



The Community Development Service Learning Initiative:

“Situating people as human beings within their learning: connecting individual and community learning to a greater social movement.”

What is the CDSL Initiative?

The Community Development Service Learning Initiative is a national project to strengthen service learning opportunities in CED organizations for students, build youth engagement in CED, and facilitate effective experiential learning partnerships between community organizations, educational institutions and youth.

This initiative is being developed in partnership with the Storyteller’s Foundation, an organization that uses a place-based approach to individual and community learning in the Upper Skeena region of northern BC¹. The initiative will support development for intentional and meaningful learning opportunities to be integrated into CED projects, increasing the capacity of the learner, the organization and the community to contribute to social change.

What is service learning?

Service Learning is a form of experiential education. It integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities. It supports the student to learn through a cycle of action and reflection as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community, deepen their understanding of citizenship, acquire knowledge and build skills for themselves. It supports the community agency to move their vision/goals forward by supporting an individual to contribute meaningful service.

What is Community Development Service Learning?

Community Development Service Learning is a form of experiential education situated within a community learning framework. This means that within the informal arenas of community, practitioners consciously create learning opportunities for people to engage with each other to bring about change that enhances civic engagement and local well-being. It is a community process that fosters relationships of equality, community engagement and social responsibility. The learning can happen in a variety of contexts, promoting local knowledge and skills, critical reflection as well as rigorous, sound, and appropriate academic study. Community development service learning builds capacity for communities to learn, reflect and act. Simultaneously, it offers opportunity for individuals to identify their interests and passions and link this with local community needs, issues and opportunities.

CED and Community Development Service Learning

This project promotes the use of community learning for empowerment, and for connecting individual learning to the greater movement of social and economic justice. It builds on existing work happening in CED to engage youth, develop leadership and build capacity for youth involvement in CED initiatives. It will also contribute to existing initiatives that aim to mobilize new knowledge that informs policy & practice through partnerships between practitioners, communities and educational institutions.

¹ Find out more about the Storyteller’s Foundation at <http://www.upperskeena.ca/>

What are the project's objectives?

This project has four objectives:

- a) Build capacity of CED organizations to benefit from community service learning & contribute to the development of curriculum and programs in post secondary institutions that meet CED needs.

- b) Build opportunities for students to engage in effective community development service learning, and network with youth leadership and the CED movement to contribute to social and economic change in Canada.

- c) Build opportunities for post secondary institutions to partner with CED organizations to expand service learning opportunities that contribute to community needs and assets.

- d) Enhance the effectiveness of service learning in building community assets and contributing to youth engagement in CED, inclusive of rural, urban, northern, Aboriginal and disadvantaged communities.

What will the initiative do?

This initiative will create a platform for engagement with and between youth, community-based organizations, and post-secondary institutions around experiential learning for civic engagement and social change. Specifically, the initiative will:

- Engage young CED practitioners in reflection, dialogue, peer learning, and planning to strengthen community development service learning opportunities for CED in Canada;
- Engage with community organizations to identify and describe existing service learning activities and explore interest and opportunities for further learning within the network;
- Identify and review opportunities for linking service learning to CED related post secondary initiatives;
- Identify opportunities for relationship building and capacity building between community organizations and post-secondary institutions interested in community development service learning;
- Identify opportunities for, and create new CED service learning initiatives; and
- Develop the tools, resources, and models necessary for community organizations to develop and participate in service learning activities that support their CED objectives.

Coming soon...

By January 2008, this initiative will have:

- A discussion paper for CED organizations on community development service learning;
- A critical reflections paper detailing the Storytellers' Foundation's experience using service learning as a strategy to mobilize citizens around community development.
- A practical "how to" guide for those CED organizations who may want to embark on a community development service learning initiative, including the replication of tools used by the Storytellers' Foundation for service learning initiatives.

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