For over 30 years, I’ve served as an Executive Director of several organizations and worked as a volunteer in many others. I’ve also received services and supports from several community organizations throughout my life.

In 1988, I moved to Vancouver and luckily found a position as Executive Director of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, a three-year old organization located in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood.

On the first day of work at the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, I visited a local financial institution at my lunch hour. Coming from the Prairies and being known as a friendly person, I struck up a conversation with an elderly woman in the lineup. Her name was Pacita and she was delightful, with this infectious laugh that made me feel wonderful. She welcomed me to the neighbourhood and promised to drop by to see me and continue our conversation.

Relationships like these made me feel like I belonged and have kept me in Renfrew-Collingwood for 23 years and counting.

In 2010, I had the great honour to be selected as an Alan Thomas Fellow through the Carold Institute, an organization committed to advancing civil society in Canada. This group is currently investing in people who have worked in the nonprofit sector by giving them an opportunity to explore and share knowledge about ways to advance civil society.

I began exploring the developmental journey that people and organizations went through as Renfrew-Collingwood changed in diversity and grew in population over a 25-year period. First, as a way to continue development in the local neighbourhood, second, to help create dialogue with other communities interested in this work and, third, to inform governments, philanthropic organizations and academics who could further support this kind of development through research, policies, practices, and resource allocation.

The project *Growing an Intercultural Neighbourhood, Growing a Civil Society* is the result of this exploration. Its collection of stories and articles reveals how we develop capabilities to grow community within what we call an intercultural neighbourhood and, as a result, enhance civil society in Canada.

*Growing an Intercultural Neighbourhood, Growing a Civil Society* captures how, as local residents became engaged in community building, the many layers of cultural values and practices created a new culture and spirit. Through our local experience, we valued and celebrated diversity and as a result became a far more inclusive society. Through visioning, dialogue and gift-sharing, we created approaches and solutions that transcended traditional multiculturalism into interculturalism.
My name is Paula Carr and I started my work in communities as a volunteer in a small town in Saskatchewan. I was 10 years old. Volunteering left a mark on me and subsequently led to my career in the community development field.

Interculturalism means we focus on building bridges and exchanges, between diverse people, and encourage them to bring their unique gifts and approaches to creating solutions around common interests. An intercultural journey requires a degree of introspection on the part of the newcomer and the host community, the marginalized and those that are marginalizing—an integration effort that goes in both directions. It requires a leap of imagination, and courage to explore.

At the heart of this intercultural journey are the stories of the people within the neighbourhood - inspiring stories of being, belonging, and becoming.

As I remember my good friend Pacita and my first day in Renfrew-Collingwood, I think of the thousands of other people who share acts of kindness and support their neighbours every day. These are often hidden jewels and having the privilege of discovering them as I work in the neighbourhood has been my greatest joy and my greatest growing experience.

I want to acknowledge all of the people who have helped me in my reflections both throughout the fellowship year and along the way.

There are far too many to name individually. This fellowship has provided an incredible year of learning and growth for me. Through this process, I have been able to know myself better, get in touch with my being. I was able to explore my time prior to coming to Renfrew-Collingwood and understand more clearly what I brought into this neighbourhood.

As I reflected with others, there is a great sense of pride, seeing all that we have created together. I was completely overwhelmed and touched by the generosity of gift giving and support that has become the culture of this community. This neighbourhood has given me another family, close friends, and a sense of belonging and becoming.

An intercultural journey...requires a leap of imagination and courage to explore.

In this document I hope to share lessons and strategies with others doing similar work and to encourage intercultural conversations and actions and, ultimately, create pathways toward a new vision for our future and a new society.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank and acknowledge the generous time, support, and wisdom given by so many during this project.

**Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Carold Institute**

Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Carold Institute have supported this work financially and through their ongoing encouragement. The opportunity to reflect on the development work in Renfrew-Collingwood and see the threads coming together that led to an intercultural community is truly a gift. It is a gift for my personal and professional growth, a gift for all the neighbourhood workers who contributed and a gift for people doing similar work across the country.

**Collingwood Board of Directors:** Julie Linkletter, Kenny Diebel, Patricio Ibarra, Oscar Allueva, Winny Wong, Joshua Hergesheimer, Yee Ching Hoo, Bill McMichael, Rania Hatziioannou, Karthy Sivalingam, Sara Zhou and Rico Wen. **Staff:** Jennifer Gray-Grant (Executive Director); Kulwant Kaur, Sharon Gregson, Michael Mclenaghen, January Wolodarsky (Staff Directors); Bless Manalo, Aurelia Schmor, Zeena Chopra, Maria Nombrado, and Karen Caguiao (Office Support)

**Carold Board of Directors:** Michael Cooke, Michael Clague, Kris Frederickson, Arpi Hamalian, Amir Hussein, Diane Laberge, Lois Ross, Mark Selman; **Staff:** Juliet Huntly

**Renfrew Collingwood Leaders who generously shared their stories**

Chris Taulu, Chas Bains, Tammy Do, Matthew Sheena, Ken Green, Thelma Bureyko, Julie Cheng, Carmen Rosen, Terry Tayler, Don Van Dyke, Marjorie Scarfe, Robert Burkart, Bobbie Duvall, Kerry Jang, Bill McMichael, Julie Linkletter, Oscar Allueva, Jenniffer Gray-Grant, Kulwant Kaur, Michael Mclenaghen, January Wolodarsky.

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To all my friends, family and co-workers that encouraged me on this journey. You are the BEST!
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The vibrancy of our cities is based, for the most part, on the vibrancy of the neighbourhoods that make up a city. Conversely, our neighbourhoods flourish when the city flourishes. This relationship is intertwined and reciprocal. The topic of intercultural neighbourhood development is timely and has significance in urban and rural centres across Canada and the world. Our communities are adapting to growth in immigration, globalization, technology and other changes such as increase in poverty and growing populations in our cities. With these shifts, there is an opportunity to embrace diversity in the promotion of civil society.

Through our work in Renfrew-Collingwood, we learned that to work interculturally means we focus on building bridges and exchanges between people. This approach is greatly advanced when we create more opportunities for connections. Neighbourhoods provide many places of interaction such as schools, parks, businesses, and housing. Experiences of organizations, like the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, that focus on inclusive, place-based development can provide useful information to enhance civil society.

Residents and workers in Renfrew-Collingwood who experienced these changes and involved themselves in social and community development work describe it as a great transformational learning process and one that continues. Community leaders made it an intention in the early years to reach new immigrants. They asked newcomers to join in, participate in programs and work with others to improve the neighbourhood. In the process, the leaders had to change their attitudes, perspectives, and approaches for inclusion to be successful.

These community members learned lessons from this intentional work that later became the foundation for reaching and including other marginalized groups such as the homeless, addicts, sex trade workers, people living in poverty and people with mental health challenges. The intercultural approaches evolved organically over many years, with some intentional strategies moving them along. It continues to be re-created as new people bring their ideas and gifts forward.

What’s in it

This document examines relationships and collaborative work done from the perspective of people who work within a neighbourhood and supported by a neighbourhood house, an organization mandated to develop services and build a sense of community within a geographic

Why the project?
area of a city. It teases out the unique practices and approaches used by the Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood as they took this developmental journey over 25 years.

The results might look different if we were to examine intercultural development from a perspective of the business community, the housing community, gangs or other neighbourhood groups or if we looked at a completely different neighbourhood. It might also look different if we examine intercultural development from an economic, environmental or health lens rather than primarily from a social development lens, recognizing that these are not mutually exclusive.

The developmental journey in Renfrew-Collingwood is a collective effort with many actions building on one another. It has not been easy or smooth, nor is it finished. We learned many hard lessons as we tried to bring diverse groups together, build neighbourhood meeting places, find resources, balance competing interests, address racism and exclusive attitudes, and think “outside the box” to create the community that neighbourhood leaders envisioned.

Who was involved

The knowledge shared in the following series of articles is drawn from interviews, historical material, and my personal reflection on work I’ve done with others over the last 23 years. As well, several community members in Renfrew-Collingwood shared and heard stories of their neighbours. Some wrote articles and created multi-media presentations to reflect what they heard, advancing their understanding of intercultural development and how it was experienced personally and as a community.

A group of advisors and the CNH Board of Directors provided guidance to me on this fellowship journey. They were critical participants in reflecting on the content and process, kept me focused and provided links to others working in related fields.

KEY QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

WHAT ARE THE KEY CAPABILITIES AND CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR GROWING COMMUNITY WITHIN AN INTERCULTURAL NEighbourHOOD?

WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE GIFTS THAT LEADERS OF ALL AGES AND BACKGROUNDS BRING TO GROWING COMMUNITY WITHIN AN INTERCULTURAL NEighbourHOOD?

Collingwood Neighbourhood House staff and local volunteers helped to gather stories, organize a resource library of presentations, conduct research, and provide organizational support. They reflected on our history, culture, leadership, and developmental journey.

How to use it

This exploration has been captured in written papers, film, digital stories, and presentations. This paper is the first edition and work is underway to create an interactive edition that will provide more detailed information on examples of strategies, and links to electronic resource material that can be used to create further dialogue, learning and action.

Each section can be used independently or grouped together depending on the audience and focus of the discussion. The material can be used in formal presentations, workshops, and dialogue circles. After publication of this document, material will be on our websites and more conversations can take place through social media.

This is an unfolding story and further documentation of processes, discussions, and related research will be added over the years so there is a continuous learning in the area of intercultural neighbourhood development.
Changes in our communities are happening at a rapid pace throughout Canada and elsewhere in the world as a result of immigration and our global connections. It is predicted that migration, diversity, and growth trends will continue.

The 2006 Canadian census enumerated 6,186,950 foreign-born residents in Canada. They represented virtually one in five (19.8%) of the total population. By 2031, Statistics Canada predicts between 25% and 28% of the population could be foreign-born. They also estimate that approximately 55% of persons living in Canadian municipalities would be either immigrants or the Canadian-born children of immigrants. In Toronto and Vancouver, these proportions would reach 78% and 70%, respectively (Statistics Canada 2010).

In the early 1980s, 30% of Renfrew-Collingwood residents spoke English as a second language. In 2011, the figure stands at 74%.

These population changes have created an environment in Canada that is a kaleidoscope of multiple ethnicities, races, identities, histories and ways of being, belonging, and becoming. With numerous cultures coming into contact with each other, we are witnessing the mixing of cultures in communities, families, partnerships, marriages, and workplaces.

Individuals are embodying the values, practices, and norms of multiple cultures in their upbringing and day-to-day encounters. We see this cross-pollination in our food, sports, music, fashion, gardens, language, housing designs and, most importantly, in our relationships. This exposure to diversity plays out at individual levels as well as collectively.

Canada’s approach to this diversity has been to support a multicultural philosophy while other countries have created varied policies. History, nature, and expectations of the people and their leaders set the foundation for how countries experience diversity.

The box on the following page describes some of the different approaches to newcomers and diversity experienced in countries and places around the world.

Regardless of the policy, the public discourse on immigration and diversity is often heated and has varying reactions. In Canada alone, a country that is considered progressive in this area, there are constant reminders of the struggles in bringing diverse cultures together. Examples include homeless people having limited access to public spaces; new Canadians from China opposed to having a hospice in their neighbourhood based on proclaimed personal beliefs around dying; or debate around religion-based schools and their rights to public funding.

There are also many examples of violence and radical reactions to changes happening in our environments and varying beliefs on how these
In the early 1980s, 30% of Renfrew-Collingwood residents spoke English as a second language. In 2011, the figure stands at 74%.

Approaches to integrating newcomers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No approach</th>
<th>Worker’s approach</th>
<th>Assimilation or melting pot approach</th>
<th>Multicultural approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers and people who are different are regarded as irrelevant or considered unwelcomed. There is no perception that they have gifts to offer and they are seen to be more of a drain on personal and societal resources than having positive impacts.</td>
<td>Newcomers and people who are different are regarded as workers. They are encouraged for economic reasons and may be considered temporary or serving a limited purpose.</td>
<td>Newcomers and people who are different are accepted; however, their differences are not encouraged and they are expected to fit in and adopt predominant cultural approaches.</td>
<td>Newcomers and people who are different are accepted and their differences are encouraged and protected. There is integration work happening. However, multiculturalism can provoke segregated development and rivalry between communities for power and resources.</td>
</tr>
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**Intercultural approach**

Newcomers and people who are different in the predominant culture create a new society together. This approach uses a broader, flexible, and inclusive self-image of society. This new society is based on everyone bringing their gifts and strengths to a democratic process and being guided by fundamental values of human rights and responsibilities.

Changes should be addressed. In Canada, we have several examples including the Chinese head tax and appropriation of property without payment due to cultural heritage. In July 2011, a Norwegian citizen killed over a hundred people (many youth) in reaction to the government policies on multiculturalism and his belief that immigration was threatening Norwegian culture and society. This tragic event resulted in the Norwegian people strengthening their commitment to a diverse and intercultural society. Had this situation occurred elsewhere or if the killing was caused by terrorists, there may have been a completely different reaction, where people and their government move toward a more closed and protectionist approach.

How do these approaches and policies of governments play out in local communities and neighbourhoods? Diversity of cultures as well as abilities, perspectives and incomes exist in all of our neighbourhoods.
There are multiple approaches; you see examples of individuals and communities that do not see or recognize diversity and others that embrace it. Some create segregated approaches while others take more integrated approaches. Some move further than where their governments or family and friends have moved. Different approaches are used in urban and rural settings or in communities that experience post-conflict recovery and reconciliations such as in First Nations and places like South Africa and Rwanda. This project focuses on the approaches of one neighbourhood in Vancouver, Canada.

Why are intercultural approaches important?

An intercultural approach builds bridges and exchanges between people, brings out their uniqueness and from this place encourages co-creation processes. This is different than celebrating diversity side by side, which is often the outcome of multicultural approaches.

This diversity challenge is often focused on immigration; however, we have a variety of diverse ideas, abilities, incomes, and perspectives within our families, neighbourhoods, and communities. Our overemphasis on differences has led to the marginalization of a number of people, including people who are aboriginal, people without homes, people living in poverty, people who are sex trade workers, people who are suffering from poor mental health, or people who are developmentally or physically challenged.

Intercultural approaches are important because they promote:

- **Bringing value** and being valued in your community resulting in greater contributions of talents in workplaces and community
- **Engaging** with others to improve the community by creating solutions to complex issues and developing harmony
- **Enriching** the community with your career and life skills leading to personal growth, community growth and innovation

Who is doing this work?

