

The Canadian CED Network



Place Based Poverty Reduction Initiative

Our four Community Partners share:

Personal profiles of impacted participants ("Testaments" on how lives changed)

The Canadian CED Network's Place-Based Poverty Reduction Initiative (PBPR), was a national project, to identify, document, analyze and promote innovative community-driven collaborative approaches to poverty reduction and the methodologies they use to evaluate their impacts on the lives of individuals in their communities. Recognizing that the sector has historically done a more effective job of describing qualitative impacts, this initiative focused considerable attention on quantitative methods of describing the impacts of our work.

The Network worked with four CED partner organizations from across the country who represent a range of approaches in integrated action on poverty reduction in diverse communities with complex demographics:

- [PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise \(Thunder Bay, ONT\)](#)
- [CED Corporation of Trois-Rivières \(ÉCOF-CDEC\) \(Trois-Rivières, QUE\)](#)
- [Trail Community Skills Centre \(Trail, BC\)](#)
- [Learning Enrichment Foundation \(Toronto, ONT\)](#)

The partners developed detailed profiles of their communities, the impacts of poverty and the collaborative community action they use to address poverty. Their documentation included comprehensive organizational logic models as well as descriptions of the range of interventions and methodologies they use to evaluate qualitative and particularly quantitative impacts of their work. Challenges and benefits of this latter process were documented and shared.

As part of assessing the qualitative impacts of their CED approaches our partners collect stories from participants. These are stories of personal courage, determination and dignity and stories of community. They are stories of diverse people who lived in poverty and faced challenges that often seemed

insurmountable. Connecting with a local CED organization helped them to connect with others in their community, to rebuild their skills and their lives and to earn an income. Some gained regular employment, some worked in a social enterprise and some started their own businesses to gain independence and sustain themselves and their families.

These stories describe the true impact of poverty on individual lives and the impact of CED on reducing poverty one life at a time. A selection of these stories is included Appendix 4 of the final project report, ***How Community Economic Development is reducing poverty in Canada and how it could be doing more***

Trail Community Skills Centre

Samantha's Story

Samantha had a run of bad luck. She had been in a car accident, which affected her ability to work for a period of time. She also discovered that without a car she had limited access to work opportunities, due to the lack of availability of public transportation in this rural community. Samantha had been taking some training to upgrade her skills, but was not able to meet the required grade standards and was asked to leave the program. In addition, her mother was very ill and Samantha found herself living back at home looking after her younger siblings, who were 2 years and a new born infant.

It was at this point in time Samantha heard about the Right Stuff through a friend and was able to secure part-time employment. Through this opportunity she stabilized her living situation and found a home of her own. Samantha also took advantage of the various training opportunities through the Right Stuff, such as Food Safe, Serving it Right and Occupational First Aid.

Over-time however, the repetitive work of collating flyers was creating physical problems for Samantha and it was on her doctor's advice that she quit her job. Fortunately, at the same time the Right Stuff was looking for a driver to deliver the collated newspapers to the various carrier drop-off locations. Samantha now had her own vehicle and had developed the credibility of being a reliable worker and was therefore offered the driving job. This job involved more hours and an increase in pay. Typically the drivers for the Right Stuff are older individuals because the youth do not have a driver's licence or a vehicle. Samantha is the only collator to date that has moved into a driving position. Since she started driving Samantha has become a mother and one of the benefits of the job is she is been able to bring her baby along with her while she does her route. This benefit allows her to maintain part-time employment as a mother because she does not incur the cost of child care.

As a driver for the Right Stuff Samantha is able to enjoy a much more comfortable lifestyle, and she feels she now has the freedom and flexibility to make choices on how she lives.

Peter's Story

Peter had been working "under-the-table" since he was 12, doing handy-man type of work, but had never been able to find "real" work until he was hired at the Right Stuff. He is thrilled to be working at the Right Stuff because he is getting regular hours and regular pay; there was a point in time when he felt he would never get a legitimate job. He could have had one job, but decided against working for that particular employer because there are a lot of personal injuries at that work-site.

