

# GOOD WORK NEWS

The Working Centre, 58 Queen St. S. Kitchener, ON N2G 1V6

Issue 122

September 2015

Subscription: A Donation Towards our Work

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## Housing Campaign Update

On June 24th 2015, 100 people gathered at 256 King East to officially launch The Working Centre's first capital campaign, focused on the development of 18 affordable and supportive housing units. Most of the units are designed to house and support those who are chronically homeless or who frequently experience homelessness.

Campaign Co-Chairs, Jim and Sue Hallman and Jim and Marianne Erb invited community support to raise \$1 Million to make this housing initiative possible. Regional Chair Ken Seiling, Kitchener Mayor Berry Urbanovic and Waterloo Mayor Dave Jaworski joined with MPs, MPP's and local councillors to show their support for our community building project.

We deeply appreciate the

generosity that our community has already shown. To date we have raised over \$500,000 towards our goal.

Raising \$1 Million will give us the means to purchase and renovate 18 units of housing, and ensure that resources are available to support mental health, emotional, and addiction issues experienced by residents. It will also help to support future housing efforts.

The Working Centre's resources and funding provided through the Region of Waterloo's Affordable Housing Strategy complement our campaign efforts to make these housing efforts possible.

As we work to complete the renovations, we invite your support to help us reach our goal and create affordable supportive housing in the core of our community.

## Creating a Third Place Queen Street Commons Café

Rebecca Mancini

When you walk into the Queen Street Commons Café, it quickly becomes apparent that something feels different. It's hard to put your finger on what the difference is but newcomers to the space often look around them in wonder, trying to figure it out. When you step back and take a look, there are a myriad of things going on – people clustered at tables while others sit at their laptops or read a book, always people moving about, a constant buzz of lively conversation, dishes clattering and music playing. Café regulars walk in with purpose, greetings for those around them and the confidence of knowing that they belong and are welcomed. Each of these pieces form a strand of the complex web that is the Queen

Street Commons Café, creating a space that is as intricate, delicate and strong as a spiders web.

We asked folk who work in the Café to help us reflect on what it is that makes the Café a warm and welcoming place, but one in which so many diverse, often disparate things take place. This was inspired by a comment from Kayli who remarked: Everyday we gather a bunch of people together, many who have not done food service work, to respond to the orders of the long line of people (which sometimes stretches out the door) who are expecting food service. And somehow these things work together, but they shouldn't. This is just one of the opposites that form the core of the Café.

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Join us

September 17<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 pm

for the Book Launch of  
**Transition to Common Work**

by Joe and Stephanie Mancini

The event will be hosted by Dr. Katherine Bergman, President of St. Jerome's University, and Dr. David Seljak.

Joe and Stephanie Mancini will explore The Working Centre as a model for energizing grassroots social development.

We hope you will be able to join us for this unique event celebrating The Working Centre community.



**Location:** St. John's Kitchen, 97 Victoria Street North, Kitchener

**Time:** 7:00 PM

**Date:** Sept 17, 2015



SJU  
St. Jerome's University



## Thirty-First Year

Issue 122

September 2015

# Good Work News

Good Work News was first produced in September 1984. It is published four times a year by The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen as a forum of opinions and ideas on work and unemployment. Four issues of Good Work News constitutes our annual report. There is a circulation of 12,000 copies. Subscription: a donation towards our work.

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## Projects Designed for People Under 30

### STEM to STEAM

Supporting Arts Grads to Find Work in Waterloo Region's STEM Sector: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

This project is for people between the ages of 15 and 30 who have graduated with an Arts degree or diploma—who have been unable to transition into the labour market in their chosen field of study—to find work in the STEM sector. STEM to STEAM includes a six month, subsidized placement to help build work experience, practical skills, and connections in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sectors.  
(Supported through Service Canada)

### Digital Media for Youth – Build your Digital Media Portfolio

Are you between the ages of 20 and 29 and interested in using your creative and technical skills at work? Join us for digital media training and job placement: 20 hours per week, for 20 weeks.

Creative design: use open source software applications to design 2-D raster and vector images, 3-D objects designed for 3-D printing, edit audio, etc.  
Maker training: build an Arduino robot and gain experience in programming, circuit basics, digital prototyping, etc.

Entrepreneurial Skills, Social Media and MS Word/Excel Certification

(Offered in collaboration with Kwartzlab, Supported through Province of Ontario - Ready Set Work)

### Other Youth Opportunities

You can volunteer in one of our Community Tools projects (Call Jen – 519 743-1151 x 176), or we can find the steps or the program that best suits you. Make an appointment or drop in to our Job Search Resource Centre for more information – 519 743-1151 – located at 58 Queen Street South, Kitchener, ON.

Visit our website at [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org) and keep an eye on the “What’s New” section to learn more about applying to these projects, or if you are an employer with an interest in supporting a work placement.

## 26<sup>th</sup> Golf Tournament



By Dave Thomas

The Working Centre/St. John's Kitchen golf tournament is a long-standing tradition - a great opportunity to strengthen our connections with the labour movement and to raise funds to support our operations.

The 26th outing, held August 12 at Rockway Golf Course, brought together 125 golfers and 26 sponsors under mostly sunny skies and a light breeze, to raise about \$18,000 dollars.

“It's another successful tournament,” said player Jim Woods from Unifor, a member of the organizing committee and the MC at the evening's dinner. “It builds on the long history of support for The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen.”

