels, and it will not be drummed into them that they are poor and do not belong into wider society."

Finally, local identity is absolutely key to people having a sense of rootedness to the earth... In traditional communities we sense a sense of community and connectedness: squares and open spaces, and shops and galleries and coffee... all things that create a richer environment are there on your doorstep."

- Dominic Richards
Prince's Foundation for
Building Community

Dreaming Big: Building Social Connectedness

If you have \$10 million, what would you do to build social connectedness?

#1 - Pilot a New Educational System & Start a UN Campaign:

Four cities each get a \$2 million grant to **develop a kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum** that would **teach inclusion, leadership, engaged citizenship and lessons of the heart**. The curriculum, for example, could build practical knowledge, teaching children how to deal with not belonging and how to include others, giving grades for teamwork and relationship building activities. It could teach children how to value and use their unique skills – supporting differences rather than pushing for conformity. All children, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have an opportunity to serve their own community. The schools would also have to use the money to create campaigns that bring the community in to serve and reach out to the kids.

The remaining \$2 million would be used to **start a UN campaign**, to challenge all UN nations to **infuse their education systems with the ‘lessons of the heart’**. The ‘lessons of the heart’ would be diverse in every country, reflecting the different cultures, spiritualities, ethnicities, and country-specific barriers to inclusion.

#2 – Develop a New Economic Model and Measurement System

Develop a new economic model that **demonstrates the value of inclusion and the cost of isolation**.

The \$10 million could be used, in part, to fund an audit on what are current practices and interventions that build social connection or lead to social isolation. We’d focus on measuring the benefits and costs these have, and include market-valued activities. For example, innovation, is fostered in open and receptive environments. Inclusion has positive benefits for health and well-being. This would enable us to weigh out the cost of doing social-connecting activities against the costs of isolation.

The audit would also allow us to inform policy, finding out **what works in addressing different elements of social isolation, how different communities build social connection, and what metrics could effectively measure social isolation versus connectedness**.

#3 – Change the Language

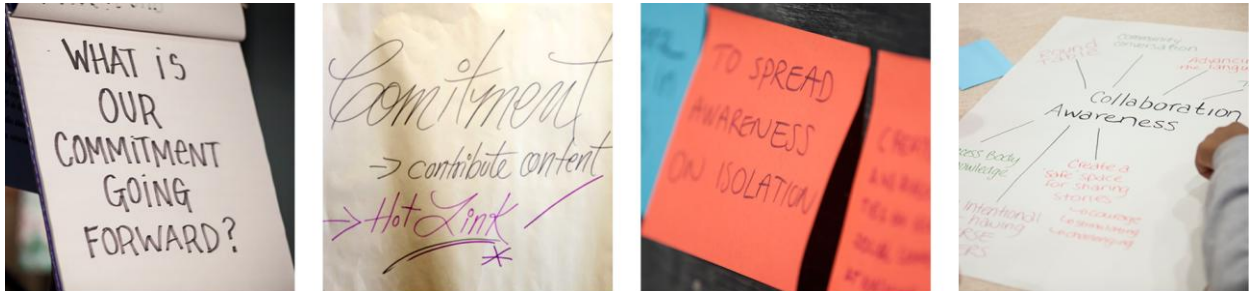
Language wars are important wars. Language is something that can continue to divide and isolate us. We need to raise awareness, and push to change language.

The word “disability” and all words that are like it, need to be renamed or changed. There is a negative association with ‘dis’, which can make the word ‘disability’ problematic as it keeps us tied to a negative association. An idea would be to shift the prefix. Make-up a prefix, such as ‘diff-ability’. **Develop different labels that are more positively or neutrally oriented.**

Commitments: What are we going to take forward?

“The one thing I cannot do is to work on ‘isolation’ in isolation... I’ve always known that it’s the ‘we’ that is going to get the work done. All of this is a true partnership.”

- Kim Samuel, Samuel Family Foundation



Harnessing the Web

We can develop three web platforms that allow people to harness their strengths by contributing content in the form of:

- Sharing their **stories**
- Providing **links** to projects and research
- Participating in a **forum** with various discussion topics

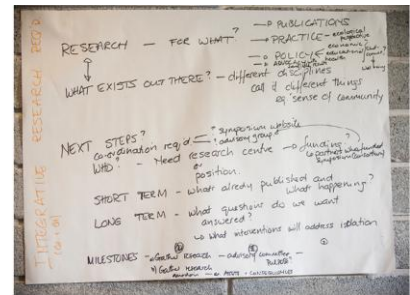
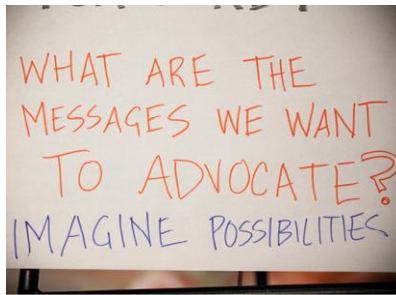
Building Awareness and Collaboration

We need to undertake intentional outreaches to partners with whom we can collaborate. This requires, however, that we sharpen our focus on what we mean by social connectedness and identify ways others can reach out to tackle isolation and build connectedness.

For example, applying **practice-based evidentiary research**, we could look at what practice is saying about social connectedness, and how, in practice, we can glean ideas that might have been forgotten and need to be reclaimed. **In indigenous communities as well as isolated communities, how do people maintain a sense of community and togetherness?** We need to focus our research efforts on identifying what research has been done on these practices or in focusing studies on these practices.

An example of a focused outreach would be **using food to raise awareness and to build social connectedness**. For example, we could promote participatory approaches when food is being cooked, share work in growing vegetable gardens, and reclaim ceremonies around food.

An example of building collaborations would be to reach out to each other, **leverage the connections begun here**, and write up information on our own programmes to help others to integrate these ideas into their own work.



Bringing together Research, Advocacy and Policy

We need to build and contribute to an online platform where we can gather together existing research and create links to programs, practices, or policies that address isolation or build social connectedness.

Currently, in academia, different fields use different terms for isolation and connectedness. We need to **bring together the sources from our different disciplines, creating a depository for related work.**

For policy makers, **research needs to be synthesized**, focusing on the assets of social connectedness and consequences of being disconnected. Tangible **reports on approved practices** could be collated and made available for advocacy purposes.

An **advisory group** could be established to help oversee this process and to help guide the longer-term goals of commissioning specific research projects to address gaps in our understanding of isolation and connectedness.

