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Whatever the Question, Community is the Answer

Communities in Control Conference: "Think Differently"
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Presentation by

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[Please note, this transcript refers closely to Dr Diers' PowerPoint presentation. It is advisable to enjoy both in conjunction with each other]

Thank you. It is great to be in Melbourne – one of my very favourite cities. But it is also fantastic to be among so many people who share my passion for community.

I think there's really only two paths to healthy communities. One of those paths is service delivery, the other path is community building. They are two very different paths.

With service delivery we have agencies; with community-building it is about associations.

Service delivery tends to focus on professionals, volunteers and clients. In community building, we're just all citizens.

With service delivery it tends to be top down, whereas community building is democratic. Service delivery tends to be one way, whereas community building is all about reciprocity, mutual support.

Service delivery tends to be siloed, whereas in communities, holistic is where everything comes together. Service delivery tends to focus on people's needs, whereas community building tends to focus on people's gifts.

And service delivery is totally dependent on money. I know there's some incredibly dedicated people here who show up to work, whether or not you get paid, but community is really totally dependent on relationships and trust.

Two very different paths. Both are absolutely critical but what I'd like to argue is there's no substitute for community when it comes to the things we care most deeply about.

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I think the first of those is the power to care for the earth. That we're not going to make it with climate change if it's just about green technology. People actually have to adopt it. And I think people only will if they feel some sense of connection with each other and the place they share. Some sense of collectively, my actions can make a difference, otherwise what difference does it make if I don't act responsibly. I'm one person on this huge planet, but it's in community that we feel some sense of responsibility, some sense of accountability.

I'd like to share a story from one of our neighbourhoods in Seattle. This is the Ballard neighbourhood. It's a neighbourhood of 5000 people.

The story's based on a program we developed out of the Department of Neighbourhoods called The Neighbourhood Matching Fund that provides a cash match from local government in exchange for the community's equal match of volunteer labour and support of community initiated projects.

There is a woman in Ballard named Dervilla Gowan. She cared passionately about trees. She wanted to see trees up and down the streets of her neighbourhood.

Ballard at the time was the neighbourhood that had the least number of street trees of any neighbourhood in Seattle. They also had the least number of parks in the neighbourhood outside of downtown. So Dervilla put notices in her church bulletin, she put them in the Ballard News Tribune, she put them in the corner grocery store advertising for other people who shared her passion for street trees.

And Dervilla tried to find somebody in every block in Ballard who shared her passion. And if nobody came forward, she'd go to that block and knock on

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every door until she convinced somebody they shared her passion for street trees.

And then she got that person to come to a training event and sign a pledge for them saying they'll come to a training about how to plant, take care of the trees.

She turned in all of her pledge forms for matching fund application and one day, trucks pulled into her neighbourhood with 1080 trees. They dropped them off at every block in Ballard.

Dervilla knocked on the door of block captain and said the trees are here. The block captain knocked on the neighbour's doors. That day, over 1000 people came out and planted trees up and down the streets. People felt incredibly empowered; at the beginning of the day there's no street trees. At the end of the day they had tree lined streets. Look what we can do when we work together as a community.

They said we still have the least number of parks of any neighbourhood in Seattle. So they walked around the neighbourhood looking for potential park sites and had a hard time finding them because the neighbourhood is pretty developed.

They finally found this old run down house that used to serve as a nursery. It was right in the business district. Property was overgrown. Huge public safety problem. Convinced our local council to buy the property for a park. Council said they had some money to buy the property but absolutely no money to design or build the park. So the neighbours did it themselves.

Local landscape architect volunteered her service and worked with the other neighbours, and together they designed and built Baker Park, all with volunteers. This is some of the landscaping in the park.

There are some beautiful old trees in the park. One of them had died. They're trying to figure out how to remove it, then one of the neighbours who was a native American had a better idea and carved it in place as a totem. And here's some of the detail.

This group went on the next year and they tore up all the asphalt around the school. They called it the Greater Green Project. Much better for the environment, the water can percolate through the soil rather than having instant run off. Much better for the kids and the neighbours. Now we do it around all our schools.