This year's top foursome consisted of Gord Currie, Chuck Neu, Rich Rooke, John Brady. Cindy Snell, Karean Alaske, Denise Nash, Helen Willard were the top women's group. The top mixed quartet was made up of Steve Menich, Mary Ellen Cullen, Bob Servo and Brian Bledsoe.

Unifor and Lear Corporation were the community sponsors, and MTD Products was a patron for the golf tournament.

Other sponsors included Strassburger Window and Doors, Brinks, UA 527, Staebler Insurance, Canadian Labour Insurance Services, Breckles Insurance, Nuernberger & Scott Insurance, Progressive Waste Solutions, Unifor 4034, Unifor 1524, Unifor 27, Unifor 5555, Unifor 444, Dana Automotive Corporation, Mondeleg International.

Once again, we are very thankful for the efforts of our organizing committee, Unifor members Jim Woods, Brian Little, and Dayle Steadman.



### Now with 9 Stations serving Kitchener-Waterloo:

- Kitchener Market
- Waterloo Parkade (King St. S. & Willis Way)
- Your Neighbourhood Credit Union (King & William)
- Charles Street GRT Terminal
- Queen Street Commons Café
- and CIBC parking lot on Queen St. S.
- Kitchener City Hall
- Kitchener Public Library
- The Tannery (Charles & Victoria)
- WLU (University Avenue at the Go Station)

# Creating a Third Place

## Queen Street Commons Café

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### About the Café

The Café is a place of welcome and integration in the downtown, where people from all walks of life gather around food, coffee or tea, or around the tables – in often surprisingly diverse exchanges and conversations. We serve 350 customers per day with delicious, affordable vegetarian meals, prepared through Maurita's Kitchen (where 20-30 volunteers gather daily to make good food possible); complemented by coffee roasted fresh each day, creative tea options (including some grown by our own garden projects), and delicious desserts.

Many events take place in the café every day, including gatherings like the Speak English Café (with Mennonite Coalition for Refugee support), Open Space (with Extend A Family), movie nights (with the Commons Studio), musical performances, graduations of entrepreneurs who proudly present their business ideas, graduations of

the Local Democracy course hosted by The Working Centre, the annual MEDA breakfast, all-candidates election panels, community group meetings and presentations, and various classes of students.

The Café also sells Working Centre Community Enterprise soaps, body products, gift certificates, roasted coffee beans and more, complemented by a wide range of products made by people/small businesses affiliated with The Working Centre. Books for Sustainable Living also has a spot, it is an interesting collection of books we sell about community engagement, intentional living and social, economic and environmental analysis.

### Leaving Space for Others

These are the regular, day to day elements of the Café and they call for us all to weave the pieces together so that anyone who wants to be involved is welcome. Hsain describes his role in the café as hosting – “there is a tradition of hosting at the Café that invites people from all elements of life into

the space so that when they come together new things can arise.... Backed by The Working Centre's deeply rooted values, some examples of the things that can be created with this tradition of hosting are new friendships, micro-communities, and partnerships.”

This weaving or hosting role is not something that is easy. It is “work that challenges norms as we practice inclusion among such a mixed group of people”, says Kayli. The work is to balance diverse personalities, wants and needs, in a place where people feel ownership of the space and eagerly offer their thoughts, ideas, concerns and suggestions. We work to create a space where people can reintroduce themselves each day – if problems emerged yesterday, can we look past this moment today and invite them into working on shifting this behavior? If we are truly a welcoming space, how do we not exclude people, but constantly invite them into what it is to be a part of shared space? This requires a new way of thinking for all of us, where we build the habits that leave space for others.

Misha tells the story of someone learning and playing her favourite song on the piano just because she asked him if he knew it. One

day, as he was playing Misha's song, someone in the Café wrote a note on a napkin and set it on the piano. The napkin said “haters always gonna hate. Ignore them, you're awesome!”. The person was responding to the fact that earlier someone had emphatically asked the piano player to stop playing. Amy notes that it is moments like this that have a humanizing aspect to them. It is people being themselves in the fullness of their being and working out the tension of sharing space with others. It is people taking ownership of the space and demonstrating it by their support of others, by their pitching in to help when things get tight and by just being present. It is people collecting the mugs that have been taken outside to the back alley, it is people filling the water jug when it gets low, it is people reaching out to each other, and people coming to soak up the vibe. As Eric says, each person has a voice and has a story and the Café is a place where people can come, be themselves and contribute in whatever way they have to offer.

### Daily Work of Hosting

While this sounds magical in some ways, it is held in the same way the spider builds its web – methodically, in a disciplined way, that requires an endless list of small, seemingly mundane tasks. There are lots of cleaning jobs, the meticulous work of food service, the welcoming and training of the rotating group of volunteers, washing dishes and tables.

Kayli describes the range of work each day as moving from serving people, connecting with a frustrated person who has come to the Café for support, receiving craft items to add to the goods for sale, talking to someone who is playing music on their cell phone and disturbing others, checking the laundry, connecting with Maurita's Kitchen, greeting a past volunteer who has come back to visit, thanking the person who has just played the piano, helping someone to track down a book they read about in Good Work News and enjoying a conversation about it, helping volunteers find tasks in a lull, helping to weave the symphony of food service when the line-up of customers grows. And in the midst of all this, always looking up to greet each person.

### A Web of Complexity

This web of complexity is delightful to watch and to be part of. Everyone who works within the web talks about the personal change that comes from the disciplines and the joy of leaving space for others. It is about holding the virtues and practices so that the simple idea of welcoming each person forms a complex web of informal connections and surprising moments. We try to weave the strands of the web, let the connections develop, and leave space so that when you walk in the door, you feel at home.



