



SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
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**Making Community Essential:
Seven Areas of Impacts for Communities and the Policy
Shifts to Get There**

By Muhammad Bilal Raza
Social Connectedness Fellow 2022
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness
www.socialconnectedness.org
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tamarack Institute is a leader in the field of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Working with them and the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, I was able to explore the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) movement through the lens of academic research and lived experiences. This report is an analytical study focused on the practical workings of ABCD, highlighting real change that has come about as a result.

Focusing on equity and inclusivity, I consider how social isolation impacts immigrants, and how social connectedness practices need to be inclusive of those most vulnerable amongst us. The report is based on the seven areas of impact for deepening community through an ABCD approach. The evidence for the working of ABCD comes from its real life implementation in neighborhoods and the ideology behind it. Hence, I consider real life case studies where organisations have used the approach to foster change.

However, the main source of my first hand research has been people: community members, community leaders, and Tamarack Institute's partners who are making waves in the field of community development. I have considered each area from a policy lens, as well as from the perspectives of community members to create change.

The report also discusses reasons and factors for why certain communities face higher levels of social isolation and difficulties in forming meaningful connections. My approach goes beyond simply making policy suggestions; I have analyzed the stakeholders for these policies and discussed how policy frameworks need to cater to everyone. In doing so, I was able to analyze policy from the lens of those it affects the most: people.

In general, the language used in the report is intentionally conversational, in an effort to democratize the knowledge I have consolidated through my research, and outreach for community members and future community leaders.

The most important recommendations that I have deduced from my research are:

1. Representation is paramount for the practice of ABCD, and Community Development in general, to be equitable.
2. Outreach and garnering interest and awareness in the cause of community building is an issue that needs to be tackled using innovative ideas.
3. Community members need to believe in their own strengths and 'Assets' to bring about the desired change for their community.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am a settler who is living and working on land that is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississauga's of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. I also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississauga's of the Credit. With any discussion related to policy and impact, it is most important to retrospectively consider the impact of colonialism, trust, or lack thereof, and power imbalances. Only in understanding these dynamics can we discuss policy and change that is beneficial for everyone.

TERMINOLOGY

- **Asset-Based Community Development** - abbreviated as (ABCD)
- **'Tamarack's event'**: refers to Tamarack Institute's annual gathering in London Ontario, which focused on 'celebrating neighbors and measuring the impact of ABCD'. Members at the event included but were not restricted to: Shorefast, Community Foundations of Canada, Canadian Urban Institute (Canada Healthy Communities Initiative), 8 80 Cities, Coady Institute, Pillar (groups that are energizing shifts in systems and policy environments)
- **Community members**: refers to Tamarack's Partners at the event, specifically in a focus group I co-hosted about understanding and policy implications of ABCD.
- **International students in Canada**: broadly refers to people who are enrolled in post-secondary degrees or diplomas in institutes across the country
- **Immigrants to Canada**: broadly referring to foreign-born people working or gaining education in Canada with temporary or permanent resident status.
- **Social Connectedness**: refers to being able to live in "a society where everyone is valued, seen, and heard; where everyone can exercise their basic human rights and live a rich and fulfilling life; where solidarity, trust and cooperation pave the way for inter and intra community bonds; where people can exercise their agency and have the opportunities to achieve substantive freedoms. In essence, it means building a society where everyone—no matter their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or political affiliation—has the opportunity to belong." (As defined by the Samuel Center for Social Connectedness.)
- Furthermore, this report talks about four things concurrently: **Place, People, Program and Policy** . The analysis focuses on the intersectionality of all four

elements of belonging in what we term communities (as informed by the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness).

- **Social isolation:** Social isolation as described by the Government of Canada as “a situation in which someone has infrequent and/or poor-quality contact with other people. A person who is socially isolated typically has few social contacts or social roles, and few or no mutually rewarding relationships. Although social isolation is often associated with loneliness, the two are not the same. Loneliness is better described as “a feeling of distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships.””¹

¹ “Social isolation of seniors: A Focus on New Immigrant and Refugee Seniors in Canada”. Government of Canada. Accessed on July 19, 2022.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-immigrant-refugee.html>

INTRODUCTION

In light of recent global events, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge of Black Lives Matter organizing, growing xenophobia, sexism, homophobia and racism, and attacks on national sovereignty, it is safe to say we live in unpredictable and confusing times. These global crises, and the socio-political environment of the world, have given rise to growing rates of social isolation and self-reported loneliness. Many organizations and governments have tried to tackle the issue of social isolation through aiding the development of community and social connectedness. This report goes beyond the assessment of social connectedness measures and looks at important aspects of community development. Using Tamaracks framework these can be summarized as the following seven areas of impact:

- Sense of belonging
- Equity and Inclusion
- Civic Engagement (enabling care/acting together)
- Strengthened Resilience
- Community Safety
- Community Health / Wellness
- Empowered Local Economies

These seven impact areas serve as a general metric for community well-being and a sense of social connectedness. Furthermore, in this report I aim to analyze the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model. This model differs from other models of social connectedness in the approach and thought process. While the mainstream narrative surrounding community development is on a 'needs basis', the

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model considers the available resources of a community in engaging its residents to live a socially connected and healthy lifestyle; a lifestyle that champions integration, equity, and solidarity, amongst other important values. The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model is also an important shift in the narrative surrounding community development, from one of need and deficiency to one where a community highlights its own resources and abundance. This model fosters the emergence and growth of community leaders, as well as solidarity in acting together to achieve change in the means available to them. The practice of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) can be summarized in a famous quote by Theodore Roosevelt, “Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are.”

