

Huron Perth Community Planning Table

*Exploring Community Planning in
Huron and Perth Counties*

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Section One: Project Overview	2
Project Purpose	2
Huron-Perth Community Planning Table.....	2
Social Research and Planning Council	2
Definitions of Planning.....	2
Two-County Report: Research Base.....	2
Two-County Report: Developing the Research Questions.....	2
Workshop Details.....	2
Workshop Design.....	2
Section Two: Workshop Themes	2
Section Three: Summary Suggestions	2
Appendices: Workshop Evaluations and Materials	2

Executive Summary

This report follows from a Trillium Foundation grant that was awarded to the Huron Perth Community Planning Table. The report is divided into four sections.

The first section provides an overview of the project activities that includes evolving a Huron-Perth community planning model and a two-county social report. The overarching grant goal is to explore the viability of community planning in Huron and Perth counties. Community planning is a large term that needs a focus. To this end, YOU Power workshops were developed to bring youth and seniors together to discuss issues that their individual age groups are facing. There is strong evidence that supports the engagement of the public in social planning and in providing opportunities for people to collaborate in solving the problems that impact them. How to engage the public is an ongoing challenge. The section includes the details of the workshop components with a brief rationale for the design construction.

The second section of the report synthesizes the discussions that took place during the workshops in four communities. Themes that emerged to reveal shared and varied opinions and attitudes of youth and older adults are drawn from discussions about what it is like being young and also growing older in the counties, the reality and causes of stereotyping that both age groups experience, the need to build intergenerational relationships and personal stories about how that happens. Generally it was found that youth and seniors do not interact very often outside of immediate family. Strong feelings were expressed repeatedly about the importance of cultivating these relationships for the health of individuals and the community.

The third section makes a number of suggestions about how the workshops might serve the larger project goal to sustain community planning. The importance of creating spaces where people of all ages can talk together about the things that matter to them is quite clear. The workshop design together with the YOU Power concept provides a framework and a model that could be used by different planning groups for a coordinated approach to community planning in the two counties. Next steps toward the big vision of sustainable cradle-to-grave community planning are outlined.

Appendices include information from the evaluations that were given at the end of the workshops. Participants consistently rated the workshop experience very high and many asked if there would be other similar opportunities. Also in the appendix are materials from the workshops, the invitation and YOU Power PowerPoint presentation.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation funded a one-year project to the Huron Perth Community Planning Table (HPCPT) to explore and enhance the relationship between groups and activities related to community planning in Huron and Perth counties. Anticipated results for the project included community dialogue with possible consensus being achieved on a sustainable structure and process for ongoing community planning. A two-county Social Report was also included in the project plan.

Representatives from HPCPT, the United Way of Perth-Huron and the Social Research and Planning Council participated in the project as members of the working group and contributed to a number of the planning discussions over the course of the project.

Huron-Perth Community Planning Table

The Huron Perth Community Planning Table (HPCPT) is a collaborative that has grown from a vision held by a broad range of over eighty human service leaders and educators committed to establishing a new approach to community planning in Huron and Perth counties. The intent of the HPCPT is to form a centre where cradle-to-grave planning activities that span multiple service sectors can be made visible to all stakeholders in the counties. The visibility allows for greater effectiveness of planning that can inform, and be informed by, cross-sector information and exchange. HPCPT established a Mission in 2007: To provide a unified, community owned, integrated table for community planning.

Social Research and Planning Council

The Social Research and Planning Council (SRPC) is funded by the United Way of Perth-Huron and is comprised of community representatives who are dedicated to the collection, analysis and distribution of information relating to social trends and issues in Perth and Huron counties. It is the hope of SRPC that with the information provided in research reports, social and human service agencies and funders can make informed decisions regarding courses of action and implementation resources.

The amalgamation of United Way Perth and United Way Huron in 2010 increased the former Perth County Social Research and Planning Council mandate to include both counties.