Targeting Community, Education and Inclusion

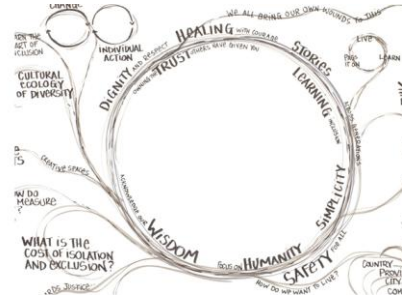
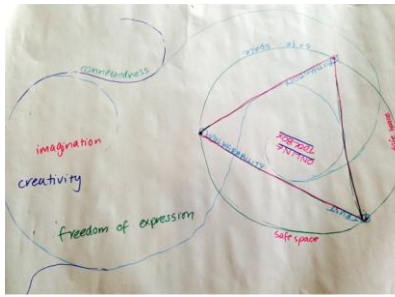
We would like to target career development offices and teacher colleges or university programmes to:

- Push for teaching to be seen more as a calling instead of a just a career choice: we **need those teachers who can adapt to all different types of learners**: visual, kinesthetic, audio
- Build better educators: many teachers are never trained in how to help children with disabilities; teachers need **proper guidance and training in how to help children with disabilities.**

We could target Boards of Educators, advocating the need to:

- **Expose students to diversity, disabilities and differences** early on in the school curriculum. "If we start young, we create more room for understanding and acceptance."
- Shift the approach of teaching from expecting kids to conform to a standard of learning, where they are told something, absorb it, and write it down, to focusing on **helping kids realize their own potential** by teaching them they belong and encouraging them in what they are good at doing.

In addition to the in-school focus, we also could create programmes that reach outside of school environments, to **create community awareness** about what we can do to lessen isolation and build social connectedness.



Promoting Safe Spaces

We need to develop an **online toolbox** that can be used by educators, child/youth care workers, and be accessible to as many people as possible, on **how to create safe spaces**.

Core concepts would include:

- The importance of being authentic and vulnerable and establishing trust
- The outputs, that reinstall a sense of a safe space, may be freedom of expression, creativity, imagination, and a sense of connectedness.

Using Art to Build Connectedness

We recognise the role of art in building connectedness through:

- Encouraging intergenerational learning of art so that we do not lose the traditions of art and the cultural identities intrinsic within the art: **"finding someone to teach today so we can pass things on."**
- Telling the stories behind the art: "Art is made for a reason, and it also is made using a very specific process." Recognising the story behind the art gives the object a deeper level of meaning, and allows us all to **connect further with each other through recognising the craftsmanship** in what has been made.
- Connecting back to the artist within oneself by going home and finishing a piece of unfinished art.
- **Making art together as a community and about community**. For example, we could encourage people to use art as a form of community service, bringing people together to make crafts, such as mittens or scarfs, for community members in need.
- **Bringing art into places where people are isolated** such as hospitals and prisons.

Outcome Statement

Through exploring ideas in different streams - workshops, dialogues, art, journaling, reflection walks - the symposium built towards an actionable outcome. The results culminated in a consensus statement that was drafted by participants and shared for on-line comment for 30 days following the symposium. The final document, contained below, is a powerful, focused and collective statement from the symposium. It confirms a common purpose, commitment and key next steps for taking this work forward.

I. Values and Principles

1. We, the participants of the first dedicated Symposium “Overcoming Social Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness: Global Innovation and Local Practice” gathered at Toronto, the traditional territory of the Mississaugas, October 1-3, 2014, to work together towards understanding social isolation, to gain insight, and to confirm actions required to support and achieve social connectedness as a key to individual and community well-being.
2. We, from diverse backgrounds and experiences around the globe, share common values consistent with the goals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and acknowledge the important role of international instruments, noting the first goal for the globe’s shared development agenda remains the eradication of poverty in all forms everywhere.
3. We share a vision of promoting understanding among peoples, groups, communities, and Nations to lead to actions supporting social connectedness and advancing positive progress in the achievement of shared international goals.

II. Building Understanding

4. We gathered with the bold aim to launch a movement of understanding and action based on experience and expertise related to social isolation and building social connectedness.
5. Our objectives included the sharing of research and the exchange of practical experiences that contribute to the building of an inspired community of practice and a network of individuals and organizations to advance understanding broadly and to act in support of the achievement of social connectedness.
6. We have affirmed that social isolation includes the experience of profound, sustained loneliness and disconnection and can create significant barriers to socio-economic individual and community well-being.
7. Social connectedness provides people with a sense of belonging through meaningful and trusting relationships and bonds with those around them.

Social connectedness facilitates access to supports and opportunities to achieve improvements that are desired and valued by both individuals and groups. Social connectedness results in tangible assets for communities and nations.

Tracing the Linkages between Poverty and Social Isolation

8. Poverty exists in multiple dimensions and includes many socio-psychological dimensions that can lead to further deprivations and violence. Social isolation appears as an important cause and effect of poverty disproportionately affecting women, children, particular racial and cultural groups, and persons with disabilities.

Learning from Stories of Community Resilience

9. Deep learning and understanding is achieved through listening to those directly affected and experiencing social isolation. Peoples and communities directly affected by social isolation must be supported to voice their experience as first steps to build connectedness. Consequently, these voices must be integral to the design of solutions.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Reciprocity

