

Case Study #4: Closing the Distance in Peel and Halton

Creating Diversity Competent Organizations in Peel and Halton Regions

Sue, the Executive Director of a community agency, walks into her office and looks at her calendar. “Oh no!” she says, “I have to have my diversity competence training today! I’ve got a million other things to do!”

Sue talks about how important diversity is. “It’s what makes our world so rich,” she says, but she also talks about all the challenges and barriers to being diversity-competent. These barriers include lack of time and money, and fear of failure and change.

A funny, clumsy, clown-like angel pops up from under Sue’s desk and tries to support Sue. She asks Sue, to think about some of the reasons why diversity-competence is so important. “Imagine yourself in a foreign country...you don’t know the language, you don’t know the culture and you can’t go back to your own country. Your child becomes very sick and you have to rush her to the hospital. No one speaks your language. How do you feel? What do you do?” The clown then asks Sue to imagine “...getting the help and support you need so that you are confident your child is in good hands.” She asks Sue to imagine a world that reflects and includes the diversity of its people.

(Opening scene of the Diversity Competence Training Conference sponsored by the Peel-Halton Closing the Distance Project, Mississauga, Ontario, January 22, 2004)

An audience of more than 100 human service managers from Peel and Halton regions responds enthusiastically to this short play on one of the major issues confronting them in their daily professional work. Following the performance, the audience, participants in a training conference on Diversity Competence, talk in small groups at their tables, to absorb and reflect on what they saw and heard.



The Angel Clown played by Laurie Williams for the skit at the Diversity Competence Conference

Their response is strong. They talk about what they could relate to in the presentation, and which barriers and challenges to diversity competence they too are worried about. They say that some of the barriers that they can relate to are the overwhelming nature of the topic; resistance to change in their organizations; the idea that many people are afraid that diversity competence means having to give something up; that diversity competence is great in theory but difficult to do in practice; and how organizational and workload barriers often take over when you get back to the office, so that you either forget what you've learned in a workshop, or you feel like you can't act on it.

The daylong Training Conference is based on a resource manual for people working in and managing community organizations that provide health and social services. Titled "*Developing the Diversity-Competent Organization*", the resource manual was created by the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project. The Project created educational materials and training to increase awareness and knowledge about the need for service providers to be "diversity-competent" and to provide them with some tools to help make these changes in their organizations.

Just over a year earlier, the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project had decided on its key goal. On December 13, 2002, a group of community leaders from the health, social and education sectors came together for a community visioning meeting about how to "close the distance" in Peel and Halton regions. They decided that the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project should ensure that community and public services in Peel and Halton regions are accessible, welcoming and appropriate to immigrants, people of colour and other diverse citizens who need them.

A mural of “Diversity Competency” was created at this meeting, illustrating the different areas where social service organizations need to change to reflect and be appropriate to diverse people in Peel and Halton.

Preparing for the Journey:
Proposing a GTA-wide Initiative

“Diversity groups have never been involved in processes like this in the past...people in the community have always been left wondering what these processes are about...it’s great that we’re here now and the timing is good.”

“...we need to recover and empower communities directly – a major issue historically because there was always someone speaking on our behalf with a limited history of our community.”

“...diverse communities have diverse experiences – we need to give more space for these actors to influence policy.”

**(GTA Diversity and Equity Roundtable,
March 25, 2002)**

Before the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project is created, several community leaders participate in some “roundtable” discussions. At the first roundtable discussion on February 15, 2002, a group of fifteen community leaders meet with the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) Consultant, who presents the idea of a Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII) being developed by Health Canada. These leaders come from community organizations working in health, social, human service, policy and settlement sectors in Toronto. They talk about what “social and economic inclusion” means to them, and some of the issues related to exclusion, inclusion, “population health” and “health promotion”. They also discuss what they think a *Closing the Distance* Project could do, raising ideas such as policy change and promoting the participation of marginalized people in decision-making.

A second roundtable discussion focusing on “Diversity and Equity” is held on March 25, 2002. At this meeting, twelve community leaders who represent some of Toronto’s ethno-racial communities participate, most of them coming from organizations that address diversity, racism, immigration and settlement, and ethno-specific groups and councils.

In this discussion, participants discuss what they think social and economic inclusion and exclusion mean in the Toronto area. They focus on how immigrants, refugees and racialized people have been excluded and marginalized in many parts of Canadian society, including employment, education, income, housing, and citizenship. They talk about how many groups of people feel like their voices and ideas are used as the subjects of research and policy-making, but the people themselves are not included and their concerns are not addressed. For example, many groups of people need services to be available in many different languages, but these services are often not available.

The group talks about how, because there are so many different concerns that immigrants, refugees and racialized people face, a *Closing the Distance* Project may need to be focused on policy change.

It seems clear from these roundtable discussions that in the Toronto area, immigrants and refugees are often excluded, and that they face many barriers to the health and social services they need. It might make sense to focus a *Closing the Distance* Project on immigrants' and refugees' access to services.

Over the summer, the SPNO Project Coordinator reaches out to leaders from community organizations in Peel and Halton regions. It is hoped that a *Closing the Distance* Project can include the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – not only downtown Toronto, but also the areas that surround the city, including Peel and Halton regions. The SPNO Project Coordinator recommends that a *Closing the Distance* Project take place across the GTA, and that the Peel Social Planning Council be the lead organization in partnership with two other Toronto-area social planning councils – Community Development Halton and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC-T).

The CSPC-T is not very happy about this idea.

Phase 1 of the Journey:
Negotiating a Project Focus . . . or Two

“People of diverse ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds need an experience of welcome in services that are so vital to their citizenship, safety and survival. Our public services must explore ways that we can welcome, include and serve all of our citizens.”

**(Peel-Halton Narrative,
December 13, 2002)**

In October 2002, Health Canada approves funding for a “Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative”, which includes a *Closing the Distance* Project in the Greater Toronto Area. Now it is important to decide on a focus for the Project, and to start working on the next steps.

