

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING:  
A ROLE FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES IN  
COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Urban communities are undergoing a period of rapid change prompting concerns about community fragmentation. By building social cohesion and revitalizing civic participation, community development is viewed by many as a remedy to offset the weakening of community ties. This thesis explores how a community agency- based worker might help a fragmented community (re)build itself.

By employing a single case study methodology, this thesis applies community development theories and related concepts to examine how a multicultural neighbourhood in east Vancouver mobilized community action. The case study found that a community capacity building framework, when supplemented with other community development tools, is an effective model for strengthening community leadership and building social connections. The study draws attention to the different kinds of social and cultural capital required to develop neighbourhood solidarity and bridge cultural differences in creating an inclusive community building process.

The community worker was based in a unique form of community agency called a neighbourhood house. By providing resources needed for encouraging leadership and developing social connectedness the neighbourhood house was found to be a key asset for building community capacity. However, the study revealed that a neighbourhood house's participation in community building is constrained by the multiple community roles and relationships that it must maintain to ensure operational funding and a stance of political neutrality in its everyday dealings. The case study concludes with a set of recommendations for basing community development functions in a neighbourhood house.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is a broad perception that communities are becoming increasingly fragmented due to political, economic, and social forces tied to the technological age and economic globalization. To address the multiple challenges faced by contemporary communities there is a need for neighbourhood solidarity. Community development is viewed by community workers and social work academics as a remedy to build social cohesion. Community development holds out the hope for social change by working with community actors to develop leadership and to build community capacity for collective action.

Community development has a long history and takes many forms. The purpose of this thesis is threefold: to show how community development and related concepts are applied in the field, to show how community development and social capital theories inform community development practice, and to identify where practice reveals gaps in community development theory. This thesis case study explores how a community agency-based community worker might help a fragmented community to (re)build itself. The fieldwork for the case study was primarily guided by a community capacity-building framework articulated by Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, and Vidal (2001). The findings show that the framework, when supplemented with additional community development tools, provided an effective template for helping residents strengthen their community organizing work.

The case study examines the formation of a newly formed citizens' group called the South Hill Initiative for Neighbourhood Engagement (SHINE). Local residents initiated

this development in response to local neighbourhood concerns that include: the lack of a shared neighbourhood gathering space, drug-dealing activity, increasing garbage in alleys, and a feeling of decline in the commercial strip. SHINE emerged to address these concerns by nurturing community participation in local improvements and by creating a more positive neighbourhood environment. In examining the formation and campaigning of this organization, this thesis provides an empirical and conceptual understanding of how community capacity building as a practice model can be used to address pressing community issues.



Figure 1: SHINE poster used for publicity at community events

The community worker, who is also the author of this thesis, is the executive director of a local neighbourhood house (NH), who was invited by members of SHINE to work with residents to strengthen their neighbourhood. Considering the challenges and changes

contemporary urban neighbourhoods face, NHs have been identified as having an important role to play in assisting community members to rebuild fragmented communities by increasing their capacity to address social concerns. Because of their traditional community development roots, NHs are a critical resource in building community solidarity. However, little is written from the perspective of an NH-based community worker about the opportunities and limitations related to undertaking that role. This case study explores these issues and, in so doing, enhances the knowledge available for NH-guided community development work

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the purpose of the thesis and states the reasons this area of study is important for the field of social work.

Chapter 2 examines the existing literature exploring community fragmentation as experienced by contemporary urban neighbourhoods. It examines proposed solutions to fragmentation, utilizing concepts of community development and concepts of social capital. The historic role of NHs as leaders in community building is described, and a research question is proposed based on this literature review.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this single case study design. The methods used follow those outlined by Yin (1998). According to Yin, case study methodology is the preferred approach when “how” questions are posed and when the study investigator has little control over events because the subject studied takes place in a real-life context. On the basis of these criteria, an individual case, SHINE, was selected to explore the community development process.



Chapter 4 presents the findings from the case study. The findings are organized according to the community capacity-building framework as described by Chaskin et al. (2001). Guided by this framework, the findings begin with a description of the context of the project and then continue with a description of the results according to four categories: leadership development, organization development, community organizing, and organizational collaborations. As the case study unfolds, additional community development theories and concepts informing the community development practice are referenced.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of key lessons learned from the findings, particularly from the perspective of NH-based community development practice. The utility of the community capacity-building approach and applicability of social capital and cultural capital concepts are discussed. Links between neighbourhood-level capacity building and broader social change are also explored. Finally, the benefits and challenges pertaining to locating community development in an NH are identified.

Chapter 6 presents implications, recommendations, and conclusions of this case study. Based on the lessons gained from the case study, practice implications are identified and recommendations made for community development work based in a locality-based organization such as an NH.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Community in Contemporary Society**

##### **Redefining Community**

Communities are primary places of human socialization, identity formation, and social reproduction. Major social, political, and economic shifts have taken place in Western societies since the 1970s. These changes have had significant impacts on individuals and on the communities that they are part of (Everingham, 2003; Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Ife, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). From a global perspective, these shifts are largely the result of rapid technological development, economic globalization, increased global migration, and the entrenchment of neo-liberal values (Giddens, 1998; Harvey, 1990; Riches, 2002; Teeple, 1995; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). Locally, these shifts lead to reduced economic security and greater racial and ethnic diversity in urban centres, which in turn, Putnam (2000) argues, pose challenges to moral and social order. Consequently, contemporary communities are subject to social fragmentation and decline (Harvey, 1990; Ife, 2002; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). Therefore, understanding shifts in communities is fundamental to developing new discourse and practice in social work (Everingham, 2003; Leonard, 1997; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004).

The concept of community has changed from one of a fixed location and stable identity to a fluid and dynamically constructed entity (Everingham, 2003; Giddens, 1984; Leonard, 1997; Studdert, 2005; Wood & Judikis, 2002; Sin & Yan, 2003; Yan, 2004). Communities can be viewed as socially constructed by the human actors who constitute them (Giddens, 1984; Studdert, 2005; Wood & Judikis, 2002). Each community emerges

from the unique profile of its members, and its members are socially located, in part, by their communities. Previously homogenous communities are challenged to adopt new pluralist identities (Giddens, 1998; Sin & Yan, 2003; Young, 1990; Yan, 2004).

Individuals belong simultaneously to multiple communities, such as places where they work, play, and live; as well as to identities they occupy according to factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Mullaly, 2002; Wood & Judikis, 2002).

Community is therefore understood as an evolving social space that contains multiple differences (Bankhead and Erlich, 2005; Sin & Yan, 2003; Studdert, 2005; Wood & Judikis, 2002; Yan, 2004; Young, 1990). Collective community identity formation is a dialogical process that creates room for uniqueness and commonality at the same time (Hopper, 2003; McBride, 2005; Studdert, 2005). McBride (2005) argues that universality and particularity coexist through the joining of disparate entities rather than a “merger of many into one” (p. 10).

Community is created through personal investment of effort that builds relationships of trust among people (McBride, 2005; Wood & Judikis, 2002). In other words, communal participation creates community and community cannot exist apart from those who create it (McBride, 2005). However, strengthening communal life in the context of constant change, diverse interests, and individual differences is challenging (Leonard, 1997). This challenge must be embraced, because collective structures and human interdependence form the bases of an active and engaged civil society (Leonard, 1997). Community participation through civil society associations has been shown to provide a powerful counterweight to the democratic state’s power (Giddens, 1998). By using their

capacity to influence state policy, these community associations have been able to hold the state accountable to the people whose interests they represent.

### **Civil Society**

The concept of civil society emerged with the development of the liberal state and remains a major theme in political and sociological writing (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Giddens, 1994). The definition of civil society is contested and is conceptualized differently depending on the time and place of its arising. For instance, civil society can be defined as “those intermediate institutions formed between the atomistic lives of individuals and the alienating mega-structures of the state and the market” (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001, p. 19). Edwards and Foley (1998) argue that the idealized division of society with three discreet categories has limited utility for empirical analysis because of boundary difficulties: state, market, and civil society intersect and interrelate. However, the concept of civil society is useful as a model to simplify complex social realities and can be used to delineate a social space set apart from state coercion. As contended by Edwards and Foley (1998), “civil society crystallized projects of social autonomy against the dominant power(s) of that time and place” (p. 125).

A strong civil society, which is viewed as necessary to influence state power, ensures that the economy is regulated and wealth is redistributed to meet social goals (Weil, 2005). A strong civil society is also necessary for citizens to take collective responsibility for social issues (Weil, 2005). Some argue that over reliance on state or market structures for social well-being produces political alienation (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001). Roberts and Ferguson contend that civil society institutions offset alienation by providing a means for citizens to share responsibility for social care with the state. First-hand experience of

sharing social care functions with the state encourages citizens' interest in political and social structures (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001).

Civil society includes social structures that people produce voluntarily to meet their interests (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001; Giddens, 1994; Ife, 2002). These organizations include: third-sector organizations (e.g. non-profit organizations and trade unions), service clubs (e.g. Lions and Rotary), citizen's associations (e.g. parent and resident associations), social movement organizations, social clubs, and sports clubs (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Ife, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Civil society is recognized as a unifying social structure that can bring together private and public interests through the notion of "active citizenship" (Giddens, 1994; McBride, 2005; Murray, 2000; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). Citizen participation can both reproduce and change social conditions and civil society itself (McBride, 2005).

Contemporary interest by these authors in civil society reflects concern over the decline in citizen participation in democratic processes—including participation in political and community associations (McBride, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Growing workplace and domestic demands result in people having less time for involvement in voluntary communal life (Ife, 2002). Putnam contends that a reduction of citizens' participation in community associations is both a symptom and a cause of social decay (Putnam, 2000).

## **Challenges for Rebuilding Community**

### **Complex Social Realities**

Many writers suggest the need to revitalize the local community as a means to engage civil society in finding and sustaining solutions to the problems that plague contemporary

society (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Giddens, 1994; Ife, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Murray, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). Rebuilding communities is a complex task (Hopper, 2003; Roberts & Ferguson, 2001; Studdert, 2005; Weil, 2005). High social differentiation creates conditions that favour individualism and reduces the opportunity to create social cohesion (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001). People must adapt to multiple and sometimes incompatible role demands, an adaptation that encourages individuals to take autonomous action in addressing their unique life circumstances (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001; Studdert, 2005; Wood & Judikis, 2002).

Although role and relationship diversity results in greater personal autonomy, such diversity may lessen the opportunity to forge mutually dependent ties with others (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001). A reparative counterbalance to this form of alienation can be found in civil society institutions. As Roberts and Ferguson (2001) contend, “It is the institutions of civil society that counteract alienation by allowing individuals to be meaningfully connected to and participate in their constructed social surroundings” (p. 19). Social capital (resources associated with social connections) is a concept used to explain how social network bonds strengthen the social fabric (Edwards & Foley, 2001; Everingham, 2003; Murray, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Roberts & Ferguson, 2001). The building of social capital and development of civil society go hand in hand (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Roberts & Ferguson, 2001).

### **Social Capital**

Social and political scientists increasingly view social capital as a key concept for understanding how social networks operate as a source of social cohesion and a means to strengthen civil society through enhancing social networks and organization (Edwards &

Foley, 1998; Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000). Social capital proponents call for a return to more traditional community structures such as social clubs that encourage strong face-to-face associational life (Putnam, 2000). By contrast, critics view social capital as a Trojan Horse disguising a conservative social agenda, claiming social capital reinforces social inequality (Kenny, 2002; Schuller et al., 2000). The concept of social capital is evolving in the context of this debate. Renewed attention given to building strong community connections and civil society engagement also creates an opportunity for remaking a civic space that can address social justice concerns (Arneil, 2006).

The main ideas behind social capital can be traced to the different views of three theorists: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Schuller et al., 2000). French sociologist Bourdieu observed that, in addition to human capital, social and cultural capitals were related to economic success (Halpern, 2005). Furthermore, Bourdieu articulated the positive relationship between social capital and social, economic, and political power (Field, 2003). American sociologist Coleman viewed social capital and human capital as complementary and mutually beneficial, each reinforcing the other (Field, 2003; Schuller et al., 2001). The view of American political scientist Putnam of social capital largely reflects that of Coleman. However, Putnam pays more attention than Coleman to the resources contained in loose ties found in social networks extending beyond the close bonds of church and family (Field, 2003).

In most discussions social capital, human capital and cultural capital are related concepts that provide a means to include non-market factors into economic models used

to explain political and economic behaviours (Edwards & Foley, 1998). Cultural capital refers to symbolic social resources such as norms, values, and knowledge (e.g. scientific, artistic, and religious) that individuals possess (Edwards & Foley, 1998). Whereas human capital refers to skills and attributes that inhere in individuals, social capital refers to relations between individuals and groups in a particular social context (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Schuller et al., 2001). Norton (2000) argues that, because social capital is a function of social networks, one should look beyond the political and economic value of social capital to recognize the social and emotional benefits that it produces.

Social connectivity inherent in social capital makes it an obvious asset for community development. However, all forms of capital are developed and utilized in the community development process. For example, human capital is invested when individuals contribute their labour in the form of skills and abilities to the community transformation process. The development of residents' leadership skills is a primary focus of community capacity building (Chaskin et al., 2001). Similarly, cultural capital identifies culture as a resource that connects and benefits people who share similar cultural backgrounds (Smelser, 1992). In multicultural communities, cultural knowledge can be used to bridge cultural differences to promote inclusive community development processes (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). Cultural capital, such as language skills, reduces barriers to community participation and ensures that diverse interests are represented as communities renew themselves. Culturally inclusive community development fosters norms of reciprocity and trust between diverse community members, which are essential to social cohesion in pluralistic societies (Yan, 2004).



The definition of social capital is inconclusive. Social networks, organization, norms, and values are generally seen as the core ingredients of social capital (Field, 2003; Edwards & Foley, 1998). These ingredients are particularly important to community building and civil society regeneration. Putnam offers his definition: “social capital refers to connections among individual-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam has extensively researched social capital in the US and has concluded that the decline of social capital can be attributed to people spending less time in voluntary community associations and more time engaged in singular pastimes such as watching television (Putnam, 2000). He posits that, by building social capital, communities will return to a healthier state of existence.

Social capital is a relational concept that includes both personal and collective benefits. People benefit individually from involvement in social connections, and the community as a whole benefits from the network of connected people who develop norms of mutual obligation and responsibility for cooperative action. However, the connectivity of social capital depends on the nature of the network. Putnam (2000) categorizes social networks into two major forms. Networks that link different social groups create bridging social capital, whereas those that reinforce close ties within groups sharing similar identities are called bonding social capital. Networks of both kinds help people access and compete for limited resources. In contrast, those who lack network memberships have a more limited ability to get what they want (Putnam, 2000).

Field (2003) suggests that limiting our understanding of social capital to the concept of face-to-face associational life is outmoded; he argues that we should be looking at how

social capital is changing form. Current social capital research demonstrates the role that recent technologies, such as the Internet, have played in forging social ties in the rapidly changing and ephemeral context of contemporary life (Field, 2003).

In summarizing the potential explanatory power of social capital as a concept, Field (2003) contends that “The idea of social capital draws attention to the links between the micro-level of individual experiences and every-day activity and the meso-level of institutions, association and community. Moreover, by defining social connections as a form of capital, the concept points broadly to a set of explanations that can link the micro, meso, and macro-levels together” (p. 7).

Commentators such as Putnam posit social capital as a constructive dynamic in collective organizations or mobilization; however, critics warn there are potential negative outcomes of social capital that should be understood. For example, social capital can be employed in the service of both pro-social and anti-social ends such as gang violence (Edward & Foley, 1998; Field, 2003; O’Neill & Gidengil, 2006). Other critics argue that the conservative current found in communitarian ideals of traditional society run through social capital discourse and must be exposed for debate (Arneil, 2006; Everingham, 2003; Field, 2003; Kenny, 2002; O’Neill & Gidengil, 2006; Schuller et al., 2000). Communitarians adhere to a nostalgic version of community that reflects the values of a more traditional and homogenous society of the past (Everingham, 2003; Yan, 2004). Social capital can be used, in this case, to reinforce community structures that resist integration of diverse interests into the reconstruction of community (Yan, 2004).

A major critique of social capital is its potential for reinforcing social inequality.

Social capital can reinforce systems of domination and work against social equity and justice goals (Field, 2003; Kenny, 2002; O'Neill & Gidengil, 2006; Schuller et al., 2000). Historically, economically disadvantaged groups have not benefited materially from social capital, because they tend to have connections within the same social strata, which lack connections to those who could bring benefits from outside their community (Field, 2003; O'Neill & Gidengil, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Schuller et al., 2000).

O'Neill and Gidengil observe that social capital is divided along gender lines. Research in the United Kingdom shows that males' social capital links them to sources of economic and political power, whereas females' social capital develops largely within social caring networks and does not easily connect women to economic and political power (Lowndes, 2006). This research shows that social capital is mobilized differently by different groups in society (Lowndes, 2006).

A social justice framework is necessary to counteract the tendency for social networks to be self-reinforcing in a manner that strengthens existing inequities (Arneil, 2006; Everingham, 2003; Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Kenny, 2002; Mullaly, 2002; Weil, 2005). Arneil (2006) observes that the renewed focus on community and civic participation is important, but the kind of community we strive to create is equally important:

Justice requires that we pay special attention not only to the number but also the kind of connections we are building both in terms of particular associations and the community as a whole. The real question is not how do we create community, but how do we create just communities, that neither exclude, nor assimilate; nor put a differential cost on women than men; communities that ultimately seek to empower those who have been historically marginalized (p. 39).

Social capital is evolving as a key analytical tool for gauging the health of Western societies (Roberts & Ferguson, 2001). It is a useful concept in the community

development field, because it explains how social networks strengthen bonds within communities and establish ties to needed resources that originate beyond the community's immediate domain (Halpern, 2005). Harvey (1990) argues that there is hope for reversing social fragmentation in a shifting world by supporting small acts of community resistance and development. However, the debate over social capital indicates that even the smallest acts of community resistance/development require vigilance to avoid exclusivity tendencies within social capital creation that would undermine its benefits.