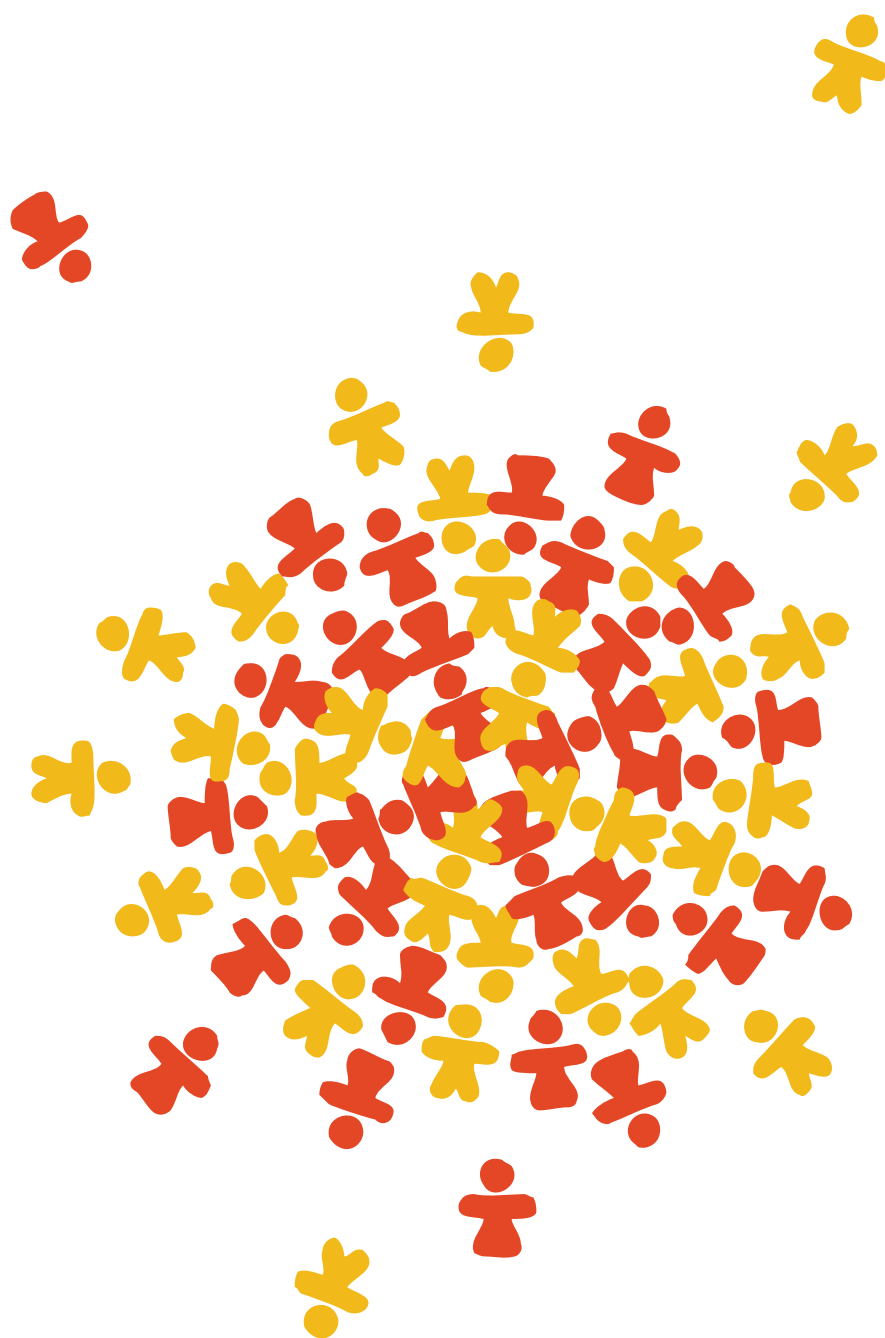
10. Social connectedness results in reciprocal, trusting relationships that facilitate development and other opportunities that enable individuals and groups to achieve improvements that they desire and value in their lives.

III. Commitments and Next Steps

11. We will continue the dialogue to build understanding of social isolation as a pervasive challenge affecting diverse communities. We commit to creating safe places for dialogue and providing a voice for those experiencing social isolation as the first step to building connectedness through new on-line resources and dedicated forums.
12. We support and encourage the development of a solid research base through analysis of the implications of isolation and the tangible outcomes of building social connectedness. We will link research to practice to advance outcomes for advocacy supporting social connectedness.
13. We will support a community of practice to advance specific actions for both programme design and policy development that are shaped by this understanding and directly contribute to deepening social connectedness. These may include fostering and supporting the development of policy and programming that:
 - a) encourage an approach recognizing, supporting and utilizing local strengths and respecting local values and practices;
 - b) encourage, enable and share behaviours that promote social acceptance and inclusion, including specific conflict-resolution skills

- c) bring deliberate focus to the needs, interests and realities of children at the centre of our considerations and actions
 - d) utilize art and creativity as a vehicle to engage and motivate diverse communities to foster awareness, understanding and inclusion
 - e) create and provide specific tools and supports for individual and community engagement for addressing complexities and potential internal conflicts.
14. We commit to sharing and advancing our understanding and our action through our respective communication networks and circles of influence, and by building partnerships with others.
 15. We will share and confirm research and support emerging partnerships to advance the desired outcomes.
 16. We look forward to participating in a network of participants to be formed in 2015 to further this dialogue and to a second Symposium early in 2016 to share advancements and outcomes, and continue building the global movement of understanding of social isolation and action to achieve social connectedness.

Annexes



Annex I: Kim Samuel's Opening Address

Kim Samuel is the President, Samuel Family Foundation and Policy Advisor and Scholar in Residence, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford. Her vision and leadership was a critical driving force in bringing to fruition the inaugural symposium on *Overcoming Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness*.

I suppose I should start with “Ladies and gentlemen,” because that’s how you’re supposed to start speeches like this. But I hope you don’t mind if I address you from the start as friends.

Welcome to Toronto and thank you for bringing your considerable experience and knowledge to this symposium.

You’ll see that for purposes of this gathering we’re defining isolation as the deprivation of social connectedness.

And while that definition is sound and that identifies the key element – social connectedness – that when lost constitutes isolation, I would also like to add to that definition a more impressionistic one:

The feeling of sitting alone at the bottom of a well.

A separation so profound that it can occur in the midst of others.

A circumstance in which coldness, not the warmth of connection with others, is the defining sensation; and darkness, not light, is the norm.

What little hope there is and what little light creeps in feels small, distant, and diffused.

A circumstance in which the meaningful relationships that make joy a shared experience and pain more bearable are nowhere to be found.

It is an isolation so consuming that individuals become the songbird that has spent its entire life in a cage. Even when the door is finally opened, the act of flying is so alien and the cage itself often represents the only security.

I also think about an old movie called the *Shawshank Redemption* when the inmates finally get released from prison they cannot cope with freedom and in the end they commit suicide. This is what I believe isolation has the power to do. It creates a kind of paralysis, locking the individual into a suffocating inertia.

I have long believed that isolation underpins many of the challenges in our world today. But because it is so difficult to quantify and perhaps also because it seems so nebulous it is all too easily escaping notice, or if noticed is dismissed.

If it is considered at all, it tends to be seen as a consequence of problems. But I have come to see that it can also be very much the cause of them.

I recognize that if we are to approach this challenge with rigor we cannot simply design a one-question survey in which we ask, “Hey, do you feel like you’re alone at the bottom of a well today?”

And yet there are questions we need to ask because isolation is a problem we can no longer afford to ignore – for its impact can literally mean life or death. It’s that vital, that elemental.

You do not have to look very far to understand this in the natural world.

