

International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers Conference

# The New Settlement Way: Building Resilience by Weaving Policy and Practice

Workshop Presentation by

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I'm pleased to be here with all of you and trust this important conference will stimulate your work in communities back home. As I prepared for this presentation, a story about three travelers came to mind: seems like a corporate CEO, a settlement house worker, and a workshop presenter were part of an extended trip through a dangerous foreign land. Quite innocently, but so unfortunately, they ran afoul of the law of that land and were summarily sentenced to be executed by firing squad. On the night before their executions, the head jailer approached each of them and said, "while the sentence you have been given is harsh, we want you to know that we are a sympathetic people, so we are offering each of you one last request. After much agonizing, the CEO asked for a good bottle of scotch as his last request. The workshop presenter asked that he be allowed to make one last presentation, and the settlement house worker asked that he be shot before the presentation! I hope your reaction today will be different.

One of the themes of this conference, "**Place Based Approaches: Integrating Community Development, Service Delivery and Social Justice,**" neatly summarizes most of our work at Pillsbury United Communities over the last 35 years. As I thought about this theme, the word weaving kept coming to mind, and I was struck by its meaning: to twist and turn from side to

side while moving somewhere in order to avoid obstructions, as in, "she had to weave her way through the crowds". Weaving is an action verb and action is the key to understanding the concept of resilience.

Today, I want to focus on this place-based theme in three ways beginning with a brief look at Pillsbury United Communities -- its mission and purpose, highlighting some of the obstacles that required our own twisting and turning; next, I'll share some thoughts about resiliency, identifying those factors that are foundational for organizational resiliency; then we'll look at how Pillsbury United Communities used place-based practice for social policy change and advocacy; finally, I'll offer a view of what I believe is a major pivot in human service work – a pivot from an age of professional sovereignty to a new age of community sovereignty that is grounded in co-production as the key factor in redesigning the role of the human service professional.

### **The Context: Pillsbury United Communities**

Shortly after I retired in 2011, someone asked me why I did so. "You know," I said, "the last 5 years of my career were tough – diminishing funds, staff lay-offs, program cuts, hostile politicians and strident community leaders – all tough stuff." But, as I thought a little more, I realized my first 5 years were tough too; oh and then, there were all those crises in between, crises like recurring neighborhood violence including maiming and murders of staff and residents, rapidly shifting neighborhood demographics, periodic upheavals in funding priorities, and natural and man-made disasters like tornados ripping through our neighborhoods and the collapse of a major interstate highway bridge with 60 of our staff and children involved. I guess it was all tough.

Being involved with Pillsbury United Communities was like a long term marriage – most of the time I was really in love; at other times it felt like I needed out of the relationship; but all the time, and I sincerely mean this, it was exciting, challenging and different. For the most part, we

were blessed with an incredibly supportive and enthusiastic board and staff. We tried to make Pillsbury United Communities an adaptive and entrepreneurial community based organization that helped individuals and communities find equity and justice by creating environments and opportunities for people of all ages to effect change for themselves.

We were sustained throughout by the cornerstones of personal resilience: strong support system (family, friends and professional colleagues), powerful relationships with the people we served (including their respect), a never ending infusion of young, dedicated staff, a laser-like focus on finding justice, and, of course, a bit of personal stubbornness best described by the Latin phrase, "*ne tibi spurii sunt*" (don't let the bastards get you down).

For over a century, Pillsbury United Communities has been a presence in Minneapolis neighborhoods and is recognized and respected as a valuable community resource and advocate. At its peak prior to the 2008 collapse of the U.S. economy, PUC operated some 50 distinctive programs and projects through a citywide network of five neighborhood centers and other facilities. We sponsored 15 independent charter schools and provided management support to 20 mostly small, immigrant led non-profits. By intent, most of the agency's 200 full and part time staff live in the neighborhoods where they work and are passionate about helping their community and its members grow and solve the challenges they face. Seventy per cent of PUC's work force are people of color who speak, collectively, 37 languages.

We recognized that in any community there is educational, social, intellectual and economic inequality. Consequently, most of PUC's annual budget was used to create partnerships and safe environments for members of the community who wanted to address some area of inequality in their lives. It is important to note that we did not see ourselves as *service providers* or a *social service agency*; even though that was the "box" we were constantly put in. Instead, we tried to see ourselves as advocates, social entrepreneurs, community organizers and social innovators. This perception conflict often made us a "square peg" in a "round hole" organization and we were engaged in a struggle to reconcile our view of ourselves with the view that funders and other community leaders had. We learned to operate in both worlds,

sometimes brilliantly, but often confused and unsure. It felt like our financial support was tied up in meeting the needs of our funders while our passion was linked to creating community. It was as though we were in a constant state of conflict over our organizational imperative. Who do we serve, whose needs get met? Trying to reconcile these conflicting imperatives required resiliency in spades.