Within the Vancouver’s Lower Mainland, there is the Building Welcoming and Inclusive Neighbourhood’s Project. This project is supported by a coalition of 14 neighbourhood houses in Metro Vancouver who aim to document their best practices in building inclusive neighbourhoods. Collingwood Neighbourhood House is part of this group.

The interactive edition will provide further information, see on Why Are Intercultural Approaches Important and Who Is Doing Intercultural Work?
INTERCULTURALISM: THE GLUE THAT HOLDS THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

CNH Presidents discuss the key ingredients to intercultural cohesion by Lixian Cheng

Bill McMichael, Terry Tayler, Rob Burkart, Chas Bains, Bobbie Duvall, Kerry Jang, Julie Linkletter. These Presidents, past and present, of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House Board of directors form an integral part of Renfrew-Collingwood’s intercultural matrix.

Time, the Board Presidents acknowledge, was a major factor in allowing this historically Anglo-European neighbourhood to come to terms with its changing demographic.

Chas Bains points out that another key ingredient to intercultural cohesion is the charting of common goals and values across differences.

CNH is another integral community institution that has facilitated change, speaking to the necessity of communal spaces to facilitate interactions — and from there, foster relationships — between diverse community members.

The development of CNH itself has been essential to the area’s intercultural growth. Since its beginnings in 1985, CNH has served the community based on inclusive ideals. Chas remembers being struck by the diversity of the staff on his first visit to the neighbourhood house. It wasn’t a Caucasian affair, he states. It was a mix.

Rob Burkart, who was also part of the CNH committee that drafted the neighbourhood house's multicultural policy in the early 1990s, remembers the debates around cultural programming at CNH, and the Board’s decision to resist exclusive policies that would restrict participation in programs on the basis of cultural background. Today, participants from all different backgrounds enjoy programs such as Tai Chi, Chinese classical dance and the Aboriginal youth club.

The CNH Board Presidents realize that it is through everyday practices that inclusivity can translate into true intercultural bonds. Even something so seemingly benign as a potluck—a common occurrence at CNH—can have an incredible effect. As Bobbie Duvall remarks, What does [a potluck] really mean? Everybody from their personal homes [cooks a dish] ... It’s a piece of who they are and their values and their identity.

Along with food, community members also bring their skills to the table. Chas relates that the neighbourhood house has the ability to be flexible and say to people, You’ve got a talent, and we will create a space for you if we can.

In this way, the neighbourhood house not only provides community members with opportunities to share different traditions and discover common values, but also fosters a sustainable model through ownership. The sustainability of the system is further aided by a sense of community pride in its members.

As people [find] the support they [need] within their community, usually then what follows is a sense of ownership, Julie notes. You want to put something back into the community to also see it benefit other people, as well as yourself and your family.

Excerpt from Interculturalism: The glue that holds the community together, -published in the Renfrew-Collingwood Community News, April 2011, page 16.
One of the first things we discovered as we unearthed the history of the neighbourhood was the continual reference to its fertile physical and social environment.

Before settlement, the Renfrew-Collingwood area was rich with pristine lakes and diverse forests. Aboriginal people would come to the area to hunt and gather food. It was said to be a popular destination with people as far away as Vancouver Island paddling over in their canoes to get food to feed and nurture their families. As the area became settled, this fertile ground laid the foundation for farmlands filled with orchards of fruit trees.

At a recent event called Collingwood Renfrew Reflects, a group of residents were talking about what struck them from the stories they heard from the intercultural journey of neighbourhood leaders. I found it interesting that the symbolism they used to describe the process of development was organic and linked to the history of the area.

“We compared Collingwood to a tree. The tree represents Collingwood with many different branches connecting to various areas around the community and the apples are the successes of the people who work and volunteer here, like ‘the delicious fruits of their labour.’ The apples then fall to the ground and the seeds are dispersed, spreading knowledge and empowerment and, hopefully, little sprouts of mini Collingwoods will appear all around Vancouver.”
- Cassandra Ly, from Collingwood Renfrew Reflects

As I heard the residents describe this organic growing process, I thought of a process as described by Roby Kidd, former Executive Director for the Canadian Association of Adult Learning. He said that learning is a process of being, becoming and belonging. He saw this as being who we are as individuals, moving to who we can become, and then belonging to an evolving community.
But as I heard the local stories, it appeared to me that it was our sense of belonging that encouraged our becoming which is why I changed the order to describe the Renfrew-Collingwood process.

The concept of being, belonging, and becoming has been adopted by many writers and is currently built into the framework for early learning and care in Australia as well as used to measure vital signs in the city of Toronto neighbourhoods.

I began to imagine how the roots of a tree resemble the being stories of community leaders, Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the neighbourhood. How the strength of what is developed depends on the strong roots of its people. These roots get stronger as people find their identity and have the courage and supportive fertile ground to express their unique selves.

As I heard their belonging stories, the image of a strong trunk came forward. This was the common ground, the connections that allowed new branches and new life to be born. The more these diverse human connections were deepened and broadened with intentional bridging work and exchanges, the more new branches were created that gave birth to new life and products.

Becoming is a result of being and belonging. The branches of the tree begin to sprout in all directions when the roots and trunk are well nourished. They begin to bear fruit which feeds us as a community. Many of these fruits are new organizations and community amenities. As some fruit drop to the ground, new growth is born and a continuous cycle of re-birthing occurs. This process gives us the becoming stories.
Being is about finding one’s identity. It is about expressing your personality, uniqueness and “relational you.” It involves knowing oneself through life’s challenges and joys. This involves bringing value and being valued in your community.

- Acknowledging the influences of our historical experiences
- Encouraging our passions and gifts
- Understanding the evolution of our cultural identity
- Recognizing our common values, traditions, and differences

Belonging is our fit and connection with the environment and others. It helps us understand where and with whom we belong. It is about our relationships and interdependence with family, friends, community, culture, place and partnerships. This involves engaging with others to improve the community. It is encouraged by:

- Building diverse relationships over the long term
- Uniting through living, working, shopping, playing, learning, and creating spirit together
- Enabling our gifts and resources to be maximized by getting together

Becoming is about changes that evolve over time in pursuit of our dreams, goals, and full participation in society. These changes are influenced by our experiences, relationships and circumstances. They can affect our identity, knowledge, understanding, capacity, skill, and relationships. This involves enriching the community with your career and life skills, leading to personal growth, community growth, and innovation. It is facilitated by:

- Creating collective intercultural people power
- Evolving diverse roles
- Supporting ongoing leadership and learning
- Overcoming and not overcoming our challenges

The following summaries are organized into these categories and will describe the common insights found from the community listening to their own stories. This is the beginning of a reflective process. This information will be used to inform the skill sets, practices, policies, and measurements needed to further intercultural neighbourhood development both within Renfrew-Collingwood and elsewhere.
My first meeting with Pacita on my first day in Collingwood led to an incredible friendship.

Pacita and I would often eat together and many times she invited other people at the neighbourhood house to join us. She had one of the most generous and giving spirits and was extremely private and humble about her contributions.

As I went to different places in the neighbourhood with her, we often met people who greeted her lovingly and with great respect. I later came to know that she helped many new immigrants and people living in poverty settle in our neighbourhood, providing them with food, clothing, financial support, and most importantly friendship. She welcomed them with open arms and quietly shared her personal resources to give them a healthy start in their new homes.

From this early experience, it became apparent that the first place to explore the developmental journey of growing an intercultural neighbourhood is to look at some of the people that helped build a sense of community in Renfrew-Collingwood.

There are countless individuals who have contributed to this neighbourhood over the last 25 years. This paper features a small group of people as an example of what exists in the neighbourhood. In the upcoming years, we plan to work with the community to continue to collect and share stories of the hidden jewels in Renfrew-Collingwood.

The following personal stories were gathered from interviews with eight community leaders who have engaged in community-building initiatives over a significant period of time in Vancouver’s Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood.

These leaders came from a variety of backgrounds, ages, cultures and experiences. I met each of these people at different times and stages of my own personal and professional growth and Collingwood Neighbourhood House’s development. Each of them contributed greatly to making me the person I am today and the neighbourhood into a welcoming and thriving place.
There are countless individuals who have contributed to this neighbourhood over the last 25 years.

Each of these leaders contributed greatly to making me the person I am today and the neighbourhood into a welcoming and thriving place.

Chris Taulu has lived in the neighbourhood for more than 40 years and became an activist initially to improve her child’s education. Later she dedicated her time to creating safe communities through initiating the first community policing model in a diverse neighbourhood.

Ken Green’s family runs a local business that was started by his grandfather. It was one of the first businesses in the area. Ken worked with others to establish a business association to revitalize the area during a time when the business owners were becoming more ethnically diverse.

Julie Cheng started her involvement as a volunteer in the newly formed CNH. She raised her family in the neighbourhood. As a child of an immigrant, she has dedicated her community work to helping people find their voice through various media and engagement processes.

Thelma Bureyko, as a single parent, raised her family in the same neighbourhood where she was raised. She volunteered in many local organizations during the time when cultural diversity was on the rise.

Chas Bains emigrated from England and arrived in Canada with no previous volunteer experience. He was drawn into community work through connections to his children’s child care and later became the President of the Board of CNH, helping to move it forward as an intercultural organization.

Matthew Sheena became involved in community life as a school-age boy when his parents began to work on local neighbourhood projects. Through many influences, he began to discover his lost culture. Matthew is currently in his 20s, providing leadership through sharing his aboriginal culture.

Carmen Rosen is a local celebration artist and parent. She established an environmental arts organization that mentors children and youth in celebration arts that bring diverse cultures together.

Tammy Do came to Canada as a refugee. She found her connection to the neighbourhood as she entered her senior years and was looking to reinvent how she spends her time. She became a cultural connector and Board member of a community association.
At age 23, Tammy Nguyen Do came to Canada in 1978 as a refugee from war-torn Vietnam. She had worked as an interpreter in a refugee camp, where she met a Canadian officer who asked if she wanted to emigrate to Canada. At first Tammy declined, saying that it was far too cold. At the time, the United States was the desired destination for refugees, but to receive priority, you had to have military service. Tammy, a recent high school graduate, reconsidered the Canadian’s offer.

“Life in a refugee camp is very hard, so everyone is trying to get out as soon as possible,” she reflects. She accepted the offer from the Canadian officer, joking, “but put me somewhere as warm as possible.” Tammy shares her gratitude to Canadians for their efforts in helping her and many refugees settle in Canada.

Tammy landed in Toronto and, not surprisingly, experienced culture shock. She remembers the difficulties of starting a new life, but eventually met her husband and soon began a family of her own. In 1990, she and her family settled in Vancouver’s Collingwood area. At first, her interaction with the community was limited. She made some friends, but life was focused on raising her two children and working six days a week, helping with her husband’s import food business.

But time moves forward and as all things change, so too must people. With one child going to university, the other in high school, and her husband downsizing the business, Tammy found herself with free time on her hands. “I felt a bit lost.”

Tammy’s involvement with the Collingwood Neighbourhood House began under less-than-exciting circumstances: boredom. At her husband’s request, Tammy accepted an invitation to a senior’s dinner, where she met members of the Cultural Connectors program, who were looking for new volunteers.

Tammy found herself yet again starting a new life. Her shyness and inexperience took away her self-confidence, and she wondered what exactly she could contribute to the community. However, the reception at the Collingwood Neighbourhood House quickly erased any doubts about volunteering.

The staff was very inclusive and took me the way I am, says Tammy. They were not looking at my education or background, and helped me and gave me support.

This realization gave Tammy, in part, her motivation to help others and pass it on. She saw that many Chinese seniors travelled, some from as far as the suburb Maple Ridge, to Vancouver’s Chinatown just to take part in activities with other Chinese. Her first volunteer experience was simply talking to seniors in Renfrew-Collingwood. This proved difficult, as many seniors were reluctant to share life stories with a stranger.

It’s about building trust, she says. It’s a slow process to get people to open up.

Gradually, she built relationships, which led to the creation of a small exercise group that met weekly in the park. From this small group, many more joined, having seen them from their apartments. Eventually, others slowly took on leadership of the group, and Tammy found herself in a familiar position. It was difficult to leave. You spend a lot of time and energy building relationships with people, she says. But they need to be on their own.

Tammy’s efforts and persistence have indeed been passed on to her community. Her personal triumphs reveal what’s required to form an inclusive community and bridge the gaps between cultures.
Leaders’ Being Story

Throughout the interviews conducted by myself and a team of volunteers, community leaders described the interplay between different community influences that impacted them. Their stories and influences rubbed up against each other, similar to waves washing over stones. Each moment has an impact and is a valuable part of the whole. Many talked about how their personal growth mirrored the growth of the neighbourhood as it became revitalized so too did they become revitalized.

As I listened to the stories of the neighbourhood leaders, I was struck by the uniqueness of each person. As they relived the many years of contributions to the community each of them described things that impacted their being. Some felt they were brought closer to their calling or purpose and all of them described a process of getting to know themselves.

Their being stories are categorized in four areas: historical experiences, passions and gifts, cultural identity and values.

Acknowledging the influences of our historical experiences

People’s individual histories, expectations, and experiences had an impact on the directions, approaches and solutions they took. This history seems to act as a solid foundation, a thread that weaved its way through how these leaders saw the world and developed relations. There were diverse experiences. For example, Thelma and Ken talked about the influences of their parents and grandparents.