Leaders from the social planning organizations in Peel, Halton and Toronto meet and discuss how a GTA Project might look. It seems that the CSPC-T has different ideas than the Peel and Halton organizations. CSPC-T leaders are concerned that a GTA *Closing the Distance* Project will not meet downtown Toronto's needs. They are concerned that not enough money will be made available for Toronto and that the focus on immigrants and refugees will be lost. The CSPC-T is also worried that it is not as high a priority for the Peel and Halton partners to ensure that people working with immigrants and refugees will participate in planning, carrying out and evaluating the Project.

Leaders from the Peel Social Planning Council and Community Development Halton develop a proposal for how they think a GTA *Closing the Distance* Project should look. Although the Executive Director of the CSPC-T is supposed to provide input into this proposal, he misses a telephone meeting and is unable to provide feedback. The proposal talks about the need for culturally appropriate health and social services for immigrants and visible minorities in the GTA. It suggests that a group of “champions” who support social inclusion and “diversity competence” should be created. The proposal plans to provide support and training to these “champions” so that they can make important changes in the health and social service agencies where they work. It is hoped that this will eventually lead to public service organizations that provide appropriate services to diverse people.

The next GTA roundtable meeting is held in Peel region on October 2, 2002. Eighteen leaders from social planning, health, social and educational organizations in the Greater Toronto Area attend. At this meeting, the Peel and Halton social planning councils present their proposal for a GTA Project, which focuses on mobilizing and training “diversity champions” – people who are committed to working on diversity issues in community and public agencies where they work.

There is tension at the meeting – it becomes even clearer that the Halton and Peel social planning organizations have very different ideas than their Toronto partner about the goals of this Project. Following the meeting, there is a heated discussion among the social planning leaders from the three communities. The Executive Directors of the Peel and Halton councils express frustration and dismay at their Toronto colleague’s hostility in the meeting.

The SPNO Project Coordinator attends this meeting. It is clear that Toronto may have to follow a different path than Peel and Halton in closing the distance for immigrants and refugees.

Creating Separate Projects

The SPNO Project Coordinator meets with representatives from the CPSC-T and other Toronto organizations. They talk about some possibilities for a Toronto-specific *Closing the Distance* Project that is separate from the organization-focused Project in Peel and Halton. They agree on some important decisions about Toronto:

- That the Peel-Halton model is appropriate for those regions, but will not meet the needs of a Toronto-based Project focusing on immigrant and refugee issues.
- In Toronto, it would be more appropriate to focus on advocating to change policy and mobilizing leaders from diverse immigrant and refugee groups.
- The group will explore the possibility of a “hybrid” Toronto Project where two other foundations interested in conducting a “social inclusion audit” in Toronto could partner with Health Canada to provide funding for a Toronto Project.

It is at this point that the Toronto Project begins a journey separate from Peel and Halton. In the months that follow, leaders from the CSPC-T and four ethno-cultural groups discuss and develop a proposal to conduct a “social inclusion audit”. This would

involve creating a “tool kit” that could be used to evaluate existing institutions and policies. This tool could be used to identify the changes that would need to happen to make institutions and policies ready to address ethno-racial diversity and equality in a meaningful way. The Project is planned by the “Alternative Planning Group”, made up of the African-Canadian Community Social Development Council, the Hispanic Development Council, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, and the Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter, in partnership with the CSPC-T.

In December 2002, the SPNO Project Coordinator facilitates several meetings with leaders from the Alternative Planning Group (APG) and CSPC-T, and representatives of Health Canada and two foundations which are also interested in funding social inclusion projects. The result of these discussions is a, Toronto Project with funding support from Health Canada, which takes its own shape and path separate from the Peel-Halton initiative.

Health Canada decides that they will work directly with the Toronto Project, rather than through the SPNO Closing the Distance Project. The SPNO Project Coordinator makes it clear that support from the SPNO is still available to the Toronto Project if the group requests it, and leaders from the Toronto Project are still invited to attend “Reflections” sessions, where all of the Ontario Closing the Distance Projects work together and support one another.

As the Toronto Project moves forward, some people attend Reflections sessions, and they call on an SPNO resource person to provide facilitation once. But in general, the Toronto Project goes on a journey that is quite separate from the Peel-Halton Project and the other Ontario Closing the Distance Projects that are supported by the SPNO. Although both the Toronto and Peel-Halton Projects have interesting experiences closing the distance in their communities, the remainder of this case study follows the experience of the Peel-Halton Project.

Building a Project Leadership Group in Peel-Halton

While the Toronto Project decides on the path it will follow, the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project moves forward with its plan to make health and social services more appropriate for immigrants and visible minorities in Peel and Halton regions. Leaders from the Peel and Halton social planning councils continue to develop a proposal and plan to create and provide training for a group of local leaders who can act as “diversity champions”, promoting changes in social service organizations and sectors where they work, to make them more “diversity-competent”. The SPNO Project Coordinator provides support and feedback as plans are developed. He raises questions about how this Project can meet the important closing the distance goal of “community mobilization”.



Paula DeCoito, Executive Director,
Social Planning Council of Peel



Joey Edwardh, Executive Director,
Community Development Halton

Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project Leaders

The Project leaders also begin to reach out to people in Peel and Halton who are concerned about issues of diversity in the community. They find that there are strong community leaders, mainly women, who are interested in being involved in the Project. These include community leaders who work in ethno-racial and multicultural groups and agencies, at local school boards and on diversity issues. The group begins to develop as an advisory committee, which will give leadership throughout the Project, providing advice on the directions that the Project should take.



Some of the Peel-Halton Project Advisory Group in Meeting

It is interesting that most of the advisory committee members come from Halton region – only a few are from Peel. This happens for several reasons. Because there is already a “Diversity Committee” in Peel, many community leaders from Peel who are involved in diversity issues are not interested in being involved. Many are too busy with

the Diversity Committee, while some are concerned that the *Closing the Distance* Project will compete with the Diversity Committee that already exists. The Peel Social Planning Council, however, is also part of a network called the Community Leadership Alliance of Peel (CLAP), which is made up of managers and directors from 40 social service organizations in Peel. CLAP also has a working group focusing on diversity issues. The Peel SPC Executive Director is an active member of CLAP's Diversity Working Group. The Executive Director will report to CLAP's Diversity Working Group, bring their input back to the Peel-Halton Project, and invite CLAP members to be involved in the Project when opportunities come up. So, although there are many more Halton leaders on the Project advisory committee, there are other opportunities for more community leaders from Peel to be involved.