It's the kind of innovation that is much more likely to come out of community than out of bureaucracy. Here they are on the opening day celebrating the project, and the Sedentary Sousa Band is performing. It's a marching band that only plays while sitting down.

This is a piece of property in the neighbourhood that was planned as a street. There are houses on either side, but it was never developed because it's too steep. Cars could never make it to the top. So as a result, it just became overgrown, huge problem with rats.

The only thing that tried to go up were four wheel drive vehicles. They'd come in the middle of the night, they'd race their engines, squeal their tyres, challenge each other to make it to the top, drive the neighbours totally crazy.

I thought the neighbours were mad because they went out with picks and shovels, dug through the heavy hard pan clay soil by hand, hauled those timbers up the side, terraced that whole problem hillside, and turned that problem property into a community garden.

This is the group's most recent project. This is the site of another former house. To commemorate the house they built all the furniture out of cement. And at

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the dedication of this park they unveiled a timeline that shows the 20 parks they built over the past 20 years. Every one of them with volunteers. They've re-naturalised natural areas. They're restoring a salmon estuary. They built ball fields. They built playgrounds. They worked with the kids to build a skate park. Twenty parks in 20 years. One neighbourhood, all volunteers.

They said, "Well this is great. We've made our neighbourhood a much better place but we're concerned about what's happening to the planet. We're concerned about climate change."

So they organised an all-volunteer group called Sustainable Ballard. And every Summer for the past twelve years they've had a Sustainable Ballard Fest, where they have music and food to bring people into the local park. And they have booths to educate neighbours to what they can do to reduce their carbon footprint.

And the first booth you go to is the un-driver's licence station. Where you go and check all the ways you will not drive over the next month, and when you do, you get a laminated un-driver's licence. Julia Fields, one of the organisers, she says "I'm going to walk, I'm going to bike, I'm going to take transit", etc etc, and when you get your un-driver's licence it entitles you to drive the shuffle bus.

This is like a Fred Flintstone mobile. It's going down the streets, gets everybody's attention, gets people thinking about what they could do to get out of their car. What could I do to reduce my carbon footprint? This has created a movement now, all the neighbourhoods around Ballard have organised their own all volunteer sustainability groups.

All the suburban communities around Seattle have done the same. We now have 67 of these all volunteer groups and collectively they call themselves SCALLOPS. Sustainable Communities All Over Puget Sound. And it all started

with Dervilla Gowan and those street trees. There is incredible untapped power in our communities.

Another unique power of community is power to care for one another. I think with the economic crisis we realise that. All we can really count on is one another.

I was in Wodonga, and neighbours had come together and wanted to create a community garden so they approached the local church, said “ Can we tear up your grass?” They said “ Okay” .

“We want to put it in the community garden”.

And they’re trying to figure out how to build the raised beds, so they contacted a local association, The Mens’ Shed. And the men built the raised beds, the whole community got involved in filling up the raised beds with soil. They rechecked the mutual assistance association for new immigrants and refugees. They were excited because they’re able to grow food indigenous to their culture. The senior’s centre found a role. They found a role for everybody.

Crops grew, they realised there was a commercial kitchen in this church. They said “Can we use your kitchen?” They said “Sure”. So a local chef came up with the most amazing recipes and the whole community came together to gather that produce and to prepare it.

So the women’s group, the local church, the high school student group got involved. Across the street is an institution for people with intellectual disabilities. They are no longer the people with disabilities. They are the community chefs. They are so proud to be cooking for the community and they work together to prepare thousands and thousands of the most delicious nutritious meals you can imagine for people who otherwise would have no food at all.

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That's the power of community.

Another unique power of community is the power to prevent crime.

Again there's a role for agencies and a role for professionals. You probably don't want the communities enforcing the law, you want professionals doing that. But when it comes to preventing crime, there's absolutely no substitute for community.

We spent way too many resources lining up the ambulances at the bottom of the cliff when community should be building a fence at the top.

In my country we spent more and more and more money on so called public safety programs. We have more and more and more people behind bars, and people aren't feeling any safer. We've forgotten about the role of community.

This is in our SoDo neighbourhood. This is just south of Seattle, the warehouse and industrial area. The backs of the warehouses were covered with graffiti, there was garbage all along the tracks and it's the first view that commuters and tourists get of Seattle each day.