For Chris, she used her resilient spirits to reframe the abuse she suffered into modeling compassionate behaviour:
I always want to stop someone else, someone suffering the way that I suffered as a child. It has really coloured who I am, that whole feeling of guilt, that compassion, that kind of feeling that I didn’t get when I was a kid. – Chris

I had this British granny who always felt that it didn’t matter what the person looked like or what religion they were from or whatever you needed to assess whether they were a good person or a bad person. She would always say there’s good and bad in everybody, in every type of people, so I don’t think the ethnic differences make a really big difference to me. – Thelma

I’m a person that seeks justice and I guess that comes from my father ... My grandfather would treat a six-year-old customer who wanted to buy two ball bearings the same way, giving the same amount of time, as the customer who wanted to buy a brand new bike. Those sorts of ethics were instilled in us at a very early age. – Ken
Encouraging our passions and gifts

There were great passions and gifts that people shared, again, some that were always in their lives and others that they found along the way. In some cases, passion came from something lacking earlier in their lives. Julie described loving parents who were often afraid to speak out or ask for anything as new immigrants in this country. Having a voice was important to her:

“I’ve always wanted to have a voice and I’ve wanted other people to have a voice. To be able to do that through the RCC News (Renfrew-Collingwood Community News), I’ve been able to follow my passion.” - Julie

Others arrived in the neighbourhood with a certain set of skills and passions. Carmen found ways to bring her passions to light by sharing her ideas with community members and mobilizing talents to bring ideas to action. Through deepened relationships Carmen saw hidden talents, both within herself as well as people she worked with and engaged:

“I was a professional performing artist doing costume design and touring with the Mortal Coil Society. I had all this stilt-walking and children’s show experience. I suggested that we should have a community celebration here (Renfrew Ravine) ... within six months of moving in, we did a festival. It was really exciting because there were so many great artists and people didn’t even know there were artists being creative in the neighbourhood.”

Understanding the evolution of our cultural identity

Learning about others helped them learn about themselves. They were curious about culture. They learned about their own culture as they were exposed to other cultures in their activities in the neighbourhood. The rediscovery process evolved over time and was encouraged by certain opportunities.

Matthew found his lost culture when he joined the aboriginal canoe club:

“I didn’t really think of culture back then. It was not really something that was a huge part of my life because when you were young either you grow up with it or you learn it later on ... I don’t know if it was the water, or the canoes, or the nations I visited, but the culture just slowly started to seep into me. It fills me to this day because I can’t foresee my life without culture.”

The reconnection with culture for Julie came as she approached a group in the neighbourhood to encourage their participation in a park improvement project:
“I don’t speak Cantonese well. I’m hesitant about using it and I don’t feel like I belong in the Chinese culture ... I went to one of the Chinese seniors groups at the Renfrew Park Community Centre and I spoke to them in Chinese. First I apologized saying that I don’t speak very well. These little ladies, it turned out, spoke the same dialect. They were so thrilled and treated me like their granddaughter.” They said, “You’re doing very well.’ It gave me a sense of identity, which a lot of people lose when they lose their language.” - Julie

Recognizing our common values, traditions and differences

The leaders all shared values that fostered involvement as a key to being a good citizen and to encouraging a sense of community. Chris simply states:

“I like being involved and making sure the community is involved.”

A common value was respect. Being treated with respect and treating others with respect was the guiding light. This transcended the colour of someone’s skin, mental and emotional abilities and differing perspectives. Ken learned to move beyond tolerance to openness and respect as he was exposed to more diversity while organizing local businesses:

“I was raised in a working-class Anglo-Saxon family and there wasn’t a whole lot of multicultural diversity. And so it took a lot of learning and growing on my part and also hoping people would be tolerant of me, not me tolerant of them ... I became far more respectful and open. It really has been a growing process.”

Many of them felt that if you give to the community it will give back to you. They recognized that they needed community and the community needed them. It was a reciprocal relationship. Tammy, through her voluntary experiences, wants her daughter to understand the value of community contributions:
“While I am developing my own interpersonal skills, I’m giving. I’m setting an example for her (daughter) to look at. It’s good you go to school, you get a job, but if you have time you come out into the community and meet the residents here, you never know, you can do something for them and they can do something for you.”

As community leaders looked for ways to bring diversity together they began to look for things they had in common, traditions that were both shared and diverse. Carmen describes her process of looking for common traditions:

“I love all the variation and cultural traditions but also that there are these common threads running through all the cultural traditions the things that are sacred to each culture ... There’s something in every single culture that will make whatever celebration that much richer.”

SUMMARY FROM THE LEADERS’ BEING STORY

- **Getting** to know ourselves and others takes time and effort and is an unfolding evolutionary process. It requires the ability to reflect, reframe and be resilient
- **Intercultural** values begin as a child and are nurtured in families and community. Values of respect, caring, social justice, and friendliness bring communities together
- **Looking** for common values and traditions while acknowledging differences is a key ingredient. This requires curiosity about others and self-reflection about your values
- **Leaders** were engaging in areas of interest and passions with occasional connections to one another. Opportunities existed to bring leaders closer together around common areas such as new housing developments or celebration arts
- **Cultural** identity can be nurtured by intercultural community activities where a multiplicity of talents, passions and traditions are expressed
Leaders’ Belonging Story

Building diverse relationships over the long term

Local leaders talked about the importance of being in relationships with other people, feeling a sense of community, family, and belonging. It appeared that their happiness evolved as networks of friends increased and their relationships became more diverse. Many of them are still getting to know their neighbours at deeper levels as their friendships evolve and years together pass.

For Julie it was sharing Board experiences with Dave:

“The one person that I really remember is David Hanuse, a First Nations elder. We really clicked … the Board process was new to both of us; we were kind of newbies. We connected that way and we learned together. He’s still around and we have a nice talk every time we meet.”

Through these connections, built-in prejudices began to dissolve. The differences they were exposed to helped them to open their minds. Chris described her journey as “the more people I met, the difference disappeared.”

Matthew saw these relations as a refuge and safe place where he learned to be accepted:

“School was never a good place to meet friends. At the same time, those little quirky things that made those cruel people so cruel to me made other people smile at me here (CNH) … Every time I was here there would always be somebody welcoming, there would always be somebody smiling at me, encouraging me to be a little goofball, you know, ‘speak your mind.’”

As I reflected with them in the interviews, we remembered how simple gestures like learning words from each other’s language, smiling and saying “hi” went a long way in building connections. All of us felt that the face-to-face contact and doing activities together were the catalysts to building positive and trusting relationships.

Uniting through living, working, shopping, playing, learning, and creating spirit together

People described common ground and interests as a means to nurture intercultural relationships. Living together, working together, shopping together, playing together, learning together, and creating spirit together were built into each of their stories.

Living together: Sharing a geographic area such as a neighbourhood, housing unit, and school catchment made it easier to connect due to proximity.
**Working together:** Action-oriented people created multiple services and organizations such as the Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Collingwood Community Policing Centre, took on hard issues as well as saved threatened resources such as school closures and heritage sites.

**Shopping together:** The diverse business district along Kingsway attracted settlement in the area and provided a place for people to see their neighbours often, like at the local grocery store.

**Playing together:** Places like our parks, the neighbourhood house and community centres provided welcoming, friendly, and accessible gathering places for recreation and activities that encouraged playing with their neighbours.

**Learning together:** Schools, early learning centres, libraries, language classes, and leadership institutes as well as reflective practices like hearing each others’ stories through a local newspaper provided learning opportunities.

**Creating spirit together:** Leaders described a feeling and spirit within the physical and social environments using words such as friendly, hospitable, sanctuary, refuge, warm, nurturing, encouraging, and transparent. There was a sense of being more like a gathering of family and friends than a place to go and do things.

Chas describes his process of involvement in the neighbourhood:

“As you get more involved in the community, you start looking at your community differently.” – Chas

**Maximizing our gifts and resources to be maximized by getting together**

Local people and organizations championed intercultural relations.

There are people who are naturally linkers and tend to know many of their neighbours. You see them in programs, on the street, in our local institutions. They introduce people, share information, invite people to participate and share their gifts or notice yours. These are the people that take the time to walk you to a new
“No matter what culture we are, we all want to thrive.” – Collingwood Renfrew Reflects

location or gathering. They make you laugh and feel comfortable.

Tammy is one of these linkers and connectors:

“I went out and I talked to seniors in the park. I told them who I am, who I was, and what I am trying to do. I was trying to connect them with activities or programs in the future, or an English class, or friendship, that’s how I started. I started talking to people and I made a connection with them.”

There are neighbourhood institutions like the Collingwood Neighbourhood House that work together in the same intercultural spirit. They act as a convener, a catalyst and a gathering place for ideas and actions. They are most successful when they facilitate collaboration that brings skills, ideas, people, and resources together.

Julie sees it as a hub that reaches out:

“The neighbourhood house is the hub, in the middle like a magnet, and then different rings go around it. As you go farther away from the hub, you lose that magnetic power. But as people move away from that, they create their own little hub, and I think in my neighbourhood that’s what I’ve done.”

Allowing people to contribute also creates a sense of belonging as does providing support when needed. Chas fondly remembers this support:

“When my father passed away and you guys sent me that card, that was extremely touching. I think that made me value Collingwood Neighbourhood House more, because it brought into focus not the people I knew but the friends made.”
SUMMARY FROM THE LEADERS’ BELONGING STORY

• **Bridging** relationships and trust is an intentional, slow, and gradual process. It requires safe places and processes to help people respectfully speak their mind and connect with one another.

• **Small**, friendly actions like saying “hi,” speaking another language, and bringing in humour and laughter make a difference.

• **Face-to-face** contact is key.

• **Sharing** common physical and social space is a uniting force. The more these areas thrive, the more the community thrives.

• **Encourage** natural connectors and relationship builders.

• **Invest** in people.
Leaders’ Becoming Story

People described constant movement and significant transitions in their lives. Examples include moving to a new place, becoming a parent or an empty nester, and changing from elementary school to high school. For others it was a more difficult journey as they moved from surviving abuse to thriving.

There was movement from informal approaches to more formal organized approaches. Sometimes there was an initial vision, other times a vision emerged as people engaged and took actions with others. Sometimes they took a single focus, other times multiple and interrelated focuses. Through their work, they moved from having no confidence to having confidence.

With each of these changes, there was a process of re-discovery, re-socializing, re-invention, and re-settlement.

Creating collective intercultural people power

Leadership was seen all over the place: in staff, volunteers, program participants, residents on the street, and supporters. It was seen more as a way of bringing people together and harnessing diverse talents, rather than the work of one person.

Ken remembers the power of networking:

“We had common interests and common goals and we also had common problems. We quickly learned by networking with groups in the community – the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, the Joyce Area Planning Committee, the schools and teachers associations and police and city departments. We could do more by networking. It was a process and some wonderful relationships evolved from that.”

The local leaders recognized that one voice could gather other voices; one person’s actions could motivate other people’s actions. Involvement started with a small action that then began to link to larger actions. Picking up a piece of garbage on the street led to organizing a neighbourhood-wide clean up.

This happened on Julie’s street:

“That simple step of getting neighbours out to pick up garbage and plant flowers built community on my little street. To this day, we have flowers on our boulevards and I know Benny down the street and Cliff, who looks like a biker (he has a Harley) but is a teddy bear. My neighbours came out to clean the Renfrew Ravine behind us and some neighbours who had lived there for seven or ten years learned each other’s names by getting together that day.”

They were motivated by the spirit, enthusiasm and commitment of the people around them. They became less fearful of making mistakes and felt supported by being part of something larger.

“Just do something. Take it on, fail, pass, encourage people. You can do it.” – Chris”
Evoluting diverse roles

Some leaders took a reactive role while others took a proactive role; some felt more comfortable in controlled and structured settings while others preferred more organic and loose approaches; some were advocacy warriors and others were people in the middle bridging ideas and relationships. This could vary with each situation and also depended on the resilient factors in their life. What was clear is that it took all of these approaches to make a difference.

For Tammy, connecting people through language was one of her roles:

"Because I speak different languages plus English, I was able to use my language ability to connect with people."

Chris’ role was to bring out a community voice:

“One of the things we always did, and still do, is making sure that the community is involved. We’ve always wanted to make sure that the community’s voice, not our voice, was heard.”

As they worked together, cross-pollination began to occur. People were experimenting with different roles based on what they had witnessed and experienced from working with a diverse group of people. People who were once warriors began to play the role of mediators, people who were drawn to structure began to work in more unstructured ways.

Supporting ongoing leadership and learning

The greatest learning that took place was by getting involved and doing something. Regular and consistent contact helped them to get to know their neighbours and neighbourhood.

Community leaders grew through mentorships and regular contact with each other. There was a strong commitment and intentional work on passing the torch, stepping away so others could lead. As Tammy advises us, “Pass it on.”

Many invested in youth leadership, others in moving co-workers into new experiences, workers orientated their replacements and residents mentored their neighbours to act on what was important to them. Sometimes this was done informally and other times this was developed through more formal structures like training through the locally based leadership institute.

Overcoming and not overcoming our challenges

Some of the greatest challenges people experienced were working through issues such as new housing developments in the neighbourhood, seeing the formation of youth gangs, increase in people living on the streets, lack of services and amenities for the popula-
tion. These were emotionally charged and required a great deal of exploration on shared values, finding commonalities and getting to the essence of “why” a particular perspective was important.

Building trust took time and often this was not a luxury we had. Where possible, we moved where we had consensus and energy. In some circumstances, we waited until we could bring differing perspectives together to reach consensus, offer new ideas or, at the very least, tolerance for the decision and action.

There was an acceptance to “agree to disagree” and an understanding that compromise was inevitable. It was not seen as a form of failure rather as a way to move forward on attaining goals.

As challenges came forward we were able to stick to rather than abandon the vision, primarily because of the strong supports we gained from diverse people and organizations with us. This diversity encouraged our confidence and creativity to come forward.

There are many challenges that still need to be overcome—some that are re-occurring and others that are emerging. Community leaders developed persistence and tenacity over time and a wealth of experiences to draw upon from successfully overcoming some challenges. This has encouraged us to come together to take on hard and often systemic issues. We continue to look for creative solutions that are informed by bringing in new people, thoughts and perspectives.

Time was identified as a major barrier to resolving issues in a productive and positive manner and also in encouraging people’s involvement. Personal time was limited, considering other obligations people had in their lives such as family, marriages and making a living. Many talked about the sacrifices their family members made to allow them to become involved in neighbourhood building. They contributed countless hours, with no or little pay and all felt that this work needed to be more valued.
SUMMARY FROM THE LEADERS’ BECOMING STORY

• See everyone as a leader with something to contribute. This requires an acknowledgement that we all have times when we need support and times when we need to contribute.

• Intercultural development is about bringing people together and harnessing diverse talents. Creating safe environments as well as having the ability to witness, watch, and integrate visions helps to advance this work.

• One action, one voice, one mentor can be infectious. People who can encourage and nurture people to stretch beyond their areas of comfort are needed in our communities.

• People are empowered by being part of something larger that is action-oriented.

• Diverse people, roles, approaches, and perspectives stimulate growth and cross pollination. This is encouraged by experimenting, taking risks, playing with ideas, and using multiple approaches.