## **Nurturing Community Revitalization**

### **Third Sector Role**

Social capital building and community reconstruction rely on an engaged civil society. Many point to the "third sector," also called the charitable, non-profit or voluntary sector, for leadership in developing community-based structures that encourage community revitalization and civic engagement (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Giddens, 1994; Ife, 2002; Putman, 2000; Yan, 2004). The third sector is composed of many different types of organizations including community services, credit unions, cooperatives, faith groups, and trade unions (Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005; Ife, 2002). In general, third sector community organizations have local governance structures that provide an opportunity for people to exercise collective decision making in the context of diverse interests (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Freire, 1970; Murray, 2000; Yan, 2004). Non-profit agencies and community associations have a long history of fostering social connections that build social capital (Ife, 2002; Yan, 2004). Some argue that the state also has an important role to play in community reconstruction, or specifically, that the state

and third sector formations in civil society need to work together (Giddens, 1994; Hopper, 2003; Leonard, 1997).

Canada has one of the best developed third sectors in the world (Hall et al., 2005). Non-profit associations have been the dominant method in which Canadian civil society has developed alternatives to state- or market-based services (Hall et al., 2005). Whereas non-profit organizations are at arm's length from the state, most non-profits rely heavily on state funding, through grants and contracts, for community service delivery (Hall et al., 2005). Research shows that, on average, 80% of non-profit organization funding in Canada is supplied by the state (Hall et al., 2005). The government funding auspices of third sector organizations affect their capacity to engage in critical social reform (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002; Kenny, 2002; Panet-Raymond & Mayer, 1997). Government funding interferes with the capacity of third sector agencies to connect with communities, because funding blurs the boundaries between state and civil society, making such agencies appear mere extensions of state institutions (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002; Kenny, 2002; Shragge, 2003). However, resistance to state policies by government-funded non-profit agencies could amount to biting the hand that feeds them.

Shragge (2003) explains that the community movement has suffered by community organization's "partnership" with the state. He argues that adopting a professionally controlled service orientation has led to a political dead end. Community agencies now stand between people and the state, playing a mediating role, acting on behalf of the community, with the result that the people's voice is silenced (Shragge, 2003, p. 32). Fabricant and Fisher (2002) argue that social service delivery should be linked with community building, despite the potential contradictions and dilemmas government

funding poses. To be successful in this role integration, community agencies must uncover the obscured state interests and power differences contained in partnerships with the state (Shragge, 2003).

For two reasons I have chosen neighbourhood houses, a specific form of third sector community organization, as the focus for this thesis. First, NHs, which are heavily rooted in the settlement house legacy, have been recognized by many for their long tradition and success as community-building agents (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002; Husock, 1993; Ife, 2002; Koerin, 2003; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). Second, as the executive director of a neighbourhood house, I have witnessed first-hand the community development potential of this type of third sector organization.

### **Neighbourhood Houses as Agents for Community Development**

Since the Industrial Revolution, settlement houses (the original concept behind NHs) have been involved in community building, as a means to help communities adjust to rapid social and economic change. Settlement houses helped to facilitate integration of the social classes in 19th-century England (James, 2001). The first settlement house was established in 1884 at Toynbee Hall in London, England, by a group of Oxford University students. A settlement model for services and participatory research was designed to address the effects of industrialization on people's lives and community, to alter conditions in the urban slums that formed as a result of mass migration from rural villages to cities. The settlement workers lived in the settlement house and befriended local residents as neighbours (James, 2001). The workers encouraged residents to register as members, to give them a stake in the institution; workers rejected the concept of

“client” and referred to participants as “members,” to enhance their self-respect (Husock, 1993; James, 2001).

Members participated in group-oriented services and adult education classes provided at the settlement. The group approach to services was used to build social bonds between people and encourage interdependence. The provision of education was aimed at helping members become involved in changes that would improve their living and working conditions. The settlement workers promoted mutual aid and cooperative self-government organization based on the belief that reciprocity and democracy were essential values to preserve society (James, 2001; Yan, 2004). James also notes that the settlement model encouraged the poor to aspire to middle-class values. The settlement workers did not define their roles to include challenging the social order. Settlement house pioneers believed that human progress is achieved by fostering interdependence and friendship between people “regardless of their age, gender, class, ethnicity and race or their identities” (Yan, 2004, p. 58). Incorporating the great tradition of settlement houses, NHs have been established in many North American cities.

The settlement movement in Canada is based on the English model. In Canada, settlement houses are often referred to as neighbourhood houses: each NH has developed locally based community activities to facilitate social integration of immigrants into established city neighbourhoods (Yan, 2004). Neighbourhood houses have a similar approach to the original settlement houses, although the workers no longer live in the settlement. The settlement house model of community building combined with service provision creates an ideal approach to empowering the socially marginalized (Galper, 1975; Weil, 2005; Yan, 2004). By creating opportunities for participation and education

of community members, community leadership roles continue to be fostered by the NH. For example, a participant who seeks services will be given opportunities for training and volunteer work that may eventually lead to employment in the NH. Neighbourhood houses have retained a culture that emphasizes participation, inclusiveness, reciprocity, and trust. This culture means the organization is more likely to espouse values and practices that promote communal relationships (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002). Thus, NHs are ideally placed to provide community development leadership (Husock, 1993; Ife, 2002; Koerin, 2003; Yan, 2004). Moreover, settlement houses provide a physical space or community focal point with resources, such as staff and volunteers, to anchor community development work (Ife, 2002).

However, unlike their predecessors, today's NHs have increasingly relied on government funding, which has limited their involvement in social reform activities (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002). However, Weil (2005) argues that NHs that strengthen civic participation through community development can effect positive social change with minimal threat to funding relationships. Neighbourhood houses already integrate social justice values into their community work, facilitating their return to a more active role as leaders in a community change movement (Ife, 2002). Principles of social justice form the backbone of values-based community development approaches and are outlined as part of the community change framework.

## **Community Development Theories and Approaches**

### **Overview of Community Development**

Community development is an ongoing process and should not be viewed as an outcome in itself (Delanty, 2003; Hardina, 2002; Ife, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight,



1993; Lotz, 1997). Instead, community development is “the process of establishing, or re-establishing, structures of human community within which new ways of relating, organizing social life and meeting human need become possible” (Ife, 2002, p. 2). Community development is undertaken to strengthen or build social relationships and strengthen structures that have become fragmented (Hopper, 2003; Ife, 2002; Yan, 2004). Community development holds promise in two areas: firstly, as a strategy to empower community members to become active participants in civil society; and secondly, as a means to find creative and locally sustainable solutions to the issues affecting their community (Ife, 2002). Mutual aid and social participation, which characterize community development approaches, have the potential to build social capital through establishing social networks, counteracting the fragmentation of contemporary society by bringing together different people and different interests to achieve a common purpose (Halpern, 2005; Hopper, 2003; Lotz, 1997). The community development process can revitalize existing structures or create new ones. Examples of the kinds of projects that might employ community development include: building new community infrastructure, addressing social conflict, addressing sustainability of local economy, and restoring community participation in local issues (Ife, 2002; Lotz, 1997).

According to Lotz (1997), community development is ultimately a political process that redistributes power and resources. Different community development approaches are informed by different ideological perspectives about power and social change (Shragge, 2003). For example, a “liberal” perspective informs reformist community development strategies that focus action on making incremental changes within the existing systems of power, such as improving access to affordable housing (Shragge, 2003). In contrast, a

“radical” perspective informs community development strategies used by social movements that seek fundamental change in the power relations at the root of social inequality (Shragge, 2003). According to Shragge (2003), most community development practice focuses on localized change goals. He argues that the community movement has lost its critical edge and should make more effort to link to wider social change processes. The use of less abrasive “radical” change strategies makes combining these approaches feasible (Rothman, 1996; Shragge, 2003).

As a values-based practice, community development is associated with perspectives of empowerment and strengths (Hardina, 2002). Empowerment is achieved through developing leadership and decision-making skills in members from disadvantaged groups (Freire, 1970, Hardina, 2002; Ife, 2002). A strengths perspective recognizes that people are their own best experts and assumes that individuals and communities possess capacities and assets needed to create change (Freire, 1970; Hardina, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). These perspectives are found in different fields of community practice. For example, they are applied in the field of community group work in the development of self-directed autonomous groups (Batten, 1967; Goetschius, 1969). These perspectives are also embedded in the transformational approach to adult literacy with oppressed groups, in which critical consciousness and empowerment is stimulated through dialogue that links everyday experiences to oppressive societal structures (Freire, 1970; Lovett, 1975).

Lotz (1997) observes that the community development process has two observable outcomes. The first is to stabilize and calm society through consensus- and cooperation-building approaches. The second outcome is to destabilize society in order to redistribute

power and resources through conflict and protest. Whether engaged in consensus-building or conflict approaches, a fundamental principle of community development process is that the people participating in community development undertake their own agenda which the community development worker does not control (Delanty, 2003; Ife, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Lotz, 1997). The worker must balance the requirement to provide her or his skills and experience without asserting her or his own agenda with the group. Ideally, the worker unites in the people's cause such that the helper and the people being helped are not distinguishable over time (Lotz, 1997).

### **Different Approaches to Community Development**

Rothman articulates three interwoven models for community practice: locality development, social planning/social policy, and social action (Rothman, 1996). Locality development (also referred to by Rothman as community development) focuses on grassroots processes that build relationships and solve problems through consensus-building activities that include local organizations and residents in a geographic area (Rothman, 1996). Social action is task focussed and engages in more conflict-oriented tactics that target members of the power structure to advocate for change (Alinsky, 1971; Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Rothman, 1996). Social planning employs the worker as an expert in community evaluation and problem solving. The planning process results in solutions which are proposed to the community rather than created by the community (Rothman, 1996). Rothman suggests an integrated and flexible approach to working in community which employs the three strategies at different times, depending on the community situation. He further suggests that a "development/action composite" is most consistent with empowerment style grassroots work. He suggests that this composite,

which has a greater emphasis on development, is also employed in neighbourhood-building groups that may swing toward social advocacy methods when a treasured community feature is threatened (Rothman, 1996).

Recognizing the value of integrating all approaches in community practice, the primary emphasis of this thesis is placed on exploring development/action modes, but greater emphasis is placed on locality development. Locality development is the primary model for community-building activity (Rothman, 1996). Locality development is consensus based and brings together different groups and interests in the community to address issues (Chaskin et al., 2001; Hardina, 2002; Ife, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Consensus-based community development is consistent with the neighbourhood house as a community development agent that helps local residents organize and develop leadership from within the community. Moreover, consensus-based strategies are less threatening than conflict-based strategies to community connections and funding relationships upon which the NH depends.

Following similar conceptualizations to those of Rothman (1996), community development scholars have proposed different but mutually informed community development models, of which three are particularly relevant to NH community work: (1) asset-based community development, (2) community capacity building, and (3) social justice community development.

### **Asset-based Community Development**

The asset-based community development approach is outlined in Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) work entitled *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. The authors emphasize asset-

based approaches which are based in evaluating community strengths and assets as opposed to evaluating deficits. The traditional model for dealing with community issues creates dependency on outside social services and state institutions. By contrast, the goal of asset-based community development is to build interdependent community networks that achieve community self-sufficiency with a minimum of outside supports.

Asset-based community development is a participatory and inclusive process which empowers community members to create local solutions to social problems through building relationships (social capital) among different community elements such as businesses, schools, media, libraries, community organizations, and faith-based groups. Asset-rich networks serve local community interests and remain under local community control. Multiple assets exist in every neighbourhood; however, identifying and organizing these assets to address community issues requires grassroots leadership and other community capacities.

### **Community Capacity Building**

Capacity-building processes help to identify and organize the neighbourhood's intrinsic assets (Chaskin et al., 2001; Ife, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Chaskin et al. (2001) outline a conceptual framework for understanding and developing effective community capacity-building strategies in urban neighbourhoods. They define an urban neighbourhood as "a geographically defined sub-area of a city where residents share some degree of spatial proximity and mutual circumstance" (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 1). Community capacity building is linked to asset-based community development through the understanding that most of the community assets that are needed to undertake area improvements already exist in communities.

Community capacity is defined as “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of that community” (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 7). The characteristics of community capacity include: a sense of community connectedness, member commitment to the community, ability to solve problems, and ability to access resources. These characteristics operate through different levels of social agency, including agency at the individual, organizational, and network levels (Chaskin et al., 2001).

Chaskin et al. see an important role for community development workers helping local communities design change strategies and develop organizational structures to support change; however, they advise workers that solutions to the community problems be a resident-driven bottom-up process. Capacity development has two goals. The first is to enhance the agency of local resident and institutional actors. The second goal is to strengthen relationships with actors outside of the local area. Community capacity building may be a long process and can be a challenge to sustain over time (Chaskin et al., 2001).

Chaskin et al. (2001) argue that people gain a stronger voice and have more power when they are involved collectively with a community organization; furthermore, organizations provide a vehicle for long-term sustainability of community efforts as individuals come and go. Organizations also have the capacity to access systems, resources, and opportunities that exist within and outside the neighbourhood and provide practical support to the work of individuals and groups involved. Chaskin et al.'s (2001) research shows that community organizations assist communities through four key

strategies: leadership development, organizational development, community organizing, and interorganizational collaboration.

Community capacity building and asset-based community development models are micro-level change strategies that emphasize locally developed solutions and mechanisms for creating and maintaining community well-being. However, micro-level changes will not address the root causes of community problems resulting from structural issues such as poverty. To address the need for structural social change, macro-level change strategies are necessary. Local grassroots groups may contribute to fundamental changes by connecting to wider coalitions and movements seeking social and political transformation (Chaskin et al., 2001; Shragge, 2003). Community development is by definition a change process; however, a social justice approach to community development is necessary to ensure that the results of change include the interests of marginalized groups.

### **Social Justice Community Development**

As discussed, depending on the power base of the worker and the group involved in the process, there are limitations and possibilities for community development to contribute to fundamental social change (Kenny, 2002). Community development as a process has no predetermined political or social agenda; thus, community development tools can equally serve the interests of established power holders, as they can further the goals of social equality (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Ife, 2002; Kenny, 2002; Ledwith, 2001). If advancing or upholding the goals of social equality is to be part of a grassroots-based community development, values of social justice values must be enshrined in community development practice.

Social justice has no universal meaning. “‘Justice’ is a socially constituted set of beliefs, discourses, and institutionalizations expressive of social relations and contested configurations of power that have everything to do with regulating and ordering material social practices within places for a time” (Harvey, 1996, p. 330). Justice discourses are expressions of social power and reflect the standpoint of the speaker (Harvey, 1996). Harvey argues that every concept of justice contains hidden power relations that must be uncovered to properly understand whose interests are being served.

Most concepts of social justice are distributive in that they are concerned with the fair distribution of goods and services among members of a society (Mullaly, 2002). This approach is embedded in social welfare policies and traditional social work practices that aim to alleviate poverty by redistributing wealth (Mullaly, 2002). Although redistribution is necessary to provide for people’s basic needs, this approach ignores the social structures, processes, and practices that create unequal distribution in the first place (Everingham, 2003; Harvey, 1996; Ledwith, 2001; Weil, 2005; Young, 1990). Access to non-material resources such as rights and opportunities is necessary for oppressed people to experience justice.

Young (1990) outlines a “deliberative” perspective of social justice that addresses the barriers to full social participation faced by oppressed peoples. Mullaly (2002) explains: “Social injustice from this perspective entails not only an unfair distribution of goods and resources, but includes any norm, social condition, social process, or social practice that interferes with or constrains one from fully participating in society, that is, from becoming a full citizen” (p. 35). The deliberative concept of justice draws attention to the



benefits of participation in power-based social relations (such as social networks) in helping people gain access to material resources (Mullaly, 2002).

Ife articulates a social justice model for community development that is consistent with a deliberative notion of social justice. Ife proposes to challenge the oppressive power relations related to gender, race, class, etc. through utilizing a dialogical empowerment model. Transformation of unequal power relations takes place in community development through dialogue between marginalized groups and the dominant group (Freire, 1970; Ledwith, 2001; Sin & Yan, 2003). The existing order is changed through a synthesis of the interests of the different groups (Ife, 2002).

Engaging oppressed groups in community development is challenging, because often these groups have underdeveloped leadership skills and have identified themselves as clients rather than as leaders (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002). Community-based services can be used as a gateway for the leadership development of disadvantaged populations when an empowerment service approach is used (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Ife, 2002). The aim of empowerment-based services is to transform the service participant's role from that of client to that of leader (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002). Empowerment is achieved by including participants in decision-making, collective activities within the organization (such as membership of an advisory committee), and by providing opportunities for leadership skills development (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002).

Ife advocates linking community "needs" statements with "rights" statements to ensure that community development remains directed toward social justice ends. Ife (2002) explains that "One can think of need definition as being the way in which universal rights are defined within specific social, cultural, and political contexts. In this

respect, local definitions of need can be seen, not as dangerous relativism but rather as an extension of the definition of universal human rights” (p. 66). Securing individual and collective rights is achieved by engaging in local community development while utilizing a global perspective (Fisher and Shragge, 2000; Harvey, 1996; Ife, 2002; Ledwith, 2001). Because human rights are contested, the community development worker may need to engage in dialogue with community groups in order to proceed in a manner that affirms human rights (Ife, 2002).

### **Summary**

Contemporary times have brought profound changes to how we conceptualize and experience community life in Western societies. Social, economic, and political shifts have resulted in less stability and more pressure in people’s lives. Contemporary communities are adjusting to the new reality of constant change and population diversity that have replaced the traditional homogeneous and static communities of the past. Many argue that community fragmentation and declining social capital are among the most significant changes that have occurred in the last few decades. People have to attend to multiple demands in the workplace and family and are spending less time in voluntary associations which, many argue, form the base of a strong community and civil society.

Strengthening citizen participation in community associations is an important step toward rejuvenating fragmented communities and restoring collective structures that foster human interdependence and bonds. Neighbourhood houses, and other local community organizations that have a history of developing community leadership from within, have a primary role to play in building grassroots democratic structures that empower citizens to participate in civic life.

