



Belonging Delburne | A Local Deepening Community Initiative

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Why A Local Deepening Community Initiative?

In 2012, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how to build deeper and stronger communities, Tamarack launched a campaign to host 1,000 conversations in communities across Canada. Emerging from these conversations are incredible stories from people who shared of communities coming together in times of need and opportunity. It also presented common themes of a sense of belonging, the importance of building on community assets, and how creating a shared vision of what community looks like can be a powerful exercise in people working together to create a better world. Three years later, these conversations are continuing. At the heart, this project creates an opportunity to think and act differently together: recognizing that no one sector, working alone, can effectively address complex community issues.

Delburne Profile

The Village of Delburne, located half way between Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta, provides a case study that demonstrates what's possible when citizens collaborate with government and organizations united by a commitment to create positive change. Over the course of four months, in partnership with Tamarack, a local leadership team in Delburne convened over 400 people (48% of the town's population) to participate in conversations about their strengths, challenges and hopes for their community. A related survey and a photo project – Belonging Delburne – contributed to this effort to strengthen the community's sense of connection.

The analysis shared below explores the overall themes, assets and stories that emerged throughout this process.

Who Did We Hear From?

A total of 400 people were involved in the project (48% of Delburne's population)

- A total of 20 Community Conversations were hosted across the region.
- These conversation Involved a total of 260 individuals
- 245 surveys were completed
- Engaged "unusual suspects" and new community leadership to support emerging projects
- Identified 4 projects that are now being advanced together
- 130 photographs were taken of local residents for a large-scale portrait project exhibit entitled- Belonging Delburne



Timeline: In late October of 2013, the Village of Delburne, Delburne FCSS and Tamarack began a partnership to gather a series of community conversations in the Delburne, AB. This process took place over a 4- month period and was implemented by a local leadership team.

Population: 830 (2011 Census)

Partners: Tamarack partnered with a local leadership team, including: the Village of Delburne and Delburne Family & Community Support Services (FCSS).

Results: For the Belonging Delburne photo project, internationally renowned photographer, John Beebe, invited residents to pose for portraits with an item that represented belonging. These local resident’s portraits were then wheat-pasted into gigantic murals on multiple exterior buildings throughout the village to create a striking visual representation of community ownership.

Watch the video [here](#)

What did we learn?

The information generated through this intentional effort to deepen community has enabled Delburne residents to identify, prioritize four priorities for shared community action:

- Main Street revitalization
- Health and Wellness
- A Belonging Delburne art project
- A communication project

Local Deepening Community Initiative Roadmap



Delburne represents a growing shift in communities and neighbourhoods across Canada to focus on stronger resident engagement and collaboration with local government to decide – and implement – important community projects.

Defining Community

Below are some ideas about the meaning of community that emerged from the 7 conversations that took place with youth and children.

- **Physical:** airplanes, cars, a market place, the hockey rink
- **A Gathering of People:** family, friends, people, neighbours
- **An Activity:** a bonfire, fishing with the family, playing hockey, working on the farm
- **A Describing Word:** safe, comfortable, global (online video games), good, people who know each other
- **An Action:** teach others, help your family, help people when they're hurt and can't help themselves, serving others, giving



pie/drinks to others, play with others to cheer them up, to make friends with who don't have any friends.

In the other conversations with adults and some of the older youth, participants were asked to share a story of when they have felt a strong sense of community. From these stories, we explored **what the job of community involves**. Here are some ideas that were shared:

- To provide support in crisis
- To honour each other's memory (shared in the context of a community member who has passed away and the community had gathered to celebrate their life)
- To welcome each other
- For older generations to embrace, support and teach the younger generations; to encouraged the youth to get involved
- To have activities available for those of all ages and abilities
- To listen and to be a voice
- To support local businesses
- To be proud of one's town/ to be spirited

Conversation Quotes

In 10 years, our community will...

"Be proud of our thriving, beautiful town because we will be working together, respectful, trusting and will know and take care of our neighbours and developing community."

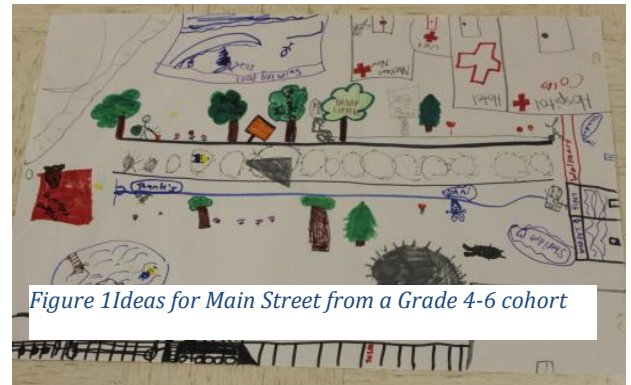


Figure 1 Ideas for Main Street from a Grade 4-6 cohort

- To protect others; to be responsible for one another
- To get to know each other
- To discover hidden talent and find ways for this to be shared/celebrated
- To communicate and include each other in events
- To be stronger, together