• Time is needed for people to process and contribute. Finding ways to value this work and honour the time it takes will greatly advance civil contributions.
Collingwood Neighbourhood
House: Being

Acknowledging the influences of our historical experiences

A group of residents in the neighbourhood gathered to develop the Joyce Street Area Plan. The planning process was initiated by the City of Vancouver to minimize impacts and identify opportunities around the Skytrain stations that were built in communities to prepare for Expo 86 and add to the transportation resources in the Lower Mainland.

At the same time as the Joyce Street planning process, the federal Member of Parliament responded to residents’ requests to study and map community amenities situated within the federal riding. The Kingsway study identified that service levels were low compared to other areas of Vancouver, particularly around the Joyce area. Recommendations from this study were to increase housing, services, and amenities. They were incorporated into the Joyce Area Plan, which was later adopted by Vancouver City Council.

There was a great deal of fear about how these changes would affect the neighbourhood: Would the Skytrain bring in more transiency and crime to the area? Would more housing bring people that will create more demands on already oversubscribed and lacking services? How are we going to talk to our neighbours when they don’t speak English? Would their quiet community become too busy to enjoy and raise their children?

People felt overwhelmed. Some resisted change and worked adamantly to maintain the status quo while others felt they could help shape the change so it had positive impacts for them and their neighbours. The new and changing environment brought forward all of these competing interests and emotions. There were constant tugs and pulls

“Good leaders emerged through the community, both in politics and social institutions like Collingwood Neighbourhood House.” – Rob, Past President

that people experienced personally and also with their neighbours.

Citizens began to talk about these changes, emotions, opportunities, concerns, and ideas as groups of neighbours assembled for these planning processes. They thought like pioneers- exploring new territories and people.

Chris, describes those early years as taking action instead of complaining:

“I don’t think anyone envisioned this type of neighbourhood house ...whenever we
wanted to do something we’d say, ‘instead of complaining, let’s try it and see if it works.’ But the one nice thing I love is, everybody is prepared to put everything into it. It’s not like a lot of places where it’s yes we’ll do it, but we’ll expect someone else to do the work … it goes back to the uniqueness of this community.”

Don Van Dyke was one of the founding members. Like others, he got involved to help fill in this amenity gap:

“What brought me into this was a shortage of amenities for my children and neighbours’ children... a school and library or community centre. That issue brought the people together in the evenings. Community was a big thing for us and as we started getting involved like I did, I’d let other people take over, give different ideas and bring their friends in.”

People on the neighbourhood house planning committee formed a sub group to start an organization whose mandate was to develop and coordinate services and build a sense of community. The Collingwood Neighbourhood House Society was incorporated in 1985 as a nonprofit society and in 1987 became a charitable organization.

Terry remembers the ideas that stimulated the creation of the neighbourhood house:

“We saw what they had in other parts of the city ... Then we would throw up these ideas. What if we had this? What if you thought about that? We didn’t even know what a neighbourhood house was. We heard about it and thought, ‘Let’s keep an open mind ... let’s check it out.’ ”

Many of the people who sat around these tables were parents and grandparents interested in making the community a safe, nurturing, and growing environment for their children. They began to think like a family.

Encouraging our passions and gifts

The founding members of the neighbourhood house were five people who brought unique and complementary skills, gifts, and passions. All of them were dedicated to improving their neighbourhood.

Four of the founders lived in the neighbourhood. They all got involved primarily to make their community a better place for their children and families and also to ensure that urban planning included changes that would benefit the neighbourhood. Terry and Chris were passionate about education and became the first parents on the school advisory committees. Don worked in the Parks system and was active in maintaining sports groups in the community. Marjorie was active on
The other founder, Derek, an urban planner, worked on the Kingsway study and who had an interest in social and community development.

The combination of these people, their interests, passions, and skills set the stage for the type of organization that CNH would become. They wanted to promote other people contributing to building the organization and neighbourhood just as they did. They saw that they each had a niche to fill and also a great deal of dynamic energy when they put their collective minds and actions together. They were action-oriented people and very hands-on in the initial years and throughout the last 25 years.

In 1988, I came into the organization. As we started to build programs slowly, and coordinate new developments with existing service providers we began to realize how important these existing and new services were to people in the community, which motivated us to do more. We enjoyed meeting new people and helping them; it started to feel like a community. It was an exciting time to see things become more concrete from what we had imagined.

The more we did the more the organization started to be recognised. This recognition was first grounded in the neighbourhood. At one point the First Lutheran Church wanted to redevelop their land and approached the neighbourhood house to find out the priority needs. We identified affordable housing and childcare. We began to feel like we had become the place of connection and had a solid reputation to get things done. We felt like creators of change. Our recognition also brought in more resources from the city, other levels of government, philanthropic organizations and local institutions.

We felt like creators of change.

The commitment to tap into people’s passions and gifts is embedded into CNH’s culture. People whose skills we had become aware of are encouraged to share them. Often this takes place in our programs and services:

“You also bring the skill set you have, and it’s accepted in a place. If you can drum you bring that and all of a sudden we have a class on drumming.” – Bobbie, Past President

The primary interest was to get to know their neighbours and develop services that would support families. The Board was interested to see if others shared this interest and began to link with neighbours. They identified people, groups, and connections, primarily through their own personal relationships. Slowly they began to broaden their networks of contacts.
Understanding the evolution of our cultural identity

Initially, the makeup of the Board was Caucasian residents and workers in the neighbourhood. The Board had some diversity with people coming from a variety of experiences—some were parents, others worked in schools, churches and health organizations and they had varying political perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. Some were long-term residents, others had recently arrived.

Both the Kingsway study and the new networks identified the importance of reaching the ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood, which became visible prior to Expo and more pronounced after Vancouver was on the world stage.

Terry shares a motivation to reach out to diverse neighbours:

“We realized that if we didn’t include everyone, we couldn’t have these amenities ... These are neighbours that are paying their taxes as well—their children need these amenities, their seniors need these amenities, their families ... Even the sports team—if you didn’t include everybody, you’d have no team.”

An intention was set to connect with ethnic groups. We primarily used word of mouth and every connection we could imagine. We found that churches, businesses, local politicians, and schools were good starting places to identify people who lived in the neighbourhood. The focus was on the geographic area and our relationships.

As the local neighbourhood was discovered, we were exposed to more and more diversity—of people, talents, interests, generations, perspectives, ideas, and cultures. Some began to see this as a huge challenge while others saw it as a great asset. Our conversations and experiences allowed us to see multiple viewpoints. Thinking about diversity helped us create a mix of services and approaches and opened up what we thought was possible.

Over the years, the cultural identity of the organization evolved as new people joined and other people sustained and grew with their involvement. There was an evolution of an organizational culture and a thread of continuity that remained, as Chris describes:

“The community has maybe changed, but not really changed for me ... There are still people who have lived here for 60 years. Their children live here. Their grandchildren live here. We’re still that same neighbourhood, that community that we were in the 70s.”
Recognizing our common values, traditions and differences

In 1988, shortly after I was hired as Executive Director, the organization held a planning session. Planning was foundational to CNH considering their roots came from land use planning. However, there had been little experience around social planning. The Board decided it was time to look at the bigger picture; it had been a while since they had done this as they had been busy running programs and raising resources.

An external facilitator was hired, first, to help residents identify focus areas and priorities from the flood gate of needs and, second, to identify values that would drive the organization.

The needs helped us identify focus; we also considered where support and trends were with governments and philanthropic organizations. Since the neighbourhood had a strong family orientation and the people around the table were passionate about improving family life, support to families became one of the focuses. This was also the time that the City of Vancouver had appointed its first children’s advocate. Next, we wanted to help immigrants in their settlement journey and were aware that the City, through grants and training under the Hastings Institute, as well as groups like the federal government and United Way, were assisting in this area.

We spent a significant amount of time naming values, understanding their meanings and determining if they were commonly held. We discussed how we could put these common values into action. This work was amazing and I remember how invigorated we were. It had tapped into our emotions and spirit in a way none of us had previously experienced.

This planning session became one of our strongest foundations and served as a guiding light throughout the next 23 years. The values that were articulated that day were later incorporated into our mission statement and evolved over the years to include:

“Stories that built on each other gave me a sense of ‘this a cool place!’”
–Julie L., President
• **Respect:** Coming into our relationships with an open heart and valuing and treating everyone as you want to be valued and treated.

• **Diversity:** Recognizing that it is a strength and advantage to be exposed to different cultures, generations, abilities, perspectives, and experiences.

• **Capacity Building:** Seeking and supporting the expression of gifts, skills and experiences and providing opportunities for personal and community growth.

• **Relationship Building:** Getting to know each other on a personal basis and hearing each other’s stories. This requires attention to creating environments for social interaction.

• **Reciprocity:** Providing opportunities for people to give and contribute as well as receive support, when needed.

• **Collaboration and Cooperation:** Working together to maximize resources and generation of ideas.

• **Accountability:** Being accountable to the neighbourhood and those who support us.
When I reflect on how we instilled these values in our actions, what’s so amazing is how everybody provided a level of leadership. It isn’t actually one individual or even a group or handful of individuals. It’s about virtually drawing common values out from each and every person who lives and works here.

I continue to ponder how we got these values to be expressed. I know we spent a lot of time in our early years discussing values and we worked from our value-driven mission. We were tested and sometimes pulled from these values, both internally and externally, at many points in our development. Through uniting around our stated values, we were able to get back on course. I don’t know exactly when, but I remember sitting in my office one day and just watching everything that was happening and thinking, “we have internalized this in such a way that we don’t even realize how much we live these values.”

Past President Chas describes his experience walking into the neighbourhood house:

“It wasn’t a Caucasian affair, it was a mix and everyone was working at a different level, a level of values … they were here because of these values … I felt immediately that here was a community taking shape.”

When I reflected with people on this journey, we realized there were a number of influences. First we created the value statement together. There were approximately 30 diverse people who participated in the initial session. We all held these values personally and this had been part of our upbringings and family traditions. They were values we all had in common. Since they were commonly held and we all agreed to practice them, we had a support system immediately built in.

“You’re modeling behaviour and it feels good, it works, people follow in it to and you can build on it. And you know there are a lot of people out there that want to live in a peaceful world but don’t know how to do it. So they come in to this environment and they learn that kind of lifestyle, or attitude, or respect. I don’t know that it’s always conscious, it just works, it happens.”-Oscar, former Staff Director and current Board member

We don’t even realize how much we live these values.

“You can come here with a certain kind of background and mindset but once you’re involved in it, you see how it runs and how it works and how good it feels. It’s really hard to not stay or not behave like that because you can feel it … most people want to be a part of it.”-January, Staff Director

In being intentional about this work, one of the key factors was our ability to sustain people’s involvement in the organization, over long periods of time. This allowed a critical mass of people to practice and evolve shared values.
“We have kept staff and volunteers over a long period of time. I have been here for many years and I still recognize everybody. And leadership has remained committed to the founding values. There have been more intentional actions that, by example, promote that within the way we hire. Within volunteer recruitment it’s probably the most important thing we want people to come with. It’s the same with staff; everybody here wants to be here because they believe in that. They have been hired because they live by those values.” - Oscar

Staff members internalized the values in their day-to-day work with others in the organization:

“I was always thinking about the values and the beliefs and how we function in the organization… I found that this is such a unique place to be in and a place to work, where we have respect, we have kindness, we teach others… Now that you see your staff dealing with their staff you hear them repeating what you at one time told them… it’s just going through the whole organization like a domino effect.” - Kulwant, Staff Director

SUMMARY FROM CNH’S BEING STORY

- **Invest** in knowing people in your organization and people in your stakeholder-groups. Feelings are part of this work - fear, pride, passion

- **Diversity** in the early stages builds resiliency and creativity. It requires openness to discovery, a pioneering spirit and a willingness to be creators of change

- **Community** development and services delivery working together is a powerful force - there is a need for hybrid organizations

- **Putting** a focus on passions and gifts brings them out

- **Organizational** identity evolves with diversity, time, opportunities, and threats

- **Articulating** core values and embedding values into actions is intentional work. Common values are felt and innately within us but there may be times that require difficult decisions about organizational fit with volunteers and staff who are unable to live these values
Past Presidents of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House

1987 - 1992
Terry Tayler

2003 - 2005
Kerry Jang

1992 - 1998
Robert Burkhart

2005 - 2009
Bill McMichael

1998 - 2001
Chas Bains

2009 - 2011
Julie Linkletter

2001 - 2003
Bobbie (Dosanjh) Duvall
Collingwood Neighbourhood House: Belonging

To build a sense of belonging and trust is the key to developing healthy, safe, and vibrant communities. It requires a great deal of time and intentional practice. It involves creating links, exchanges, and bridges between people as well as ongoing nurturing support. Not only does it encourage participation in community life, in the programs, services, and amenities that are offered, it creates a spirit within a community connection that moves people beyond where they thought they could be. It is a launch pad for “becoming.”

Building diverse relationships over the long term

In the initial years, few people knew their neighbours. There were some relations that had been established through living next door, school activities, faith-based organizations and common shopping areas. In the early ‘80s a majority of the population was Caucasian. Over the years, the cultural makeup of the community changed to the visible majority it is today.

Difficult relationships began to re-establish in more positive ways as people focused on common goals.

Prior to creating the neighbourhood house, there had been some divisive conflicts in the neighbourhood around new social housing developments which caused many people to feel angry, protective, unwelcomed, and hurt. Some of these housing developments had been designed for specific populations—low income, aboriginal, single parent families, and ethnic enclaves.

These initial reactions and feelings of residents remained in memories as new relations were being attempted. Some healing had to occur and trust rebuilt which took a great deal of time and sensitivity. Some of these difficult relationships began to re-establish in more positive ways as people focused on common goals. People were meeting one another through the planning processes and their work in developing the neighbourhood house and community services.

Action research and community connectors were significant tools that were used to reach people that did not know about community offerings. Local people were hired to take on these roles. Reaching people in their first language, going to people rather than having them come to us were welcoming gestures. We were asking who was missing which helped us to expand beyond our existing networks.
Aspects of collective child raising had been developed initially in program areas such as child care, family places and, later, with youth leaders engaging children, peers and adults. Families became involved in neighbour-to-neighbour support initiatives such as baby sitting coops and walking school buses.

It is not clear how much of our collective child raising influenced the social values of the children raised in this environment. However, in our focus-group discussions people described how the seeds that were planted in the formative years took root. Child-care services played a strong role in developing intercultural relations at an early age. Children spent significant time in spaces specifically designed for them. The children learned about cultural practices around the world through intercultural programs and intercultural staff. They felt comfortable and at home with diverse friends. This also encouraged intercultural relationships with parents.