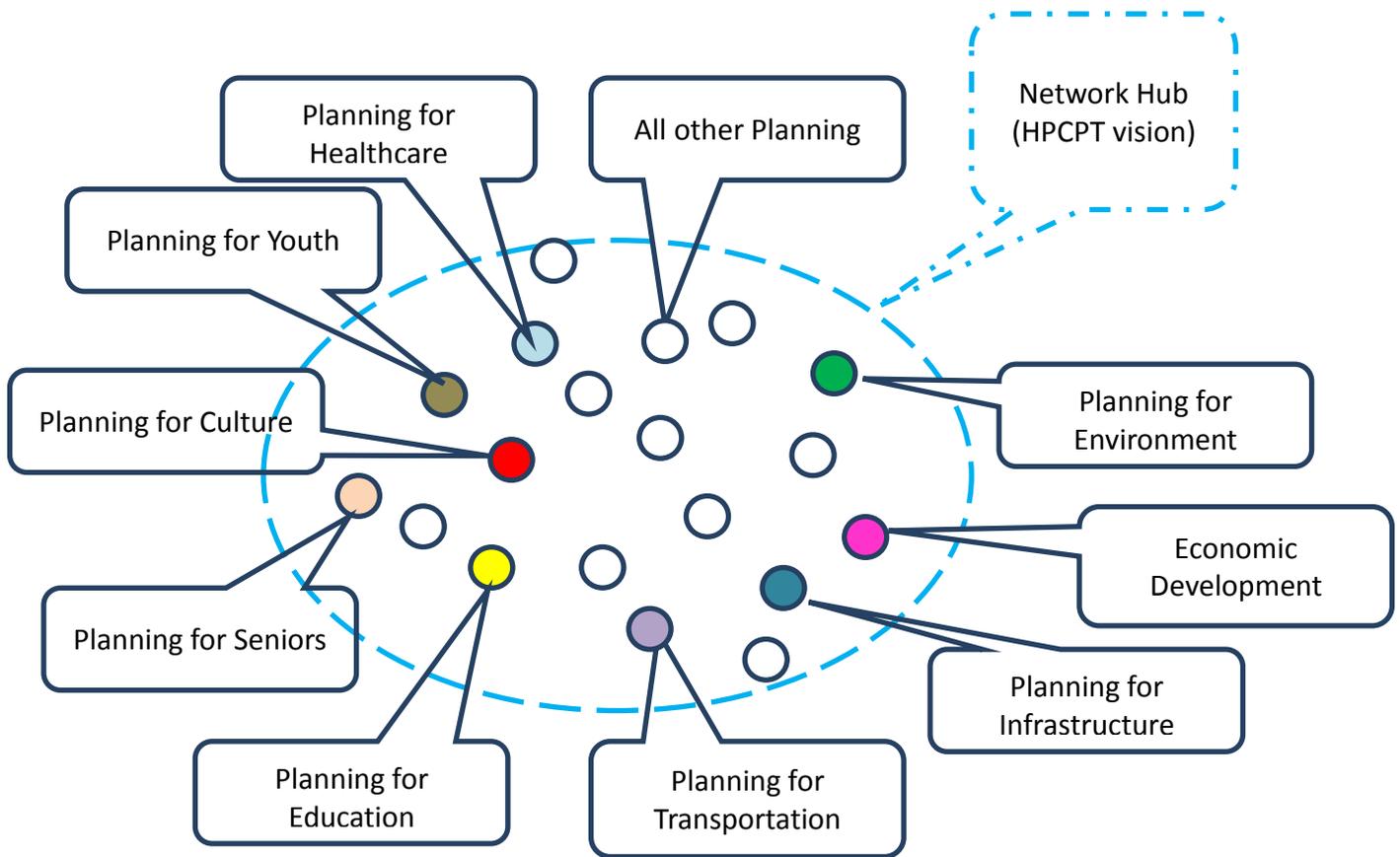
Definitions of Planning

Planning takes in a number of activities that could include:

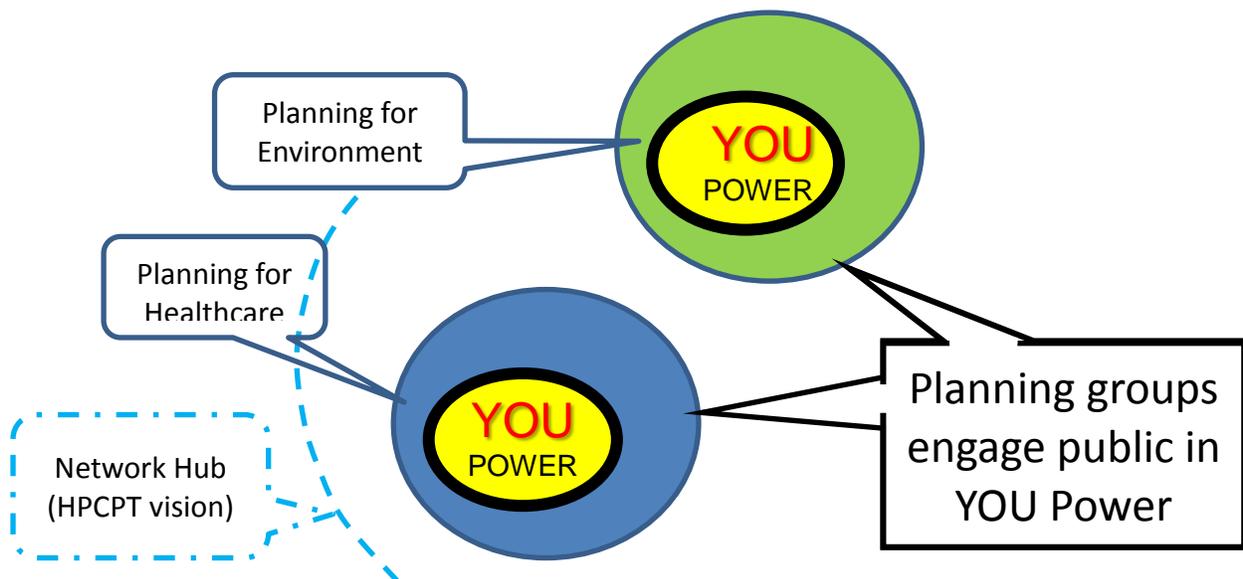
- Planning for implementation of specific Ministry / community programs. A 2007 HPCPT report listed 50 committees / groups engaged in this type of planning activity in the two counties.
- Meta-planning – the original HPCPT vision and mandate was to create a network 'hub' where all of the separate planning groups can make themselves visible to each other – creating a 'whole picture' of planning activity across sectors and issues in Huron and Perth. This whole, or bigger picture could allow for 'meta-planning' (planning that takes into account the range and scope of planning / funding activities occurring at any particular time) and also in supporting more informed specific planning of projects, programs, while reducing duplication through increased collaboration.
- Social Planning is the process of investigating and responding to the needs and aspirations of the people who live or work in a community. Citizen engagement for the purpose of accessing local wisdom, motivating shared ownership, heightening the individual and collective sense of belonging, and increasing citizen involvement are key activities.

Toward a Vision of Cradle-to-Grave Community Planning

The project addresses each of the three different types of planning identified above through the vision of the HPCPT to create a network "hub" where all the separate planning groups can make themselves visible to each other. The idea is to create the possibility for a 'whole picture' of planning activities across sectors and issues to emerge in Huron and Perth. This bigger picture could allow for 'meta-planning' for the municipalities and organizations with county-wide mandates. The theory is that better planning decisions will be made if the groups responsible for planning are aware of other planning efforts and groups as well as where they themselves fit into the bigger picture. HPCPT has provided a physical table since 2007 to create the hub but the sheer number of planning activities that take place in the counties requires a different approach to realize the potential of a holistic approach to community planning. Below is a simple illustration of the vision. The hub line is dotted because it is still an idea that needs to be brought into form.



