

THE LES HALLIWELL MEMORIAL ADDRESS

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“Community back in the picture. Are we ready?”

2015 QLD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

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Introduction

I want to begin by paying my respects to the indigenous people who are the guardians of this land we now meet upon.

And I want to pay my respects to you all for being here tonight, both in support of the conference, but also for placing faith in me. I am feeling quite inadequate, standing here, as I am, on the shoulders of giants.

And not for the first time I'm reminded of the very first CD Qld Conference I attended in Sandgate in 2003.

At that time I was auditing a few classes with Tony Kelly, and I met a Master's student, Kylie Costello, who had the gift of being an incredible straight shooter. She didn't muck around with words – she just told it like it was. Her spontaneous workshop at the conference was called “Help. I'm a CD imposter”. What made this workshop extraordinary was that it was by far, the best attended workshop of the day. In fact, it was so popular that we had no time to do anything but introduce ourselves, much like a 12 –step program meeting, with each of us standing and saying something like “Hi My name is Lynda and I am an imposter”.

What was even more surprising was how many workers who had been practicing for a very long time and who I looked up to with deep reverence, confessed feeling like imposters.

So I often recall that moment to remind myself that there is something in this work—its complexity, its myriad forms and forever changing nature - that makes us feel like we are inadequate or simply tinkering on the edges of something much greater. And humility is a lovely quality for this work; but at the risk of pulling all my wisdom from fridge magnets, I worry that we have confused thinking less of ourselves with thinking of ourselves less.¹

One of the beautiful texts I've been spending time with this year is the book "Letting Stories Breathe" by Arthur Frank. And in this book Frank warns that we need to abandon all pretense of saying anything original. But he also concedes that that does not mean abandoning hope of saying something useful and interesting. So let's see how I do.

I will spend some time tonight exploring our conference theme. But before turning to that I wanted to first talk a little about what this address means. I confess when first asked to speak here I spent a lot of time puzzling over the purpose of an address such as this. Is it to celebrate, to eulogise or to honour memories? Is it to open up the conference theme or lay out some grander vision? Is it to ensure we don't forget where we came from or remind us of how far we've come?

I want to suggest that regardless of its original intent, this address and this conference now constitute a sacred space. *Now in saying that I don't want to imply that I'm here as the high priestess seeking ascendance.* And I recall from Tony Kelly's Address a few years ago that Les Halliwell was not a demonstratively spiritual man. But I understand a sacred space to be a space beyond the everyday to pursue the things that evoke your sense of wonder and prod you toward the unexplored. Sacred space is where questions can be asked, conversations can occur, rituals can be perpetuated, dances can be performed, songs can be sung, and silence may be heard—all in the attempt to find answers. It is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be.

A couple of weeks ago, in another sacred space, I was at the 'Local Lives Global Matters' Conference in Castlemaine, Victoria and I had the privilege of talking to Jamie Thomas an indigenous leader in the area. We had a rich conversation about the importance of history. He challenged me by saying, "How do you know who you are if you don't know your mob?" He asked, "How can you go forward if you don't know where you've come from?"

So I think in this sacred space, one of the roles of the Les Halliwell Memorial Address is to share the story of our mob—because by simply being here tonight we are all co-creating our story and we need to own this story and keep telling our story if we are to move forwards from here.

And in fact tonight I want to tell you several stories because as Arthur Frank says, "stories breathe life not only into individuals, but also into groups that assemble

¹ This quote is often attributed to C. S. Lewis, but appears to be more in sympathy with his work than an actual

around the telling and believing of certain stories”. But in telling stories I want to be wary of suggesting that I am telling any kind of accurate, singular truth. For Eli Weisel reminds us that “Some events do take place but are not true; others are although they never occurred” (Eli Wiesel cited by Rachel Adler, 1988, p. 28).

The history of our tradition

Some of us here know the unique history of CD in Queensland and knew Les Halliwell personally. Others—like myself—only know his name and a little of what has brought us here. So I’ve spent some time recently talking to his colleagues, and consulting the archivists at UQ, to piece a little of the story together.

And that’s exactly how stories are created. Stories are “cobbled together” from a creative mix, beginning with memory, reassembled from bits and pieces—recycling them in the present storytelling and then turning them loose for future use (Franks, 2010, p. 90).