Visioning Diversity Competent Service Organizations

On December 13, 2002, the Peel-Halton Project holds its "Community Visioning" day with the help of some SPNO resource people who facilitate. A group of ten women who are emerging champions on diversity issues, and who are interested in the Project advisory committee, meet with staff from the Peel and Halton social planning councils. Participants are asked to talk about the issues in Peel and Halton Regions that they care about. Community leaders talk about the growing diversity of people in their regions:

"Over the last decades the Region of Peel has bloomed into one of the most diverse populations in the country. This growth continues, and now Peel's neighbour to the west, Halton Region, is anticipating a similar pattern of growth. The leadership group in Peel-Halton cares about...ensuring that our service systems can competently reach out, welcome and serve the diverse population that lives in the area."

(Peel-Halton Narrative,
December 13, 2002)

The group talks about some of the problems that immigrants and racialized people face when they use services in the community, including:

- young people who find that they are misunderstood and feel they don't belong in public schools;
- women experiencing domestic violence who are unable to get help because they don't know where to look and because they can't get culturally appropriate help and services in their first language;
- professionals such as doctors and social workers who were trained in another country and find that their credentials are not recognized here;
- people who don't get the protection they need because they are afraid to approach the police; and
- people who can't enjoy recreational programs and services because they are not culturally appropriate or they are not welcoming for newcomers.

The group decides that there are some common problems with all of these services, which make them difficult for immigrants and people of colour to use:

and concerns directly to those who provide services. Ideally, immigrants and people of colour would be actively involved in creating training and educational materials for these service providers.

Organizational Development as Community Mobilization

At this point, leaders from the Peel and Halton social planning councils make an important decision about the Project. The SPNO have designed the *Closing the Distance* Projects in Ontario to focus on “community mobilization”, which includes directly involving community members who tend to be “distanced” or left out. This means that the SPNO expects the Peel-Halton Project to work directly with immigrants and visible minorities who are not service providers, but who live in Peel and Halton and use health and social services.

The idea of creating opportunities for immigrants, refugees and people of colour to voice their concerns to human service organizations and their staff had been raised at the Community Visioning session. The Peel-Halton Project leaders, however, think of community mobilization and “closing the distance” differently for several important reasons. Their first concern is that the funding offered for the Project will only last for a year and a half. Having done community mobilization before, these leaders know that it takes a long time. They worry that it will take almost a year and a half to involve a group of community members in a meaningful way, and that by the time the group has begun to work on the issue, the Project will end. They do not want to let down the community like this.

Instead, they have a different vision for how the Project could work. They decide to focus on creating educational resources on how mainstream health and social service agencies can collaborate with ethno-specific agencies and groups to make sure that their services are culturally appropriate for immigrants and people of colour. They plan to create a training manual, to provide training to a large group of people from many of these mainstream agencies, and to make the training resources available for many other community groups to use. Their hope is that, through this training, a group of “champions” from different social organizations and sectors will emerge, and that this group will work within their agencies and sectors to make sure that positive changes take place, and will continue to work with one another to support each other in this work.

In this way, a large group of service providers would be mobilized by the end of the short-term Project funding. The Peel-Halton leaders also see the development of the advisory committee as a type of mobilization. Advisory committee members represent ethno-specific and multicultural groups, who will also be mobilized to be “diversity champions”, and who will provide insight and help to people hoping to make changes in their mainstream organizations.

The Project leaders see this plan as more realistic than mobilizing community members for the time they have available. They also see it as an important form of community development and community capacity building. At the end of the Project, there will be a concrete educational publication and training program that can be used by different

groups in the future, and can benefit the community for years to come. These resources will also be adaptable to different communities and groups, which they see as important for the diverse regions of Peel and Halton, which are not contained communities, but consist of large geographical areas that cover many distinct communities and neighbourhoods.

While the other *Closing the Distance* Projects plan to focus on providing spaces for excluded people to have a voice and input into decision-making, Peel-Halton chooses a very different model. Their focus is on raising awareness and promoting change among those who exclude others in their services, rather than involving those who are excluded. Over the following months, the SPNO Coordinator continually challenges the Peel-Halton leadership's views of both community mobilization and closing the distance, but they hold fast to their positions based on their understanding of their own communities' needs and interests.

Research and Planning Starts

In the middle of January 2003, the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project completes a proposal outlining their plans in detail. The Project submits its proposal for Phase 2 to Health Canada. The proposal is entitled: "*Social Inclusion Through Collaboration: A Training Program on Collaboration Between Mainstream Human Service Agencies and Ethno-specific Agencies and Groups in Halton and Peel Regions*".

In the early months of 2003, the Peel SPC begins doing research for the educational program. On March 29-30, 2003, an SPNO All-region REFLECTIONS session is held, where people from the *Closing the Distance* Projects from five Ontario communities come together to reflect on their Project work so far and to plan for the future. A strong group from the Peel-Halton Advisory Committee joins leaders and staff from the Peel and Halton social planning councils for this event. At the workshop, the group plans their Project strategy in more detail.

Phase 2 of the Journey:

Creating and Testing a Community Resource to Promote Diversity Competence

"Action without the benefit of prior reflection is often flawed. Time should be taken to reflect on what the organization understands diversity-competence to mean, and how it wants to go about developing that competence. Such reflection, done in a collaborative team setting, can help the organization to have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and a path for making that vision a reality."

**(Developing the Diversity-Competent Organization,
January 2004)**

As Phase 2 of the Project begins, research is underway for the educational resources. A Project staff person works with the Executive Director at the Peel Social Planning Council to conduct a large literature review of past work on diversity, and on diversity-competence in organizations. Between April and September 2003, a collection of

research on “Best Practices in Diversity-Competent Organizations” is created. This collection is divided into seven sections or “modules”. These modules are refined so that the research information is packaged as a manual of seven individual training modules that can be studied separately or together.