Included in the HPCPT vision of whole community “cradle-to-grave” planning is the acknowledgement that the public has an important contribution to make through social planning. The YOU Power workshops were designed as a potential model. Below is an illustration of the possible relationship between a common approach to social planning such as YOU Power and the many planning groups that could be involved in a planning network.



Neither drawing is intended to be prescriptive or definitive. Rather the images are meant to provide a starting point for discussions beyond this report with a broad audience. Every citizen in Huron and Perth has a stake in how planning happens. Finding ways to access the wealth of diverse and creative ideas in our communities on specific issues, and that can help to realize the big vision of a coordinated, integrated, strategic community planning process and body, is a shared challenge.

Two-County Social Report: Research Base

“When the old are not allowed to tell their story, the young grow up without history. If the young are not listened to, we have no future.”

For the two-county social report, the project workgroup initially identified youth issues as a shared area of interest for the report focus. Over the course of a number of meetings, the conversation broadened to consider youth and seniors. Discussions included acknowledgment of the impossibility of solving complex social issues facing youth and seniors strictly through government funded programs. Tough economic times can create new opportunities for innovation as people struggle to “do more with less”. The need for increasing public engagement in the issues is an ongoing challenge that calls for greater collaboration, innovation and broad strategic and social planning for the purpose of improving the wellbeing and quality of life for all people in their local communities. Youth and seniors are two populations with overlapping issues that can be seen to intersect.

Social Isolation is a Common Experience

Many youth are growing up isolated from the range of caring and consistent adult relationships so important for navigating the course from adolescence to adulthood. An accumulation of research from the social sciences suggests that adult relationships — provided not only by parents, but by grandparents, neighbors and other interested elders — are a common factor among resilient children, who achieve success even when growing up under disadvantaged and stressful circumstances. Children and young people need adults who take an interest in them and who can spend time with them.

At the other end of the lifespan, older adults report increasing isolation. Abuse of older adults has emerged in the last ten years as a significant public health issue.¹ This type

¹ Statistics Canada reports that 4-10% of seniors experience abuse of some kind.

of abuse is usually perpetrated by children and grandchildren, most often sons and grandsons.²

“Us and Them” – The Impact of Ageism

Research has shown that a lack of empathy caused by social isolation contributes to harsher judgements of others and has been linked to the development of ageist attitudes that are often present in abusive behaviour.³ Ageism is defined as discrimination against another because of their age. A recent study showed that young adults who have ageist attitudes are more likely to engage in abusive behaviour toward seniors.⁴ Conversely, young people who have close contact and good relationships with older adults, also have more positive attitudes toward them, which may in turn reduce the risk of abuse.

Older adults also develop ageist attitudes about youth, falsely believing youth to be perpetrating most of the violent crime in Canada; therefore giving rise to beliefs that youth, especially in groups, should be avoided and even feared.⁵ Youth are often seen as being lazy and irresponsible by older adults who are resistant to changing this perspective even when research says otherwise.⁶

The Case for Encouraging Intergenerational Relationships

When considering the impact of social isolation on seniors and youth, there are mutual benefits to consider their issues together and to look for innovative solutions to the challenges they face by building bridges between the generations.

Respectful relationships grow when older adults and young people are given the opportunity to see one another as individuals and not as stereotypes harboured in a large group. By getting to know one another through activities, youth and older adults become aware and informed of the challenges effecting each generation. This brings an appreciative understanding of similarities and differences in one another’s lifestyles and attitudes. By building positive connections between individuals of different generations,

² Statistics Canada Report—*Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2006*

³ See: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=what-me-care>,
<http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/cafe2/article/97> and
http://academics.tctc.edu/adn_nursing/Nelson-Ageism-Prejudice%20Against%20Our%20Feared%20Future%20Self.pdf

⁴ See Yongjie Yon 2010 article cited in bibliography

⁵ Most crime is committed by adults and most youth crime is perpetrated against other youths.
<http://www.stthomasu.ca/research/youth/myths.htm>

⁶ See: http://articles.cnn.com/2011-04-20/opinion/stepp.teens.followup_1_young-people-generation-asian-kids/3?_s=PM:OPINION

communities become more resilient. The network of caring prevents mistreatment of individuals and groups.⁷

There is a growing body of cross-sector research that supports the case for building stronger relationships between the generations as a primary prevention strategy to address multiple and intersecting social issues at the root, while increasing citizen participation in the process. This is the fertile ground for the two-county exploration and report.

Two-County Report: Developing the Research Questions

The shift in the report focus from youth, to youth and seniors, was in large part informed by past reports published by the Social Research and Planning Council (formerly the Perth County Social Research and Planning Council) and a group of Huron County health professionals.

In 2009, the Perth County Social Research and Planning Council published a report titled: *Breaking the Silence: A Report on Elder Abuse in Perth County*. Recommendations included increasing public awareness through a public education campaign and holding public meetings to formulate a “plan of action”.

In 2009, the Ministry of Health funded a Huron project under the Drug Strategy Communities Initiative Fund titled: *The SPARK Project - Building on rural youth assets to develop and maintain a health promotion website*. Recommendations included maintaining a youth-run website, local health promotion content and creating adult /youth partnerships to generate content.

In 2007, a report titled: *Voices of Youth: An Inventory of Programs and Services for Youth in Perth County* was published. Recommendations included creating opportunities for youth to participate more fully in existing community activities and working toward development of non-programmed activities for “less formally active” youth.

⁷ <http://www.intergenerational.ca>

In reviewing the reports for the current project, an idea surfaced about using the information as the basis to engage youth and seniors in discussion. Questions were raised that ultimately led to the project design. They were:

- Is the public aware of the SRPC reports?
- What impact do the reports have?
- Can the information in the reports be a catalyst for engaging youth and seniors in addressing the very issues identified by the reports?