This paper outlines the ideal components of each area of impact, and how different levels of government (Federal, Provincial and Municipal) can support communities to achieve impact in these areas. I will further expand my research into policy advancements to support impacts for deepening community through this mechanism.

An important aspect of my report is the discussion regarding representation in the discourse surrounding community development. While it is important to celebrate the efforts of community leaders and organizations, it is also important to consider key questions such as, “who does not have a seat at the table? Who is underrepresented and who is overrepresented? Are we recreating the power dynamics we seek to counter or change?” With this in mind, and considering a specifically Canadian context, we need to look at historically vulnerable groups, namely immigrants and newcomers to Canada.

The focus on these groups stems from their positionality of not having pre existing support systems in a new country.

An essential component of my research was the participation of community members and leaders. This component of my project is called the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI). As part of my Community Engagement Initiative (CEI), I co-hosted a focus group with my partners at Tamarack Institute. The theme of their annual event in London, Ontario was "Celebrating Neighbors and Measuring the Impact of ABCD". In my focus group workshop, I interviewed a diverse group of people from different organizations, agencies and ethnicities about their understanding of ABCD. Their opinions and lived experiences serve as the backbone of my analysis and recommendations. These are people who are active in their communities, lead their community members, and have insights about the current state of policy as it relates to community development.

The paper also gives a special focus to the immigrant perspective on social isolation and community development. To highlight why, here are some important facts about immigrants in Canada:

The Government of Canada highlights, "The immigrant and refugee population is growing. By 2055, it is projected that 40% of Canada's population will have been born outside of Canada. Individuals who migrated to Canada within the preceding five years are referred to as "new" immigrants, including landed immigrants and refugees. In 2015,

new immigrants made up 17.2% of the total immigrant population and 3.5% of the total population in Canada.”²

With this in mind, and considering how important immigrants are to the Canadian social fabric, the report focuses on why they are increasingly/disproportionately/extremely vulnerable to social isolation, and have more difficulty finding and maintaining social connectedness. Furthermore, the perspective of many newcomers to Canada is considered through first hand interviews and academic journals, as well as Government reports.

BACKGROUND

The practice of Asset-Based Community Development may seem like a very new phenomenon, but institutes such as Tamarack Institute, and visionaries such as John McKnight³, have been talking about the ideology for years. It is only now gaining traction within the mainstream, with many municipalities trying to practice it through the help of organizations such as Tamarack.

To appreciate the history of Asset-Based Community Development, it is important to consider the perspective of the founder of the movement. John McKnight, who laid the foundation for Asset-Based Community Development in 1969-1973, describes the work of Asset-Based Community Development as being a movement, rather than an

² “Social isolation of seniors: A Focus on New Immigrant and Refugee Seniors in Canada”. Government of Canada. Accessed on July 19, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-immigrant-refugee.html>

³ Books by John McKnight: The Abundant Community, The Connected Community

institution. His initial findings, which still ring true to the basis of Asset-Based Community Development, are resources of residents that are termed ‘assets’:

“The talents and capacities of the local residents

Their voluntary clubs, groups and associations

Their local institutions – for profit, not-for-profit, and government

The land and other physical assets

The process of exchange – sharing, bartering, trading, buying and selling.”⁴

Apart from the central ‘resource’ based approach, the approach of ABCD varies from other community development models in that it focuses on Capacity-Focused Development, rather than a ‘needs-driven dead end’.⁵ The reason that having an approach that celebrates abundance rather than deficiency is important is because of the shift in mindset. Capacity-Focused Development allows communities to think about what is possible in their means rather than looking to external actors for help.

Alison Mathie and Gord Cunningham state, “the appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that people in communities can organize to drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity. In particular, ABCD draws attention to social assets: the particular talents of individuals, as well as the social capital inherent in the relationships that fuel local associations and informal networks.”⁶ This is certainly true

⁴ McKnight, John. “A History of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute: Unintentionally Creating a Movement.” Asset-Based Community Development Institute. Accessed on July 20, 2022. [https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/A%20History%20of%20the%20ABCD%20Institute%20\(1\).pdf](https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/A%20History%20of%20the%20ABCD%20Institute%20(1).pdf)

⁵ Kretzmann, John P., and John McKnight. “Building Communities from the Inside Out: a Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets.” Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 1993.

