

Analysis of Community Health Principles: The Alex

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As practitioners in the field of community development, it can often be difficult to understand the various dynamics affecting the individuals that we work for. However, by taking a community development approach to understanding the various forces that have a tremendous impact in the lives of people we work for, we become a much more competent practitioners. It is in this light, that we examine a particular community in Calgary providing services to people of various demography. This paper is therefore aim to recount my experience during the investigative process and reconcile it with the various principles of community health development.

#### **What is Community Health Development**

In order to do full justice to this experience, I believe it is only proper to begin by first defining community health development. It is perhaps worth noting that community health development does not have a single definition, however, I have selected one appropriate for the focus of this paper. According to Warren (1978) Community Development is define has: “a process of helping community people analyze their problems, to exercise as large a measure of community autonomy as is possible and feasible, and to promote a greater identification of the individual citizen and the individual organization with the community as a whole.” This definition fits the focus of this analysis.

#### **Organization History**

The Alex is a nonprofit organization that was established about 40 years ago. It was primarily born to serve a specific needs within the community of Inglewood and Ramsey. They provide primary healthcare and housing support to venerable youths of various demographic compositions. In 1973, the organization was recognized as a non for profit organization. In 2001

they lunched a community health bus. In 2006 they moved to its current location. In 2007 they lunched housing first. It was in 2008 that the youth program opened. By providing some basic historical background, I am hoping to create a foundation for exploring the various aspect of the organization.

**What were some of the major challenges the community encountered?**

At their current location, they do not currently have stoves as a result of limited space, they needed to come up with creative ways of getting people involved with cooking. So they cook on a skillet instead. She pointed out that some of this might actually be good because some of the people they work for might come from places where they don't have those equipment.

Secondly, she pointed out that as part of their program's effort to get youths employed, they often find it challenging to get youths to access services that are outside their parameters, however, a lot of the individuals they work for will not go as a result of a number of issues such as: it being traumatic for them, their inability to locate the places, uncertainty of what might happen if they go in, etc. Their efforts to resolve those issues including bringing the services to them---bringing the youth worker to them rather than them going to those places.

Thirdly, because they have a large population of transitioning youths; youths who identify themselves as transitioning, they have decided to have a non-gendered washroom as a response to that need. In addition to that, they wanted to better understand what LGBTQ people needed in terms of housing, so they are partnering with LGBTQ organizations. The result of that was having an LGBT counselor in their center that the youths can identify with.

Another challenge that she discuss was removing people from the drop in center program because they were unsafe for other people that comes there. They address this situation by

providing services to them in an alternative ways----whether it be providing services to them on the phone or referring them to other places.

She also talk about transitioning being a challenge. When a person reaches 24 years of age, they can no longer provide services to them. So before then, they sit with the person and look at alternative options. However, it can often be challenging for a number of the people they work for as they still passive themselves as youths.

One of the major challenge that she recount was helping young people who grew up in foster care create natural support. Because many of those youths have been segregated from their parents from an early age, a number of them do not have natural supports----they are surrounded by paid staffs: social workers, doctors, youth workers, etc. Natural support has been identify as one of the key component of growing into successful adults. We do not go to paid support if we need 50 dollars to buy food, or someone to talk to after certain hours---we go to our parents or other people in our lives. She gave examples that illustrates how a number of their youths have not develop concepts of reciprocity as a result of growing up in foster care. So they are trying to help this people develop natural relationships. They are looking at who the person is, who are his/her family and how can they help them develop relationship. She talked about the word “healthy” being used to exclude certain family members. However, if those people are willing to invite them for Christmas, give them money when they need it, maybe there are some good in that unhealthy relationship.

She talks about policy being another major challenges. She gave an example of the plan to end homelessness in Calgary within 10 years. How a number of this plans just sit on someone’s table and nothing is really done toward accomplishing it. Some of those plans should be informing their practices, but they currently don’t. She talks about someone trying to link

them to those polices so that can better understand what is going on and be able to challenge polices that are ineffective.

### **Community Health Center Principles:**

**Comprehensive:** I think The Alex provides a fairly comprehensive health care to the community they serve. They provides primary care to the young families they work for. They have a crisis prevention strategies in place to support the people the community. They large population of young people who are pregnant or mothers and in other to promote awareness in this areas, they make it easier for their community to have access to things like condoms and other birth prevention control tools. They offer their clients healthy meal options at the center whenever they make food. They have a bus that goes into the community to see people because they recognized that not everyone have access to transportations and other factors. They work with other community agencies to promote health in community, especially among younger generations. They offer a one to one services to people when they come in. If any of their members come in and say they need help, they can meet one on one with one of the staffs to discuss the issue. This are all central to what makes their services unique.