## **Organizational Resiliency**

When contemplating the present and future of individuals and families living without economic means and hope in our nation's neighborhoods, strong feelings about the inadequacies of the human service system emerge. There is growing restlessness about the sub-optimal results of institutional responses to the great issues of our time: racism, persistent poverty, and community disintegration in an era of distrust, discord and polarization. As troubling as these conditions are, this restlessness is driving an exciting, growing community based movement throughout the country that inspires hope and promise. (The great French general, Napoleon Bonaparte, who, when asked what the secret of good generalship was, replied, "It is very simple, my friend, all you need to do is find out where the troops are headed and then get out in front as soon as possible!") So where are the troops, the community, heading today? While none of us can be certain about where we're headed, it seems clear that we're on the move, twisting and turning, overcoming obstacles and challenging and redefining our practice in profound ways. In settlement house terms, I think we're redefining our work, searching for a new settlement way.

Turbulent Times. We live in turbulent times; times that require large scale change. Arguably we need a new "reformation." In her book, *The Resilient Organization*, Välikangas (2010) writes, "We need a reformation like the one that took place in medieval Germany: a rethink, not so much of what makes a good person (as per Martin Luther) but what makes a resilient organization. Resilience is the capacity to survive rare events – unexpected changes that may be minor (like Apple's iPod) or major (the 2008 financial crises). When something unexpected

happens, or our assumptions about likelihoods, causal sequences, and human behavior turn out wrong, it is resilience we fall back on.”

Van Breda writes about the concept of “fallen eagles.” Fallen eagles are those iconic concepts and beliefs that hold widespread attention and underpin behavior, program development and policy, but which are no longer relevant. A classic example comes from the nearly terminal 2008 financial crisis. Alan Greenspan, head of the federal reserve bank, was quoted as saying, “I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interest of organizations, specifically banks and others, was such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity.” The equivalent is the recognition of suicide bombers as a new security threat. No longer, it says, can the public interest be protected by relying on people’s sense of self-preservation and their will to live (or make money).

In terms closer to social work, there are two “fallen eagles” that are losing relevance: 1) the problem/pathology paradigm that so powerfully shapes our practice and policy, and 2) the sovereignty of professions that drive our work, the policies we adopt and the solutions we choose.

In a review of the literature on resiliency, Van Breda makes it clear, “...researchers have historically tended to confine their attention to pathology and problems. The advance of our knowledge of how people survive, cope and even thrive has been left largely to clinicians in the field. This has had four main effects:

- It has created the impression that coping in the face of adversity is an idiosyncratic phenomenon rather than widespread or even normative.
- It has tended to locate such coping within unique individuals, thereby overlooking the possibility of “institutionalized solutions to common tasks.”
- It has elevated pathology into the high realm of “Science”, and relegated coping to the homely world of folklore.
- It has led clinicians, including social workers, to resist acknowledging the validity and

presence of strengths in their clients.

There is, of course, the danger of turning the notion of resilience into a kind of rugged, rigid, “just-shake-it –off”, “don’t-look-back”, “Teflon-coated” resilience, which has rendered the individual or system “brittle” and vulnerable to stress. What is advocated in the resilience literature is a kind of resilience that is compassionate, flexible and in-touch-with-life and which promotes the ability-to-bounce-back.” That’s the kind of resilience we tried to foster at Pillsbury United Communities.

The problem/pathology paradigm has not only shaped our view of human life, it has created the overall structure of how we meet human need in our society. I’m referring to the extraordinary way that government, private philanthropy, big media and nonprofits organize to provide resources through problem based “silos.” Maintenance of the silo structure often results in complex regulation and bureaucratic processes that hinder coordination and communication with other programs, saying nothing about effectiveness.

This problem/pathology orientation re-enforces the notion of narrow, specialized approaches to family and community issues. Borrowing from health care, the system has produced scores of “specialists” while diminishing the role of the general practice doctor. The same is true for social work where only 700 of 12,000 licensed social workers in Minnesota are doing macro social work.

This “problem/pathology paradigm,” although weakened by the growing number of adherents to a strengths based paradigm, still dominates the human service system that endorses and pays for specialization, programs as units of analysis and short term projects, all the while devaluing the fundamental and most significant part of any human service effort – the relationship between worker and client.

This paradigm is the handmaiden to what might be described as the “sovereignty of professions,” our second fallen eagle. Currently, most of the organizations and institutions that constitute the human service system are dominated by a professional class who are the architects of the structures, processes, ideas about quality, performance and outcomes. In

digital terms, they are the “operating systems” of their organizations.