From the bits that I have managed to cobble together, I can tell you that Leslie Marsden Halliwell, was born 20 September 1908. I don’t know anything of his early life, but that date alone tells me he was a 7-year-old boy when WWI broke out. He would have been a young man of 22 trying to make his way in the world when the Great Depression began and he would have been in his early 30s during World War II. When I look at my own family elders I can guess at some of the consequences of living through those times.

In five years between 1948 and 1953 Les Halliwell achieved three qualifications from Melbourne University and by 1967 he had also attained a Master of Social Studies from UQ.² So I think it’s safe to say that he wasn’t afraid of hard work and we can assume he was disciplined and had a thirst for learning.

Before his appointment at UQ he was a social worker at a children’s home in Ballarat Victoria. He was appointed as a Social Worker (Lecturer status) at UQ’s Remedial Education Centre in 1958. He was appointed Lecturer, in the Department of Social Studies in 1962. By 1970 he was Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Education and Acting Head of the Department of Social Studies for that year. Following a year’s study leave in the UK he was re-appointed annually as a Senior Lecturer through to the middle of 1976 when his appointment expired.

² *Leslie Marsden Halliwell, born 20 September 1908, was appointed as Social Worker (Lecturer status) at the Remedial Education Centre on 1st October 1958. He was appointed Lecturer, Department of Social Studies on 26th February 1962. On two occasions, 1966 and 1967 he was appointed as Acting Head of the Department of Social Studies. In 1969 he was promoted to Senior Lecturer and a year later in 1970 appointed Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Education and Acting Head of the Department of Social Studies for that year. Following study leave he was re-appointed annually as a Senior Lecturer through to the middle of 1976 when his appointment expired. His qualifications were as follows; Diploma of Social Studies, Melbourne, 1948, Bachelor of Arts, Melbourne 1951, Diploma of Education, Melbourne 1953, Master of Social Studies, Queensland, 1967. (Information provided by Bruce Ibsen, University of Queensland Archives, Scholarly Publishing & Digitisation Service, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland.) A photograph was provided to me however it requires permission for publication.*

(So I'm suddenly feeling great affinity with Mr Halliwell as he came to academia after a career in the community sector and the fact that he lived with the impermanence of contracts for much of his time, as the majority of academics and indeed most community workers do.)

What make Les Halliwell so important to us is that he was the first person to be appointed to a speciality position in CD in Queensland and his interest was in building community organisations. He is responsible for so many of the organisations that continue today—including QCOSS, Relationships Australia and Inala Community House just to name a few. One of the reasons we celebrate his work through this address and at the CD Qld conference is that his work was unashamedly local community development work. It so clearly focused on Queensland and particularly regional Queensland: places like Rockhampton, Mackay, the Gold Coast, Inala, and of course, Logan—where we gather now.

I have been told that he that he was complex, he had a sharp mind and at times, an equally sharp tongue, and he was very straight with people, that he was tough; even brutal. But I've also been told that he was gentle and admirable. Most of all he had a profound capacity to listen and trust and his legacy has been the importance of placing our faith in the people we are working with.

If Les Halliwell's legacy was an inward and local gaze, then the gift of Sugata Dugupta who followed him, was to help us lift our gaze outwards. The 21-month emergency in India declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had closed down Segata's Institute and put its chair, Jayaprakash (JP) Narayan, in prison. 'As a person placed on the "second enemy list," Professor Dasgupta opted for discretion over meaningless sacrifice and decided to wait out the crisis abroad' (Summy, 1995, p. 322). Among his references was a personal letter of recommendation from Paulo Freire—which apparently went down very well with the UQ recruitment team! Dasgupta was appointed to The University of Queensland in 1976 and returned to India after the lifting of the emergency in 1979.³

It was Segata Dugupta who established the 2-yearly community development conference in which we are gathered here today to take part. When I spoke to Tony Kelly about the legacy we have inherited, he summed it up by saying "Les Halliwell built the institutions, Sugata Dasgupta consolidated the tradition."

