

Community Development Halton Possibilities Cafés

Summary of Discussions

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Summary of Discussions

Background

Community Development Halton (CDH), established in 1984, is an organization that operates 2 major programs: social planning and Volunteer Halton. It has in the last several years also been host to Age Friendly work, an example of a role it has played over the years of incubating new initiatives in the community. Early in 2019, the Board and staff began a process of examining the role of CDH in the community in a process of re-visioning with a view to the future. Considerable time and energy went into internal discussions among and between Board and staff, and it was in late June that CDH decided that it needed to be able to factor into its decision-making the current perspectives of the community it serves prior to deciding on its future. This decision led to the creation of the Possibilities Cafés.

At roughly the same time, the Executive Director, Joey Edwardh, announced her retirement to take effect in October 2019. This leadership change provides a significant moment for any organization to consider re-inventing itself and offers an important opportunity to acknowledge the wide range of CDH accomplishments that have occurred under Joey's longstanding leadership. However, it also opens the door to new leadership and new thinking about the role CDH should play in the community. As one participant in the Possibilities Cafés said, "...[the] change in the CEO is a huge opportunity", a thought echoed by another who commented "It is helpful that Joey has/will be retiring."

While CDH has sought feedback on its work in the past (e.g., there was a survey conducted in the community by CDH in 2017 to evaluate its programming), the Board and staff felt strongly that updated feedback and input from the community was needed. The 2017 survey indicated, in general, strong support for all the functions of CDH, but there were also a variety of suggestions for improvement or concerns included in that report¹. It is uncertain to what degree CDH has used these suggestions or concerns to modify or consider modifying the services it provides or the way in which it provides them. In this regard, the 2019 process that CDH has sponsored has provided an opportunity to assess whether the community's perspectives have changed and whether additional suggestions and concerns have since emerged.

¹ It is unknown how many of the critical comments or suggestions made in the 2017 survey were actually included in the summary report that was available for the consultant to review.

How was the Consultation Carried Out?

There was a very narrow window of time for the consultation and the process was complicated by the fact that it occurred over the summer. There was a concern that with many people taking vacations that attendance at sessions planned for the consultation might be very low. In response, CDH staff ensured that invitations were widely, and repeatedly circulated and personal invitations and reminders were extended in a series of follow-up phone calls. In the end, about 90 people registered to participate in the sessions and about 75 people attended. While this does not necessarily represent the community, it could be considered a very good response given the timing with which CDH was working.

Additional input that could be used in the analysis came in a number of ways from people unable to attend a Café: 4 surveys were completed and were returned to the consultant (the surveys duplicated the questions asked at the Cafés), several e-mails were received and an on-line opinion piece in the Burlington Gazette reviewed. In total, then, about 85 individuals had input in one way or another into the process.

A review of the attendance list at the Cafés indicates that participants came from representation from community agencies throughout Halton, from government and funders, and included a range of individuals who have been connected in one way or another with CDH. While there were a few past Board members of CDH present at the sessions, consistent with the design of the Cafés process, no current staff or Board members attended making it easier for participants to speak openly.

Three sessions were offered, one each in Milton, Georgetown and Oakville². The method that was used is a group conversation process known as “World Café” (in this case, the sessions were called “Possibilities Cafés”.) The process involved a series of structured questions posed to small table groups (normally a maximum of 5 people per table), with people moving from table to table at specified points to create new table groups, thus maximizing the potential for people to interact with a mix of other people.

The questions were developed by the consultant in collaboration with CDH Board and staff representatives. There were 3 groupings of questions and a closing-out question. The first three questions that participants were invited to respond to in Round 1 of table group discussions were focused on CDH in the here and now, i.e., What does CDH do well? What could CDH improve on? What “value-added” does CDH bring to the community. The second and third round of questions had a future orientation to them: How could CDH best determine community needs? How could CDH best ensure people feel their voices are heard? How could

²The Halton Regional Centre in Oakville was chosen as a Café site because it offered a reasonably central location for both Oakville and Burlington participants.

CDH best engage with the community? How could CDH best serve as a resource to the community? How could CDH best facilitate the engagement of others in the community? In closing, participants were also asked to identify the one thing they would say to the Board if they were given the opportunity (in one session this was done verbally and in the other 2 sessions people write down their comments on sticky notes and left them with the facilitator.)

The questions used are included for information in the Appendix to this report.

How was the Information from the Consultations Analyzed?

The analysis began with a comprehensive transcription of all the notes kept by participants in each consultation session. To these were added survey comments, e-mail comments and the on-line opinion piece. This was followed by a theme analysis that identified themes across questions³. This theme analysis involved grouping similar comments and then identifying patterns of recurring issues, topics, or perceptions mentioned across several discussion groups and/or across several questions. The themes that emerged most frequently are discussed below and sample quotes that illustrate the themes have been included so that the reader can hear the “voices “of participants.

The Café Proceedings contain a comprehensive transcription of the notes from the consultation discussions and is available as a separate report. Readers are directed to it if they wish to hear the voices of participants directly and if they wish to review the rich raw data that was used by the consultant to identify key themes.

Limitations and Challenges of This Approach

The use of World Café, or for that matter any other qualitative approach that attempts to capture the perspectives of large groups of people (and, in this case, something as amorphous as “the community”), has its limitations. The most significant of these limitations is that it cannot be assumed that the people who were involved were representative of the community⁴.

³ The sessions yielded approximately 130 - 140 easel chart sheets of paper containing notes made by participants PLUS individual “sticky notes” that were either appended to easel chart sheets or handed to the consultant as people left a session. In total, it is estimated that there were approximately 1,200 discussion points and comments recorded by participants during the 3 sessions, and through the other information gathering methods. Theme analysis involved review and re-review of each of these comments.

⁴ This could also be said, however, of the surveys that CDH has used to evaluate its work over the years. The report on the survey done in 2017, while it breaks down respondents by various constituencies, reports a response rate of only 14.8% and contains no analysis of possible response bias, meaning that generalizing survey results to the full community or even to those invited to complete the survey could not be done with any degree of confidence.