As some of you may know, my family has a long association with horses. Within a herd of horses there is always a leader, and more often than not the leader is a mare. Maybe a young stallion begins nipping or butting others. What does the lead mare do? She excludes him from the herd.

If you watch this happen, you’ll see how anxious that young horse is to return because it knows instinctively that it cannot survive for long on its own. To be cast out and isolated from the rest of the herd means certain death. That’s how dangerous isolation can be.

It’s just as dangerous for humans because we, too, are social creatures. We thrive in community and we struggle if we are cast adrift.

And yet as humans there is an important difference. We can act on more than instinct. We can choose. We can choose to value, honour, and respect one another.

Just as the lazy gardener allows weeds to sprout up and vines to proliferate out of neglect, we can choose to cut back the tangle.

We can choose to look at communities that were once vibrant tapestries and identify the conditions that rent the fabric of connection and reduced too many to lonely threads.

I remember I had a visit in 2002 with the global humanitarian Graça Machel, whom you may also know as Mozambique’s former Minister of Culture and Education...and as Nelson Mandela’s wife.

Graça said, “I haven’t seen you since your daddy died. How are you?”

In that moment I opened up to her. I told her that I keep thinking about how much I loved him and how much I wanted to honour him. I told her that even after he had the brain injury that changed his life, he wasn’t diminished in his wisdom, or his integrity, or his kindness.

Indeed, his worst affliction had not been illness or disability, but the isolation that accompanied it, and not just his own isolation but that of my mom, who was

his best friend, wife, and primary caregiver.

And then I turned to Graça's husband, Nelson Mandela, whom I was meeting for the first time, and I said, "I can imagine you know a lot about isolation."

But to my surprise Madiba said, "No."

My initial reaction was, "Oh, no – I am meeting Nelson Mandela for the very first time and this is not going well at all."

But he wasn't being dismissive of the idea. In fact it was quite the opposite.

He told me that even on Robben Island, imprisoned for so many years, "We were all brothers working together with a common purpose. I was never alone."

And then he continued, "But I have seen isolation. I know what that loneliness looks like. Isolation is the child with HIV in a village with no one to care for him, no one to feed him, clothe him, or touch him. I have seen isolation and it is very bad."

Leading up to that moment I had already been devoting time and energy to issues of poverty disability and human rights. But this really crystalized it for me. This issue is going to be my issue for the rest of my life

And yet what exactly is this issue?

Well, it's actually these issues: issues of identity, dignity, and belonging. Issues of agency and voice. Issues that affect people's experience of life and their ability to reach their true potential – because isolation takes an excruciating toll on individuals, families, and communities. And even though it is too often invisible, that suffering exists all around us.

Among people with physical or intellectual disabilities too often excluded from society's mainstream.

Among victims of domestic abuse we've heard so powerfully in recent weeks, like one woman who, when asked why she stayed with her, abuser said, "Because I no longer knew who I was."

Among elderly people, our fastest-growing population here in Canada, where one in five say they are not frequent participants in any social activity.

Among those who are economically disadvantaged or displaced by the harsh winds of our volatile world; in marginalized populations from refugees to Roma...Indigenous people to Indian Dalits...people who for reasons of community or caste are locked outside all circles of concern.

Even the way we design and build our communities can influence isolation – with spaces and structures that bring people together, or that drive them apart and keep them that way.

An elder of the Musqueam First Nation in British Columbia said that after the government leveled their long houses and built single-family dwellings instead they no longer had a life frame of reference for being connected with multiple generations under the same roof. Many elders felt this deeply and died shortly after.

And because these issues are interconnected as a web, any boundaries we try to apply are going to be porous. But in trying to focus and define the challenges we face, I have tried to characterize them at least broadly in the hope that we might begin to address the problem in a meaningful, sustainable way.

One aspect is the painful link between isolation and poverty. A second is the impact of isolation on communities. And third is the need to foster a sense of belonging and community. Let me take each in turn.

I've spent a lot of time in Southern Africa, where I have learned that it is naive to define poverty in purely economic terms. If you ask the impoverished how they define poverty their answer is multidimensional. They describe a set of deprivations of which income is only one. Others include aspects such as education, health care, decent housing, safety, security, access to water, and political voice.

And a lack of connection, a lack of social belonging – a sense of profound isolation – which represents not just a consequence of poverty but can reinforce it as well.

For one thing, there is a stigma to being poor even when everyone around you struggles too.

Whether your floor is made of concrete or dirt can mean the difference between acceptance or rejection.

I remember a woman in Mozambique who told me that "Poverty means being lonely and not being able to get things because you are lonely." When pressed further she said, "In our community people have this attitude: 'You're not gonna be my friend if you stay in a shack.'"

Another said, "Even if you are hungry you can't go to your neighbors to ask for food or money because they are judging you, that you are poor."

The shame of being seen as in need can be so painful that people withdraw and isolate themselves. From their point of view isolation is a key and seriously damaging component of poverty. And until it is recognized as such it's my view that any efforts to improve the lives of such people will struggle to succeed.

Just look at the research being done on the effectiveness of social assistance programmes around the world. Time and again you'll find that if social bonds are threatened or if they are broken all together, then social assistance programmes

are prone to failure. This is because there is often a hidden stigma attached to taking advantage of such programmes. And so people who need the assistance mostly avoid taking it up.

I have met pregnant girls in South Africa, for example, who feel so shamed by their situation that they do not use pre- or post-natal services – risking their own health and that of their unborn child.

I have spoken to people living with HIV and AIDS who will not see a doctor or disclose their status to get treatment because of the social consequences. As one neighbor explained, “In our community most of the people who get HIV are the most poor. So we tend to say they were using their bodies to get food and money. So the stigma is there.... and they end up dying because they can’t ask for help.”

The more deprived of social connectedness people feel, the more vulnerable they become. The more they are relegated to the bottom of the well.

As I indicated earlier, it isn’t just individuals. Entire communities can face isolation and it isn’t just in developing countries. We see it here in Canada, where even under the umbrella of national wealth we see acute forms of inequality fueled by isolation.

Most compelling and alarming is the plight of Indigenous people.

The statistics are staggering. A child born into an Indigenous community in Canada is twice as likely to die in infancy as one born elsewhere in the country. If that child makes it to her teenage years she is five times more likely to commit suicide. And if she survives she is more likely to end up on jail than to graduate from high school.

Many northern communities are suffering. Pikangikum, Kesheschewan, and Neskantaga – to name just a few.