³ *Sugata Dasgupta, born 12th August 1926, received a Bachelor of Arts (Honours), no school identified in 1947, he received a Diploma in Social Services Administration from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Bombay) in 1951. His qualifications also note time spent on courses at the University of London (one term), a UNESCO Fellow in Fundamental Education in 1957, plus courses taken at Elsinor (the castle is in Scandinavia, but I'm not sure where this course was given), plus a course in International Studies at Harvard in the summer of 1966. He was appointed Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Work on 22nd September 1976, but as you mention, resigned 25th November 1979. (Information provided by Bruce Ibsen, University of Queensland Archives, Scholarly Publishing & Digitisation Service, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland.)*

But of course our history doesn't stop there. Having been a student of Anthony Kelly's I think I can safely say that it is Tony who has been so integral to sharing this tradition through the development of rich frameworks. ⁴

Tony's beautiful framework of working with head, heart and hand has permeated at least two generations of workers in Queensland. And of course, alongside many others, Ingrid Burkett and Peter Westoby have continued to grow and develop this tradition, each with their own sharp, insightful, and poetic writing: Ingrid with her engagement in creativity, and innovation, and Peter extending thinking on dialogue and soul. There are so many teachers in this room and in our lives, but I bring attention to these three figures in particular because Tony, Ingrid and Peter have all been my community development teachers and dear colleagues and friends. I draw on their wisdom within this address and I love that I have a chance to publicly express my deep appreciation to them all and weave my story into theirs.

Tony shared with me Desgupta's wisdom that we keep a tradition alive not through our academic achievements but by people telling their stories in sacred moments. And it is in this sacred moment that I turn this story loose for future use.

“Community back in the picture, are we ready?”

Moving from the past to the present I want to turn now to focus on our conference theme to tell a different story: **“Community back in the picture, are we ready?”**

This year's conference theme is a deliberately provocative and challenging one and suggests change is in the air. If we look back to the last Community Development Queensland (CDQld) conference held in 2013, there was a vastly different picture. At that time, people were reeling from severe funding cuts and sudden job losses and the feeling in the sector was particularly bleak and pessimistic.

Jump forward to 2015. If the rhetoric is to be believed, community is back in the picture and the evidence is all around us. In July 2015, the Queensland Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Shannon Fentiman said the Government was committed to revitalising the community sector saying “Our community

⁴ Anthony David Kelly, born 23rd November 1943, received a Bachelor of Social Work (UNSW) 1973, and a Master of Social Work (U Queensland), 1978. His career at UQ began on 3rd April 1978 as a Tutor in Social Work. This appointment expired later that same year. He was appointed Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Work on 2nd June 1980. He was appointed Acting Head, Department of Social Work on 1st March 1987. He retired 31st December 2005. (Information provided by Bruce Ibsen, University of Queensland Archives, Scholarly Publishing & Digitisation Service, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland.) A photo was provided but it is in copyright and we would need to contact the studio, most likely in Bombay/Mumbai should we wish to publish it. We will need to find someone who can read the inscription, which is most likely Hindi.

groups are the backbone of the support we provide for our most vulnerable. We value their contribution” (Minister Shannon Fentiman’s Office, 2015).

Various structural reforms across multiple community sectors suggest the emergence of a new landscape. Neighbourhood centres are being refunded by state government, there is a renewed and expanded Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) program. The ‘no advocacy’ clauses associated with community group funding have been removed. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is being rolled out in the disability sector, with Queensland and Commonwealth Governments agreeing to an early launch of the scheme in North Queensland in 2016.

There are a range of initiatives targeting vulnerable groups, including financial resilience programs, services to address domestic and family violence, support for multicultural events and regional events, programs to reduce alcohol related violence, and much-needed assistance to drought affected communities. There are significant changes to aged care, the mental health act, new multicultural legislation, a review of the child protection act, and a new child and family support system.

Collective Impact groups are forming to play with new coalitions and partnership. Expressions like “social innovation” and “collective evidence” are making a regular appearance at meetings I attend. Conversations are shifting from a discourse of sustainability to a discourse of “regeneration”.

With all of this exciting change in the air, and community well and truly back on the agenda, we need to ask ourselves, “Are we ready?”

...Or do we?

Before we break out the streamers I think we need to tell another story of our communities, one that moves us from the sacred to the profane. Because when I heard the title of this conference my first thought was, well if community is back, where did it go?

I have some ideas about this that I’d be keen to test out.

Searching for community

If we accept Ingrid Burkett’s proposition that community is a verb not a noun, then community is about who we are and what we do in each moment and each interaction. In which case I think where community went, is to the bottom of our very long to-do lists. It’s in the phone call we haven’t got around to returning yet and it’s in that email that we know we have to respond to and that meeting we really should have been at.