## Youth Entrepreneurship Project has a Successful Launch

by Jane Snyder

“Finances and anxiety”; “getting the supplies needed to make my product so I can sell to customers”; “trying to pin-point exactly what I wanted my business to be”; “keeping my agenda, my goals and my thoughts organized and on track” – these are some of the biggest challenges facing young entrepreneurs, according to the Youth Entrepreneurship Project (YEP) program participants.

Launched in November, 2014, the YEP program walked with 14 young entrepreneurs, providing small business training, and access to tools such as money management and budgeting, employment search support, and mentoring.

At the end of July, 2015 the YEP program celebrated the launch of 14 new businesses: registered massage therapy, graphic design, a peer-to-peer bikesharing app, jewellery design, Zumba fitness, a Hip Hop music portal, photography, cycling infrastructure consulting, organic hair products for curly hair, opera/voice training, a catering company that caters to kids and families and colour and light therapy.

The entrepreneurs researched and wrote business plans that were presented to a review panel made up of representatives from local banks such as banks and credit unions (RBC, Scotiabank, Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, Libro and Your Neighbourhood Credit Union),

as well as members of the business community. Far from the Dragon's Den or the Shark Tank, the YEP review panel members carefully and respectfully reviewed the business plans and gave thoughtful, insightful comments to the youth.

“I liked hearing the panel's input” commented one of the YEP participants, noting that the panel presented challenges and business opportunities that the entrepreneur hadn't imagined in their research.

“The YEP program will be a good assessment tool that the participants can apply to any business, job or life decision” notes YEP program coordinator, Emi Rapoport. The YEP program “exposes people to the amount of work that is needed to make a business idea happen” Emi continues, noting that the YEP participants were exposed to all elements of starting a business.

Funded through the Ontario

Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, the YEP program followed the Waterloo Region Assets Plus (WRAP) small business training program developed with the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), which has been run at the Working Centre for the past 10 years.

Now that their businesses are launched, YEP participants are thinking about their next steps: in a post-program survey, participants reported that their greatest needs were “access to an enterprise facilitator who can help me think through business challenges”, information about other business training programs, and access to a low-cost workspace.

“Making the idea.. ideal, things change as you go!” one of the participants quipped, realizing that a business idea is constantly evolving and changing, but always exciting.



# Developing a Wider Understanding of Homelessness Issues

by Joe Bauman

Homelessness is a problem. And it turns out that the physical, mental and social ills associated with it are not only felt by the individual sleeping outside, but also by the public in the form of taxation toward the over-use of certain public services. Hospitalizations and police involvement drop considerably when someone who was homeless finds an apartment. This is a win-win. People have housing and the system is saving money. With the help of academic research and political attention, ending homelessness is now not only a moral responsibility but a fiscal one, too.

## The Upside of Homelessness

Although the goal of ending homelessness might be a good one, it should not be assumed that living inside and in one place is always better than living outside and moving around. Assumptions like this have been made over and over again by people wishing to bestow their version of civilization on

*Distinct cultures are born out of common practices, beliefs, history etc. The culture of homelessness grows out of a pool of common experiences unique to people living outside. These experiences include battling the elements, knowing how to live far below the poverty line, being the object of discrimination in the form of classism and condescension*

others. To the original inhabitants of North America, the benefits of western civilization came at a great cost. That is, the loss of autonomy and identity, land and culture. But to the colonizer it was seen as a win-win. The adoption of western civilization, and along with it fixed agriculture and settlements, was believed to bring prosperity and progress, and it would also free up huge swathes of hunting ground for the coming European immigrants.

The comparison is not at all

perfect. The similarities are not so much between members of the homeless population and the First Nations but rather the attitudes towards them embedded in the dominant culture and its assumptions about the lives that they are living. Europeans, usually in association with Christianity, who saw their native neighbors as victims and not enemies, pushed for reforms resulting in the reserve system and residential schools. It is easy to look back and criticize the arrogance of these policies that at the time were considered progressive. But the



the back room, found a first aid kit and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. He didn't want to go to hospital to have it treated - a friendly customer heard about what was going on and offered a lift to the hospital. No, he didn't want a lift.

In most situations, this person might have been asked to leave. No shoes, no service! The kind of compassion we try to live each day must guard itself from such policy-supported excuses, and respond with kindness to the person before us.

One pitfall of policy is that it fails to prescribe action for unusual circumstance. Our government institutions are especially aware of this. Unfortunately their solution is to expand policy, to build a massive system that attempts to transcend decision-making, transforming its members into cogs of a computational machine — if client meets requirements A, B, and C, then do X and Y. This sterilized mathematics dehumanizes all parties, making any genuine human relationship impossible, which totally defeats its purpose.

Our work as caring community, in a social enterprise setting, must carefully guard itself from this tyranny, lest we lose our mandate to seek just human relationship.

At Worth a Second Look, we could enact more rules, which I might add would certainly make my day-to-day work considerably less demanding. When someone asks for a lower price, I could point to something above and beyond myself and thereby conveniently absolve myself of any responsibility to consider his or her complex circumstance — I'm not a mean

outlook that made them possible is similar to that of today's middle class majority toward a small, seemingly victimized homeless population: a complete confidence in what is personally familiar and comfortable and an unwillingness to concede that someone else might want to live differently. It's one culture failing to recognize the legitimacy of another.

## Thinking About Distinct Cultures

Distinct cultures are born out of common practices, beliefs, history etc. The culture of homelessness grows out of a pool of common experiences unique to people living outside. These experiences include battling the elements, knowing how to live far below the poverty line, being the object of discrimination in the form of classism and condescension that is often accompanied by charity.