Many professionals have embraced the hierarchical notion that with professionalism comes status and an inherent “intellectual superiority.” Dewar (1978) notes that there is a certain push, an implicit requirement, that the client adopt, assume the language, ideals and culture of the professional, thereby becoming the good client. While seemingly a natural process, Dewar maintains that this process of making good clients paradoxically produces poor citizens, dependent people who are unable to solve their own problems and issues. In practice and personal behavior, professionals create a climate of inaccessibility, intellectual superiority and withdrawal. Especially if they are surrounded by sycophants, it’s easy for professionals to develop a too-elevated opinion of themselves. During his reign as heavyweight champion, Muhammad Ali was in the first class section of an airliner waiting for takeoff, when a flight attendant asked him to please buckle his seat belt, Ali looked her right in the eye and said, “Superman don’t need a seat belt.” The attendant looked right back and said, “Superman don’t need an airplane, either.” And that’s what professionals need -- someone who can bring them back to earth when they get too carried away with themselves and their accomplishments

I’ve come to the troubling realization that the gap between professionals and the constituencies they serve is growing and may be unbridgeable if we don’t change. The great American fictional icon, Archie Bunker, once said, “I got nothin’ against mankind. It’s people I can’t stand.” In the same way, too many professionals love “consumers or clients.” It’s just individual “customers or clients” they don’t want to deal with.

Too many professionals have become arrogant, too heavily focused on issues of autonomy, exclusiveness and regulation, pushing aside the important values of servant-hood and calling. John Ralston Saul (1992) puts the situation on edge when he argues, “Our reality is dominated by elites who have spent much of the last two centuries, indeed of the last four, organizing society around answers and around structures designed to produce answers. These structures have fed upon expertise and that expertise upon complexity.” Saul continues, “In reality we are today in the midst of a theology of pure power -- power born of structure, not of dynasty or

arms. The new holy trinity is organization, technology and information. The new priest is the technocrat -- the man who understands the organization, makes use of the technology and controls access to information, which is a compendium of 'facts.' It follows that the theology of power, under which the technocracy prospers, marginalizes the whole idea of opposition and therefore that of sensible change. Opposition becomes a refusal to participate in the process. It is irrational. And this trivialization of those who criticize or say no from outside the power structure applies not only to politics but to all organizations."

Even though things are not well in the professional house, there is hope -- hope that emanates from countless local projects and organizations that are modelling a new kind of professionalism and practice aimed at the goal of building abundant communities.

## **Resilient Organizations**

Sometime around the turn of the turn of the century, we witnessed what I think was an important uprising in our ideas about the poor and poverty. We've had a change of heart, the beginning of a shift from a system driven by professional expertise to one that might be called the "sovereignty of community" -- a growing appreciation of local solutions by people most affected. We are learning that the best outcomes are those that engage both the professional and the client or resident as equal partners. In medicine it's the realization that while doctors have a body of knowledge, patients have knowledge of the body. Resilient organizations have understood the need for this shift and are actively embracing it.

Pillsbury United Communities and other settlement houses are very resilient organizations. Throughout the past century, the settlement house movement has had its ups and downs, twists and turns, but it has persevered. Settlement houses continue to be critical players in poor and marginalized communities as well as vanguards of community sovereignty.

Resilience has been described as, "finding your power." That's as good a definition as any. Pillsbury United Communities found its power -- a power that emanated from its dual emphasis



on **client respect** and **relationship building**. We liked the people we worked with. We did not view them as “clients” with problems and needs. We saw them as friends and partners and believed in their innate goodness and we expected them to grow and contribute. We worked with the rawest form of humanity: the poor and marginalized, the newly arrived immigrant, the lonely, angry teen, the abused child, the abuser, and many others. We were privileged to meet and work beside the best of us, people with few resources, poorly educated, beat down and oppressed, yet beautifully resilient in their quest for self-advancement and for creating a better life for their children and families. We were regularly inspired by them.

Seven Keys to Organizational Resilience. While client respect was paramount in our operations and challenges, other factors contributed to our resilience.

1. We **continuously scanned the horizon**, listening to key stakeholders like funders, community leaders, our own staff and board, and most importantly to the people we served. We conducted regular Community Connections breakfasts and many similar events. We hired and promoted neighborhood residents including my successor, Chanda Smith Baker.
2. We maintained a **healthy skepticism** of funder, academic and other professional solutions.
3. **Innovation and experimentation** were encouraged and we gave permission to fail by providing relatively safe landings.
4. We **prepared staff for disruptions and flexibility** by continuously changing office locations and organizational structures.
5. We strengthened and expanded internal and external **communications’ networks** through efforts like the creation of cross-center Core Service Teams, the Forum for Nonprofit Leadership and the MACC Alliance of Connected Communities. We were active in national and international associations like United Neighborhood Centers of America, the Alliance for Children and Families and IFS.
6. We constantly **focused on our purpose and mission** not on survival and growth.
7. We built and relied on **powerful relationships** to withstand crises. We utilized “Key

Influencers Campaigns” and other devices aimed at building relationships with funders, political and community leaders.

