

Crisis Call: Self-Determination and Community Development

The *Crisis Call Community Development Project*, a.k.a. the Thunder Bay Mental Health-Criminal Justice Project (MH-CJ) ran for 15 months in the Thunder Bay community and is a fine example of the community action component of the Sky Works mandate.

Annie Jollymore was the Coordinator for the project and this article is based on her recent description of the project's activity and outcome. Annie's report reviews the community capacity-building process from a psychiatric survivor perspective, and features her conversations with Stella Montour, who, in *Crisis Call*, had told the story of the prejudice she endured as an Aboriginal person and as a psychiatric survivor.

Stella puts a finger squarely on the central concern expressed in *Crisis Call*. Speaking about the "revolving doors" of jails and psychiatric hospitals, she says,

It's just a different form of institutionalization... As a native person, I see all these Indians locked up.... There are native people who do things and they need to be locked up. But a lot of them are in there because they can't get their needs met anywhere else.

The MH-CJ project was Thunder Bay's community action follow-up to the successful launch of the Sky Works documentary *Crisis Call*, part of which was filmed in the community. In her documentary, Laura Sky asks what happens when the boundaries between policing and mental health care disappear... when the police become our new front line mental health care workers. The ongoing involvement of the Sky Works organization in the MH-CJ project was an effort to sustain the documentary's impact in Thunder Bay. It brought together representatives from 39 Thunder Bay agencies and organizations as well as other unaffiliated individuals - members of the community determined to find new solutions to the problems generated by mental health crisis.

Annie notes that the project was based on the belief that identification of problematic issues and

effective solutions should be guided by the active participation of the people directly impacted by the issues. This means that survivors are equal partners in implementing alternative justice protocols and procedures. Their experiences of living in poverty, facing discrimination at every level of society, and being vilified by the popular media, give psychiatric survivors a status equal to that of police, correctional officers, mental health service providers and others, for purpose of this change process.



The Thunder Bay Tactical Unit on scene in Crisis Call

Crisis Call opened a community dialogue about issues like the sexual abuse and the harsh treatment survivors often experience at the hands of law enforcement and correctional officers. MH-CJ meetings were a safe round-table where survivors could sit across from people like the Deputy Superintendent of Programs at the Correctional Centre and know it was OK to talk about things that previously they'd have a hard time telling anyone. These discussions encouraged other stakeholders to come forward and talk about their experiences, good and bad. In the MH-CJ coalition, survivors were accepted as equals and were respected for having the courage to make a difference. Survivor participants felt an ownership of a process that is conducive to their healing.

The group discovered that change goes beyond implementing alternative criminal justice or mental health policies and procedures. It requires people to reconsider their own beliefs about mental health and how they look at psychiatric survivors. "In Thunder Bay", Annie says, "we've progressed from negative attitudes like those of a service provider who said living on the streets and scavenging in dumpsters must be 'OK' for the

mentally ill, 'because they're used to it', to the attitude of a Legal Aid lawyer who said that she now views clients with mental health issues as real people with lives beyond the courtroom and the charges they're facing. It's a process that will save lives."



The OPP's Larry Faulkner and Stella Montour go to work

Crisis Call also changed how survivors see themselves. When the project first started, Stella said it was safer to say, 'I'm with the Elizabeth Fry Society', or 'I'm Chair of PACE (a Thunder Bay survivors' organization)'. But it got to the point where a job title didn't matter any more.

"You can say 'I'm a survivor', she says, "and there's no longer shame in that. I've been involved with *Crisis Call* for three years and it changed me a lot. Years ago, I thought I was recovered, but after making the film and being on the MH-CJ Committee I did a lot more growing. Things we discussed allowed me to grow away from psychiatric survivor places. I realized there are things you can do that are fun, empowering, but still serious. *Crisis Call* added a balance. It's given me the confidence to go out and try public speaking, to try acting. These are educational things, public education, and I can make a fool of myself but still have confidence."

However, Annie notes that not all survivor participants in the MH-CJ project could use the self-determination *Crisis Call* gave them to influence institutional change. Some people, at varying levels of recovery, posed a significant challenge to long-term working relationships. Survivors were angry about past systemic abuses and needed to voice their anger before they could see their experiences as building blocks for change. Sometimes this anger felt like blame personally directed at police, correctional officers and other officials in the room. Their stories were very hard to listen to. Emotional self-disclosure could trigger bad memories, even crises in other

survivors. Disclosure could derail the entire agenda of a meeting.