⁶ Mathie, Alison and Cunningham, Gord (2003) From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development, *Development in Practice*, 13:5, 474-486, DOI: [10.1080/0961452032000125857](https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857)

for my understanding of what ABCD is; it is a movement that requires nothing more than willingness from community members to want to do better for themselves and their communities.

Working with the Tamarack Institute, one thing was highlighted to me about ABCD above all else: it is an action-based movement. Calls to action, working plans, and effort are key tenets of the movement. A leader in community mobilization, and an expert in the practice of ABCD, Heather Keam, highlights a recovery plan based on principles of ABCD. One of her calls to action that is most relevant in the status quo is 'Community Asset-Mapping', in light of COVID-19.⁷

She suggests that in the future, we need to take unconventional steps, for example, reaching out to untraditional leaders such as Facebook group creators or IT tech folks who have emerged⁸. In addition to her suggestions, I call on us to reach out to younger community leaders; those who are mobilizing the opinions of millions on TikTok and Instagram, youth activists and advocates and young immigrants navigating their new communities. Having input from young people is crucial, as ABCD is an intergenerational effort to build thriving communities for the future.

Furthermore, she suggests that recovery is not the goal. It is time for us to reset our intentions and actions. Reset rather than recover. Learning from the difficulties people

⁷ Keam, Heather. "Nine ways to create an Asset-Based Recovery Plan." Tamarack Institute. Accessed on July 25, 2022.
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Field%20Note%20%7C%20Nine%20Ways%20to%20Create%20an%20Asset-Based%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf?hsCtaTracking=af345e76-744d-4077-a1ee-5eb2d86a51bf%7Ce1189c0e-3d27-43db-aea7-90599f9e6f98>

⁸ Keam, Heather. "Nine ways to create an Asset-Based Recovery Plan." Tamarack Institute. Accessed on July 25, 2022.
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Field%20Note%20%7C%20Nine%20Ways%20to%20Create%20an%20Asset-Based%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf?hsCtaTracking=af345e76-744d-4077-a1ee-5eb2d86a51bf%7Ce1189c0e-3d27-43db-aea7-90599f9e6f98>

faced pre and during the pandemic, community resources need to be viewed and approached differently. While physical resources hold great importance, it is time to acknowledge the soft skills that people can offer their communities. These can range from being able to teach languages, gardening, arts and craft and cooking.

When we talk about “Asset-Mapping”, pioneers of ABCD, John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann have provided a simple guide to it. According to them: “1) everyone has gifts, 2) everyone has something to contribute, and 3) everyone cares about something and that passion is his or her motivation to act.”⁹ With these fundamentals in mind, the only challenge then is to mobilize and incentivise community members to participate, act and lead. The report will build upon changes community members feel are necessary, and how involvement in the cause can grow.

Tamarack Institute also highlights 8 touchstones that serve as best-practices for a dynamic community environment:

TOUCHSTONE 1: Establish a community-building team

- Which people are good at discovering what people care about and where their assets can be used?

TOUCHSTONE 2: Recruit a Community Animator

- This is not someone who will set an agenda, but someone who is skilled and passionate about helping people organize.

TOUCHSTONE 3: Host Community Conversations

⁹ Duncan, Dan. “Asset Mapping Toolkit.” Asset-Based Community Development Institute. Accessed on July 30, 2022.
<https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/D.%20Duncan%20Asset%20Mapping%20Toolkit%20Eight%20Steps%20to%20Increase%20Residential%20Engagement.pdf>

- Create opportunities for diverse conversations to take place, focused not on “deliverables” but on mutual discovery.

TOUCHSTONE 4: Engage Community Groups and Organizations

- Clubs, associations, and informal groups offer great capacity towards community building.

TOUCHSTONE 5: Build Connections and Social Interaction

- Connectors and Animators are to create meaningful interactions, not just plan events.

TOUCHSTONE 6: Inspire Vision and Plan for the Future

- Once trusting relationships have begun to form, look to the future to imagine together what the community could look like (for example, one-ten years from now).

TOUCHSTONE 7: Implement Change

- Take action and next steps to work towards your shared vision for the future.

TOUCHSTONE 8: Foster Celebration

- Throughout the process, take joy in every positive development, in each person’s gifts and the effort they invest. Believe-in and encourage each other!¹⁰

Before discussing the 7 areas of impact for deepening community, it is important to consider the breakdown of how policy is created at different levels. As outlined by the Tamarack Institute:

- Federal Government in Canada is responsible for policy pertaining to:

¹⁰ Asset-Based Community Development at a glance. Accessed on August 10, 2022. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/CDC%20ABCD%20resources/ABCD%20at%20a%20Glance.pdf>

- Mental Health, Economic Development, Civic Engagement, Safety, Climate, Poverty, Funding, as well as Health and Welfare.
- The provincial Governments in Canada focus on policy regarding:
 - Education, Health, Social Development, Local Government, Mental Health, Safety and Wellbeing.
- Municipal governments look at aspects of governance such as:
 - Libraries, Parks, Local Safety and Infrastructure.