And I can't tell you how many workers and students I've spoken to about this conference who've said things along the lines of "I'd love to go but I can't—I just have too much on". And I know from looking at the registration list that many of us have had to make a call about which day to be present—unable to take time out of our lives for 2, 3 or 4 days away. And this is done not flippantly but with real regret as we wrestle with the demands upon our time.

In various workplaces – including my current one – I listen to people play the humble brag game of workplace poker:
"I'm so tired – I worked every evening last week."
"Really? Well not only did I work every evening but I worked the whole weekend."
"I'll see your weekend and tell you about all the public holidays I've worked this year."
"I'll see your public holiday and raise you all my annual leave for the last three years."
"I dragged myself to work even though I was sick with pneumonia and could barely breathe"
"That's nothing. I worked even though I fell out of ten story building and was unconscious in hospital for five weeks".

(As a sidenote I adore watching my colleague Peter Westoby disrupt this dynamic, when he turns to them on a Monday morning and says "I'm sorry to hear that. I had a great weekend. I went hiking; the weather was beautiful")

And it's not only the world of work that overwhelms us. Carl Honoré (1995, p. 30) notes that

tempted and titillated at every turn, we seek to cram in as much consumption and as many experiences as possible. As well as glittering careers, we want to take art courses, work out at the gym, read the newspaper and every book on the bestseller list, eat out with friends, go clubbing, play sports, watch hours of television, listen to music, spend time with family, buy all the newest fashions and gadgets, go to the cinema, enjoy intimacy and great sex with our partners, holiday in far-flung locations and maybe even do meaningful volunteer work. The result is a gnawing disconnect between what we want from life and what we can realistically have, which feeds the sense that there is never enough time. Our schedules are bursting at the seams."

And when I read that passage the first time I was quite surprised – because that was exactly my definition of a good life.⁵ It has never occurred to me to want anything less and that that might be the problem. I'm not talking about the life of fast cars and yachts, but a life filled with interesting things to do: to have a meaningful career, to have time with friends and family, to play a game of tennis, to have great sex, to go to different classes and learn new things. This kind of thinking really challenges me.

⁵ (*ok maybe without the clubbing*).

But a few weeks ago I was at a yoga class and 15 minutes into our usual beautiful relaxing meditation one of the regulars burst through the door in a flurry of frustration, noise and bluster. “I’m sorry” she apologised “I was trying so hard to get to here in time for the relaxation, but I was stopped by the police for speeding...”

And I’m reminded of an email I received from a student . She said,
“Sorry I can’t make the class tonight but I have to prepare for a dinner party.⁶
What’s the topic? Will I miss anything important?”

To both questions I responded: “Participation and engagement”.

She replied: “Can I get the PowerPoint slides for that?”

Over 20 years ago, long before the invention of the not-so-Smart Phone, (the April 24 1994 edition of) the New York Times featured an essay about the erosion of leisure time. How the off spaces between focused activities, that we used to call idle time, relaxation, daydreaming or even goofing off, are now invaded by faxes, emails and telephone. Either our work or our obsessions with being reachable can encroach on every moment of solitude or leisure. And I notice the new trend is to abhor idle time and instead we are called to do classes in mindfulness which demand our attention and presence to everything we do.

Sister Janet Ruffing (1995) is convinced that this love of busyness is profoundly destructive to self-intimacy, intimacy with the Divine, interrelationships, reflective thought, the social fabric of our society, our care for the planet, and our own psychological and physical health. She says,

When I am busy being busy, my field of awareness constricts and I tend not to notice my surroundings or other people. I tend to be unresponsive either to the needs of those who cross my path or to my own. I lose my contemplative attitude and so deprive myself of moments of beauty, surprise, delight, or love. When I am busy being busy, I avoid making time for leisure, for play, for relationships, for reflection...When I am busy, I can believe myself to be incredibly important to the scheme of things. I become indispensable, necessary. My ego becomes reassured (while this state lasts) that I am productive, accomplishing something worthwhile and valuable. (Ruffing 1995, p. 307)

Indeed I have noticed that the answer to the first movement introductory question of “How are you?” receives a response not of “fine” or “well” but usually of “busy”.

⁶ I know –? And yes it’s a true story.

Given that Dasgupta was a contemporary of Mohandas Gandhi's it feels important that I include at least one Gandhian quote at this point. There is a story of a western journalist who asked "Mr. Gandhi, you have been working fifteen hours a day for fifty years. Don't you think you should take a vacation?" Gandhi smiled and replied, "I am always on vacation".