When looked at together, *Voices of Youth* and *Breaking the Silence* point toward the need for greater and mutual awareness of the issues facing both age groups as well as the need to engage the whole community in planning for responsive and practical action. Using the reports to generate discussion among the subject populations was endorsed by the workgroup and by the SRPC as the focus for the project report. Information would be gathered for the report through workshops held in the two counties.

The research questions for the workshops include:

- Do seniors and youth in Huron and Perth experience an intergenerational gap?
- Are seniors and youth aware of the different issues they each face? (specifically the content issues as reported by SRPC and Spark reports)
- What opportunities do the age groups have to connect with each other?
- Are seniors and youth interested in learning more and working on social issues together?

Larger questions are also raised:

- How does this project contribute to the HPCPT vision for cradle-to-grave planning in the counties?
- What are the opportunities for social planning?
- Does SRPC research provide an effective frame for public engagement?

Workshop Details

A full day workshop was designed to bring youth and seniors together to discuss issues and recommendations outlined in the SRPC reports. Four communities were selected; two in Perth county and two in Huron. The workshops took place during the late fall of 2011 and were held in:

- St. Marys

- Stratford
- Goderich
- Wingham

Participants for the workshops were invited through contact with seniors programs and groups and through the Avon-Maitland District School Board. A total of 68 people participated over four workshops, 35 students and 33 adults. As much as possible a balance in numbers and gender was sought between students and adults; however it was difficult to achieve.

Students were included from both public and high schools in each of the communities. Teachers were asked to select students who are influential with their peers, not necessarily good students. Similar requests were made for seniors who are active and engaged in their communities.

The breakdown of participant age and numbers are captured in the chart below. (See appendices for invitation)

Location	Girls under 20	Boys under 20	Women over 50	Men over 50	Adults (20-50)
St. Marys	3	1	6	3	1
Stratford	5	3	2	2	2
Goderich	10	1	7	1	1
Wingham	8	4	2	5	1
Total	26	9	17	11	5

Workshop Design

The workshops were led by two facilitators, Rae Smith, a Baha'i leader and group facilitator from St. Marys, and Margaret MacPherson, the project lead. The workshops were originally designed to run from 9:00 a.m – 3:00 p.m. however; an adjustment was made during the first session so that the workshops were complete by 2:00 p.m. The original design proved to be too ambitious in content.

The agenda included a number of discussions and activities that occurred in the following order:

1. Introductory PowerPoint Presentation

Following introductions and an overview of the agenda, a presentation was made to introduce the concept of YOU Power and the issues identified in the SRPC reports,

Breaking the Silence and Voices for Youth. (See YOU Power described in the paragraph below, and appendices for PPT)

2. Small group discussions

Youth and adults were separated for a facilitated discussion. A list of ten (possible) questions was posed to both groups. Participants were also encouraged to introduce other topics and/or their own questions. Separating the age groups gave both a chance to talk together and to find common ground with their peers before moving into discussion with the older / younger participants.

1. Do you have relationships with older / young people?
2. Where do you interact with older / younger people? With peers?
3. What do you imagine is good about being an older adult / youth?
4. What do you think is difficult about being an older adult / youth?
5. Do you think it is important for youth to be involved with older adults?
6. How do you benefit? How do they benefit?
7. Do you believe older adults / youth have important lessons to share?
8. What opportunities are there to build these relationships?
9. What would you most like to know about older adults / youth?
10. What would you like to tell older adults / youth about life?

3. Fishbowl Exercise

The fishbowl exercise followed the small group discussions. The fishbowl is created with two circles, an inner circle where the discussion among one group takes place and an outer circle where the other group “eavesdrops” on the discussion. The rule is that the outer circle does not participate in the discussion while the inner circle pretends the outer circle is not present.

Two of the questions asked in the small groups (Q. 9 and 10) were included to create the opportunity for the groups to ask each questions they most wanted to know about each other and to give their best life experience advice.

4. Large Group Discussion

After both groups had taken their turn in the inner and outer circles of the fishbowl, a whole group discussion was held to summarize the experience and to identify similarities, differences and points of interest between the age groups.

5. Video – Free Hugs

Just prior to lunch, a YouTube video was played to further highlight the idea that small actions can have meaningful impact. The video takes place in Italy and shows a group of young people holding up signs that say “Free Hugs” in a marketplace area.

6. Lunch with Ice Cream

Participants were encouraged to mix together at “intergenerational” tables for lunch. Evaluations indicated that the lunchtime was an important element to the day and that both age groups enjoyed the interaction. The ice cream was also mentioned in the evaluations and is included in the workshop design to provide a sense of play.

7. TARP Exercise

Following lunch, participants were asked to stand on a large blue tarp. The only instructions for the exercise are to turn the tarp completely over without anyone falling off. The exercise provides a direct experience with achieving a seemingly impossible task through shared leadership, collaboration and trust. Those not able to participate were asked to watch the process to provide feedback in the debrief that followed about how the success actually happened.

8. Individual Interviews and Storytelling

The final activity of the workshop saw participants paired (a youth with an adult) for one-to-one dialogue. The instructions were to tell a peak experience where a person had had a big impact on the storyteller’s life through some small action. The person listening was asked to assume an interviewer role and to ask questions so that the full significance of the action was considered. The roles were then reversed so that both participants had an opportunity to recall and reflect a personal experience.

9. A Challenge to Take-Away

Just prior to wrapping up the session, participants were given a challenge: Watch how you live your life and report back (through email or letter) the smallest thing you do in the next few days that makes a positive difference for another person. The focus is on the smallest action that comes into awareness to demonstrate individual ability to have impact in everyday ways, often not noticed. Eleven participants took the time to respond with their stories.