As one individual noted when asked what they would say to the Board of CDH, “90 people does not represent the community”. Having said this, those who were invited and who attended were people who, in one way or another, have interacted with CDH over the years or who are familiar with the work of the organization. To this degree, they were an interested group representing a range of community stakeholders.

A second limitation is that the data this report is based on has undergone a theme analysis by the consultant, and theme analysis sometimes requires the exercise of judgement, particularly if wording is unclear or convoluted, etc. The analysis may therefore, despite efforts to stay neutral and be as rigorous as possible in the analysis, suffer from interpretive errors. For this reason, the original transcribed notes have been made available in a separate report (Café Proceedings) so that people can make their own judgements about the degree to which the interpretation provided in this report reflects the content, tone, and tenor of the community conversations.

A third limitation to the methodology is that at some point a line must be drawn with regard to which themes need to be rolled up into a report. Put another way, how often does a comment have to be made or issue noted for it to be considered a theme? How does one account for the fact that some people/table groups might keep more detailed notes than others, thus impacting the frequency with which something is mentioned? Is the issue really mentioned more frequently or simply scribed with more impact? The result of this is that many ideas that may have been repeated across discussions or in notes only a few times will not necessarily be identified in this report as a theme; this report focuses only on what the consultant believed were the strongest themes. For example, in this case, there were several comments made to the effect that in one way or another CDH Board governance has room for improvement. To the participants who made these observations, this is an important issue and it may, in fact, be an issue that CDH needs to look at. However, if it is only mentioned 4 or 5 times and other issues are mentioned 20 or 30 times it will not be reported as a theme in this report. The number of themes that are ultimately contained in any report need to be manageable for an organization and listing 50 or 60 “themes” would confuse more than facilitate discussion. Unless noted, only what the consultant believed to be the most dominant themes are reported. The reader can review the data which is in “Café Proceedings” if they wish to see for themselves what issues and concerns did not make it into the report.

WHAT versus HOW: Overall Patterns

In undertaking the theme analysis, it quickly became apparent that there was broad, strong support for both Volunteer Halton and the social planning mandates of Community

Development Halton. Further, its role as a connector of people and organizations/relationship builder, while not mentioned quite as often, also received notably significant support along with its advocacy and the training/education opportunities it provides. Incubation as a role also received good support, although not as strong as these other roles and functions. This support was not only for what CDH does now, but also for what CDH should continue doing to be effective.

However, there were also themes focused on ways in which participants felt Community Development Halton could become more effective most often by changing how it does what it does. These themes, if CDH were to act on the suggestions, would require CDH to change NOT the WHAT it is that it does, but the HOW it does what it does.

This notion of “the what” and “the how” has helped shape the reporting on key themes and learnings to be drawn from the consultation process.

CDH STRENGTHS AND THE VALUE-ADDED IT BRINGS

There were 2 questions posed to participants in the Cafés that were intended to provide an opportunity for people to identify what they feel are the strengths of CDH and the value-added it brings to the community. Two additional questions were also included in this theme analysis, that being what CDH should be doing to be an effective resource in the community and to be an effective facilitator of people’s involvement and engagement in their community (in these 2 instances, if activities in which CDH is already engaged were mentioned, the consultant interpreted the comment to mean CDH should “carry on” in these areas.)

This section of the report shares the themes that were identified in relation to CDH strengths and value-added.

CDH sees itself as having 7 core activities, but the consultation process asked people to focus on the 2 major program areas (social planning and Volunteer Halton) plus Age Friendly initiatives as an example of CDH’s incubation function. As noted above, there was very strong support across all three consultation sessions for 4 activities that are carried out by CDH that fall under these 3 areas and about which participants were specifically asked: research, data analysis and data sharing; volunteer initiatives under Volunteer Halton; training and education, and advocacy, and; incubation of new initiatives. There were calls for these activities to continue as they were central to CDH’s effectiveness going forward. This does not mean that there were not suggestions for change, suggestions that will be discussed later.

There was one other strength that people discussed, one that was not specifically asked, that being the way in which CDH connects people and organizations and builds relationships. This is seen by CDH as an element of community development work, one of its core activities. As with

the other strengths, there were suggestions made for changes that could impact how this is done, but nevertheless this connector role is seen as a real strength.

It is also worth noting that, in the discussions, there was some conflation of incubation as a function and Age Friendly initiatives as an example of incubation OR as a stand-alone program of CDH. As a result, at times, people spoke about incubation as an activity, and at other times people spoke about the value of Age Friendly initiatives. There was, in fact, good support for Age Friendly initiatives, but there was also discussion more generally about when it is appropriate to spin off incubated initiatives into the community (see discussion on page 21).

Participant voices around these strengths were compelling. Sample comments are included so that the voice of participants can be heard.

Research, Data Analysis and Data Sharing

(very strong support)

- *Data [is] used to inform [agencies'] grant writing.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors) ...a fundamental impact [would be] loss of Halton specific data.*
- *"Community Lens" and "Dispatch" series - crucial for smaller agencies to plan.*
- *Data for grant applications.*
- *Data is community-specific which is very important - organizations do not have time to gather that information.*
- *Community knowledge gained through research - anyone can get StatsCan data, but we would lose Region specific interpretation of data.*
- *Repository of information - easily accessible social data that nonprofits need.*
- *Data / social planning - social service agencies rely on data.*
- *We wouldn't have a central go-to place for data.*
- *Who would alert us about social trends - e.g. seniors living alone?*
- *Where would we get the data / proof we need for grant applications, impact assessments (if CDH closed its doors)*
- *Data analysis is excellent quality*
- *Research reports (e.g., Community Lens)*
- *Research / community lens reports - useful for proposals / reports.*
- *Social research - grant applications, narrow focus from larger data, user-friendly, specific - Community Lens!!!*
- *Data/reports - customized, emailed, summarized, assists with grant writing, wealth of knowledge of staff.*
- *Research dissemination - love the dispatches sent monthly/bimonthly.*
- *Warehouse of information on current and historical data.*

- *Smaller organizations do not have the resources for statistics, training and support.*

Volunteer Halton

(very strong support)