In the following section, I will discuss each area of impact in depth, with a focus on community outlook on each area. Moreover, based on their responses and my research, I will also highlight the initiatives for each impact area on the Federal, Provincial, Local/Municipal, Institutional and Community levels.

METHODOLOGY

My methodology for this research paper was two pronged. My primary source of information came from interviews conducted with Tamarack Institutes Community partners at their event in London Ontario. Questions that I asked the focus group at Tamarack Institute's event:

Q1) What do you feel is the most important factor in fostering community?

Q2) Which of the areas of impact do you find the most challenging to make waves in?

Q3) What does an ideal community look like to you, identify 3 key aspects of an ideal community

Responses from the community members based on these questions are the focal point of my research.

Additionally I also interviewed international students that were serving in the capacity of Community leaders on University campuses. Additionally I conducted expert interviews with policy professionals at IRCC and CAMH.

The second part of my research focused on academic articles, books and the news. These were my secondary source of information and served as evidence for claims made in the paper.

Limitations

While I was able to interview a diverse group of people and had the benefit of many different opinions in my report. I was not able to hear from senior immigrants and immigrants from East Asia, Africa and South America. Moreover I was not able to find adequate research on the issue of Community safety and what it means to international students. While I was able to talk to policy professionals who are experts in their field, their knowledge was limited to their respective departments and hence was not as holistic as I would have wanted.

ISSUES, EVIDENCE AND KEY FINDINGS

Areas of Impact

Sense of Belonging

On a personal level, out of the seven areas of impact, I found this one to be the most challenging and open-ended. Practically, this term can be defined as the feeling of security and support based on acceptance, inclusion, and identity.

However, 'belonging' cannot be caged in such certain terms. Examples of a 'sense of belonging' include an individual being accepted for being themselves, or feeling like an organic part of their community or neighborhood.

Community members at the event described 'sense of belonging' in very vivid terms. According to one attendee, a person of color, to belong meant feeling needed, being missed, being surrounded by people that look like oneself, having shared goals, feeling safe, self determination, solidarity, empathy, accountability, feeling heard, and the list goes on. It was through their responses that I realized how broad the concept is, and consequently difficult to distill into a policy proposal. However, let's look at the existing policies that foster belonging.

An interesting example I found of policies that support a sense of belonging was mental health programs for vulnerable populations. This is just an example of how governments can make the most vulnerable amongst us feel like they have a right to belong. Until governments are able to respond adequately to the needs and grievances of the most vulnerable amongst us, equity is a distant goal. To be more specific, one such program was initiated by CAMH in Ontario. They are aiming to culturally adapt

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for Canadians of South Asian origin. Speaking to a student community leader of Bangladeshi origin, Simran Aman, I found out about this community initiative to adapt community mental health resources specifically for those of South Asian descent. This program focused on taking South Asian culture into account when recommending mental health resources. This is a great step in the right direction. While it is important to think of ourselves in the context of a larger community within our neighborhoods and countries, it is equally important to consider the differences (cultural or otherwise) that make us unique. It is the government's responsibility to provide resources catered to each group and segment of society.

Conversely, while the government has started programs to help immigrants and newcomers to Canada, the status quo does not have enough support mechanisms. Newcomers to Canada need directed resources to ease their transition, as well as to help them build community. Whether it's resources to mentor young newcomers (international students) or support systems for older immigrants, these facilities are not catering to the general immigrant population. I look at myself as an example— after landing in Canada, apart from making friends on campus, I did not have access to any community resources. For me this included mentorship for jobs, housing and even financial literacy. Moreover, I would have benefited from South Asian friendly resources to feel connected to my culture through food etc. Many institutions, whether it's the job or housing market, make it very difficult for newcomers to build a connected and meaningful life. This can be in the form of landlords not willing to rent apartments to newcomers without a credit history in Canada, discrediting the fact that they have not had the opportunity to do so. The government also gives no assistance or guidance in

this regard. The issue is exacerbated in mega cities such as Toronto, where finding social connections are even more difficult due to vertical neighborhoods¹¹ and lack of community engagement.

On a local level this stems from a lack of local gathering spaces such as parks and community centers. The City of Toronto and the greater Toronto area is a prime example of this issue. An attendee at the focus group pointed out that she wanted to teach Spanish in her community center and wanted to engage with her community center, but due to COVID and bureaucratic red tape, was unable to offer her assets (Spanish speaking skills) to her community.

While policies can definitely foster a sense of belonging, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) method dictates that a community must use its own present resources for social connectedness. Suggestions offered by the attendees included community fairs and performance by local artists. Moreover, a suggestion that caught my interest was the designation of community members to act as ‘community connectors’, people who help new community members meet and connect with existing members. Other members of the event suggested the presence of community kitchens with diverse food, to cater to a diverse community.