**Accessible:** I think the organization is definitely very accessible to people. Firstly, they do not have a specific group of people that cannot receive services there---everyone is welcome in as much as you are within the age criteria. Again, they are providing services in a nontraditional way in the hopes of being able to eliminate barriers to participation---this I believe is what compelled them to start the community bus. This is central to full participation; finding unique ways of providing services to people who would otherwise not be able to access them. She gave an example of their clients that have “behavioral issues” that they still find ways to provide services to either by them calling when they need something. Interim of the location of

the organization, I believe they are located relatively close to city center. There are public transportations close by that can be accessed.

**Individual and Community Centered:** The Alex is really grounded in providing service to the individuals they work for in a person centered manner. This is reflected in the story that we were told about when they wanted to start a new group. They had a focus group to determine things like: the name of the group, who should be involved, the type of topic they people would like to discuss, the type of snacks the people would like to have, etc. This exemplifies their determination to ground their practices being mindful of the people they are providing those services to. Also, they are constantly attempting to refine the way the provide services and trying to reach more people that might not currently be reached. This is important in the services delivery process of any organization. The Alex is constantly evolving and changing. No year is ever the same for them. They work in large part with the community to provide a number of services they provide. For example, they have a large number of community organizations that they collaborate with. Their food hamper is provided by the food bank. They make every effort to work with the community to promote awareness to the many issues they deal with.

**Interdisciplinary:** The staff at the organization comes from wide varieties of backgrounds. They have: doctors, nurses, social workers and youth workers, councilors, postnatal and anthinatal---all of them working together as a team. Each one of them brings varieties of knowledge, experience and background to the table and they pull these resources together to meet the needs of their teaming population. I find this quit remarkable. With this uniqueness, they are providing services in a nontraditional way.

**Integrated:** This organization has develop a very unique position within the many professions. They work with the health departments, social services, community organizations to

ensure that the services they are providing is relevant to the people. This in turn improves the services they provide to their community. They can better ensure that they provide the most accurate service in a timely and accessible manner. Our guide told us that they serve as the hub of all information for the individuals they work for. They can get most of the services they need in one place rather than going to many different organizations individually. By integrating the various services in one place, the barriers that might be associated to having those services is hopefully reduced. Integration is therefore important to effectiveness in their case.

**Community Governed:** The Alex has a board made up of 10 people and an executive officers. A number of the board members all come from various background, but they all have extensive experience working with venerable youths and youths at risks. The executive officer reports to the board and the board makes the bigger decisions. The boards are not directly involved with the organization, however, they are provided updates by the executive officer. The aim of having community board is to enhance community health. This is done by ensuring that the board reflects diverse communities. This people can also advocate for the awareness of the various issues facing the organization within the larger community and with government. Essentially, they can balance the inequality of power. This also ensures that the organization is responding to the needs of its members.

**Social Determinant of Health:** This is one area that I think The Alex is exceling. They do a love of social determinate of health work: making sure the people are not starving, helping them find hosing, providing them with a stable environment; helping them develop natural relationship. I'm not sure whether or not they subsidence their income, but I will assume they provide resources on the type of grants they can receive. They do a lot of anti-oppression work indirectly by educating the community about a number of issues. . There was a strong emphasis

on social support. This are key to increasing the quality of life of the people they work for and for ensuring that they are providing inclusive health.

**Locality Development:** The Alex is very much a locality development approach. They are an organization that hopes to provide services to people who would otherwise not be receiving services. They recognize that a number of issues that the individuals they work for have is something that affects everyone in the community and through partnership with other community organizations, they are able to address some of those issues. Their very aim is building capacity with the community through collaboration to address health inequality within the community. This is exemplified by their many alliances with several other organizations, their dedication to providing person centered practice, and finally, their keen focus on meeting the needs of community.

In conclusion, through this experience, I have learned that in order for community organizations to be relevant to the needs of its people, they have to use a multidisciplinary approach. Through diversity, The Alex is providing services in a way that is continually relevant and potent to meet the needs of the community. Community Development is a very challenging endeavor that relies on the working together of many facets in order to be relevant. As a practitioner, being community competent will allow me to be better equip to deal with the various challenges that comes with each systems.

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