“I was struck immediately on how diverse the [child-care] staff were. I’m thinking of the infant-toddler centre and as I got to know them, I consider them some of my close friends still. I was struck by the mutual respect ... From very different backgrounds from all around the world.” Julie L.

After 25 years of creating inclusive services for children, we see many of these earlier children become adults having intercultural views and approaches. For instance, Matthew shares his aboriginal culture with other children and has become part of a community band that integrates aboriginal drumming into its local world music. Sanjeev works in the neighbourhood supporting intercultural youth leadership. He has used his interests in media to start a youth media club and also supports a buddy program that helps immigrant youth adjust to life in their new country. Peggy and Neelam offer intercultural day camps for school-age girls interested in environmental and social movements.

Programs and services were one way that intercultural relationships were formed. Many people were engaged through voluntary activity. Some people volunteered in programs and services, others in administrative areas. A number of people were encouraged to come forward with ideas to improve their neighbourhood; some addressed issues such as density, housing design, addictions, poverty and anti-racism, and others wanted to improve public and shared spaces such as parks and business areas.

Working together, we started to see more of the common ground and the specific and evolving gifts each person had to offer. Stereotypes and attitudes started to dissolve as human relationships were encouraged. As a result of the work people did together, they created a greater sense of trust, ownership and responsibility.

“One of our volunteer events had the slogan ‘Volunteers: the glue that pulls the community”
together.’ That’s what the intercultural part is, the glue part. Multicultural is celebrating the different, but the intercultural is making connections. And they can be between young and old people, or male and female, or ethnic groups and professional groups-and they look like a big matrix!” -Bill, Past President

Uniting through living, working, shopping, playing, learning, and creating spirit together

A shared common geographic space brought residents and workers together. Having this frame around an area shifted our thinking to the local, to our front and back yards, our meeting places, our businesses, our people. We began looking for volunteers and staff in the local area and were surprised to see that the talents, skills, and perspectives we needed for development were in our community. This focus on local was drilled down even further to create smaller units within the neighbourhood where people could interact more readily and access decentralized services, mostly mapped around school catchment areas.

“As people were finding what they needed within their own community, usually what follows is a sense of ownership within the community—that love for your community starts to evolve and then you take the responsibility for it.” -Julie L.

The Board, staff, and volunteers were thoughtful about the activities they designed, always looking for common ground that crossed cultures. Examples of this include choosing soccer as a sport and the ultimate connector: food.

“One of the reasons ... for the success is because all of the children from all these different countries knew about soccer and their parents were quite happy to have them in soccer.” -Terry

“I find people actually cooking in our neighbourhood, which means that they’re bringing this wonderful diversity and it’s a piece of who they are and their values and their identity. I think we underestimate the power of food ... how it defined communities and how it brings people together.” -Bobbie
Building the facilities for community services and meeting places united the neighbourhood and brought out all kinds of skills and abilities. When we first started, the neighbourhood house operated out of two storefronts and that was our primary meeting place. We had a setting for administration and a space to operate programs. There were a variety of programs offered; some directly delivered by the neighbourhood house and others by partners who satellited their resources into the neighbourhood. These were often larger public systems like the Vancouver School Board and Health Authorities. These spaces began to increase as we formed more partnerships with local churches, housing complexes and schools. We began to deliver programs in various locations and expanded the type of groups we were working with at a local level. We then focused our attention on building a new facility.

As we expanded more services for children and families, we were venturing into more settlement services for new immigrants. As we made plans for our new facility on Joyce Street, we added recreation, youth leadership, and more supports for seniors. We paid attention to not only designing our physical spaces for programs but also for interaction.

I have watched other organizations involve only a few people in their building campaign. What was unique about the approach to building our neighbourhood house was seeing the building process as an opportunity to build community. More than 1,000 people were involved in the work: architects from Chile, engineers from China, and designers from India. Children gave their input through drawing and ability groups looked at access-everyone contributed and felt ownership when the facilities were built.

Improving areas close to home enabled people to meet their neighbours and strengthened their sense of belonging.

When we asked residents for ideas to improve access to spaces, many people in the neighbourhood talked about having one-stop meeting places where they could have a variety of services in one place, as well as places where they could walk. This led us to develop services, in partnership with local agencies, around school catchment areas. Improving areas close to home enabled people to meet their neighbours and strengthened their sense of belonging.

The physical and social environment can be designed to encourage interaction and made to look friendly having art, open seating spaces and hubs of activity in your view as you enter the space. Having people participate in the design furthers the sense of ownership and belonging.
Sense of family. Most of the neighbourhood members reflecting on our history talked about the CNH organization as the CNH family. A sense of belonging, a sense of loyalty, a sense of trust, and a sense of responsibility were created. Just like in families. There were many small units of engagement and relationships that fit into the larger picture. Just like a family tree.

So many diverse people may have been attracted to our organization because they saw the opportunity to strengthen their family, re-create families lost or find a more positive family experience.

This sense of family was not only created within the environment, there was also work focused on family support within the neighbourhood. Staff and volunteers from neighbourhood agencies came together to develop programs for children of all ages, such as early learning and care for children under six, middle year recreation programs and youth leadership initiatives.

As well, parents were invited to create supports and opportunities for their peers like single mom support groups and families branching out approaches.

Enabling our gifts and resources to be maximized by getting together

Key connectors for residents and agencies In the initial years, the CNH Board of Directors were key connectors in the neighbourhood. They used existing relationships to reach into the community to encourage participation in the programs, services, and voluntary activity. They had a strong nucleus from the Joyce Street Area Planning Committee and also used neighbourhood-based institutions such as libraries, schools, churches, and community centres to broaden the reach.
Over time CNH became a convener of agencies and residents within the neighbourhood and began to deepen our work together-shar- ing information, coordinating, and working on common fronts. One of the first areas we ventured together on was support for children and families. I had a background in this work and was excited to see that this experience was useful. Also, it could be taken to a new level in breadth, depth and accessibility considering the diversity of cultures reflected in the makeup of our families and the number of engaged partners (residents and agencies).

The City of Vancouver was instrumental in helping us gain momentum and recognition as an agency to lead new developments for children and families. This eventually created the numerous child care, children and family support services in the local area and expanded the number of places and spaces for families to meet one another and grow. The convening table used in the family development work was replicated as we ventured into new program and leadership areas. Bringing people together went a long way in helping our sense of belonging.

Another key factor in building intercultural relations was the willingness of neighbourhood institutions such as the schools, community centre, and health centre to collaborate. We kept our focus as local as possible and deepened the work together that began in 1985 when CNH established. We created an area service network not just to share information but to take actions together. The more we worked together, the more we achieved.

We also developed a greater understanding of the cultures within each institution and learned to be flexible, resourceful, and supportive. There were frustrating times when work had to be adjusted because of leadership or policy changes of another organization. Due to the diversity of neighbourhood institutions, we were often able to redirect the work to another organization so we could continue to improve the neighbourhood.

 Bringing people together went a long way in nurturing our sense of belonging.

Connections were further facilitated by splitting the Executive Director’s role into two positions—one focused on operations, the other on community development. Through the community development focus, 22 local groups made up of residents and workers were formed to work on areas of neighbourhood interest. A few examples of bridging work include:

- The development of the Renfrew-Collingwood Leadership Institute, a place where local leaders learn from each other
- The Windermere Family of Schools, an initiative where local champions support youth leadership that focused on improving the neighbourhood
“An intercultural organization is a very good incubator of ideas. You’re getting these ideas coming from all over the place and a good incubator that will take an idea and grow it until it hatches and leaves the nest to propagate on its own.” - Bill, Past President

We also had other civil society organizations that we worked with, particularly other neighbourhood houses. We all shared the same goals of service and community development in our neighbourhoods. We had different approaches depending on the background and experience of the leaders and the history of their neighbourhoods. We learned a lot from each other. We found that some of our work gained more momentum when we partnered and collaborated.

Local recruitment. Early on, the Board, staff, volunteers and I would brainstorm ideas on how to reach more people. Our interest was to keep “the local” in the forefront. We saw that the small links being established were powerful and we wondered how we could continue to engage local people.

We identified experiences that enabled neighbours to find, talk to, and hear from neighbours and co-workers.

There were two attitudes we had to overcome. First, rather than looking for people with expertise from anywhere, we began to look for everything we needed right in our back yard. Second, we had always seen our diversity as a big challenge to reach people; we started to see the people in our neighbourhood with bilingual language abilities as great assets filled with gifts beyond language. They became connectors and much more.

A few things we noticed were that the group of linkers and connectors were growing from this work and from the relationships they established. Not just with people that were from their culture but also with people of other cultures.

Finding appropriate people to lead new initiatives were some of our challenges. Most systems for recruitment are not established on a local basis. So we searched within our programs and human resource pools and through our neighbourhood’s institutions and networks to hire staff and volunteers. We also created a local list for recruitment. Because our neighbourhood was diverse, our human resources became diverse as well.

As we focused on hiring and mobilizing local staff and volunteers, there was an added investment. Their work not only gave them intrinsic rewards, it was also benefitting where they were living and playing and it was helping to improve life for their family members, and neighbours. This encouraged a much longer-term involvement and investment of their time and commitments. They had a greater sense of ownership than in previous experiences.

With the long-term investments and relation-
ships, trust was developed. This trust added to a sense of belonging and also encouraged people to stretch beyond their comfort zones, facilitating a new “becoming.”

Once residents were active, there was a concerted effort to help them build capacity, develop new skills and try new areas of work. This maintained consistency in people and, for many, having long-term stable relations and constant growing experiences motivated them to stay involved and continue to contribute.

“That we could work in the community that you actually serve, that’s become much rarer these days … the good thing about it is that you’re also looking for potential within the community all the time … you’re saying there are people here we can take on and we can teach them or they have the skill base.” — Chas

As leadership changes occur within the CNH organization, there is an effort to orient new players to the culture of the neighbourhood and provide space for them to bring new ideas forward.

**Outreach and welcome.** One of the common threads in the development of CNH is our welcoming environment. This is first and foremost achieved by the people within the organization. From the moment you enter the doors of our facility you are greeted. Sometimes by our wonderful receptionists, other times by a volunteer, and other times a friend, neighbour or someone you have worked with.

We managed to attract, with some effort, very talented staff and volunteers that came from all over the world. Some were new immigrants, others were children of immigrants, and many came from growing up in the neighbourhood. Our staff and volunteers were mostly female, from the local area and were quite young.

There was a great deal of synergy created with the variety of workers in the agency. Volunteers and staff worked in unison; cultures came together and brought unique approaches into activities that either came from their culture or a combination of cultural practices. People openly spoke first languages and were encouraged when people wanted to learn some of their language, even if it was just a greeting. At the same time, they used English as their common language and were thoughtful and sensitive to new people entering the environment, using the language they were most comfortable in.

“When you look for and hire people from the neighbourhood, that’s a powerful model. You’re not only running a service, it’s directly going to impact your personal neighbourhood.” — Bobbie

People reached out to other residents who had not been involved in community life. Some relationships are easier to develop than others. People who have experienced trauma and
Stories of Being, Belonging, and Becoming in Renfrew-Collingwood

exclusion require a long time to build trust. Consistent welcoming approaches, openness to hear their stories, positive feedback, and patience help to ease the way.

Supporting peers to reach other peers was instrumental in connecting with marginalized people in the neighbourhood. Youth are bringing in youth, cultural connectors are bringing in people from different cultures, and seniors are encouraging seniors to come out to contribute and participate. They are going out to parks, businesses and places rather than expecting people to come to them.

Safe places. Creating safe environments are always challenging particularly when you consider the trauma and abuse suffered by many. Often, developing one trusting relationship can make the difference and in many situations people walked and escorted people to a more public venue, making it feel safer. When we first started the Homeless Breakfast Program, we worked with the Community Policing Centre to deliver an invitation along with a sandwich and hot drink to come and join us for breakfast. We did this for three to four weeks before we started to see people coming for breakfast. Now over 100 people join us every Saturday morning.

People discussing safety talked about the importance of being able to listen and observe. People feel safe when they are heard.

“You’re back to the listening. That people really needed a place where they could come... When you allow people in the community to be able to come together and they really know somebody is going to listen, then I think that’s the big thing.” - Chris

Conflict is inevitable when you bring people together. Setting up a safe environment, where conflicts and differing perspectives can come forward, helps greatly in building intercultural communities. The founding members established a practice to “agree to disagree” and leave conversations with relationships intact:

“We agreed to disagree ... at the very beginning of the meeting we said that there would be a lot of difference of opinion and no matter how hard we fought, when we left the meeting we had to leave as friends. That was the biggest commitment we made every time we started.” - Chris

There were invitations to come and join the planning groups, particularly if you had opposing perspectives.

“Come and join the group. If you’re opposed, come and join ... every time there was opposition, we went to that meeting and just brought them into the fold. We can’t build consensus unless you’re here at the table. I think this community has always done that. It’s OK to disagree.” - Chris
The process of inclusion does not happen overnight, nor is there a magic formula. It is a gradual process that takes time, information, effort and creativity.

“At first this person wouldn’t communicate or interact with people. And as people have gotten to know him [here at CNH], once in a while you’ll see him talking with people. I’ve gotten to know this young fellow, and about every third week he’ll put his arms out like this [gestures] and he wants to give me a hug and that didn’t happen before ... So it makes me really proud to be part of an organization that nurtures that, where people of different ability levels can feel welcomed and supported and respected. It’s a special place.” - Mike, Staff Director

Many described the process as organic and evolutionary when they reflected on their upbringing and first intercultural relations.

“Growing up there were very few visible minorities in my block ... high school is for me when it started changing and ... there were never any real racial issues. It just happened in the neighbourhood slowly ... We started playing soccer with visible minorities ... you start doing that and you see their parents and they invite you over and you have food with them.” - Rob, Past President

Others had to sustain their intention over a long time before they saw results.

“Years ago when I was chair of the PAC (school parent advisory committee), it was always a struggle to get parents from the ethnic minorities to participate ... This is in the ’70s and the ’80s ... we had to fight to save the school.

Supporting peers to reach other peers was instrumental in connecting with marginalized people in the neighbourhood.