## **When Resiliency Mattered**

These seven factors permeated our organizational culture and thankfully helped us through some very difficult crises.

The I35W Bridge Collapse. Shortly after 6:00 p.m. on August 1, 2007 a major interstate highway bridge over the Mississippi river dramatically collapsed. One hundred eighty people were on the bridge when it collapsed, including a bus load of 60 children and staff from Pillsbury United Communities’ Waite House. Thirteen people died and scores were injured (four of our children and 2 staff were hospitalized and many were traumatized). Lots of heroic acts were performed that day including our own staff who kicked the back door of the bus open and successfully brought 52 children and 7 other staff to safety. Amid the chaos and confusion, our staff performed exceedingly well, first assuring the safety of the children and other staff, then by connecting frantic parents with their children, taking action to meet the needs of children and their families post-trauma, and finally by managing the flurry of press and TV news desires for information. Understand that the whole event was complicated by the fact that many of our clients were the children of undocumented adults many of whom spoke very little English.

With the help of many community and neighborhood leaders, we arranged to get medical needs taken care of, mental health counselling, financial and other services for the families. We worked to develop a significant fund to assist the families and later worked with the state legislature representing the children and their families in the prolonged legal settlement resulting from the investigation and findings of fault. While we are proud of the eventual outcome, wending our way delicately and carefully thought the legal issues regarding getting the families help while trying to manage “documentation” issues was very challenging to say the least. Thankfully, no one was punished or deported as a result of surfacing to get their

needs met because of this tragic event.

During a press conference that we held a day after the event, a reporter asked one of my staff on the bus whether they were provided with sufficient training to handle this kind of event. Our staff person replied with complete sincerity, “No we did not get training for a bridge collapse, who could have thought of that? But we did have the kind of relationships with the kids and their families that allowed us to do what was right by them. We cared about them and they trusted us.”

The Murder of Ahmednur Ali. Ahmednur Ali, a 19 year-old Somali, seemed to be on a path that would transcend the violence in his community. While growing up, he played soccer and taught himself to read and write Somali. He even created a Facebook page announcing his plans to run for the presidency of Somalia, hoping he could reunite his homeland. Ali finished his first day as a work-study student volunteer at Pillsbury United Communities’ Brian Coyle Center in the heart of Minnesota’s large Somali community. He was a freshman at Augsburg college and wanted to give back to his community while studying. At about 5:00 p.m. Ali left the center and confronted a group of Somali youth who were in a dispute in the parking lot of the center. As Ali tried to defuse the tension, one of the youth produced a pistol and shot Ali in the head. He died instantly.

Ali’s death ignited long growing frustrations with violence in the Somali community: community frustrations with institutional inability to control the violence as well as police frustration with the community for not providing information and access to perpetrators of violence.

Pillsbury United Communities lead an effort to bring people together to address the issues related to Ali’s death and the events leading up to it. Ali died on a Monday. On Thursday, some 500 people packed the gymnasium at Brian Coyle Center to address Ali’s death. The mayor of Minneapolis, the city and park board chiefs of police, the President of Augsburg College, several Imams from local mosques, city council members, 50-75 youth and many community leaders and residents came together to “vent” and find ways to move forward. As a result of that meeting, funds were located to assist Ali’s family as well as to improve the

physical security of the neighborhood center and surrounding area and significantly to create the Cedar-Riverside Development Council tasked with finding solutions to the area's security, transportation, youth and employment issues relevant to the Somali Community.

## **Weaving Practice and Policy**

Working through these community crises compelled us to seek policy change. Our practice informed our policy choices. Early in my career this approach wasn't so obvious. Back then social policy was too often staff or board driven. I was troubled by the fact that when discussing social policy, our staff usually expressed their own, often passionately held personal beliefs about what needs changing. Staff assumed that "If it's important to me, it must be important to the community." Regardless, there wasn't a disciplined approach to connecting policy to the people we were serving. So we decided that our work in affecting policy had to be forged first and foremost in connecting directly with neighborhood residents.

A couple of examples of this approach are constructive.