Equity and Inclusion

In contrast to the previous area of impact, equity and inclusion is a term that we have started to understand in more definitive terms. Policy on this issue is widespread,

¹¹ <https://www.alfred-mueller.ch/en/forum/article/vertical-neighbourhood>

or so I thought before I met with community members. While Canada is a champion when it comes to equity and inclusion, a lot of work is yet to be done.

Community members at the event believed that one of the foremost policy reforms in this field is a change in immigration policies. While Canada is a world leader in immigration, its policies gate-keep¹² talent from entering its borders. Tamarack's community members believe that Canada needs to widen its immigration horizons. This is supported by the widespread benefit immigrants bring to Canada, both economically and culturally.

To foster a sense of inclusion amongst newcomers, they must be provided housing and employment support through the Federal government. Giving people legal status in a country is simply not enough. In the socio-political climate of today's world, opening work and housing opportunities is paramount, not just for inclusion, but for survival. Canada also severely overlooks its senior citizens, specifically immigrants. They constitute a very vulnerable group and are among the most harmed by social isolation and a lack of community. While younger immigrants are able to adapt faster to the Canadian social fabric, older immigrants do not have the same opportunities, and struggle with high rates of social isolation.

Furthermore, a common suggestion by community leaders at the event was the appropriation of policies. Members suggested that governments need to consider the impact of policies on youth and senior citizens, respectively, with more diligence. This

¹² the activity of controlling, and usually limiting, general access to something.

translates into having specific plans to reduce poverty amongst these groups, and looking at institutional protections that can be offered to them.

On a local level, equity and inclusion is even more specific. Community members highlighted the importance of accessibility. This comes in different forms; first is accessible buildings, transportation, housing, healthcare, and childcare. The second is access to food security. While these seem like mammoth issues to solve coherently, the solutions lie in community.

While our community members did a great job of highlighting the issues present, they also gave us important community-based solutions. One such solution was the presence of community members and residents in the development of cities. A ‘people first’ approach to urban development is necessary. According to a report by the Tamarack Institute, “Municipalities across Canada are realizing that it’s not just about pavement and buildings, it’s about the people who live, work and play in each neighborhood”.¹³ This is essential to understanding that policies need to be focused on people.

A great example of this is the Regent Park community development plan. The Regent Park Social Development Plan is an example of a community-based solution to housing and development in urban cities. The development has been done with community consultations to champion social inclusion and cohesion of residents throughout the planning process. In addition to this, the plan focused on creating a social application for

¹³ “Building Your Case For A Neighbourhood strategy.” Tamarack Institute. Accessed on May 17, 2022. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Building%20Your%20Case%20For%20Developing%20a%20Neighbourhood%20Strategy%20-%20Heather%20Keam.pdf?hsCtaTracking=59de9c9e-93d8-4680-8991-673fb7b79cea%7C4adb064b-3ae2-4b60-9b79-c5331d2cda71>

residents to be able to connect with other residents, and access resources in their neighborhood.¹⁴ Community members of the area were also consulted on other factors of living such as jobs, rent prices, and community resources such as parks. This plan serves as a blueprint for how development can be inclusive and equitable, while catering to the interests of communities and City governments.

Moreover, a keynote speaker of the event also had amazing solutions to offer. Guillermo Penalosa (a mayoral candidate for the City of Toronto) described the need for open streets and spaces in great detail. He explained the importance of having broader sidewalks and open spaces that cater to senior citizens as well as children and youth. According to him, this is key in creating intergenerational community bonds. It is important to have as many community members be able to access resources as possible. Access to resources in this case is the cornerstone of equity.

Members also spoke about initiatives that community institutions and organizations can take in making their communities more accessible and inclusive. They defined hiring policies, educational access and training, and volunteering opportunities as being most important. One member also mentioned the benefits of having community gardens, which provide communal spaces, as well as access to food security.

Civic Engagement (enabling care/acting together)

On the issue of civic engagement, members had very aspirational suggestions. While some suggested that the Canadian political system needs reformation, with the

¹⁴ “Regent Park Social Development Plan” Accessed on July 20, 2022.
<https://www.regentparksocial.org/sdp>

dissolution of the party system, others believed that media regulations and transparency are needed to build trust.

Members also suggested that since we live in a highly digital age, it is time our community practices reflect that. One suggestion was the creation of digital community boards. Friends and colleagues all over Toronto have vouched for the use of such digital community boards in their vertical neighborhoods. An example is a condominium building called 'The Selby' which makes use of a digital messaging board to connect the residents of the building, for socializing and to build a sense of community¹⁵.

While most members mentioned the use of technology to build connections, some believed that it is important to consider partnering with community organizations that specialize in the practice of community development. This can be seen in the relationships that the Tamarack Institute has with the municipal governments of many cities across Canada. Tamarack provides the local governments with guidance and workshops on how to inculcate a sense of social connectedness amongst its residents.

