

“A Community Where All Kids Belong!”

Sudbury's children had followed up on the newly elected Mayor's invitation to send him pictures of their dreams for Sudbury, an idea inspired by his connection to the *Closing the Distance* Project in Sudbury, which, since July 2003, had worked with more than 80 children and teenagers in summer recreation programs and over 200 students in classrooms.

***“Does the community care?
Where are the voices of concern for those left out?”
(Sudbury Roundtable, February 28, 2002)***

A series of community “roundtable” sessions in February, August and September 2002 preceded and prepared for the formation of the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project.

At the first roundtable, fifteen community participants including David Courtemanche, then a Sudbury City Councillor, talk about what “social and economic inclusion” means to them. There is a good mix of Anglophone and Francophone participants, which allows each group to discuss the topic fully in their own first language and to report back for a general discussion in plenary.

The participants identify many groups that are excluded from full participation in community life, such as Aboriginal and Francophone people, low-income families and their children, women, homeless people, marginalized youth, people with mental health problems, and people living in isolation in communities distant and remote from the urban center. Participants ask the critical question: “*who cares for and listens to the voices of those who are left out?*”

On August 7, 2002, the Social Planning Council of Sudbury brings together thirteen community leaders to brainstorm on a possible focus for a *Closing the Distance* Project in Sudbury as part of Health Canada’s Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII). A number of possibilities are generated including a focus on children, which “*would likely have broad appeal in Sudbury and involve many groups and interests*”. The group also identifies more than 33 other community groups that should be invited to participate in developing a local project.

Follow-up meetings on September 6 and 16 organized and facilitated by the Executive Director of the Sudbury SPC confirm the community’s interest in developing a project focused on children:

“We are committed to developing a project that will teach skills and develop attitudes in children that are socially inclusive. The project will create an environment where children will experience social inclusion. This will of course, necessitate working with adults and will affect policy. All of this will connect naturally with the healthy communities process as it is developing at the City.”

A major factor in this decision is the community leadership’s recognition that there is a history of concern for children in the community, and work is already being done on getting a Children’s First Charter passed by Sudbury City Council. Given that Health Canada is proposing a relatively short project period of 18 months for the SEII, the community participants consider it wise to use the *Closing the Distance* Project to build on the existing momentum in Sudbury.

A community leadership group of four people plus the Sudbury SPC Executive Director is formed to work on project development. Sudbury is ready for Health Canada to approve funding for Phase 1 of the SEII.

Phase 1 of the Journey:

Visioning an Inclusive Community for Sudbury's Children

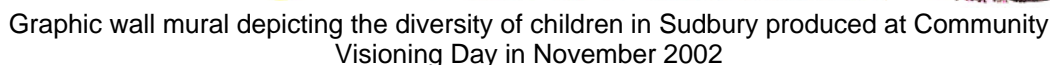
“Together we will, piece by piece, remove those practices that keep us apart. And in our growing experience of connectedness we will experience hope, and our children will know that they belong ... and that we need them.”

(Sudbury Community Visioning, November 28, 2002)

Sudbury is the first of the five regional SEII projects to hold its Community Visioning Day and it becomes a model for those held in the other regions.

Prior to the Community Visioning event, the Sudbury SPC hires three staff for the *Closing the Distance* Project, including a Francophone woman and an Aboriginal woman. Led by the SPC Executive Director, the new Project staff participates in the Community Visioning session. A team of three SPNO resource people visits Sudbury on November 19, 2002 and spends a day working with about 35 community leaders, including four Aboriginal women active in community support to the First Nations community in Sudbury.

Responding to the question *“Which children do you care about?”*, the participants describe a very diverse community of children and a large number of conditions that disconnect them, and often their families, from mainstream community life. Especially the Aboriginal participants tell some very powerful stories of shame and discrimination. One of the SPNO facilitators present with graphic arts expertise captures and portrays all of this a colourful wall mural as a permanent record of the community's perspectives on social exclusion.