Preparing Strategy for Halton Region’s Particular Needs

During this period, the group of advisory committee members from Halton decide to form a group they call the “Halton Reference Group”. This group consists of those advisory committee members who work in ethno-specific, multicultural, and educational organizations in Halton. The purpose of this group is to discuss how to make the work done on the Project relevant to people in Halton. They see this separate work as important, because the reality in Halton is very different from Peel. In Halton, people are just starting to think about diversity as an important issue to address, while in Peel, diversity is an issue that many people have been discussing and working on for a long time.

In Halton, there is still a need to make people and organizations aware that diversity is an important issue. The Halton Reference Group gets together several times throughout the Project, to discuss these issues and to think about how to make sure that work on diversity moves forward in agencies in Halton Region.

Community Input to Development of Training Materials

During the same time period, the Executive Director of the Peel Social Planning Council also consults with the Diversity Working Group of CLAP, the coalition of 40 social service agencies in Peel. This Working Group is kept informed about how the Project is progressing, and members provide valuable input about their views on the manual and the training conference that is being organized.

Throughout the April-September 2003 period, the Project advisory committee provides critical input into the resource manual. Although this group does not meet and direct the Project on a regular basis, they are involved intensely at important moments. During Phase 1, the advisory committee had been involved in deciding on the goals, audience, purpose and strategy of the Project at events like Community Visioning and SPNO REFLECTIONS sessions. In the first six months of Phase 2, the committee reviews drafts of the resource manual twice, and gives feedback about significant changes that should be made to the information that is included and the format of the manual. The advisory committee also helps to plan a large training conference.

Responding to Challenges from SPNO

While the educational resources are being developed, the SPNO Project Coordinator and resource people work with the Peel-Halton Project staff team in meetings and at the next SPNO REFLECTIONS session. The SPNO resource people discuss Project developments with the group, and continuously challenge them on meeting the SPNO’s goals of using community mobilization and transformative change to close the distance between newcomers and the wider community.



Joey Edwardh and Paula DeCoito consult with Mike Balkwill, SPNO Central Support team member

Peel-Halton Project leaders again explain how they see their Project closing the distance. They hope that the training workshop on diversity-competence will be the first step in mobilizing managers to work on diversity issues; this work will eventually lead to transformative changes in their organizations. SPNO resource people suggest that if this kind of mobilization is the goal, the Peel-Halton Project should think about holding a second day of the diversity conference, where interested people can talk about future sustainability, such as building networks where people can support each other in their diversity work, and doing additional training to reach larger numbers of service agencies. In the end, the Peel-Halton Project team comes up with several things it will do to make sure that the work they have done will continue beyond the training workshop, including:

- Distributing the manual widely so that many people can use it in their own organizations;
- Giving training to managers who are part of CLAP, the Peel coalition of 40 social service organizations;
- Peel and Halton social planning councils acting as a “how-to” resource for organizations who want to try to become diversity-competent; and
- Building networks that can help support organizations and people working on diversity competence on an ongoing basis.



Maureen Brown, Halton volunteer, Angela Nijhar and Srimanta Mohanty, Peel SPC staff participate in All-Region REFLECTIONS session

Creating and Testing the Training Manual

By September 2003, a draft resource manual on “Best Practices in Diversity-Competent Organizations” is created. It is time to plan the training workshop – a conference where the knowledge collected in the resource manual is shared with a large group of representatives from service organizations in Peel and Halton. The Project leaders and advisory committee had decided early on in the Project who they want their audience to be. First and foremost, they hope to reach senior managers from social and human services agencies in Peel and Halton, as these people hold positions in their organizations where they can make changes on diversity issues. The Project also hopes that representatives from school boards, local government agencies and organizations that provide funding to community organizations will attend, to increase their understanding of the importance of diversity-competence and the supports and funding needed for an agency to become diversity-competent.

The Project team plans for a full-day training session targeting this audience. They hope that people who participate in the training will walk away with a strong understanding of what “diversity competence” means, why it is important, what an organization needs to do to become more diversity-competent, and what can help or hinder an agency in trying to become diversity-competent. On October 21, 2003, they hold a “pre-test” of their training workshop.

The advisory committee, SPNO resource people and five people from the CLAP Diversity Working Group participate in the pre-test. It is an intensive, full-day trial of the diversity-competence workshop. The pre-test is a safe environment where strong and knowledgeable leaders who have been involved in the Project can provide constructive criticism for how to make the training conference better. After the Project team has presented the workshop, there is time for advisors to provide feedback on how it went. They give important input that leads to significant changes in the workshop plan. They point out that too much information has been presented, and they work with the Project team to choose which content should be included and which should be cut. It is also noted that the workshop needs to be more interactive and participatory, and that there needs to be more space for conference participants to reflect on and discuss what they have learned and to ask questions.

The ongoing involvement of the Project Advisory Committee and the Halton Reference Group goes beyond providing important guidance for the Project. The active involvement of these representatives of ethno-specific, multicultural and educational organizations also helps to focus these emerging “champions” on the issue of diversity in their organizations. Many committee members work with clients on a regular basis, but their involvement in this Project gives them a chance to focus on the organizational side of their work. Committee members are very committed to and interested in this work – they see real benefit from their involvement. It seems clear that this is a group of “champions” that will work hard to carry the work on diversity forward in their agencies and sectors.



Peel-Halton project staff plan conference, Laurie Williams, Joey Edwardh and Paula DeCoito

Planning to Launch Training for Diversity Competent Champions

From October to December 2003, the Project team does outreach to managers at community organizations across Peel and Halton who they hope will attend the

conference. They also work hard to refine and improve the training workshop, to make it a useful day where participants have an opportunity to gain knowledge and reflect on their learning, so that they can carry work on diversity forward in the sectors and agencies where they work. The SPNO Project Coordinator and two SPNO resource people provide important support throughout these months of planning. They meet with the Project team several times to plan and refine the workshop. Meanwhile, people from agencies across Peel and Halton register for the training conference. By early January 2004, about 100 people have registered to participate in the day.

On the evening of January 21, 2004, SPNO resource people join the Project team to make last minute arrangements and plans for the workshop. They run through a short theatre performance that they will use to open the event, and the content they will present. This is a stressful time for the Project team, and they are grateful for the support they get from SPNO resource people.