Strength and Resilience

When we look at the topic of strength and resilience as an area of impact, it opens up a broad arena of options. Strength and resilience are difficult aspects of community development to quantify. Each community deals with having to develop different levels of resilience, based on the adversities its members face. This is an area of impact that requires further research and should be considered from the lived

¹⁵Detailed list of Community resources present at the Selby:
<https://triconresidential.com/apartment/the-selby/>

experiences of the neighborhood or community. For this area of impact, I connected with a group that's particularly vulnerable to social isolation, and disconnection from their new communities - international students immigrating to the country for higher education and work opportunities. This community has to display a particularly large sense of strength and resilience in the face of adversity on a daily basis.

International students do not receive benefits from the Government of Canada, whether it be social security or a sense of belonging. They largely depend on the bonds they form through their own hardwork and perseverance. Being an international student myself, I took this opportunity to interview my peers on campus, who have migrated here for education, and also serve as community leaders on and off campus.

One such student is Simran Aman, an international student from Bangladesh. She serves as the President of the Bangladeshi Students association. Through her efforts in music, dance and cultural activities, she has furthered a sense of community for many Bangladeshi students on campus. She did so without any pay or stipend; her only motive was to build a safe space for others like her to be able to be themselves and find community.

Community Safety

Living in a world with movements like BLM and the reality of police brutality, the word 'safety' does not resonate with armed law enforcement anymore. Community safety, unlike our traditional understanding of safety, holds very different connotations.

Members at the Tamarack event had very interesting notions regarding community safety. On a local level, they believed that community safety starts as small as giving education on bike riding safety rules, and having block connectors and a neighborhood watch. However, in many cases neighborhood watches have been known to routinely surveil BIPOC, immigrants and Homeless peoples.

At a more meta level, suggestions regarding safe, transitional, provisional and social housing were also made. Moreover, members believed that municipal governments should invest in having better lighting for streets, ensuring pedestrians do not have to walk through dark, secluded areas. Arguments were also made for improving bicycle safety on roads and making physical changes to the current nature of sidewalks (by broadening them).

While the suggestions from the members were very helpful, I believe community safety goes beyond all the above-mentioned suggested changes. Community safety means having neighborhoods that are safe from xenophobia, homophobia, sexism and racism; neighborhoods where one's race is not a question of safety for them, and communities that accept all sexualities, ethnicities and languages.

Community Health / Wellness

The idea of community wellness is twofold. The first, or more apparent, is the access to healthcare resources, mental and physical. The second, and more covert understanding, is that of the collective well-being of the community. This idea revolves around a community that deals with issues such as social isolation, and has residents that are able to self-actualize and be their true selves.

On the first idea of access to resources, members argued that access is only truly there when it is present for all. A prime example that was stated was that of mental health and addictions support. While addiction and mental health are issues that are garnering awareness, they remain taboo topics in many communities, especially in immigrant communities that do not have resources tailored to their needs or face social pressures to not seek help. Speaking with a professional policy maker at the Ontario Center for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH), I realized that while specialized resources for mental health are present, they are not widely available or advertised.

On the idea of Community Wellness and its dimensions, it is important to consider the perspectives of different communities, to ensure the ideas are diverse and equitable. An example is Indigenous perspectives on community wellness. In their academic article on community health, Thiessen K., Haworth-Brockman, M, Stout, R. *et al* state, “Western conceptualizations of health reflecting colonialist regimes portray Indigenous communities from a deficit-based lens while ignoring communities’ strengths and self-determined perspectives of health and well-being.¹⁶” This is particularly true in the case of Indigenous peoples of Canada, who’s community health practices are not respected. This is visible when we see doctors discrediting Indigenous health practices based on herbal healing and non-invasive treatments.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the impact that social connections can have on the health outcomes of community members. In a report by the Social Sciences and

¹⁶ Thiessen, K., Haworth-Brockman, M., Stout, R. *et al*. Indigenous perspectives on wellness and health in Canada: study protocol for a scoping review. *Syst Rev* 9, 177 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01428-0>

Humanities Research Council of the Government of Canada, immigrants' stories were shared regarding their opinion of the connection between social connections and wellbeing. One of the people highlighted in the report is Salma, she states “ “They spoke about being connected and being included, and what it meant for their health to not be included,”.. “Women who were less socially connected were not as able to cope with their medical situations, while those with stronger connections had better health outcomes.”¹⁷ Through her description and a plethora of other research, it is clear that social connections have a grave impact on the health outcomes of people. The report also talked about the importance of platforms for immigrants to be able to share their stories, which would help them build social connections and in turn lead to a healthier lifestyle¹⁸.