Introducing “YOU Power” in Huron and Perth

The concept of “YOU Power” was developed both to market the workshops and to provide the foundational basis for the workshops. The concept works in two ways;

- to promote the idea that “YOU” have power to make change and that,

- we collectively need the power that (all of) “YOU” can bring to creating the communities where everyone feels valued, supported and safe

The exploration of intergenerational relationships in Huron and Perth is the stated reason for the workshops, and as well, the workshops are designed to have an impact that contributes to citizen engagement. The underlying premise of the workshop design is that if we want more people to be involved in making social change, they first have to believe that what they do can – and does - make a difference.

The YOU Power framework challenges well-established cultural beliefs that contribute to individual feelings of powerlessness, apathy and disengagement. These beliefs include:

- I am not important, nothing I can do will make a difference
- Only important successful people have the power to make change
- Only big change is meaningful

The YOU Power premise is that humans are powerful beings who have impact on the world through every action, every thought. If we are to realize the potential of our communities, as individuals we have to become more aware of the impact we have on the world so that we can make responsible choices about the kind of impact we actually want to make.

Workshop Themes

Section Two

Growth and aging are both a part of life. To understand both and to see both happening is perhaps the fullest way to experience living. The aged who feel rejected by the young, seek to find acceptance only among other aged and thereby segregate themselves from the young, who in turn reject elders more because they have no close contact with them. Georgia Barrow

The evaluations and comments by workshop participants indicated that overall, the workshops were found to be valuable and there was a widely shared appreciation for the opportunity to talk together and to hear from each other. Many people commented on the honesty and openness that occurred during the conversations. The number of participants in the workshops was purposely kept small to create safety and a sense of intimacy that would lend itself to ‘real’ talk.

I don't see the differences, I see the similarities. We all want to fit in and we act out when we are unhappy or angry.

The workshops revealed many common themes from community to community. Participants noted that youth and seniors have a variety of things in common; they experience ageism and

stereotyping, are criticized for bad driving habits, have trouble believing that they have a voice that others want to hear, have time to volunteer and are thinking about what they want to do with the rest of their lives. Both youth and adults advise that they like it “when people say hello”. For the most part, participants of all ages also share a love for their communities.

We are two interesting groups – young people are a lot like us.

The Experience of Rural Life

During the introductions, participants were asked to say what they liked, or didn't like about living in Huron or Perth. The majority were quite passionate about life in their home community. Almost without exception they spoke about positive experiences of small town and rural life, the importance of knowing their neighbours, of being recognized wherever they go, and of the quiet. More than a couple of students talked about the peace and pleasure of being able to see the stars at night. There were farm kids who love farming and want to carry on with it when they finish school. A number of adults were surprised; confessing that they had preconceived notions that young people are bored and just want to 'get out' of the area for the big cities.

There were young people who do want to leave the county, and who don't like farming; however they were fewer in number. They are bored with the lack of activities for youth, the lack of shopping and the slower pace. One young woman described her experience of living in “older town” where young people are perceived as a threat that have to be constantly watched, especially when in the stores. Others echoed a sense of injustice that a few “bad apples” can spoil it for all.

We usually live with assumptions that are made about us, rather than talk about it

The Experience of Stereotypes and Judgement

A number of youth believe that seniors don't see youth as being trustworthy. It was a surprise to one young participant when some of the adults denied this as their experience. The students in one group wanted to challenge the adults directly in the workshop about the stereotyping of youth. The question was posed during the fishbowl exercise; “why do you judge us?” There were a variety of responses; “not all adults judge”, “it is human to judge”, and an acknowledgement that judgement is not always particular to the youth, “I judge everyone.” After the initial responses, there was one thread that opened into a larger conversation that was also echoed in other workshops. The adults talked about judgement arising

We assume that young people are not interested in us.

out of fear that comes from not knowing or understanding the culture of young people, and of not having relationships with youth to be able to talk about their concerns.

To many of the adults, the world seems “faster” and “standards” that have been in place for many years are familiar and comfortable. One participant commented that the speed with which technology changes “exhausts my brain”. Others spoke about the use of judgement as an ineffective way to try to protect young people from harm. In the absence of real opportunities to talk about and understand how society is changing and what it means to young people, the fallback position can be one of judgement, mostly out of a sense of concern, but also out of the fear of change and the unknown.

Young people have many more pressures today. I admire them for coping. I would like to understand their world more than I do.

The adults also wanted to talk about being stereotyped and of their experience of becoming invisible in society as they age. One woman spoke of her realization that the people around her see her now as an “an old lady”, which she can accept, but it is only one aspect of her life. There was some resistance in one workshop to referring to participants as “youth” and “older adults” with a challenge, “instead of looking at age, why can’t we see the person?”

I like to think I am not prejudiced but I have to keep challenging myself, I have to take opportunities to get to know people.

A number of young people felt that older adults in their lives are prejudiced against other races. Judgements were made by some youth that older adults “can’t adapt” to the diversity in the counties. It was acknowledged that change can be hard. The counties have not had much diversity in the population in the past. One of the adult participants acknowledged that her elderly mother thinks that she has changed with the times but still uses language that is perceived as racist. Direct contact with people from other cultures in the community was felt to be the best way to shift prejudiced attitudes. These attitudes are often informed by stereotyping that occurs in the media. “I form my thoughts through the media” said one senior, “and so need to be critical of how the reporting of news happens”.

The media was also blamed for perpetuating stereotypes by using age to tell only “the worst” news stories. The focus on negative news “plays a role in the assumptions we make” about the event being described and the generation that is involved. It was noted that there are seldom good stories that challenge our attitudes about

stereotypes. A number of adults talked about the benefits of growing up at a time without television and so being less influenced by the media.

The Experience of Growing Older in Huron and Perth

I am afraid to ask young people questions. I'm afraid they'll laugh at me for not knowing simple things. I pay someone to do my technology.