Day Care Grandma's. In the 1990's we noticed that with growing frequency, Grandmas in place of Moms, were picking up and dropping off children at our child care centers. At the same time, we became concerned that the fees for many of these same children were being delayed or not paid at all. We asked the Grandma's to come to a meeting to help us better understand what was going on. Many of them told us a similar story: their daughters who had custody of their children, were incapables either through issues like chemical dependency or mental health, of getting their children to child care let alone meeting other needs of the child. Granma was simply taking over, being the responsible party. We then learned that these mothers, most of whom were receiving assistance by the County through direct payments from the county were not passing along those funds to the actual caregiver – Grandma. We learned that the county was bound by law to send the check to the legal custodian, Mom that is, even though they acknowledged that in many cases mom wasn't acting responsibility. Pillsbury United Staff led a campaign to get the county to recognize that many families don't follow

“formal lines of custody” and that the best interest of the children demanded that the county change its policy and practice so that the actual care-giver has access to funds.

The NSP power shut off controversy. In the 1970’s power companies in Minnesota frequently cut power even in mid-winter to customers who fell behind in payments. This practice adversely affected poor and elderly residents, including many of PUC’s neighbors. As we became aware of this situation for our clients, we formed a coalition to change this practice seeking a moratorium on power shut-offs from October through April of each year. At one point, we conducted a protest in the offices of Northern States Power with signs and slogans. Eventually, the state of Minnesota passed legislation that stands today making it illegal for power to be shut off during winter months. One of the signs had PUC’s name on it and was recognized by an NSP executive. Turns out, the chair of the United Way (PUC’s major funder at the time) board of directors that year was the CEO of NSP. Not long after the protest, I received a call from the United Way CEO expressing displeasure with our activities vis-à-vis shut-off issue. This had a chilling effect on us.

These efforts at policy change sprang from our practice. If it was an issue for the people we served, we had to act. Policy work has consequences for organizations: A price will be paid for raising issues since many policies that negatively impact neighborhood residents are developed and enforced by government units and organizations that fund our programs and projects. It’s hard “biting the hand that feeds you.”

## **Trouble with the Loom**

There are other dynamics preventing human service organizations from effectiveness in policy work. Using weaving analogy, the loom that produces our professional and institutional fabric is in need of repair if not outright replacement.

Nonprofit organizations are caught in a dualistic dilemma called mission polarity. Nonprofits need to balance two competing imperatives:

--managing for performance and growth which requires consistency, efficiency, eliminating waste, and maximizing short term results.

--managing for adaptation which requires foresight, innovation, experimentation and improvisation with an eye to long term benefits.

Throughout the last 30 years, in the age of professional sovereignty, nonprofits were pressured to adopt business practices like “management by objectives,” “continuous improvement,” and “strategic planning.” Programs were commoditized and clients were transformed into customers/consumers. Nonprofits were encouraged and supported in this effort and many “rode the corporatization wave.”

Early on, PUC invested heavily into becoming “business-like.” And we were good at it, so much so that it was the first Minnesota charity to be awarded the Minnesota Council for Quality’s Gold Award for excellence in evaluation using the nationally lauded Baldrige criteria. But, as PUC “corporatized,” it became increasingly difficult to build and maintain long term, quality relationships with our clients – relationships that are crucial for individual growth and family progress.

At the same time, we witnessed the blurring of the boundaries separating government, business and nonprofits. In the 1970’s and ‘80’s philanthropic foundations and charitable funders like the United Way rarely, if ever, made grants to government units, nor did business provide programs or services to the urban poor. Concomitantly, corporate and philanthropic leaders developed a love affair with the “new” and spawned a plethora of efforts to encourage partnerships between government, business and nonprofits.

By the turn of the century, the sectors had converged so thoroughly that a monoculture was created – a corporate monoculture. This monoculture makes it very difficult for ordinary citizens to tell the difference between a nonprofit, government unit, or a business when walking into a facility to receive service. They look alike, act alike and increasingly use the same financial, human resources, evaluation and technology systems. They even speak the same corporate language and management professionals are increasingly interchangeable.

This corporate monoculture has transformed client/citizens into consumers and customers. McKnight and Block (2010) note, “a consumer is one who has surrendered to others the power to provide what is essential for a full and satisfied life. This act of surrender goes by many names: client, patient, student, audience, fan, and shopper. All consumers, not citizens. Consumerism is not about shopping, but about the transformation of citizens into consumers.”

Professionals of all stripes have learned to thrive in this corporate monoculture. In many cases, they’ve become proponents and architects of this monoculture. But there is pushback, thankfully and the monoculture is increasingly off-putting for poor and marginalized citizens, and lately, even for the middle class.

The corporate monoculture results in an architecture of fear. Most facilities look alike and are designed to separate and control clients from workers, doctor from patient, and employee from the public. There are security cameras, metal detectors, security guards, and so on. Formal, clearly defined procedures for connecting professional and client are in place and rigorously enforced. The message of this architecture is clearly that workers need protection. Unfortunately, this architecture is now all too prevalent in our institutions and organizations.