Proposal for Empowering the Voices of Sudbury's Children

“The well-being of children is a common bond that joins all groups together. The theme of diversity and inclusiveness also underpinned all discussions, and this project aims to give voice and tell the stories of children from all backgrounds.”

- (a) *“To engage children and their families from diverse groups to develop strategies and resources that promote the social inclusion of children (“diverse groups” are groups that involve people of all backgrounds and walks of life).*
- (b) *To engage decision-makers and other influential sectors in adopting these social inclusion strategies.”*

Proposed Project activities include working with neighbourhoods and schools and other sectors, such as the local business community, by facilitating ways for children from diverse backgrounds to tell their own stories in order to create awareness and understanding about closing the distance. The stories would form the basis for impressing on decision-makers and other influential sectors (e.g. City Council, Boards of Education, Public Health Unit, business) the change needed to create more inclusive and diversity-responsive environments for Sudbury's children.

Reaching Out to the Community

After the proposal is submitted to Health Canada in mid-January 2003, the Sudbury Project team launches into community outreach. The murals created at the Community Visioning session are used as the basis for presentations to a number of groups such as the Sudbury Rotary Club and the Children's Roundtable set up by the City.

Over the period from January through March, the Project Leadership Committee in Sudbury expands its membership to reflect the diversity of the community, bringing together representatives from the health sector, social services, education, childcare, the Aboriginal and Francophone communities.

A storytelling facilitation workshop with the aid of the SPNO graphic artist is planned for March. The idea is to train local artists and young people from the Francophone and Aboriginal communities in the technique of storytelling via the images and pictorial symbols of graphic murals. This event becomes combined with a children's concert based on the theme of social inclusion and held on International Day for the Elimination of Racism. This proves very successful, attracts 100 children, and brings media attention and profile to the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* for Children Project.

Realizing the Challenges of Project Implementation

By the end of March 2003, the Sudbury Project team is ready to attend the SPNO All-Region REFLECTIONS Workshop in Toronto for SEII project leadership from across Ontario. One of the staff team members has learned the graphic arts technique of facilitation and uses this skill in the reflection and planning on the Sudbury Project in the All-Region Workshop in Toronto.

Seven participants in the Sudbury Project attend the All-Region Workshop in March. They use the planning tools provided by the SPNO facilitation team to identify the full spectrum of organizations, sectors, and communities in Sudbury that can assist or resist their efforts. They identify many allies, up to 20 or more, although more than half are "passive" rather than "active" allies.

They also recognize that there are important potential sources of resistance to their goal of empowering the voices of children, such as school boards, principals, teachers, even parents. The Sudbury Project team leaves Toronto

sensitive to the need to cultivate carefully support among these groups in order to break down resistance. How will they ever help children speak out about inclusion if they cannot get access to the schools? Further, here it is spring, schools are about to close for the summer, and anything that the Project starts cannot be followed up until the fall school term.

Phase 2 in the Journey:

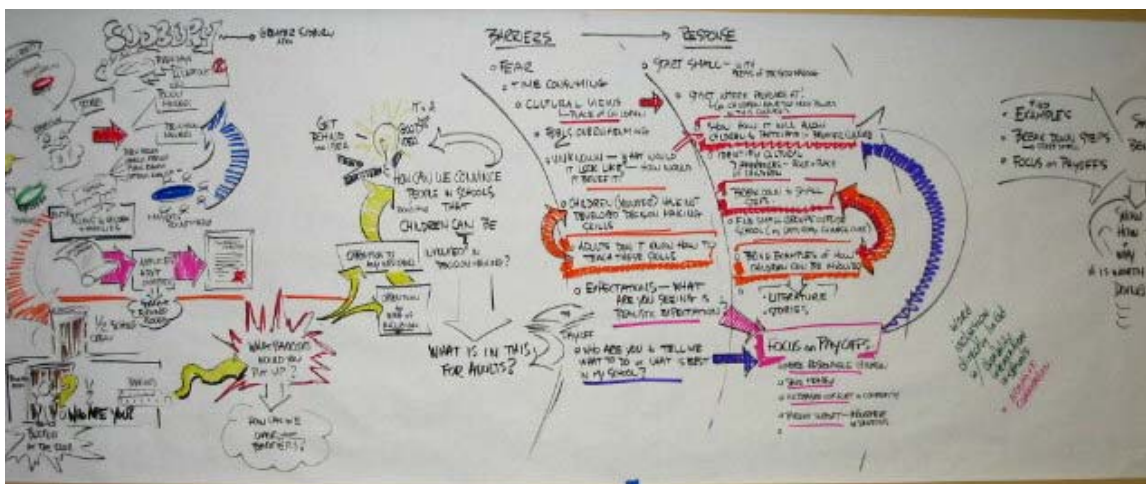
Directly Engaging Sudbury's Children

“The study also found that some kids in the area are threatened by violence, and are victims of racism. Putting an end to violence and racism would make for a healthier and happier neighbourhood, the kids said.”

(Sudbury Star, August 30, 2003)

The Project experiences a smooth transition to new staff in April 2003, the first Aboriginal staff person replaced by another woman, also from the Aboriginal community. The staff person hired to write the Phase 2 proposal has completed her task and leaves the employ of the Project, but remains interested and supportive of the initiative. The Francophone Project staff person continues in her role in Phase 2, as does the SPC Executive Director as overall Project supervisor. The Executive Director also plays a major role in presenting the work of the Project to community groups. The Sudbury Project team makes more than twenty community presentations on the Project by the end of 2003.

The objective at the outset of Phase 2 in April 2003 is to begin work in three or four schools. The Project Leadership Committee organizes itself to better plan how to work with its diverse student base – a Francophone and an Aboriginal caucus are formed, each with Project staff support. Overtures are made to some schools to start work with children in the fall. When the Sudbury team comes to the fourth SPNO All-Region REFLECTIONS Workshop in Waterloo in June, its main reported concern is getting access to children and youth in school classrooms in the fall.



Graphic wall mural for the Sudbury Project produced at All-region Workshop in June 2003

Connecting with Kids in Summer Programs

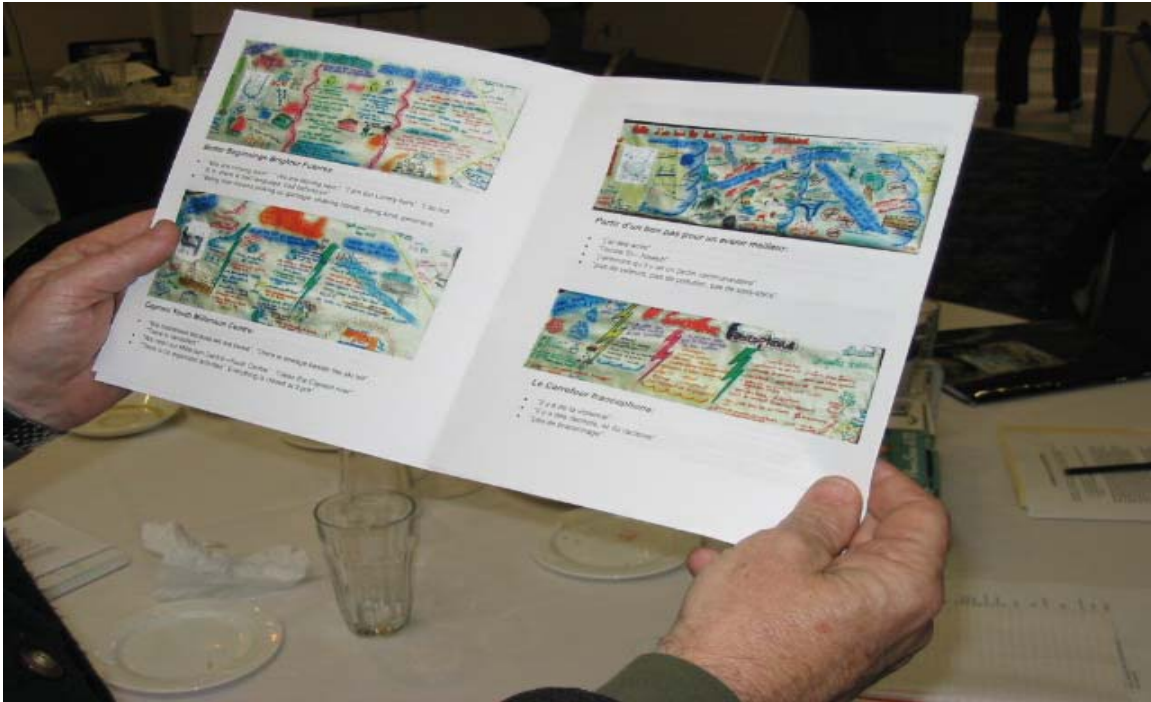
The dilemma on how to reach out to children when school is out for the summer is resolved by the “walk-around” technique. Project staff decides to walk around the city and engage the parents and staff of children in supervised summer recreation programs. They get cooperation to conduct “story-telling” sessions about inclusion and exclusion, which are recorded on wall-size murals as the children participate. Eleven sessions involving about 80 children and teenagers are conducted around Greater Sudbury and the Whanapitie First Nations Reserve with murals portraying all of them. The sessions involve “story-telling” in which youth aged 8 to 19 cover:

- barriers to a sense of belonging and participation in their communities;
- conditions that would make them feel more included and happy about their communities; and
- changes that could make their communities more inclusive.

The results are compelling as the children raise concerns about the presence or lack of seven key conditions that affect their view of the world: 1) family, friends, roots; 2) recreational and cultural facilities; 3) environment, lakes, rivers; 4) safety, police; 5) social status; 6) economics, poverty; 7) value, respect, caring.

Children Tell Their Stories to the Community

At the end of the summer just before school re-opens, the Project organizes a media event to share the children’s stories with the wider community. The media event highlights the findings from the summer sessions by displaying the murals on the walls of a community centre. Information kits about the concept of social and economic inclusion are distributed in both official languages, as well as a colourful booklet, which shows the murals and quotes from the summer discussion sessions with children and youth.



The Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project produced a colourful booklet highlighting the stories of exclusion and inclusion expressed by children and youth in group sessions

Children from the summer programs explain what the pictures mean to the media and representatives of community agencies, including two of the four local school boards, the United Way, the Health Unit, the Band Council, the police, and other community groups. One participant tells the SPC Executive Director that it is the first “*interactive press conference*” she has ever attended.

The Sudbury *Star* prints a very positive article about the event on August 30, 2003 and the local TV station interviews one of the young participants. CBC Radio Canada interviews the Francophone children about their participation in the Project. The interest and enthusiasm generated by this event leads to a number of invitations to the Project from the Sudbury English Catholic School Board, the United Way, and the Sudbury Police. The Police inquire about how to connect with the Project for collaborative community awareness work in the schools.

New people also come forward to inquire about and volunteer for the Project Leadership Committee.

Opening the Doors to Schools

The publicity about the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* for Children Project opens up doors in schools. By October 2003, the Project is working with classes at Macdonald-Cartier, a Francophone secondary school, on conflict resolution and tension arising from intimidation and racism. Macdonald-Cartier students are frustrated and angry as reflected in a high rate of expulsions and suspensions, bullying, and disruptive behaviour in class. Project staff employs techniques that

surface the tensions and frustrations in dialogue, which eases the stress and frustration among students towards each other and the teachers. One result is a change in school policy to eliminate off-site suspensions.

At College Boreal, a community college, the failure rate was getting higher, especially among immigrant students, a rapidly growing part of the student population. Project staff facilitates a dialogue that triggers the development of a well thought out plan to better welcome immigrant students and their families. New policies are discussed as well as the funding support needed for implementation of the new policies.

