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TIME TO BUILD THE FUTURE

Geoff Thomas

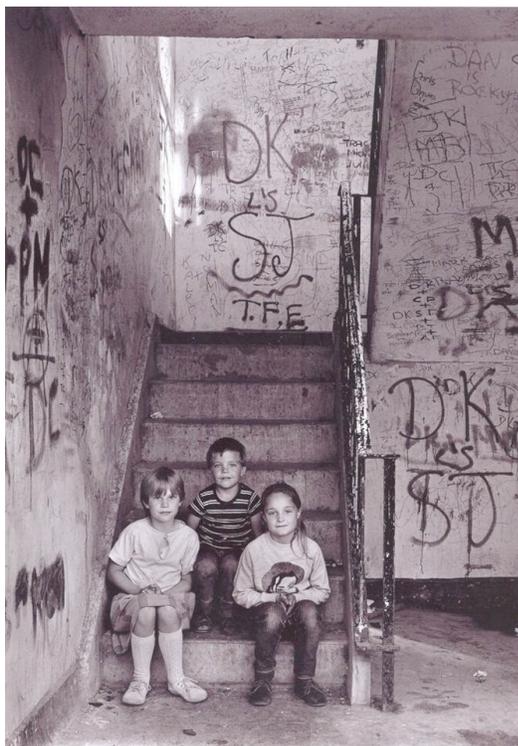
Why Build the Future?

Geoff Thomas of South Wales began his presentation with a personal narrative from when he was a child. He lived in a community with a large grassy field where all the children in his neighborhood would intermingle and play sports. One day after school, he arrived back to his neighborhood to find that dozens of trees were planted on the playing grounds without the consent of the neighborhood. This 'Lady Bountiful' model, where the service provider claims to know best, is a one-way conversation where the leaders of the community autocratically make decisions on what they believe is best for the community and disregard the voices of the citizens.

Another reform Thomas experienced while living in his community was when the service provider decided, again without the consideration of the opinions of the people, to demolish the housing estates and place the citizens in government-subsidized housing projects. Ten years later, illustrated by a photo, Thomas shows the audience children sitting on the base of the steps of the housing projects, the walls covered in graffiti, explaining that the children were growing up with exposure to needles and pipes blanketing the floor, as well as drug addicts. The housing projects were eventually demolished, demonstrating that clearly this model is not sustainable.

Participants

Merlyn Kettering
Jami Garton
Sarah Dalton
Renee Marver
Stephanie Rearick
Tony Budak
Rebecca Kemble
Darron Suttle



Citizen-Engaged Model

The new citizen-engaged model provides mutual conversation between the service providers and citizens for rebuilding communities based upon membership, mutuality and active citizenship. In a case study by Creation, the community of Gawr Valley was observed and is noted how collective action is for the common good. People are invited by service providers to join in the program and take part in a new conversation, with the vision that everyone has a contribution to make of value to their community, regardless of disability, gender, race or religion. For each hour a citizen gives to building civil society, he receives one time credit, which is a type of community service currency to be used for different social events. The credits are issued in paper form, designed by the community, and they are used to access social education and cultural events. For instance, a local theatre donates a portion of their seats to the community, so if a person has earned four-time credits, he can exchange his credits for a seat to an event. Volunteering time creates a new wealth of currency in exchange for events that some people would not otherwise be able to attend.

This active citizenship creates a knowledge bank of what the citizens would like to accomplish in their community and thus produces carnivals each year, various cooking classes, people are engaging and becoming more active, environmental work and the list continues. Taking learning outside the classroom and into the community is a strong feature of South Wales and creates collective engagement. At present, there are active learning studios such as food studios, sculpture studios and hair studios. These studios provide training, production, active learning and a 'can-do' culture. As a result, in the community, there are new clay sculptures being erected restoring positive new memories of achievement.

Results

Currently, there are 830 members and 40 new groups and as a result, there has been a reduction in anti-social behavior and improved community cohesion. Furthermore, the community was a BURA award winner in 2009 for community inspired regeneration. Through this case study, it has been learned that less exchanges in a community creates a lack of trust, social isolation, lack of respect for others and higher crime rates. Alternatively, more exchanges in a community leads to increased trust, strong social networks, greater respect for others and lower crime rates. Lee Gregory, author of *The Benefit of Time Banks for Local Economies*, states, "Wales already has a global model of best practice for regeneration tucked away in the Gawr Valley," and Thomas emulates this by being a part of a groundbreaking program that should be replicated within every community with the intent of making the world a better place.