These shared experiences serve to strengthen qualities such as self-sustainability and an acute sensitivity to inequality and control. Someone who has experience living outdoors can identify as one who survives, rather than the more popular public view, one who suffers. This person can rightly claim that their lifestyle is one most people would not be able to live, at least not with his level of ease and endurance.

In the same way, someone who is not paying rent or working a regular job can claim that she does not answer to a landlord or boss, an autonomous position that many would admit at least in private to be desirable and a goal that someone with more disposable wealth could understandably try to achieve by owning her own home and being self-employed.

## A Rich, Functioning Community

There is a sense of belonging that comes with sharing experiences and in turn, sharing a perspective. It's worth noting here that any well-meaning attempt to bring community to this population from the outside will find a rich and fully functioning community already there. A clear example is the concept of family on the street, which can be fluid and by choice, bringing different people together in mutual respect and care, signified by the designation mother or brother. Countless acts of radical generosity distinguish this community's philosophy from mainstream individualism, and at the same time, individual freedom is highly valued. When comfort and stability are sacrificed in favor of autonomy and identity, like when an apartment is abandoned for a season of camping, the decision is often more fully understood and supported by the street community than by anyone else. And even if ideal housing is attained, many people never leave the street. It remains a front porch, at times a source of busy entertainment and at times a place of quite contemplation, and hosts a

# Mindful Work at Worth A Second Look

by Seth Ratzlaff

Working at Worth a Second Look, The Working Centre's second-hand furniture and housewares store located at 97 Victoria St. North, sometimes we are faced with difficult decisions. How do we deal with hagglers, people who consider the price tag more disputable than settled fact? Well, it depends. It depends on the circumstance...

We live out each day in ambiguity at the store - in terms of boundaries, item pricing, roles and job descriptions — even in terms of its purpose: it is both a business and a place of community building. This sometimes loose structure demands mindfulness, re-evaluation, faith in choices; in other words, difficult things that can challenge one's spirit as we try to determine right action.

A man comes in looking for a lower price on the litter box because he simply doesn't have the money, and more conversation reveals his cats can't use the pail currently set up. So we come to a compromise that is not for free but requires him to pull together a few bucks to contribute.

Most second-hand stores enact a rule about pricing: all prices are final. But such a policy doesn't always recognize the importance of compromise, kindness, decisions made in relationship with the person before us.

When you are working in the role of store host, one sometimes wonders if a stricter policy would be better — something people can

*This sometimes loose structure demands mindfulness, re-evaluation, faith in choices; in other words, difficult things that can weigh on one's spirit as we try to determine right action.*

predict and we can lean on when trying to make decisions. There are times when a clear policy is helpful.

But there is a kind of policy that doesn't really promote relationship, and in fact, achieves the opposite. This kind of rigid policy can all too often infect the structure and responses of our institutions. It is a poor policy that replaces informed decision-making with blind prescribed action. In this scenario, workers no longer make decisions; judges no longer judge.

Last summer, a young man sat down on a couch in the store, removed his right sneaker, produced a safety pin and lighter, and began to operate on a very infected blister covering nearly half his heel. Instead of sending him away, we moved to



# The Community Economics of Karl Polanyi

by Isaiah Ritzmann

The work of Karl Polanyi turns our usual story about economics upside down by clarifying that at one time markets, now global in scale and barely limited through free trade and regulation, were once local, strictly controlled by the community and barely economic in function. While scholars in the field call Polanyi's anthropological and historical views substantive economics I prefer to call his views here community economics. Through his work, particularly his magnum opus *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi shows that these things we call "community" and "economics" were so tightly integrated that separating the one from the other is a counterproductive anachronism.

## Justice

Community and economics have been two of most generative themes in my own thinking the last number of years. I have framed them both as justice issues. I understand justice to mean that people deserve, as a matter of their dignity, access to something to which barriers are put up by powerful forces and structures in our society. To work for justice is to identify those things that people deserve access to and work towards dismantling the barriers that the forces and structures have developed, including working towards changing those very forces and structures.

## Community Justice

By community justice I mean that every person should have other people who love them whom they can trust to take care of them as they grow old. I call it a justice issue because I believe there are certain structures in our society that bring about the breakdown of these communities.

## Economic Justice

By economic justice I mean that every person should have a way to make a living, to be able to work and have the goods necessary in order to survive. Yet our economy is arranged in such a way that unfairly excludes many from all three.

Polanyi has helped me to see the connections between these two themes. In *The Great Transformation* Polanyi explains that in most cultures around the world up until the industrial revolution the economy was submerged and rooted in people's communities.

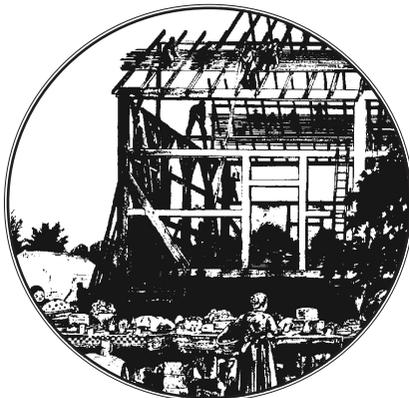


*This is because markets had never dominated human communities or societies before then. Polanyi has a simple way of understanding this: If before the economy, including the market, was under the control of the community now the economy, following the market, put the community under its control.*

He discovered through his research that historically most cultures lacked anything like the kind of individualism that is particular to western, market societies.