Extending Community Outreach

The Project becomes actively involved in the Communities That Care Citizen's Committee and the Community Research Alliance, generating an Aboriginal youth focus for the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project. Members represent nine local organizations whose clientele include the Aboriginal youth population. The Sudbury Committee believes that the combination of an evidence-based approach with a community mobilization process offers an exciting opportunity to assist the community in addressing the needs of Aboriginal youth.

A detailed presentation of the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project to the Principals' Meeting of the Sudbury District Catholic School Board in October is very well received. The Program Director for a new Bachelor of Teacher Education Program at Laurentian University attends and follows up with Project staff to learn more about social inclusion and to establish a relationship with the Sudbury SPC.

Shaping Proposals for Change Based on Children's Issues

By the spring of 2004, the Sudbury Closing the Distance for Children Project has worked in 5 schools and 14 classrooms and with over 420 children and youth in grades 6, 7 and 8. These sessions focus on how students experienced a sense of belonging or being left out in their school lives, what being included would look and feel like, and the changes needed to make inclusion a common regular experience for all.

After workshops are completed, the Project staff team prepares reports from each class workshop and present these reports to the principal and parent-teacher council for that school. Towards the scheduled end of the project, in April 2004, Project staff put together a final report of findings and recommendations based on all the workshops for presentation to principals, teachers, School Councils and all of the four participating local school boards. The Project plans to work with the school boards to encourage and support follow-up on the concerns and recommendations raised by the school children and youth.

The Next Steps in The Journey: ***Building on Success***

By the end of 2003, the Project Leadership Committee has also developed a strategy and funding proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for building on the Project's success, not only in schools but also with the summer recreation programs where the Project started its community fieldwork. Three local school boards join the collaborative initiative and send letters of endorsement and support for the proposal.

The Leadership Committee clearly frames the next challenge for the Project to be helping teachers, principals and schools act on children's expressed concerns and dreams for an inclusive school environment. The Committee's proposal to the Trillium Foundation states:

- "The initiative will also work with teachers and recreation program supervisors to develop strategies and actions that respond to and use the voices of children in developing more inclusive learning and recreation programs. In this regard, the initiative will produce:*
- (a) a guide for curriculum and program development that includes the voices of children;*
 - (b) training materials and formats for teachers and recreation program supervisors and monitors; and*
 - (c) an inclusion audit tool for use in schools and recreation programs to assess the level of inclusive practice from a child participant's point of view.*

These results will be accomplished by working with children and teachers/supervisors in selected schools and community recreation programs from January 2004 over the school years of 2004-05 and 2005-06 and the summer recreation program seasons of 2004 and 2005. The plan is to develop a resource base of materials of inclusive processes and practices and trained volunteers and professionals (e.g. teachers, recreation monitors, young people) for incorporation into the local education and recreation systems (i.e. adoption by local school boards and municipal recreation department)."

The Sudbury Project team attends the fifth SPNO All-Region REFLECTIONS Workshop in Mississauga in November 2003 and presents the Project's development from community mobilization to influencing school policy and practice using a "journey" metaphor.



Sudbury Project Community Worker Caroline Recollet and SPC Executive Director Janet Gasparini at All-Region Workshop, November 2003.

Sharing the Experience Beyond Sudbury

Several weeks later, after municipal elections, the new Mayor of Sudbury refers to the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* for Children Project as the inspiration for encouraging children in Sudbury to send him their pictures of the kind of City that they dream about and hope for. The Mayor joins a team from the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project to present their progress to 160 participants from across the province at SPNO's *Closing the Distance* Conference in March 2004. Besides the Sudbury Project staff the other members of the team attending the provincial conference include a student, a teacher, a principal, a public school board superintendent and a Native Band Council chief.

Interest sparked by the Sudbury Project leads to invitations from other communities. The Sudbury Mayor and Sudbury SPC Executive Director/City Councillor are invited to participate in an all-day community forum on social and economic inclusion in Kingston in April 2004, which is very positively covered by the local media. The SPC Executive Director/City Councillor is invited to talk about the Sudbury Project's work on inclusion to a delegation of senior government officials from South Africa visiting Ontario in May 2004.