Successful Conference on Diversity Competence

On the morning of January 22, 2004, it is a snowy day. People trickle in to the conference; some are late because of bad roads and traffic. The conference gets off to a late start, but around 9:30am, the conference room is full with over 100 people, and the “Developing the Diversity-Competent Organization” workshop begins. The day starts with a short play, as Sue, a human services manager and a clown-like angel take the stage.



Participants at the Diversity Competence Conference, January 22, 2004

Following a short skit about the challenges of becoming diversity-competent and the importance of meeting the needs of diverse community members, conference

participants work in small groups to discuss their own concerns and challenges about diversity training. The training day then continues with a series of presentations on diversity-competence in organizations and small group discussions. Throughout the day, information is presented well, and there is lots of good discussion in the small groups. Participants also give positive feedback about the theatre piece. Near the end of the workshop, Project leaders hold a panel discussion where the audience can ask additional questions that weren't addressed during the day. The Project leaders manage the questions with skill, and clarify things well for participants.

At the end of the day, there is a lot of buzz about how great the training manual is – each participant has received a copy of the resource manual, which contains all seven modules about “Developing the Diversity-Competent Organization”. Participants can use this manual as they work on diversity-competence in the future.



David Hasbury, SPNO Graphic Arts Facilitator, portrays Conference discussion on wall mural

The participant evaluations show that most people were very happy with how the day went. Sixty-four people fill out evaluations. Just over 90% say that their overall impression of the conference was either “A-One” or “Thumbs Up” – that is, either a four or five out of five. Participants give similar positive feedback about the organization, content and format of the conference. Comments include:

- “The manual is a tremendous resource,”
- “Very useful information, opened my eyes to a lot of things,” and
- “Great combination of theory and practice”

(Evaluation Summary, Developing the Diversity-Competent Organization, January 22, 2004).

For months after the event, Project leaders continue to hear positive feedback when they run into people who attended.

The Next Steps in The Journey:
Growing the Base of Diversity Champions

In the months that follow the conference, several next steps take place in Peel and Halton regions.

In Halton, the Halton Reference Group holds a follow-up meeting on March 3, 2004, with the hope of building on the momentum that was started at the conference. Not only do the advisory committee members from Halton attend, but many of the Halton community agency representatives who were at the conference come too. There are a total of about twenty-five people.

The group discusses the importance of the educational manual, which they see as an important resource for the future. They also talk about the importance of continuing to work on the issue of diversity in Halton. The group sees a strong need to continue to raise awareness in the community about the need for diversity-competence, and to begin to ask questions about diversity in community services. Many think it would be useful to create a Halton Diversity Network, where people could come together to discuss the issues, share knowledge, and get support for their work on diversity competence.

The Halton group comes up with the idea of having a series of breakfast meetings. Considering everyone's busy schedule, it seems more realistic to have regular short morning meetings to talk about diversity issues, rather than trying to hold day-long workshops. There is a great place in Halton to hold these meetings – a little house out in the country with meeting facilities, which has a warm and comfortable feeling. At these breakfast meetings, they plan to use the outline of the resource manual, and work their way through each of the topics discussed in the manual.

The hope is that a series of short meetings will generate interest from more people in the community, and their group of "champions" will grow. New projects and work on diversity issues might even result from this. Currently, there is no organization in Halton that has offered to take the lead in organizing these meetings. A big challenge for a lead organization will be finding staff time and the money to coordinate this work. However, there are many people who are very keen on making this network a reality, and it seems hopeful that the breakfast meetings for diversity champions will happen in the near future.

It also seems likely that other work on diversity competence will continue in Halton. In the months that follow the conference, many people in Halton say that they plan to

make use of the resource manual they received. It seems like awareness about the issue of diversity is much higher among community agencies than it was before the conference. The conference inspires two organizations to apply for funding from the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition to do diversity competence training and implementation in their organizations.

There are also some promising developments in Peel Region. The Executive Director of the Peel Social Planning Council makes plans to train the managers from social service organizations in Peel who are members of CLAP. The local health authority, which offers health services across Peel Region, asks the Peel SPC Executive Director to train people from its organizations on diversity-competence. This training will reach people from many of the health service organizations in Peel. Another large health facility asks the Peel SPC for diversity training. Someone from the Community Care Access Centre, an organization that organizes home care and other health services across Peel, speaks to the Peel SPC about setting up a diversity network. There is a network of people in downtown Toronto that works on diversity issues that has existed for many years, but it is far for people in Peel to travel, and they do not feel that organizations in Peel have the same concerns and issues they want to address. They feel that a network that is focused on diversity in community agencies in Peel would be very beneficial for the community.

An interesting thing about the requests for training that the Peel SPC receives is that they may become an important source of funding for the organization. If requests continue to come in for training, the Peel SPC hopes that they can use the money they get from this training to make the organization more sustainable, so that they will not have to rely on as much funding from other sources. Similarly, the manual might become a source of revenue for both the Peel and Halton social planning councils. The interest in the manual is so great, and it is such a strong resource, that they may be able to sell it to organizations who hope to use it for their own work on diversity-competence. Although the Peel SPC mainly created the manual, the Peel and Halton organizations could work out a partnership where Community Development Halton does marketing of the resource manual in Halton Region. Revenue from this Project could help lead to more secure and sustainable funding for both social planning councils.

Conclusion

It seems clear that the educational manual and conference have led to the beginnings of mobilization for managers and staff from community organizations in Peel and Halton Regions. If the momentum from the conference is not lost, there is strong potential for change in organizations that will ultimately lead to more accessible, welcoming and appropriate services for immigrants, people of colour and other diverse groups in Peel and Halton.