They struggle with many typical problems. Eighty per cent of the houses lack sewage pipes or running water. Unemployment is around 90%. Crime rates are through the roof and a recent report suggested that half of all the young people in the communities sniff gas to get high.

Most shocking of all, these small communities have suicide rates equivalent to 250 per 100,000. That’s 20 times higher than the rest of Canada and among the highest rates in the world. In Neskantaga alone, a community of 300, ten young people killed themselves last year.

And I would submit that disconnection is the thread that links all these problems together – geographic isolation combined with the legacy of forced assimilation, which has resulted in what some have described as “an eradication of culture, an erosion of traditional values, and a loss of traditional family stability.”

If you ask Indigenous people what has caused this crisis high, on their list is the residential school system in Canada. For more than a century it explicitly attempted to separate the children of the First Nations from their families and their culture. The aim, as some have chillingly described, was “to kill the Indian in the child.”

These schools cut them off from their traditional teachings on spirituality.... silenced them from speaking their own language...and made sure that children grew up without being able to draw on the indigenous knowledge that covered every aspect of life, from food choices to parenting.

And so they became estranged from their elders, their traditions, and their heritage. They also became disconnected from the land by the reserve system the federal government imposed.

All those traumas now affect younger generations. Fractures and destructive disputes abound within these communities. They have no jobs. They have no money. But crucially they have become isolated from themselves – trapped between cultures, seeing no way forward.

Once proud nations. Thousands of years of self-reliance. Thousands of years of internal harmony. Thousands of years of harmony with the natural world – gone.

So the question is not simply, “How can we reverse the isolation?” but, “How can we renew the cohesiveness and strength these cultures exemplified?”

While being part of a particular group may increase your risk of isolation, it need not preordain isolation. We can choose different paths and foster a sense of belonging and community.

To give just one example, people with intellectual disabilities often suffer profound isolation – especially in places where stigma obstructs their basic human rights.

One of the worst cases I have heard was two intellectually disabled brothers in Pakistan whose parents chained them to the walls of their home for many years, even into adulthood. What makes this story even more tragic is that the parents thought they were doing the right thing. In the face of stigma they thought this confinement would help keep their children safe.

More recently, a new report by Human Rights Watch has found that nearly 30% of all Russian children with disabilities live in state-run orphanages, lacking access to health care, nutrition, education, and most of all human contact and love. In the overwhelming majority of cases these children have at least one living parent. Yet mothers and fathers are being pressured into relinquishing their sons and daughters and falsely told their children will never develop intellectually or emotionally.

These stories remind me how isolation can spread from the individual to the family, making people feel literally and figuratively abandoned with no choices, no one to help them, no hope.

And yet, through new understanding that we can build together to recognize the pervasiveness of isolation – there is hope, great hope that illuminates pathways serving to nurture and support individuals, families, and whole communities. Beyond the challenges I have had the gift of seeing extraordinary examples of inclusion – none more inspiring than the Special Olympics movement founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

To me there is no effort that better conveys the idea of belonging or that better advances the power of unity, dignity, hope, and love.

Watching Special Olympians compete gives me a whole new dimension to joy; not just the joy of the athletes themselves raising their arms in celebration, but the joy of parents cheering their bold-hearted children to the finish line. The joy of volunteers sharing in something so much bigger than themselves. And the joy of the collective because the bonds of social connection run in both directions.

And each of us is uplifted when we open our heart to a wider world of human talents and potential.

I know there will be many questions for us to consider in the coming days from practical matters, like what kind of data is needed to give expression to isolation and its impact.

To policy questions like what kind of initiatives – local, national, and international – could be put in place to combat isolation in all its forms.

To innovations, like using technology to widen the circle of belonging, even as we acknowledge the double-edged sword of people moving their lives online.

I certainly think this last point is an issue we need to confront. We might take a moment to reflect on how our culture and technologies are doing their bit to isolate many millions.

On the face of it we all seem so connected. Everyone is on their cell phone or their tablet, especially young people. But are we really as connected as we think we are? As one friend of mine put it to me some time ago, “It’s depressing knowing that my young daughter is up in her bedroom reading on her phone about all of the parties she has been excluded from by her so-called friends.”

This is the tip of a very frightening iceberg. According to Ipsos Reid, one in five Canadian teenagers have witnessed online bullying, and two in five parents say their child has been involved in some kind of cyber bullying. A quarter of teachers surveyed said that they had been the victims of harassment online. And we have all heard the stories in the news, whether it be here in Canada or

elsewhere in the developed world, of children who have been so victimised by online bullying that they have taken their own lives.

This has to concern us – not just for the victims but for the perpetrators as well.

There are old ideological divides in much of so-called “Western” thinking that struggle with where we need to focus our attention – on the victims or perpetrators. Well I’d like to set all those aside and thanks, to traditions within Indigenous communities that I have begun to learn about, I believe we can build solutions that place a primary emphasis on reintegration and restoration of harmony as opposed to an emphasis on punishment and isolation.

Ideology aside, the victims and the perpetrators both need our help. We must free not only the prisoners – we must free the jailers, too.

I come to this meeting with great hope because just as social isolation is pervasive, so too is it preventable. And in our efforts to solve the problems we need not work alone.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed so beautifully in his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny.”

If we can find a way to truly see one another, to reach out to the person who feels invisible, to invite the one who feels different to belong – if we can do that as individuals and through our organizations, then I believe we can start blazing a trail toward a better world for us all.

I invite you all to reflect on these themes from your unique perspectives. With the tremendous spirit of partnership exemplified in the planning and convening of this symposium we will have the chance to weave these threads into new understanding and visions of the future. I am particularly excited about the special evening tonight where we will showcase art and the youth voice thanks to the incredible efforts of our partner TakingITGlobal.

I often tell my friends that the poet William Blake helped me survive my childhood. Earlier I mentioned the bird that had been caged so long it feared freedom. Well, Blake was the one who asked, “How can the bird that is born for joy sit in a cage and sing?”

My dream for this Symposium is to give vision and voice for the person who feels as if they were sitting alone at the bottom of a well.

The vision to see a way out. To see a future of inclusion.

The voice to sing out. And to get others to join in a chorus of inclusion.