Adults were asked in the fishbowl exercises to talk about what it is like to be growing older. One woman spoke right away that she “never expected to get this old”. This sense of surprise about aging was repeated in all of the workshops. The shared experience is that older adults often feel young “on the inside” and receive a bit of a shock when they see their reflections. Most participants appreciate the benefits of aging, of gaining experience and perspective that helps them to live a more balanced life and they feel their life experience could and should have value for others as well as a real place in the community. A number of participants spoke of seeing youth who are struggling but don’t know how or where to contribute to “make things better”. Others talked about volunteering as a way to stay connected and alive and of the importance of being around young people.

Good health is seen by everyone as being critical for quality of life. The idea of death is difficult, especially if the journey to it is long and painful. One group in particular talked about the lack of discussion of death, one person stated that “no one talks about it”. Many seniors are concerned about becoming a burden to their families. A common idea was voiced as, “I don’t mind helping someone, but I don’t want to be the helped.” It was also acknowledged that age does slow one down and that it is a new experience for many older adults that they have to learn to ask for help.

The idea of being near the end scares me. I want to talk about it.

When asked in the small groups about whether they were curious about death, the students felt very strongly that death is a “taboo” subject and they were not comfortable asking questions. This aversion to talking about death was particularly strong in one of the Huron groups. One young person admitted to having some anxiety about what happens after death but didn’t want to raise it with the older adults. They felt that facing your own death and the death of loved ones was one of the “hard parts” of getting older. The adults acknowledged this as true and agreed that it is hard and why it is really important to stay involved in the community

I worry about...will I have enough? Is the world going to be okay? Will it be liveable for kids?

as they reach the age where people in their lives begin to die. The adults were much more open about the topic.

The Experience of Being Young in Perth and Huron

Young people in the counties are concerned about the future of the environment and about their individual paths. Many are hopeful about the creative ability of humanity to solve our environmental problems. They are inspired by great minds of the past, breakthroughs, stories of leadership and music. A few voiced frustration about the scope of the problems and their sense that the problems are too big for them to have an impact.

A number of the older students talked about the pressure of making the “right” decisions with respect to their career choices. Those who don’t know what they want to do for work talked about the problem with school being too focused in course options,

If I only get one-shot, then I need to be right.

designed to herd students along particular paths, a problem for those who are uncertain. As well, the expense of post-secondary education is a weight that intensifies the need to know in advance what their career will be. The structure of high school creates the perception of a “one-shot” opportunity for education that is determined by grade ten. Many of them don’t see making mistakes or bad choices as an option. One young woman spoke about an expectation she has that she will succeed at everything. The students want to succeed for themselves and for their families; however, that pressure is tempered by the desire not to “hate my life”.

Another common theme to emerge was the recognition of how closely watched young people are today. One man recounted a childhood prank with a BB gun that would have involved the police today. “I think about the things I did and I blush, now we say it’s wrong and we punish and criminalize kids for things we did without thinking”.

I need them around and have made my home known as a welcome place...they will call me just to talk.

Adult Perspectives about Relationships with Youth

One of the more striking realizations to emerge from the conversations among the adults in each of the workshops was how subtly the separation from young people has occurred. There were several participants who recognized that they have little to no contact with youth anymore. If they don’t have grandchildren and once their children leave home and the area, a number of parents in the groups had to acknowledge that they have no point of ongoing contact with youth.

You get cut off from kids and you don't realize until it's too late.

For adults who have not been parents, they have made special effort to build relationships with youth, often in simple ways. Participants talked about different opportunities to stay connected to the young people in their neighbourhoods, making invitations to their homes, volunteering and taking time to show interest and have conversation where they find youth, as neighbours, as servers in restaurants and cashiers in grocery stores. One man befriended two single-parent neighbour children who lived next door when they were young and still enjoys visits from them as teenagers. In one of the workshops, the spectre of child abuse was raised by a male participant who would like to have more contact with young people but is cautious. He acknowledges that the suspicion about adults, especially men, who take an interest in children for perverse reasons, was a strong deterrent for him to engage young people.

Ideas to Stay in Touch

All of the adult participants talked about the importance of staying connected to young people, both for their own well-being but also because they believe they have things to offer to youth. Several adults would like to find opportunities to share their knowledge about important life skills like managing money, nutrition and knitting. Another spoke about telling stories to young children. Many of the grandparents have learned to SKYPE and enjoy virtual and telephone visits with grandchildren who live far away. A church in Huron county holds an annual birthday party that celebrates all of the birthdays with a single party. It is an important community event that brings people of all ages together to celebrate. Others spoke about community dances that used to be held for all ages and how the loss of the dances has taken away an avenue to get to know people.

I like to listen to their song lyrics so that I can have real conversations with them

I didn't have the desire to spend time with older adults. I wanted to be with my friends....maybe it's up to us to reach out to them if we want to have the relationships.

Residents of a senior's home spoke about the pleasure in past years of having the neighbourhood kids come to show their costumes

I joke with the kids at the grocery store, humour opens doors.

on Hallowe'en. It is sadly a tradition that has fallen away. Another memory was shared about a project that took place in London between children in grades 7 & 8 and residents in a nearby senior's facility. The children interviewed the older adults about their experiences of World War II. After the project ended, the students had formed relationships and were still having contact with the adults.

Youth Perspectives about Relationships with Older Adults

Many of the young people do not have relationships with older adults. A small number of the students have grandparents who live nearby. They were able to talk about the importance of having relationships with older adults to hear the stories and to have someone other than a parent to talk with. A few others acknowledged that they have some contact with older adults at church but only in a casual way.

People of any age like to talk about things that matter

When asked about the importance of being involved with seniors, students felt they benefited from the stories and experiences in a way that they “could learn from their mistakes”. Older adults can “teach us” about priorities.