In pre-industrial societies individuals would act, he explains, not to safeguard or protect their own individual interest or property but to protect their social standing or place in the community. In contrast to our current economy where wealth is used to create more wealth in most traditional societies when someone had wealth that wealth would be used to shore up his connection to the community.

It is helpful to think of these embedded economics in terms of survival. Take the case of a tribal society – in such a society the economic interest of an individual is rarely important. It really does not matter what I might have at all. It matters what we have together.



This is because, as Polanyi explains, the community keeps all members from starving unless it itself is borne down by some catastrophe. In which case, people's interests are threatened collectively and not individually. People have such a vigorous solidarity that they succeed or fail as one, not one on one. In these societies there was no such thing as personal economic success or failure. Economic success or failure was held in common.

## Householding

Polanyi discovered three primary non-market economic activities that he saw most societies practicing. The first is householding. This is basically the extended family living on a piece of property and producing most of what they need to subsist by

## Not Too Important

*Polanyi tells us that once upon a time our economy was rooted in our communities.*

*When our economy was rooted in our communities markets did not play an important economic role.*

*Markets were local places with local rules where people would buy and sell things that weren't all that important.*

*When our economy was rooted in our communities the things we needed came from somewhere else.*

working together.

## Reciprocity

The second is reciprocity. Reciprocity is a kind of trade of goods and services between people in a community that is dictated most often by culture and custom. These trades were equal and were not done for profit. Instead these exchanges would solidify relationships.

## Redistribution

The final practice was redistribution. Polanyi found that in many of these societies there would be figures like chiefs whose main role in the community was to facilitate the sharing of resources and making sure that everyone had enough. This person would have the authority to mobilize the community to rebuild a house that burns down, for example, or providing food for someone who has none at the time.

In these three practices it was as if everything that could not be provided by householding was provided by reciprocity, and everything not provided by reciprocity was provided by redistribution. Polanyi is at pains to remind us, who often view economy and community as two separate things, that these two were so tightly integrated that all three economic activities were, at the same time, social activities. These activities not only provided for needs but built, strengthened and, importantly, maintained relationships.

Markets were the fourth economic activity that Polanyi identifies. Polanyi defined markets as "a meeting place for the purpose

of barter of buying and selling." Markets were different from the other three activities. Though markets had been fairly common since the Stone Age their role was no more than incidental to economic life. It was householding, reciprocity and redistribution that provided the goods of everyday life and not markets. Markets were not that important.

Polanyi says the mistake of thinkers beginning in the 19th century was thinking that local market just 'naturally' evolved into national and then international markets. Historically it was government intervention that created national, then, international markets. It was first national governments who intervened and destroyed local customs to forcefully integrate local markets into national markets. After the industrial revolution certain forces in society, those who owned industry and their political allies, helped to forge the international market.

## The Market Economy

Polanyi defined the Market Economy as "an economy directed by market prices and nothing but market prices." He makes the point emphatically that no economy in human history prior to the 19th century was ever primarily organized by market logic. Gain or profit, while surely an individual motive from time to time, never played an important role in organizing human economies prior to the industrial revolution.

This is because markets had never dominated human communities or societies before then. Polanyi has a simple way of understanding this: If before the economy, including the market, was under the control of the community now the economy, following the market, put the community under its control.

Polanyi critiques markets for a different reason than Marx critiqued them. Marx focused solely on the economic injustice – the exploitation of workers – the market-system produces. Polanyi does not deny this but focuses instead on how markets also and as importantly destroy people's community ties.

To put Polanyi into my own words: economic injustice produces community injustice. Through turning land and labour into commodities, and by taking all that is sacred for communities

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## Karl Polanyi

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and turning them into marketable products, market systems tear apart community ties including the values and inherited institutions that hold people together. The instability that the market economy creates erodes the ability of communities to stay together over the long term in mutually helpful ways. This is, in essence, Polanyi's story of the growth of market economies and their replacement of traditional community economies.

### Barnraising as Mutual Aid

Community leaders in Kitchener-Waterloo often invoke the 'barn-raising' heritage of our cities. This practice of mutual aid is a vibrant image of the kind of community economics that Polanyi both praised and expounded. In barn-raising a community works together to provide for the needs of a member family. It is about householding as it enables a family to begin to produce for their own needs from their farm. It is about reciprocity as the family

## Economics of Broken Community

**Karl Polanyi critiqued the market economy for different reasons that did Karl Marx.**

**Marx focused solely on economic injustice and the exploitation of the workers.**

**Polanyi does not deny this but focused instead on how the market destroys the ties that bind people together in their communities.**

**He focuses on how individuals are pulled apart from each other through the growth of the market economy.**

whose barn is being raised will often contribute to the raising of many a neighbour's barn. Finally it is about redistribution as the community will chip in materials, labour, expertise, skill and occasionally land to see that their neighbours have a barn, and a good one at that. Yet barn-raising is much more than the community working together to meet the economic needs of its members. It is also an act that strengthens relationship. Building barns builds community! A renewed and tangible sense of community is formed that has effects that last far after the construction work is done. Such a sense of community is a kind of re-investment, promising returns tenfold down the road. The history Polanyi tells fuels a re-imagining where something like barn-raising becomes more central to the economy than the ups and downs of market prices. In such an economy people who are rich in relationships are rich indeed.

*Isaiah Ritzmann facilitates the Diploma in Local Democracy course and works on community education projects at The Working Centre. He wrote both Easy Essays that accompany this article.*

## Community Dental Clinic



The Working Centre is collaborating with a group of dental professionals to establish a Community Dental Clinic that will improve access to preventive dental services and dental health care for people who are homeless/at risk of homelessness. We will also be adding services for refugees over the next few months. This is a volunteer dental clinic – no fees will be charged and no billings issued.