It looked terrible. This is how our light rail comes in. Mike Peringer here worked for the local factory. He was embarrassed by this image of his neighbourhood. Mike had a great idea. He said why don't we see the backs of the warehouses as potential canvasses for murals? He called it the urban art quarter.

But Mike had an even better idea. And he worked with our court system and he asked the judges could you offer the kids that get busted for graffiti an alternative sentence? Where they could come and help us and create the murals. Not an easy decision for the kids because it's like a job. You show up to work on time, dress appropriately, got life skills training, mentored by professional artists but young people created every one of these murals.

And we found that as long as the kids were involved in this program, not one of them re-offended. The problem with Seattle is you can only paint outdoor murals three months a year because it's raining the other nine months, but Mike came up with another great idea. Got a local warehouse to donate their space and in there they create murals on sheets of plywood.

They put those around construction sites to beautify the construction sites, keeps the program sustainable over time and now more than 1500 murals have been created through this program and more than 5000 young people have participated. And you don't have to get busted to get into the program. We don't want to create negative incentives!

Another unique power of community is the power to create great places. Both Christchurch and Kobe are sister cities of Seattle, so you don't want to be our sister. I was in both places before the earthquakes and immediately afterwards, and also learned the unique power of community in terms of recovering from disaster.

This is their namesake, Christchurch Cathedral. Vacant lots all over downtown where the buildings have fallen. Wasn't prepared for the level of devastation in many of the neighbourhoods as well, but all over people said we need to find places now to come together as a community and support each other. And they lost their major gathering places, but they had these vacant lots everywhere, so community members came together to create gathering places, fantastic spaces.

Right where the major hotel had collapsed in downtown Christchurch they came together and all they had were a bunch of construction pallets. So they ended up building the Blue Pallet Pavilion.

I was there opening day, just a fantastic space, full of greenery, with a performance stage. Every time I go back to Christchurch there's something

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happening there. There's band concerts, there's poetry slams. Last time I was there they were celebrating holy day, the Indian festival of colour, throwing the coloured flour at each other.

They had another vacant lot and all they had was an old washing machine. They fixed up speakers on the inside of that washing machine, and if you hook up your iPod and put in a couple of quarters, you can play whatever dance music you want. And there in the centre of all this devastation, people are dancing.

They had another vacant lot where they whitewashed the wall and created a movie screen. You ride up on your bicycle and you hook it up to a generator. As long as you are biking, the movie plays. It's called cycle powered cinema.

The kind of creativity that only comes out of community.

They had another vacant lot, where people could come and write poetry, and they'd leave poetry, they'd do poetry readings here. And this poem in particular really got to me:

Amidst the shards of glass and twisted steel

Beside the fallen brick and scattered concrete

We began to understand that there is beauty in the broken

Strangers do not live here anymore.

And how through that catastrophe the people of Christchurch came to understand what's most important in their lives - each other.

Prior to that I think Christchurch was probably known as the most class conscious city in New Zealand. The first question was often “Where did you go to school?” Now the first question is “Are you okay?” “How you doing?”

But it’s often a lesson we learn when it’s too late. Margaret Wheatley said “Whatever the question, community is the answer”.

I think it’s also the answer to promoting health. There are studies that show that only about 15% of health outcomes can actually be attributed to healthcare professionals.

That there are many ways our communities can have a much bigger impact on our health, on our mental health, on the behaviours that impact our health, on the social, economic, physical, natural conditions that impact our health, sustaining the local economy, advancing social justice, no major social change in my country has ever come top down.

Talk about the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, the disability rights movement, the gay lesbian rights movement. Every major change has come bottom up, so without strong communities we can’t make change. And our very democracy is dependent on strong communities.

I saw Robert Putnam’s book sitting out here on the shelf. How many of you know his work? *Bowling Alone*. Professor at Harvard University, wrote the most depressing book for those of us who care deeply about community, because he tracks the incredible breakdown of community life in North America over the past 50 years.

As I travel around Australia I see the same forces at work.

Robert Putnam says there’s fewer and fewer families eating dinner together. Fewer and fewer people belong to the traditional associations. Fewer and fewer

people except in Australia where you have to, fewer and fewer people are voting.