Speaking specifically about immigrants facing social isolation and loneliness, a Government of Canada report highlights why immigrants are more likely to feel socially isolated. According to the report, “Research suggests immigrants are one group that tend to report higher levels of loneliness. Because of migration from one country to another, many experience social disruption and increased isolation. Immigrants, especially new immigrants, may experience unique stress in acculturating to Canadian society, including culture shock and difficulty finding employment. They may also encounter language barriers, credential recognition challenges, and other disruptions

¹⁷ “The Link between social connectedness and healthy aging.” Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Government of Canada. Accessed on July 20, 2022.

https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/stories-histoires/story-histoire-eng.aspx?story_id=328

¹⁸ “The Link between social connectedness and healthy aging.” Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Government of Canada. Accessed on July 20, 2022.

https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/stories-histoires/story-histoire-eng.aspx?story_id=328

that can lead to higher levels of self-reported loneliness.”¹⁹ It is important to consider the societal, economic and personal struggles of immigrants when talking about policy change. Those most vulnerable amongst us need community and social connectedness the most.

Another important determinant of community health is the level of employment and income in a community or neighborhood. Without equitable access to food and resources to improve one’s life, community members will not be able to access holistic wellness. For this issue, Tamarack’s community members believe that community food support is extremely important. One example is communities practicing breakfast programs in their neighborhoods.

Empowered Local Economies

The area of impact related to ‘empowered local economies’ is a contentious one. At the event in London, Ontario, I realized that some of the language surrounding improving the state of local economies was not inclusive of immigrants to Canada. When we use terms like ‘hire local’ or ‘buy local’, it leaves room for a very valid question: what is local in the Canadian context?

Immigrants to Canada provide immense economic and social benefits to the country. According to Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), “Immigrants account for 33% of all business owners with paid staff, creating important local jobs in all sectors of our economy such as construction, professional services, health care and

¹⁹ Stick, Max, Feng Hou, and Lisa Kaida. “Self-reported loneliness among recent immigrants, long-term immigrants, and Canadian-born individuals.” Statistics Canada. Accessed on July 30, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021007/article/00001-eng.htm>

retail trade.²⁰ It is therefore important to consider immigrants in the conversation surrounding hiring or buying local. Canadian governments, institutions and communities need to make an effort to include immigrants in the conversation surrounding empowering local economies, keeping in mind the immense contributions immigrants can have for the process.

Members at the event highlighted important policy changes necessary for empowering local economies. One such change is governments creating economic and employment incentives for its citizens through better wages and benefits. Members suggested focused tax credits for small business owners to promote sustainability. Another example was mentioned during a key note panel where Zita Cobb spoke about the importance of promoting sustainable and local fisheries²¹. As Ms. Cobb mentioned, and I later learned in my research, the model of an economically sustainable community is very important. Her venture in her community of Canada's Fogo Island, through her charitable endeavor, Shorefast, is a prime example of these efforts. The Fogo Island Fish website states, "We are ten distinct cultural communities combined to make a single economic community. Our fishers, both men and women, all live on Fogo Island, as do all the workers at Fogo Island Fishing Cooperative's processing plants, stationed in several small communities around the island." This community was formed after the collapse of fisheries in Newfoundland due to unsustainable fishing practices globally.

²⁰ "Immigration Matters in Business" Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Accessed on Aug 10, 2022.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/campaigns/immigration-matters/growing-canada-future/business.html>

²¹ Cobb, Zita, Mary Rowe, Rudi Wallace, Michelle Quintyn and Emilie de Rosenroll. "Building Place-Based Community Economies." Keynote Panel, Celebrating Neighbors. Measuring the impact of ABCD. London, Ontario. Witnessed on June 8, 2022.

While we see such examples of community based economic empowerment, the practice is not widespread.

Through the opinions of Tamarack's community members, I was able to consider policy options that I was not aware of. One suggestion was the possibility of access to financial capital to increase the presence of community owned goods. This can also translate into community owned enterprises such as 'Fogo Island Fish', mentioned above. However, to make this happen, and for communities to be more cognizant of their finances, it is important to understand where our money goes. For this reason, members suggested financial literacy avenues for community members to be able to make more informed decisions pertaining to income and finance.

While the panel with Ms. Cobb was very helpful for me in regard to understanding the presence of community based enterprises, the main impact was pertaining to the image surrounding 'hire local'.

In a country that boasts a refugee population as large as Canada does, the 'hire local' model is a slippery slope. While many academics and activists use the term with the intention of being inclusive, that is not always the outcome. Speaking with international students on campus, specifically, a Pakistani student community leader, Shanzeh, I realized many employers in Canada perceive hiring locally in very different contexts. She shared her experience whereby she reached the final stage of many job interviews, only to be told that the company was not looking to hire international students due to the financial and bureaucratic burden, and that they would be hiring 'local'. Like Shanzeh and myself, thousands of students suffer the same fate at the hands of employers due

to restrictive policies by the Canadian government. In a Globe and Mail article that surveyed many international students, an international student, Gurpreet Kaur states, “employers either don’t need anyone or don’t want to deal with the immigration paperwork to sponsor her.”²² After paying hundreds of thousands of dollars in tuition fees, the future and fate of international students should not be dictated by the willingness of employers to go through with a bureaucratic process.

