



The Society We Want DISCOVERING Newsletter

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A Legacy of Citizen Engagement: The Society We Want Wraps Up Research

After four years, and hundreds of dialogue groups across the country, The Society We Want Public Dialogue project is coming to an end.

As the project wraps up, however, citizen engagement and deliberative dialogue will continue to play an important role in CPRN's research projects. In October 2000, for example, nearly 400 Canadians participated in discussion groups across Canada as part of the Quality of Life Indicators Project (see story page 3).

"The Society We Want has indeed helped CPRN recognize the importance of citizens' values, and of taking those values into account in both the design and the conducting of research," says Karen Jackson, CPRN's Director of Corporate Affairs. "It's had and will continue to have an impact on how we do research. And I think we can note with some confidence that we've seen increased interest in public dialogue within the federal government."

Since its inception, The Society We Want has benefited from the generous advice, participation and input of a group of national advisors. As CPRN explores the next steps for public dialogue in Canada, it hopes that these advisors will continue to play a role.

CPRN's expertise in public dialogue has benefited the National Association of Friendship Centres, says Marc Maracle of the NAFC, who offered the association's continued support for The Society We Want and its offshoot projects. Debbie Cook, of the Privy Council Office, sees The Society We Want at the forefront of public dialogue initiatives: "It has created a very significant legacy." Wendy DesBrisay,

of the Movement for Canadian Literacy, likes the project's potential to link citizen engagement with literacy work to increase Canadians' "political literacy."

"The Society We Want has really pushed the boundaries for citizen engagement in Canada," says Miriam Wyman, Project Coordinator. "It demonstrated just how much citizens can – and want – to contribute to policy thinking. Participants really understood the value of focused conversations in small groups. Invariably, they said, 'We need to get our politicians around the table to talk this way. This is a way for them to really know what we're thinking.'"

The Society We Want founder Suzanne Peters, who passed away in March 1999, would be proud of what the project has accomplished, and thrilled about all the new activity that has been spawned at CPRN and in other organizations, says Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN: "The fact that there is now an annual prize for citizen engagement at the Canadian Policy Research Awards is clear evidence that Suzanne's pioneering work has made a difference." (See story on awards, page 3.)

While the project is formally ending, The Society We Want team encourages citizens to continue to hold dialogue groups. Issue guides on the health care system and the changing world of paid work can be downloaded from the CRPN Web site at www.cprn.org, or ordered by contacting CPRN by email at info@cprn.org or phone at (613) 567-7500.

"Our task now," says Judith Maxwell, "is to demonstrate that

public dialogue can be done on a national scale, in tight time frames, and produce results that are serious inputs to decision making."

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Students at St. Mary's Collegiate and Vocational Institute (St. Mary's, Ontario) talk about their perspectives on quality of life with Miriam Wyman (left) and Susan Himel (second from left). See story on page 3.

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Work Dialogue Results Are In

The emergence of a global economy, free trade agreements, industrial restructuring, technological shifts in production, and a telecommunications revolution have all changed the way work gets done – in Canada and around the world.

In fact, notes CPRN research associate Joe Michalski, only one in three Canadian workers holds what we might call a “traditional” job – that is, a full-time, permanent, nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday position in a single employer’s workplace. A higher proportion of workers work part time, in temporary or contract positions. Over the past two decades, the percentage of jobs lasting six months or less has increased significantly, while the ranks of the self-employed grew to 18 percent of the total labour force.

How are Canadians adapting to the changing world of paid work? To find out, 98 participants in 14 The Society We Want dialogue groups examined the tensions and trade-offs that arise in a rapidly evolving work environment. Participants reflected on three viewpoints: that paid work should provide *economic security*; that workers should have *healthy and balanced lives*; and that paid work should be *meaningful*. Michalski conducted the initial analysis of dialogue group responses.

While the number of participants was relatively small, with a preponderance of people under the age of 35, the dialogue groups yielded some interesting

results. In particular, participants’ priorities tended to reflect their stage in the “life course”: adults with family responsibilities, and those in their prime working years, tended to focus on economic security and striking a healthy balance between work and family. Younger and older workers, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of meaningful work.

Nearly all the participants, however, stressed that workers, governments *and* employers shared responsibility for achieving security, balance and meaning. Participants wanted to see some key policy changes to help achieve these goals, including: more training, a higher minimum wage, pay equity, greater job security, expanded access to Employment Insurance, lower unemployment and more affordable child care.

The status of part-time versus full-time workers was a hot topic for many groups. Most participants in these groups tended to view part-time work as a threat to peoples’ economic security: part-time workers, they noted, had no benefits or fewer benefits than full-time workers, were paid less, and had less perceived job security.

Participants were reasonably optimistic about their economic futures, though many were also aware of the possibility of losing their jobs. More than three-quarters suggested that they would likely need additional schooling to adapt to the changing world of work. The same number reported

working in a reasonably safe and supportive environment, although most wanted more flexibility in their work schedules to help meet family and other personal obligations. As one group concluded, “balancing work, learning, family, and life is difficult even when [you have] a life partner who contributes.”