And he cites lots of reasons. I've added some of my own, but single purpose land use. Used to be we live, love, work and play all in the same neighbourhood and the same village.

Single purpose place is better than communities where you just go to sleep. We're losing our main street to malls, drive a half hour to the mall to shop. We might commute an hour to work. In a sense we have many different communities, in a sense we have no community at all. Because we don't bump into the same people over and over and over again.

How we're increasingly mobile. More time working. Fear's been documented as a key thing, breaking down community in so many places. Electronic screens, Robert Putnam said the biggest thing breaking down community is television. People say they don't have time for community, yet spend an average of three or four hours a day in front of the television set.

He wrote this book about fifteen years ago so now I think he would add video games, Facebook and all the others.

Increasing globalisation, where products are made further and further away from where we live and I think most distressing to me is the very agencies, local government, many not for profit organisations, that are trying to help our communities, have inadvertently contributed to breakdown of the very communities they're trying to help.

We have more and more and more professionals doing for communities, what communities used to do better for themselves. And where the strength of every agency is the organising the silos with a laser light focus on their expertise, on

their discipline, on their mission. It's important but it makes it absolutely impossible to work with communities.

We've created one set of silos for young people. Another for old people. Another for people with disabilities. Another for new immigrants and refugees. Everybody's in their own box and we can't build community in boxes.

It's a question of who's serving whom when our communities are having to organise themselves the way the professionals are organised, rather than the professionals being organised the way our communities are organised.

So I've totally impressed everybody. Talked about how there's no substitute for community and it's going to hell, right? So I want to talk about a few of the things agencies can do of all kinds.

With local government, not for profit, the kind of change we can make in order to rebuild community. Because I'm not one of those - you know I think over time we've had more and more and more services and less and less and less community.

And I'm not one of those Tea Party guys in the United States who thinks the answer is fewer agencies. The answer is more community.

So I think the challenge is how do we get the best of both? Because we absolutely need the professionals and we also need the community, and it's really tough to bring the two together.

I think it requires three paradigm shifts on the part of agencies of all types. And the first one is to get out of the silos and start focusing on whole places. To think about how our functions come together in a neighbourhood, in a town.

In the city of Seattle we had 32 departments in our local government. We have our state government with this department, our federal government with this department.

We got a port in Seattle, we got a school board, we have three transit agencies and we have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of not for profit organisations, each one on its own trying to reach out in the power of the community.

They are being empowered to death. There aren't enough nights in the year to go to all those meetings.

And it's not the way anybody experiences their community. They don't experience it in a silo. So if we're going to be good partners with community, we need to figure out how do we come together as one set of agencies in a place?

One of the ways we did that in Seattle was we created the first ever Department of Neighbourhoods. First time we organised the department, the way the people in the community were organised.

We organised a series of little city halls, 13 storefront offices where people can do business with government right in their own neighbourhood across all layers of government and across all the not for profit organisations.

But the key resource we have in each of the little city halls is somebody we call co-ordinator.

Somebody who works for the department of neighbourhoods but it's clear they're working for all agencies and all community. They often refer to themselves as overt double agents. Really clear they're working for both government and the community, their job just helps bring the two together.

I just did some work in the Kootenays in British Colombia and there all the human services, all the not for profit organisations joined forces and formed a co-operative.

And they start sharing their resources and jointly they headed their own co-ordinators who are more price based. I tell you it's a whole lot more cost effective than every agency fending for itself and it's so much more community friendly.

Second major paradigm shift is instead of always driving the agenda from the top, to support community driven initiatives. So in Seattle, one of the ways we did that is created a neighbourhood planning program, where we actually empowered neighbourhoods to hire their own planner who was accountable to the community.

But only once they brought all the different interest groups in the neighbourhood together. Through that process we involved 30,000 people in the development of 38 bottom up plans. Had incredible results. We had over 5000 recommendations. People voted to tax themselves an additional \$464 million for improvements that they'd asked for in their plans.

Democracy works. Every place else people are thinking themselves as taxpayers. Here people thought of themselves as citizens because it was their idea. But I think more importantly the community also took a lot of responsibility for implementing those plans themselves.