“This year (2010) we had the same fight, to save this school. At the first big public meeting I took one look at the gymnasium and I just couldn’t believe what I saw. People from every race, all ages ... we had ex-teachers there, parents, the parents of the school when I was there; we had several generations of people there.”
“It really lifted my heart to see the change in 28 years … to hear people get up and speak so eloquently, and some of them in their own language … it was the growth of our community in those years and just the perfect venue to see it so visible.”
-Terry

SUMMARY FROM CNH’S BELONGING STORY

- **Begin** with children and invest in the long term as they age
- **Welcoming** environments need to be designed and can become contagious if consistently supported. Cross-cultural abilities and visibility of peers help people feel welcomed
- **Common** ground consists of local geographic areas, services and meeting places, interests, and values
- **This** is a marathon, not a sprint, and it requires long-term vision and investment to establish building blocks. Multi-year funds and in-kind support from governments and philanthropic organizations that focus on community development advances this work
- **Create** time, space, intention, and expertise to help heal marginalized relations and develop healthy ones. This requires empathy, understanding, sensitivity, and a nurturing nature
- **Dialogue** is a starting point - working together is the “glue.” Invest in local recruitment of staff and volunteers and their continuous capacity development
- **Create** places of belonging, a sense of family and community rather than institutional settings
Collingwood Neighbourhood House: Becoming

As we embarked on new journeys we began to learn a great deal—how to plan new facilities, how to engage and reach residents who are different, how to conduct community research, how to develop proposals to get support, how to resolve conflicts, how to manage growth, how to play and learn with neighbours are only a few examples. These ongoing experiences help us share knowledge and skills with others, learn from neighbours, and try new things. Most importantly we learn to act like a supportive and creative community.

Creating collective intercultural people power

Through some of the more challenging and overwhelming times, we recognized that this was not the type of work that any one person or any one organization could do. The responsibility of developing an organization, services, facilities, and responding to issues and interests can be overwhelming. It requires moving from a place of individual responsibility to shared responsibility.

Terry Tayler learned this lesson early in her tenure as President as she talked with another Board member:

"I was telling him how hard it was, especially at the very beginning— we were hands on, sweeping the floors and putting up shelving ... But it was always people issues that were hard ... I didn't know how I was going to deal with it. And he looked at me and said, 'Terry, you're not alone, there's all of us on the Board, it's not your decision, it's our decision.' That was a powerful moment for me ... to share the load was a new concept! And so I learned, I started practicing at the Board meetings: OK, I don't have any answer for this one. What do you think about it? ... I would just be absolutely amazed at how the wonderful ideas and the solutions that came from all these other people."

It feels stronger with others involved.

As Executive Director, I observed that this shift from doing to facilitating is a challenge for people engaged in community work. Facilitating is a long process of learning and continues to be a struggle. When we have passion for the work and a clear vision of the outcome, it is hard to let go. However, when I have let go and allowed others to come forward, it resulted in stimulating new ideas and a more supportive environment.

Instead of feeling a loss of power, it feels stronger with others involved. It is less stressful, like a weight off your shoulders as Terry describes. I believe that learning this approach has allowed CNH to take on the magnitude of work and level
of creativity it has achieved. The more we were able to share leadership with individuals and organizations as well as develop convening and coordinating tables to resolve issues and develop the community, the more we were able to do and the more we were supported in the journey.

Once people gathered together in neighbourhood programs, there were intentional efforts to build relationships between people. Staff and volunteers with bilingual language abilities were recruited and encouraged people in programs to get to know one another. In a short period of time, participants were making friends and connecting outside of the program times. Some participants brought other friends and told their neighbors. An informal network of connections was formed and people started to describe the places where programs were held as “their second home,” a place “where they belonged.”

“It was the openness of the staff and the way they spoke to me, it was very refreshing. They told us about these facilities they had. Everything was so different from my past experience is being in London, a Londoner. I was just blown away.” —Chas

There were some challenges as a result of our initial approach. We initially had staff and volunteers work with specific language groups as we thought this would be more welcoming and comfortable for our new settlers. While this helped participants bond with the neighbors that shared their same language and culture, we started to see that segregation and conflict was starting to exist between groups.

As a result, we redesigned our approach. Bilingual staff and volunteers worked with a variety of cultures, participants were mixed and encouraged to form cross-cultural relationships. In some circumstances we had first-language delivery; however, we intentionally bridged people into intercultural programs as soon as possible.

As we worked on bridging cultures, we also looked for opportunities to bridge generations and people from different economic backgrounds. Connections were brought together through family programs, particularly Families Branching Out. Participants ranged in age from a newborn to an elder. They came from various cultures with a large representation of Aboriginal residents. Recreation services, which were initiated after the new facility was built, began to attract people of all economic backgrounds. Our leisure-access approach encouraged participation regardless of ability to pay and through this people created friendships across economic differences.

The developments of policies allowed us to debate and discuss values throughout the whole organization. Rob was part of the committee that officially drafted the neighborhood house’s multicultural policy in the early 1990s. He remembers the debates during his time on the Board around facility use and program
development. The Board was being lobbied for Chinese-only programs and workers, the staff was designing ESL classes by specific cultures, and some groups were not being hospitable to different people wanting to join their groups. The Board ultimately decided to resist exclusive policies and create an atmosphere and philosophy of inclusion. They recognized that bringing groups together that were homogenous happened quite naturally but bridging relations would require skills and approaches beyond traditional practices. This was the unique work CNH could take on. They choose an approach that encouraged interaction and exchanges between different cultures and ages. A concrete way they encouraged interaction was in the design of the facility, resisting rooms for particular populations.

There were also many dialogues that happened unintentionally as people worked on projects together. These dialogues allowed us to bridge relationships, explore our values at a deeper level and reflect on “teachable” moments.

One of the stories was about an aboriginal carving initiative. Aboriginal youth and their mentor were meeting with the CNH Board of Directors about designing the totem pole that would sit in front of the neighbourhood house as a symbol to welcome people. The Board indicated that they wanted to show the multicultural nature the community, their commitment to family and children, and their work as organizers and conveners. The youth asked, “If we had a totem pole, which culture will be put on top of the other?” The Board responded, “None. We believe we are all equal.” Thus, the idea of the Gateway was developed, where all cultures are equally honoured at the top and are supported by two pillars—a bear and a cub symbolizing family and the wolf symbolizing social organization.

Through this dialogue, we all became more aware of our shared values and the importance of how we display these values to others. We found creative ways to exhibit the intercultural nature in the carving, fully using the talents within community. As this carving was developed, the attitudes of people changed towards the aboriginal people in our neighbourhood. We saw their tremendous gifts and assets rather than their needs and deficits. This is an example where we moved beyond dialogue and created something together that continues to remind us of the beliefs that unite us and how we are interconnected as people.

Evolving diverse roles

Each founding member and staff brought unique skills and gifts to the table. This continued to grow as new initiatives were taken on, more people became involved and we gained more experience operating this hybrid organization. Most people initially started where their comfort level was, using the skills and abilities they were aware of. Later, they were encouraged to stretch further and this was enabled by a number of people.
Some, like Chas, were encouraged to move forward on their visions and ideas:

“I saw you (Paula) as an enabler for us to get these things done … you’d throw out ideas and you’d see the road blocks and you’d say, well how about we do this? So you were definitely enabling us to move this forward.”

We learned process and negotiation was important to achieving positive outcomes.

“You learn to negotiate, you learn the cooperation, the collaboration, and once you really get a feel for it, you realize this is the only way to breathe!” - Terry

“Coming here, when I started working with Paula, I realized that I had been missing that process base. I was always so focused on the outcomes, while the overall work of my values were in the process … You really get a sense of the organization and how that piece of it was just as important as the outcome. The process is part of the outcome, they are connected. That really is key. It’s absolutely key to the organization.” - Jennifer, current Executive Director

There were efforts to matched skills and abilities to existing work requirements and there were also efforts of broader discovery. Through conversations between staff and participants, neighbours and neighbours as well as formal processes such as skills inventories, we found out about people’s skills and aspirations and linked them to opportunities. We began to see how truly rich we were both as individuals but also as a neighbourhood.

Individuals took on roles within the organization and the organization as a whole took on roles in the neighbourhood. We provided a place to meet and a place to be supported and served. We also provided mapping, convening, and linking, administrative support roles.

“I just thought [CNH] offered programs so I was slowly learning what a neighbourhood house did. That it was responsive to the needs of the community and would develop what the community wanted.” - Jennifer

Supporting ongoing leadership and learning

Residents, volunteers, staff and organizations grew the more we did and the more we worked together. As people took on new roles or experiences they were often mentored and coached by people who were previously in the roles.

“When I first started doing community work here I was being mentored and doing that it felt kind of artificial: “OK now I have the person that speaks Cantonese and the person who speaks Mandarin and I have to hit this demographic.” But then you do try it and you see the difference it makes on the community.” - Jennifer
At the Board level, Presidents stayed on in the Post-President position and took their responsibility to mentor the new President until they could find their feet. We also developed a process to bring on four new Board members every year. This set up a revitalizing approach. The new Board members asked those important clarifying questions and brought new life to the Board. The partially experienced members were eager to take on more responsibilities as they were clearer on the culture, vision, and activities of the organization. The most experienced understood the importance of contribution and modeled this as well as paid attention to “passing the torch.”

In staffing, people moved into different positions as we grew in size and also during staff leaves. With our focus on local hiring, we filled the positions within the neighbourhood and supported career skill development. I personally took two leaves and a part-time secondment during my time as the Executive Director. While I was away a staff director moved into the Acting Executive Director position, a coordinator moved to a program director position and line staff moved into a coordinating role. These new experiences of taking on broader responsibilities developed not only skill but also confidence and new interests. Often we were able to accommodate the staff when the leave was complete based on growth objectives of the Board and creative restructuring.

We also grew through a variety of learning tools. We often held training on site, partly because it was a cheaper and a more relevant option but also encouraged us to learn together as an organization, using real-life examples from our work. We became more skilled in action research that utilized local people to gather information, hear from neighbours and analyze and plan from the findings. We hired mentors that could help build capacity. We were also fortunate to maintain the skills of a talented facilitator and social planner, Gavin Perryman, for our 25-year history. Gavin led several on-site evaluations and collaborative planning sessions. This gave us an opportunity to reflect, keep focused on neighbourhood relevancy and move forward with clear goals.

**Overcoming and not overcoming challenges**

One of our greatest growths came through meeting our challenges and not shying away from the harder issues.

**Balancing competing interests.** Looking at child raising as an example, we had some people on the Board and people living in the neighbourhood that felt our focus on children had to be moved to other populations such as youth and seniors. Others felt we focused too much on systems approaches (e.g., licensed child care) rather than neighbour-to-neighbour approaches (e.g., babysitting co-ops). There were often differences in child-raising practices that were culturally
based and a great deal of effort was put into understanding these differences and providing education. One of the challenges was gaining support for family daycare providers. There were opposing views on the best delivery mechanism and culturally sensitive approaches for child care (home and institutions) and concern around quality and monitoring. Eventually a program was designed that addressed concerns and family daycare was supported with training in multiple languages. The demand for childcare in our neighbourhood has never fully been met. We have hundreds of children on our waiting list and have only managed to develop additional spaces every 10 years, which hardly makes a dent in the demand and need for services.

Finding land for a portable child-care facility was also a big challenge as we were told that parks and school land were the only available options in our area. Both the Vancouver Park Board and School Board opposed the placement of a child-care facility on their land, citing lack of available green space in the area. This was one of the first times when the Board was faced with two competing needs in the neighbourhood (child care and available green space). After many painful meetings and calling on Vancouver’s Director of Social Planning to help resolve the issue, a resident suggested a site on Duke Street. This site was owned by the city and had not been identified as an option in the earlier stages. There was agreement from all parties to place the facility on Duke Street.

To this day, we are so grateful to the resident whose knowledge of his neighbourhood helped find this win win situation.

Another example is when we were establishing support for the homeless in a facility with child, youth, and family programs. We had to scale back plans for the homeless due to community opposition around the compatibility of services. Many parents with young children raised concerns. As a compromise, we limited times, adjusted schedules and put energy into stabilizing a few key areas. It took five years to get appropriate resources and build people’s capacity (through sensitivit training, outreach, mental health first aid, and de-escalating situations). The program and outreach areas are stabilized now and plans for further development are underway. However, the challenges around varying attitudes and affordable housing continue to be in the forefront of current planning and actions.

“It’s part of our wanting to always go as far as we can … Not at the expense of others but take it as far as we can and … teach others and teach ourselves and be prepared to make some mistakes along the way.” – Oscar

There were also challenges in balancing a focus and intention with openness to different views.

“It was important for the Board to maintain its focus. Those members often found themselves in the margins … It was good for other Board mem-
bers to hear those viewpoints. You don’t want to be permanent in your views. You do have to always keep an open mind to what’s been said.”

- Oscar

“I think there is flexibility to the meaning of intentionality ... it’s the ability to hear and change and not get stuck in certain ways. Like the ability to change with changing ideas, changing environments, changing people.”

- January

**Mobilizing resources.** In the early years, it was tough getting support to bring on staff and create partnerships for service delivery at a time when competition for resources was high. The environment was quite competitive and the neighbourhood was not a well-known entity. There was a great deal of relationship building with funders during this time and once a few key funders stepped forward others followed.

We were fortunate during the building campaign for the new facility to work out an arrangement with the City to establish an endowment. This endowment has provided stability for our organization and has allowed us to venture into community development areas beyond what most organizations could afford.

There were changes in government policy and funding structures. We experienced losses in provincial government funding, which reduced services to youth and caused rollbacks in wages and benefits. This was a choice made by the organization, in consultation with the union, rather than having massive layoffs.

We also had to respond to a request for proposal (RFP) to maintain our local settlement services. This was a result of federal programs devolving to the province and the provincial
government moving to a practice of RFPs rather than grants. A lot of frustration was experienced by our agency, considering we had been offering these services for a number of years had been acknowledged for high quality and meeting identified needs. We had also integrated the settlement work into other fabrics of the neighbourhood. Any losses in this area would impact other areas and affect the infrastructure in place supporting intercultural relations. It also set up an environment of competition rather than cooperation, tugging at the values we were trying to keep in action. We began to explore funding alternatives and advocacy around these issues. There have been some small wins in this area with a multi year approach to funding settlement services and a greater understanding of the long term process for settlement. This continues to be a challenge that emerges every three to five years and our advocacy remains strong along with other service providers in the settlement field.