Reflections on Closing the Distance in Peel-Halton Regions

A Capacity-building Analysis

Context for the Analysis

There are several things important to the context of the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project:

- Peel and Halton are rapidly growing regions with larger urban (Mississauga and Brampton in Peel; Burlington and Oakville in Halton), smaller towns and villages and many rural communities. Their populations are becoming increasingly diverse as more newcomers come to the regions for housing and employment. Peel has become very mixed ethno-racially, while Halton is just starting to become so, but is changing at a rapid rate.
- There are three social planning councils in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with long histories of service to their respective communities: the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, the Social Planning Council of Peel, and Community Development Halton (formerly the Halton Social Planning Council). Since 1992, Executive Directors of these three local SPCs have taken leadership in the formation and development of the Social Planning Network of Ontario. Although change at the Executive Director level at the CSPC-T in 2001 did produce some new circumstances, the three organizations and their leaders had a history of good relationships and collaboration on SPNO related work.
- The Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative presented a challenge to the organizational hosts in the GTA, since the resources were very limited for a region of this scale, focusing on such major demographic, social and cultural change – inclusion/exclusion in the lives of immigrants and refugees to the region. Therefore, negotiation of a project for the GTA took a much different direction than in the other SEII communities as the following story and analysis relates.

The following chart gives an overview assessment applying Kaplan's Capacity-building Analysis Framework to the Peel-Halton *Closing the Distance* Project.

<p style="text-align: center;">Hierarchy of Elements that Build Capacity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Capacity Assessment of the Peel-Halton <i>Closing the Distance</i> Project</p>
<p>1. <u>Conceptual Framework:</u> <i>The organization's understanding of its world (context).</i></p>	<p>Divergent views of the world and how to create transformative change on the diversity issue contributed significantly to the separation of the Toronto and the Peel-Halton Projects in the SEII. Leadership in the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto its counterparts in the ethno-racial planning sector favoured a focus on policy change by governments to tackle inequitable treatment of immigrant and refugees. Although the staff leaders in the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton personally shared a strong structural and political analysis of inequity, they also held a keen appreciation for the sensitivities of their respective local environments. With the time and resources available, they determined that targeting organizational change on diversity issues both had the greatest prospects for impact and also was consistent with the historical roles that independent social planning had played in these two communities.</p>
<p>2. <u>Organizational Attitude:</u> Confidence and responsibility to act in its world rather than be passive victim of external conditions.</p>	<p>Both organizations were confident of their capacity to act on this issue in their communities. The projects fit well within the mandates of the organizations and both Boards of Directors embraced the diversity work. There were no concerns about appropriateness of fit from their respective Boards of Directors.</p>
<p>3. <u>Vision, Strategy & Culture:</u> Sense of purpose and ability to plan, implement and adapt a course of action.</p>	<p>The two lead organizations shared a vision of a more diversity competent human service system via organizational change. Their strategy was (1) to create a knowledge tool – a well-researched training resource manual and format – that could be targeted to senior managers in social, health and educational service agencies; and (2) through training and dissemination of the knowledge tool to create “diversity champions” in each region in order to enhance the diversity competence of service organizations, and hence, benefit people that use their services.</p>

<p>4. <u>Structures and Procedures:</u></p> <p><i>Organized and operationalized in a way that enables fulfilment of purpose, realization of vision, and effectiveness of strategy.</i></p>	<p>The Peel-Halton Project was the most staff-driven of all the <i>Closing the Distance</i> Projects throughout the funded Project period. It was, however, senior executive staff in the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton who assumed a strong Project leadership role. Advisory Committees were set up and did have input, but they did not drive or guide the Project. Although the SPNO project Coordinator had concerns about limited direct involvement of community leaders in the development of the Project, this structure and method of Project management did produce stated project objectives of creating a training package.</p>
<p>5. <u>Skills and Competencies:</u></p> <p><i>Leadership and staff relevant and appropriate to the organization's mission and work.</i></p>	<p>Focused on creating a knowledge tool and training capacity, the Project required personal and professional expertise on the issue of diversity. It had both of these competencies in its Project staff team as well as sound senior Project management skills.</p>
<p>6. <u>Resources:</u></p> <p><i>Financial means and physical assets.</i></p>	<p>The resources available for the Project were adequate for the creation and field testing of the Diversity Competence manual and training format. Additional resources are required to implement a strategy for building networks of diversity champions in the two regions. Some opportunities have arisen to sustain the work and the two lead organizations continue to support local mechanisms for sharing the manual and conducting diversity training with organizations.</p>

Conceptual Framework

Summary:

Divergent views of the world and how to create transformative change on the diversity issue contributed significantly to the separation of the Toronto and the Peel-Halton Projects in the SEII. Leadership in the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto its counterparts in the ethno-racial planning sector favoured a focus on policy change by governments to tackle inequitable treatment of immigrant and refugees. Although the staff leaders in the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton personally shared a strong structural and political analysis of inequity, they also held a keen appreciation for the sensitivities of their respective local environments. With the time and resources available, they determined that targeting organizational change on diversity issues both had the greatest prospects for impact and also was consistent with the historical roles that independent social planning had played in these two communities.

Discussion:

Initially, this Project was conceived as a collaboration of the three social planning councils in the Greater Toronto Area. Early on as a result of roundtables held in Toronto, the issue was framed in a more political context, naturally reflecting the debate on diversity issues in the City of Toronto, which had evolved over many years. The diversity issue was not as highly politically charged in Peel-Halton Regions. It became clear that the conceptual frameworks of the Toronto and the Peel-Halton leadership differed significantly, leading to the separation into two Projects.

The situation in the Peel and Halton regions was not exactly similar. The Peel SPC had a history of research work in the community on settlement and immigration and is seen as an appropriate leader for an initiative of this kind in the community. The Peel SPC plays a leadership role within an inter-agency group called the Community Leadership Alliance of Peel (CLAP). The Peel SPC led a Diversity Committee, and drew an advisory group together from their membership.

Community Development Halton has a history of being a neutral negotiator in the community on a wide range of issues. The community of Halton is gradually becoming more diverse (in contrast to Peel where more than 40% of the population is visible minority). The only research studies on ethnicity in the Region of Halton had been done by the Halton SPC, so again there was a recognized leadership role. In Halton there were a few individuals active in diversity issues and who were not working in a collaborative way. This initiative was seen as an opportunity to bring them together through an advisory group and to develop a framework for collaboration.

The two social planning councils held a similar read of the social forces that shape the experience of diversity in their communities and the distribution of resources. They agreed that (between them as partners) the Peel SPC had the primary expertise in the area of diversity and that each organization would play the convening and facilitating role in their own respective communities.