Before working at the Right Stuff, Peter had a very difficult time leaving his home and dealing with people, now he enjoys getting out and being around people everyday. In fact since he has been at the Right Stuff he has also taken on a second part-time job, has an on-call position for a third job and is still doing some of the handy-man type work.

Peter has pursued the training opportunities offered through the Right Stuff and is now licensed to drive the fork lift and is certified for Occupational First Aid, W.H.M.I.S and Foodsafe. In addition Peter represents the Right Stuff on the Joint Health & Safety Committee for the Skills Centre. Peter is also the Acting Supervisor for the Right Stuff and handles the operation when the full-time supervisor is away.

The greatest learning Peter has encountered is the challenges and nuances of working with other people. He has come to recognize there can be a difference between an individual's work ethic and their ability or skill level to complete a certain task. He is also learning how his reactions can impact the outcome of difficult situations. Peter's life is busier than it has ever

been; he finds it easier all the time to pick up odd-jobs. He is seldom at home any more, he is usually out working.

Steve's Story

After leaving home and spending a summer at a friend's, who was collecting Income Assistance, he found living on his own wasn't the experience he thought it would be. A typical day for Steve consisted of just hanging out with friends, playing video games, watching movies and playing with the friend's dog. He didn't have a job or a legitimate source of income. There were also problems living in this friend's environment, people would take Steve's stuff, the house wasn't very clean, and there would be a fair amount of physical violence whenever there was a disagreement. On top of that there wasn't any food in the house, so Steve was often hungry.

At the end of the summer Steve moved back home, and although the living conditions were better, he realized he still needed to get a job to earn an income without stealing. He heard about a chance for employment at the Right Stuff from a Counsellor at the local youth centre. Steve is one of the youngest workers ever hired at the Right Stuff and his continued employment is based on the condition he continues with his education at the alternative school. Steve's work schedule is set up to allow for regular attendance at school and because he is living at home he does not require the number of hours needed to pay for housing and food. He is able to use his income as he pleases.

Since Steve has been at the Right Stuff he has completed his high school English and his certification for Occupational First Aid. He has also quit stealing. The accomplishment he is most proud of is being accepted for volunteer work on the local ski hill as a ski patrol. As a ski patrol he is assigned a section of the mountain to tour, in the company of a more experienced ski patrol. As a volunteer he gets the benefit of skiing for free and gets to help people that are hurt with his Occupational First Aid certification.

With his work experience Steve feels he has matured and has become a good worker. Previous to the job Steve admits he didn't have much respect for people, and didn't show any respect. Now he has learned how to listen and be respectful. He makes the connection his new behaviour has resulted in having nice things and that he is now able to enjoy skiing. When he was living on his own he used to think \$10 was a lot of money, now he thinks \$300 is nothing. Steve also recognizes he behaves differently at school. The first year at the alternative school he admits to being very difficult with the instructors; that was his purpose in going to school. Now he focuses on the work and is getting through the program, the instructors have told him they notice the change in his behaviour. He feels he now has an adult perspective rather than a kid perspective; he sees a lot of immature behaviour in the younger and more rebellious students.

Steve's next goal is to be good enough to get paid as a ski patrol.

PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise

Naomi's Story

Naomi is a single mother who grew up in a remote northern town. She's had a hard life, struggling with violence, addictions and poverty, yet she managed to get a university education and begin to build a foundation of a future for herself and her two children. She went through an acrimonious divorce in 2000 and ever since then, she and her children have been living in poverty, struggling to survive. When she came to PARO, Naomi was very down and hard on herself; she was unable to see the tremendous skills and assets that she already had.