The dominant gene in my ancestry is the protestant work ethic. So I've had the privilege over many, many years to study busyness and devotion to work in a great deal of detail. My conclusions echo those of Ruffing: that busyness is also a form of self-defense.

If we are as busy as we pretend to be, then we are too busy to allow ourselves to be affected by the pain and suffering of our world. We are too busy to be addressed personally by the social, political or ecological disasters occurring in our relationships. We are too busy to listen to our own feelings or those of others. Our busyness insulates us from care and from compassion (Ruffing, 1995, p. 306)

We are too busy to make the connections between our own actions and the larger patterns of the world. We can distract ourselves – at least for a while – from our own suffering or that of another. It's how we survive a world so saturated with violence and need. Our busyness deadens our feelings and numbs our responses. This climate of busyness and efficiency is one of the ways we support the ever escalating levels of violence in the culture.

And I don't plead immunity from this. I know that I am absolutely guilty of variations of these crimes against my own humanity. This address is as much a personal wish as it is a commentary on the sector. Because "are we ready?" means to me more than just do we have the right organisational structures or the right analysis. It also means, have we cultivated the necessary habits of the heart?

Most work environments, including academic ones, reward participants not for the quality of their outputs but for the sheer quantity of whatever they produce: hours, ideas, words, papers. And part of the reason for this lies in the recent changes to the nature of work itself.

In 1976 a social theorist Jean Baudrillard, wrote a book with the uplifting title "Symbolic Exchange and Death". And in this jolly little epistle he wrote that financial capitalism is essentially the loss of the relationship between time and value. Work ceases to be the strong, muscular work of industrial production, and begins producing signs—products that are essentially semiotic. For example, in order to establish the average time needed to produce a glass, one simply needs to understand the material labor involved in converting sand into glass, and so forth.

But try to decide how much time is needed to produce an idea, a project, a style, a creation, an address like this one and you find that the production process becomes semiotic, with the relationship between time, work, and value suddenly

evaporating, melting into air. Work expands to fit the time available because there are no physical limits except the other demands upon our time. The work is often never finished. I very rarely have the satisfaction of drinking from the metaphoric glass that I create.

Franko Bifo Beradi (2011) argues that with the victory of neoliberalism we have seen the amplification of forces (material/economic, and discursive/disciplining) that dissolve much of community life. For example, people are more mobile than ever, following the flows of capital. Those deeply rooted in place are often left behind.

And those mobile people are forever also connected to the hyper-velocity network, called the Infosphere, with mobile communication technologies plugging people into an attention seeking, responsive, addictive network. This semio-capitalism, whilst beneficial for the economy, appears to be also leading to massive disorders of attention, anxiety, panic, and eventually depression, as the soul goes on strike (Beradi, 2009: 12; Westoby & Shevellar, 2016).

In a semiocapitalist world, the main commodity becomes attention. Community requires time. Building relationships takes attention and presence. Listening for opportunities to connect demands a sense of spaciousness. And I wonder how many of us truly have cultivated this?

So, what kind of community is back?

So the other question we need to ask is if community is back in the picture – what kind of community is back? And what kind of picture is it?

I know many of us are still cringing from Tony Abbott’s speech in London last week and his cry that “too much mercy for some necessarily undermines justice for all”. As I watch the reclaim Australia marches, the ongoing incidences of bigotry and racism, the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers, the ongoing denial of climate change impacts, our love affair with fossil fuels, and the continual worship of the deity known as The Market, I have to ask, what community is being promoted and in whose interest?

The answer may lie in what sociologists call the *risk society*, describing cultures increasingly preoccupied with threats to safety, both real and perceived. The dangers of modern life have a stranglehold on people’s imaginations. Sociologist Barry Glassner demonstrates that it is our *perception* of danger that has increased, not the actual level of risk (1999). On the whole, the world is healthier, safer, and more prosperous than ever before.

And here lies an interesting paradox. Sarah Abramsky writes: we are frightened because life is so good

We have become so fearful at least in part because we fear our

intoxicating futures being snatched away from us ... Especially affected are the comfortable classes, the people who have most benefited from educational, economic, workplace, and scientific changes in the past few decades, and who have the highest expectations for how they and their children will interact with those changes. Comfortable people today don't simply fear losing what they already have; they also fear losing what they might soon have. They fear that the ugly present might sabotage a beautiful future ... And so they convert their utopias into dystopian fortresses." (Abramsky, 2008)

I see evidence of these dystopian fortresses and this kind of community all around us. But if this is the community that's back, then how do we respond? Are we ready? And ready for what exactly? What do we need to do?