Community development is viewed as the best way to build the capacity of community residents to engage with each other and find solutions to issues that affect their community. Community development has a long history and is multidimensional. Consensus-driven, locality community development is recognized as the best way for community agencies, such as NHs, to support community development activities, because the consensus approach is most consistent with other agency priorities. Furthermore, the consensus approach brings different people and interests together to build a common ground and work collaboratively. While recognizing the limitations to consensus-based approaches for fundamental social change, the organizing process creates a space for democratic participation that can lead to political education of members of disadvantaged groups.

Each community has unique challenges to face and unique assets to work with; therefore, the solutions to a community's challenges will be unique. However, the literature suggests that all community development approaches share common values, principles, and processes which guide the community development journey. The social justice framework for community development ensures that the process will be directed toward promoting human rights and broad goals of inclusion and equity for marginalized people. By ensuring an inclusive community process, the negative homogenizing tendency of social capital can be overcome constructing a just community that reflects the interests of all its members.

Taking the existing literature into consideration, the question that this study sets out to answer is "how can a community agency-based community development worker help a fragmented community to (re)build itself?" By examining a single case study, I explore

how community development actions help a grassroots residents' group establish itself and begin efforts to generate and strengthen resources, including social capital, in order to achieve its community-building goals. This question is important, because little research exists that examines the experiences of NH-supported community building in the context of declining contemporary urban neighbourhoods. Community development in today's diverse and rapidly changing urban communities emerges as an important tool for community integration. The findings from this case study provide insight for community development workers in how to facilitate local community members in taking up leadership roles in their community and in learning community development skills and knowledge for their future organizing work. Findings of this study, which are actualized experiences of a group of local residents, shed light on the applicability of the existing body of social capital and community theories and concepts for community practice.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this case study is to show how community development processes and concepts are applied in the field, how theory informs community development practice, and where practice reveals gaps in community development theory. Lessons from the case study may inform the community development practice of NHs and of other social workers working in similar community settings. The case study is based on the first twelve months of a community development process in East Vancouver with the newly formed local residents' group South Hill Initiative for Neighbourhood Engagement (SHINE). The process was a supervised social work field placement that had reflection and instruction built into the process.

### **Research Design**

#### **Rationale for Selecting a Case Study Design**

A single case study design was used to explore how a community worker (the author) facilitates a community building process with a group of east Vancouver residents. The case study design is based on the framework outlined by Yin (1989). Yin defines a case study as “an empirical study that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). Yin asserts, “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 13). The community

development work with SHINE fits these criteria as the study explores “how” community development strategies assist a residents group’s community building efforts; moreover, SHINE emerged from and undertakes activities within the real-life life context of the members’ neighbourhood.

The case study is a valuable tool to explore and better understand the community development process because it allows for holistic inquiry into real-life social events, such as organizational processes, and neighbourhood change (Yin, 1989). The purpose of the case study is to shed light on a particular topic such as a process or program to better understand “why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Yin, 1989, p. 23). Yin categorizes three types of case studies: explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive. The research question in this case is: how can a community agency-based community development worker help a fragmented community to (re)build itself? The “how” question is exploratory in nature establishing this case as an exploratory case study (Yin, 1989).

### **Case Study Framework**

Yin’s framework for designing and analyzing case studies provides a methodological structure to address criticisms of case study research. The primary concern expressed about case studies is that they lack the rigour needed to address investigator bias and ascertain validity and reliability of the findings (Yin, 1989). Case studies are also criticized for providing little basis for generalization of the findings. To address this concern, Yin argues that case studies should be generalized to theoretical propositions rather than to other populations or situations.

Theories were used to generalize the findings in this case. Furthermore, theories provided instructive guidance during the implementation of the community development process. In this case study, exploring theoretical propositions was made possible through the direct application, in the field, of (primarily) three community development models. These models were selected by the community worker after analyzing the requirements for community development in this particular community. The three mutually informed community development approaches include: asset-based community development, community capacity building, and social justice community development.

The following case study design is based on Yin's framework for structuring a case study. Yin articulates five components to case study design: "a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings" (Yin, 1989, p. 29).

Articulating the research question is the first element for the case study design. The research question reflects the investigation's purpose and is at the heart of the study that links to all other aspects of the research design (Maxwell, 1996). The research question in this case is: how can a community agency-based community development worker help a fragmented community to (re)build itself?

The second case study component is determining the study propositions. The proposition "directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study" (Yin, 1989, p. 30). The propositions in this case study are extracted from the theoretical concepts contained in the community development literature. The case study examines the research question through exploring the following three propositions:

1. Community development processes will strengthen the capacity of individual citizens to form a group and to develop democratic processes and structures to enhance the group's capacity to produce social capital;
2. Community development processes will strengthen the capacity of a citizens' group to lead social change activities in their community through acquiring and utilizing community development concepts and tools; and
3. The community development worker's affiliation to a third sector community organization (a neighbourhood house) will strengthen the capacity of the citizens' group to deploy bridging social capital in building advantageous relationships with other community groups and different levels of government.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Identifying the unit of analysis for the case study is the third component of Yin's framework. The unit of study in this case is the community development worker's role and activities in facilitating SHINE's goals. Case study methodology can utilize multiple sources of qualitative data such as participant observation, open-ended survey questions, and documents (Yin, 1989). The following qualitative data sources were used to explore the community development worker's roles and actions:

1. community development worker's activities log and fieldwork supervision notes;
2. direct observations of the SHINE group's processes as noted in the community development worker's log;
3. document review of meeting notes and other documents created by SHINE;
4. SHINE members' responses to an anonymous survey evaluating the community development worker's actions; and



5. SHINE members' evaluation of progress made on their goals.

Linking data to the propositions is the fourth component to Yin's case study design model. The case study data were linked to theoretical propositions to form the foundation for the data analysis. The data were linked to the propositions by coding and grouping the data according to the theoretical propositions by identifying the following:

1. The community development worker's actions and activities used to facilitate citizen group development;
2. The community development worker's actions and activities used to build citizen group capacity for community organizing;
3. SHINE members' activities and actions used to facilitate their community goals;
4. The activities through which the community development worker utilized relationships with other community groups, government, and local institutions to build citizen group capacity to achieve social goals;
5. The advantages and limitations of the community development worker's location as a staff member of a neighbourhood house.

The fifth and final component of Yin's case study design model is establishing criteria for interpreting the study's findings. By reflecting on the theoretical propositions, the investigator can interpret results by showing how they support, challenge, or extend the propositions and related theory. As mentioned, three overlapping community development theories—asset-based community development, community capacity building, and social justice community development—formed the theoretical framework

for guiding the case study and formed the criteria for interpreting the findings of this case study. The findings are organized according to the dominant theory applied in this case: the four community capacity-building strategies identified by Chaskin et al., (2001). Within this organizing framework, the capacity-building theory and other theories are used to interpret the case study findings.

My dual roles as a participant and observer in SHINE demanded I take reflexive actions throughout the study. Reflexivity refers to the recognition that, as the researcher, I have a direct influence on the study (Maxwell, 1996). Self-awareness is an important part of ethical research practice: “reflexivity in qualitative research is usually perceived as a way of ensuring rigour” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). My reflections were captured in a reflective journal completed after weekly meetings with the SHINE group. Furthermore, the case study was a supervised field placement and, as such, I shared my reflections about the case with my field instructor. The field instructor’s questions about my practice deepened my self-analysis about my role.

### **Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability**

According to Yin (1998), case study findings are not considered generalizable, because they lack rigorous standards of validity and reliability. Reliability refers to the accuracy of the research methods. In case study methodology, determining reliability is difficult because standardization of data collection methods is not feasible (Mason, 2002). As mentioned, the findings in this case study were linked to theoretical propositions rather than to other situations, to reduce concerns about reliability and validity (Yin, 1998). Maxwell (1996) defines a validity threat as any possible way the findings might be wrong. An exploratory case study such as the SHINE case is primarily

concerned with threats to construct validity. Construct validity relates to ensuring that the operational measures are correct for the concepts being studied (Yin, 1986). Construct validity can be addressed by utilizing multiple sources of data (Yin, 1989). Multiple sources of data were used in this case study to offset the potential subjective bias of the investigator, which in this case is particularly problematic because she is evaluating her own role.

Researcher bias was addressed by including the perspective of SHINE group participants in addition to the researcher's observations and perceptions. SHINE participants completed a questionnaire (containing open-ended questions organized according to the theoretical propositions) to gather their perspectives about the community development worker's role and activities and their perceptions about their own progress on community building goals. The participants' responses were included in the findings along with the researcher's observations.

### **Summary**

A single case study design is used to explore a community development worker's role and activities used for enhancing community building capacities of a neighbourhood residents' group called SHINE. The theories used to guide the fieldwork in this case study are also used as the criteria upon which the findings of this case are analyzed. Comparing the case study findings to theoretical propositions makes possible the exploration of how these strategies were implemented in the field and with what result for the community. It is also possible to show how the results support, challenge, and expand on the community development theories used. The next chapter explores the findings from this case study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

The case study analysis is based on theoretical criteria contained in three interconnected models of community development: asset-based community development, community capacity building, and, social justice community development. Three theoretical propositions focus the analysis on the community worker's actions and activities used to assist a residents' group, SHINE, with its core group development, its community organizing efforts, and in exploring the impact of a community worker's location in a neighbourhood house on the process. The theories used to direct the community development work are the same ones used to analyze the case study data; thus, the findings show how the case study supports, challenges, and builds upon these theoretical models.

The community capacity framework, as articulated by Chaskin et al. (2001), which is based on the experiences of several actual community building projects, was selected as a primary guide for organizing the fieldwork in the case study. The findings of the case study validate the framework as an effective template for helping a community (re)build itself. However, as a general outline, the framework lacks sufficient information for implementing a capacity-building process. Therefore, the community worker enriched Chaskin et al.'s (2001) framework with additional community development theory and practice information regarding asset-based community development and social justice community development.

The findings of this case study show how a community capacity-building approach (Chaskin et al., 2001; Kretzmann & McKnight 1993; Lee 1986; and Rothman, 1996) helps residents strengthen their local community's organizing work. A major area of interest in this case study is the application of community work from the location of a community-based organization such as an NH. According to Chaskin et al. (2001), the presence of an embedded community organization in the neighbourhood—particularly an NH—will have a positive impact on community capacity. This case study shows that South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH) was a valuable community asset; however, the capacity-building theory did not articulate well the complexity of locating community development in this type of non-profit organization. Organizations such as SVNH exist within a complex web of community relations. The findings in this case illuminate both the challenges and the opportunities that this web of relations may bring to the capacity-building effort.

The information in the findings is structured according to four capacity-building strategies as outlined by Chaskin et al. (2001): leadership development, organizational development, community organizing, and organizational collaboration. These strategies are the same as those used to organize the community worker's activities during the case study fieldwork. Capacity building is a context-driven process. Therefore, in each of the four sections I describe the nature of the capacity-building strategy as well as the local conditions which informed my actions as the community worker. Prior to outlining how the capacity-building strategies were applied, I provide background information about the South Hill neighbourhood and the process behind the initiation of the community development effort.

## **Background**

### **Local Context**

The South Hill neighbourhood is situated in southeast Vancouver and is part of a larger city area referred to as Sunset. South Hill describes the commercial strip and surrounding residential area covering about twelve city blocks south of 40th Avenue. The area is located along Fraser Street, a secondary arterial road that forms part of the north-south transit corridor of the city. The South Hill commercial area is congested with traffic, causing problems for pedestrians. Degradation of the shopping area, including unkempt or empty shops and garbage, is a major concern for the community.

The neighbourhood is primarily a residential area with modest, aging single-family homes. There is no capacity to house people who need assisted living, or accommodation for physical disabilities. Lack of green space is also a community concern. The area has lower than average city park space, and the parks that exist need equipment upgrades to make them more usable. The area has an above city average crime rate, the violent crime rate being the fifth highest of the city's 22 local areas. Prostitution, drug dealing, and property crimes are major concerns for area residents.

Sunset has a diverse population with a variety of ethnic groups and income levels. The population has an almost equal proportion of English, Chinese, and Punjabi spoken as mother tongues (City of Vancouver, 2002). The area's ethnic diversity is growing at a faster rate than any other in the city, creating challenges to meet social needs. A broad range of services is located in or near the South Hill area, including a health centre, a library, a community centre, immigrant services, and schools. However, the area lacks seniors' services, family services, and community integration activities such as those

provided by an NH. The SVNH is the closest NH for the area; however, it is located more than 20 blocks away. Although SVNH provides some satellite programs at the local community centre, these services are viewed as inadequate by the local residents.



Figure 2. South Hill residents attend the annual community festival

### **Initiating Community Contact**

There are many ways to initiate community development. Initiation from local residents is, perhaps, the most effective way because of the bottom-up nature of the community development model. In this case, a resident approached me as the SVNH executive director to invite the NH to establish a satellite site serving the South Hill area. The resident and I became acquainted with each other in the context of a community development project sponsored by SVNH, called Neighbourhood Small Grants<sup>1</sup>. She and I discussed possible supports that SVNH could provide her neighbourhood. I asked her if she would consider working with SVNH to address community and resource development issues in South Hill.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood Small Grants Project is funded by The Vancouver Foundation. Small grants of up to \$500 are provided to residents who organize community building projects (Coyne and Associates, 2007).

The resident and I focussed our discussion on the feasibility and sustainability of a community development project in the South Hill area. Out of this discussion came two questions. Firstly, would the SVNH board support the use of agency resources to embark upon a new community development process with a group of local residents? Secondly, would the community members currently engaged in ad hoc community building projects, such as those funded by neighbourhood small grants, be willing to commit to a more comprehensive and planned community building strategy? Both parties agreed to speak to their stakeholders to discuss the possibility of working together.

Although the NH model traditionally includes community development, due to a shortage of resources most capacity-building functions involving residents are offered through volunteer opportunities within the NH operations. Such opportunities include board governance activities and program planning councils, or are provided through specifically funded community programs, such as neighbourhood small grants and self-help/mutual aid programs. This is also the case with SVNH. As a non-profit organization, SVNH is governed by a community board<sup>2</sup> which is responsible for financial stewardship and strategic planning. Therefore, prior to starting a new community development commitment, I was obliged to discuss the project requirements with the board.

In its last strategic planning session, the SVNH board had decided to reactivate its community development functions—a reactivation that is challenging, considering the funding limitations for such work. The South Hill invitation offered an opportunity for the organization to build its own community development capacity. When I raised the

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<sup>2</sup> SVNH is part of a larger umbrella association and is not a legal entity. A community board, rather than a board of directors, provides community governance for the house.



discussion at my board meeting, a board member who lives in South Hill confirmed the need for community development and offered to be the board liaison on this issue and to contact his neighbours to discuss the idea. The SVNH board and the South Hill residents decided to pursue the community development process as partners, with SVNH providing the capacity-building role; however, a source of funding was needed to enable SVNH to provide resources for the process.

### **Working with the Community to Obtain Resources**

SVNH receives very little core funding for non-service operations. The City of Vancouver, through the Neighbourhood Organization Grant, provides a source of funding that can be used for neighbourhood-based community capacity building. The SVNH annual grant was fully allocated in its operational budget; thus, an increase in the grant amount was required to expand community work to include South Hill. To gain the funder's commitment, a meeting was held with City of Vancouver social planning staff, the South Hill board member, and myself to discuss the need for community development resources in South Hill. The social planner informed us that demonstrated community readiness was necessary before additional funds would be approved.

Lee (1986) suggests that community participation be central to all phases of the community development process. Lee claims that participation builds community capacity and empowers the residents to act on their own behalf and to take ownership over decisions affecting them. To that end, the board member's participation at the meeting with the city's social planner enabled the community to speak directly about their own needs to city officials. The next step that was required to move the funding process forward was to build more community participation and demonstrate community

readiness to the city staff. The board member and I created a list of groups and community leaders who could be approached to write a letter of support for the grant application. This effort produced letters from the SVNH board, Fraser Street Business Association, South Vancouver Community Health Society, South Hill Neighbours, Sunset Community Vision Implementation Committee, South Vancouver Crime Prevention Centre, and by the provincial government MLA.

The support letters clearly demonstrated the community's willingness to work together to build their neighbourhood. The funding application and letter-writing campaign was the first achievement for the new capacity-building process. This success signalled to the community that, through working together, community members can make changes for their neighbourhood. The city's social planners recognized community solidarity as an indicator of neighbourhood readiness and approved the funding.

**Deciding who should undertake the capacity-building role.** SVNH is one of the community agencies that serve the South Hill neighbourhood. As a neighbourhood organization it has a responsibility to contribute to the functioning of the community over the long term. Because funding received for community development is minimal, work that supports the community over the long term must be integrated into the roles of existing staff. Alternatively, grant funds could be used to hire a consultant to work with community members as a facilitator on a short-term basis. Rather than using funds available for the South Hill process to contract with a community worker, I proposed to the board that I take on the capacity-building role as a way to gain hands-on experience and learn more about the community development process. I argued that this approach would also build SVNH's capacity to serve the community.

Considering the limited resources available for community work, the opportunity to build the NH capacity to support community development through training its existing staff was recognized by the board as an investment that could help sustain its community development function over the long term. I arranged for this project to fulfil my master of social work fieldwork requirements, so that the community work would be guided and supervised. In addition, SVNH used the City of Vancouver funding to hire an experienced community developer as a mentor,<sup>3</sup> who developed my skills and knowledge as a community worker. Through the mentor's consultation, the project also became a learning opportunity for the community members and the SVNH board.

As guided by community development principles, the community worker nurtured a sense of community ownership among the participants by consistently employing the principle of participatory planning and decision-making during this initial phase. In the next phase of the project, this ownership became apparent when community members took the initiative to organize the first community meeting without assistance. The community and the community worker established a strong relationship by working together to achieve an early capacity-building success—obtaining city funding. Participating in this success also gave the community hands-on experience working together, brought resources into the community and, most importantly, gave community members a sense of their collective power to create change.

### **Leadership Development**

The capacity-building approach tends to focus on four major aspects. The first is how to build leadership capacity. Leadership capacity is important because leaders are the

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<sup>3</sup> Roopchand Seebaran, Professor Emeritus, School of Social Work and Family Studies, University of British Columbia served as the mentor and fieldwork supervisor in this case study.

change agents who “mobilize and catalyze action” (Chaskin, et al., 2001, p. 28). The community’s leadership capacity resides in its residents and in their relationships (Chaskin et al., 2001). In the context of capacity building, leadership development “attempts to engage the participation and commitment of current and potential leaders, provide them with opportunities for building skills, connect them to new information and resources, enlarge their perspective on their community and how it might change, and help them create new relationships” (Chaskin, et al., 2001, p. 27). It is believed that communities function well when local individuals are willing and able to take some responsibility for community well-being by initiating and facilitating actions that support community life (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 30).