Benjamin makes the point strongly in his study of gated communities throughout the U.S., “The perverse, pervasive real-estate-speak I heard in these communities champions a bunker mentality. Residents often expressed a fear of crime that was exaggerated beyond the actual criminal threat, as documented by their police departments’ statistics... Residents’ palpable satisfaction with their communities’ virtue and their evident readiness to trumpet alarm at any given ‘threat’ creates a particular atmosphere – an unholy alliance of smugness and insecurity. In their us vs. them mental landscape, ‘them’ refers to new immigrants, blacks, young people, renters, non-property owners and people perceived to be poor. “(Star Tribune, April 1, 2012)

Sooner or later, we must realize that we can’t erect enough barriers, hire enough guards, build enough prisons, and create enough procedures that isolate and protect the professional from the people they purport to serve. Our collective fear is making us irrational. Yet it is the acceptable norm among too many professionals and institutions today.

Decision-making has become increasingly narrow in this corporate monoculture. Twenty years ago or so, many communities and institutions expanded the involvement of citizens in decision making regarding human services. Cities like Minneapolis established remarkably ambitious citizen review panels and structures to enhance engagement and input. Organizations like the United Way took great care to engage large numbers of corporate and community volunteers to make critical decisions about funding nonprofit organizations and programs. Over time, however, this commitment to engagement has waned and decisions in today's monoculture are being made by an ever decreasing number of people. This situation puts tremendous decision making power in the hands of a very small number of professionals who populate these systems.

When I began my career, the United Way's decision making process regarding allocation of funds involved large numbers of volunteers. Organized into citizen's review panels, as many as 15-20 business men and women, educators, religious and community leaders, labor union representatives, and so on, would review proposals from agencies, conduct site visits to those organizations and generally did their best to understand the proposals and the organizations. In the last few years, the number of citizens involved has diminished to the point where in 2010, only one person reviewed the PUC's program proposals -- a single staff person or in some cases, an outside consultant. No visits to the organization were made and the "rules" limited contact to 1 hour. No citizen involvement whatever.

Organizations today are obsessed with "risk avoidance." Fear of legal action with its perceived loss of reputation and resources has given lawyers and insurance agents enormous power. Too many nonprofits have surrendered much of their "human-ness" and creative programming to the fear of lawsuit. This risk aversion trumps justice, transparency, innovation and most importantly inhibits the development of human connection and by extension, community.

Policy and community leaders have changed their collective minds about who can be trusted for information and innovation. During the 1960's and 1970's, a movement to increase citizen participation in community life began to emerge. Government, foundation, United Way and business leaders valued and courted nonprofit, grassroots leadership for their knowledge and



experience about what was going on in the community – its collective aspiration and need. This knowledge informed their decision making about policy and transmission of resources. In today's monoculture, these leaders assert their own agendas and solutions for community problems. They now rely heavily on academic thinkers, researchers, and programs in other cities to inform their decision making. They no longer trust nonprofit input. Bob Bothwell, Executive Director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy writes, "The longer you spend in the private foundation environment, the more you rely on your enclave colleagues for truth rather than outsiders because you've learned that when the hand reaches out for money; you need to be suspicious of the truth."

Today's policy makers decide what the community needs based on their own experience, their own world view, and "expert" (academic) knowledge. Then they seek a "vendor organization" to deliver the program or project that gets the outcomes they want. Drawing on their own methods and arrogance, they increasingly search out and develop the kinds of programs they think are best for the community, and they have the resources to make it happen. In a sense, they are "human service vigilantes," distrusting community and local leadership, determined to make change on their own. They create new initiatives and collaborations that consume enormous amounts of time and money that mostly involve professionals meeting with each other. Nonprofit agencies are relegated to either accepting the funder's ideas and getting money to implement them, or rejecting them denying resources for the community.

Another dynamic of our troubled human service loom is the diminished level of vertical boundary crossing. Discussions about boundary crossing in the nonprofit sector usually focus on the horizontal plane. Whether it's profession to profession or organization to organization, the concern centers around permeating boundaries to improve coordination and leverage resources.

While boundary crossing is likely to remain a "hot" topic, the discussion needs to include another perspective – the vertical plane. In an organizational context, this means connecting top leadership with front-line staff and community residents. In a system setting, it means

getting policy makers, foundation leaders and corporate CEO's connected to nonprofit agencies and the people they serve.