In terms of how communities across Canada can help make ‘hire local’ more inclusive, they should be making an active effort to hire international students. These are folks who have spent over 3 or 4 years making a life in Canada, and deserve to be treated like other residents. A country that is willing to take in thousands of dollars in international student fees should also be willing to accommodate the people paying those fees and giving back to Canadian society in social, economic and holistic terms. It is high time immigration officers stop asking newcomers to Canada if we can confirm that we will ‘go back to where we came from.’ The article from the Globe and Mail further supports this issue, “Federal data show immigration officials rejected more than one-third of all study permit applications last year, up from one quarter five years ago, because visa officers increasingly don’t believe foreign nationals will return home after studying.”²³ It is important that the language pertaining to ‘hiring local’ is mindful and inclusive.

²² Tomlinson, Kathy, The foreign students who say they were lured to Canada by a lie, The Globe and Mail. Accessed on August 1, 2022.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-international-students-coming-to-private-colleges-say-they-were-duped/>

²³ Tomlinson, Kathy, The foreign students who say they were lured to Canada by a lie, The Globe and Mail. Accessed on August 1, 2022.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-international-students-coming-to-private-colleges-say-they-were-duped/>

IMPACT

The Future of ABCD

While the ABCD movement has tremendous potential and has achieved a lot in the past 5 years, as is highlighted in Tamarack Institute's five-year report, it is important to look for ways to harness this potential and direct it in the best ways possible.

As mentioned before, an important consideration to make the practice and movement of ABCD truly equitable is to ask ourselves who *does not* have a seat at the table. Representation in matters of community is paramount. Without community members and leaders being present from every community, the work of Asset-Based Community Development will not reach its maximum potential. As with all matters of academia, it is important to use language that is accessible and to democratize complex ideas. Many communities globally practice the tenants of Asset-Based Community Development without ever using the term. Back in Pakistan, aiding and assisting our community and neighbors was done under the banner of 'Samaji falah-o-behbood' which roughly translates to social welfare for the community. The practices were very similar, in the sense that neighborhoods and communities used their resources and mobilized for the betterment of their communities, and for policy change.

In my Community Engagement Initiative report, I will further discuss terms used by other communities across Canada, and how they can be brought into the mainstream discussion of Asset-Based Community Development.

Furthermore, it is pertinent that in a post-pandemic world, our practices have to change. The focus needs to be on health, wellbeing and creating community. Our existing model

of ‘individuality over everything’ failed when we realized how important social connections and community are in the face of crisis and isolation. We saw an example of this during Covid when neighbors and community members helped procure groceries for each other, set up emergency relief camps and even taught emergency care to one another.

This report simply highlights some of the practices currently in place, and those that can be done better. There is still a lot of work to be done in the realm of community development; specifically equitable and representative community development.

An important part of the deepening community work has been the focus on building a neighborhood strategy, mainly by community organizations. A neighborhood strategy mainly aligns municipalities, organizations and groups with residents’ vision, values, gifts, and assets. Furthermore, the main task of having a neighborhood strategy is maintaining a framework for community engagement. This, in turn, ensures an ongoing process which leads to the betterment of communities. A good neighborhood strategy has the following things at the center of it:²⁴

- Engagement,
- Visioning, goals and objectives,
- The planning process (not the plan itself)

It is also important to highlight the steps taken by organizations in mobilizing community resources, as well as providing advice and expertise for community development. One

²⁴ “10 - A Guide for Deepening Community.” Tamarack Institute. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/BOOK-10-A-Guide-for-Deepening-Community.pdf?hsCtaTracking=cadbbe05-1b7c-4422-8720-e2b03c0472fd%7C938b3a92-100a-4147-b770-5943570dfa91>

such example is that of the Vancouver Foundation. Through small grants of up to \$500, the foundation helps incentivize community members to become community leaders²⁵. Their belief in starting small has resonated across the greater Vancouver area, with community members being able to organize events such as neighborhood movie nights, tree planting drives and emergency response programs. While these incremental changes may not seem consequential, it is through such small and focused efforts that small communities can mobilize and utilize their assets for community development.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of my research for this report, I have met many fascinating people who have given me unique perspectives on the issue of social isolation and community development. However, the common theme among my research and outreach has been the urgent need for representation. Community interests can never be fulfilled unless the socio-economic, political, ethnic and religious sensitivities and nuances of different communities are taken into account. Organizations and governments have made meaningful leaps in the field of Community Development, especially through the practice of ABCD, however much work remains to be done. Community organizations need to find innovative ways to increase community engagement; to increase the level of 'Assets' present. To increase said engagement, the interests and grievances of all communities, especially immigrant communities, need to be catered to by the government and Canadian-born folks. Social connectedness needs to be focused towards those who have the most trouble creating social connections, i.e., marginalized folks and newcomers to Canada. Policy

²⁵ "Neighborhood Small Grants." Vancouver Foundation. Accessed on July 31, 2022. <https://neighbourhoodsmallgrants.ca>

recommendations mentioned in the report are reflective of the status quo and the change that is necessary to make Asset-Based Community Development inclusive, equitable and widespread amongst all communities in Canada.

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