The two social planning councils agreed that community mobilization among primary stakeholders around diversity issues in their respective communities was not feasible within a one-year period. They determined it would be feasible to identify budding 'champions' on diversity issues in service organizations and to empower them with information, education and resource materials. One leader said in interview after the Project:

“Our focus was on giving a tool to the agencies – and that’s community development; it’s a different kind of community development, but it was a developmental initiative to increase the capacity of agencies to be diversity-competent, and that means greater access to services that meet the needs of greater numbers of people. That was a very strategic choice that we made.”

Another Project leader noted:

“The other projects started with community mobilization, and then moved towards doing something – with our project, we started with a knowledge product, and some people from the community drove this, but we decided that we would make something that people could use; and then the mobilization, this is happening now, in all the networks and groups that are emerging”.

The entry points for the strategy, therefore, were the health, education and social service systems in each community. The Project leadership also agreed to give appropriate emphasis to the ethno-racial and cultural dimension of diversity, but also to define diversity more broadly to include issues of sexual orientation, disability, gender, poverty, etc.

For all these reasons there was clear and strong agreement between the Peel and Halton partners on the conceptual framework they were using to approach the Project. Notably, Kaplan makes the point that the strength and clarity of the conceptual framework (i.e. the conviction with which the shared world view is held and used as the basis for organizational action) is more important than whether that world view is correct or not. The SPNO Project Coordinator challenged the Peel-Halton leadership a number of times on their interpretation of community mobilization and closing the distance. One leader commented afterward:

“It was always clear to me how we were closing the distance – it was knowledge, it was a cognitive closing of the distance, where other projects had the haves and the have-nots coming together physically, and ours did not fit in that model at all. Because you

can close the distance if you stop me from being a racist. You can be changed by education or exposure.”

Another said:

“For us, closing the distance was creating the capacity in agencies to not function as racist institutions, and to alter their services so that they’re more inclusive. That’s closing the distance – it’s just a different aspect of closing the distance.”

The Peel-Halton leadership held fast and remained consistent to its own conceptualizations of these key aspects of the Project and the larger SEII.

Organizational Attitude

Summary:

Both organizations were confident of their capacity to act on this issue in their communities. The projects fit well within the mandates of the organizations and both Boards of Directors embraced the diversity work. There were no concerns about appropriateness of fit from their respective Boards of Directors.

Discussion:

There was complete confidence in the capacity to design and implement the Project at both the Board and staff levels of the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton. Both organizations had a history of working in this way on social issues in their communities. In both cases, collaborative work was a hallmark of their modes of social practice.

They also had the trust and confidence of their communities to seek appropriate input. Each organization knew where to go to recruit memberships for the Project Advisory Committee and how to provide access to the Project for existing community groups with an interest and mandate in the area of diversity.

For its part, the Peel SPC was very clear that its strengths are in research, knowledge construction, and transmission of its knowledge to the larger community through vehicles such as training materials and formats. It sees this capacity as contributing to change in the community by reaching out and building community capacity and leadership on the diversity issue.

It is interesting that Community Development Halton saw itself taking a leadership role on the diversity issue in Halton Region, which is just beginning to become a more heterogeneous community.

“If you asked in Halton what the issue was, the awareness is so low, that issue [diversity] wouldn’t have come up, it would have been affordable housing, kids – so we went in with that disadvantage. But, that doesn’t mean that it isn’t THE issue on the frontier of tomorrow in our community, and we know that. So, our

SPC would work in partnership with Peel, in however this evolves. We don't want to duplicate the expertise in Peel, what we want to do as SPCs is find some kind of forum, and Peel SPC has had exposure in our community, people know [it], and we [CDH] have in our community a capacity to convene."

Not only does this thinking demonstrate a sense of confidence about the organization in its community, but also that a belief in organizational capacity to collaborate effectively with another body with specialized expertise and experience on the subject area of the partnership.

Vision and Strategy

Summary:

The two lead organizations shared a vision of a more diversity competent human service system via organizational change. Their strategy was (1) to create a knowledge tool – a well-researched training resource manual and format – that could be targeted to senior managers in social, health and educational service agencies; and (2) through training and dissemination of the knowledge tool to create “diversity champions” in each region in order to enhance the diversity competence of service organizations, and hence, benefit people that use their services.

Discussion:

The leadership in both the Peel and Halton SPCs shared a vision of creating a knowledge tool to build capacity in diversity competence in their communities. Given the resources available and the short timeframe of the Project, they truly believed that the most realistic and achievable outcome was to create and test training materials.

Their strategy was first to create agreement at the cognitive level among senior managers about diversity competence as a desirable characteristic of human service organizations, and secondly, to create a group of “champions” to advance the understanding and the practice in diversity competence through the system via organizational change. The members of the Advisory Committee were the first source of diversity champions, and they provided input to the development of the training resource material. It may have been a missed opportunity to get advisory committee members directly involved in more formal training roles at the Diversity Competence Conference. A number did serve as facilitators for the table discussions of the material.

Speaking for the Halton strategy, one Project leader said:

“From perspective of Halton SPC, it was an opportunity to involve people who were concerned about the issues of diversity in the community, already emerging champions on an advisory committee, and to bring them to a place where not only did they

give us their knowledge, but it gave them a space to work together and continue working together, and ultimately emerge as cohesive group, and I think that happened, that definitely happened here; by working together for a year and a half, it helped those with real emerging interests and concerns about diversity in Halton, it helped them come together, work on this project, embrace a social inclusion kind of perspective, which is a perspective that will have strong roots in this community and will allow that group to continue working together. They gained greater trust; they forged relations which are going to make our progress and journey in this community easier, and then they have this magnificent tool, which they advised on, so there's a particular ownership."

The Halton group has continued to gather monthly for breakfast meetings since the Diversity Conference and focuses on learning in the various modules of the manual.

In Peel, requests are coming to the Peel SPC to conduct training for organizations in the voluntary and public sectors, which the Peel leadership sees and uses as opportunities to build a strong network of "diversity champions".