### **Identifying Community Leaders**

Identifying community residents to participate in the leadership development process is the first challenge faced by a community worker. Chaskin et al. (2001) suggest that “mapping” the leadership terrain provides a starting point for finding residents who possess leadership abilities, time to volunteer, and have an interest in working on improving the neighbourhood. They also recommend that leaders should be selected among those who have connections in the neighbourhood and a commitment to work for the collective good. In this case, recruiting residents was simplified because the community development process was initiated by local residents active in local community building projects who had connections with other community leaders. By recruiting from the existing leadership pool, the community development process was able to build on the strength of community work already in progress.

To maximize opportunity for network development, the capacity-building approach also recommends that leaders should be selected from a variety of community segments including residents, businesses, institutions, and community organizations. To that end, a group of South Hill representatives had been selectively invited from a variety of groups and organizations (some of which had provided letters of support for the funding application process) to attend an orientation meeting about the development process. These contacts were encouraged to use their personal connections with neighbours to promote the project and encourage people to participate in the meeting. As a result, ten people attended the first meeting. These included individuals who represented other neighbourhood groups such as South Hill Neighbours, the Fraser Street Business Association, the Sunset Vision Implementation Committee, and those who led or participated in neighbourhood building activities such as community gardens. Eight of these people continued as regular members of what would later become a core group of resident leaders.

### **Setting the Tone for Meaningful Participation**

People are attracted to volunteer work in the community because it provides the chance for them to meet people as well as to make a change in the neighbourhood (Chaskin et al., 2001). However, it takes time for a group to develop into a functional entity of people trusting and respecting each other. In the beginning of group development, socializing and informal conversation at meetings may help neighbours make meaningful connections that result in higher social cohesion. These connections benefit them personally and benefit the whole community (Chaskin et al., 2001). To create a welcoming and informal tone the group decided to hold the meeting in a

neighbour's backyard. Socializing and sharing snacks prior to the formal meeting was encouraged and became an important ritual that took place at every subsequent meeting.

Dimock (1987) stresses the importance of a group facilitator taking charge in the forming phase of group development, when group process roles are weak. Therefore, I decided to take an active role in the first meeting to formally connect people and facilitate the discussion. The initial group meeting is the time for the facilitator to model her personal values and skills to the community (Lee, 1986). It is also the time to establish the group climate, guidelines, and purpose (Corey & Corey, 1992). Bearing these points in mind, when planning the first meeting agenda I aimed to achieve five specific goals: (1) to give people the opportunity to socialize and learn about each other; (2) to introduce myself, the SVNH commitment, and the community development process; (3) to learn about what people want to achieve from the community development process; (4) to determine how people want to work with me and each other; and (5) to motivate people's continued participation by determining "next steps."

### **Discovering and Maintaining Residents' Motivation**

Learning from people what they want to achieve from the process provides the community worker with a basis to start the leadership development work from the community's standpoint (Bell, 1995). To accomplish this, the community worker suggested using a round robin exercise to give each individual a turn to express her or his desired outcome for the community development process. The round robin approach ensures equal opportunity for participation and encourages trust-building as group members listen to different interests and points of view (Bell, 1995). The information

collected from this exercise was later proved to be useful for generating the group's collective community vision.

Raising the question of next steps provides space in a meeting for residents to determine leadership activities that would engage their motivation and commitment (Chaskin et al., 2001). Thus, prior to the meeting's end, I raised the question of next steps in order to hand residents control of the community development agenda. In this case, one member suggested that a next step could be to launch the community development process to the wider community at a community festival taking place a few weeks hence. The suggestion was greeted with enthusiasm by everyone.

As a newly formed group, the community members needed assistance to create a plan for a community festival event. In the remainder of the meeting, I facilitated a planning process by helping the residents exchange ideas and decide on activities that would launch the community development process to a wider audience. I suggested that group members contact each other between meetings to develop a name for the community development process that could be used to give the project visibility at the festival. The name South Hill Initiative for Neighbourhood Engagement—SHINE—was subsequently created after several email exchanges. The naming was a valuable group-building exercise that became an immediate source of shared pride and achievement, and the name generated a collective identity for the group.

### **Leadership Development Approaches**

After identifying potential leaders and building group cohesion, the next focus of work is to determine how best to nurture and enhance the leadership. There are different approaches to leadership training that can help leaders become more effective in their

leadership roles. The capacity-building model emphasises that the leadership approach chosen should fit the situation and include a combination of training in an instructional setting and learning through engagement on the job (Chaskin et al., 2001). Both training approaches have pros and cons; however, training on the job is consistent with adult learning needs, and means that people learn while they perform activities that benefit the community (Chaskin et al., 2001). Learning through engagement takes place in the context of structured participation in “policy processes” and in “program work” (Chaskin et al., 2001). Policy process skills include planning, problem-solving, presentation skills, group process, and group oversight. Program work nurtures skills such as community analysis, communications, and public engagement strategies.

In the case of SHINE, the leadership training activities were centred on helping the group to develop and sustain a collective structure, one in which they could develop skills in collaborative problem-solving and develop a unified voice in the community. Learning as a group embodies the learning through engagement strategy by providing residents with opportunities to build skills, connect with new information, and make new relationships in the context of working together (Chaskin, et al., 2001).

The South Hill community leaders were part of a network of friends and neighbours who socialized and worked together on a variety of community building projects. However, they had not established a cohesive group through which they could engage in their work together; thus, a significant proportion of my time as a community worker was spent helping SHINE develop its leadership structure. As a group facilitator, I tried to model meeting facilitation as one way to encourage leadership development. I also offered suggestions and encouragement in one-to-one meetings, by email, and by



telephone, to help group members undertake group process roles such as meeting facilitation and note-taking. Forming a group prepared the residents to develop confidence in group participation, including collaborative decision-making. As the group developed, each member also learned about each other's unique skills and abilities. Members learned about policy processes through working with the community worker to establish SHINE as a new community organization. Learning occurred in the context of their work to create a governance structure, set policies for their work together, and to develop an action plan.

Lamoureux et al. (1989) recommend that community leadership development occur simultaneously through group development and through community organizing activities. In the case of SHINE, the emerging group structure helped the community leaders to coordinate and plan their community organizing work more effectively. Members also gained leadership skills through their program work, which started with learning about community analysis and asset-based community development.

According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), local communities contain most of the assets required to address local issues and needs. The community development process involves identifying the local community assets contained in individuals, groups, and institutions, and building relationships needed to bring those assets into the community development process. Although SHINE members had some community organizing experience, they expressed a desire to learn more about asset-based development processes, particularly in implementing a planned strategy to broaden the scope of their local organizing efforts. To that end, I adopted an instructional role and outlined the principles and practice tools related to asset-based development processes.

Community analysis is required to uncover local community assets and issues. Analysis should remain a constant feature of community work, because the community is constantly changing (Lee, 1986). Thus community analysis skills were important for SHINE to develop and put into practice. I facilitated a discussion about how to apply the asset-based development theory in practice, by exploring ways that the community festival event could be used as an opportunity to learn more about community assets and issues important to their neighbours. After a thorough discussion, the group decided to conduct a simple survey, and have prize draws to attract more people to participate. I also introduced the group to a mapping exercise tool that had residents identify where they live and the places important to them in the neighbourhood.

Preparation for the festival gave SHINE members more opportunity to learn leadership skills. They brainstormed questions for the festival survey and planned for the materials needed for the mapping exercise. Community work requires many small tasks be achieved between meetings and in the lead-up to a community event. The members distributed task responsibilities among them, giving everyone a chance to participate.

At the festival event we encouraged people to fill in the survey and to identify assets in the community that they valued, by placing markers on a large neighbourhood map. We used both activities as tools to draw people into conversation about the neighbourhood and to tell them about the new group called SHINE. Participation at the SHINE festival booth provided members with an opportunity to build relationships and to include a broader cross-section of the community. The survey and mapping tools engaged a range of adults, families, seniors, and youth from a variety of cultural backgrounds, helping SHINE members gain a broader perspective about what matters to their

neighbours. The festival outreach also enabled them to identify and recruit new leaders willing to donate their skills to the development process.



Figure 3: Children draw ‘their neighbourhood’ as a parent completes the survey

### **Evaluating and Celebrating Success**

Evaluation is an important aspect of community work and ideally should be built into the process from the outset (Lee, 1986). Leadership development requires continuous reflection and evaluation to facilitate the learning process. By introducing evaluation tools, residents are given the opportunity to acquire methods that will aid their collective reflection. In this case, I encouraged the group to continuously evaluate their activities by discussing their work at monthly SHINE meetings. Every few months the group underwent a more significant evaluation process by rating their progress on each of the goals. The evaluations also enabled the group to recognize continuous gains and provided an impetus to celebrate achievements. For example, the group held a celebration with a cookie exchange to recognize their first six months of work together. I marked this occasion by acknowledging everyone’s contribution and commitment to SHINE’s development.

After six months of development, I distributed a questionnaire (see Appendix A) for the group to formally evaluate its progress and to assess my role. The questionnaire was optional and anonymous, in order to facilitate free expression. An important outcome of this evaluation was that the group recognized the following: the need to refocus attention on broadening its base of support across diverse population groups, to promote different types of membership in order to attract and sustain the participation of residents with a variety of skills, and to balance its broader community evaluation and planning functions with the impulse to respond to immediate community organizing demands.

Evaluation of the community worker by SHINE members was an important mechanism to demonstrate my accountability to the community. I encouraged continual verbal feedback about my role as I tried different tools and processes in the group. Members offered useful suggestions for how I could work differently to better assist their development. Suggestions included creating more opportunities for learning by reading and discussing materials about community development, using a broader range of creative community development planning exercises, and bringing more attention to the backgrounds and skills of the people in the group. I used the information from the evaluations to modify my role, identify leadership and group development needs, and to help the group adjust its action plan as community issues emerged.

In brief, through deliberate programming and informal relationship building, a group of motivated community leaders committed to volunteer their time as participants in the community development process. Consistent with community development principles, the residents defined and took control of their collective effort. This self-determination can be seen in the following actions by the leaders: 1) they defined the development

process goals, 2) they defined my role as one to facilitate their leadership development and to assist them with community organizing activities, and 3) they implemented community activities that engaged and motivated their interests and skills. The leaders enhanced their skills in the context of their group development and community organizing work. They gained policy skills through group structure development, and they gained program skills by applying an asset-based community development model to their community analysis and relationship building in the community.

### **Organizational Development**

Besides leadership, a functional community needs active community-level structures. Chaskin et al. (2001) state that organizations are key vehicles through which most community capacity takes place:

Strong organizations provide needed goods and services to community residents. They can be important vehicles for solving community problems, and for helping community members find common ground and take action in the service of shared goals. They can be a forum for building leadership and social ties among residents that reinforce a sense of community and commitment to that community. They can function as important links to resources outside the community and as important power bases for representing or advocating the community's interest in the larger environment (p. 61).

Every community has a unique set of community organizations that contributes in different ways to community capacity. They range from informal citizen groups, to legally registered non-profit societies, to local branches of public institutions. All levels of organization are viewed as community assets that can be brought into the service of community development and maintenance (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Chaskin et al. (2001) describe three strategies to foster organizational development: strengthen

existing organizations, help existing organizations take on new roles, and build new organizations (p. 62).

According to the capacity-building approach, the organizational development process begins by analyzing the local community landscape to better understand organizational assets and needs. The South Hill neighbourhood has a variety of community-level structures that individually provide sources of community cohesion; however, none of these groups has taken the role of bringing the different groups together to collaboratively address local development needs. Consequently, the target for organizational development in this case was twofold: to strengthen SVNH capacity to engage community development roles in the South Hill area and to develop SHINE's capacity as a new organization through which grassroots resident leadership and community organizing could be developed and sustained.

### **Strengthening SVNH Capacity**

According to Chaskin et al. (2001), efforts to expand a neighbourhood house's community building role will show positive results for community capacity:

Communities with settlements that have embraced this new (or old) role are now more likely to offer leadership development, services that incorporate participants' views and preferences, and community-wide cultural events that reach deep into different groups of residents, as well as places where public forums can be held or people can meet to address common problems. Community capacity is thus being enhanced by building organizations that are already embedded to some degree in the community and by deliberately trying to add to or strengthen their community-building role. (p. 81)

Neighbourhood houses have historically played a community integration role. In this case, SVNH existed as an organization that could play that role for South Hill. By adding the role of community worker to my role as executive director, I was able to transfer

direct experiences and knowledge through my work with SHINE to inform SVNH organizational development. This information transfer was primarily undertaken at staff and board meetings.

The board governance links between SVNH and SHINE also facilitated SVNH organizational capacity. A SHINE member who is also an SVNH board member facilitated board education through monthly SHINE progress reports. These reports accompanied by the board member's enthusiasm and personal commitment for the process helped motivate the board to learn more about community development. These reports also led to continued support for my role as a community worker and to the board's interest in enhancing the community development part of its mandate.

When an organization changes its role in a community, changes in organization culture, policy, and governance must also change if it is to maximize the benefits of transforming itself (Chaskin et al., 2001). One of my roles as an executive director is to assist the board members with strategic planning and implementing organizational change strategies. As part of the preparation for the annual strategic planning process, I was asked by the board to present background information about community development and to present an audit of SVNH's current community development roles. The planning process was facilitated by a strategic planning consultant who helped the staff and board develop a plan to embed community development principles and practices throughout the organization.

Community development processes that are attached to organizations are more likely to survive and grow over the long term (Chaskin et al., 2001). In this case, the renewed commitment by the board to adopt community development roles helped secure the

organization's relationship with SHINE. As a neighbourhood group that is aligned with the SVNH mission and strategic plan, SHINE can continue to negotiate access to the agency's bank of skills, knowledge, and connections when needed. Furthermore, SVNH relationships with funders, such as the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Foundation, and the United Way, could facilitate community access to grants and other forms of fund development.

### **Challenges Related to SVNH Community Development Role**

By taking on new roles in the community, an organization may face challenges as it forges new ways of working with neighbourhood stakeholders. New relationships between community actors may alter the existing power balance in the neighbourhood (Chaskin et al., 2001). In this case, the multiple accountabilities attached to the different NH roles in South Hill challenged the organization's community development role. The difficulties arose when SHINE decided to draw the media's attention to the unwanted closure of a community centre public swimming pool. I facilitated the media contact by referring the reporter to a SHINE member. My name and title as executive director of SVNH were inadvertently referenced in the article. This reference caused the community centre president to conclude that SVNH was "interfering" in his agency's business—despite the fact that neither I nor SVNH had expressed an opinion in the article. As a consequence, I had to repair the damage to the relationship between SVNH and the community centre.

The community centre conflict highlights the necessity of informing the agency's board about the risks inherent in community development and keeping them informed of issues or problems that arise in the course of this work. As the executive director, I was



obliged to report the conflict to the board because the board members are accountable to the community for the work of the agency. The board meeting discussion about the issue was instructive. The board supported SHINE's entitlement, as a citizen group, to question the decisions of other community agencies—whether or not SVNH shared the group's views on the issue. SHINE's oppositional stance towards the closure of a neighbourhood resource forced the board to consider its multiple community accountabilities. The board was alerted to the threats, as well as to the opportunities, attached to SVNH-supported, resident-driven community development.

As a result of being alerted in this way, the board (and I) recognized the need to consider the agency's broader community mandate when negotiating supportive relationships with community groups such as SHINE. This incident taught us to take greater care in clarifying the arm's-length relationship between SVNH and community groups to whom we provide assistance. A step was taken to define the nature of this relationship by stating, on all promotional materials, "South Vancouver Neighbourhood House provides community development assistance for SHINE." This distinction should help to ensure that SHINE has the freedom to act in the community interest. As one SHINE member observed in the community worker evaluation, "We need to make sure that SHINE can speak on behalf of the community without worrying about the relationship between SVNH and other community agencies."

### **Designing SHINE as a New Community Organization**

In this case, organizational change also occurred in the South Hill neighbourhood. Community capacity building is necessary to create community-level structures and processes that reduce community fragmentation (Ife, 2002). New organizations help to

develop the community's internal infrastructure (Chaskin et al., 2001). The development of SHINE as a community organization was an important step to create a structure that could bring citizens together to achieve community goals. SHINE's organizational development challenge was to transform the residents' way of relating to each other from that of a loosely connected social network of friends and neighbours to a more formal neighbourhood association with defined mission, guidelines, and goals.

In the beginning there was some ambivalence among SHINE members about the necessity to formalize SHINE as an organization. Therefore, to begin SHINE's discussion about structure I had to develop their readiness to move forward. My role in SHINE's development was to provide background information about community organization models and to facilitate the process to help the group members structure themselves. The group was reassured that a structure was not being imposed upon them and that they were in charge of the organizational development process. To further aid the group's readiness, I provided SHINE with background information about the capacity-building role of community-level organizations. SHINE members recognized the value of that role and agreed to undertake the tasks required to build their structure.

The decisions to be made about organizational structure required SHINE members to absorb background information about such things as models for decision-making and governance roles and responsibilities. The group discussions required my facilitation to ensure everyone participated and that consensus was achieved as decisions were made. To make the talks more efficient I created a worksheet that streamlined the process and helped to keep the group focussed. Group members appreciated the facilitation: one group member noted in her community worker evaluation that "She patiently led us

through many discussions regarding mission statement etc. and ensured we understood each other and agreed to core principles. She encouraged and ensured participation from all members.”

The development of an organization is also signified by individual member’s self-definition of roles and areas of responsibility. Some members consistently offered to take care of group meeting related processes, whereas others were more comfortable to organize tasks between meetings. Between-meeting tasks became an important opportunity for the less verbal members of the group to participate more equally in SHINE’s development. After several months of development, the group decided to formally recognize these different preferences by naming two types of membership: the core meeting members and community task members.