Miigwetch... Hai Hai... Kleco Kleco... We la ’lin... Merci beaucoup... And thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Annex II: Reference and Additional Information on Projects that Foster Social Connectedness

Children-Centred Outreach Projects

Kids Company

In England, Kids Company fills the caregiver role, providing unconditional social support, a long-term commitment to children, and a relationship focused on the practice of love, positive attachment, and compassion. As Florence from Kids Company described:

“We’re all about: making these kids feel like even though they’ve had a tough time when they’ve been growing up that – and that’s not normal – people can love you, people can care about you, and you can be part of mainstream society in a positive way. That kind of message completely just turns people’s lives around.”

Report: [Kids Company: A Diagnosis of the Organisation and Its Intervention](#)

Website: <http://www.kidsco.org.uk>

Symposium representative:

- Florence

City Year South Africa

City Year SA is a programme providing dual benefits: to children in school and to unemployed youth.

City Year SA works within 10 primary schools in Johannesburg and Soweto, helping marginalized children in grades four to seven improve their performance in school and self-esteem, and creating an environment which helps children to feel like they belong, are accepted, and loved.

The programme provides an opportunity for unemployed youth, often from disadvantaged communities, to gain work

experience as childcare workers in local schools. In turn, these childcare workers use these skills and experience to either gain jobs or open up similar programmes within their own communities – creating a ripple effect.

City Year’s approach is to help bridge the gaps that can occur between what schools in high-poverty areas can provide and what children need. What they do at the schools varies depending the need: in some schools they coordinated fundraising efforts to get lunch boxes donated so that children can receive food while at school. The youth workers help teachers in the classroom and provide help for those children who struggle to focus or perform well in school. Their work recognises that many children’s unhealthy home life affects their behaviour in school: having an open-arms, nurturing, attentive and patient approach helps them to create a safe and supportive environment for these children. Within these environments, children thrive. As Portia Seatlholo, a site manager for City Year stressed:

“All the games, all the activities that we play with our learners we try by all means to connect with them so that we are able to boost our students’ self-esteem and self-confidence.”

Website: <http://www.cityyear.org.za>

Symposium Representatives:

- Portia Seatlholo
- Simangele “Smash” Shoyisa
- Lindiwe Sibiya

Gogo Grannies

The Gogo (“Grannies”) programme of Othandweni Children’s Home in Johannesburg currently has 15 grannies, who provide affection and care to marginalized young children, from infants to those under six. Each granny spends two hours during the weekdays with two children, one-on-one. The grannies focus on bonding while being attentive to whether the child is meeting mental and physical age-related development milestones. They monitor children’s progress along six dimensions:

- i. cognitive skills (e.g. recognizing shapes, colours and sounds);
- ii. fine motor skills (e.g. ability to follow puppets with their eyes);
- iii. gross motor skills (e.g. ability to walk in a straight line or balance on one foot);
- iv. social and communication skills (e.g. repeating rhymes);
- v. emotional awareness (e.g. expressing their feelings); and
- vi. self-help (e.g. tying shoe laces).

Spending time with the same child for an extended period of time allows the grannies to identify whether the child is meeting developmental milestones, to pick up on problems that might otherwise be overlooked, and to intervene if milestones are not being met.

Website: <http://keepachildalive.org/our-work/gogo-grannies/>

Symposium Representatives:

- Patience Mokgadi
- Elizabeth Maki Khumalo
- Sandra Thandi Twala

Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative

REPSSI is a forum in Southern Africa that shares tools and approaches on how to provide social and emotional services to children, youth, families, and their communities.

The initiative centres around psychosocial support – providing love, care and protection – for children. REPSSI provides tools and guides in five core areas:

- Advocacy
- Provision of Basic Services
- Family and Community Support
- General Support Services
- Specialised Mental Health Services

Website: <http://www.repssi.org>

Symposium Representatives:

- Lynette Mudekunye
- Julio Mutemba

Siraj al-Quds School

Siraj al-Quds School for Integrated Education is pioneering education for the blind: it provides integrated education, where children are taught side-by-side in a learning environment that fosters understanding and equality.

Since 2007, it has served 120 children in Jerusalem, accepting students who have the most financial need. In a place where the visually impaired are denied equal education opportunities, Nureddin Amro, the founder of Siraj al-Quds School, has created an example of how systematic exclusion can be challenged. He is a strong advocate for using education as a way to teach values that promote inclusion, acceptance, and connectedness.

Symposium representative:

- Nureddin Amro

Bridge-Building Programs

Women for Women International

Women for Women International is a humanitarian organization that builds bridges to women affected by war and conflict. They bring these women's stories to light, sharing them with others to challenge the shame and isolation that often happens to victims of wars. Through sharing stories, women can create a sense of "I am not alone." As one woman said:

"If I break my silence maybe other women will be helped."

Through encouraging women in other parts of the world to write letters and send money to women affected by war, the foundation has built networks of support. Zainab Salbi, the founder of Women for Women International, explained what motivated her to build these donor-bridges:

"I believe every single woman regardless of how rich or poor she is has to have her own sense of financial independence because the lack of [it] is vulnerability."

The foundation continues to support these women, helping them to earn and save money, improve their influence at home and within the community, and gain knowledge about their rights and ways to improve their health and well-being. By bringing the women together to learn about their rights and ways to improve their lives, the programme creates a sense of community and a safe haven, even in war zones.

Website:

<http://www.womenforwomen.org>

Symposium representative:

- Zainab Salbi

Vancouver Foundation

The Vancouver Foundation, Canada's largest community foundation, supports projects that help people become more connected and engaged with one another, with their neighbours and neighbourhood, and with the larger community.

In 2012 it surveyed people in Metro Vancouver, to explore their connections to friends, neighbours and community, and to understand what prevents people from being engaged.

One project that resulted from the report was to give "neighbourhood small grants" to people to spend on activities to which they would invite others within their community to, in exchange for sharing their story with the foundation.

Report:

<http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/initiatives/connections-and-engagement>

Website:

<http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca>

Symposium representative:

- Lidia Kemeny

Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO)

SHOFCO works with communities in extreme poverty to create holistic social services. The program, geared towards ensuring that girls in the slum areas of Kenya can receive a superior education, now serves over 70,000 beneficiaries.

The programme uses donations to provide daily nourishment, health care, psychosocial support, after-school programmes, uniforms and supplies, all for free, to ensure that the educational

experience of girls will enable them to create pathways out of poverty.

SHOFCO has also developed an international primary school curriculum that incorporates the latest learning innovations in math, literacy, science and social studies. Art, music, poetry, debates, yoga, community service projects, and field trips supplement academics, adding to the education of the whole child.

SHOFCO engages families: Parents, or other relatives of students are required to work for five weeks at the school as part of SHOFCO's efforts to gain community support for girls' education.