- *Volunteer Halton website [is] well known, timely, user-friendly, effective.*
- *Volunteer database [is a strength]*
- *Volunteer database is essential in the community - tangible/visible.*
- *Large picture of volunteer opportunities in Halton communities.*
- *Volunteer - cross promotion of volunteer recruitment, promoting positions, volunteer awards.*
- *Use and reputation of Volunteer Halton - importance of volunteer, matching within organizations.*
- *Volunteer Halton's volunteer recruitment process.*
- *Volunteer - advocacy, placement since many agencies no longer have volunteer coordinators; only place where people can see the range of volunteer options; good processes in place.*
- *Resource for volunteer best practices in nonprofit organizations.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors) Volunteer Halton would need to be duplicated within organizations.*
- *Losing Volunteer Halton would hurt all non-profits and local volunteerism in all communities.*
- *Valuable volunteer assistance that helps Halton run, gives people more value and purpose and a deeper sense of care and connection within and for their community.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors) agencies will lose access to volunteers, [lose] opportunities for seniors to become involved, [and it would be a] challenge for youth volunteers if this is lost.*
- *Without the Volunteer Halton database, we could not run programs / services as we receive - 25+ referrals a week - we need volunteers!*
- *Central location for volunteers to find opportunities.*
- *Volunteer Halton negatively impact small non-profits to get volunteers.*
- *Impact community - volunteer opportunities are less accessible.*
- *It would be more difficult to find volunteers, and costly if paid advertising was needed.*

Connecting People and Organizations / Relationship Building

(strong support, roughly the same as support for training and education and advocacy, but not as frequently mentioned as research, data analysis and data sharing, or Volunteer Halton)

- *(to be effective, CDH needs to engage in) collaborative initiatives - explore possibilities / current partnerships.*
- *(to be effective, CDH needs to continue) bringing programs and agencies together.*
- *(to be effective, CDH needs to be a) community connector / facilitator.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors, we would lose) participation in community networks.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors, we would lose) networking.*
- *You are a unifying force across the various agencies in the Halton Region, networking and supporting all to the greater good.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors, we would lose) priceless connections for individuals in our community.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors) more would be done in siloes.*
- *(If CDH closed its doors, we would lose) centralized networking - opportunity for sharing information / local resources.*
- *[CDH offers] Passionate staff with good connections to variety of people and organizations across communities.*
- *[CDH has] strong partnerships with community organizations and other special planning organizations*
- *[VCDH is a] role model in organization/organization partnerships.*
- *[CDH connects] the community - senior connectors, home sharing, income tax for seniors, elder abuse.*
- *Provides many "layers" of community connection opportunities*
- *Strong partnerships with other organizations.*
- *The connections that are made to support individuals who otherwise would be left alone, unheard, etc., is amazing.*
- *Their connections with other service providers in the community is very admirable as well.*
- *[A CDH strength is the] ability of staff to work as a facilitator with other groups.*
- *[A CDH strength is its] involvement / [and being a] key partner in community collaborations.*

Training and Education

(strong support, roughly the same as support for connecting people and organizations and advocacy, but not as frequently mentioned as research, data analysis and data sharing, or Volunteer Halton)

- *HNN and workshops - capacity building.*
- *Training opportunities (low cost)*
- *Age friendly seminars very good and helpful - good speakers, well informed, valuable information.*
- *Volunteer training is excellent.*
- *(A CDH strength is the) learning opportunities offered.*
- *Volunteer training.*
- *Training is very good.*
- *Training for Halton community based on programming and volunteerism.*
- *Training and research support (offer value-added)*
- *Accessible [and affordable] educational courses for nonprofits.*
- *Training wouldn't happen for service providers - these classes help build relationships in the community; help agencies know they are not alone.*
- *Continue educational workshops - they are critical to networking.*
- *Provide education.*
- *Training (program evaluation, Board governance), add North Halton locations more often, webinars.*
- *Help us understand impact.*
- *Help us understand applied research, not just data but relevance to decision-making, analyzing data.*
- *Training / education - data analysis and collection - trainer library.*
- *Community specific workshops - adapting based on needs.*
- *Workshops, education, etc., to provide more information to volunteers across all regions (to increase skills, etc.)*

Advocacy

(strong support, roughly the same as support for training and education, but not as frequently mentioned as research, data analysis and data sharing, or Volunteer Halton)

- *(To be effective CDH needs to be a) Voice on issues requiring advocacy - vital opportunity to rally what other agencies can't.*
- *(To be effective CDH needs to provide an) opportunity to bring forward voices that cannot come forward on their own.*
- *CDH funded by agencies... able to go in front of Council to say what needs to be said so nonprofits are not having to worry about their \$\$\$ being affected.*
- *Advocacy [by CDH] - for agencies (be heard and have a voice) - for age friendly (is a strength)*

- *Coordinated advocacy - bring together groups (targeted)*
- *Advocacy would be lost (if CDH closed its doors)*
- *Advocacy for residents.*
- *Significant advocacy arm of Region - guaranteed income, etc.*
- *Advocacy - difficult questions and conversations led by CDH.*
- *Advocacy - voice for disadvantaged / poverty research / data.*
- *Willingness to delegate [to] Regional Council.*
- *Create opportunity for something to grow - for greater good - advocacy - social justice.*
- *Highlight inconvenient truths, difficult conversations - there really isn't anyone else doing this, rallying force.*
- *Advocacy - voice for the disadvantaged, i.e., better services, poverty.*
- *Representing all voices to members of government.*
- *A voice to represent smaller organizations - a leader.*
- *Provides some opportunities for voices to be heard.*
- *Advocating on issues of community concern.*

Incubation of New Initiatives

(Strong Support but not as frequently mentioned as research, data analysis and data sharing and Volunteer Halton)