Recognizing and affirming members’ different skills and abilities builds confidence in the capacity of the new organization to make meaningful change in the community. This confidence is needed to sustain members’ interest in participation (Chaskin et al., 2001). To build the group’s confidence, I presented and discussed a checklist of characteristics needed for successful community building contained in Mattessich and Monsey’s (1997) *Community Building: What Makes it Work. A Review of Factors Influencing Successful Community Building*. To help the group members recognize each other’s skills and capacities, the group created a skills inventory. The members identified that, within their group, they possessed most capacities needed for the organization to be successful. They identified the missing skills and brainstormed the names of neighbourhood individuals or groups who could potentially supply those skills when needed.

After four meetings, the group successfully defined a structure for SHINE. The information from the various discussions was consolidated into a “charter” document which contains the group’s mission statement, membership parameters, guiding principles, group roles, approach to group decision-making, and goals and objectives. The group made a commitment to evaluate how the structure was working every three months.

### **Nurturing Diversity in the Organization**

Community development is a social justice process that seeks to create inclusive community structures that empower marginalized citizens (Ife, 2002). It is therefore expected that a community worker will try to understand a community’s profile and maximize inclusion of different population groups in community development processes (Chaskin et al., 2001). The South Hill neighbourhood is a diverse community in age groups, culture, race and socio-economic status. I shared demographic information and initiated a discussion about how to reach out to include different groups in the community development process. This discussion triggered concerns by the members that SHINE not be viewed as an organization that claimed to represent the whole South Hill community. They established a principle that they would be cautious about claims to represent the community. They did not see it as their purpose to speak on behalf of others; however, they embraced the responsibility to try to reflect cultural diversity in neighbourhood improvement plans and include a broad range of residents in community development processes. The group embedded commitments to reflect neighbourhood cultural diversity in their mission, principles, goals, and objectives.

The group brainstormed strategies for increasing community development participation of different population groups in the area. Some strategies agreed to include: expanding the SHINE core group and task group membership, using participatory community analysis methods to expand local involvement and community knowledge, and reaching out to other community groups to build connections and partnerships for community work. During a SHINE meeting, one member—an immigrant herself— noted: “There are many different groups in this community. We need some way to pull the groups together. Perhaps this group could play that role.” The group decided that they would at some point in the future hold a forum to expand the scope of participation in the community work and to envision and plan for community improvements.

### **Encouraging SHINE’s Self-efficacy and Sustainability**

Self-efficacy and sustainability are critical to the survival of an organization. The community worker’s role in organizational development is to incubate the new organization so that the skills and knowledge of its members can be mobilized for self-efficacy from the beginning (Chaskin et al., 2001). The length of time needed to develop a citizen group’s capacity for independence is variable and depends on the individual capacities of group members and the characteristics of the community. The group was informed at the outset of our work together that my role was to assist them with their group development so they could operate independently in the future.

The community worker’s organizational development role changes as the group evolves through different developmental phases (Dimock, 1987). During the initial stage of SHINE’s development I took responsibility for the facilitator role, which enabled the group members to fully participate in discussions about their organization. As group

structures became more defined, my role changed to one of coaching and supporting other members to practice new roles and take responsibility for the group. This leadership development not only builds group capacity for self-determination, but it is also a significant motivator that sustains members' participation (Chaskin et al., 2001).

Chaskin et al. (2001) suggest that two tasks are needed to sustain the involvement of citizens in the capacity-building effort: "The first is to maintain the active participation of the 'core' group of residents once they have been identified and recruited. The second is to maintain contact with adequate numbers of community residents so that the actions of the effort are seen as legitimately grounded in community priorities and so that people who leave the core group can be replaced" (p. 118). Thus, continuously identifying residents who may be willing to participate and inviting them to contribute to activities is a valuable strategy to build and sustain membership in the core group. People who start participation on the periphery may one day be willing to make a greater commitment (Chaskin et al., 2001).

In this case, after SHINE members completed eight months of organizational development work, two members announced that they would be leaving the meeting group to focus more on the task side of SHINE work. This announcement triggered a discussion about how to sustain the core meeting group membership over the long term. Recruitment of new core group members was facilitated by the list of community members gathered at community events, which served as a bank for new members. The list was distributed to SHINE members to invite community members to a SHINE orientation meeting. By the end of that meeting, four new people decided to join the

SHINE meeting group and three others offered to help with specific tasks that needed to be done.

In sum, building self-sustaining community organizations is a key component of community capacity building. My dual role as community worker and executive director facilitated the growth of both SVNH and SHINE in tandem. Over several months SVNH, as an embedded neighbourhood organization, gained capacity to support South Hill's development. In turn, this capacity helped the NH reinvigorate its traditional community development role. Challenges experienced because of the dual roles were successfully integrated as a learning experience that informed SVNH and SHINE's organizational development. As a result of these challenges, the roles of each entity were more clearly defined.

Through the collaborative effort of a community worker from an NH with local residents, SHINE has gradually evolved as a new community organization. Its members defined a collective purpose and established a new citizens' organization for South Hill. The members have developed the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to sustain themselves a core group of community leaders. The organization designed community outreach strategies to work toward greater reflection of community diversity in SHINE's membership. SHINE provides a community-level structure for building and sustaining leadership skills, establishing collaborative relationships with other groups, and providing a forum for residents to organize themselves to achieve community goals.

### **Community Organizing**

The objective of developing the competencies of people and organizations is to build capacity for advancing collective aims (Chaskin et al., 2001). Such efforts are part of a

community organizing process which Chaskin et al. (2001) define as “the process of bringing people together to solve community problems and address collective goals” (p. 93). These goals may be targeted toward neighbourhood-level change or toward change that extends beyond the local to include such efforts as institutional reform. Different types of community organizing produce different types of outcomes (Chaskin et al., 2001) as follows:

Bringing residents together for collective action may produce normative outcomes, such as a sense of community or more effective socialization of young people. Organizing may enhance the social capital of individuals by increasing and strengthening relations among neighbours and by developing trust and recognition of mutual interests. Residents may be organized to seek improvement in the delivery of goods and services, such as policing or sanitation, and this may entail gaining greater influence and access to resources outside of the community (p. 93).

Community organizing constitutes a range of activities that build community capacity. These activities are located along a *continuum* between conflict-based and consensus-based approaches (Rothman, 1996). The activities chosen by SHINE incorporated both consensus- and conflict-oriented strategies. Two equally important community organizing efforts were undertaken based on the following change priorities: 1) South Hill community lacks social cohesion, so the group focussed its organizing on community building strategies that strengthen social capital; 2) the area lacks profile in the larger city environment; thus, the group engaged in political advocacy to draw city officials’ attention to local issues.

### **Communication and Outreach to Build Connections**

Community capacity can be generated by a small group of dedicated citizens; however, to achieve community goals, groups need to broaden their communication with



the wider community and engage larger numbers of people and organizational networks (Chaskin et al., 2001). A primary community development objective was to enhance SHINE's ability to make wider neighbourhood connections. These connections can be used to mobilize participation as well as to exchange information with residents about what is happening in the neighbourhood. To facilitate these connections, communication tools needed to be developed. Ideally, communications should be integrated as part of the overall community development process rather than as an add-on (Mattessich & Monsey, 1997). Communication and outreach are particularly important in reaching out to the socially isolated (Chaskin et al., 2001).

A planning session with SHINE helped the group explore ideas for outreach and communication. The members summarized messages from their "charter" to create a one-page flyer that contained SHINE's description and email contact information. The flyer was used as a handout to provide background information about SHINE to local residents and to recruit and orient new SHINE participants. Visual promotion tools were also needed to promote SHINE to the wider community. The group decided to create a logo that would provide them with the visual recognition needed to build a public profile. In keeping with the community development principle of utilizing and building on local strengths, the group identified a neighbour with graphic design skills who was willing to donate his time to design an image that fit with the SHINE acronym. The logo design was later used to produce a poster board for SHINE promotion at community events.

SHINE's participation at community events provided public visibility and an opportunity to make personal contacts with residents who might not otherwise be included in the capacity-building process. For instance, the community survey and

mapping activities conducted at the community festival provided an opportunity to reach out to residents of different ages and cultural backgrounds. Steps were taken to ensure non-English speaking residents were included in the outreach activities by asking community members, who spoke English in addition to their mother tongue, to help those with language barriers participate in the survey and mapping exercises.

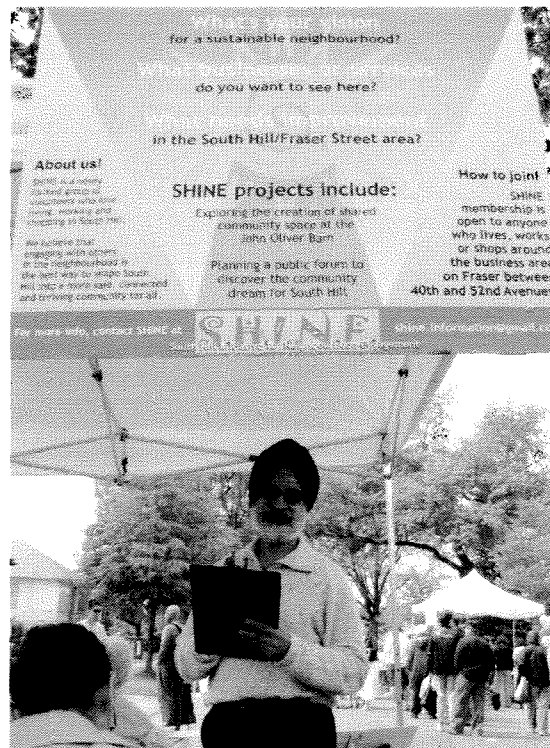


Figure 4: Community member completes the survey at SHINE's booth.

Community activities also helped to broaden SHINE's communication list. For instance, the community survey included a space for people to provide their contact information. This information was organized into an email list that could be used to share community development updates and exchange community information. The survey also identified contacts with community assets not previously known to SHINE members, such as a local historical society and a community-minded church minister. Collecting

information through tools such as the survey was an effective communication strategy that both provided key information to the organizers and increased the number of people aware of the capacity-building activities in the neighbourhood.

A broad base of connections is necessary to build and sustain a community capacity-building effort. SHINE explored ideas that would allow it to reach out and communicate with residents regularly. Communication instruments can also be used as community development tools that extend options for resident participation (Chaskin et al., 2001). One idea the group explored was production of a community newsletter in which residents and groups could share stories and information about community life. The group also planned to establish a website when resources became available to do so.

SHINE's communications strategy is still in its early implementation stage. The group has many ideas, but as is the case with many grassroots community building efforts, lack of resources is a barrier to implementing its ideas. As community development participation builds, and the skills inventory expands, the group's capacity to access resources through community connections will also grow.

### **Discovering and Prioritizing Community Issues**

Alinsky (1971) argued that communities organize more effectively around issues than visions. Community organizations may form around single or multiple issues depending on the mission of the organizations (Chaskin et al., 2001). There are pros and cons to both strategies; however, multiple-issue organizing is usually required for comprehensive community building efforts and as a strategy offers distinct advantages to the community organization. By organizing around multiple issues, collective capacity is continually renewed as different parts of the community get involved with issues they feel passionate

about (Chaskin et al., 2001). Furthermore, because multiple-issue organizations develop relationships with various interest groups, they may have more flexibility than single-issue groups to respond to demographic shifts in the neighbourhood and to changing community issues when they arise (Chaskin et al., 2001). However, multiple-issue groups can be more complex to manage and may require more infrastructure support than a single-issue organization (Chaskin et al., 2001). In this case, with the help of the SVNH infrastructure, SHINE developed as a multiple-issue organization.

SHINE members formed a group because of their collective interest to address community issues. Each member brought different community concerns to the table; however, to gain credibility as a citizens' group acting on behalf of the community, the members had to demonstrate that their actions reflected people's views from the broader population (Chaskin et al., 2001). As noted, SHINE took advantage of the community festival to implement a community survey and mapping exercise to discover issues concerning the community. As a result of these activities, SHINE was able to obtain information from a broad range of neighbours about priority issues.

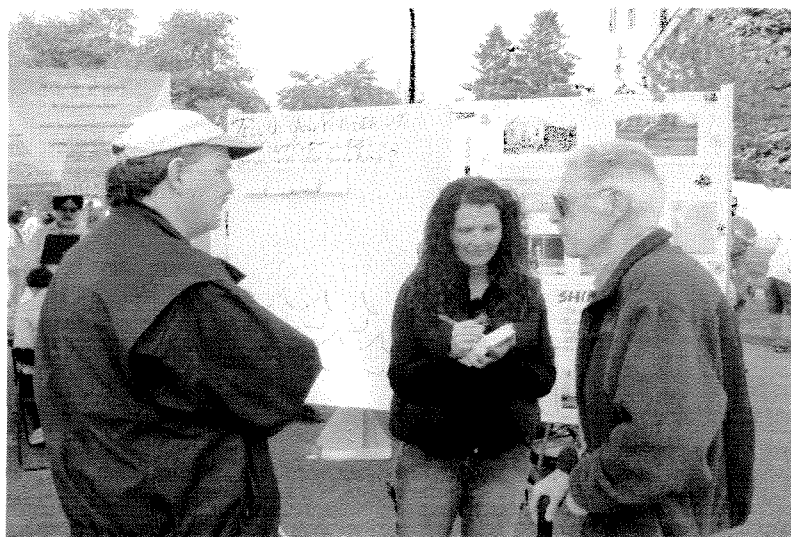


Figure 5. Community members identify Fraser Street issues

The festival survey and mapping data were compiled by a SHINE member who organized the data into pie charts for analysis by the group. The results indicated several community issues of particular concern to residents: community safety, garbage and cleanliness, area beautification, traffic, and need for social amenities. The variety of issues is beyond the group's current capacity. The group therefore evaluated each of these issues and determined which ones were most salient and actionable. Members selected the following priorities as part of their broad goal to strengthen the neighbourhood centre: the need for community amenities, concerns about the closure of a local swimming pool, and concerns related to the commercial area's decline. The group articulated each priority as a measurable objective and planned activities to work toward their achievement. An action plan was created to help organize the work and to facilitate evaluation of progress made on each of the goals.

### **Defining SHINE's Community Organizing Approach**

Rothman (1996) identifies three primary modes of community organizing: social planning, locality development, and social action. He argues that all three modes of organizing can be combined to create positive social change. However, different community organizing tactics generate different responses by important stakeholders. Conflict approaches found in social action have advantages in that the issues are more easily brought to the public's attention; consequently, this tactic is most effective when the organizers want to bring political pressure to bear by mobilizing larger numbers of people and/or through focussing media attention on the issue (Chaskin et al., 2001). However, this approach can impede collective efforts to solve problems (Chaskin et al., 2001). Consensus-building approaches found in locality development are more consistent

with community-building efforts because they attempt to address community problems by building relationships and developing mutual respect (Chaskin et al., 2001).

Consensus building usually involves seeking a compromise solution so that mutual benefits are realized. Cooperation rather than confrontation is promoted.

Cooperative approaches have the advantage of strengthening civic networks; however, when power differences are large and collaboration efforts fail, conflict tactics may be needed. Rothman (1996) observes that community groups such as SHINE are most likely to combine social action and locality development approaches. He identifies this combination of approaches as the development/action composite (p. 80). The strength of this composite, he argues, is that relationships built through development can be called upon to help resolve conflicts that arise. Although a single community group can employ both community organizing approaches, according to Chaskin et al. (2001), groups that use both tactics have a harder time establishing their identity with the public. This identity confusion can threaten the group's capacity to recruit and retain allies who may be attracted to one form of engagement over the other (Chaskin et al., 2001).

SHINE also faced this dilemma. SHINE's mission states a preference for consensus building, emphasizing mutually beneficial relationships and use of dialogue to address community issues. However, members decided to use more conflict-oriented tactics when they addressed the issue of the local swimming pool closure. They made this decision because previous attempts to engage in dialogue with the community centre had failed and they were concerned about the short time available to gain the attention of families who use the pool during the summer season. SHINE quickly organized coverage by a local newspaper to highlight the need for more public consultation by the City Park

Board about the closure. The action was effective in drawing the public's attention to the issue; however, the group was caught off guard by the negative response of the community centre president and was unprepared to deal with the centre's resistance.

This experience provided a good learning opportunity for the group to explore the different approaches to community organizing and to discuss the implications each holds for interorganizational relationships. To apply this knowledge, the group evaluated the pool action and explored an alternative strategy that considered the power dynamics between the community organizations. The group concluded that, as a small community organization with little institutional power, it would need more community support behind it to influence the community centre's decision. To generate more support, the members planned a local communication strategy that would represent both sides of the issue to pool patrons. If sufficient interest was generated through this information strategy, then the group would take further steps such as proposing a public meeting with the community centre president, to look for solutions to the issues raised by the pool closure.

Community leaders must make strategic decisions about the community organizing approach that best suits the situations they face; however, they may also want to consider how those decisions shape the public's perception of their identity. As a way to encourage reflection about SHINE's identity and role in the community, I asked the group how they wanted to be perceived by the public. They imagined how their identity was being constructed by others, based on actions taken so far. Members of the group decided to take a flexible approach. Consistent with Rothman's (1996) articulation of the development/action composite, they decided to focus primarily on developing a

consensus-building identity. However, if collaborative approaches failed they would be prepared to take a more conflict-oriented social action approach. Learning from the pool closure incident, they felt they could manage conflict constructively in the context of enduring community relations.

### **Community Organizing as Political Advocacy**

Whichever approach is used, community organizing inevitably involves political advocacy to influence policy decisions affecting resource allocation. Part of SHINE's early development was centred on gaining capacity as a collective citizens' voice on bigger issues affecting the neighbourhood. These issues included allocation of resources by the city for neighbourhood centre improvements as well as issues related to housing density and commercial rezoning.

SHINE members planned advocacy strategies and took collective action that established SHINE as a citizens' voice for South Hill. One issue in particular indicated the group's capacity for political advocacy. SHINE members were concerned about the city's low priority rating of the Sunset area for the neighbourhood centre improvements program. This program had the potential to create much-needed improvements to the South Hill commercial area. SHINE worked collaboratively with the Sunset Vision Implementation Committee<sup>4</sup> and the Business Association to plan an advocacy strategy to draw the city council's attention to South Hill's need for improvements. With support from each other, the SHINE members wrote letters to send to the mayor and council members on behalf of SHINE. They also divided up the list of councillors and made phone calls to each of them.

