



## **CROSS-COMMITTEE LEARNING SESSION**

### **DEEPENING OUR LEARNING MAY 2019 – STRENGTHENING OUR RELATIONSHIPS REPORT**

Individual organizations work to change what is important to them or their communities, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation funds projects that together promote networking and coordinated activity to create social, structural and environmental change. After all, it is easier to enact transformation if an organization can leverage relationships that span diverse groups, sectors, and philosophies.

The Collective Impact Framework of John Kania and Mark Kramer characterizes this comprehensive approach as a move “from fragmented action and results” to “collective action and deep and durable impact.”<sup>1</sup> That leap to exploring how individual causes contribute to the overall health of communities is partly explained by crosscutting themes.

Crosscutting themes are areas where many single issues and targeted outcomes intersect. They provide context for focused projects and help funders understand points of intersection between initiatives. They also help the public, media and government better recognize the wider benefits of a project. For example, an initiative that provides stable housing to an individual may also improve their employment prospects or offer better health outcomes.

The Foundation’s Strategic Plan affirms the value of engaging in cross-committee learning and exploring crosscutting work between housing, environment and adult education.

Our commitment to integrating an Indigenous-influenced perspective in our work also recognizes the need for holistic approaches reflecting a worldview that all life – human and non-human – is interrelated. “If we can solve the Indigenous crisis, we will solve the climate crisis, and if we solve the climate crisis, we will solve the economic crisis. It all connects,” Inuit activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier, explained at our May, 2019 Deepening Our Learning session. This

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<sup>1</sup> Kania, J. and Kramer, M. 2011. Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

acceptance encourages further awareness of crosscutting work between core program areas and among program partners.

Our program partners employ different approaches to remedy different problems in different places, but there are common themes or policies relevant to many or most. That is why rather than concentrate on one of our funding priorities at this learning day; we invited program partners from all three streams.

It was an opportunity to make visible the crosscutting themes of **capacity building, systems change and collaboration** that are an integral part of the work of Righting Relations (Adult Education); the Housing Professionals Mentorship Program (Housing); and Healing Through the Land (Environment & Housing).



It also demonstrates how others and we live our strategic objectives, such as reconciliation and working across silos. Crosscutting is not just a lens to gain greater understanding of how disparate themes or approaches connect to one another; it is also a method to reframe how we engage with communities.

“I think everybody in the [Righting Relations] hubs envision a community where the values of love, of togetherness are there,” Maria Antelo, a Community Development worker at Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, said during Deepening Our Learning. “At the same time, we talk about capitalism, we talk about patriarchy and we talk about intersectionality, but the base is what all our relations are and what does that mean? We are trying to infuse a new way of working I’ve learned from all of you, and that’s really working with tools of love, of compassion, with mothering and with caring.”

## **PROGRAM PARTNERS:**

### ***Healing Through the Land***

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Healing Through the Land is a new funding program that has arisen out of three convening sessions hosting by the CDF with Indigenous community leaders and funders from across the country. Guided by the wisdom of participants, we are creating an Indigenous-led pooled fund that is rooted in healing and Indigenous worldviews of interconnectedness. The CDF has committed \$1 million over the next 5 years.



#### **SHEILA WATT- CLOUTIER**

Nobel Peace Prize nominee and former International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Sheila Watt-

Cloutier is in the business of transforming public opinion into public policy. Experienced in working with global decision makers for over a decade, Sheila offers a new model for 21st century leadership. She speaks with passion and urgency on the issues of today—the environment, the economy, foreign policy, global health, and sustainability—not as separate concerns, but as a deeply interconnected whole. Sheila co-chairs the Healing Through the Land Steering Committee.



#### **MIIGAM'AGAN**

Miigam'agan is a Mi'kmaq woman of the Fish Clan from Esgenoópetitj/Burnt Church, New Brunswick. Her life is devoted to Wabanaki

cultural revival and to promoting an understanding of Indigenous matriarchal systems. Miigam'agan is the first Elder-in-Residence at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. Her role supports First Nation students and offers resources on traditional knowledge. She is a crucial link between the University and First Nations communities. Miigam'agan sits on the executive of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network at the University of New Brunswick, which sets research priorities and ensures their research support meets the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples. Miigam'agan has been on the Righting Relations Steering Committee since 2014 and co-chairs the Healing Through the Land Steering Committee.

