



Media Release

Building Resilient Communities Hears from Exploring Efficiencies Project

May 11, 2012

(Golden, BC) All over the Kootenays, things are changing. Community projects are springing up and local citizens are taking control of their future. Instead of just worrying about climate change, peak oil, and food security, Kootenay communities are making a difference.

Ryan Watmough, a consultant who is Exploring Not For Profit Efficiencies in Golden & CSRD Area A with Golden Community Resources Society, was invited to the Building Resilient Communities conference held on May 11, 2012 at St. Eugene's in Cranbrook, BC.

After many years of working with local non profit organizations, a few leaders of the Golden & Area A non profit sector articulated the resource challenges that they were all facing. In this age of cut-backs they realized new resources were not coming down the pipe, so all non profit groups and the community as a whole would need to some support in achieving their missions more efficiently.

Thanks to funding from CBT, Mr. Watmough has been researching best practices related to non profit efficiency, assessing the non profit landscape of the Golden & Area A community and preparing for upcoming non profit consultations.

The following is a transcript of his seven minute presentation to the audience of the Building Resilient Communities conference:

"My name is Ryan Watmough. I'm involved in the non profit sector in Golden & Area A through a few different roles.

I'm originally from the Tobacco Capital of Canada, and moved to Golden for the high quantity and quality of snow back in 2005.

When Joy Orr asked me to talk about this project, I was excited, but had no idea where to start.

Let's back up and set the stage for how I found myself doing something that has never been done before: exploring non profit efficiency opportunities within a community.

Sure, some countries have looked at the impact of the non profit sector. Ten years ago, agencies in Canada came together and produced the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations at a cost of more than \$1M. Even provinces have done some good research like Alberta's Points of Light. But communities – big or small – have not looked at just their local non profit sector.

After a community event last spring, where the dialogue centred on our large and disjointed non profit sector, a few local leaders wrote a couple grant applications to CBT. And they got them.

So I wrote a proposal, which included a quick research of best practices, a survey to non profit organizations and I even had the gall to include an Action Plan to align these groups. Can you believe it? Well, the Advisory Committee liked it, or were just a bunch of sadists. That was August 2011 and so off I went to my computer expecting to be done by January.

But first I had to get my head around Efficiency!

So, to begin, what is efficiency? In economics, it's capturing the amount of waste or other undesirable features. In manufacturing, it's a connected to producing better widgets, at a faster rate and at a lower cost.

But people are not widgets, non profits are not cogs, and a community is not a factory. So I was very hard to apply this term to non profits.

But every day the local non profit sector is finding ways to be more efficient – not for fun, but out of necessity. Here are just a few of examples of them.

The Golden Early Childhood Development Coalition (ECDC) helps to coordinate and streamline all early learning-related groups and their activities – an example of Maximizing Program Benefits.

Also, Golden Community Resources Society operates as an umbrella organization with 15 FTES for 30 programs over multiple sites – helping to Minimize Administrative Expenses.

With efficiencies understood, how many groups did we have?

Number of locally registered charities? 22.

Number of registered societies with an address in Golden & Area A? 79.

Some of these organizations held dual registrations. But there are another 60 that are registered elsewhere but supporting Golden & Area A, too, bringing our total to number of groups to 176... and still growing.

Therefore, for a rural population of 6,766 we have 176 non profit groups. That's more than 5X the national per capita average. If we just count the ones registered here, that's still 2.5x the national per capita average.

Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Either way it has consequences. Most are run by volunteers or very part-time staff. Most don't have office space or any real assets. But all believe that they are fulfilling a need and providing a service that no level of government or business can.

And I'll be damned if I'm going to try to tell any of the these well-meaning groups that they should do things differently. So all I can do is research and share with them the best practices from around the

world. And out of all of the best practices, I've been able group them into a few themes that I'd like to share with you now.

- 1. Co-location: Things like Joint Use Agreements between school boards and municipalities, and dedicated non profit hubs maximize the utilization of our community spaces.*
- 2. Communication: We've gone from newspaper ads, business cards, brochures and posters to Blogs, Wikis, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter in such a short time that there are very few well-understood conventions for communicating. And with limited time, which channels do you choose? Online Community Calendars, community groups on Facebook, and free website templates like Weebly and WordPress make it very cheap to communicate. Now we just need to help our youth to tell compelling stories and ensure our older citizens – those over 24 years of age – know how use these common platforms effectively.*
- 3. Consolidation: In the sector, Consolidation is very serious. It should not be seen as a sign of failure, but rather a sign of success – of succession. Recently tourism and economic development in Canmore went through this process and I think the community is better for it – I know that the organization is.*

Think to yourselves: What groups in your community could benefit from coming under one roof or moving from out of the home into a small shared office? What new collaborative ideas could be developed?

How much could we save by sharing one phone line or advertising or specialized volunteer? How can money saved in overhead help create better jobs in your community and provide a better service to your members or clients?

How do we create a collaborative, efficient non profit environment in Golden?

Well, www.GoldenLoom.ca has been created to share this information with the whole community.

Before this, we could have asked a hundred groups what we need to do and received a hundred different answers.

But now, with the best practice info available to Golden & Area A's non profits, NOW we can survey them on where their individual strengths and weaknesses are, where they see the opportunities and threats. We NOW have a common language to communicate with each other. Now we can talk.

What else? What's cool? We're also working on:

- 1. A Local Non Profit List is posted online and community-willing, will contain updated contact information for every group in Golden & Area A.*
- 2. With this data, a Road Map or project plan can be created, resources – both near and far – can be assigned or engaged, and groups can 'right size' as their resources allows.*
- 3. Speaking of 'right sizing', a Community Grant Continuum has been roughed out, and hopefully, community funds will be dispersed with appropriate administration.*

4. *Community consultation will also include developing a Consolidated Income Statement for the local non profit sector. That way the sector can state it's employment numbers and total value in the local economy. I'd like to include the value of the volunteer component, too.*
5. *A Non Profit Potential Projects List will also be created so that good ideas can be captured, rolled around and energy can gravitate to them over time. This is one way of putting the power with the people. And may cultivate the next Civic Centre-sized project.*

And now for my lessons. So, now I know why no one has examined the non profit sector at the community level. It's huge, it's unruly, it's poorly understood and it's organizations are often stuck in crisis mode.

On the way to improving the greater good, someone's stuck a bunch of rules and regulations in there. And there are no stock options or gold-plated pension awarded to staff when problems are solved.

But collectively these organizations make our towns and villages into communities. It's that sense of community that everyone can get behind. And most would agree that's worth more than stock options – unless they are with Apple. Maybe...

And for you, the Audience.

To the business people: support doesn't always have to come in the way of cash donations or discounts. Sharing resources and your expertise will likely make the biggest positive impact to a group.

To the government workers and funders: Please look at your procedures through non profits eyes – minimize the hoops, and administrative requirements, and help maximize the impact of our tax dollars and our Trust dollars. Look at making fewer more impactful grants.

To the non profits: Show the value of your volunteers' contributions, and look to others for collaboration before it becomes an unexpected necessity.

I hope you have enjoyed this session and had an opportunity to think about your community's non profit sector – how we help it and indirectly hinder it. And I hope you enjoy working with the entire sector to build your community and make it more resilient.”

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About Golden Community Resources Society

Golden Community Resources Society administers non statutory social services in the Golden area including employment programs, early learning programs, and seniors housing.

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