I want to share a story. I think most of you are from not for profit, so I want to share a story of the same approach being taken by a not for profit. This is our senior services at King County.

King County's the next layer up from the City of Seattle so it includes Seattle, all the suburban cities, and unincorporated rural areas over a huge geographic area. Senior Services is in charge of all the senior centres and all the senior programs like Meals on Wheels and all those programs.

Denise Klein is the head of senior services; she came to me and said "Jim we got a terrible problem. Every year we're facing larger and larger budget cuts and our population's quickly ageing."

She said "We can't just do business as usual. We need to figure out a new way of working with our community."

So we organised gatherings all over King County. We had 15 gatherings in urban neighbourhoods and rural small towns. And had about 100 people at each gathering sitting around tables like this. Just like you guys. Except they were a lot older.

They were largely Boomers and older people who we attracted to these gatherings. And at the gathering Denise started off with a really great exercise. She asked people, "Close your eyes and think about when you were first old." It really shook up people like me who have never wanted to think about that. For the first time I'm thinking "What's it like to be old?" "How am I fitting into my neighbourhood?" "What kind of support do I need?" "What kind of contributions am I making?"

So here people are thinking about that question. I love this woman's expression. She's not quite sure she wants to go there. And this guy's having a good time with it.

And then when people are in that frame of mind, I asked them to think about "What would your neighbourhood need to be like, both physically and socially

to allow you to age in the way you would like?” What would a senior friendly community look like?

And then I gave each table 20 minutes to collectively draw their vision of a senior friendly community. And then each table got a minute to present their vision to the room as a whole.

And then I had a graphic artist who took those ideas from each table and created a composite vision for the neighbourhood or town as a whole.

And she had a pretty easy job because the themes were so similar from one table to the next. But what was really interesting to me was that not one of the themes that was identified by the participants was something currently being done by senior services. Showed the importance of instead of always pushing our programs, to step back and listen. Find out what it is people care about.

So first thing we heard, right now we've spent a whole lifetime getting skills and knowledge and go to relationships, we're just valued for our needs. We're just valued as clients. We want the opportunity to contribute.

Second thing we heard, right now senior services always see us as a bunch of old people. It is so boring. We want to be able to interact with young people.

Third thing we heard, we spent a whole lifetime screwing up the environment. We want to get back. We want to live in a place that's green and sustainable.

Fourth thing we heard. Right now every stage of our life, we have to move to a different place. We want to be able to age among the people we know and love, and the places we're familiar with. We want to be able to age in place. So we want universal design. We want good transportation. We want good access to services.

So while you don't have any additional resources to do any of this, what could you take responsibility for? And one at a time, people stood up and advocated their cause, and all kinds of projects resulted.

So one group came together to organise a neighbourhood walking group. Another group organised a senior dating service in West Seattle. We have three different groups planning for senior co-housing. We had one gathering for the gay lesbian community and they came up with a whole series of projects.

We organised four virtual retirement villages where people in the neighbourhoods are supporting their elders to stay in their homes. Just about every group had an interest in lifelong learning so they came together for it to work together on a website, to capture all the opportunities from lifelong learning.

One neighbourhood, the elders came together with the young people, created trail systems for the woods and get together every weekend for maintenance parties. Out of this we organised four time banks, where people are sharing their skills with each other. And a lot of it's between young people and older people. Younger person helping an older person stay in their home.

Driving them to a doctor's appointment, teaching them how to use computer. An older person helping a young person learn a trade, learn a craft, making them a great meal.

In my neighbourhood somebody said the strength of our community is it's many different cultures. So they organised a world dance party. And we had people show up at the first party from twelve different cultures. Each one teaching their dance. We learned 12 kinds of dance in one night. And people were there from all cultures. People were there from absolutely all ages.

And then we organised a summit. And we brought 350 people together from all these gatherings with our elected officials, with the funders, and we said here's our vision and here's what we're doing to achieve our vision, and here's what we need from you because we can't expect community to do everything. There is also a role for agencies and professionals.

So we need help from you in creating more walkable communities, better transportation options. And they were very responsive because there were 350 people in the room and because they were putting in their own resources. They cared that much to achieving their vision.