Most participants, especially those working full time, rated the quality of their work highly; more than half agreed that their work gave them a sense of accomplishment, while an equal percentage considered it meaningful. Roughly a third of the participants, however, were pessimistic about their chances of competing successfully in the labour market, including, in particular, those who work in part-time positions and those who described themselves as unemployed.

Overall, the dialogues revealed that while most Canadians clearly would like to have meaningful work, economic security and achieving a healthy balance between professional and personal lives took precedence. For most, the priority tends to be achieving job security regardless of gender or minority status – and the creation of policies in support of workers and their families.

For more detailed results on the work dialogue groups, please visit CPRN’s Website at www.cprn.org.

Citizens and Governance: From Research to Action

The Commonwealth Foundation’s new *Citizens and Governance Programme* aims to translate its research on citizen engagement into action.

From 1997 to 1999, the foundation’s *Civil Society in the New Millennium* project gathered the views of more than 10,000 citizens in 47 Commonwealth countries on the roles of citizens and government in a “good society.” In November 1999, the results of the project were presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban, South Africa. The response was over-

whelmingly positive; the heads of government encouraged implementation of the recommendations outlined in the *Civil Society* report.

The *Citizens and Governance Programme* aims to do just that, by involving a wide spectrum of civil society organizations to “internationally push the agenda of taking citizens’ voices seriously,” says Miriam Wyman. Wyman is a member of the international team guiding, implementing and monitoring the program, now in its initial stages.

The *Citizens and Governance Programme* encourages and supports

practical initiatives at local, national, regional and international levels that advance and act on the lessons learned from the *Civil Society* project. For example, in December 2000, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia convened an exposure/learning exchange among delegates from five South Asian countries on the theme of “Citizen Engagement in Local Self-Governance in the South Asia region.” In New Zealand, the Maori non-governmental organization Te Korowai

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Citizens Play Key Role in Quality of Life Indicators Project

How are you? And how do you know?

If you're like most Canadians, you rely on a whole host of factors – like your health, job, income, safety, level of education, spirituality, personal relationships, and housing – to determine just how well you're doing as an individual. At the national level, however, Canadians don't have a comprehensive set of indicators to determine quality of life. Traditional measures, like gross domestic product or the United Nations' Human Development Index, rely on only a limited set of factors. And these, says Sandra Zagon, don't tell the whole story.

Zagon is the Project Coordinator for the Quality of Life Indicators Project (QOLIP), the goal of which is to develop a set of indicators, made in Canada by Canadians, that together paint a holistic picture of what constitutes "quality of life" *on citizens' terms*.

What makes the project unique is that it is the only project at a national level to seek input from citizens. In

this sense, QOLIP both complements and continues the citizen engagement process begun at CPRN by The Society We Want.

The Society We Want acted as a resource for the project. As it created issue guides, trained moderators, and reached out to a diverse cross-section of Canadians, the QOLIP team drew on the experience and expertise that came out of The Society We Want's public dialogues.

The results of all that work were impressive: in October 2000, nearly 400 Canadians participated in 40 dialogue groups across the country. Over the course of three hours, they explored the questions of what quality of life in Canada means, how it can be measured, and by whom. Trained moderators led the discussions, helping participants to build a collective portrait of quality of life in Canada and suggest ways to track our progress over time.

In December 2000, stakeholders in the project – including dialogue partici-

pants, researchers, members of the project steering committee, and indicators "experts" – met to discuss the results of the dialogue groups, and to develop the prototype set of indicators. The results can be viewed at CPRN's Web site, www.cprn.org.

The next steps for the project include compiling the prototype, and then reporting back to Canadians about how we're faring according to our own perceptions of quality of life. The goal is to create an ongoing, robust index of indicators that may well change, says Zagon, as citizens' concerns shift.

"The input of 'ordinary' citizens in this project was extraordinarily rich," says Zagon. "They did a lot of demanding, challenging work in the dialogue groups and workshops to create a set of indicators that reflect *their* values. And they strengthened the notion that citizens want and need to be involved in the creation of good public policy."

Award-winning Work on Citizen Engagement

Canadians from all regions and sectors of the country are doing groundbreaking work on citizen engagement. On November 30, 2000, the Policy Research Secretariat honoured one of these pioneering Canadians with the Suzanne Peters Citizen Engagement Award.

Jacquie Dale, of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), won the award in recognition of her leadership on *In Common*, CCIC's innovative pilot project on globalization and campaign to end global poverty.

As National Project Coordinator for *In Common*, Dale used and built upon The Society We Want's public dialogue methodology. She designed and implemented a deliberative dialogue project that engaged more than 600 citizens in 40-plus discussion groups across the country on how Canada should approach globalization.