Naomi came to PARO in 2001 seeking a better future for her family. What she found was a supportive environment that helped her to heal and move forward with her dream of starting her own business. It took her a while to identify a focused and realistic business idea and to sort through the many personal issues that distracted her from the business. It was when she entered PARO's advanced business development program in 2004 that Naomi's business idea took off - the start up process on operations of her business really helped her to explore different options and test their feasibility. She is now contracting out her services in the non-profit sector as a project coordinator, researcher and proposal writer.

Naomi is not only keen to make changes in her life, but is also committed to promoting social change in the community. She developed a proposal which was approved for funding, and this has led to the designing and facilitating of a community development project. She gets tremendous satisfaction from this work and is very happy to be able to give back to her community. She identifies as a business woman and community leader: in addition to her professional work, she is involved in volunteer commitments related to neighbourhood policing and Aboriginal housing.

Naomi has made huge changes in her life: she is much more self-confident and assertive, and is very clear about what she wants. Her goal is to continue on to the next level of her university education, and she plans to continue to grow and refine her business. While problems persist, Naomi feels more resilient and better prepared to deal with crises and setbacks that come her way. One of Naomi's children has been struggling with addictions and Naomi has been able to draw on her own experience and identity to ensure that she has strong family support.

Four years ago she had a huge debt and no income; now, she has paid off her debt and her income is steadily growing, and it is clear that she has created an independent, sustainable way of supporting her family and achieving her wider aspirations of promoting healing and social change in her community.

Louise's Story

When Louise came to PARO, she was over 50 years of age and had just lost her job. She was in crisis and was dealing with a wrongful dismissal lawsuit against her former employer who she reports 'pushed her out the door' because of her age, even though she was competent. She had been employed in the same field for her whole career and couldn't find an employer willing to hire her at her age. She now found herself with the choice of going back to school for retraining or self-employment. She decided to start her own business.

She went through PARO's business development program and created a business plan. She started her business, and accessed resources such as office equipment, internet access and space in PARO Centre, and her business grew rapidly. She quickly realized that she needed more space, and expanded as she hired a part-time employee. The business is going very well and she is able to support her family on the money she earns from it.

Louise is married and has an older son who has been hospitalized with a serious, life threatening health condition. Her life partner has been coping with their son's illness in self-destructive ways and their relationship is very stressed. While she says her life is the 'pits', she is really enjoying working on the business, which keeps her busy and distracted from her troubles. Yet she works very long hours and the business has taken over her life. She is aware that she is not eating properly, and is not taking care of herself. As a result, she is grooming her new employee to partner with her eventually, and possibly take over some of the business operations. This successful business offers a way to transition into retirement. The resources at PARO, including her Peer Mentoring Circle, will help Louise to deal with this process.

Sarah's Story

Sarah is unmarried, and a mother of two. She has been coping with a long-term illness which has impacted her ability to gain and keep employment. When first Sarah came to PARO in 2000, she was looking for a program that would give her the flexibility she required, and chose self-employment as a way to keep active in the workforce.

Through PARO's start up program, Sarah developed her business plan, and opened her business. She joined PARO's *Business Accelerator* program to further grow her business, which included increasing her social network.

A life long learner, Sarah had set a goal to acquire further knowledge about computers. Although she had access to equipment at PARO Centre, she had expressed a need for her own computer that she could access at any time; and PARO was able to provide the supports necessary to help Sarah achieve this goal. Although Sarah's health issues continue to limit her ability to work, she maintains her connection to PARO which she says has given her support and motivation. She continues to set new goals for herself, and gives back to the community.

Learning Enrichment Foundation

Ed's Story

Forty-nine year old Ed was a long-term social assistance recipient when he was referred to LEF. His work history consisted of general labour and factory work, but a back injury had long prevented him from working in this field. As a result, Ed had not held regular employment in over 15 years. Instead, he had relied on sporadic temporary jobs and social assistance.