- *(a strength is) capacity to incubate new initiatives.*
- *If we lose testing ground for new ideas, it will fall on agencies who maybe shouldn't do it and have the expertise to do it.*
- *Incubator – [CDH is] best positioned to be incubator of new ideas - especially for things that are in between - no specific mandate.*
- *Helping to pull together and be incubator for small organizations to help with structure, human resources, funding "collaboration".*
- *[CDH is a] neat testing ground for community ideas – incubator.*
- *Burlington Age Friendly Council [is an example of CDH as an] incubator.*
- *Valuable to initiate development of new programs and services.*
- *Create sustainable programs (e.g., Food for Life)*
- *(a strength is) incubation of new groups.*
- *Facilitate more incubation ideas.*
- *Incubator - spearheading projects.*

In sum, the participants at the 3 consultation sessions identified the following as the key strengths and value-added that CDH brings to the community:

Mentioned Most Often (Very Strong Support)	Research / Data Analysis and Data Sharing		Volunteer Halton
Mentioned Often (Strong Support)	Connecting People and Organizations/ Relationships	Training and Education	Advocacy
Mentioned Frequently (Good Support but not as Strong as Other Activities)	Incubation of New Initiatives		

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND CHANGES THAT WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO CDH EFFECTIVENESS

Discussions in response to 6 questions were analyzed in order to identify themes related to improvements people believe could be made or changes that CDH could make to contribute to its effectiveness. The first was a direct question about things that CDH could improve on. The next 3 questions posed provided participants an opportunity to share how they believe community needs can best be determined by CDH, how the organization can ensure people with whom it engages feel they have been truly heard and understood by CDH and how CDH can most effectively engage with the community. These questions resulted in comments about CDH’s current work as well as suggestions for change. The final 2 questions asked about ways in which CDH could be most effective as a community resource and as a facilitator of people’s engagement in their communities.

The themes which emerged were either issues/suggestions that were identified by participants across a number of these 6 questions or by many participants within one question

Need to be More Inclusive Demographically and Geographically

Comments about the need for increased inclusivity were made by participants in response to all 6 questions outlined above. This inclusivity related both to demographics and to geography, i.e., presence, engagement and service in all communities of Halton. Sample comments included:

- *If goal is to represent the community, need to be representative and engage community diversity and all issues.*
- *Think about how to involve diversity.*
- *Tend to focus on marginalized population - need to be representative of full community diversity [e.g., sectors]*
- *Greater visibility in all 4 communities.*
- *More research regarding adults with developmental disabilities (social isolation, housing)*
- *How to be relevant across a large region (small staff cannot be everywhere)*
- *Hosting workshops in north for more access in Acton / Halton Hills because transportation access is limited.*
- *Struggle with reach - make it equal.*
- *Space for programs/training in North Halton.*
- *More locations and staff to support and connect all parts of Halton and to provide a voice for every demographic.*
- *Critical to ensure diversity of input / influence (demographic)*
- *Focus groups - reach out to different sectors (get total view of sectors)*
- *Connecting with other demographics, e.g., youth, immigration, developmental disabilities inclusion...*
- *Board should be representative of the whole community, not just non-profit and each municipality (that they live there). Different sectors as well. If your Board is set up correctly, they will be able to represent all groups...*
- *Need for needs analysis for each community - different for each community of Halton region.*
- *Engaging the Deaf community of which the Halton Deaf population is the largest in Ontario.*
- *Target geographical areas to determine needs.*
- *Inclusion of lived experience.*
- *Representatives across the Board - organizations and residents - not always the same people - broader reach.*
- *Good mix in engagements.*
- *Hire people with lived experience to inform / lead / drive initiatives, e.g., human trafficking.*
- *Invite participation from all groups.*
- *Travel around the region.*

- *Are CDH Board and staff representative of the diversity of the community?*
- *Diversify staff and volunteers to branch into new demographics, e.g. youth, etc. - Volunteer Halton branding for youth.*
- *Tap into youth!!! Stay relevant, support.*
- *Adjusting to be inclusive so all can access resources.*
- *Broad representation on Board.*
- *Board members with cross-community representation (from all sectors)?*
- *Stronger presence throughout Halton (North and South) at community tables.*
- *Have a diverse representation on Board and leverage their networks.*
- *Be mindful of diversity in the community - include diversity beyond Age Friendly, i.e., newcomers, autism ???, etc.*

A review of the comments indicates that diversity/inclusion is, from the perspective of participants, a lens that CDH needs to bring to all its work, including governance.

Need to Effectively Use Social Media / Technology

Comments about the need to effectively use social media and technology were made by participants in response to all 6 questions outlined above.

- *Improve and increase digital presence - particularly to engage broader community - social media; interactive website - opportunity to add feedback; "What's your burning issue?"*
- *Electronic and on-line presence and engagement*
- *Open forum on-line to have access for community members who cannot make meetings - social media and advertising.*
- *[perhaps get] a volunteer in high school to update social media.*
- *Monitor Social Media.*
- *Spot on website for people to comment on community improvements and anything else pertinent to the community (e.g., less police presence in a specific area).*
- *APPS - connections to volunteers and support*
- *APPS - Person-generated health data.*
- *Facilitate conversation on web, e.g., Facebook Group.*
- *Use of volunteers to monitor and interact with the community through the Facebook account.*
- *Use of social media to engage conversations.*
- *Facebook / social media presence!!!*
- *Use "on-line" resources to promote.*

- *A "Hot Topic" online conversation.*
- *Greater social media presence - use it to rally people and make them more aware.*
- *Send videos of your events to different organizations.*
- *social media, technology (webinars).*
- *Digital engagement and social media are a CRITICAL focus engage ~ 40 and younger generations.*

This call to enhance its social media presence and use of technology (in other places, e.g., CDH was asked to consider using webinars) suggests that, in this area, people perceive that CDH has not moved with the times and is missing significant opportunities to engage the community in new ways.

Improved Promotion / Marketing / Branding

There was substantial discussion at the sessions about CDH's need to improve its promotion, marketing and branding.