And then the third paradigm shift is instead of always focusing on the needs of the community, and that's important.

We often say agencies need needs. It's a good thing there are needs in our community, we'd all be out of work. And it's a good thing we have professionals because there's some things communities don't do so well.

But often our desire to help communities, the first thing we do is a needs assessment. Figure out what are all the problems? How can we be most helpful? It's a very legitimate exercise. The problem is that we often stop there. We forget about this map of the same place which are all the strengths of the community.

And I would argue that this is the basis for community empowerment. If we're looking at the community as nothing but people with needs, all the power's with the professionals, and there's really no value in partnering with the community. It's when the community's focusing on their strengths that we can do amazing things together.

A key resource we have in every community are the individuals who live there. And I'd like to argue that absolutely every member of our community,

absolutely everybody has gifts to give to our community. I like to think of them as three kinds of gifts.

One are gifts of the head, that person's knowledge. Gifts of the heart, that person's passions. And gifts of the hands, that person's skills. Absolutely everybody's got these.

But the problem in our society, and again it's largely the professionals, are putting labels on most of our population that label people not by their gifts but by their needs.

We use terms like homeless, unemployed, poor person, non-English speaking, single parent, addict, offender, old person, at risk youth, disabled, to describe most people in our society.

And we just focus on what people are missing, they become clients in a service system. We focus on people's gifts, they become citizens in our community.

And I'm not denying that people have needs, people require some services. Everybody in this room has some needs and everybody in this room requires some services. But I think most people in this room would be identified primarily by your gifts. And most people outside this room would be identified primarily by what they're missing.

The term disabled really drives me crazy because we invent more disabilities all the time! And think about people solely in terms of their disability and miss out on all their abilities.

How many people in this room have no disability? I see some eye glasses. I suppose my memory gets worse every year. When I'm applying for a job, I don't say I'm disabled, please hire me. I try to think of some gifts I have and yet there's a huge growing section of our population that we think of solely in terms of their disability.

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We started up a program in Seattle called the Neighbourhood Matching Fund, again to build on people's strengths, to encourage communities to start thinking about their strengths rather than always adopting that map that we've created of them, of their needs.

To start thinking about what communities can do best. And through that program we have supported over 5,000 community self-help projects over the past 25 years. People coming together to create 95 organic community gardens with 7000 urban gardeners who collectively donate 15 tonnes of organic produce to our food banks every year.

Every one of our playgrounds in Seattle, both in our parks and our schools, have been redeveloped by the community. New parks all over the city built by neighbours, public art of all kinds all over the City of Seattle. Renovated facilities. But I want to talk again about a not for profit and how they took this approach and when it shifted from needs to strengths.

Neighbourhood House, this is at High Point. This is a social housing community in Seattle, a couple thousand residents, from all over the world. Very diverse. And probably the most labelled community you've seen. All those labels I talked about you can find in High Point.

Neighbourhood House is one of many agencies operating out of High Point. They got a grant to create a healthy community. So they put up posters encouraging people to come out to an event about creating a healthy community. Nobody showed up. So they started paying people to come to their meetings. They had a paid advisory group. And they sat down with them and said what are some of the things that would create a healthy community?

They came up with a long list of things to do but they were all things for the professionals to do because that's how everything gets done in High Point. There were no additional resources. They asked me to come in. I met with

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them and I said “Could you get your neighbours involved, your friends?” They said “Oh they really don’t care that much about nutrition or fitness”. I said “What do you care about?” They said “We just want to create an awesome community”. I said “Really? Would people come out to a gathering about how to create an awesome community?” They said “If we had good food”. I said “I just have a limited budget. I could pay for the ingredients, could you make the food?”

And they were so proud to bring food from absolutely all over the world. Bring their own dishes and share them with each other. And they said “If we had good entertainment people would come”. I said “What kind of entertainment could you provide? “

And there was a senior who said “I belong to a senior line dance group. We’ll come and perform”. So they showed up and some of them even had walkers. But the music was so contagious, young people jumped up and said “Can we do this with you every month?” And then they said “If we had raffle prizes people would come”. And I said “What could you raffle?” Somebody said “I do great knitting. I’ll make a stocking cap”. Somebody else said “I make a great apple pie”. Somebody else said “I like to garden. I’ll pledge a couple of hours of gardening”. We had so many raffle prizes. We were raffling for a half hour.