Structure and Procedures

Summary:

The Peel-Halton Project was the most staff-driven of all the *Closing the Distance* Projects throughout the funded Project period. It was, however, senior executive staff in the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton who assumed a strong Project leadership role. Advisory Committees were set up and did have input, but they did not drive or guide the Project. Although the SPNO project Coordinator had concerns about limited direct involvement of community leaders in the development of the Project, this structure and method of Project management did produce stated project objectives of creating a training package.

Discussion:

The Executive Directors of the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton took primary leadership roles in the Peel-Halton Project and drove it from concept to design to development to field-testing. Because of her knowledge and both personal and professional experience of diversity, the Executive Director of the Peel SPC took the first lead role in conceptualizing the content of the diversity competence material and in developing the curriculum. She assigned additional Project staff to do research and assist, but she had final say on what went forward for review or field-testing.

The Executive Director of CDH helped create a strong network of women from diverse backgrounds and experiences to become the Project Advisory Committee. She also maintained relationships with other community groups in

Halton that had an interest in the diversity issue, and got them involved in an advisory capacity and participating in the Diversity Conference.

While the Advisory Committee was made up of very strong women from diverse cultural backgrounds and racial identities, their role was to be advisors rather than to give the Project strategic direction or provide Project oversight. This role was acceptable to the members. As one Project leader explained:

“They were an advisory committee, not an operational committee – so for the first few meetings were intense – directing who the project was for, for what purpose, how will we do it – once we got that kind of input, we were able to go ahead and fashion a project – they were involved at the critical points, and the junctures, where we needed their buy-in and support and advice to move forward; nor were they reviewing a community development project that was evolving and changing every day – that’s the critical difference with ours [our Project]”

The role of the SPNO Central Support team was vague with respect to the Peel-Halton Project. Since the Project adopted a different approach to community mobilization, the SPNO project Coordinator was uncertain about how to provide assistance. He did challenge the Project leadership about their approach and pushed on issues such as developing a more coherent and planned action to build the network of “diversity champions” following the Diversity Competence Conference.

In the end, however, SPNO Central Support became another source of advice to the Project leaders, specifically on how to organize and conduct the Diversity Competence Conference. A Central Support team member also served as principal facilitator at the Diversity Conference, which was greatly appreciated by the Peel-Halton project leadership. One commented afterward:

“It’s important to highlight Central Support – they came in for us at critical moments, and were an important source of support, they alleviated the facilitation role needed for the big event, which is a high stress role, also [they] were at the pre-test, that was very helpful; it was a big luxury to have the support of the SPNO, with Mike facilitating workshop day, having people you trust review your document, and at the pre-test, and giving feedback; the night before we did a trial run of the skit and the presentation and got feedback – all of this support moves us up a notch – it makes the workshop more professional, makes it all it can be.”

Skills and Competencies

Summary:

Focused on creating a knowledge tool and training capacity, the Project required personal and professional expertise on the issue of diversity. It had both of these competencies in its Project staff team as well as sound senior Project management skills.

Discussion:

Project staff leadership included three professional staff with academic degrees at the doctorate level and with many combined years of experience in creating educational materials as well as teaching and training in university and adult education formats. In addition, several SPC staff who contributed to the research on the Project, including the senior Project staff leader, were members of ethno-racial minority communities and understood the diversity issue in terms of the experience of women, people of colour, and immigrant status.

The members of the Project Advisory Committee were also mostly women of colour and with immigrant experience, and many were actively involved professionally or in volunteer roles in work with these communities. The SPNO Central Support did feel that the experience and skills of the Advisory Committee might have been used more in developing the training curriculum and testing it in training formats.

In terms of Project management, Peel-Halton was well equipped through the many years of management experience in the Executive Directors of the two collaborating lead organizations. The partnership was effective and stable throughout. Also, this Project was not subject to the staff turnover that characterized some of the other *Closing the Distance* Projects.

Material Resources

Summary:

The resources available for the Project were adequate for the creation and field testing of the Diversity Competence manual and training format. Additional resources are required to implement a strategy for building networks of diversity champions in the two regions. Some opportunities have arisen to sustain the work and the two lead organizations continue to support local mechanisms for sharing the manual and conducting diversity training with organizations.

Discussion:

The Peel-Halton Project leaders acknowledge that the resources provided to the Project were adequate to organize the Advisory Committee, do the research for, draft and revise the training manual, test the manual for further revisions, and launch it with a major training conference. Except for immediate follow-up work,

Project resources were not adequate to implement a full-scale strategy for supporting diversity competent champions.

Still, both the Peel SPC and Community Development Halton have provided follow-up support to individuals and organizations that have shown an interest in the manual and training. Community Development Halton has set up a Halton Reference Group and initiated a series on monthly breakfast meetings to study further the modules in the Diversity Competence Training manual. Should additional training support become available, this group would be the starting point for supporting a network of diversity champions to take the information and training into their own and other community organizations.

Also, Community Development Halton recognizes that it may need to draw on the Peel SPC in the delivery of diversity competence training because of Peel SPC's expertise, and it is prepared to do so to keep the partnership in place. Commenting on the capacity to sustain the initiative, a Halton Project leader said:

"I definitely see the mobilization potential, so we are still optimistic, but the future will partly depend on resources – of course the trust we have built with these groups isn't going to go away, but we don't know if we can continue without something to back it up."

The Peel SPC also sees the need for more investment to use the knowledge tool created for building a network of diversity competent champions. It also, however, is receiving many requests for information and training from both voluntary sector and public sector human service organizations and sees the possibility of conducting training in a cost recovery and self-sustaining way. A Peel SPC leader suggested in interview at the end of the Project:

"Now the Peel SPC is at a stage where we're thinking strategically – we can't continue to rely on United Way funding – we see diversity competence work as an area of income-generating activity – this could help the organization become self-sustaining, working in this area gives us an opportunity to create funding, and if necessary, spin it off as a small business."

There appears to be capacity to sustain the initiative in Peel and Halton. In Peel it is coming from the interest of social service organizations to receive training and their capacity to pay for this training. The collaboration that exists through the Community Leadership Alliance of Peel (CLAP) and its Diversity Committee provides community relationships that can sustain the initiative.

In Halton the goal of bringing a group of individual activists into a collaborative supportive group has been achieved. This is the foundation for sustaining the initiative in Halton.