SHOFCO builds up the community: The organization works in partnership with other programmes to improve access to proper water and sanitation. It provides healthcare services and has built a community literacy, library and computer centre.

By taking a holistic approach and actively working to build connection, engagement and support within families and the community, SHOFCO is shifting the dial on gender inequality, poverty, and the walls that can limit opportunities.

Website: <http://www.shofco.org>

Symposium representative:

- Kennedy Odede



Council of Yukon First Nations, Canada

The Student Mentorship Program, established in 2010, is filling a critical gap for rural first nation community high school students: it is creating bridges, connecting students to help them manage a difficult transition. As Kluane Adamek, a founder of the programme described:

"We made this program called the Student Mentorship Program, SMP. It was based very simply on this big brother/big sister model where we partnered students who had undergone [the transition from a rural indigenous community school to high school in an urban environment] with students who were just coming in. We had a ton of different activities focusing on academic, social [issues], helping these young students."

In addition to this programme, Kluane discussed other ways that the youth continue to build connections to each other while maintaining their sense of community belonging, for example, by celebrating their respective traditions and cultures through "Tradish Tuesdays" which they post using social media.

For more information on the Student Mentorship Program, watch the video:

<http://youtu.be/u0ndlwkAyXE>

News article:

<http://www.yukon-news.com/life/mentoring-first-nation-education>

Symposium representative:

- Kluane Adamek

Fostering Collaborations

Synergos

Synergos creates and supports collaborations between marginalized communities, civil society, government and business. The organization helps partners to generate, test and implement their own ideas that can tackle problems of poverty and inequality in their communities. Synergos also builds the capacity of leaders, helping to increase their understanding of the challenges their communities face. Through its consulting services, it works with companies to identify how businesses can have a social impact on communities.

Website: <http://www.synergos.org>

Symposium Representatives:

- Kate Czarniak
- Peggy Dulany
- Robert Dunn
- Anna Ginn
- John Heller
- Marlene Ogawa

Leadership and Innovation Network for Collaboration in the Children's Sector

LINC uses a cross-sector leadership development programme to encourage representatives from government, NGOs, business and donors, to think strategically about collaborations and how they can transform their systems to increase the quality and quantity of support for children in South Africa. A Synergos programme, LINC combines training, dialogue and peer coaching, with stakeholder engagement, experiential problem-solving, and action-learning. Innovations that improve systems and support for children are spun off from the programme.

Website: <http://www.synergos.org/linc/>

Symposium representative:

- Renald Morris

Prince's Foundation for Building Community

The Prince's Foundation for Building Community promotes collaboration and education that can build sustainable and socially connected communities. It advocates for creating spaces that encourage human interaction and integrative environments, using multi-stakeholder engagements, including designers, planners, builders, local authorities, community members and government for any new building or city changes. It uses the education system to equip professionals and students to be able to build sustainable cities, and undertakes research that brings together solutions and best practices.

Report:

<http://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/princes-foundation-community-connectedness.pdf>

Website: <http://www.princes-foundation.org>

Symposium representative:

- Dominic Richards

Evergreen

Evergreen brings together innovators, decision makers and the Canadian public to accelerate the shift towards sustainable, greener, and healthier communities. It raises awareness and fosters engagement and collaborations, allowing citizens to become involved in transforming their cities.

Website: <http://www.evergreen.ca>

Tedx Talk: <http://youtu.be/iKkH59gssFs>

Symposium representative:

- Geoff Cape

Advocacy Work

Special Olympics

Special Olympics uses sports to spread compassion and acceptance. Its goal is to awaken everyone – and every community – to each person’s common humanity. It raises awareness through sports events, shared stories, and advocacy work, about the abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. It educates people about the skills and gifts of their athletes, and encourages people to recognise the benefits of differences. As Loretta Clairborne described:

“Special Olympics is going forward to break down isolation, not only towards people with intellectual disabilities but towards people who don’t even have disabilities by educating them that it’s okay to be you, to be unique.”

Website: <http://www.specialolympics.org>

Symposium Representatives:

- Editra Allen
- Sean Bogart
- Loretta Clairborne
- Dan Golberg
- Tim Shriver
- Troy Sundwall
- Matthew Williams

Inclusion International

Inclusion International is an international network advocating for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

The organization undertakes campaigns and research, and leverages partnerships to raise awareness around practices and policies that can lead to exclusion and inequality.

Its report, *Inclusive Communities = Stronger Communities*, assesses what living and being included in the community means to people with intellectual disabilities and their families, the benefits to society, and a number of prerogatives that could be taken to build inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Some of these prerogatives include:

- Moving from segregated models (i.e. employment, housing, education) to community-based models that enable individuals to access systems and supports in the community.
- Supporting self-advocacy groups created by those with intellectual disabilities.
- Developing family resource and training programs

Report: <http://inclusion-international.org/inclusion-international-global-report-on-living-and-being-included-in-the-community/>

Website: <http://inclusion-international.org>

Symposium representative:

- Diane Richler

Visualizing Impact

Visualizing Impact uses graphic design to highlight critical social issues around the world. Through design, the organization is able to encourage people to see issues from a different perspective. They bring to the fore marginalized perspectives on social issues, giving a voice to those who are often silenced.

Website: <http://www.visualizingimpact.org>

Symposium representative:

- Joumana Al Jabri

Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (BFPA)

BFPA is an organization that advocates for sexual and reproductive health rights and gender issues. As part of their mandate, it focuses on improving access to health care and information for marginalized groups such as Roma, rural women, people with disabilities. Its advocacy work addresses the risks of sexual exploitation of vulnerable women. It combines awareness campaigns with specific outreach interventions such as the provision of mobile health services and education, working in partnership with governments, NGOs, and international donor agencies.

Website: <http://www.safe sex.bg>

Symposium representative:

- Radosveta Stamenkova

UAHI EASHRI – East Africa Sexual Health and Rights Initiative

UAHI EASHRI is an African-based activist, grant-making initiative, in which LGBTI people and sex worker activists themselves make decisions on who gets funded and for what amount. Working across Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya and Burundi, it supports civil society and its advocacy work on issues of sexuality, health, and human rights for sex workers and LGBTI persons. It provides peer learning events, capacity-building programmes, and an online platform for knowledge sharing. Its programmes and planning are all done in consultation with the LGBTI and sex workers communities.