Continuing the Journey

Locally, signs of sustaining the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project are encouraging in the spring of 2004. The proposal to the Trillium Foundation is approved in June. The City of Greater Sudbury asks the Project to provide diversity training to its summer program supervisors for more than 500 children and youth aged eight to eighteen in Sudbury. The Laidlaw Foundation approves a funding proposal for the Project to do diversity training for staff in summer recreation programs.



Sudbury Mayor David Courtemanche (above) and
Sudbury Project Community Worker Lise Denis (below)
speaking at Provincial Conference on Closing the Distance
in Toronto, March 23, 2004



Reflections on *Closing the Distance* for Children in Sudbury: A Capacity-Building Analysis

Context for the Analysis

There are several things that are important to the context of the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* for Children Project:

- Project leadership intentionally decided to build on other community work that had established children as a priority for Sudbury. Early on, however, it decided that its own particular contribution would be to empower the voices of children as the focus of its community mobilization and transformative change objectives, which presented several challenges. First, how to get access to children to help them tell their stories. Secondly, how to convert the expressed children's issues into change in the institutions and systems to which they were subject.
- The Sudbury Project was very sensitive to the issue of diversity, especially with sizable local populations of Francophone and Aboriginal families in the community. Project leadership was convinced that a focus on children, a priority for the entire community, would breakdown traditional barriers and would facilitate cooperation across agencies and sectors in the community.
- Prior to the SEII, the Sudbury Social Planning Council was recognized as an important community resource. Although there are always funding challenges, the Sudbury SPC was and is well-led and managed and a relatively stable community organization. Its Executive Director had a high community profile with previous elected trustee experience with the Board of Education and strong political connections in the community. She was elected a Sudbury City Councillor in November 2003, and continued to serve as SPC Executive Director on a half-time basis after she assumed municipal office.

Of all the SEII projects sponsored by the SPNO, the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project probably had the strongest most stable organizational host in the Sudbury SPC and its staff leadership. The Sudbury SPC anchored and facilitated Project planning and development with the community's confidence. For this reason, the following application of the Kaplan Capacity-building Framework focuses on the Project itself and its strengths and weaknesses with respect to the Framework's six elements.

The following chart gives an overview assessment applying Alan Kaplan's Capacity Analysis Framework to the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project. Clearly, this assessment shows strength in all six dimensions of the Kaplan framework, which will now be further explored for learning.

Hierarchy of Elements that Build Capacity	Capacity Assessment of the Sudbury <i>Closing the Distance</i> Project
<p>1. <u>Conceptual Framework:</u> <i>The organization's understanding of its world (context).</i></p>	<p>Community leadership in the Project showed an acute understanding of diversity in the Sudbury population, especially with respect to the major population breakdown into Anglophone, Francophone, and Aboriginal communities. Establishing <i>all</i> children as the Project's focus was a critical decision to bring the whole community together on the inclusion issue, and also allowed scope for working with the particular experiences of more vulnerable groups of children. The Project also had no illusions about the major challenge of translating listening to children's voices to action for change in the institutions and systems serving children. There was a deep Project conviction about the need to empower the voices of children in the community.</p>
<p>2. <u>Organizational Attitude:</u> <i>Confidence and responsibility to act in its world rather than be a passive victim of external conditions.</i></p>	<p>In terms of confidence to act positively in its environment, sensitivity to the needs and conditions of its community, and responsibility to its community and the larger initiative of which it was a part, the Sudbury <i>Closing the Distance</i> Project consistently demonstrated a strong organizational attitude. It not only developed a strategy that directly engaged and mobilized the voices of children, but the Project also built support and receptivity for the voices of children with other sectors, institutions and systems in the community.</p>
<p>3. <u>Vision, Strategy & Culture:</u> <i>Sense of purpose and ability to plan, implement and adapt a</i></p>	<p>From the outset, the Sudbury <i>Closing the Distance</i> Project took a careful and deliberate approach to pursuing its vision, acutely assessed its community environment to build community support, showed a capacity to innovate and adapt to conditions and opportunities that presented themselves (e.g. starting its work with children in the summer recreation programs), and effectively used the resources available to implement Project objectives. Further, the Project maintained its strong strategic planning orientation to make progress on sustainability beyond the project period funded by Health</p>