As Stella describes the impact of the documentary,

Crisis Call took on such a big, big issue across the country. It's really courageous and it's raised a lot of hell all over the place. When people have problems you have to talk about them—find out, understand, learn about it, [then] you can do something. But it has to come from people who are [directly] involved...and *Crisis Call* has done that. These are still really controversial issues.

If Laura had just made the film and then left, there might not be so much happening. Others have picked up on these issues, like the Canadian Mental Health Association justice project in British Columbia. I don't know about other places, but in Thunder Bay this is a phenomenal thing.

Crisis Call set into motion a process of self-determination by psychiatric survivors, who are sure to continue the fight. "We have experienced inclusion," Annie says, "and it has made a world of difference to what people think they can do."

The Kids Care Tour as of June 2006

Kids Care was released in September 2005 and since then has set an intense pace of screenings and workshops throughout Ontario and across the country. More than 40 people (half of whom are young people, many seen in the film), have been trained as peer facilitators to give leadership to this exciting program. Here are a few highlights.

1. Personal notes and reflections

The Sudbury screenings went great! Jamal is such a funny guy and I was glad to do it with you! The audience members were very moved and took it great. Also, Sheila and Pat were wonderful, they took us everywhere we needed to go. Thanks for everything!

- Kerri Ford

I think that today's screening went very well. There was a much larger turnout than I have experienced before which will help us for further screenings...many thoughtful questions, and I was pleasantly surprised at how many other organizations showed up to give support.

- Aubrey Miner, after St. Catharines

Life is like a video game. Every time you get older there are new challenges in your life.

- Kenneth Bemister

We're in St. John's Newfoundland and it is great. A really beautiful city with such nice people. The screening last night produced some of the most challenging questions I've had to deal with yet. Overall, I'd classify this screening as a learning experience. Always expect the unexpected.

- Jamal Amin

The screenings were all like, so like, amazing! Every screening was a new adventure. We learned new things about ourselves as well as other people...The feedback we received has proven we can make a difference and we can move on to new places and help everyone we can.

- Robert Pavan, after Halifax/Sydney

2. The numbers say it all.

41 - screenings completed since last September 25th's Toronto launch

28 - cities and towns where we've done screenings

17 - Ontario communities we've visited thanks to a generous grant from The Lawson Foundation

11 - Canadian communities we've visited outside of Ontario, thanks to national tour sponsor, Ronald McDonald House Charities

53+ - nights we've stayed in Holiday Inns at discounted rates thanks to Tim Wilson and Patrick Field

40 - people we've trained as facilitators

10 - 60+ - age range of our volunteer facilitators

53 - newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations that have covered our tour.

3.5 - number of meals eaten at Tim Horton's during a 4-day road trip. Record set by Lynn Ross, Nancy Garrow, Kerri Ford and Meghan Ford during the "The Sisters Tour of Alberta"

3 - Sky Works business suitcases traveling in rotation with facilitators. Each suitcase has its own flow chart of tour stops to ensure there's always a suitcase ready to hit the road.

3 - tour staff keeping volunteers, hosts and suitcases on track



Kenneth and Krischanda Bemister

3. Other tour facts:

Where else we are going: This autumn to Montreal, Vancouver, Victoria, Thunder Bay, Midland, Sarnia, and a pilot project in schools.

Who are our audiences: bereaved kids, their friends and families, high school students, teachers, guidance counsellors, parent-teacher groups, social workers, hospice/palliative care staff and volunteers, child and life workers, children's aid workers, bereavement counsellors, mental health counsellors, funeral home staff, nurses, doctors, paediatric and cancer care professionals, pastoral care professionals.

Where we've shown Kids Care: funeral home, church, museum, hotel meeting room, seniors' residence, country club, community hall and even city hall council chambers. Also high schools, colleges and universities, hospitals (i.e. Toronto's Hospital for Sick Kids, Alberta Children's Hospital), hospices and public libraries.

4. Bring Kids Care to a theatre near you!

Sky Works welcomes the opportunity to arrange a screening plus facilitated discussion and, if desired, a *Train the Trainers* workshop in your community. We only require that a local grief support network be in place for the kids (or that you are actively planning one.) To schedule a screening in your community: call the Sky Works at 416 536 6581 or e-mail to info@skyworksfoundation.org

To buy individual copies for your own personal or professional use, contact our distributors: V-Tape at 416 351 1317 or distribution@vtape.org

Documentary Update

Projects in development

We Need It To Be Real

Women and Addiction

In collaboration with the Iris Addiction Recovery for Women in Sudbury, Ontario, Sky Works is planning to produce a documentary training and community development package to support women in recovery from addictions.