- *More visibility/formal communication to the community.*
- *Advertising - building awareness about role /services they provide...go beyond those "already in the know".*
- *What else beyond Volunteer Halton database is available to support the community e.g., volunteer training, promotion through libraries, social media (e.g., use volunteers to Tweet) - promotion year-round.*
- *More awareness of their activities, seminars, outreach / promotion...many groups have limited understanding of what CDH does.*
- *Use ambassadors to promote work that is being done.*
- *Increase exposure to public, community on what they do so volunteers could find them.*
- *Promotion.*
- *Promoting their own programs within the community - to agencies not previously contacted, but also within current members (CH as a whole).*
- *Visibility, higher profile.*
- *Focus on effective organization to communicate.*
- *Awareness of CDH resources provided to other organizations /available.*
- *Do they promote themselves enough?*
- *Not sure anyone in the community has a complete picture of all that CDH does.*
- *Volunteer - promotion of database / not well-known - Brand promotion*
- *Lack of awareness in broader community beyond nonprofits.*

- *More transparency around the function of their initiatives and how they measure impact and outcomes.*
- *Do agencies / decision makers know the value of CDH resources?*
- *NB - educating communities on what they provide.*
- *More active role in the community regarding "what CDH does and delivers"...not well known what they offer.*
- *It seems to me CDH is better known in the South Halton area*
- *Branding: we don't know what initiatives came from CDH*
- *Better known in South Halton*
- *With branding - for years we thought CDH was part of United Way*
- *Provide clarity on the 3 pillars (VH, social planning, incubation)*
- *Information session on CDH and their services.*
- *Social media presence for awareness.*
- *More awareness that they exist and what they could do for our community -Acton, Milton, Georgetown, Oakville and Burlington.*
- *Promotion of events - more targeted / open events.*
- *Marketing.*
- *Sophisticated PR.*
- *Visible communication.*
- *Be more visible - use PARK AMBASSADOR⁵S to spread the word*
- *Stronger awareness and promotion of themselves*

Clarifying, Explaining and Communicating Vision, Mission and Priorities

Linked to promotion, marketing and branding was a slenderer thread running through some of the conversations about CDH's need to clarify its vision, mission and priorities so that the community will understand its work and value. This is linked to promotion and marketing because mission, vision and priorities are the overarching things which the community needs to understand, extending that understanding beyond simple programming and events so that there is greater potential for support for CDH as an organization. The following comments were made:

- *Figure out who they are before they rally the troops.*
- *Ensure agencies understand the role of CDH.*
- *Define who community is...stakeholders, resident, et. [consultant's note: community*

⁵ The consultant is not familiar with this term but based on a web search thinks it may be a position

title referencing someone in the community who plays an ambassador role for an organization.

served is a key element in vision and mission for any organization].

- *Define who they are trying to target - service groups, individuals in community - support providers OR be a provider.*
- *First define community then define needs.*
- *CDH communicate who they are and what they do.*
- *Image in community and organizations - what does social*

planning mean? What benefit will you bring?

- *Understand and [be] open about how research priorities are set.*
- *Identify distinct purpose / focus of CDH; what's the mandate, what are the deliverables.*
- *Clear mission and more information on role "how to facilitate and support community response".*

Need for Intentional Outreach to be a Priority

Participant comments made in response to a number of questions suggests that CDH needs to become far more intentional about outreach into the community and in many cases groups suggested that it needs to allocate resources to this function. The following comments were made:

- *Agency visits - discuss challenges.*
- *Do road shows /across Region / town halls.*
- *CDH Board members visit other Boards to listen and represent.*
- *Visit agencies and give them something which will help them do their jobs better.*
- *Presentations at staff meetings, union meetings, community workshops.*
- *Utilize volunteers more in the community to save staff time.*
- *Look at your staff structure and roles, i.e., outreach so can go into the community.*
- *Expand volunteers to promote CDH.*
- *Could be an "Outreach Coordinator" or even hiring summer students or high school interns, field placements of community college and university students.*
- *Outreach worker visiting agencies and hear issues firsthand.*
- *Communications staff/volunteer - social media (e.g. Volunteer Halton), digital engagement as demographics shift - staying current and relevant...*
- *Outreach.*
- *Add position on community outreach.*
- *More programs like Senior Connectors.*

- *Dedicated staff role for community engagement - partner organizations; government; community.*
- *Senior Connector program - peer to peer.*
- *Senior Connectors engage well - could we designate other than seniors to go into the community.*
- *More collaboration.*
- *Involvement with community events*
- *Outreach - go out and speak to people in own communities and setting.*
- *Need to look at staff structure and position self to be able to do outreach.*
- *Outreach coordinator.*
- *Community outreach available*
- *"Pop-up Kiosk".*
- *Outreach to general public / community members through focus groups, surveys, events, etc.*
- *Outreach to social service/nonprofits with a "what can we do for you?" message.*
- *Ask for input - reach out - email, website, social media.*
- *Approach using a variety of media and include American Sign Language in any promotional videos or Interpreters at in-person events.*
- *Use the Board – connector.*
- *Community ambassadors to see what is happening in the community.*
- *Hold community meetings to hear voices (not just in the South)*
- *Youth volunteer internships*

Create Opportunities for the Community to Provide Feedback

Many comments at the sessions indicated that participants viewed communication as a two-way street and that CDH should provide opportunities for feedback from the community when they have shared information with the community or engaged portions of the community in the work it is doing. Often this would need to be done by creating follow up opportunities. The following comments were made:

- *When there is a meeting or issue reported, CDH could do feedback report to their distribution network, use website to provide feedback.*
- *Different methods of feedback (written, audio, website), e.g., Burlington "Getting involved".*
- *Follow up with reports and see how agencies are using the information.*
- *Report back on what is happening in the community.*
- *Ask similar organizations (United Way) [about whether people have felt "heard"]*
- *Invite people to contact through website - increase organization's awareness.*