Overall Hopes

- Generally, **growth** is desired: in terms of population (more young families was mentioned several times), economic growth (businesses, more jobs) and more activities
- It's really important to note that though growth is desired, there is an equally strong hope that the **"small, friendly town" feel will** not be lost if there is growth
- **More businesses** (the word business appeared 71 times on the surveys in response to this question: What are your 3 hopes for our community?) Specifically: unique businesses, home businesses, and small businesses, specifically restaurants and grocery stores. Restaurants came up as the most



common business suggestion on surveys and in all the conversations held.

- **Accessible health care services.** Either for these services to be local or for transportation to the services. There is interest in a pharmacy, business medical centre, and assisted living/senior living centre services. This was brought up in all the conversations, but with deep concern by the historians and coffee crowd.

- **More year-round activities/recreation and community events** that are geared to all residents including young families. Ideas for such activities were:

- Pool/water park
 - Park and pathways
 - Facilities where people can connect
 - Music stage
 - More opportunity to engage with local arts/music
 - Trampoline building
 - Better sports programs for all including youth (e.g., football, track, curling, outdoor ed., tennis, baseball, soccer)
 - New arena (idea: combine groups to make recreation buildings more viable e.g., ag society, curling rink)
 - Trade Shows
- People expressed a desire to keep Delburne's **heritage** but have a new look on Main Street through beautification (flowers, trees) and updating the buildings. On the topic of infrastructure, locals want street improvements, thorough snow clearing, paved school parking lot, city water, and upgrades to the Hall.
 - There is a desire to create a culture of caring, community spirit/pride, respect, and trust and community engagement
 - A clear, unified, central communication plan for all community events and initiatives



- More environmentally friendly initiatives: electric cars, solar/wind power
- Have people who are new to the village feel more welcome and included as soon as they arrive
- The coffee crowd expressed wanting more shops in the area where they can buy the parts and tools they needed in timely fashion
- Public transportation to surrounding areas that is accessible and affordable
- Promotion of talent and greater support of the arts.

Some fun ideas from the children:

7 of the 20 conversations were with children and youth. They had lots of amazing ideas! Many of their ideas were quite similar, if not exactly the same, as what we heard from adults and seniors. That said, they do have great imaginations.

Here are some of their unique ideas:

- That it will rain iphones
- We can go camping with LOTS of marshmallows
- We could have a live dinosaur to ride (a friendly one!)
- A mud pit to play in
- A shelter for emergencies- in case it rains and people have nowhere to go
- Camping in ice cream land



- Main street with lots of trees and flowers
- Signs: don't litter and live healthy by not smoking
- They want a Walmart, a Bass-Pro shop and more restaurants such as McDonalds, Wendy's and Dairy Queen
- A hospital with a hotel attached so you could stay with your loved ones
- A veterinary clinic to help the animals
- A pharmacy
- A laser tag centre
- A zip line
- A horse stable

Overall Challenges

- The most commonly mentioned issue was a lack of privacy- everyone "knows your business" (this comes with living in a small town)
- Has become a bedroom community: people go outside of Delburne to work, access services, buy groceries, to be social, etc.
- Those who have been in the community for many years expressed that those who have moved in don't know the history/roots of Delburne and so overall pride is decreasing
- Many different groups or organizations have tried to start different clubs, hosted events or run programs that have not been well attended or supported- so there is a sense of hurt and frustration (Maybe too many similar initiatives running, instead of unifying and working together?)
- No centralized location for news and information. There is the Village Voice, but not everyone receives this and businesses cannot advertise in this communication. People shared that it is hard to know what is going on in the village.
- CAVE people (a term floating around amongst Delburne citizens) Citizens Against Virtually Everything; a group of citizens who thwart any new initiatives with negativity
- Since it is a really small community and there are

Conversation Quotes

In 10 years, our community will...

"Grow and thrive in a positive way. Delburne will be a self-sufficient, clean, and welcoming place to live."

many families who have lived in Delburne for generations, conflict can persist for generations. Some youth expressed frustration about being judged by their last name (because they may come from a family with a bad reputation) before others actually get to know them (teachers included). It's easy for prejudice to prevent people from coming to know each other and work together.