"Through her research, [Jacquie] enhanced the citizen engagement

technique of public deliberation that Suzanne Peters had developed," said CPRN President Judith Maxwell, who presented the award. "And in the process, she built new capacity to organize dialogue with citizens. The legacy of Suzanne Peters grows deeper and stronger in the work of Jacquie Dale."

The Suzanne Peters Citizen Engagement Award was created in honour of The Society We Want founder Suzanne Peters (1948-1999). It is awarded by the Policy Research Secretariat of the Government of Canada, and celebrates "those who are helping to advance research and create oppor-



Citizen engagement in action: Jacquie Dale discusses quality of life with Montreal citizens.

tunities that will enable Canadians to have a greater voice in shaping future public policy."

For more information on the deliberation pilot, visit CCIC's Web site at www.web.net/ccic-ccci. To find out more about the award, please visit policyresearch.schoolnet.ca/awards-prix/engagement-e.htm.

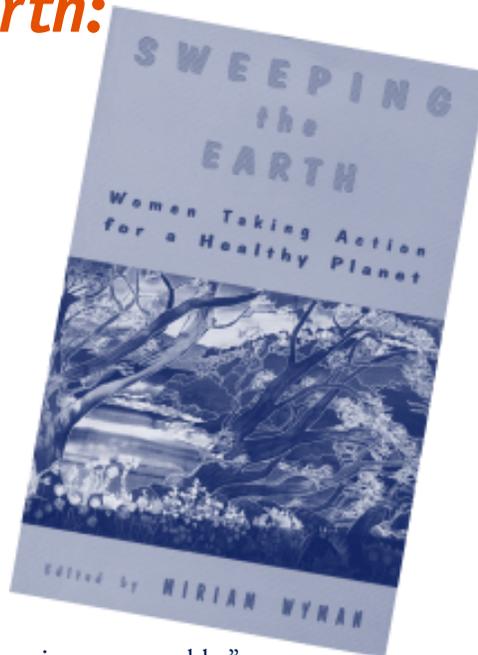
Sweeping the Earth: A Blueprint for Action

Women the world over are making connections between health and the environment. And a new book, edited by The Society We Want Project Coordinator Miriam Wyman, brings together some of their voices. *Sweeping the Earth: Women Taking Action for a Healthy Planet* is a powerful demonstration of women's determination, creativity and tenacity in making a world devoted to sustaining, rather than destroying, life.

The collection of essays is, in essence, a conversation between women all over the world. It illustrates women's achievements as they work to detoxify the environment at local, national and international levels, and provides models for change. The book focuses on issues of connectedness, globalization, equity, prevention, poverty, "ecostress" and sustainable development.

Importantly, says Wyman, *Sweeping the Earth* brings together the "lone voices in the wilderness" of women who work on environmental issues, and shows the power of women to effect change by joining with others, mobilizing communities and challenging authority. In this sense, *Sweeping the Earth* is an important tribute to citizen engagement; the women in the book are taking an active role in creating the society *they* want, and need, for a healthy planet.

"The work these women do is hard and exhausting, and the odds often feel



insurmountable," says Wyman. "Too often, they feel isolated. This collection is a way of easing that sense of isolation, and of sharing some of their learning. Knowledge about each other strengthens each of us and strengthens the whole."

In the book's Foreword, Canadian scientist, astronaut and photographer Roberta Bondar writes, "I believe that the readers of *Sweeping the Earth* will find inspiration from the vision and activism of the women in this important new collection."

Wyman is co-author of the *Citizen's Guide to Agenda 21* (1993) and co-editor of *Environmental Challenges: Learning for Tomorrow's World* (1986).

Sweeping the Earth can be ordered by sending an e-mail message to books@gynergy.com or by checking with local bookstores. Please address comments or questions to the author at miriam.wyman@utoronto.ca.

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Aroha has launched an initiative to promote Maori engagement with the constitutional review efforts of the Aotearoa/New Zealand government.

In addition to providing funding for such projects, the program will create a venue for international learning and research on citizen engagement. The initial projects will be reviewed, evaluated and reported on at the NGO Forum in advance of the CHOGM in Brisbane in October 2001.

"Our aim is to both support and learn from citizens around the world about the ways civil society thrives," says Wyman, "and then apply those lessons to make sure that citizens have a strong, vibrant role in the creation of policy and practice."

For more information, please visit www.commonwealthfoundation.com, or contact Miriam Wyman at miriam.wyman@utoronto.ca.

Learning to Engage is online!

Learning to Engage: Experiences with Civic Engagement in Canada is Canada's contribution to the *Civil Society in the New Millennium* project. This report examined six case studies of citizen engagement in Canada, and highlighted The Society We Want Public Dialogue project. It is available, free of charge, at CPRN's Web site, www.cprn.org.

Our Web site provides more information about The Society We Want and CPRN: www.cprn.org

Ce document est aussi disponible en français. Téléphone : (613) 567-7500

To order issue guides on "Adapting to the Changing World of Paid Work" and "The Health Care System," please contact The Society We Want. You can also download issue guides from CPRN's Web site.



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