Returning to the wisdom of story telling, Alasdair MacIntyre says "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (1984, p. 216).

Tonight I want to suggest three stories that speak to what we might do. And these are not the only stories to be told, but they are the ones that call us forth in very different ways. Because to me, "Are we ready?" means are we ready to engage with the challenges before us?

Are we ready?

The first story is a very difficult one to tell – and it asks us to consider where we focus our efforts. Our Victorian colleague Susan Kenny argues,

Given the scale of the international structural problems currently facing the world, including crises concerning the environment, entrenched poverty, civil conflict and omnipresent human rights abuses, we no longer have the luxury of resting in the relative comfort zone of the hard won spaces of 'our own', in localized communities. We now need to focus on challenging wider power relations and envisioning and acting upon alternative ways of organizing human existence. We need to shift from the myopic focus on 'our own backyard' to international collaboration. For this to happen, we need to generate an international, visionary active citizenry and we need 'homes' that are different from most of the current [incorporated] third-sector organizations through which we work. (Kenny, 2011, i16)

She calls for an unsettled third sector and unsettled community development.

Or to put it more simply, if I grow vegetables in a community garden, become an ally to someone with a persistent mental health issue, volunteer for a local association, and always put out my recycling bin – is that really enough? Am I being naïve and ignoring the obvious dangers? Am I about to be overtaken by larger events? How do my small, local efforts in any way make a difference given

the challenges of structural injustice, big pharma, the international finance systems, extractive industries, or global trade agreements?

I think this is a challenge for community development here in Queensland.

How do continue to work locally AND lift our heads to a global systemic analysis? At what point are we ceasing to be CD workers and moving into a social movement? And is this a problem?

The tradition we have inherited in Queensland is a powerful tradition but it is also a very humble tradition. It makes a humble contribution to the work. Does “are we ready?” call for us to fundamentally challenge the way we are working and how we understand our CD tradition?

I don’t know the answer to this, but it unsettles me and it’s a conversation I continue to have.

The second story that we are part of is a story about how we work. It worries me that much of the enthusiasm for community’s return seems to be predicated on the return of funding and government support. The location of much of development practice is deeply embedded in large NGOs and the welfare state and we are at a point where it is increasingly difficult to disentangle development from welfare at both local and global levels.

Last year Tony Nicholson from the Brotherhood of Saint Lawrence gave an important speech to the Community Welfare Sector (Nicholson, 2014). He said that,

Our sector has evolved to a critical stage underpinned by a particular paradigm. Central to this paradigm is the idea that our sector can continue to meet society’s current and emerging needs by contracting to government, expanding and aggregating organisations, driving for greater efficiency and further professionalising, regulating and circumscribing care. To my mind it is a paradigm that is fundamentally flawed. ...the paradigm is neither sustainable or even desirable....

In this story, “Are we ready?” asks if we are ready to engage in a new paradigm and to try new ways of working. And already we have begun this work, as we will hear in various presentations throughout this conference: the collective impact initiatives like Logan Together, the social innovations that explore the 4th space beyond private enterprise, the public service and the community sector. One of the things that excites me at the moment is that we are starting to see ways of connecting to other CD traditions – not to eradicate our own tradition but to enrich it. People are exploring new structures and new collaborations and are being called forth in new and exciting ways.

There's an essay I love to read and reread by James Ferguson about the "The Uses of Neoliberalism".⁷ In it he argues that for the last couple of decades what we call the Left has come to be organised in large part around a project of resisting and refusing harmful new developments in the world. And this is absolutely understandable given that, by their very definition, we see them as harmful. But it has given us what Ferguson calls a "politics of the antis" – politics defined by negation and disdain: "anti-globalization, anti-neoliberalism, anti-privatisation, anti-imperialism, perhaps even anti-capitalism – but always anti – not pro. Which leaves us simply denouncing the system and decrying its current tendencies. He asks, "but what if politics is about getting what you want?"

I think, "Are we ready?" also provides the challenge of are we ready to tell a different kind of story—one that clearly calls for a politics of pro- not anti- and clearly defines what we want.