The documentary will examine the needs of women who are dealing with addictions and those of their children. Although it will focus on the realities of women living in rural and urban settings in the north, the documentary will be a useful resource for communities across Canada.

Target audiences will be women dealing with addiction and recovery, their families and co-workers, social service agencies, health care programs, children's aid programs, schools and colleges, the courts, prisons, lawyers, and the police.

Susan, a woman committed to her recovery, is clear about how this documentary should appear. "I need it to be real – no big words, keep it simple and make sure it shows what's real in my life."

In telling their stories, the women in recovery will show us that they are not weak, not flawed, but women of courage and integrity. Traditionally, talking about women's addictions has been a taboo, and that taboo is very strong. Addicted women are particularly marginalized. The documentary will present a strong voice for women. We need to demystify the stigma of addictions for women and to understand how strong a woman has to be in recovery and how deserving she is of the support of her peers, community, and family.

*Building on our experiences with **Kids Care**, Sky Works has embarked on two new projects dealing with children's issues.*

Working with Children and Families who are Homeless

A documentary and community development project that will focus on the experiences and needs of children and their families who are homeless. The project will focus on children under the age of 14, who, with their families, have been

forced into shelters/motels, hostels or transition houses as a consequence of extreme poverty and/or family crisis.

Sky Works proposes to develop and produce a documentary that will engage communities in positive action around the issue of homelessness as it affects children and their families. The project will incorporate an extensive community development component, and will give direct voice and an opportunity for engagement to children who are homeless.

We will challenge the invisibility and shame experienced by children and their families who are homeless, and challenge the stereotypes that keep them **marginalized**. The documentary will encourage cross-sector alliances between people who experience with poverty and homelessness, concerned citizens, community leaders, business people, and policy makers who care about regional and national economic health.

As we did for *Kids Care*, we will create a kids and an adult advisory group who will inform the form, content, and community implementation phase of this documentary. Through this work we can support the children's resilience, create opportunities for them to be heard, encourage them to build their individual capacities, their self-esteem, their problem-solving skills, and their expressive capacities. The documentary and community development project will give them the opportunity to take action on their own behalf, and provide role models for responsive kids and adults across the country.

Working with Medically Fragile, Technology-Dependant Kids and their Families

This new project will focus on the needs of children who were "miracle babies" and who now remain medically fragile and technology-dependant, living at home with their families.

Over the past two decades, federal and provincial health care policy changes and systemic restructuring have shifted the primary locus of health care from the hospital to the home. Parents now bear an increasing burden of providing services to their child that previously have been the responsibility of health care professionals.

At the same time, medical advances have led to increased survival of fragile babies and children. The legal and political environment has largely ignored questions about the quality of life of children whose lives are saved miraculously, but

who subsequently live difficult lives of isolation, marginalization, and terrible discrimination.

These issues and realities live out locally, regionally, and nationally. In Canada, there are active networks of professional and family support organizations; disability rights/peer support and advocacy groups. At the same time, the needs of these children and their families are invisible on the level of federal and provincial health care policies. They also remain invisible in our communities.

Our project will create an opportunity for families of technology-dependant children to connect with each other across the country, to provide mutual support, home and community survival strategies, and lobbying plans. The documentary will give voice to the children themselves so that they may represent their concerns, experiences and needs to each other, their care providers, their communities and legislators.

It will support health care personnel to see beyond the barriers of their daily work environments to consider the larger social and economic implications of health care for technology-dependant kids and their families. We believe in the importance of narrative - first hand accounts and stories of change - as the backbone of qualitative evaluation. Such narrative elements are essential tools to help us document and understand the effect our work is having on the communities with whom we work.

Recently Released

Prescription for Addiction

Commissioning Sponsor: Ontario Federation of Mental Health and Addiction Programs in partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group

Prescription for Addiction is a compelling documentary about the benefits and the health and social risks of prescription opiate use. These prescription drugs include opiate painkillers such as OxyContin, Percocet, Dilaudid, MS Contin, and Vicodin. The documentary's goal is to enhance community awareness of the issues surrounding opiate misuse and dependency.