- *Feedback loop - Newsletter - Report (no one will read) - email and summary of what was learned - video summary of what was learned.*
- *Keep communicating commitment to an issue/ listen, ensure actions happen and follow-up / update.*
- *Action and follow -up - engagement - post-feedback and input to know you've been heard and in-progress / next steps (timely communication is KEY).*
- *Authenticity and transparency when seeking and reporting feedback - clear communication re: purpose (the why) - ensure follow-up report back regardless of outcome.*
- *Volunteers could help with follow-up work - further engagement.*
- *Provide opportunities for continuous feedback.*
- *Anonymous opportunities to provide constructive criticism.*
- *Regular feedback with organizations about satisfaction with CDH and its services.*
- *Sharing of information.*
- *Sharing of results/outcomes.*
- *Provide meaningful follow-up, survey individuals, have meetings/ability to have open dialogue and again for the community to know that they exist.*
- *By reporting back to them on how their needs are being worked on being addressed by CDH. Even if there has been no concrete result, it would be helpful to know what it being done. CDH may already do this. As I haven't been involved for a while, I wouldn't know.*
- *Checking and evaluation to make sure needs have been understood.*
- *Follow up with agencies after reports /services are provided.*
- *Follow up is key - thanking individuals - technology can help (e.g., set reminder for e-mails).*
- *Publish report - plan for action.*
- *Create more opportunities for the community to be heard / participate in different ways (family bbq's, incentives, e.g., evening, go to them)*
- *[Participate in] community activities / visibility.*

Continue and Enhance CDH Role as a Connector

There was a thread running through some of the discussion about CDH's need to continue and/or enhance its role of connecting others and being connected to others.

- *Bringing cross-sector agencies, neighbourhood groups, community interest groups together on certain topics.*

- *More collaboration/communication with community organizations and committees to prevent overlap in service.*
- *Move to more of connector [role] to bring people together VS leading activities dues to limited resources, i.e., staff, funding.*
- *Facilitate networking opportunities amongst similar social service agencies.*
- *Identify and support other community initiatives.*
- *Ensure working through networks and organizations to leverage their clients and resources.*
- *Facilitate community organization networking and collaboration, i.e., bringing groups together.*
- *Run regular non-profit organizational network events.*
- *Explore collaboration opportunities.*
- *"Matchmaking" between ideas and potential developers of these ideas.*
- *Facilitate and foster partnerships amongst organizations (like - minded).*
- *Collaborate with agencies in order to reach more communities.*
- *Meet and greet opportunities, i.e., businesses' networking model.*
- *Governance to governance activities.*
- *Bringing organizations together with similar issues.*
- *Collaborative initiatives - explore possibilities / current partnerships.*
- *Bringing programs and agencies together.*
- *Community connector / facilitator.*

Enhance Engagement with the Community

While this theme relates to some of the others, it was the most frequent response when participants were asked about how CDH could best determine community needs and, for this reason, it is included here. These were the comments made:

- *Go to the organizations VS having them come to you.*
- *Community sector engagement.*
- *Association / membership - get community organizations behind CDH as supportive voice - build a stronger voice for advocacy.*
- *Build relationships with organizations as informants. Region is large and has challenges. Responsibility to centrally inform organizations on demographic information.*
- *Connect with organizations that also collect information and represent their voices, i.e., strategic in community consultations.*
- *Ensure CDH has representation on Boards and committees from across the region.*

- *Meeting with agency leaders to see where the need is - survey, workshops.*
- *To continue having meetings with community agencies.*
- *Talk to all organizations within Halton.*
- *Include all services, including schools, for feedback and suggestions. Look for consensus - deal with three items at a time...*
- *Leverage community partnerships and connections - to engage them and the broader community.*
- *Networking.*
- *Community engagement.*
- *To have ways the community can be more involved, more active and truly see the value in having an agency dedicated to the betterment of our people/environment, etc.*
- *CDH play a leadership [role] to introduce groups to each other and identify what is important*
- *Invite nonprofits to come together and work on collecting data*
- *Connect like-minded people.*

What is significant about this is that in the determination of community needs, a process which might, for example, help inform CDH research priorities, participants appear to be saying that the community should be involved in this process. This is further reinforced by the fact that the other dominant responses to the question about how CDH might best determine community needs, involved CDH using formal processes for seeking community input, e.g., use of surveys, focus groups, large group processes (such as World Café). The message behind this appears to be that CDH should be seeking to formally engage the community in helping to determine needs and potentially priorities.

Opportunities to Improve Accessibility of Materials

As noted earlier, participants at the sessions strongly supported the research, data analysis and data sharing that CDH undertakes. However, there were several suggestions for improving how this information is presented and/or made available, improvements that could enhance accessibility of the materials. Comments made in this regard were:

- *Data and research - good to have in other forms or about how to manipulate for specific purposes, e.g., open access for community to access on own and manipulate.*
- *Better visual appeal of the reports.*
- *Better resources for making more appealing reports - software / infographics.*
- *More user-friendly communication - clearer / simpler.*
- *Better review and evaluation of Community Lens.*
- *Better align data with partnerships to decrease duplication.*
- *Speak the language of the communities/community.*

- *Improve their process around assisting the community to utilize the data they're collecting in all areas.*
- *Present data in a variety of ways that are more dynamic, e.g., Data Walks.*
- *Community Lens needs to be more easily searchable / accessed online.*
- *Availability of information/data so it can be accessible and manipulated.*
- *Community Lens posted in community centres / media.*

Opportunities for Revenue Generation

There emerged in several discussions across several questions suggestions for revenue generation that would facilitate a diversification of revenue sources. The following comments reflect this line of thinking among participants:

- *Assistance with grant writing - fee for service, capitalize on knowledge and data sources.*
- *A lot of organizations could use help with grant writing - fee for service piece could be a social enterprise they have the expertise and data.*
- *Become consultants - responsive to the needs of each organization.*
- *Assistance with grant applications and needs statements.*
- *Provide in-depth analysis to business sector - maybe they can pay for service (e.g., consumers of census data, tax file data, research capacity).*
- *Funding model is flawed - funding comes in grants from the Region and community-based grants - should be integrated into municipal budgets.*
- *More resources use more volunteers and their expertise.*
- *Look for more funding opportunities.*
- *Year to year stability.*
- *I wish the organization was more financially secure.*
- *Reliant on government funding.*
- *Grants - more support to grant writing Fundraising.*
- *Look into other revenue sources for support, e.g., grant writing.*
- *Can they do something else about/for membership? This could be a real opportunity for growth.*
- *Make information more widely known that they can provide supporting information.*
- *Could CDH utilize volunteering for their organization?*
- *CDH provide expertise and consultant positions (change model of delivery to be more responsive to partners' needs).*

2 Smaller but Important Considerations

There were 2 less frequent discussion themes that are presented here because they have implications for how CDH does it work, and the Board and staff may wish to explore them.