It was mostly the adults who spoke about their own experiences as young people. One woman spoke about her memory of an older woman who had “simply showed an interest” in her life and how that attention had turned into a long and meaningful relationship. Many of the adult participants shared stories of extended family situations where older adults had been part of their everyday life and the importance of those relationships both at the time and in hindsight.

Best Advice for Seniors Who Want to Engage with Youth

The advice from students was consistent across the workshops. Find a common interest or a connection and talk to young people, “more than just saying hi”. Show an interest in us as people and ask questions. Accept that sometimes we may know more than you do. Accept our opinions. Tell us your stories. Give us another perspective. Risk rejection!

I had forgotten what it was like to be young.

What do Seniors Expect of Youth?

Older adults in the workshops articulated a number of expectations for youth. Many spoke about the importance of respect. One participant suggested that all ages need to be respectful. Another shared an ‘expectation’ for youth to be “kind and caring of our disabilities”. Other comments included advice such as; “develop your potential and acknowledge everyone has talent, give others a chance to do what they think best”, and, “believe in yourself”.

Lessons from the Tarp

The Tarp exercise was for some participants the highlight of the workshop. Following lunch, participants were asked to stand on a large blue tarp. The only instructions for

the exercise are to turn the tarp completely over without anyone falling off. The exercise provides a direct experience with achieving a seemingly impossible task through shared leadership, collaboration and trust. Those not able to participate were asked to watch the process to provide feedback in the debrief that followed about how the success actually happened.

The idea that everything I do makes a difference – that's hard!

In addition to providing hands-on fun, it generated rich discussion about what it takes to achieve seemingly impossible tasks together. These are some of the comments and lessons learned:

- The tarp is like life because it is confusing and you can't be successful without working together
- You have to think
- Individuals have ideas but we have to put ideas together and then work together
- It seemed impossible
- People have different roles, the leadership moves around
- Communication is important
- Adults were telling us what to do
- We cannot all do the same thing
- You can't see the whole picture, you have to trust that things are happening that you can't see
- We muddled through. We don't have a plan
- We didn't know we were at the end
- We plan but most plans do not work out the way we thought they would
- Fear stops learning

The Workshops - Lessons Learned

There are some valuable lessons learned for future mixed generation workshops.

- Participants in the workshops discussed in this report are clearly students who are leaders in their peer groups and many of the adults are former teachers. Retired teachers have a natural affinity for youth and are good allies for building bridges between the generations.
- The agenda must have room for participants to take their time in conversation with each other. Pushing a group through a packed agenda will not allow for the relationship building that encourages open dialogue and trust to emerge.
- The original 6 hour workshop was scaled back to 5 hours as the workshop intensity made the last hour too long for some of the older adults.
- The informal lunch discussions appeared on several evaluations as a favorite part of the day. It was important to ask participants to mix the age groups prior to breaking. The ice cream was also noted as a good and worthy choice.

- The fishbowl exercise was very popular with both age groups, there is something important about being able to just listen and be privy to a discussion between peers.
- The Tarp exercise was also very popular, especially with the students who found some of the discussions to be long. The adults found the tarp to be fun and a great way to interact with the students. Participants were free to abstain if they felt unable to participate.
- Adult learning principles apply. Discussions need to be balanced against a variety of activities; boys in particular lose interest in too-long discussions.
- Venues must be accessible, one of the venues had an elevator out of order on the day of the workshop and another room had to be located.

Summary Suggestions

Section Three

Getting to Maybe

Getting to Maybe is a reference to a book of the same title that was published in 2007 in Canada. It is written by some of Canada's best thinkers and leaders on how to make large social change by bringing together existing resources and people in new and unusual ways. To borrow from the Forward; the central idea is that "maybe" accurately describes our fundamental relationship to the world. "Maybe" becomes a potent word for the brave, the inventive and the adventurous. Maybe, just maybe, we can discover a way to save a species, help lift people out of poverty and indignity, break the grip of intolerance and lighten our footprint on the fragile earth. Maybe comes with no guarantees, only a chance. It is not a cautious word. It is a defiant claim of possibility in the face of a status quo we are unwilling to accept. It is about hope. Valclav Havel, the poet who became the president of Czechoslovakia said it very well; "hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

Together we are wise.
Margaret Wheatley

It is in this spirit of getting to maybe that this project has unfolded and the summary suggestions have been written. Maybe, just maybe we can find ways to engage everyone in Huron and Perth in collectively thinking and planning together about how to address our toughest challenges and in so doing, strengthen ourselves in the process. There is no clear path forward; we build the road as we walk it. This project has explored a number of possibilities that could grow into more concrete steps if there is the ongoing leadership and the collective will to try.

Social Planning - Change to the Workshop Scope

The initial workshop design was intended to engage the participants in discussion about the specific issues addressed in past SRPC reports: *Breaking the Silence*, and *Voices of Youth*. The reports and recommendations were referenced and made available during the introduction to the workshop; however, it became very clear during the first session that for the participants, the activity of coming together and just talking about themselves was a necessary first step that filled the day to the brim.

For the generations to be together and to learn about each other was a rare experience for the majority of participants. It was interesting to note that very few were aware of the SRPC reports. The question of how the reports might be used to engage the public in social planning will not be answered by this project. This is not a failure to achieve outcomes, but rather it is the recognition that if intergenerational relationships and public engagement are indeed strategies for primary prevention of a number of social ills, then the slow work of building trust and opening the way for meaningful conversation cannot be rushed or ignored but could be built into all planning processes. The SRPC reports provide important information that could be used for future workshops on specific issues.

Evolving the Community Planning Model

If community leaders want to engage the general public in social planning, the experience of this project suggests that the key to creating the productive space where more specific problem-solving discussions can happen, those next conversations might be built using the YOU Power workshop model.