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### ***Housing Professionals Mentorship Program (HPMP)***

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The HPMP is a 3-year pilot program for early career professionals working in the housing and homelessness sector in Canada. The program matches mentors and mentees and provides professional development and networking opportunities to foster the next generation of leaders. The CDF has awarded the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) \$180,000 over 3 years to support this program and they are currently mid-way through their second year (and second cohort).



#### **DOMINIKA KRZEMINSKA**

Dominika Krzeminska, MPH, is Director, Programs & Strategic Initiatives, at the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. She also co-directs the national Housing

Professionals Mentorship Program. Dominika holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Human Biology/Global Health from the University of Toronto and a Master of Public Health in Population Health from Simon Fraser University. Since her university days, she has been interested in housing and homelessness issues, particularly how they relate to health.



#### **ADRIENNE PACINI**

Adrienne Pacini, MDes, APF, is an urbanist, strategist, and researcher. At SHS Consulting, Adrienne leads human-centred design approaches to explore the lived experiences of

individuals facing housing-affordability challenges. She spends her time facilitating conversations and developing strategies for business models and systems innovation in the housing sector. Adrienne has co-authored research papers, housing strategies as well as plans aimed at creating systemic change in our housing and human services systems. Adrienne is presently involved in leading Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s Solutions Labs across four provinces and territories. Adrienne is a current mentee in the Housing Professional Mentorship Program.

### ***Righting Relations***

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Righting Relations is a women-led, pan-Canadian network of adult educators coming together to strengthen capacity to work critically, creatively and collectively

with marginalized communities for radical social change through political and economic literacy. The program prioritizes regional hub/network development with adult educators who work with and are from Indigenous, immigrant, refugee and low-income communities.



### **MARIA ANTELO**

Maria Antelo is a settler in Turtle Island. She has worked in various capacities with refugees, newcomers, the unemployed and vulnerable populations

as a social service and community worker. Since 2010, she has worked for the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, leading

social justice and legal reform projects, including the successful 2014 effort to make Hamilton a Sanctuary City. In 2015, Maria helped create the Hamilton Tenants Solidarity Network to fight gentrification. “As a settler in Turtle Island, I profoundly believe that before we seek reconciliation, we need to learn the Truth.” Maria coordinates Righting Relations’ Central Hub Hamilton Circle.

### **SESSION OBJECTIVES:**

- ❖ To explore crosscutting work between housing, environment and adult education by inviting program partners to engage with board members/staff
- ❖ To reflect on the crosscutting themes and synergies of these programs across funding priorities
- ❖ To deepen board learning
- ❖ To foster learning, collaboration and networking between program partners
- ❖ To build and/or deepen relationships with program partners

Cross-committee learning days are an opportunity to consider the political and public policy environment our program partners work within. This fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face in achieving program goals and aspirations. We agreed to incorporate an adult education for social change process for cross-committee learning days, which encourages active engagement and prioritizes learned experience. To support this objective, we asked Rehana Tejpar to facilitate our session.



### **REHANA TEJPAR**

Rehana Tejpar, M. Ed, is a Toronto-based artist-facilitator of East African Indian and Uruguayan ancestry who has been designing and leading artful popular-education programs with children, youth and adults for the past 15 years. She is currently serving as the National Program Facilitator for the CDF’s Righting Relations program. Rehana is a practitioner of Art of Hosting, Theatre of the Oppressed and InterPlay and brings together dialogical processes and

body-based storytelling in her approach to personal and collective transformation.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**Capacity building** is the process of developing an organization's strength and sustainability. The United Nations has defined capacity as 'the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner.' Capacity building also entails ensuring an organization's readiness to fulfill its mission into the future.

**Systems change** is a deliberate shift in policies, processes, relationships, and power structures, as well as deeply held values and norms, designed to address the root causes of social problems at scale. Adopted as a priority by organizations as diverse as the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the McConnell Foundation, systems change is an intentional process designed to fundamentally alter often intractable and embedded components and structures that cause the system to produce outcomes that benefit some members of society and penalize others.

**Collaboration** is informal and strategic partnerships designed to achieve greater impact than individuals or organizations can generate alone. These efforts range from a network of community leaders sharing ideas and feedback to joint programming or shared services that increase awareness, advocacy, reach and benefit from economies of scale.