We are continuously challenged to maintain resources in our neighbourhood and throughout this period we fought hard to save heritage buildings and three schools at risk of closure.

The challenge is to find resources to support the work “the glue” that brings us together. Over the first 25 years, short-term project funding was supporting the “glue” and is soon coming to an end unless we can re-create new approaches with funders and investors. During our development, we became resourceful and learned how to frame our work according to the trends of funders and policymakers.

“What we are doing is pretty much the same thing over time. It’s just how you talk about it according to what the current funding trend is.” -January

**Managing growth.** Finding focus was a challenge as the needs and gaps were immense and at times it felt like we had opened a floodgate. The population of the neighbourhood was increasing considerably and we were still dealing with a deficit of community offerings for the population who was there before the Collingwood Village development that occurred in the 1990s.

Initially our plans for the new facilities (Sarah House, Duke Street and the CNH main facility) were to come on stream at different times, allowing us to manage the growth. Due to design and cost changes, resolution of neighbourhood conflicts, and time to secure funding and negotiate arrangements, we ended up having all three facilities open within four to six months of each other.

We had significant growth in staff from three to 80 and ongoing volunteers from 40 to 400. This did not include the 1,000 people mobilized on the building design and fundraising campaigns. The challenges of managing our growth in overall population and organization size and diversity of services were immense.
In the history of complex and long-standing organizations, there are usually a number of growth cycles. In the case of CNH, there are six distinct and inter-related cycles under two strategic directions:

Each of these cycles overlap as we mostly grew new stories before older ones were saturated. We redirected resources in each cycle to renew the system. We also integrated work between cycles. As one cycle was developed and another one came on stream, there were intentional efforts to create bridges and integration between groups and neighbourhood services/initiatives.

An interactive edition will provide additional information on The Chronological History of Collingwood Neighbourhood House.

**Balancing neighbourhood interests with broader interests.** There was a great deal of interest at the time to develop one-stop integrated centres and we supported this direction. This opportunity was pursued in the Collingwood Village development. However, in the negotiations, which needed to be completed quickly, the neighbourhood was feeling that some city-wide and public services were not compatible under the same roof and that the neighbourhood leadership and profile was no longer going to be the flagship. The neighbourhood took the stance that time was not sufficient to resolve these issues and advocated for the site to be designed to accommodate an addition at a later time. This affected relations for a time with the other stakeholders that were primarily larger region-wide service providers from non-profit and government sectors.

The other major challenge resulted in working with the Vancouver Parks and Recreation and the Vancouver School Boards on facility design and operating agreements around an integrated facility. These were first-time agreements in the City of Vancouver and took a lot of discussions and negotiations to find common ground and build trust. At one point, the city and the Parks Board agreed that CNH should manage the recreation component based on meeting integrated needs of residents and the cost effective delivery. The unions opposed this on the grounds that it was contracting out in the parks system. We found ways to overcome this

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opposition through discussion on best interest for the neighbourhood and changing the funding structure to come from the city rather than parks Board.

Union certification was sweeping through the community service sector around the province and Collingwood Neighbourhood House became unionized in 2001. During the unionization, relationships with staff became more formalized. It created initial tension around the volunteer’s role, communications with each other, funding demands and local hiring practices. There was an incredible amount of time spent trying to understand each other and find ways to work together.

Renfrew-Collingwood was a working-class neighbourhood with a strong history of union activism. Many of our Board members were union organizers or members. Philosophically, there was support for unions and their role. On the ground, our different approaches became apparent. Simple things like sitting across from each other to negotiate felt divisive and different than the cooperative social environments we operated in. So much of the conversation was based on larger province-wide agendas and did not hold the same relevance at a local neighbourhood level.

We feared that we would lose much of the ground we had established. Through ongoing dialogue and many sleepless nights, both parties finally signed their first agreement and began to restore relations within this new agreement. Today, we very much value the strong relations we have with the union and continue to improve working conditions. In a recent budget cutback, the union acknowledged the organization’s integrity and commitment to unionized staff by citing the unprecedented action of having the non-unionized staff share the burden of layoffs and wage and benefit rollbacks along with unionized staff as well as the transparency in the process to make these decisions.

Measuring impact. We realized that measuring success in small increments is not sufficient. These developments take time and experimentation, and frustratingly, they were often interfering with systems that measured and provided support in small increments. The current support and subsequent evaluations for services and community development are mostly short term, separate and linear in the measurements of success. From our experience, we need to find more effective ways to show how actions build on one another and develop over time.
"You don’t necessarily measure success in short little increments. For a long time we’d be thinking that we weren’t really doing much, then two or three years later you look back and say, ‘Look at what we’ve done.’" - Rob

How to measure impact is always a struggle and it ultimately affects our sustainability and continued support from the neighbourhood and funders.

"I always thought the biggest challenge we have is to demonstrate the impact. Because you can’t say you know in the 25 years that we have been here what truly that impact has had. What would have happened had the organization not been here? We can tell stories of individuals. And see that Thomas is in grade 12 now and he seems like a pretty well-adapted young man.

"The neighbourhood house has a very solid organic relationship with the community ... That all can change. So one of my biggest fears is that we are still not able to necessarily put the kind of data before a decision maker – a true impact of the organization. Because it was built on subtle relationships between people and the bonds that make people feel safer and better about the neighbourhood. If you stay living here instead of moving out and have a family, you know we have our neighbourhood – all that makes a difference and it’s all hard to capture." - Oscar
SUMMARY FROM CNH’S BECOMING STORY

- **People** involved had an attitude that shared responsibility was an advantage rather than a threat. Taking a shared responsibility approach requires learning to let go so others can come forward.

- **Invest** in coaching, mentoring, and succession planning. This requires an ability to believe in people - their capacities and potential - and to act as a guide and cheerleader.

- **Funders** and supporters invested in the neighbourhood’s proposals to glue different approaches and - in-between - areas together. They invested in sustaining structures that convene and link people and organizations in small-scale geographic areas like neighbourhoods.

- **Support** intercultural learning organizations that use a variety of tools and approaches to encourage curiosity, inquiry, and reflection as well as courage to go to new places. It seeks out stories and experts to help inform direction and decisions and explores new ways of doing things with patience, nimbleness, and flexibility.

- **This** learning organization takes on challenges, uses collective problem solving and negotiation, facilitates conversations and actions, and uses integrative and strategic thinking.

- **Create** impact measurements that recognize long-term and integrated processes of building intercultural relationships.

- **View** change as inevitable and assist people to see opportunities rather than resistance, understanding rather than ignorance, inclusion rather than exclusion.
My Being Story

As I heard the stories of local leaders through this project, I began to see more clearly the influences that are established early in our lives that impact what we are today and how we conduct ourselves. This led me to think about the experiences that impacted my life: growing up in a small town, having parents as teachers, experiencing racism and segregation, and building bridges and exchanges over time.

I was born in 1956 in Regina, Saskatchewan, becoming a member of the Carr family, and joining my mother Jean, father Hugh and sister Michelle. Later we adopted my two brothers, Mike and John.

When I was in elementary school, I found out that my family had changed their name from Dombowsky to Carr due to racist attitudes that inhibited my father from finding work. Certain communities resisted people working in their schools if they came from German or Russian backgrounds.

My family lived in a small town in rural Saskatchewan called Wilcox. It had a population of approximately 100 people. Wilcox is in the middle of the bald prairies and was primarily a farming community until Notre Dame College was established in the early 1930s by Father Athol Murray, lovingly known as “Pere.” He started the college initially to give farm boys an opportunity for an education during the Depression. Pere had a vision to build great citizens in Canada, anchoring them in a good education and strengthening their character through adversity and sports. The school motto is “Luctor et Emergo” meaning Struggle and Emerge. My parents were students at the college and later taught there.

With the establishment of the college, Wilcox was different than typical small towns in Saskatchewan. During the school year, its population would grow to 250 people, primarily young men between ages 14 and 20 from all across Canada. Most people were Caucasian, with a few aboriginal students and later foreign students primarily from China. Back then, I had few friends who came from other cultures.

In my first years, I was educated in a Catholic elementary school while some of my neighbours attended the public school. It is hard to imagine a town so small supporting separate schools based on religious grounds. This was my first experience of segregation. Until I was 12 years old, we were schooled separately and had separate times to skate and curl at our local rink. We shared the same business ser-

I felt totally nurtured, loved, and cared for by everyone in my community.
My parents were some of the people who worked with others to break down these old barriers. As I moved into grade 6, my Catholic friends and I joined the public elementary school. I remember being quite afraid at the time of going to this new environment and after the third day would run home to excitedly tell my parents about the new friends I had found and to share with them all the things we had in common. None of my friends really understood the religious divides that kept us apart, we were just happy to have new friendships and more open access to the town’s meeting places.

Growing up in a small town can be both challenging and rewarding. It is a challenge if you were a private person since most people knew your daily routines and family and business activities. If you stepped outside the box, you risked being ostracized from people in the community.

However, small farming communities are also known for their friendliness and helping nature, which provided a supportive environment in which to grow. Any time people experienced trouble or hardship; there were always people immediately at the door to offer help, support, and positive wishes. We grieved with each other over the loss of loved ones, and celebrated together the birth of children, graduations, marriages, and other major milestones in life.

My parents were kind and giving people. I rarely heard them speak negatively about anyone. They were often the “firsts” to pitch in and help out. They worked hard to build bridges and improvements in our small community. I witnessed these strong giving values in action and was taught the importance of helping others. I was challenged any time I started to stray from putting these values in action.

Child-raising in a small town was not only done by the parents and relatives, the whole town was involved. I remember having neighbours reprimand me when they caught me trying to smoke, treating someone unkindly, or crossing the highway without an adult. I also remember their complete joy when I achieved good grades in school or won a game of softball. I felt totally nurtured, loved, and cared for by everyone in my community.

I was also encouraged to give to others. I started to volunteer early at age 10, collecting money...
for the Red Cross, donating my housekeeping money to people living in poverty, organizing social events and sports teams and creating publications to share community news.

I went to elementary, high school and university in this small and intimate setting. At that time, Notre Dame had a liberal arts program that was affiliated with the University of Ottawa. The 30 students that were enrolled would sit around large tables, surrounded by books, and we learned through dynamic discussions. At the time, it felt like a regular approach to education. It was not until I left that I realized how fortunate and unique my educational experience was. It was in these small rooms that I studied moral and social ethics and theories of the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

At 17, I went on to get another degree from the University of Ottawa in the area of leisure studies and community development. I remember how overwhelmed and isolated I felt moving to a big city. It was at this time that I recognized that the best way to feel at home was to get to know smaller areas and the people in those areas like creating a small town in a big city. I ended up carrying this practice with me as I travelled and lived in other larger metropolis areas.

Throughout school, I worked in community settings offering programs and services for children, youth and families. After graduating, I continued this work initially as the director of a cooperative childcare centre, then as the Executive Director of Big Brothers and finally working with the City of Regina creating greater access to leisure services for marginalized populations. During this time, I was first introduced to travel outside of Canada, with my first trip to Mexico. This was such a life-altering experience that I vowed to seek to travel every opportunity I could. I can proudly say that I have travelled most of the world and grew tremendously with the new things I experienced and the exposure I had to varying cultures and people.

In 1988, I moved to Vancouver. I was drawn by friends and felt completely at home with the multicultural nature of the city. I began to work in community development as the Executive Director of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, a relatively new organization formed three years prior. I was 32 years old.
My Belonging Story

Recently I was at the neighbourhood house and ran into Yoko, a person who I wanted to connect with around a project. That same week we ran into each other three times after not seeing each other for a while. When we finally connected, we reflected on the serendipitous nature of this community: just when you are thinking about someone, they appear; just when you are thinking of some initiative, others show up with the same interest.

It reminded me of my first experience with Collingwood Neighbourhood House. I had been travelling in India and Southeast Asia before I landed in Vancouver to be part of a wedding ceremony of friends from my home town. While in Vancouver, I decided to start looking for work. As I began my job search, I was led to the opportunity at CNH three different times within a week through various new connections. At first, they did not seem to be related. Later I realized that there was a serendipitous force that led me to CNH, a force where a number of people from different places wanted to see it succeed.

I was excited about the position of Executive Director for a number of reasons. First, I felt the warmth, pride and dedication of the Board members who interviewed me and felt that personal connection right away.

Second, it was a job that integrated pieces of my previous work experiences, which at the time felt disjointed and nothing like a typical path to career planning. I started to see the threads of my previous experiences coming together in our conversations of what might be possible. It was an integrative experience for me and left me with an overwhelming feeling of being grounded.

Third, I had always had an interest in community development, mostly coming from growing up in small town, but I had also study it in university. Working within a geographic area felt like I had come home, only on a bigger scale.

Finally, I saw it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Starting something from the ground up and working with such talented people was bound to expand my learning.

I remember when I was offered the job; I agreed to take it but indicated that I could only commit two years because I wanted to continue my education. Marjorie Scarfe, one of the founding members, still teases me about this after my 23 years of work in the neighbourhood. I think I got the best education ever from my community experiences witnessing and influencing changes with a diverse and growing group of people.
experiences witnessing and influencing changes with a diverse and growing group of people.

My first day on the job, I was greeted by Derek Murphy, one of the Board members, and later met with Terry Tayler, the President. They made me feel so welcome. Their passion about their work was infectious. They were so knowledgeable about the neighbourhood and neighbours and also recognized that they still had a lot of work to do to get to know their neighbours better.

I also remember Samia, the Office Manager and a local resident. One day, we were sitting down with our bagged lunches. Her eyes nearly fell out of their sockets when she saw that I had brought a tabbouleh salad for lunch. This was a dish from her own country and she had no idea that other people would enjoy this food. We immediately felt connected and spent years together sharing recipes, food and friendship.

Relationships like these developed in small and organic ways throughout my 23 years in the neighbourhood. I was gifted with a friendly and positive disposition and was also tremendously curious about the people I met. I loved hearing their stories, meeting their families, and watching them in action. These relationships made me feel like I belonged. The more people I met, the more at home I felt.

I am not sure if I was a matchmaker in a previous life, but I know I played this role very naturally in the neighbourhood. As I heard one person tell me their story, it would remind me of someone else’s story or interest so I would introduce them. From this introduction, they would often develop friendships and I would later see them doing things together throughout the neighbourhood. I could see that they both benefited from a relationship with each other.