At what point does incubation cease? The first of these was the emergence of a dynamic tension between participants seeing real value in the incubation role of CDH (for example, there was good support for the work coming out of Age Friendly) and the need for clarity and transparency about when and how CDH should/would set incubated initiatives free, i.e., let them become stand alone programs or organizations elsewhere in the community. One comment illustrating this was “Incubator - moves out into community OR doesn't move out - why? [needs to be] transparency around drivers for moving out or not.” Related comments questioned the role that service provision (associated with incubation) has within CDH’s mandate or mission, i.e., is it an intermediary organization or a direct service organization? can it be both and/or should it be both?

How action-oriented should CDH’s work be? The second of these is the degree to which the work of CDH should be linked to action plans, e.g., is it enough to do research alone or should CDH develop and implement action plans around its research findings? The following 2 comments illustrate this point, one taken from an on-line newspaper opinion piece/letter which was added to the data used in this analysis:

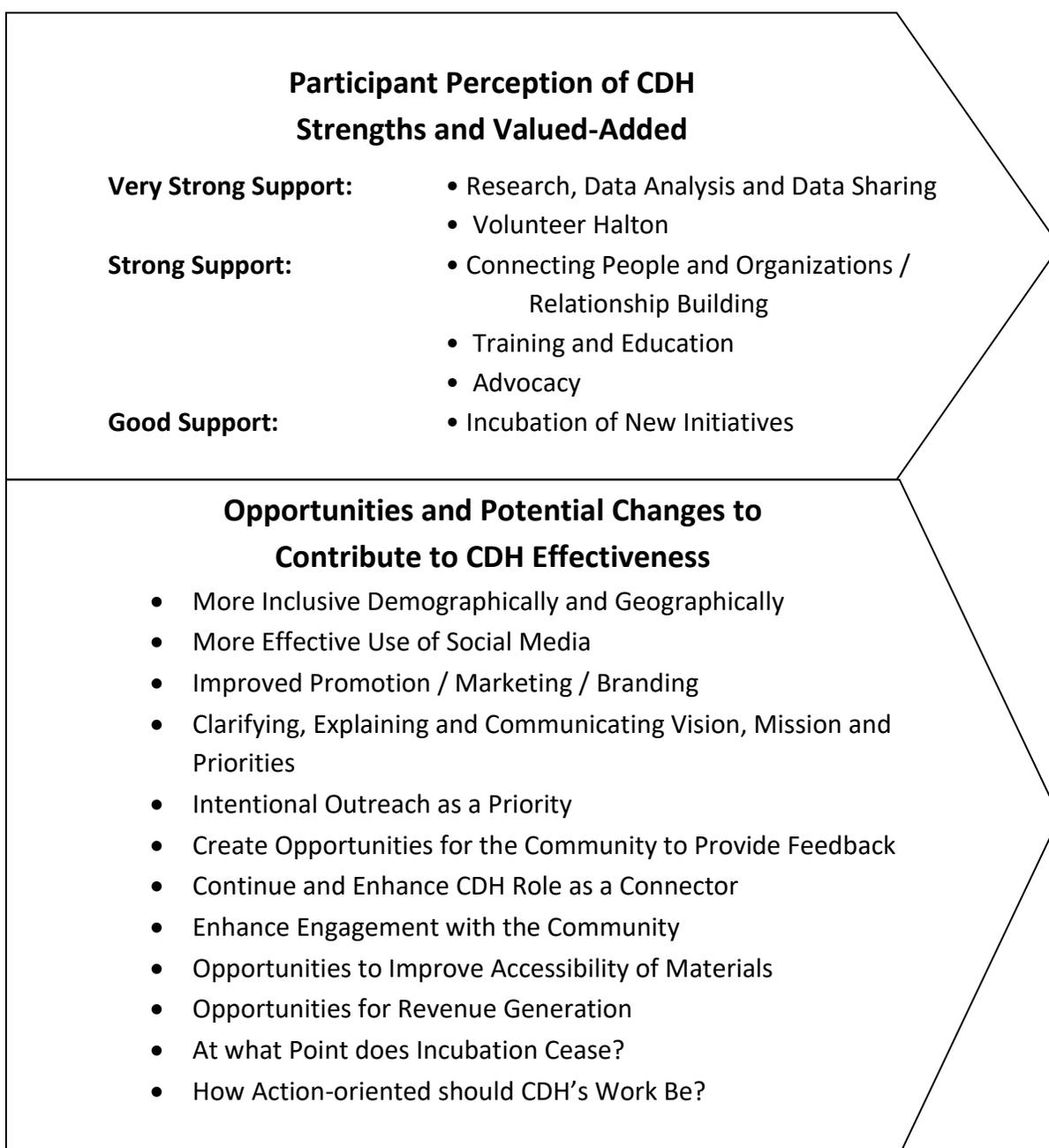
- *Need to get beyond planning and see “actionable” items happening - need to ensure promotion and communication of follow up.*
- *CDH’s website is laden with words like “facilitate”, “coordinate”, “partner”, etc. That does not describe an action-oriented mandate or agenda. If you want broad-based community support, funding and engagement you need to be leading, directing and implementing.*

It is also worth noting that when asked about improvements that CDH might consider, there were several suggestions made in regard to Volunteer Halton, but suggestions tended to be limited to the discussion in response to this one question. Readers are advised to look at Café Proceedings, Improvements that Could be Made, to see a list of these suggested improvements.

The Café Proceedings contain a comprehensive transcription of the notes from the consultation discussions and is available as a separate report. Readers are directed to it if they wish to hear the voices of participants directly and if they wish to review the rich raw data that was used by the consultant to identify key themes.

Summary of Key Themes

In sum, key themes from the Café process (which had input from survey respondents, several e-mails and an on-line newspaper opinion piece/letter) were as follows:



Consultant's Comments

The themes that emerged from the Café conversations provide rich opportunities for thinking about the future of CDH.