At the end of each of the workshops, participants expressed quite clearly, a desire for more interaction and for opportunities to tackle real issues. In addition to taking on social challenges, participants also suggested that social outings and events are equally important in the ongoing need to build relationships. The kind of social change that is most needed in terms of creating caring, supportive communities will not be driven by efficiencies and pre-determined outcomes, but instead will emerge out of everyday interactions and the realization of ordinary citizens that they are powerful beings who have the ability to make positive social change if they are aligned and involved with the people around them.

YOU Power is the united effort of community to make a difference.

YOU Power is the ability inside someone to make a difference.

The specific suggestion to be made here is that YOU Power and the workshop model has been tested and embraced by a small sample group. Possibly it could become the brand for social planning in Huron and Perth counties. If the many stakeholders undertaking planning made a commitment to include public engagement in their planning activities, and used YOU Power as the identifier, after a time, the public may begin to identify YOU Power advertisements as the opportunity needed to contribute on particular issues.

For community wide cradle-to-grave planning to become possible in the two counties, there needs to be a sustained centre where the information and activities of planning can pool and collect. The HPCPT has invested in this vision since 2007 by meeting regularly, undertaking projects, inviting other interested stakeholders to join, and by believing in the possibility of whole community planning. In these tough times of economic constraints, the need to be more coordinated, integrated and strategic across all issue-specific planning efforts is an imperative. A shared sense of ownership for community planning will be the key to moving forward.

Engaging everyone in addressing our most serious issues is a universal challenge. The vision of whole community cradle-to-grave planning is a true one. Figuring out how to make that happen is the work ahead. The complexity of issues and numerous groups working on those issues, in different sectors and communities, makes it physically impossible to connect everyone together solely through a single physical table such as the HPCPT. A virtual space would allow for the many kinds of planning activities to be made visible across sectors so that service professionals and also the public can see the broad range of planning that is occurring. A host for such a virtual centre needs to be found.

Next Steps

The members of the HPCPT will continue to serve as partners to the possibility of two county cradle-to-grave community planning and to think with leaders such as United Way about how to engage other partners to make the vision a reality within existing constraints. There are a number of visible next steps toward evolving a sustainable community planning model that engages everyone in the process of creating the communities we all want to live and work in.

- **Disseminate the report widely** - The HPCPT will develop a dissemination strategy to promote the report in order to generate broad discussions about how to build on the past work and engage more people in the future building process.

The report is a tool to stimulate and frame different kinds of discussions with the service community, planning groups, the public and with funders.

- **Hold a forum** - the HPCPT stakeholders are the early adopter group that has already indicated interest in supporting a two county community planning model. Hold a forum with them to introduce the report and to generate discussion that will stimulate the good ideas about how to move forward.
- **Find a willing host** - with an existing website to provide the virtual centre that will allow for the many planning activities to become visible in the counties.
- **Bring YOU Power to other issues** – Work with United Way to collaborate on a specific planning project to further explore the potential that YOU Power has to imbue the planning process with community input and engage citizens in issues that impact them.
- **Write another Trillium proposal** – seek funding to further develop the YOU Power brand and model as part of a larger strategy to evolve the cradle-to-grave community planning model and to increase community ownership and capacity for addressing local issues.

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To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2010.520625>

Sixty-four evaluations were completed.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Unsure 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I am glad that I participated			2% (n.1)	9% (n.6)	89% (n.57)
The workshop had a good variety of activities			7% (n.5)	36% (n.23)	56% (n.36)
I felt engaged throughout the day		1% (n.1)	6% (n.4)	25% (n.16)	68% (n.43)
We need YOU Power to address our social issues			5% (n.3)	16% (n.10)	78% (n.50)
I believe my community needs me (and vice versa)			13% (n.8)	28% (n.18)	58% (n.37)

These were some of the comments:

- The best part of the day was engaging in conversation with the elders, a society I have not been associated with before. It opened my eyes and changed my perspective on things in the community.
- The best part of the day was having an opportunity to share ideas with others and to take major pride in the upcoming generation.
- The best part was having the opportunity to express myself and listen to the stories and feelings from elders.
- The best part of the day was at lunch when we all sat around talking and laughing.
- These workshops should be monthly gatherings
- I feel inspired in my own power to make a difference and inspired to engage with youth further.
- The workshop opened my eyes and changed my life because I was always hesitant about doing things because I thought they wouldn't matter.
- I realized that even the small things can make a difference.
- I loved the opportunity of talking to people I wouldn't usually talk to.
- Thanks for the opportunity to share, to listen and to be involved. We can make a DIFFERENCE!



The Huron-Perth Community Planning Table
Invites you to explore

“YOU Power”

- What is it?
- What can it do?
- Does it really make a difference?

You are part of a small group of youth and older adults being invited to participate in a fun and interesting workshop to explore “YOU Power” in Huron and Perth. You have been asked precisely because you are the kind of person who cares about the future and because you have good ideas.

The goal of the workshop is to get people talking and thinking about how to solve complex problems that youth and older adults are facing in your home community. We need your input and participation and can promise an interesting day in return.

The workshop will include:

- Small group discussions:
 - What’s it like to be young in Perth County?
 - What’s it like to be older in Perth County?
 - What are the big issues people are facing?
- An excellent lunch (with ice cream)
- An afternoon of wild ideas and useful information about how to strengthen the things that make our community great!
- A personal challenge

The workshop will be held on **Thursday October 13, 2011 in the Endzone Room at the Pyramid Recreation Centre in St. Marys**. The workshop will run from **9:00 am – 3:00 pm** and will be limited to 10-12 youth and 10-12 older adults. Lunch will be provided.

To register for the workshop, please contact the facilitator, Margaret MacPherson at m.macpherson@execulink.com or call 519 854-9752.

[Click on the PowerPoint presentation below to view.](#)



Welcome!
YOU Power Workshop