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<sup>4</sup> A description of the Sunset Vision process and partnership with SHINE is provided later in this chapter in the section entitled Organizational Collaboration ( subsection: Developing specialized partnerships).



As a result of the advocacy campaign, city councillors responded to the concerns of SHINE members. One councillor (from the ruling party) requested a meeting and tour of the neighbourhood with the residents. In addition to drawing attention to the neighbourhood, the letter-writing exercise helped the group articulate their concerns about the neighbourhood. These actions established SHINE as a legitimate citizens' organization with the capacity to take a community leadership role. Most importantly, they put their neighbourhood on city council's radar screen. The relationships that were developed with city council helps councillors remain accountable to the community and may give South Hill an advantage when the city allocates future resources.

In short, community organizing brings people together to solve problems and achieve collective goals. Practical goals such as learning about community issues, opposing the decision to close a pool, and drawing outside attention to the area's development needs were explicit targets for action. SHINE also achieved normative outcomes for those who participate—such as a sense of community and increased social capital. The public's participation in the SHINE survey at the community festival helped to increase the number of residents interested in getting involved in their community. Participatory research strategies, such as the community survey and community asset mapping, enhanced SHINE's capacity to analyze and use community information to inform their action planning and better reflect the interests of a broader constituency. SHINE members gained the capacity to develop an advocacy strategy that resulted in focussing the attention of city councillors on the South Hill neighbourhood, potentially positioning the area for future city resources.

## **Organizational Collaboration**

The goal of community building lies beyond the reach of any single organization; thus, the creation of collaborative networks is an important aspect of building community capacity (Chaskin et al., 2001). Community capacity is therefore enhanced by building social capital or developing networks of positive relations between organizations and actors within and beyond the neighbourhood (Chaskin et al., 2001). According to Chaskin et al. (2001) these connections “foster a collective capacity for problem solving, resource allocation, and connection to resources beyond the community, as well as particular outcome goals.” (p. 123).

Three strategies are outlined for developing organizational collaborations, as follows: “(1) establishing or supporting broker organizations that can foster and convene partnerships and networks among existing organizations; (2) creating mechanisms of direct, ongoing communication and collective planning and action among organizations; and (3) supporting or engaging in particular partnerships focussed on specific goals and activities” (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 126). These three categories are broad and often coexist, depending on the local environment. In the South Hill case, all three strategies were employed at different times to establish a wider connection in the community. As mentioned, South Hill has many community assets; yet, there is little collaboration among them. Network development was thus a priority activity for this community development process.

### **Utilizing SVNH as a Broker Organization**

Fostering social capital across community organizations builds capacity for collective problem-solving and resource development. One strategy for building collaboration is to

work through a “broker organization” that has the community trust and legitimacy to convene partnership networks (Chaskin et al., 2001). Chaskin et al. (2001) define the term *broker organization* as “a particular kind of intermediary organization that is specifically engaged in mediating, promoting, and nurturing instrumental relationships among organizations in a community, or between them and organizations outside the community” (p. 126). Furthermore, broker organizations are mechanisms with ongoing capacity (acting as a bridge to information and resources) and therefore must be part of the community (Chaskin et al., 2001).

Neighbourhood houses, which have the tradition of nurturing collaborative relationships, are well placed to play this role. In this case, SVNH was already active in the South Hill area and known by businesses and other service providers; therefore, it had legitimacy and trust to fulfill the broker purpose. An advantage to SHINE using SVNH as a broker was that its capacity-building effort could be based on existing community capacity. A further benefit was realized through my capacity as an executive director of SVNH to act as a bridging agent to connect the needs of SHINE’s community development effort with SVNH social capital, particularly with leaders of local community organizations and with centres of municipal power such as civic politicians and city staff. One SHINE member noted the benefits of this affiliation in the community worker evaluation as follows: “Your experience working with many different circles of people (politicians, city staff, multicultural workers, immigrant services...) represents years of work that residents would have to put in just to build the connections and knowledge that you bring to the group. It gives us a huge head start. Having the name of a recognized organization behind the group is also a benefit.”

An effective broker organization has the capacity to act as a bridge to organizations outside the neighbourhood. In this case, connections with the media, at the City of Vancouver, and at the Vancouver School Board were used to gain access to information and resources outside the neighbourhood. A broker organization also acts as a point of contact for information exchange and as a conduit for resources for actors located outside the community. For example, ongoing contact through SVNH with City of Vancouver social planning staff has maintained the city's interest in South Hill's development. This interest will help to position the neighbourhood for further financial resources when needed.

A broker organization can also act as a neutral third party to bring together complementary local organizations to pursue a common interest (Chaskin et al., 2001). They offer this capacity due to their position in the community: "The principle advantages here concern mobilization and influence. Because of its structural position and organizational resources, a broker organization is a potentially effective catalyst for ongoing participation of community organizations for collective deliberation, decision-making, and action"(Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 130). In this case, SVNH played the role of convener to pull organizations together to develop a shared vision for South Hill neighbourhood as part of "the barn" development initiative, described in the next section.

### **Building Partnerships for Collective Action among South Hill Organizations**

According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), communities should ideally minimize the use of outside supports and build an interdependent network of local assets to resolve issues and meet needs. Developing reciprocal interdependent relationships is the key to building and sustaining social networks and is the foundation of asset-based community

development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The South Hill neighbourhood has many assets to build and sustain the community. In addition to local associations and organizations, community branches of public institutions (schools, parks, libraries, etc.) offer a collection of assets such as facilities, materials and equipment, and relationships which can be “captured” for community building (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

In this case, the lack of a shared community facility in which to establish a hub for neighbourhood groups was identified as one of the priority issues that sparked SHINE’s creation. As a potential answer to that need, the Vancouver School Board facilities manager invited the community to consider possible uses for an underutilized local school space, referred to as the barn. SHINE embraced this opportunity and recognized that forming a collaborative network of groups and organizations from different segments of the community would be necessary to achieve this goal. To facilitate this alliance, SVNH acted as a broker to bring together a broader scope of community organizations and local institutions to create a plan for collective use of the barn.

As a first planning step, SHINE developed a list of local groups and agencies which might be interested in working together to develop the barn. SVNH connections were used to invite local leaders to attend a meeting to explore the barn’s development. The meeting was attended by 23 people representing groups such as the local high school, four non-profit organizations, two resident associations (including SHINE), the business association, the community health centre, the community policing centre, and the local library. Representatives from the Vancouver School Board staff and City of Vancouver attended as information resources. The initial exploratory meeting led to a second

meeting of parties that agreed to develop a shared vision for the use of barn space and to participate in the implementation of that vision, should it be approved.

A broker organization is, by virtue of its organizing role, at the centre of a network. Being at the centre brings the responsibility to remain neutral in order to earn the trust of the new assembly (Chaskin et al., 2001). This trust will be established when the broker demonstrates its capacity to act on behalf of the community's interests rather than on behalf of its own interests. To retain legitimacy in this role and remain accountable to the other community groups, the broker must manage community concerns about power and control.

SVNH acted as the broker in this situation; however, SHINE members were the impetus behind the barn project. To promote SHINE's visibility as the citizens' group with the community power behind the process (and to assert SVNH neutrality), I took steps to ensure SHINE's position was communicated to the other community actors. This was undertaken by having SHINE introduce itself at the barn vision meeting and by having a SHINE member co-facilitate the visioning process. By playing this role, SHINE provided a local governance counterpoint to SVNH as they voiced opinions on behalf of neighbourhood residents.

After four months of working to build a shared vision and develop a proposal to utilize the school facility, the Vancouver School Board staff suspended their interest in working with the community in order to undertake a comprehensive review of all school facilities. The decision to undertake the review occurred after considerable time and resources had been spent by the community to engage a wide coalition of community agencies in a community planning process. This decision was a setback for the community members,

who felt frustrated with the change in school board direction and disappointed at losing an opportunity to fulfil their vision for a community gathering space. This setback was turned into an opportunity for reflection, and ultimately a recasting of SHINE's strategy to achieve a community hub. SHINE decided to return to the idea of organizing a community forum as a way to broaden participation in the planning process and explore options in addition to the barn that could lead toward fulfilment of this goal. A project as complex as developing a new neighbourhood gathering space will take years to unfold. In the meantime, the community has established the basis to broaden and strengthen the network of relationships needed to implement a comprehensive community building project such as this.

### **Developing Specialized Partnerships**

Partnerships are often created between community organizations and public institutions to address particular issues (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 141). Partnerships vary in formality and may consist of an informal agreement to share information or may develop through a formal joint-venture agreement (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 141). In this case study, two partnerships with public institutions were formed: 1) the partnership with the Vancouver School Board in the context of the barn development, as discussed; and 2) an informal partnership developed between SHINE and the Sunset Vision Implementation Committee, which is explored in this section. The Sunset vision process is an important one to South Hill's development because it brings into play the social planning/policy function, which is the third pillar of community intervention (along with locality development and social action), as described by Rothman (1996).

The Sunset Vision process is a city-sponsored community planning and development initiative that is part of a Vancouver-wide process referred to as City Plan. City Plan's development mandate sets out to achieve community infrastructure improvements and makes suggestions for how residents can work with the city to improve such things as neighbourhood safety, cleanliness, and beautification (City of Vancouver, 2002). The plan also functions as a policy statement to guide city decisions about resource allocation and land use for the Sunset area. A couple of SHINE members participated in the original Sunset planning process and continue to provide community leadership as part of the Sunset Vision Implementation Committee. These overlapping relationships provide a cooperative link between city plan resources, including factual information and SHINE's grassroots organizing capacities.

The close ties that exist between members of SHINE and the Sunset Vision process have benefits to both parties; however, these ties also have the potential to confuse the public, which may not distinguish SHINE's grassroots base from the Sunset Vision Committee's institutional roots. In a field of multiple community groups, differentiating the roles of the various groups is important in organizing effective community action (Mattessich & Monsey, 1997). I wondered how SHINE distinguished itself from the Sunset Vision process, so I facilitated a discussion to explore this relationship. I identified the risk that the Sunset Vision process and SHINE could be confused in the public's mind. The members discussed how SHINE and the Sunset Vision process could work together and yet remain distinct. The group viewed SHINE as a complementary process that was resident driven as opposed to city driven; furthermore, SHINE allowed the neighbours to focus attention on the South Hill neighbourhood, which is a smaller



area within Sunset. They saw SHINE as unencumbered by the municipal mandate attached to the Sunset Vision process; therefore, SHINE could engage residents in local improvements that may not be part of the Sunset Vision.

The partnership developed between SHINE and the Sunset Vision Committee was reciprocal. SHINE identified resources that the committee could provide, including information about the area, human resources through a city planner, and material resources. Over the course of several months, the vision committee supplied SHINE with access to city printing resources to print their poster board, supply poster-sized maps of the city for community mapping, and print the SHINE survey. The city invited SHINE to share a tent and display stands for the SHINE booth at the community festival. The vision committee recognized that SHINE's connections with the community could benefit the local vision process. For example, information about community issues collected in the SHINE survey was also of value to the vision committee. Furthermore, many of the city-planned infrastructure improvements will need strong community participation—participation that SHINE has the potential to mobilize. Most of these improvements require allocation of resources by the City of Vancouver. By working alongside members of the vision committee, SHINE can help draw attention to the South Hill area's needs—as it demonstrated it could do through the neighbourhood centres political advocacy campaign—and better position the Sunset area as a priority for city resources.



Figure 6. Sunset Visions Committee shares their tent with SHINE

In sum, community capacity is generated through interorganizational networks and partnerships. SVNH gained capacity as a broker organization to facilitate network development and played a bridging role to organizations and individuals inside and outside the neighbourhood. By employing SVNH social capital, the neighbourhood gained access to human and material resources, institutional power, and media contacts. A collective community vision was created during the barn planning meetings, and relationships were forged among residents, community organizations, and institutions. These relationships have established a foundation for collective deliberation and action to address community issues.

### **Summary**

Community development theory posits that community development is a social justice process that deepens democracy by engaging civil society in finding community-based

solutions to social problems and to meeting human needs (Ife, 2002). This case study has shown how a group of committed community residents can work with an NH to harvest the capacities and assets of a local community and facilitate neighbourhood change through a grassroots capacity-building initiative.

The capacity-building framework as described by Chaskin et al. (2001) provides an empirically derived community capacity-building approach. The framework was shown in this case study to provide an effective guide to aid citizens' efforts to organize and sustain their community revitalization work. Chaskin et al. (2001) articulate an amalgam of different community development approaches to arrive at their general framework. However, Chaskin's framework was too broad for meeting the requirements of capacity building in South Hill, necessitating the addition of reference material pertaining to subjects such as group development, community analysis, asset-based community development, and practice principles related to social justice community work.

Based on the findings of this case study, I concur with Chaskin et al.'s contention that community-based organizations are of central importance to building and sustaining community capacity functions such as community-based planning, governance, and decision-making. The neighbourhood house as a community organization embedded in local neighbourhood life was found to have made a significant contribution to building the South Hill community. The organization provided a vehicle for access to all forms of capital development and provided a source of practical support to individuals and groups involved in the community revitalization process.

The findings of this case study also illuminate the challenges related to locating community development in an NH. An NH's contribution to community capacity is

shaped by both constraining and facilitative forces related to its multiple community relationships. The conflict encountered in this case study provided valuable learning experiences about strategies for balancing the demands of multiple relationships with community capacity-building roles.

According to Chaskin et al. (2001), communities with capacity have four characteristics essential to their well-being: a sense of community, commitment to community, problem-solving mechanisms, and access to resources. With the assistance of a community worker, SHINE and SVNH combined forces to develop South Hill's community capacity. The next chapter identifies and explores lessons gained from these case study findings, lessons that can contribute to advancing this promising capacity-building process.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Based on the case study, this chapter discusses the lessons learned with regard to the research question, “How can a community agency-based community development worker help a fragmented community to (re)build itself?” The case study findings illuminate the applicability and shortcomings of current community development and social capital theories. Based on the experience of a community worker from an NH, the findings also raise questions of the feasibility of expanding community development roles provided through an NH.

First I discuss the utility of a community capacity-building framework (Chaskin et al., 2001) as a model for strengthening social cohesion. The community capacity- building model provides theoretical guidance for the fieldwork in this study. Like other community development models, the capacity-building framework incorporates the concept of social capital as media and outcome of community building. This study provides useful information for appraising the strengths and limitations of social capital theory as it is applied to community capacity building.

Reflecting on the community development process in this case study, I also examine how micro-level neighbourhood change processes can have an impact on macro-level social justice issues. The findings of this case study suggest that including community empowerment and social justice principles in the community development process advances the goal of achieving social equality. Community capacity building enhances democratic participation and in so doing strengthens civil society’s function as a counterbalance to state power.

Third sector non-profit organizations are identified as important contributors to civil society development. This case study shows that a community worker's social location is an important factor that has a direct impact on the community development process. As the community worker in this case study is located in an NH this case study explores opportunities and challenges that may arise when community development is implemented from within this particular type of community organization.

### **Community Development as a Vehicle to Build Social Cohesion**

Concern about community fragmentation is a central theme in contemporary community discourse. This fragmentation can be linked to a lack of people's participation in community associations (Putnam, 2000). Community development holds potential to build social cohesion by facilitating a community's capacity to forge and engage connections between individuals, organizations, and networks (Chaskin et al., 2001). This case study shows that people's interest in strengthening their community connections remains strong. However, people in communities need assistance to develop and sustain their community organizing and participation roles.

Helping a community build its capacity for self-efficacy is a primary goal of community development (Ife, 2002). Research examining several community capacity-building efforts shows that community building involves at least three levels of social agency: individuals, organizations, and networks (Chaskin et al., 2001). Accordingly, the capacity-building effort in this case study tried to engage and develop all three levels of social agency. These actors were engaged by utilizing the four capacity-building strategies identified by Chaskin et al. (2001), which include: leadership development, organizational development, community organizing, and interorganization collaboration.

Leadership provided by the skills and attributes of individuals can be defined as human capital and is considered a critical component of community capacity (Chaskin et al., 2001). Human capital coexists and interacts with organizational resources (including financial capital) and social capital (connections among social networks) to solve community problems and maintain community well-being. Each form of capital represents an accumulation of community assets that can be drawn upon as required, to facilitate social change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Of these three forms of capital, human capital plays a key role. A neighbourhood's capacity for self-efficacy is facilitated through the human capital of its community leaders (Chaskin et al., 2001). Neighbourhood leadership is most effectively mobilized when organized collectively through grassroots community organizations (Lee, 1986). Organizations such as SHINE build collective power from below by uniting individuals in a common purpose (Lee, 1986). Furthermore, these community structures are fluid and dynamically constructed by the human actors that constitute them, creating a space for community connections to evolve (Giddens, 1984). These connections result in bonds of reciprocity and trust (social capital), which form the base of social cohesion (Putnam, 2000).

Social cohesion is further developed when individual groups such as SHINE join forces with other groups to form a network of associations (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Collective mobilization of different neighbourhood groups is facilitated through developing and utilizing social capital (Chaskin et al., 2001). SHINE members and the community worker collaborated to enhance social capital in the South Hill neighbourhood by creating new networks between individuals, organizations, and

institutions. The following section discusses the ways in which conceptualizations of social capital were applied to the community development work in this case study.

### **How Social Capital Concepts Informed Community Development**

Of the forms of capital discussed, social capital currently dominates the community development discourse. Developing and utilizing social networks—social capital—is a primary goal of community development (Murray, 2000). Social capital theorists argue that developing opportunities for participation in civil society associations will reverse social decline associated with community fragmentation (Putman, 2000). This case study demonstrates that both bonding social capital (networks that reinforce close ties) and bridging social capital (networks that forge links across social groups) can be enhanced by strategically utilizing the connections belonging to key individuals and organizations engaged in the process (Putnam, 2000).