Within the first month on the job, we moved our location to storefront on Kingsway. I still remember receiving a phone call from Chris Taulu, the chair of the Joyce Street Planning committee. She welcomed me to the neighbourhood and invited me to the next meeting. I knew from CNH President Terry Tayler that this planning committee was one of our organization’s birth parents. This invitation made me feel welcomed.

I remember attending the meeting and as much as I felt honoured to be invited, I had no idea what they were talking about. I had no previous experience in land use planning. I found that every second word was new to me, even though we were sharing the same language and were mostly from European backgrounds.

I was also struck by how spirited the conversations were with the diversity of opinions. There were many people’s opinions that I did not agree with and I wondered how I was going to be able to work with these people and their emotionally charged perspectives.
For a while I limited my time with some of the existing groups, partly to focus my time on outreach and setting up programs, but also to give some space. I needed to feel more secure before I was able to voice my opposing views. I later found others who shared my views, which added to my courage and sense of not feeling so alone. However, I noticed that, as I was hearing other people’s perspectives, I was picking pearls of wisdom from them and incorporating them into my thinking and actions in very organic ways. In reflection, I am not sure I would have created some of the ideas and directions we took if I had not heard these diverse perspectives.

For me, having relations with other service providers was very supportive. We talked the same language and were often addressing similar needs and challenges. One of the first calls I received from outside the neighbourhood was from Steve Boyce, the Executive Director of Kiwassa Neighbourhood House. I was so touched by his outreach. Thankfully, I formed a long term friendship with him where we shared stories and laughter, provided support to each other and created some wonderful work together. These kinds of relationships were developed both within the local neighbourhood and also across the Lower Mainland, primarily with other neighbourhood houses, children services organization and immigrant serving agencies.

When we were challenged with building a new facility, I had little experience in space design. I was thankful to have so many people in the neighbourhood knowledgeable in the area. I considered that my job was to find these talents, bring them together and support the generation of ideas and actions. Working in this way created more of a sense of belonging and contribution and a great learning experience for us all.

My management approach was to be a facilitator, guide, and cheer leader rather than a person that micro managed. I learned these practices early in my childhood from my parents and it fit my personality. I had also learned how to find the gifts in people and often saw them before they recognized them in themselves. I would encourage them to see them, bring them out, and share them with others. This took ongoing support and feedback and people were excited to grow in this type of supportive environment.

I had the great fortune to have the experience of living and travelling in other countries. This helped to open up my thinking to other cultures prior to coming to Collingwood. I am not known for my language abilities but I was like a sponge when it came to integrating cultural practices into my daily life.

These relationships made me feel like I belonged. The more people I met, the more I felt at home.
Food was my first love and I expanded what I ate and how I cooked. I also loved the clothes. There was comfort, colour and flow that drew me to a totally different wardrobe. I started to practice traditional health practices of many cultures and was drawn into the connections these health practitioners made between the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of health. My health literally increased while I worked at CNH. I began to broaden my participation in world cultural activities like movies, theatre, dance, and music and was particularly drawn to the intercultural work that was evolving.

I am so thankful for the wonderful friends and co-workers who so openly shared these new experiences with me.

As I was hearing other people’s perspectives, I was picking pearls of wisdom from them and incorporating them into my thinking and actions in very organic ways.
My Becoming Story

In the earlier years, I learned to be a pioneer with others. Starting things from the grass root was an advantage for us as we did not have to learn to undo old ways. We were in a constant state of exploration, creation, adaptation, and integration. Since we started with little, we could see the seeds of our labour take shape quickly, which motivated and empowered us to do more.

I learned the power of sharing responsibilities. Letting go of pieces or whole areas of work was a gradual and supportive process. It allowed me to take on new areas and encouraged others to come forward and try new areas as well. It instilled in me the commitment to build both personal and community capacity. There were many circumstances when I was encouraged to lead from the front, other times side-by-side, other times from behind and other times by just witnessing. I learned to do this through many different relationships and initiatives that allowed for nimbleness in our collective leadership.

Learning from others was a great gift. I searched for stories to inform our work from the beginning and continued this practice to this day. There were milestones that advanced me hearing stories, which included practicing action research where neighbours talked to neighbours, focusing on the arts, creating a locally based neighbourhood paper, making the film Where Strangers Become Neighbours (with UBC professors Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attili and the UBC students) and, more recently, collecting stories for evaluation and reflection purposes.

As I took on projects with others, the experts were there and if they weren’t I went looking for them. I mostly found them in shared spaces and places in our neighbourhood. One of the areas of reflection I am proud of is that I always remained true to my belief in people and their capabilities. This was how I was raised and the belief became more entrenched as I witnessed and emulated the gift sharing and people reaching for their fullest potential.

The sense of belonging that I felt within the organization and neighbourhood was also felt in bigger structures. I worked with civil society organizations in service delivery and commu-
Community development. My closest relationships were with other neighbourhood houses. Together, we were able to influence policy and practices as we advocated for positive social changes. This required relationship building with politicians and staff at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. There were many times I butted heads with them; however, it is a point of pride that I kept these friendships and relationships intact. These strong and varied relationships continue to feed my spirit to this day.

The dynamic work that happens in communities requires a great deal of strategic thinking. Much of this happens on a day-to-day basis and supporting people through these processes helped me to increase my skill and also build this capacity with others. One of the best practices I adopted was to take time to reflect and celebrate. In our annual planning sessions, I learned how to experiment with all kinds of approaches such as on-site evaluations, open spaces, future searches and scenario planning. I was reminded of my strengths by others, and eventually took time to acknowledge them, with a great deal of humility. I worked on areas that were more challenging to me until I found an approach that worked for both me and the neighbourhood. There were incredible challenges throughout my years of working in Renfrew-Collingwood. I grew considerably by taking these challenges on with others. We began to have a reputation of not shying away from the hard issues. I think this was partly due to having a diversity of perspectives, which opened up thinking. I moved from seeing things as black and white to understanding the grey. Feeling that I was not alone gave me the courage to stretch further and take risks.

This work also required a great deal of patience. I watched people struggle as I did when we framed this work as having immediate results and gratification. At times, we were able to take small steps and see results but, for the most part, our transformation came from taking a long-term view and investment.

Feeling that I was not alone gave me the courage to stretch further and take risks.

In this work there is much interplay that happens between people, approaches and processes. This requires an ability to be in the moment in order to respond to the constant state of flux. There is constant movement between complex and simple approaches, organic and planned processes, appreciative and critical analysis, and static and fluid motions. I learned to have flexibility with a solid spine and I believe this ability increased with long and varied practice.

The workload in this type of work is immense and did require some sacrifices along the way, some professional and some personal. There were times that I felt I could not hear any more new ideas or engage any more people. It felt like
there was no more room. Finding ways to create processing space helped me overcome some of these times but sometimes that did not happen. I know I disappointed some people under these circumstances.

I always tried to find ways to keep myself healthy and to create life-work harmony. Working from my passions and values was fundamental to my happiness. I found that, over the years as paper accountability increased, I became less passionate about the work.

My personal growth was also facilitated by being part of what was happening. I also was blessed with a tremendous Board of Directors who always encouraged my growth and passions. The Board was very supportive in allowing me to explore a more balanced approach to my work. They supported two leaves, one secondment and this fellowship over my 23 years. They encouraged me to increase my capacity through training and trying new things. This support encouraged me to pass this on to other staff and volunteers in the neighbourhood. This, in part, led to developing a culture of capacity building and began to be practiced throughout the organization. People were learning by doing and through the expression of their gifts and talents.

During my times away, I spent a great deal of time in reflection. I am very clear on the things that tap into my passions and that are important for me. In my professional life, I am a community developer and am driven by my relationships with people. This has sustained my spirit and has enabled me to share spiritual growth within the neighbourhood. In my personal life, time with my family and friends is of utmost importance. Having happiness in my work life meant I brought this into all my relations. I always enjoy and cherish time with family and friends. There were moments when this was compromised due to time pressures. On reflection, there were times I was more successful in balancing and putting my energies on important areas of my life and other times I wish I had found better strategies to balance my time. This is a continual inquiry and experiment.

Over the years, I continued to grow and became more experienced in my work. This is my becoming story. My nature and essence has remained throughout; however, I learned more about diversity through my increased exposure and relationships with thousands of unique people. I saw the resiliency of individuals, experienced resiliency myself, and observed how this translated into our approaches around our challenges.

There were many emotional moments. This year was a time of transition, learning who “I am” when I am not the Executive Director of Collingwood Neighbourhood House. As I saw the intercultural strength of my fellow workers and the neighbourhood, new possibilities began to emerge that will form my next career path in civil society work. The research provided me
I am a community developer and am driven by my relationships with people. This has sustained my spirit and has enabled me to share spiritual growth within the neighbourhood.

with expanded knowledge and networks and a thirst to continue my exploration into intercultural neighbourhood development.

One of the greatest challenges, which my colleagues and I grapple with, is how we build sustaining structures that focus on developing relationships between people and support their growth as citizens and a caring society. How do we get out of these short-term mindsets so we can respond to the long-term nature of social development work?

There are some seeds of knowledge from the Renfrew-Collingwood experience that can help in re-creating public policy. This is the next destination for this journey.

How do we get out of these short-term mindsets so we can respond to the long-term nature of social development work?
This summary of lessons from the Renfrew-Collingwood case study is a starting recreation point for conversations in the neighbourhood and elsewhere.

These dialogues could be guided by the following questions:

• What are neighbourhood-focused and place-based advantages and limitations?
• What are the benefits and limitations of intercultural development?
• What are the indicators that tell us we have an intercultural society?
• What are the ability and skill sets for intercultural workers and how do we develop and support these skills and abilities?
• How do we sustain intercultural neighbourhoods? What infrastructure is needed?
• How do we develop the new intercultural citizen?
• What more research needs to be done?
Appendix 1: Products of neighbourhood engagement over 30 years

**Developed New Facilities**
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House with gymnasium and child-care space
- Sarah House Childcare with First Lutheran Church
- Duke Street Childcare
- Collingwood Community Policing Centre
- Evergreen Health Centre
- Vancouver Public Library Renfrew Branch
- Collingwood School
- Housing – Collingwood Village, Eldorado, Boundary Road (pending), First Lutheran, numerous housing coops

**Developed Non-Profit Organizations**
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- Collingwood Community Policing Centre
- Collingwood Business Improvement Association
- Still Moon Arts Society

**Improved or Saved Existing Facilities and Public Spaces**
- Local schools adapted for early learning, school age child care, and other community services
- Carleton School – in partnership with Green Thumb Theatre
- Fire Hall No. 15
- Renfrew Park Community Centre – pool and centre renovation
- Parks – field house improvements and design of Slocan Park, Collingwood Park, Norquay Park, Gaston Park, Falaise Park
Addressed Issues and gaps in services

- More than 200 new services for the local neighbourhood including child care, family support, recreation, and settlement services for immigrants
- Safety
- Addictions and Drug Policy
- Homelessness – Morning Star, Outreach, You Count
- Sex trade – Living in Community demonstration
- Poverty
- Food security

Revitalized Geographic Areas

- Joyce Area – Collingwood Village Development
- Collingwood Business District
- Norquay Centre
- Renfrew Ravine
- Joyce and 29th Avenue Skytrain areas
- Windermere high school and Skytrain community gardens
- Public Art – Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Joyce Street, Skytrain stations, Slocan Park, Renfrew Community Centre, Synata Housing, Collingwood Business District, Renfrew Ravine, Windermere Family of Schools

Coordinated Services and Supports

- Early Childhood Learning and Care Neighbourhood Hub
- Family of Schools – Youth Leadership and Community Champions Model
- Renfrew-Collingwood Recreation Services
- Renfrew-Collingwood Food Security
- Renfrew-Collingwood Community News
- Celebrations – Multiculturalism Week, Collingwood Days, Canada Day, Renfrew
- Ravine Harvest Moon Festival
- Renfrew-Collingwood Leadership Institute
- Keep Renfrew-Collingwood Spectacular community clean-up
- Renfrew-Collingwood Literacy Plan
- Community Assistance for Seniors Independence
Resources

Where Strangers Become Neighbours
by Leonie Sandercock and Giouanii Attili

Film trailer: youtube.com/watch?v=YWzcGXUWsI8
Film excerpts: vimeo.com/18745652 and vimeo.com/18746726

Ideas for Promoting Inclusion

Living Together from Cities of Migration: citiesofmigration.ca/living-together/
The Intercultural City by Phil Wood and Charles Landry. From Charles Landry, Toolkits for Urban Innovators: charleslandry.com/index.php?l=inter
Building Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (BWIN) welcomebc.ca and anh.bc.org/bwin.pnp

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RESOURCES

GROWING AN INTERCULTURAL NEIGHBOURHOOD, GROWING A CIVIL SOCIETY

“The work of Paula Carr and CNH touches every corner of this neighbourhood and every one of us who lives here.”
— Julie, resident

Building on the lessons of local leaders and service providers, Paula Carr describes the journey of intercultural community development and citizen engagement in Vancouver’s Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood. In *Growing an Intercultural Neighbourhood, Growing a Civil Society* she offers real-life examples of how to bring diversity together to create a new spirit and inclusive culture in a neighbourhood.

Carr explains that interculturalism means we focus on building bridges and exchanges between diverse people and encourage them to bring their unique gifts and approaches to creating solutions around common interests. At the heart of this intercultural journey are the stories of the people and service providers within the neighbourhood - inspiring stories of being, belonging, and becoming.

Eight local leaders share their reflections and personal experiences they had as their community changed and they became more exposed to people who were different from themselves. Their lessons are inspiring and help us understand the personal transformation that is required when we embrace the richness of diversity.

Paula Carr weaves her story throughout the paper, sharing her personal process of being, belonging, and becoming as she worked as the Executive Director of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House over a 23-year period. The practical lessons here provide insight to what an intercultural citizen might look like or become.

The development of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House was a catalyst to bring people together, offering an opportunity for neighbours to meet one another and work toward a common goal of creating a caring, well-served, inclusive, and supportive community.

Developmental stories are shared as diverse people came together and co-created approaches, services and meeting places that enriched the community and peoples’ relationships with one another.

Thought-provoking and heart-warming, the stories in *Growing an Intercultural Neighbourhood, Growing a Civil Society* provides a launching pad to encourage intercultural conversations and actions and, ultimately, create pathways toward a new vision for our future and a new society - a vision that embraces the citizen and community activist within all of us.