- We will depend on the volunteer efforts of dentists, dental assistants, and dental hygienists. Do you know a dental professional that may wish to contribute their time?
- We are looking for donations of small equipment and supplies.

**More information is on our website – [www.theworking-centre.org](http://www.theworking-centre.org) – look in the What's New section for Community Dental Clinic.**

## Life on the Street

continued from page 4

community whose members belong simply because they continue to be there.

There is the risk in an article like this of romanticizing homelessness. This is not my intention. Life on the street is difficult and, as an outreach worker, when I talk to people who are experiencing homelessness they will often say they would prefer to have a place to stay indoors. Affordable, adequate, and if need be, supported housing should be available to all, with a concerted effort made towards accommodating the wishes of the tenant.

But until this moves from being a good idea to a practical reality, the choice of some to live outside and to move around, a choice made in the context of a housing market that does not suit their needs or desires, should be seen as a logical decision. To be sure, the goal of ending homelessness can only be realized through the strengths and values honed by a culture of homelessness. Autonomy, identity and belonging will always determine the sorts of places we decide to call home.

*Joe Bauman has worked as a Downtown Street Outreach Worker for eight years.*

## Mindful Work

continued from page 4

person, it's just the store Policy.

Here is the insidious nature of rigid policy at work. It actually hinders the chance to help one another. By deterring conversation, policy can prevent the development of an authentic relationship, something that is essential if we are going to begin to understand each other. The specific context, the extenuating circumstance, the unique suffering are all ignored because the decision is pre-ordained.

Worth a Second Look is a second-hand store that seeks to provide affordable furniture and housewares to the local community. Approximately 3000 houseware

and furniture items are accepted, processed, cleaned, shelved, and sold a week. All of this is made possible because of a large group of dedicated and loyal volunteers. We work hard not to respond as policy, but to receive each person in thoughtful ways, with a sense of fairness to everyone.

Part of this is done by making sure policy remains in general (something The Working Centre calls "virtues"). This practice makes space for creative and cooperative solutions, new forms of action in response to new circumstance. This is difficult stuff. But it is also, ideally, more human. It is mindful action working alongside communal reflection, constantly re-evaluating oneself and itself, always seeking new and better possibilities.

A few weeks ago two older men

were hanging out at the store. Someone pulled up and started to unload some donations for the store. Suddenly, out came an acoustic guitar. One of the gentlemen commented, Wow! That's a nice guitar. And then the man donating the items offered it to him. We work as staff and volunteers not to take privilege in moments like this. We both looked at the guitar. It's a nice one. Okay, he said, I see now that you are losing money because of me, so how about I give you some money for it? Sure, why not? But I don't have any money, he said. Well we hummed and hawed and then he had an idea and suggested, How about I go out and busk tonight with the guitar, and I'll donate the proceeds to WASL?

Now that's a creative solution.

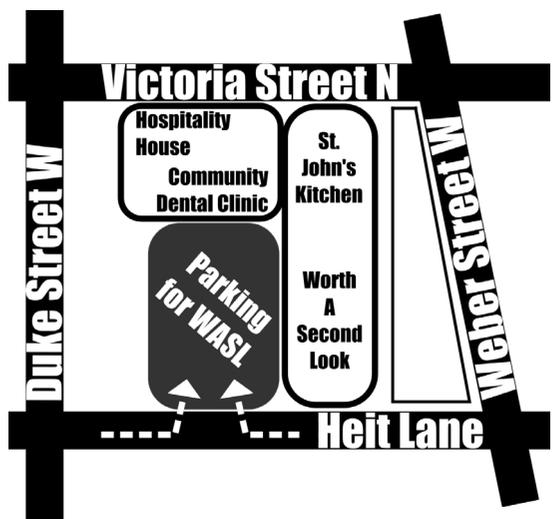


**Store Hours:**  
Monday-Friday: 9:00am to 5:00pm  
Saturday: 9:00am to 4:00pm

.....

97 Victoria St. N.  
Downtown Kitchener  
519-569-7566

Our huge inventory of highly affordable, quality used goods offers something for everyone and turns over frequently, so stop by regularly to see what's new!



# Defining Local Democracy

*Editors Note: Participants in the 2015 Diploma in Local Democracy class chose to write a joint final paper that summarizes what they learned about Local Democracy.*

What is local democracy? When we first began the class we saw it for its failures. We weren't quite sure what local democracy was but we knew what it was not and where it did not exist. As the class progressed this changed. We learned from each other's experiences to better recognize democracy when it was present. It became more about looking for the light that does shine, the democracy that does exist, than the darkness that seeks to overwhelm the light. As we come to the end of this year's class we risk a definition of what local democracy is, to summarize where this pilgrimage of a class has taken us.

## 1. Rooted in Place

We first learned that Local Democracy is rooted in specific places. As a class we recognize that different places are, to hazard redundancy, different. This means there can be no universally applicable handbook for local democracy – the very phrase made us laugh. We didn't know there was one way to do local democracy! Local Democracy means the particular people in a particular place responding to their particular needs. We asked questions like: How does local context impact reality? How large is this place? How are people geo-spatially arranged? What is the political and cultural reality of the space and what emerges from this? Place offers a connecting point but does not guarantee common interest. Local Democracy is not an abstract set of ideas but a concrete, lived reality rooted in a place. Change will only happen if people in localities take control and develop their own ways of doing things. There are no one-size-fits-all democratic institutions for local places; rather institutions such as city governments need to respond to the needs on the ground.