Website: <http://www.uhai-eashri.org>

Symposium representative:

- Wanjia Muguongo

Workshops that Build Connectedness The Prince's School for Traditional Arts (PSTA)

PSTA uses art as a channel to build connectedness, running workshops in schools, communities, and organizations. Through its workshops, it encourages people to participate in shared work, teaching people the value of togetherness: together we can build something beyond our own independent abilities. It encourages appreciate for traditional knowledge and cultural understanding and ensures that traditional methods are passed on to future generations.

Website: <http://www.psta.org.uk>

Symposium representative:

- Lisa DeLong

Heart of Belonging Workshops

These interactive workshops, offered in the Vancouver, Canada area, focus on the psychological sense of community – our experience of connection within the groups to which we belong. In the workshop, Collin van Uchelen has participants examine their own sense of community in their lives, share ideas on how to enhance it, and learn how to sustain it over time. Through interactive tasks and role-playing activities, participants experience a sense of community, and learn how to create connections and bonds to each other.

Website:

<http://www.heartofbelonging.com>

Symposium representative:

- Collin van Uchelen

Annex III: Participants

Kluane Adamek
Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship,
Walter and Duncan Gordon
Foundation
Canada

Larry Adoranti
Samuel, Son & Co., Limited
Canada

Bruna Aguiar
TakingITGlobal
Canada

Joumana Al Jabri
Visualizing Impact
Lebanon

Dr. Sabina Alkire
Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative (OPHI),
University for Oxford
United Kingdom

Editra Allen
Special Olympics International
United States

Nureddin Amro
Siraj al-Quds School
Palestinian Territories

Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo
Ahousaht First Nation
Canada

Shantha Rau Barriga
Disability Rights Program, Human
Rights Watch
United States

Prof. Aysenil Belger-Arcasoy
Neuroimaging Research in
Psychiatry, University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill
Turkey/United States

Rahul Bhardwaj
Toronto Community Foundation
Canada

Matthew Bishop
The Economist
United States

Sean Bogart
Special Olympics International
United States

Jennifer Brennan
University of Toronto
Canada

Geoff Cape
Evergreen
Canada

Rory Case
TakingITGlobal
Canada

Loretta Claiborne
Special Olympics International
United States

Jennifer Corriero
TakingITGlobal
Canada

Kate Czarniak
Synergos Institute
United States

Lisa DeLong
Prince's School for Traditional Arts
(PSTA)
United Kingdom

Peggy Dulany
Synergos Institute
United States

Robert Dunn
Synergos Institute
United States

Hallie Easley
Synergos Institute
United States

Paddy Favazza
Center for Social Development and
Education, University of
Massachusetts Boston
United States

Jennifer Gawor
TakingITGlobal

Anna Ginn
Synergos Institute
United States

Dan Golberg
Special Olympics Canada
Canada

M.L. Hale
Rain Child Project
Canada

Eva Haller
Glasgow Caledonian University
United States

Yoel Haller
Obstetrics and Gynecologic
Associates of San Francisco
United States

Dr. John Hammock
Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative (OPHI),
University of Oxford
United Kingdom

John Heller
Synergos Institute
United States

Gabe Hughes
University of Oxford
Canada

Jane Humphries
Community Foundations of Canada
Canada

Menaka Jayakody
Networking HIV, AIDS Community
Of South Africa (NACOSA)
South Africa

Mary Jordan
Washington Post
United States

Florence
Kids Company
United Kingdom

Lidia Kemeny
Vancouver Foundation
Canada

Elizabeth Maki Khumalo
Othandweni Children's Homes
Canada

Daniel Kooveanatok
Youth artist
Canada

Heidi Loening
UNICEF South Africa
South Africa

Graça Machel
Foundation for Community
Development
Mozambique/South Africa

Sama Mara
Artist and geometer
United Kingdom

Laurie McLaren
Nipissing University
Canada

Ovide Mercredi
Misipawistik Cree Nation
Canada

Patience Mokgadi
Othandweni Children's Home
South Africa

Renald Morris
Synergos Institute
South Africa

Lynette Mudekunye
Regional Psychosocial Support
Initiative (REPSSI)
South Africa

Wanja Muguongo
UHAH EASHRI
Kenya

Owen Munroe
Youth artist
Canada

Julio Mutemba
Regional Psychosocial Support
Initiative (REPSSI)
Mozambique

Mao Nakai
Synergos Institute
United States

Vuyani Ntanjana
Nelson Mandela Children's Fund
South Africa

Liam O'Doherty
TakingITGlobal
Canada

Kennedy Odede
Shining Hope for Communities
Kenya/United States

Marlene Ogawa
Synergos Institute
South Africa

Monica Patten
Anglican Church of Canada
Canada

Ginger Rhodes
San Francisco Psychotherapy
Research Group
United States

Dominic Richards
Prince's Foundation for Building
Community
United Kingdom

Diane Richler
Inclusion International
Canada

Noella Robinson
Kipawa First Nation
Canada

Zainab Salbi
Women for Women International
United States

Caitlin Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation
Canada

Emma Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation
Canada

Kim Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation
Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative (OPHI)
Canada

Mark Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation
Canada

Griffin Samuel
Samuel Family Foundation
Canada

Kevin Sanford
Samuel Family Foundation
Canada

John Sawyer
Nipissing First Nation
Canada

Ian Scott
Emerging Markets Symposium,
Green Templeton College,
University of Oxford
United Kingdom

Portia Seatlholo
City Year South Africa
South Africa

Simangele “Smash” Shoyisa
City Year South Africa
South Africa

Tim Shriver
Special Olympics International
United States

Lindiwe Sibiya
City Year South Africa
South Africa

Adele Simmons
Global Philanthropy Partnership
United States

Ian Skelly
British Broadcasting Corporation
(BBC)
United Kingdom

Julian Smith
Willowbank School and Centre for
Cultural Landscape
Canada

Cara Smyth
Glasgow Caledonian University
United States

Radosveta Stamenkova
Bulgarian Family Planning and
Sexual Health Association (BFPA)
Bulgaria

Laurel Steinfield
University of Oxford
Canada

Troy Sundwall
Special Olympics International
United States

Sandra Thandi Twala
Othandweni Children's Home
South Africa

Zeni Thumbadoo
National Association of Child and
Youthcare Workers
South Africa

John Tomlinson
Synergos Institute
United States

Collin van Uchelen
Heart of Being Workshop
Canada

Barry Walker
Psychotherapist
Canada/United States

Matthew Williams
Special Olympics International
Canada

Aaron Williamson
The Value Web
Canada

Carmen Zgouras
Oxford Philomusica
United Kingdom