Prescription for Addiction offers a fair and honest view of the challenges facing patients, doctors, health care service providers, social workers, law enforcement agencies, and communities who are struggling with the current opiate abuse epidemic.



*A community mobilizes – Patrick Patabon, Chief
Veronica Waboose and Frank Onabigan, Long Lake First Nation*

The film asks: what happens when powerful addictive medications are made widely available to the general public and used for purposes other than what were intended? How can we balance the needs of people in pain, with the need to protect patients from the risks of addiction? And how should we respond to individuals, families, and communities for whom the use of opiate drugs has gone horribly wrong?

Prescription for Addiction is a powerful educational resource, which can be used to reduce harm associated with opiate misuse and promote prevention, early identification and intervention, and enhanced community awareness of the issues. The documentary is intended to assist healthcare, educational and social service providers to respond more effectively to high risk and special needs populations including Aboriginal people, youth and older adults.

Sky Works launches Annual Appeal

The Sky Works experience – documentary films that fuel community action on important social issues – is moving forward on a head of steam. Recently, the Board of Directors approved a new funding initiative that allows individual friends, fans, and supporters to play a direct role in the adventure.

Over the past five years, Sky Works has developed and grown at an unprecedented rate, not just in documentary production, but also by giving leadership to the use of documentary film in community development. With all this activity, the staff was literally bursting the seams of the office, resulting in a recent move to a wonderful new space at 401 Richmond Street West.



Sky Works in the community: Meghan Ford, Kerri Ford, Paresa Amin, and Laura Sky at a public screening

Our generous funders have supported each of our productions and their distribution over our 25 year history. However the funding gap we face is familiar to many not-for profit organizations.

Activities related to organizational learning and development, outreach and training – the essentials that support our long-term work – those activities, in their entirety, need your support.

So to help meet these costs of growing and nurturing the organization, and to provide continuing support for the long - term community use of our substantial collection of documentaries, the Board has launched an Annual Appeal for funds. All members of the Sky Works community are being asked to participate with a financial donation at whatever level they can afford.

**Sky Works Charitable Foundation
Donation Form**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Amount: \$50 \$100 \$250
 \$500 \$1,000 \$5,000

Payable to: **Sky Works Charitable Foundation**

To pay by Visa or MasterCard please provide:

Visa/MasterCard #: _____

Name on Card (print) _____

Expiry Date: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____ (Tax receipt issued.)

This is a way for everyone to contribute personally to the Sky Works enterprise. We are counting on you to sustain the organization as it works to fulfill its mandate. Sky Works' strength is measured by the sum our documentary projects, but the glue that binds it together is the organization itself, and we need your help to maintain it.

No gift is too small or too large! The Board and staff have launched the campaign and each has made an individual gift for a combined total of over \$10,000. But more is needed – so please help by making your gift now. **Gifts may be made on-line at www.skyworksfoundation.org, by telephone at 416 536 6581 or by mail to Sky Works at 401 Richmond St. W, Ste 240, Toronto M5V 3A8.**

What We Do and Who We Are

Sky Works is an independent, registered non-profit documentary organization. We make documentaries that deal with contemporary issues and then use the documentary as a community development tool to support concerned communities to create strategies for change. Our documentaries are designed to encourage audiences to see the value of their own experience and to take action on their own behalf. They raise questions, stimulate discussion, and encourage the audience's participation in social and community processes. We work closely with community groups, educational organizations, and peer support groups, including them in the formulation, editing and distribution of our documentaries.

Sky Works Board of Directors

Pat Davidson	Mark Krakowski
Lynn Ross	Nancy MacDonnell
Cathy Jonasson	Susan Copland
Cathy Crowe	Doug Peter
Nancy Garrow	George Wilson

Sky Works Staff

Laura Sky – Executive Director, Producer/Director
Helen Kampfmuller – Director of Communications/
Tour Manager
Joanne Bacon – Executive Assistant
Verne Sparks – Administrative Coordinator
Amanda Connon-Unda – Administrative Assistant
Graham Hawes – Bookkeeper
Rebecca Sweetman – Tour Assistant

Newsletter Production

Editor: Verne Sparks
Writers: Verne Sparks, Annie Jollymore, Laura Sky,
Nancy MacDonnell, Helen Kampfmuller
Photos: Vincenzo Pietropaolo
Layout: Amanda Connon-Unda