

To create the Gateway Community Centre, citizens of Dufferin County have implemented many of the tools/techniques presented at the 2010 Leading Edge Summit including root cause analysis, storytelling and innovative public, private, not-for-profit partnership building. Below is an overview of the creation of the Gateway Community Centre as well as some details of how the tools were used.

## **Background**

In October 2010, the Community Advisory Board (on homelessness) hosted the Up and Out of Homelessness Stakeholder Forum to identify existing services, gaps in service and provide a networking base for service providers. From this forum an adhoc group provided the base information for a community plan for Dufferin County.

The first meeting of the steering group took place January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Several key stakeholders and community members who had attended the October forum came together to discuss concerns for the disadvantaged who had no shelter from the elements during the day time hours.

As discussions progressed, it became apparent that a community centre that would provide a hub for access to community services would be a great asset to the people of Dufferin County. Further, that services and programs could be offered at the site to assist with engaging members of the community and could also provide a break from isolation for all ages- parents and tots through senior citizens.

Word spread and the steering group flourished. Media accounts in the Banner created community interest and many people started calling to volunteer their time or provide clothing, food or other items.

St. Mark's Anglican Church offered their church hall as the first site for the Gateway Community Centre. Members of the steering group toured the facilities with delight, taking note of the large kitchen area, well furnished lounge, large meeting room, washroom facilities, a private area for counselling and a board room and other facilities that could be made available.

By March 10<sup>th</sup>, a business licence was secured and a Post Office Box was in place. A small donation by an anonymous donor provided funds for insurance for the site and for the Board of Directors. Enough funds were available to provide seed money for the first fund raising project: a booth at the Orangeville Farmer's Market that would provide hamburgers, hotdogs, beverages and serve as a marketing point to make the community aware of the Gateway Community Centre.

By March 14<sup>th</sup>, members of the steering group provided a line up of services/programs that would be offered at the Gateway Community Centre. All core programs are based on best practice models and are presented by professionals from our member organizations

The services of administration/secretarial duties are currently provided as part of the Up and Out of Homelessness initiatives through the Community Advisory Board on Homelessness through grants from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Dufferin Not For Profit Group.

June 3, 2011, the Grand Opening of Gateway Community Centre welcomed a cross section of community members from elected officials to service providers to potential clients to concerned citizens. Programs will be phased in effective June 8, 2011.

## **Tools/Techniques Used**

### **\* Root cause analysis**

January 20, 2011 we held a round table discussion regarding a situation that was of great concern both to the community as a whole and to stakeholders involved in homelessness issues. There were concerns regarding youth loitering, a reported increase in vandalism, some voiced concerns by citizens regarding their safety, and some serious concerns about providing a safe warm haven from the elements for those in need. After exploration, the root causes narrowed down to two: disadvantaged people had nowhere to gather during the day; and, the John Howard Society had experienced fire damage so their offices were not available for many youth who normally gathered there.

The group of stakeholders was drawn from a number of individuals/agencies who had expressed an interest in further involvement at the Up and Out of Homelessness Stakeholders Forum in October 2010. After a great deal of discussion and input from the community plan priorities that resulted from the forum, it was decided that a community centre should be created with free programs and services for all ages; that would serve as a hub to services available in the community; that it should serve as a safe, warm haven for all members of the community.

### **\* Storytelling**

Storytelling is used for community presentations to increase awareness about homelessness as well as introduce the topic of discussion: Gateway Community Centre. Participants are asked to close their eyes and remember a wonderful family gathering they have experienced... with lots of their favourite foods, friends and family present... in a warm and cosy home. Then, as they settle into their memories, they are asked to imagine things being stripped away... one by one- through illness, loss of work, death, etc. until they can picture a woman with three small children who is sitting in the dark. She is crying as she tries to decide how to spend the few dollars she has... will it be food... heat... rent... the two pairs of shoes each of her children need for school... or should she buy that birthday present her six year old has been praying for? They are then asked to open their eyes. It is explained that 'homelessness' is not about the stereotype of the person with their belongings in a backpack, who begs for money on a street corner in Toronto... homelessness is... and some examples from Dufferin County are provided. Then, the "back pack game" is played. A series of cards with multiple choice answers is used to introduce local statistics and information on the Gateway Community Centre.

This approach has been used with professionals and service clubs and can fit any time frame from 10 minutes to an hour. Participants seem to enjoy the novelty of the approach.

### **\* Innovative public, private, not-for-profit partnership building**

The steering group consists of more than 40 members representing more than 20 community organizations/agencies, including a member of the local media who has written several articles on homelessness. Members, in general, were drawn from a list of stakeholders who had attended the October 2010 forum and who had expressed an interest in further networking opportunities. Between formal meetings, all communication between steering group members is accomplished using the

internet. A website was designed and hosted (in-kind) to assist in promoting the future Gateway Community Centre. Subcommittees were formed to do research on existing drop in centres, explore potential fund raising opportunities and to find an affordable, suitable location for the future Gateway Community Centre. Members of the steering group also made themselves available for community presentations to increase awareness and solicit input from the community in general. Further, people using services such as the local soup kitchen and food banks throughout Dufferin County were approached for their input.

April 11, 2011, approximately 11 ½ weeks after the first meeting of the steering group the first community information session was held at the site of Gateway Community Centre. Less than 14 formal meeting hours passed between the first meeting and the information session.

The Gateway Community Centre hosted its Grand Opening June 3, 2011. A core of volunteers has been trained, in collaboration with the Orangeville Police and Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services. A selected team of volunteers has been trained as fire marshals by the Orangeville Fire Department regarding fire drills, etc. This team is also trained in setting up and taking down a hard wall system (in-kind use that would normally cost \$1,500 to rent for a weekend).

More than \$120,000.00 in in-kind programs and services have been committed to Gateway Community Centre. The Community Advisory Board (on homelessness) and the Dufferin Not For Profit group contributed to the salary of the Up and Out of Homelessness Coordination and Liaison officer, allowing her to assist with Gateway Community Centre research, planning, implementation and fund raising until March 2012. To date the following documentation has been completed: comprehensive business plan; comprehensive budget; bylaws; terms of reference; policies/procedures manual; volunteer training program; establishment of a board of directors and a two tiered steering group- active and associate members; paperwork started for not for profit/charitable status; an MOU to allow for charitable receipts to be provided and grant applications submitted; and, liability insurance has been purchased.

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