What is abundantly clear from the consultation process is that the work of CDH over the last several decades has laid a solid and highly valued foundation for any re-visioning work. CDH is held in high regard and is respected for the “what” it does: high quality research, data analysis and data sharing; Volunteer Halton and its support for volunteerism; training and education that builds capacity; advocacy for changes that will have a positive impact on the community; connecting people and relationship building, and; incubation of new ideas that respond to emergent issues. Staff, Board members and volunteers over the year should be congratulated for the commitment they have brought to their work and to the community.

A careful reading of the opportunities and potential changes that people feel could contribute to CDH effectiveness, however, suggests that there is broad scope for doing the “what” it does differently. A critical question for CDH as it thinks about re-creating itself is why it would want to change; the consultant believes there are important messages in this regard in the discussions that occurred during the Café process (including additional comments gathered through other means, i.e., e-mails, surveys, etc.).

Many of the themes that were raised as opportunities and potential changes that could contribute to organizational effectiveness are not new or even recent. They are, in many cases, issues that plague and have plagued the nonprofit sector for some time, e.g., becoming more inclusive as an organization, using social media in a way that has impact, promoting, marketing and branding in ways that will resonate with the community, diversifying revenue sources, demonstrating impact in a way that is meaningful to people, etc. Other themes may relate more specifically to CDH's role as what is known as an “intermediary” organization such as how most effectively connect with the community, how best to identify, respond to and support the community, how best to raise awareness of its vision, mission and priorities. Others may be issues that CDH has already had brought to its attention but for various possible reasons community members are indicating continue to be issues.

Put another way, while there is no question that people want to see core functions of CDH continue, they have posed questions and made comments that suggest CDH could be more effective if it engaged the community more meaningfully in determining needs and even priorities, in providing feedback, in ensuring more effective access to materials, etc. In turn, participants have suggested that the community would be easier to engage if communication was clearer, vision and mission were clearer, people were reached in different ways, e.g., through social media. To repeat what was said previously, the thematic issues that were identified by people were NOT the “what”, they were clustered instead, around the “how”.

It is not my role as the consultant who facilitated this consultation process to recommend what CDH should do. I do believe, however, that it is within the scope of my work, based on the consultation process, to at least lay out some of the questions CDH may wish to ask itself as it continues down the road of re-visioning its role in the community.

The consultant acknowledges that some of the questions listed below may speak to both governance and operational matters. It is ultimately up to the Board to set the direction and to make the high-level decisions about what CDH is to become as it moves into the future. In reviewing the questions, it is important to keep this in mind.

In this context, therefore, some of the questions that CDH may wish to consider, based on consultation findings, are (in no order):

- Is our mission statement clear and easy to understand? If no, do we need to change it? If yes, why have we not been able to communicate it effectively?
- Does our Board have the diversity an organization such as CDH needs to have? If not, are there steps we can take to change this?
- Are there ways (other than Board representation) of ensuring diverse voices are meaningfully heard at the Board table and in the work of the organization?
- Does our communication reach a wide enough audience? If not, how can we ensure that it does?
- How can we effectively engage with and respond to communities in Milton and Halton Hills?
- Are there ways we can become more “user-friendly” and effective in our on-line presence?
- Should we be more deeply engaging the community in our determination of community needs and in our priority setting?
- How important to us is outreach and connecting with others in relation to informing our work and determining our effectiveness? Do we wish to invest resources in sustained and ongoing outreach to the community?
- Can we make our research and data materials more accessible?
- How can we leverage social media to our advantage? What are the risks in doing so? How could we mitigate these risks?
- Do we really listen to our community? Are the feedback opportunities we provide truly meaningful?
- How important is revenue diversification to us as an organization?
- Can we/should we use our skills sets as an organization to work in a different way that could generate revenue, e.g., social enterprise that might involve consulting, grant writing, etc.?
- At what point should incubated activities be shifted to the community?

- Is transparency something we hold as a value? If yes, do we act in ways that align with this value?
- How action-oriented should we be in our work, i.e., should we be leaders? Should we be facilitators? Can we do both?
- What role might both governance and operational volunteers have in expanding the resources that might be necessary for CDH to meet the challenges it faces?

There are many additional questions that could be posed, but the list above will hopefully prove to be a useful start to CDH in moving forward as it digests and considers the input it has received through this consultation process.

The consultant believes that the issues are well laid out: CDH has an opportunity to significantly improve its connection to the communities that comprise Halton, to embrace inclusivity, to bring its web and social media presence into the 21st century, to focus on becoming more inclusive, to clarify its vision, mission, values and priorities, to communicate these with transparency and a commitment to ensuring they remain timely and responsive to the community and to build on community engagement efforts of the past in ways that have the potential to increase community support of CDH. It is now up to CDH to use this information along with the insights it has gained since it started this re-visioning process to determine a future path.

Appendix

Questions Posed During Possibilities Café

Questions Posed During Possibilities Cafés

1. Thinking about the 3 major program areas of CDH as well as the organization overall, what do you see as the organization's current strengths?
2. Thinking about the 3 major program areas of CDH as well as the organization overall, what do you see as areas or things that CDH could improve on?
3. What is the value-added that CDH brings to the community? Put another way, what would be lost to the community if CDH were to close its doors? Please consider each of the 3 main program areas (social planning, Volunteer Halton, Age Friendly Initiatives)
4. Change is happening so quickly in our communities these days that knowing what is important to the community can be challenging to figure out. In what ways could CDH best ensure that it is dealing with the issues that the community feels are most important?
5. We all know when we deal with organizations what it feels like when we are truly heard and are know our needs have been well understood. In what ways could CDH best ensure that the people, groups, and organizations with whom it connects feel truly heard and know their needs have been well understood?
6. How do you feel CDH staff and volunteers could most effectively be engaged with the community?
7. Please list the ways in which you believe CDH could best be a useful resource to the community.
8. Please list the ways in which you believe CDH could best facilitate the involvement and engagement of people in their community.