Early in my career, when I met with colleagues around the country, they frequently asked me why Minnesota seemed to be so progressive and sympathetic to the plight of poor people. As I formulated my response, it became clear that what distinguished the Minnesota experience from that of my colleagues in other cities and states, was the unusual amount and frequency of connection between senior elected officials, academic leaders, foundation executives, corporate CEO's, and nonprofit and community leaders in discussions about key community problems. My colleagues would exclaim, "You mean you actually were in a lengthy, serious discussion with the mayor, the CEO of General Mills, Hennepin County Commissioners, the President of the McKnight Foundation and leaders in the African American community to talk about gang violence?" "Yes," I replied and they walked away stunned, "that doesn't happen in my city." It did happen in Minneapolis and it happened often, primarily because of the existence of special convening organizations like Springhill, the Itasca Project, the United Way and the Minneapolis Foundation. To our collective loss, Springhill no longer exists and the others have turned away from a convening role and agenda.

Vertical boundary crossing is rapidly becoming extinct in our society (although social media and the internet hold promise). The emphasis on horizontal boundaries has distracted us from the bigger problem of building relationships top to bottom. The importance and disappearance of connective tissue like Springhill has debased the quality and vitality of the Twin Cities' once vaunted human service system. More than ever, settlement house need to fill this void, providing connections on both vertical and horizontal planes. It is the best thing we can do to make policies that benefit residents and communities.

## **The Next Generation Loom and the New Settlement House Way: Moving from Providing to Co-Producing**

In spite of these troubles with our collective loom, I am optimistic about the future. We are in the midst of a quiet revolution of the heart and of our own sense of what it means to be a new kind of professional in today's world. But, the outcome is uncertain without our continuing attention and participation. Settlement house workers will continue the march toward practice and policy based on the strengths' perspective, joining the chorus of community voices who are quite serious about co-production of solutions and creating abundant communities. We can forthrightly challenge the corporate monoculture and the sovereignty of professionals. We need to shuck the concept of service provision and embrace the concept of co-production of solutions, working beside our neighbors as equity partners with the people we serve to create value.

As we assertively move our organizations and intuitions on this path to the next generation of practice, there are a few key themes that require our attention. The next generation professional and organization will:

Focus on new localism blending social service with economic activity.

Engage in actions that regenerate, renew and heal broken social relationships.

Use Empowering technologies to create participatory citizenship.

Create social and financial capital.

Focus on information gathering, leveraging information and action research.

The good news is that there are considerably large numbers of projects and organizations engaged in this work every day, showing us the way co-produced solutions. A couple of examples from PUC:

#### Starting New Social Enterprises.

**Full Cycle:** A retail and bicycle repair business that engages homeless youth in learning the bicycle business.

**Community Connections Café:** A Somali youth-run coffee cart business.

**MACC Commonwealth:** A management service organization formed by six nonprofits to develop financial, human resource, technology and facilities management services to its members. Now numbering 30 members, this nationally recognized model has dramatically improved nonprofit capacity in a time of reduced resources.

### Creating New Financing Mechanisms

**Micro-lending:** Perhaps the best example of new financing is Grameen Bank. Started by Professor Muhammad Yunus in 1976 with 5 members and 0 employees, by 1995 it had 2 million members & employed 12,400 people. Grameen Bank has reversed conventional banking practice by removing the need for collateral and created a banking system based on mutual trust, accountability, participation and creativity. It provides credit to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh and now throughout the world (including the U.S.) without any collateral. At Grameen Bank, credit is a cost effective weapon to fight poverty and it serves as a catalyst in the overall development of socio-economic conditions of the poor who have been kept outside the banking orbit on the ground that they are poor and hence not bankable. Professor Yunus reasoned that if financial resources can be made available to the poor on terms and conditions that are appropriate and reasonable, "these millions of small people with their millions of small pursuits can add up to create the biggest development wonder." As of October, 2011, Grameen Bank has 8.349 million borrowers, 97 percent of whom are women. With 2,565 branches, it provides services in 81,379 villages, covering more than 97 percent of the total villages in Bangladesh.

**Human Capital Performance Bonds:** The Minnesota legislature recently passed legislation recognizing that those offering work-force training, mental-health treatment, supportive housing, chemical-dependency treatment, and so forth, create value, some of which is financial. The pilot program makes Minnesota the first state in the nation to officially recognize that nonprofits create financial value that can be captured and used to fund services. The cornerstone is "Human Capital Performance Bonds," the brainchild of Steve Rothschild, a former General Mills executive and founder of Twin

Cities RISE!, an intensive work-force training program. The legislation authorized \$10 million of appropriation bonds for the pilot. The concept is simple. Nonprofit human-service providers generate value to society. Among the many benefits created, there exists a subset of financial benefits that can be measured and have actual cash value to the state. For example, when a work-force training provider helps someone get a better-paying job, the state receives higher income and sales tax revenues, spends less in public benefits and may spend less on incarceration. The state would enter into a contract with a service provider to pay a given amount (based on projected financial benefits) when certain performance standards are met. Bonds are sold, creating a pool of funds to pay the service providers. As the state begins to reap financial benefits, it sets this money aside to pay back the bonds.