Bonding social capital was evident in the formation and consolidation of SHINE as a group of community leaders. The group members developed close ties to each other through the process of working together. Norms of reciprocity and trust were strengthened between members as they actively supported each other's participation (Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, the relationships that developed among members provided personal benefits and strongly motivated individuals in the group to participate in the community development process. Bonding social capital generated within SHINE was also a source of bridging social capital. As SHINE members got to know each other, they strategically pooled their personal connections to broaden SHINE's social network.

Bridging social capital is dependent on "people or organizations that operate at the points of connection among different networks" (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 21). The more



connections people have, the more power they wield to influence decisions in the community. These linkages serve the community development process by strengthening connections between individuals and among different groups of community assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The dynamic relationship between bonding and bridging social capital had the result of enhancing social cohesion, particularly when members of SHINE reached out to other people in the neighbourhood, creating new connections among individuals living in the community. Likewise, through initiating community building activities, SHINE established new institutional forms of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). In the barn (see p. 80) visioning process and proposal preparation exercise, connections were made not only between SHINE and other residents but among different South Hill organizations and public institutions.

By the virtue of my executive director role, I was a connection point of different networks in the community. Located in a web of organizational relationships, the NH-located community worker served as an active agent in bridging different forms of social capital. By bringing my knowledge as well as my personal and institutional networks to the process, I was able to enhance SHINE's efforts, creating both bonding and bridging social capital. For instance, my connections to networks of community organizations as well as administrative and political networks at the City of Vancouver made it possible to obtain resources for the South Hill development process and to form the collaborative network required to respond quickly to the barn opportunity.

As a conceptual tool, social capital was useful to me as the community worker by building my understanding of how to strengthen social connectivity through enhancing social networks. By forging connections between networks at different levels of society,

the concept of social capital offers an illustration of how to bridge the micro-level needs of community members to the resources of meso-level organizations and macro-level social and political systems. Indeed, community development *is* a process embedded in larger socioeconomic systems. Recognizing and utilizing the interrelatedness of social networks at different levels of social organization can facilitate and expand the availability of community resources which may not be accessible to everyone in the community.

### **Limitations of Social Capital**

Understanding the strategic utilization of social capital is part of the dynamic community development process. However, the case study indicates that the strategic utilization of social capital is limited by its context specificity. Unlike other forms of capital, which can be transferred to different social contexts, social capital's relational properties limit its portability (Edwards & Foley, 1998). As a relational concept, social capital's application is limited to those who have ties with others and share their values (Field, 2003, p. 139). For instance, in this case, the SVNH relationship with the community centre was a productive partnership in one community context and became a source of conflict when that community context changed. The change exposed power dynamics and values differences between SVNH and the community centre that was not apparent in the original context.

Understanding how networks of social capital are constantly reformulated according to the context of changing community power alignments was a phenomenon exposed in this case. To a large extent, in a community development process, social capital is a tool for the redistribution of political power and material resources; consequently, community

participation brings with it the possibility that existing relationships of power will be upset, resulting in conflict. As Foucault (1990) points out power "...must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (p. 92). Power is given shape through institutions and structures and creates a "general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together bringing about redistributions, realignments....and convergences of the force relations" (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). In this study, power exercised by the City Park Board, in their decision to close a local swimming pool, can be viewed as creating a change in the multiplicity of force relations in the South Hill neighbourhood. The decision triggered grassroots opposition that brought about a new convergence of power relations, upsetting the previous relationship alignment.

As an institutional site of power within a web of power relations, SVNH is also part of the South Hill community power struggle. The community worker, through using the power of SVNH media connections, was able to help SHINE strengthen its protest over the closure of the pool. However, in taking this action she triggered a conflict with the SVNH interest of maintaining a partnership with the community centre. In the language of social capital, the pool action threatened the context-defined social capital contained in relations between SVNH and the community centre. Therefore, when SVNH was perceived to be realigning itself with a competing community group, the community centre accused the NH of interfering and breaking the relationship of trust held between them. The community worker learned from this experience that the multiple roles and relationships of an NH may have both an enabling and a constraining effect on the

community development process and must be strategically reformulated according to the community context. An analysis of issues related to location of the community worker in a non-profit organization such as an NH is discussed later in this chapter (see section entitled Benefits and challenges to NH based community development, p. 104).

### **Social Capital and Community Development Strategy**

Community change takes shape through protest and conflict as well as through sharing common goals and values (Everingham, 2003). As Rothman (1996) argues, each community change process takes place in a “complex, contentious, constraining and obdurate environment” (p. 85). Consequently, change strategies will also take different forms, depending on the type of social and/or political interests at play. Rothman (1996) explains that community development, particularly in the form of locality development, is connected to a perspective which seeks social consensus and views relationships between community actors as cooperative and based on shared interests, whereas community development in the form of social action is connected to a perspective that views conflict as a catalyst for change in a field where community actors’ interests compete with each other. In reality the theoretical distinctions between these different perspectives become blurred, and community groups must find ways to combine their different modes of practice by strategically utilizing relationships towards creating positive social change (Rothman, 1996).

Dilemmas for community workers emerge when community groups mix consensus approaches and conflict tactics, because in so doing they are pursuing practices based on opposing value orientations (Rothman, 1996). In this case, both SHINE and SVNH had to grapple with dilemmas related to combining consensus-based locality development and

conflict-based social action approaches. However, there is an advantage to the development/action composite which “weds the means of locality development with the goals of social action” (Rothman, 1996, p. 80). Social capital created through development efforts builds the potential for cooperation between parties such that when a conflict occurs those bonds can be called upon to resolve problems. In this case study, the community worker was able to draw upon her relationship with the community centre president to diffuse the pool closure conflict by explaining that the NH had a capacity-building role with the neighbourhood group and was not, as an NH, opposing the community centre decision. Through this experience she learned that, by better anticipating the response of important stakeholders to social action, these relationships may be utilized as an asset to avoid or resolve conflicts. Furthermore, by emphasising organization neutrality during a community conflict, the NH has the potential to play a mediating role between conflicting parties, bringing them together to find mutually satisfactory solutions.

In brief, social capital was shown to be a valuable concept for understanding how social networks wield power to effect community change. As an asset, the creation and application of social capital is limited according to the community context. Power groupings are in a constant state of flux as relationships are reformulated in the process of responding to different issues. The community worker must navigate her or his way through the web of community relationships, anticipating and working through conflicts as they arise. The community worker must be aware that the strategic use of social capital in conditions of harmony as well as in times of conflict is essential for redistributing political power and material resources in neighbourhood-development processes. The

next section discusses the importance of bridging cultural differences when facilitating social capital development in multicultural neighbourhoods.

### **How Cultural Capital Concepts Informed Community Development**

Social capital, human capital, and financial capital have been shown in this case study to be instrumental in the community development process. When community development takes place in a multicultural neighbourhood, as it did in this case, cultural capital was also shown to be critical for community capacity. Cultural capital is a concept coined by Pierre Bourdieu to conceptualize how socialization processes cultivate a person's cultural outlook (a person's knowledge and attitudes about society), shaping how that person acts in society to reproduce social structures (Smelser, 1992). Building on Bourdieu's concept, culture embedded in language and daily practices can be viewed as a form of capital that people use to pursue valued ends (Dimaggio, 1997, p. 268). In a multicultural environment, the cultural dimension is a significant aspect of the community development process because, as Wood and Judikis (2002) suggest, community is a "process involving social structures and cultural behaviour" (p. 8). Furthermore, demographic shifts in communities resulting in greater cultural and racial diversity may result in fragmented social networks (Giddens, 1998). However, recognizing culture as a resource to facilitate social capital development may work against fragmentation.

Understanding how culture effects and is reproduced through relationships is important knowledge for building community connections. Including different cultural groups in capacity building enriches residents' understanding of community and ensures that the revitalized community reflects a blend of different cultural outlooks. Community

development, at the neighbourhood level, serves a community integration function by focusing neighbours' attention on their shared geographic space, creating opportunities for collective participation that cuts across social and cultural differences. A renewed community identity is created when people with different interests and perspectives come together for a common purpose (McBride, 2005). The challenge for community development in a multicultural context is how to bridge diverse cultures.

Community development methods that bridge cultural differences are fundamental to building social cohesion in complex and rapidly changing communities (Rivera & Erlich (1998). Furthermore, these methods may address concerns that social capital fosters exclusivity—exclusivity that resists the integration of diverse interests (Arneil, 2006). Strategically utilizing cultural capital (in the form of language and cultural knowledge) during capacity building counters network exclusion by developing connections within and between different cultural groups.

Establishing culturally inclusive structures, such as SHINE, creates a civic space for a multicultural community to generate solidarities and reconstitute itself (Giddens, 1998). From the beginning, SHINE recognized the need to include different cultural perspectives and utilize a socially just approach to community building. SHINE's mission statement, principles, and goals identify cultural inclusion and respect for different views as a foundation for their activities. SHINE employed strategies to facilitate cultural inclusion; for example, SHINE nurtured and utilized cultural capital through community outreach during an annual community festival. The festival served as a platform to gain the participation of people from diverse cultural groups in community mapping and survey processes. Community members who spoke English and another language were asked by

the community worker to contribute their language and cultural skills to the process, providing a bridge for people who experienced language and/or cultural barriers to participation.

In sum, community capacity building in a multicultural neighbourhood demands attention be paid to cultural behaviour as a fundamental component of social relations. The concept of cultural capital was shown to be helpful in understanding how social cohesion can be facilitated in a pluralistic community. As an asset, cultural capital is useful in building a community's capacity to bridge cultural differences. Through efforts to build a culturally inclusive process, SHINE could be viewed as contributing to a larger social justice goal of empowering disadvantaged groups in society. The links between community development and social justice are explored in the next section.

### **Community Development as a Vehicle for Social Justice**

Community development processes have the potential to broaden civic engagement and build the participation of disadvantaged groups in democratic processes (Ife, 2002). Based on the findings of this study, can a claim be made that the empowerment of groups at the neighbourhood level advance social justice issues related to social inequality? According to Ife (2002), incorporating a social justice perspective will guide a community development process toward more fundamental social change. A social justice perspective articulates the concept that power operates in society through institutionalized systems of domination and oppression (Mullaly, 2002). For example, sexism, racism, and classism are institutionalized in society, thereby maintaining existing power structures which favour and reproduce the privileged position of dominant groups (Mullaly, 2002). According to this analysis, social inequality, resulting from unequal



distribution of economic resources and decision-making power, is the root cause of social problems. Correcting the power imbalance requires empowerment of the oppressed through social/cultural transformation and political mobilization at the grassroots (Freire, 1970).

According to Freire (1970), human liberation is problematic because the oppressed have internalized the social order that oppresses them. Transforming people's consciousness is a necessary first step to making behavioural changes needed for social transformation. Through a liberating education process, people reflect on their social conditions and discover the cause of their oppression. This "critical consciousness" can only be gained "by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Freire argues that the educator should work with, not for, the oppressed as they struggle to transform society. "Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators" (Freire, 1970, p. 56). However, liberation requires political power. To gain power, the oppressed must organize action that confronts the culture and structure of domination of society (Freire, 1970).

Unequal power relations are reflected at all levels of society, including the neighbourhood level. Realistically, neighbourhood-level community development is limited in finding solutions to root causes of social issues such as poverty, because the locus of change resides outside of the neighbourhood (Shragge, 2003). However,

neighbourhood empowerment can, in a limited way, address distributive justice issues by organizing for improved access to needed resources (Ife, 2002). Moreover, cultivating participation in decision-making processes contributes to social justice by helping the disadvantaged gain capacity to speak for themselves (Young, 2000).

To combat social injustice through social change requires strategic actions guided by realistic goals of change. Rothman (1996) identifies two social change goals: (1) incremental change goals that seek social reforms within the existing societal power structures; and (2) through radical change, goals that seek change through altering existing power arrangements. Rothman (1996) observes that distinguishing between incremental and radical social change is difficult, because incremental changes can have a ripple effect that contributes to fundamental social change over time. Therefore, by combining local grassroots empowerment with the organizing efforts of social movement alliances, social inequality will be more fully addressed (Shragge, 2003).

Grassroots empowerment occurs when individuals pool knowledge, participate in decisions, and take collective action to address conditions affecting their quality of life (Hardina, 2002). Community workers facilitate community empowerment through grassroots organizing that includes raising residents' awareness about the root causes of social problems and helping a community group articulate social justice as part of their purpose (Ife, 2002). In this case study, the social justice values of social inclusion were incorporated into SHINE's mission. SHINE's planned objectives included outreach and membership drives to include the broader community in its decision-making structure and community building activities. SHINE was, in a limited way, addressing social inequality by promoting a socially inclusive neighbourhood project.

Rebalancing power through community development is a long-term change process that requires challenging internalized representations of external power structures and relations from “multiple points of action” (Foucault, 1990). As a locus of action, neighbourhood groups offer the prospect of people exchanging perspectives, gaining critical consciousness, and working together to address oppressive social conditions (Freire, 1970). Including multiple groups of interests in local change processes facilitates a rebalancing of power across the broad pluralistic community (Yan, 2004). In this case study, the existence of multiple perspectives became apparent when a SHINE core group member, who is a recent immigrant, brought to the attention of long-term resident members the struggles faced by newcomers seeking affordable housing. Her newcomer’s perspective provided new insights for the group and, at the end of the meeting, led to a synthesis of different views about housing. Moreover, by sharing her experience with the group, the newcomer became confident of expressing her views in a letter to city council.

This case study revealed challenges to incorporating social justice objectives as part of a neighbourhood group’s actions. For example, SHINE discovered that reducing barriers to broader community participation requires time and resources that the group lacks. In the short term, SHINE succeeded in including diverse groups by drawing on connections and resources provided by the community worker through her relationship with SVNH. However, efforts to mobilize wider participation in community building efforts were limited because SHINE’s attention was continuously drawn toward pressing neighbourhood issues. The community worker encouraged the SHINE members to find a balance between responding to immediate emerging issues (such as responding to a new city rezoning program (see p. 75) and staying focused on achieving objectives connected

to their own planned community change vision (such as organizing a community newsletter). Achieving this balance is difficult, as small neighbourhood groups such as SHINE have limited time and resources to devote to multiple community priorities.

A neighbourhood group's impact on social justice issues is affected by the group's phase of development. This case study encompasses SHINE's formative stage. In addition to community actions, much of the group's time in this early stage of development was focused on defining its structure and purpose. SHINE intends to put more focus on broadening their base of participation in the next phase of development, by implementing communication strategies such as establishing a website and holding a community forum. Having completed SHINE's first phase of development, this dedicated group of residents has established a solid base for civic participation and social change in the South Hill neighbourhood.

By establishing a venue for inclusive community decision-making and grassroots participation in democratic processes, SHINE's group structure can be viewed as a significant step toward achieving social justice objectives (Lee, 1986). Borrowing from Arneil (2006), SHINE is a "civic space" with which to address community and social justice concerns. The civic space created through small associations such as SHINE develops coherence and solidarity in a diverse society (Ferguson & Roberts, 2001). Moreover, developing grassroots organizations such as SHINE nurture a "public- spirited culture" (Hopper, 2003). Public spiritedness can reinvigorate communities and reduce social marginalization by fostering a sense of belonging and connection with others (Hopper, 2003).

Due to the limitations of this case study, the impacts of SHINE's efforts to address social justice concerns are only suggestive. Further research is needed to examine the aggregate effect of local initiatives on systemic inequalities. However, this discussion has illuminated how neighbourhood-level community development may contribute to fundamental social change by forming new groupings and alliances that cut across race, class, and gender groupings. The community worker's location in an NH was instrumental in helping SHINE initiate a socially inclusive community building process. The benefits and challenges to locating community development in an NH are underplayed in the literature and warrant further discussion.

### **Benefits and Challenges to NH-based Community Development**

Third sector non-profit organizations have an important role in deepening and broadening democracy by facilitating people's active participation in civil society (Giddens, 1998). They can also promote social cohesion and self-determination through community building and mutual support activities that cultivate social capital (Giddens, 1998). As a unique form of non-profit organization, whose history dates to the creation of Toynbee Hall in 1884, NHs generate social capital through the multiple roles they play in communities. By bringing people from diverse backgrounds together and connecting different institutional networks, an NH is a major social capital asset in the neighbourhood that local citizens or citizens' groups would find difficult to replicate. Having this advantage, NHs are key civil society institutions that can facilitate local participation in democratic processes that hold the state accountable for meeting the rights and needs of citizens (Giddens, 1984).

Neighbourhood houses bring together fragmented sections of the community through facilitating local participation in the neighbourhood (Yan, 2004). The NH- based community worker in this case study played an important role in enabling SHINE to take advantage of SVNH connections to marginalized groups, other non- profit organizations, and state functionaries. Through its variety of community building activities and social services, SVNH has a history of forging connections that build trust with hard-to-reach segments of the community. These connections were used to reduce barriers to participation by marginalized groups in the barn visioning and festival outreach processes.

Participation in SHINE also benefited SVNH by revitalizing its mission as a community capacity-building agent. Once the decision was made to involve SVNH with SHINE, steps were taken to maximize the opportunity for the staff and board to become involved in the project. To expand community development skills and knowledge, an experienced community development worker served as a mentor guiding the community worker's actions with SHINE. To facilitate board development and clarify SVNH's community development priorities, a consultant was hired to help the board explore opportunities and challenges to expanding its community development role. The community worker in this case study is also the SVNH executive director, allowing her to discuss community development issues and dilemmas with the community governance board of the house. As the project advanced, valuable lessons were learned through engaging in community development. For example, the conflict with the community centre made the community worker and board aware that NH participation in community

development must be considered in the context of its multiple roles and community relationships.

Emerging from the conflicts of interest encountered in this case study, an important question arises: how can a community worker from an NH contribute to social change processes without compromising agency funding and other relationships? These relationships contain important individual and organizational interests which come about in the process of community work (Lee, 1986). A priority activity for any community worker is to understand and navigate these interests. A community worker located in an NH has the additional challenge of including both agency and community interests in her or his work with community groups. Negotiating tradeoffs between community and agency needs is inevitable, as different interests and values intersect (Shragge, 2003).