## 2. Relationships between People who Share Space

We then discovered that the importance of place is found, in major part, in the relationships between people who share the space. The importance of these relationships became a major generative theme in our discussions. Relationships spring to provide security for us in insecure situations. We are individuals in relationship from the moment we were born. Individuals within a community are shaped by it more than they shape it. As we talked about in our first classes democratic relationships in everyday life form the roots of larger democracies. Here we meet as equals. In local democracy these relationships are immediate and central to our understanding of ourselves. These

relationships exist even when it goes against individual interest. Any conversation about democracy that does not attend to place and these essential relationships will, in the long run, not engender anything democratic.

## 3. Living Ethical Traditions

In our places we are going to be beside each other for a long time so we need to abide with each other, not just now but for the long run. This means that local democracy needs strong ethical traditions, moral sentiments, even virtue. Our third discovery was that Local Democracy is about the question: how then are we to live? We answered this question by emphasizing living with compassion, building trust, loving each other, developing virtue as ethical skill and extending radical hospitality and embracing difference. We learned that embracing the other is one of the most important ethical habits of relationship that allows for the flourishing of Local Democracy. How else can we learn to abide with each other over the long-term, the kind of abiding which is the keystone of democratic tradition? For local democracy to flourish we must learn to get along. We must cooperate. We cannot be fickle. Goodwill is the path towards sustainability - democratically and ecologically. Every day, every single day, we must navigate the tensions that come out of trying to get along.

## 4. Personal Responsibility Exercised in Community

Through this discussion on ethics and relationships we came to a startling conclusion: democracy is a matter of personal responsibility exercised in community. Insuring democracy is not just the role of the government or the courts. Our fourth learning was that we, as individuals and communities, share in this responsibility. If someone is not being heard it is our obligation to listen. If someone is being marginalized it is our duty to speak up on their behalf. Everyone must play their part in the process of ensuring the sustainability of local community. This requires ongoing voluntary engagement and sustained effort – regular maintenance. To use a mechanistic metaphor, one has to change their oil regularly unless you want to pay the price later. To use a more organic metaphor kindness sows a flourishing garden. Each member of the community has a responsibility to ensure that their thoughts, feelings and actions promote the flourishing of the community, now and into the future. Because we recognize that people have different capacities, and we want to include people and whatever gifts they can bring to the community.

## 5. Matrix of Life-World

## Democracy

We called this matrix of place, relationship, ethics and responsibility the life-world of democracy. We recognized this as distinct from the system-world and thought critically about at what level, what size and what scale participative democracy becomes impossible. Our fifth learning was that, when it comes to democracy, size matters. Size matters because when something is too big it can become too complicated and when something gets too complicated people lose their centrality. When people are no longer central the word democracy no longer applies. At what point is there a radical discontinuity, a rupture, between something of democratic size and something that's too big? Our answer is where there is breakdown of face-to-face relationships and the breakdown of the ability to participate in the decisions that affect one's life. Local democracy is intimate and familiar. This requires frequent interaction. We saw this in thinkers as diverse as Leopold Kohr, Thomas Jefferson and the ancient Athenians. Small is not only beautiful, it is also key to our survival.

## 6. Networks of Communities

We asked ourselves how can local democracies relate to each other? Our sixth learning is that there are two ways of relating: networks of communities and system-world. In a network of communities the principles of subsidiarity apply as the higher levels are at the disposal of the lower levels in society, which themselves are at the disposal of the particular people of a particular place. The local is primary and needs to take responsibility, but there are also shared needs between various locales in the network of communities. In the systems world the lower levels become at the disposal of the higher levels as responsibilities are up-delegated. When the system-world assumes responsibility for our job and becomes so bloated and big that it is impossible for it to be democratic in any meaningful sense. Be forewarned against recreating local structures on the model of larger scale institutions and entrenching the up-delegation of services and functions that would be more appropriately performed

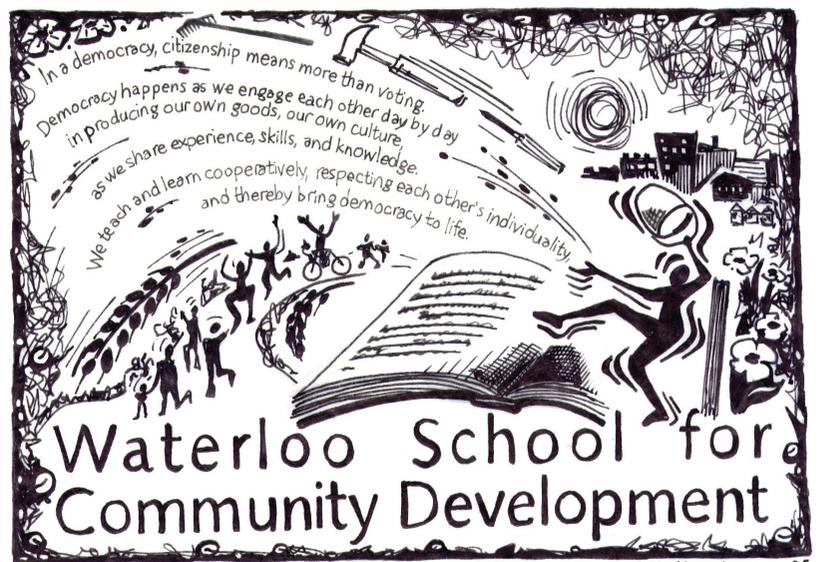
at the local level. Systems that we may have initiated to lift the burden of care from individuals' shoulders, become oppressive – become the burden – when we lose the werewithal to care for ourselves and others.