After meeting with LEF staff, Ed opted for Career Exploration workshops in order to clarify a career direction. Upon completion, he entered the job search process. While Ed found it very difficult to outreach to potential employers using cold calls, he did volunteer within the organization and eventually led external marketing groups of participants to industrial areas. LEF Job Developers arranged interviews in logistics and courier companies, but Ed then disclosed he had a criminal record and was not bondable - often a requirement within these fields.

Ed continued to conduct his job search with LEF and had made progress, but did not find employment within the mandated Ontario Works sixteen-week job search period. However, he continued to work with LEF and soon after landed a full-time job as a Superintendent in a local apartment building and moved off of social assistance. Through the job retention process, LEF supported Ed through his probationary period and has maintained regular contact. Ed has been promoted within the building management company and is now responsible for multiple sites.

Angus' Story

Angus was fifty-eight when he was referred to LEF. He had worked for over thirty years in a trailer manufacturing company before it closed down four years earlier and left him unemployed. He had found his age, limited skill sets and grade eight education were barriers to finding work and had turned to social assistance. He started the Industrial Skills training at LEF and early on, it became apparent that Angus was unable to read and write at a level required for the training and the labour market. LEF employment counselling staff met with Angus and altered his career plan to include Literacy and Basic Skills classes on-site. After nearly a year, Angus had progressed a point where he could successfully participate in the training, and he re-started and completed Industrial Skills.

Angus then moved into the job search portion and faced many challenges, including the tragic death of his son. However, he remained committed to the process and with LEF support, landed a job as an assembler in a company manufacturing specialized transformers. He has moved off of social assistance and progressed through the company and become their lead hand and responsible for training new employees. He regularly contacts LEF to find candidates for new positions within the company.

CED Corporation of Trois-Rivières (ÉCOF-CDEC)

Mr. Frappier's story

Mr. Frappier is a man of fifty years who lives with his son. He has a great social network and knows very well his strengths. He has been unemployed for three weeks and was living with this difficult situation. Mr. Frappier had just applied to employment insurance (EI) "*I hadn't even received a check!*" When we talked to him for the first time. Mr Frappier was a truck handler.

Mr. Frappier has known ÉCOF-CDEC Trois Rivières through a call return for his son. His son wanted to have an assistance to write his resume, but he did not meet the admission criteria of the organization. Mr. Frappier then asked the intervener about our program. He immediately made an appointment for more information. At the meeting, Mr. Frappier appreciated the different job search techniques such as interviewing and resume skills. The accessibility of the different services such as computers, fax and telephone has greatly played in favor for him to choose the program to help him on his job search.

Mr. Frappier attended both individual and group measures contained in the path of ÉCOF-CDEC Rivières. He also participates in various activities of social involvement, for example, the distribution of leaflets. The tour group includes a four-week unpaid program. He had targeted a business, but the employer did not want to train trainees. Mr. Frappier has sure this was the employer for him. He used many strategies to connect with the company and finally his determination paid off. He did get a job from the same company.

Memories of ÉCOF...

Mr. Frappier remembers mainly the harmony, the good mood, the general assistance provided by the facilitators and the ability to evolve at his own pace without feeling the pressure of others.

His transition with CDEC Trois Rivières allowed him to increase his confidence in himself: "Now I am able to send resumes and sympathize with employers. " Mr Frappier also had the opportunity to work on his most negative attitudes such as his impulsiveness.

EOCF-CDEC Rivières brought him back hope to keep working, but also to maintain his motivation in his workplace.

Almost a year later, Mr Frappier is still working for the same company.

Jinette's Story

Here is the beginning of Jinette's story

Jinette, aged 49, was living temporarily with her daughter in HLM. Jinette had been going through a bad time and was depressed and did not know how to get out of her situation. Jinette had huge difficulty sleeping. When she was alone she slept near the door, the lights on and blinds open.

She would get up in the morning wondering what she would do to pass her day. "When you don't have nothing to think about, you end up believing that you are nothing. And there are plenty of people to remind you that you are really nothing."

Here is the end of the story

Jinette has found an apartment to rent and is working full time at Time Horton's. She has regained her energy and she sleeps without nightmares.