An important interest for an NH is maintaining its reputation and relationships of trust with a broad range of stakeholders, including community residents, program participants, service partners, corporate supporters, and government funders. Sensitivity to these relationships may require that a community worker constantly negotiate and modify her or his role in the process. This modification may include limiting the types of activities and the types of groups with whom an NH is directly involved. To remain sensitive to its multiple relationships, an NH may limit its strategy for change to one of facilitating community consensus on contentious community issues. In this case study, the community worker's role was limited to building the capacity of residents to engage in community organizing. By distancing itself from controversial social action, an NH protects its interests and at the same time may act behind the scenes to facilitate residents' capacity to use their own voice.

To understand the challenges of an NH performing its community development function we may also learn from what Shragge (2003) refers to as the service/development dualism. Neighbourhood houses have historically adopted a dual approach by integrating community development with their service delivery. However, in recent decades they have evolved with a service emphasis which creates challenges for them to reinvigorate their community development roles (Yan, 2004). Shragge (2003) observes that, in a service role, the organization's impact on the community is under the control of the service provider, whereas in a community development role, the impact on community is in the hands of community participants who will act in their own interests and not necessarily in the interests of the organization. This case study suggests that, if an NH engages in community capacity-building, it will face challenges to successfully combining these two roles.

Neighbourhood houses, like many other non-profit organizations, are located in a macro-political environment that determines how NH operations are funded. In the United States, lack of funding for capacity building is the most significant barrier to an NH engaging in community development (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002). Neighbourhood houses in Canada have experienced a similar lack of funding. Furthermore, core funding, which supports the operating costs of NH facilities, is absent in Canada. Consequently, NHs are forced to seek funding through a variety of ad hoc sources for both service and development objectives.

The NH emphasis on service roles has evolved, in part, because service delivery brings capacity to fund operational and infrastructure costs (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002). Neighbourhood houses that contract with the government can find themselves spending



more time responding to the rules of their funders than attending to the emerging conditions in their neighbourhood (Koerin, 2003). Moreover, an emphasis on service roles and reliance on government service contracts has established NHs as de facto extensions of the welfare state (Everingham, 2003). The “partnership” with government creates organization dependency on state funding, a dependency that brings obligation to comply with government policy direction (Hardina, 2002). This obligation may reduce organization autonomy and preclude the NH from taking an advocacy position opposing government policies. Opposing government policies is a critical component of a successful community development process (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002).

The shift in NH culture from one that historically emphasised grassroots social reform to one that currently emphasises service provision may also impose a barrier to adopting community development roles. The service paradigm incorporates a view that sees service participants as clients with needs rather than as constituents with assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Furthermore, service funding brings requirements for the professionalization of management and service delivery. Many NHs have travelled down the path of professionalization, weakening volunteer and citizen involvement (Trolander, 1987). Koerin’s (2003) study of 83 NHs in the United States showed that these organizations continue to provide a range of services to primarily low-income and immigrant community members. She noted, however, that “nearly a third of centres did not provide community development programs” (p. 67). In other words, as an NH expands service roles, its involvement in community building declines. A recent study examining the roles and functions of neighbourhood houses in the City of Vancouver found a very similar picture (Yan & Lauer, 2006). Despite the gloomy picture portrayed

in the studies, authors writing about the settlement house movement (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002; Koerin 2003; Yan, 2004) contend that NHs still have an important role to play in community building. However, more research is needed to understand the current status of community development programs in the NH movement in Canada.

In sum, the opportunities and challenges to nurturing a community development role for NHs have been illuminated in this case study. An NH can contribute to the democratic life of society through its strategic middle position between micro-level community and macro-level institutions. It can use this position to build community capacity by helping local groups to gain political power and to negotiate needed resources in the promotion of social change. However, the most significant limitations to an NH expanding its capacity-building role are related to funding issues and the prioritizing of service over development. These issues must be addressed before a neighbourhood house can recommit to its traditional mission.

### **Summary**

This single case study has illuminated the applicability of current community development and social capital theories. The community capacity-building efforts in South Hill resulted in greater social cohesion and community empowerment, as evidenced by SHINE's formation and the strengthening of community networks. Strategies for community development practice in the context of culturally diverse neighbourhoods have been identified. These include utilizing cultural capital for bridging cultural differences during community building activities. The impacts of neighbourhood empowerment on broader social justice issues cannot be evaluated by this case study, yet

SHINE's development provides a civic space for democratic participation and can be viewed as an important first step toward this objective.

SHINE's community organizing capacity was enhanced through the social location of the community worker in an NH. Neighbourhood house participation also provided an advantage to SVNH by building the organization's capacity to rebalance service and development priorities. Despite the many benefits to NH leadership as a community change agent, lack of funding for community development remains a barrier for larger-scale NH involvement in community capacity-building processes. Dedicated and adequate community development resources are needed to ensure that social change initiatives created through community groups like SHINE are sustainable.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter articulates implications, recommendations, and conclusions of this case study which explores how community development work located in a non-profit organization such as an NH contributes to community capacity building. Lessons from the case study suggest that the capacity-building approach is effective in informing an NH-based community development project aimed at empowering communities to (re)build themselves. However, the capacity-building literature has given scant attention to issues related to the location of the community worker and to practice methods for creating an inclusive process in multicultural/multiracial neighbourhoods.

As an NH executive director, my motivation for embarking on this case study was to explore the opportunities and challenges related to reinvigorating an NH's community development mission. There are many lessons that can be learned from this case study, though as discussed in the methodology chapter, caution must be used in generalizing these recommendations and conclusions to other situations. While the following implications and recommendations are generated from the standpoint of a single example of community development work in an NH they may be applicable to community work in other organizations that share the similar mission and locality based characteristics of NHs.

The location of the community worker is of central importance to the community development process. Therefore, when the community worker is affiliated with an organization, its interests affect the community worker's role and actions in the community. Consequently, the community worker in an NH must at all times balance the

needs of the community with the interests of the NH. Based on the experience in this case study, the community worker role must remain fluid to continuously balance three interconnected tasks:

- facilitating the NH role in the community as a community development anchor;
- developing the capacity of community groups to function autonomously;
- reflecting NH social justice values by developing community capacity for inclusive community development practices.

Recommendations for each of these three areas of practice are described in this chapter.

### **Anchoring Community Development in an NH: A Revitalization Strategy**

Community development is a long-term process requiring continuity of resources. In rapidly changing communities, an NH acts as a stabilizing anchor from which community capacity can grow. As a resource for capacity building, the NH provides a consistent source of capital (human, financial, social, and cultural) which the community worker and the community (through its relationship with the institution) may access over time. The community worker's ability to complement residents' community building efforts with NH resources is a major advantage to locating community development in an NH. However, as indicated in the literature, the community development function of NHs has been fading and has been hampered by the nature of funding. This suggests that contemporary NHs may lack the experience needed to adopt this role. The following practice implications and recommendations may help to prepare an NH staff and board to reinstate or revitalize the NH community capacity-building role.

### **Building Organizational Capacity**

Building NH organizational capacity for community development should be viewed as part of building community capacity. It is recommended that an NH build its community development capacity by seeking help from an experienced community worker employed as a mentor/consultant. Mentoring may include supervising the community worker in the field to ensure that the organization gains the required community development knowledge and skills. The executive director and mentor should work closely together to build staff and board capacity to undertake and sustain community development functions.

As learned in this case study, a mentor/consultant will help the board that has not been actively involved in community development explore and understand its community development role. Through a strategic planning process, the board is helped to explore issues in the neighbourhood and to establish community development policy and implementation priorities. The policy should be laid out in a way that it provides the community worker with clear direction for her or his work with community groups. This guideline should reflect the multiple interests and accountabilities surrounding the web of community relations in which an NH is situated. To that end, a balance may be struck between NH and community interests by defining the NH role as one of support and consultation to build capacity of community groups rather than one of direct campaigning on behalf of the community.

To cement the NH connection with community residents, it is also recommended that a board liaison role should be established. A board member living in the neighbourhood would be ideal for carrying out such a role. The liaison person's duties would include

providing monthly updates on community development progress. The monthly updates would provide an information loop between the community and the NH board, helping the board member fulfil her or his responsibility to represent community interests at board meetings.

### **The Executive Director as Community Development Navigator**

A successful community development process requires strategic use of community resources. The executive director is best positioned in the organization to mobilize different levels of resources at the NH and in the community. An executive director typically takes responsibility for an organization's resources, including community relationships and, as such, is best positioned to navigate and bridge these resources to the community building effort. Furthermore, her or his position allows for the knowledge of community dynamics needed to mitigate the potential negative consequences affecting community relations. Indirectly as a supervisor, or directly as a community worker, the executive director can use her or his understanding of the web of community relations to advance the mutual interests of the NH and the community group.

### **Multiple Roles of the NH in Community Development Partnerships**

Traditionally, the NH understands its relationship with community groups as a partnership. The partnership with a community group couples NH assets with residents' strengths such as local knowledge, leadership skills, and passion for community change. In this partnership, the community worker has at least three interrelated roles: first, as group facilitator/consultant; second, as a liaison/communication link with the NH; and third, as a broker for applying NH resources in the community. The community worker functions as a facilitator to help the community group develop and implement its

structure and community organizing plan. As the NH liaison, the community worker is a point of ongoing contact from which residents and the NH can develop a mutually beneficial relationship. As a broker for NH assets, the community worker strategically utilizes NH resources to complement the work of the residents' group. This may include coordinating different community organizations to work collectively towards shared community goals. By working together, community groups and the NH achieve goals which no single group could achieve by acting alone.

### **Developing Autonomous Community Groups**

The key to long-term effectiveness of NH-based community development is the formation of partnerships with autonomous community groups. Therefore, a primary role for the NH-based community worker is developing self-governing group structures which serve as a neighbourhood focal point uniting individual capacities and perspectives in a common community building purpose. Developing a community group's autonomy ensures decision-making power remains in the community's hands. Furthermore, the independent relationship enables the community group and NH to renegotiate the terms of their partnership and adjust the community worker's role as community conditions change.

### **Conscious Shifts of the Community Worker's Role**

Developing a community group's capacity to sustain itself and engage in community organizing requires that the community worker adopt a fluid approach to her or his role. The community worker's role is constantly changing to reflect changes in group development and community organizing needs. The community worker's role shifts as



group self-efficacy increases and as the group undertakes different community planning, development, and social action functions.

While facilitating the group's formative discussions about purpose and structure, the community worker takes an active role in leading the group. The community worker will also play an educational role helping group members gain understanding of community development processes and community governance practices. Through developing group structure, a framework for community leadership and grassroots democratic processes is established. The structure should be laid down in a way that defines the group's purpose/vision, guiding principles, membership roles/responsibilities, and decision-making process.

As the community worker facilitates discussions about core group structure, she or he should also encourage group members to organize participation in community activism. Through developing a work plan with concrete goals and objectives, the group is encouraged to achieve a balance between addressing immediate pressing community issues and implementing objectives aligned with long-term goals and vision. Helping the group remain on track with multiple priorities ensures long-term vision is not lost to the demands of immediate issues.

Leadership skills are enhanced through engagement in core group development and in community actions. The community worker aids leadership development by assisting with planning processes and by adding knowledge of community development practices. The community worker helps the group members learn from their experiences by encouraging evaluation. The process of reflection provides the group with insights needed to adjust action strategies and/or priorities.

As the group structure consolidates and the members gain various leadership capacities, the community worker's role shifts from direct leadership to one of mentoring and support for members exercising leadership roles. This shift is important to ensure the group develops self-efficacy and a sense of ownership in its achievements. As the community worker's group leadership role recedes, she or he continues to represent the NH as a partner in the community development process, engaging NH resources to advance community goals.

### **Broadening Participation: Harnessing Community Assets**

Following asset-based community development principles, a group such as SHINE can serve as a neighbourhood-centred structure from which to expand local participation, build social cohesion among residents and make connections with local groups and institutions. To encourage participation by people with various interests and capacities, different types of community contribution should be encouraged. For example, those without time (or interest) to engage in the core meeting group can contribute their skills by assisting with time-limited projects. Broad-based participation extends community connections, builds neighbourhood pride, and instils a sense of belonging in the community.

As a key component of the community building strategy the community worker should help the group identify other important community assets and recognize how they can work together to create a comprehensive community building strategy. Recognizing the value of social capital, she or he will encourage the group to expand its base of support by developing their community networks and partnerships with other groups and

institutions. The more contacts the group acquires, the more resources it can draw upon to achieve its goals.

### **Incorporating Social Inclusion in Community Development Practices**

Social justice, based on a politics of inclusion, is a core value for NHs. Therefore, building a socially inclusive community development process is a fundamental goal. The community worker should analyze local community composition to help the community group identify social and cultural issues in the neighbourhood. This information can be used to encourage residents to think beyond the interests of their small group and consider the interests of the broader neighbourhood. When articulating its mission and work plan, the group is encouraged to include goals and strategies that reach out to include isolated fragments of the community. This process is particularly important in multicultural communities where language and cultural barriers can limit community participation.

### **Bridging Cultural Differences**

Bridging cultural differences to enable civic participation is a foundation for Canadian multiculturalism. Thus, community workers need to develop different strategies to bridge cultural differences, ensuring that the community reconstruction reflects the interests of all segments of the neighbourhood. This case study indicates that cultural capital is an important asset that can bring together different groups in the neighbourhood. Through its multiple activities in the neighbourhood, the NH-based community worker should support neighbourhood groups in cultivating cultural capital. An NH is in an advantageous position to promote cultural capital by harnessing the contributions of community leaders with whom it shares a relationship toward community building. For

example, SVNH cultivates cultural capital by recruiting staff and volunteers, particularly board members, who reflect the neighbourhood's cultural groups. In this case, cultural inclusion is facilitated by staff and board members using their community relationships to encourage broad participation in neighbourhood-building activities. These connections facilitated culturally diverse participation in SHINE's barn planning process and the community festival activities.

### **Facilitating Cultural Transformation**

By embracing a vision of cultural pluralism, an inclusive neighbourhood-building process may transform "Canadian" culture by building respect for cultural differences and discovering new forms of consensus among people from different backgrounds in the community. Culturally inclusive neighbourhood projects are a practical way of building intercultural respect and fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among diverse community members. Hence cultural transformation in a multicultural society should be facilitated by encouraging people from different cultural backgrounds to work together on issues of shared concern in the neighbourhood. Through working together on shared community goals, people from different backgrounds discover common identities from which to establish relationships of trust and reciprocity.

### **Conclusion**

As a community worker and executive director, I have witnessed first-hand the limits of taking a service approach to solving society's problems and meeting community needs. To tackle problems in the community, solidarity among a neighbourhood's empowered and politically active citizenry is needed. By uniting forces in collective action, residents can collectively improve the conditions of their local community and

even hold the state accountable for redistributing society's wealth in a way that addresses local residents' rights to such things as food, housing, healthcare, and education. Building solidarity in a local neighbourhood is a community development process. Among all the community development approaches, the community capacity-building framework provides a promising means for helping communities uncover and build upon intrinsic assets, ones that can be strategically mobilized for rebuilding and maintaining the community.

This case study has shown that people living in urban neighbourhoods care about their own community and are willing to take up leadership to strengthen communal life and improve neighbourhood conditions on behalf of all its members. To assist this grassroots organizing process, an NH, as a long-term community asset with proven success, has an important role to play in strengthening community participation roles necessary for a strong civil society (Husock 1993; Yan, 2004). The community development intervention to assist a grassroots community organization such as SHINE is a good example. SHINE creates a democratic institutional space in the neighbourhood from which community organizing activity can emanate, new intercultural solidarities can be nurtured, and community leadership can grow. This case study also indicates that, despite funding limitations, NHs should not forego their traditional community development function. As a stable feature of neighbourhood infrastructure, an NH holds capacity to facilitate community cohesion by uniting multiple sites of community organization toward achieving important social change goals.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Questionnaire**

#### **Evaluation of Karen's CD Work with SHINE**

Dear SHINE members, I am asking for your feedback about my work with SHINE over the past 6 months. The SHINE process is a learning experience for me; thus, your feedback is very important for me to learn about what has been helpful to you and to discover what I could do differently to make my work with SHINE more effective.

Your responses will be a central part of my thesis information. The thesis will explore the role of a community development worker in strengthening a community group's capacity to participate in community improvements and civic life. The more detail you are able to provide, the better able I will be to share SHINE's experience, with other neighbourhoods and other CD workers. Your answers will be anonymous so please offer your thoughts and opinions freely.

#### **Survey**

##### **Thinking about the way I work with you ...**

1. What kinds of tasks and responsibilities did you observe me taking with the group?
  
2. What tasks and responsibilities did I undertake which you expected of me as a CD worker?
  
3. What tasks and responsibilities did I undertake which you did not expect of me as a CD worker?
  
4. What tasks and responsibilities did I undertake that would be better for you to do yourselves?
  
5. How does the amount of work SHINE has undertaken fit with your needs and expectations?

6. How does the time period that SHINE has set for achieving its tasks fit with your needs and expectations?

7. How does my accessibility fit, or not fit, with your needs and expectations?

8. How would you describe my working relationship with individual members of the group, and the group as a whole?

**Thinking about SHINE's Group Development...**

9. In what ways has SHINE grown and developed as a group?

10. In your opinion how ready is SHINE to undertake its planned initiatives?

11. Identify the things that I did which facilitated SHINE's group development.

12. Identify anything that you would like me to do differently to facilitate SHINE's group development.

13. Identify anything that I am not doing, that you would like me to do, to facilitate SHINE's group development.

**Thinking about SHINE's Capacity to undertake community initiatives...**

14. What community initiatives has SHINE achieved so far?

15. Which of these achievements do you feel most satisfied about? Why?

16. Identify the things that I have done which facilitated SHINE's capacity to undertake community initiatives.

17. Identify anything that you would like me to do differently to facilitate SHINE's capacity to undertake community initiatives.

18. Identify anything that I am not doing, that you would like me to do, to facilitate SHINE's capacity to undertake community initiatives.

**Thinking about my relationship to South Vancouver Neighbourhood House....**

19. How has my connection with South Vancouver Neighbourhood House been an advantage to SHINE's capacity to undertake community initiatives?

20. How has my connection with South Vancouver Neighbourhood House been a disadvantage to SHINE's capacity to undertake community initiatives?

**Last Question...**

21. Is there anything else you would like to say about my work with SHINE?

**Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this evaluation!**