So this brings us to the third story that might call us forth throughout this conference.

US scholar James DeFilippis and his colleagues suggest that

One of the central problems with much of the work that has been written on community is its tendency to fall into dualistic thinking: organizing or development; consensus or conflict; community or labour; local or larger scale. This limits the potential scope and range of community-based efforts for social change. (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Schragge, 2007, p. 40)

So to me, this story calls forth a question about how we shift our thinking.

In Victoria, I heard Helena Norberg-Hodge caution against the tendency in our sector to discount talking and writing and to focus on action. Norberg-Hodge argues we need both. We need to link structurally. But we also need to link intellectually. There needs to be more exchange between the global north and the global south (Norberg-Hodge, 2015).

And this leaves me wondering, how do we connect practice, theory and research and stop creating artificial divisions? I was at a workshop recently and one of the participants began her comment with the phrase "The problem with you research people...". And I thought, shouldn't we all be research people? And theory people? And practice people? And policy people?

Sadly, I hear these kinds of belittling comments all the time. Just last week a community sector colleague complained, "Academics like to think they get paid by the syllable and Harvard reference".

Now I know that academics are easy targets and I recognise the kernel of truth in these comments. But the division of practice people and theory people is one I have heard too often in this sector to smile politely at any longer. I find this kind of continual othering not only naive but potentially dangerous; limiting all of us

⁷ *...and I wonder why I don't get asked out to dinner parties more often!*

to singular roles and ways of operating, instead of recognising the opportunities and possibilities and the multiple knowing spaces in which we all stand. It is also further evidence of the ongoing legacy of our mechanistic way of thinking, treating each other as components of a machine with a singular discrete purpose.

Much more helpful is the attitude of other organisations I have had the privilege of talking with recently, like Nundah Coop, DBCYP, and YANQ, who are saying, “How can we engage with you and with each other, to help us solve an ongoing question? How can we work together as co-researchers to share and expand our understanding of practice and create something new?”

One of the most meaningful and important roles in my life is as a member of the operating committee for the local mental health network “A Place to Belong”. Neil Barringham, the manager there, is another of my teachers and I love watching the way Neil works. Like other good managers that I have seen work so skillfully, he connects and resources the people in his teams, connecting us to ideas and research and new developments. He works horizontally, connecting across the sector, and then letting us know which way the winds are blowing – what the other leaders he respects are taking note of; and he works vertically, moving up and down within the organization to connect different layers – inviting the organisation’s workers to come and share their stories with committee members, inviting committee members to be allies to people supported by the organization. Just last week he encouraged a worker with some rich experience to partner with me in a writing project to encourage a two-way transfer of knowledge and skills. Weaving connections rather than fortifying divisions is what helps to build robust and healthy organizations. (Given his interest in strengthening local organisations, I like to think that LesHalliwell would have agreed with this sentiment).

Margaret Wheatley (1992) who many of you have read and heard, talks about systems and the way in which healthy systems are those systems that have the greatest numbers of connections. I think the third story that we are part of is a story about making more connections.

It is a story that calls forth connections between the local and the global and invites robust conversation about this point in our history: knowing where we have come from, where do we need to go? It is a story that calls for us to connect with each other – in new and innovative ways to challenge the dominant paradigm and imagine something risky and new.

It is a story that invites us to connect across false binaries to work with our heads, our hearts and our hands so that we might unsettle the dystopian fortresses but also unsettle community development. And it is a story that asks how we might connect more with ourselves, to challenge the perpetual busyness and cultivate much needed habits of the heart.

Many years ago I was helping some people in the disability sector explore issues around Duty of Care legislation and risk management. On this particular day one of the disability workers had brought along one of the women she supported; a young

woman who apparently had challenging behaviour and an intellectual disability. I shared with the group some thinking about safeguarding, and in particular the idea that it is people who keep people safe, not legislation. That is it critical to have many people in freely given relationships in the lives of those who are vulnerable, and we need to know people deeply. At this point I stopped and asked the group how this deep knowing of a person could be helpful. Everyone avoided eye contact, except the young woman, who thrust her hand into the air excitedly, "I know" she called out,

"Cos when you are with someone you can know them. And when you know someone you can love them. And when you love someone, you can teach them how to dance"

So is community is back in the picture and are we ready?

I'm not sure.

But I look forward to us finding out and along the way, perhaps teaching each other how to dance.

Thank you.

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