## **PARTNER VOICES:**

Following Rehana’s welcome and an introduction from Valerie Lemieux, CDF Executive Director, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions related to the underlying motivation and origins of their program as well as the vision, values, approach and those served by the initiative.

### **1) What drew you to this work, what motivated you? What sparked the start of the program?**

- Housing Mentorship - Dominika explained the program was created after the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association identified the need to bring together early-career professional in the sector and mentor them, partly to increase capacity and growth within the affordable housing sector. The program would connect those younger professionals “with people from across the country to share ideas, learning *and* facilitate systems change.” The federal government’s renewed interest in the sector encouraged that thinking.

Adrienne joined the Housing Mentorship initiative because the people involved in the program had a renewed sense of hope for the housing sector. It was a group, Adrienne noted, who “were really interested in bringing forward a new generation” due to the positive momentum created by the National Housing Strategy and the fact housing was increasingly at the forefront of political discussions.

- Righting Relations – Miigama’gan said there was a real need in her community for the Righting Relations program because of barriers to mobilization. “At a community level, our wheels have been spinning for a long time ... because of a lack of access to capacity and homelessness. Coming here to work on a women’s initiative was something of a dream,” she said. Through Righting Relations and the hub networks, she feels connected by doing this work with others. “I feel like all the undergrowth has been nurtured and it’s just starting to come up. Connecting with the different communities, recognizing we are not alone and that we have ... a common way of doing things. It’s necessary.”

Maria felt the program created a real sense of connectedness among the vulnerable populations and newcomer groups she works with. Righting Relations is also aligned with her existing work “accessing justice” as a social service and community worker at Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, where they have created an Indigenous Strategy and embedded that into their strategic planning.

- Healing Through the Land - Sheila felt her community in the Arctic is struggling with social and health challenges and the loss of so many youths to suicide. “We’ve got four or five organizations looking after 10,000 people in my region,” she said. “All these institutions are mandated to look after the people and yet the social and health indicators don’t improve ... they’ve gotten worse. So, to look at these problems with a fresh start has really been a blessing.” Sheila believes a powerful answer to those failings is a mother-based system with an Indigenous perspective. “We have to be creating mother-based systems to replace some of the things that have been happening over the decades of colonialism and oppression.” Sheila noted the program has potential for the community and particularly for youth to embrace their lives, see the potential of their community and people and “become animators, creators and champions of our environment and our climate.”

## **2) Tell us about the vision, mission, team and values, who is it for? How do you work?**

- Housing Mentorship – The vision of the program is to generate increased understanding that work in the housing sector is a career with meaning that fights for social justice. The program is designed to create capacity and offer increased opportunity and support to develop emerging professionals, so “they have the room to grow in their positions and beyond.” This work is done to encourage discussions and bring forward ideas and solutions.
- Righting Relations – The Eastern Hub in New Brunswick focuses on ways of empowering Indigenous communities and reconnecting with the traditional matriarchal culture. The connection to land is significant, as is using the land to sustain the self through traditional gardening and harvesting. The financial support from the CDF has allowed the hub to increase capacity to work with youth and offer the community access to a women’s group and support system. “Our culture has a



lot to contribute to larger society. The land is important because we are talking about relationships – righting relations. Then we need to look at our own traditional philosophies and what kept our ancestors connected to the land,” say Miigam’agan. “Those are the pillars that resonated with us and [made us feel] we could be connected with the larger community. It’s inspiring because it’s not isolated.”

In the Hamilton Hub, Maria said she works with vulnerable communities, people that have precarious housing and limited access to food. They provide a circle for both adult educators and non-adult educators. The hub works with women to provide skills required to envision, plan and open their own public workshops. The hubs focus on creating relationships and togetherness in the community by having tough conversations on settler roles, intersectionality, decolonization and reconciliation. Maria singled out the importance of connectedness to groups across the country in creating a sense of value in her work. “I wanted to say how much this connectedness, the sense that this work is being done in other places, makes it so real and so beautiful,” she said. “It’s been amazing work and growth.”

- Healing Through the Land – Sheila said the vision of the program is to work from a women’s perspective and use indigenous culture and the land to bring back what has been lost in this globalized world; what has disconnected us from each other, from the source of food, the environment and our sense of identity. “It really is about the spiritedness of our communities, so it has to come in from that place of spirit, from rebuilding that which has been lost through the centuries,” said Sheila. “A way to do things differently, it is a remarkable, fulfilling place to be in at this time when our communities are looking for solutions from their leaders. There’s a real void in leadership on so many of those levels.”