- A group of children shared that bullying is an issue- to the point that they know of some children that are now home-schooled because of this
- Faith communities are finding it hard to "break in" to the community- they want to share their programs and want to contribute ideas, but don't feel appreciated or heard
- Because local businesses are not thriving, it's very hard to find work in Delburne
- Mixed opinions on the grocery stores: some people appreciate it and try to buy food there are much as they can, others say the food is over-priced and not fresh



Overall Assets (What is here/can be accessed internally?)

1) Physical Space

- The Arena
- Spray Park (the kids love it!)
- Skate Park
- Walking Paths
- Golf Course
- Grocery Store
- Churches
- K-12 School
- Generally- it's small in size, has access to agriculture, lower cost of living, and is close to the city, a quiet hometown/old fashioned atmosphere with rich history

2) Skills of the Local Residents (Human Assets)

- The people who are involved already: high levels of volunteerism
- A collective interest to better the community
- Longevity- many hold the history of this community as they have lived in the area for many years
- Many people know each other- so often bump into each other around town and can be friendly with each other (some children shared that they find it fun to bump into people they know at the market)
- Many instances of caring for others

Conversation Quotes

In 10 years, our community will...

"A vibrant town where people young and old will want to live and support each other."

Conversation Quotes

In 10 years, our community will...

"Will be on the top '10 places to live in Canada' list."

- The youth shared many stories of being affirmed by older generations when they bumped into them in public- being congratulated on their sports games and club involvement. The youth shared that this makes them feel a sense of belonging.
- 50+ people come through the local hotel each morning to have coffee and spend time with each other- there is a large group who are committed to meeting and being in relationship with each other in an on-going basis
- Knowledge in the arts, canoe-making, agriculture, business development, teaching, preaching, quilting, graphic design, financial coordinating, skills in specific sports, and mechanical engineering make me feel like I belong; like I have a place in our community."

3) Programs/Initiatives

- Friday night pick-up hockey at the arena with a many generations of men (a youth shared that this is something he loves about living in Delburne)
- Remembrance Day Assemblies- great connection between the seniors and the youth (the seniors mentioned really appreciating this)
- "Ghost-riders"- the skate board park revitalization project which has a group of four youth with the committee members. A wonderful example of a multi-generational collaborative project.



Overall External needs (what needs to be brought in from outside of Delburne to make these dreams possible?)

- New people moving into Delburne would increase spirit, energy and resources
- Funding for specific projects and ideas (for instance: developing a farmer’s market, more of an artisan community with quilting, etc.)
- If Delburne develops itself as a unique town that people want to live in and visit, tourism could support the local economy and morale

Overall Internal Actions to Accomplish Hopes:

- Greater communication- more frequent, inclusive, readily accessible
- Increase the profile of Delburne so that it is known as a vibrant community that others with want to join and move to/visit- the Delburne’s “story” with others through the media
- Have a greater diversity of people helping and volunteering; especially those who aren’t currently involved
- Plan meetings at times that accommodate the schedules of most people (ie. Not during regular working hours)
- Many comments were made about accessibility, especially on Main Street. It would great if volunteers could put more sand/salt to make the sidewalks safer in the winter

How Do We Get There?

“In what ways could you contribute to positive change in our community?”

“Volunteer” appeared 50 times in the answers to this question. Different types of volunteering listed were:

- education
- committee involvement
- stay active and involved
- working with young people
- implement programs

Conversation Quotes

In 10 years, our community will...

“Be a prosperous, beautiful, caring, and peaceful community with increased services and lots of laughter.”

- facilitate conversations
- plant trees
- put up posters
- attend meetings and use voice
- get involved with food bank
- teach outdoor education
- organize events
- Welcome Basket (& welcome committee)
- set up a night watch
- showcase history with character re-enactment
- assist 4-H and other activities for youth
- team building skills
- work on council
- help elderly or needy

Many responses had to do with general actions:

- thinking and talking about Delburne with others
- get to know people
- publicize the positive
- encourage others
- support business
- elbow grease
- conversation
- get others involved
- help others
- increased belonging through interaction



- be a resource on who is doing what
- continue to talk and listen and give people the opportunity to contribute
- donating
- be nice
- don't litter
- be helpful
- sell toy that is not being used
- join a club/group
- encourage others
- vote/ use your voice
- stay local for activities (support local)
- speak highly of the town to others
- dialogue with influential people
- develop relationships
- be cooperative
- encourage others
- share information with other communities across the province
- gather knowledge and understanding

Attitudes or a generally positive frame of mind:

- try
- be friendly
- enthusiasm
- do my best
- caring more
- willing and able to participate
- positive attitude/energy
- encouragement
- “moving forward through work of FCSS & Economic Development”
- remain open to new ideas
- trust the process
- be happy
- “yes factor not a no!”

Thank you!

Our thanks go out to the residents of Delburne who participated in these conversations, shared their thoughts and ideas and helped us reconnect to the power and possibility of community.

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