### **Developing Abundant Communities.**

As we move away from categorizing people and communities as problems, we can focus our attention on recognizing the abundance around us. McKnight and Block have provided a clear idea about abundant communities when they write, “An abundant community is not organized the system way – there is no interest in consistency, uniformity, and replaceable parts. Abundance is about the variety of gifts and what is most personal and idiosyncratic to families and neighborhoods. A competent community, one that takes advantage of its abundance, admits the realities of the human condition and the truth of the decay, restoration, and growth processes that are a part of every living system. Variety, uniqueness, and appreciation for the one-of-a-kind are its essence.”

Abundant communities focus on the gifts of its members, nurture associational life and offers hospitality – the welcoming of strangers. Social work can and should play an integral role in developing abundant communities. Doing so means that we must change our practice and work hard to develop policies that ultimately will support this work.

## **New Settlement Way Professionals: Architects of Abundance**

We need to examine what it means to be a settlement house worker in an era of “community sovereignty” and in an emerging context of networked systems, co-production, abundance, and shared power. A different kind of professional is needed -- a new “community professional.” This new professional has a civil religion based on notions of public service and a sense of calling that requires both lateral and vertical participation. New community professionals are those unique people who by way of experience and interest are well connected to the community and have the credibility to speak for its different elements. They are also that rare collection of professionals who have managed to master the intricacies of systemic politics while keeping in touch with neighbors on the block. The new community professional navigates the landscape of class and ethnic diversity.

***Just as the conventional professional orients toward peers, over-emphasizes the written word to assemble knowledge, uses a medical model for practice, withdraws from the civic life of the community and over-values educational achievement as an indicator of success, the new community professional has unshakeable core values that have been honed in the grist of community experience.***

The new community professional values listening, understanding, knows that success depends on the client’s success, and believes that the highest credential is client respect. Authentic, new community professionals share the pains as well as the gains. *Marching his thirsty army across a desert, Alexander the Great was approached by an aide who offered him a helmet full of water. “Is there enough for 10,000 men?” asked Alexander. When the soldier shook his head, Alexander poured the water out on the ground.* Contrast that with CEOs whose pay continually increases, while workers receive pay cuts or are laid off.

Greenleaf (1991) put it best, “...a new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing

institutions. Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants. To the extent that this principle prevails in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led.”

Almost 2,500 years ago, Lao-tzu, the great Chinese sage and poet had it right when he wrote, “A leader is best when people barely know he exists. Not so good when people obey and acclaim him. Worse when they despise him. But of a good leader who talks little when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, ‘We did it ourselves.’” New community professionals will embrace Lao-tzu’s powerful message.

Finally, the next generation nonprofit will promote an investment, community building mentality that produces economic opportunity, strength, and ownership. It will bring on the sovereignty of community. In doing so, the next generation nonprofit provides new solutions to old problems. A lesson from Alfred Einstein, the great mathematician and teacher, illustrates the point.

***Dr. Einstein had a reputation for being unable to attend to the details associated with daily living--he often overlooked or forgot the simplest tasks. When teaching at the University he was often assigned a talented graduate student to help him remember the small but important daily tasks associated with teaching. The story goes that on one final exam day the graduate student overslept and upon waking was panic stricken, knowing that Dr. Einstein probably forgot to show up for the exam and that the students would be left without direction. In a flash, he rushed to the classroom only to discover that Dr. Einstein was calmly in charge. The graduate student looked at the exams that Dr. Einstein had distributed and noticed, to his great dismay, that the exams were last year's. "Oh no!" the graduate student cried out to Dr. Einstein, "these exams have the same questions as last year, the students know all of the questions." "My boy," Dr. Einstein said calmly, "Don't worry, the questions may be the same, but I've changed all the answers!"***

The questions posed today are not new, but surely the answers are changing. The seeds for reform are taking hold so deeply and the movement to a knowledge society so rapidly that we

simply cannot afford the distractions of old patterns. The new settlement way and the next generation nonprofit offer hope for neighborhoods and promises community. Its vision requires serious energy to meet the daily challenges of structure, governance, staffing, resources, and results. Thomas Edison once remarked, "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time." In a word, **resiliency**. Our task now is to help our neighbors create their own future -- a future based on assets, choice, strength and abundance -- a future that invokes a strong sense of community connection, individual power, citizenship, and accountability. It's the kind of weaving we cannot help but be drawn to.

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