

# The Art of Collaboration: Reflections from the Manitoba 2009 CED/CD Gathering

by Rachelle McElroy



I've just returned from Winnipeg, awestruck by the creative action and commitment taken by the people in the inner city of Winnipeg to forward resilient communities.

Neighbourhoods of West Broadway, Spence Neighbourhood and West End, Central, and Main Street and Selkirk Avenue each hold their own story of resurgence for the people and by the people.

On October 23rd, I attended the 2009 CED/CD Gathering titled **Stronger Together**, the annual Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CEDNet) conference, and I am excited by the passion for community that is present.

This experience has led me to reflect on what it took for the individuals collaborating to stay strong while shifting communities of extreme violence and poverty to creative, caring and resilient ones. I do believe that change is inevitable, but we, as facilitators of change have a more specific interest in what it takes. Personally and collaboratively, we can make new public policies real and create resilient communities.

Staff and members of *The Canadian CED network* and practitioners and researchers with the *Canadian Social Economy* are some of the many facilitators who have taken responsibility of forwarding the Social Economy and community economic development in Canada. That is why, the moment I felt the most alive during the CED Gathering was listening to Sue Hemphill, practicing mediator and conflict resolution trainer with Resolution Skills Centre in Winnipeg at The Art of Collaboration workshop. There, I was able to explore the intricacies of a successful collaborative endeavour. Within one hour, through a series of questions and answers to the group I was able to get a sense of the qualifications and experience of the 30 individuals in the room, and gained better appreciation of my own contribution to a collaborative project.

Sue described collaboration as.... two people driving a vehicle together - one with their feet on the gas and the brake, the other with their hands on the wheel, both with their eyes on the road. As CED practitioners - working collaboratively is our bread and butter. However when that falls apart – when we take our eyes off the road - what happens to the communities and individuals we are working hard to support?

Sue shared her own perspective of what it means to lead and participate in a collaborative project. She says, “a collaboration project is an experiment; we are the scientists and the subjects at the same time”. Given this, I can deduce that it is just as important to nurture and grow a project because it is the relationships that are the foundation.

**“A collaboration project is an experiment; we are the scientists and the subjects at the same time”.**

**Sue Hemphill**

Grounding a project by seeking mediation services can safeguard both the project and the relationships for the long run. Too often, conflict is avoided, building up tension in a group. “A pro-active solution” Sue suggests, “is to incorporate facilitated mediation services into a project, instead of waiting until conflict arises.” During these sessions participants are encouraged to voice negative feelings in a safe environment. By incorporating mediation services as part of a community development project for example, community developers are seeing so much success that they are building it directly into the funding proposal.

Few of the neighbourhood renewal projects could have been possible if cooperation was not present between participants and within participant groups. Sue highlighted how important it is to nurture what we create together as much as our relationship to each other. At times, seeking outside support to strengthen the relationship can be just as important as seeking professional help to build a website or a communication strategy. This is something that I will endeavor to integrate as part of my next collaborative project.