Specific to crosscutting themes, each of the women directly or indirectly referenced institutions or systems that were failing women, youth or Indigenous populations as a motivation for starting programs and expressed the hope that additional capacity would provide solutions. All three programs are collaborative and more than one speaker cited the psychological importance of being connected, rather than isolated. Systems change is a thread running through all of the initiatives, but is particularly important to Righting Relations and Healing Through the Land in relation to colonialism and the need for reconciliation.

### 3) **Board reflections:**

The Catherine Donnelly Foundation's commitment to collaborate with others is central to our work. Engaging with and learning from program partners is an essential part of fostering a deeper understanding of issues and perspectives related to Indigenous communities, women, newcomers and vulnerable populations. Regular communication and relationship building should be a shared responsibility, not something that falls only on the shoulders of the grantee. Here's what our Board members took away from the process:

- Women are key, as are the educators and storytellers
- The source of change comes from the self, from a heart-centered place
- The power of supported and healing relationships to engage and empower
- Community mobilizing, support coming from within community
- Building capacity, mother-based view of healthy culture
- Funding the intangible, spiritual and emotional is important
- Capacity of the community, building the relationship and how important it has been to be part of the collective experience, collaborating, systemic changes that needs to occur
- Unlearning to not get caught up in the metrics
- Indigenous protocol is important
- Working together
- Continuous learning is foundational
- Be the catalysts and provide resources to community for what needs to be done
- Relinquishing power: truly getting to a place where we are committed to being part of something new

### 4) **Philanthropic sector reflection:**

Meaningful dialogue also recognizes systemic imbalances. Those seeking grants often perceive funders as having not just money, but also a great deal more power and influence. Creating safe spaces for dialogue and listening to the needs of partners – their goals, their insights and their measures of success - instead of dictating them, is an important part of our work. After all, our partners are incredibly knowledgeable about what their communities need and how best to deliver that change. By listening, we hope to understand the power dynamics that exist in

decision making as well as in setting criteria and procedures that affect those decisions. Here is what our partners told us about how to improve the work of foundations:

- Multi-year funding with less reporting
- Funders that do the ground work by making connections and being curious
- Providing gifts once in a while is good with no expectations
- No lengthy reporting
- Flexibility, openness to hear about the program
- Other foundations are feeling stuck and paralyzed, there is a real need for leadership. We need to embolden people and need to influence the philanthropic sector through our story
- Redefine what success is and a new way of measuring



##### 5) **Summary:**

In 2018, the Board of the Catherine Donnelly Foundation committed itself to a new philanthropic approach that promotes networking and joint action among project partners, funders and the public as well as a decolonized approach to granting and investing that integrates an Aboriginal-influenced perspective.

That transition is a complex and necessarily slow process requiring much listening, dialogue and operational flexibility. Alignment within the organization is a crucial element in the transformation. CDF staff are on the front lines of this shift, so creating opportunities to share their thoughts and work – and that of program partners – with the Board is crucial. Deepening Our Learning is an ongoing forum where Board members can listen, explore and consolidate thinking on these developing issues.

Board reflections on the crosscutting themes of capacity building, systems change and collaboration demonstrated a thoughtful and nuanced understanding of the presentations and contributed to honest feedback from program partners on granting and investing processes aimed at improving the Foundation's overall effectiveness.

The importance of that openness to dialogue and connection really emerged as a central theme among participants. Sheila Watt-Cloutier spoke to the impact of coming together with shared purpose: "Coming to Toronto – coming here – and feeling something I hadn't felt in boardrooms before: an [heart-centred] energy started many years ago by incredible women. It is not just the energy, but the intentions behind it, the connections made, the kind of exercises that bring you to yourself, to your soul, your spirit and each other. So, I feel like this has all kinds of potential ... at a national level, this is reconciliation, this is how it starts. That kind of potential gives me the courage to carry on."

The success of the May Deepening Our Learning session reinforces the Catherine Donnelly Foundation's belief in increasing the number and range of voices engaged in social change. Creating safe environments for truthful and ongoing dialogue is an essential component to begin healing, build partnerships and work toward the systemic change necessary to create just, respectful, healthy and sustainable communities.