And then I asked them to do a little brainstorming about what kind of measures could create an awesome High Point community? And I said “If you want these things to happen, stand up and advocate it. Get other people to join you”. So here they are brainstorming their ideas.

This woman said “I just moved here from China. I’d like to start up a tea house as a way to create a gathering place where we can build a sense of community”. And there were some Somali elders in the corner who said “We don’t drink tea,

we drink coffee". She said "Okay we'll have a tea and coffee house". So they got together to plan that.

This guy said "I'd like to exercise but I'm a terrible organiser. Somebody help me organise the classes I'd be happy to lead exercise classes". This young woman said "I love to play soccer but because of my religion, I can't play outdoor soccer. I'd like to start up an indoor soccer league".

This woman said, "This is an incredible multicultural feast we made tonight. That's our gift. I'd like to start a multicultural catering company as a way to make some income but also a way to share our culture with the larger community". And this guy Solomon, he's just 11 years old. He sat up there, he says "All my friends in all the other neighbourhoods, they have parks and playgrounds. I want a playground, a swing set".

He tugged at everybody's heart strings. There were some elders in the corner, who said "We do regular walks around the neighbourhood for exercise. And we get tired. How about if we made a park with a bench and swing set?" Six months later they came together to create that. And the housing authority said "You can't do a swing set because the health and safety." And they said "Well Solomon's counting on it. We've got to build the swing set". So here's the swing set and here's Solomon, so happy. Yeah.

And not all those projects happened, but a bunch of others did.

They started up a community orchard. They started up a community garden. They started up a craft room and these residents are teaching each other crafts. And now they're making sweaters for Nickelsville which is a homeless encampment. Low income people watching out for people worse off than they are. That's the power of community. That's the power of doing things in a very different kind of way.

I think one of the challenges with our work, as somebody raised earlier is the funders. Always holding us accountable, wanting to know what kind of results are we going to get.

It's the hardest thing with this approach. Because if we're doing our work right, if we really do it in a way that's community driven, if the community's really in control, it should affect all kinds of indicators. All kinds of studies have been done that show that the stronger the social pathway you build, the safer people are. The healthier they are. The more resilient they are.

So what do we measure? Right? We work hard, we build it, we fix up this, we built this new community garden and the crime rate's gone down. Is it because we built a garden? Who knows what it would take credit for?

I think we spend way too much time and way too many resources offering measuring things that don't count. I was raised in Iowa so I love this Iowa farm proverb. "You don't make the hog fatter by weighing it."

And I love the Einstein quote. "Not everything that can be counted counts. And not everything that counts can be counted."

I was just in St Kilda yesterday and it reminded me of a strategy they took a few years ago. And they said you know the only thing that really matters is whether people are happy. Think about it. What else is important?

So they trained people how to be volunteer smile spies. And they walked down the street and they'd catch other people's eye and they'd see what percentage of people smile back at them.

And then they have a formula they've worked out to figure out how many smiles per hour are in each neighbourhood. And then they post traffic signs to show how many smiles per hour in that neighbourhood. And it's the only indicator I've seen that's actually changing conditions.

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Because no neighbourhood wants to be seen as unfriendly. So the numbers keep going up. This guy at Luna Park, he's so happy, he's up to ten. And this guy's really happy, he's up to fourteen.

So I'd just like to conclude by thanking you all. I know this is hard work. It's tough times. But you're the ones who are making the difference in our society. You're the ones who are putting smiles on the people's faces.

But I think there's so much, so much more we can do. This is an incredibly scary time for me. I see the economic crisis everywhere. We see climate change. And the democratic crisis where people are thinking of themselves as taxpayers rather than citizens.

We are facing enormous crises, but what gives me hope is that there are people like you in every corner of the world, every place I go. Places I least expect it too.

People working hard to make change? That's what gives me hope. So I just want to end by thanking you for doing what you do and encourage you to keep on because you are part of a huge movement.

And I think together we are going to make change.