## 7. Local Democracy is the Essence of a Thriving Local Economy

Our seventh learning was that a thriving local democracy both requires and facilitates a thriving local economy. The kind of local economy we aim for is one marked by conviviality. Ivan Illich defined conviviality as the "joyous freedom to produce for ourselves in relation to others in order to be free of manufactured needs." A local economy that lacks this convivial freedom will negatively impact local democracy. There are these necessary, intrinsic connections between economy and democracy that are dangerous to ignore. Instead we should honour them. A strong local democracy needs a strong local economy and a strong local economy needs a strong local democracy. This ideally is the case, the standard we aspire to even while recognizing the reality might be very different.

## What is the Goal of Local Democracy

We conclude by reflecting on the question: what is the goal of local democracy? What's the point? After much reflection on the richness of the idea we found the centre of local democracy to be to provide immediate responses to community needs. In this we recognize that we are part of a bigger picture: just as individuals are part of a community, so local communities are part of a wider humanity. We need to honour these wider connections while staying focused on what's in front of us. And what's in front of us, the many needs and challenges of our community, is best answered by us – locally and face-to-face. In our class we spent much time talking about the needs that have and will come up. These seem endless, and our community's capacity too often limited. In light of this we concluded that the greatest of our needs, and the one local democracy best meets, is our need for community.



Text: Joe Mancini and Ken Westhues



**Graduation of the  
7<sup>th</sup> Local  
Democracy Class**  
Wednesday November 18<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 pm  
Queen Street Commons  
Café

Professor Trish van Katwyk from Renison University College will present the commencement address. She will reflect on the three-year experience of offering Humanities 101, a non-credit course offered at the University of Waterloo aimed at providing access to a university-level course for non-traditional students.

**Next Diploma in Local Democracy Class begins  
Wednesday January 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 7:00pm**

For more information: [localdemocracy@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:localdemocracy@theworkingcentre.org)

## Laurier Option for Community Engagement

By Isaiah Ritzmann

Last year The Working Centre hosted twenty-five students from Wilfred Laurier University in the first cohort of the new Community Engagement Option, a series of courses jointly offered by Laurier's Faculty of Arts and The Working Centre. The students enrolled in three classes offered in downtown Kitchener, the first two in the fall semester and the final one in the winter. These classes were designed to facilitate student learning about community engagement through traditional lectures, walking tours, placement experiences, reflections, roundtable discussions on theorists important to the Working Centre and discussions on how to connect virtues with real world experience.

The first class explored urban space of the downtown with lectures at City Hall, the Tannery, Kitchener Public Library and Victoria Park. Students quickly learned that downtown was a place where they belonged. During the second course, AF 301 the students began short volunteer placements in Working Centre projects while reflecting on their experience while reading the theorists who

have influenced the Working Centre. Perhaps to their surprise the students began to ask serious questions about the world and their place within it. Why was work only done for money? Why not choose work that benefits the community? The last course gave the students a chance to immerse more deeply into their placement experience, learning the intentionality and work that goes into sustaining a values-based organization. Through this experience their imaginations were expanded on all the ways a community organization can welcome people and foster cooperation.

During the final class everyone was asked to choose one word to describe the first year of the Community Engagement Option. Someone chose the word "deliberately" alluding to Thoreau's experience at Walden Pond where, as he put it, he tried to "live deliberately." Through this experience students were engaged creatively, thoughtfully and joyfully. It would not be difficult to imagine these students inventively borrowing Thoreau's sentence: "We went to the Working Centre because we wished to live deliberately..."

## Conversations at the Commons

We are pleased to offer this series of lectures, panels and discussions at the Queen Street Commons Café.

- Wed October 7: More than Voting: Civic Engagement and Democracy  
Tues October 27: Rethinking Economics  
Wed November 18: Reflections on Humanities 101 & the Diploma in Local Democracy Graduation  
Tues November 24: Economic Development after Climate Change

Each event starts at 7:00 pm at the Queen Street Commons Café, 43 Queen Street South

Check out the What's New section on our website for event details.

For more information contact Isaiah: [isaiahr@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:isaiahr@theworkingcentre.org), 519-743-1151 x175



## Come Out and Support Our Fall Harvest!

The Hacienda Sarría Market Garden will continue to give us great produce into the fall, including spinach, kale, herbs, carrots, onions, beets, microgreens and more. Join our fall mailing list to see what is available and place an order for pickup each Wednesday between 4-5:30 at the Queen Street Commons Café.

This fall we will have available for sale flower bouquets, Fall planters, Rosemary Christmas trees, Christmas Wreaths. As winter approaches ask about our Microgreens/Living Greens Winter CSA

For more information contact Rachael or Adam, at [hacienda@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:hacienda@theworkingcentre.org) or by phone at 519-575-1118.



## Yes! I want to help make affordable housing possible.

### TOTAL GIFT AMOUNT

\$1,500    \$1,000    \$500    \$250  
 \$100    \$50   Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Pledge Payment Timeframe:

One-Time    Five Years: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ annually

### Payment Method:

Visa    MC    Amex    Stock (please contact us)  
 Cash    Cheque (payable to The Working Centre)

### Credit Card Information:

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_  
Card # \_\_\_\_\_  
Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_  
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### YOUR INFORMATION

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name for recognition purposes: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We prefer to remain anonymous

For more info, please contact Heather Montgomery: 519-743-1151 x136, [affordable.housing@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:affordable.housing@theworkingcentre.org)

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