And between the two, what happened?

A combination of courage, meeting others, responsiveness, and openness.

Someone told Jinette that she could register for the MULTIBOULOOT project. Jinette accepted. "Finally something to do." Jinette then came to a citizen committee and met someone from ÉCOF.

In addition to hours of work, Jinette had to participate in the training provided by ÉCOF. On the menu of the group training: self-esteem, communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, etc. Jinette is ready to attend the training but as she is very shy and reserved, she knows very well that opening up to others, it won't be easy for her. She had always been by herself: Asking for help...? No, thanks.

Jinette is paired with another participant for their task during working hours. Initially, it was far from being easy to work as a team. When you have never learned how to say things gently, you can talk in an inappropriate way. But during individual meetings Jinette and her teammate expressed what was not going well to their ÉCOF staff, wanting to find a common agreement.

During her training, Jinette learns that she has strengths and weaknesses and that she must capitalize on her strengths. She also learns to trust and be trusted by others. Little by little, she finds her self esteem. She has things to do; she has a network and she is trusted. And one day, Jinette dares to speak about herself, individually at first with her intervener from ÉCOF and then to the rest of the group. Jinette feels she has just dropped an enormous ball. She can see that there are possible solutions to her problems. Being open to others allows her to be more aware of her own issues. She can try to seek solutions rather than simply being submerged by a problem. Now she feels able to take care of herself.

Of course, not everything is easy. She has to take several approaches before reaching her goal. She still has a number of objectives to be achieved. But after 7 months in the BEING and TRAINING project, she has a job and a good home for herself. And she sleeps without nightmares. Jinette still continues to see her friends from the BEING project.

Jinette had great energy and desire to live, the only thing she needed was to regain confidence in herself and in her abilities.

Denise's story

Denise is a single mother in her 50s. For many years she was alone at home with her two children. She had her family and a few close friends, but something was missing. Denise had some difficulties in terms of reading and writing. Then, she connected with a literacy organization called Comsep.

As a result of this connection, she went back to school, then became a volunteer and got involved in various committees. She also became a representation on several different boards, including ÉCOF. Denise has always wanted to work in the community; it's an environment that really attracted her a lot, she wanted more than anything to be close to people. Thus she came to ÉCOF.

Her involvement and her work enabled her to overcome her embarrassment, and to be involved in activities outside her home. Previously Denise had felt alone and isolated: "I was tired of being alone at home. I finally decided to break my solitary confinement and I went to a Women's organization to combat world poverty. This allowed me to make my first step in literacy at Comsep and also to do a job at *Solidarity Bouffelles*. Now, I have been working at ÉCOF as a receptionist for two years and I also help my colleagues to do different things ".

All these changes were a major challenge for Denise to be comfortable to her new environment. "When you are used to living by yourself and then you get involved in group activities, it's a big challenge!"

Meeting these challenges have changed a lot of things in her personal life. For example, her personal involvement with the oldest districts of Trois-Rivières. "As a citizen, instead of staying in my living room, I feel more actively involved in my community."

Another major change in Denise life is to be "employed" and she had to adapt to having a week payroll instead of just one social assistance cheque per month. The way to handle a budget is a challenge. Denise found the transition very difficult at the beginning, but now she is very comfortable with this change. She has become an expert in Financial Management!

Denise is now an important part of a working team. This brings huge pride and also changes a lot of things in her life. She has a sense of belonging to a group and a team and this means a lot to her.

Without her involvement with ÉCOF and in the community, Denise couldn't be as helpful as a full-fledged citizen. "Well, if my civic involvement had not been there, I wouldn't be able to do something useful. I would not have shared the same problems as everyone else and wouldn't be able to change things. "

Note:

These testimonials are included as appendix 4 of the Place Based Poverty Reduction Initiative final report ***How Community Economic Development is reducing poverty in Canada and how it could be doing more***