<i>course of action.</i>	Canada.
<p>4. <u>Structures and Procedures:</u> <i>Organized and operationalized in a way that enables fulfilment of purpose, realization of vision, and effectiveness of strategy.</i></p>	<p>As a trusted community organization, the Social Planning Council of Sudbury served a lead organizational role in the Sudbury <i>Closing the Distance</i> Project: convening meetings, hiring and supervising Project staff, managing Project funding, and taking the primary role in coordinating Project activities. The strength of the Project's organization and functioning contributed to its effectiveness in engaging teachers, principals, school boards, and the municipality.</p>
<p>5. <u>Skills and Competencies:</u> <i>Leadership and staff relevant and appropriate to the organization's mission and work.</i></p>	<p>The Sudbury Project performed admirably in terms of leadership, personnel supervision and management, and the quality and effectiveness of staff in the field. The Executive Director of the Sudbury SPC skilfully led an open participatory process to build consensus among many partners on the Project's focus. A Project staff team reflective and knowledgeable of the Francophone and Aboriginal communities was recruited and smoothly adjusted between Phases 1 and 2 in order to ensure the appropriate skill base for changing Project tasks. Other community groups assigned some staff time to the initiative reinforcing and complementing the Project human resource skill base.</p>
<p>6. <u>Resources:</u> <i>Financial means and physical assets.</i></p>	<p>The stability of the Sudbury SPC enabled it to provide consistently strong administrative support to the Project throughout and to focus staff energies on achieving the Project objectives, which included successfully securing external sustaining funding support for the next two years.</p>

Conceptual Framework

Summary:

Community leadership in the Project showed an acute understanding of diversity in the Sudbury population, especially with respect to the major population breakdown into Anglophone, Francophone, and Aboriginal communities. Establishing *all* children as the Project's focus was a critical decision to bring the whole community together on the inclusion issue, and also allowed scope for working with the particular experiences of more vulnerable groups of children. The Project also had no illusions about the major challenge of translating listening to children's voices to action for change in the institutions and systems serving children. There was a deep Project conviction about the need to empower the voices of children in the community.

Discussion:

The Sudbury Project found a focus relatively early, in the preparation stage prior to Phase 1 funding approval, and has adhered closely to this focus throughout. The community leadership defined the priority population for the Project broadly as "children". Applying the notion of social and economic inclusion broadly in this way as opposed to a narrow, targeted population group was an important decision. By selecting a broad general priority population by age group (children and youth) rather than by "disadvantage" (poor children, homeless youth) or "deficiency" (disabled children, emotionally disturbed youth), the Sudbury Project created space for inclusion of *all* children and young people in the local initiative.

Fairly early on in the process, the Sudbury leadership group also showed a strong understanding of the "inclusion" issue as one of "closing the distance" in several compelling ways. First, the leadership recognized that a focus on children had great potential to bring community leaders and groups that were distanced from each other together in common cause. Notes from a planning meeting in September 2002 state that "*all groups have children – it is a connector between groups.*" Regardless of an individual's or group's position or situation in the community, everyone wishes the best for their children and can see shared benefit in working together with others to improve the future of all children.

Secondly, there was a clear appreciation of how children were distanced from the decision-making structures and processes that defined and controlled their environments. The narrative for the mural created at the Community Visioning session in November 2002 indicates that all children tend to be ignored when it comes to deciding how things in which they have direct stake are run:

"For all children and youth we notice that they inherit the impact of the practices of exclusion and distancing of the adult world around them. The dominant social views of adults around them have a direct impact on their lives."

The emotional experience of their early years becomes their identity. When children are immersed in experiences of judgment, tension, anger, and conflict, it is translated into an essential part of their identity and they become the problem.

The experience of not feeling listened to, leads to the attempt to be heard by any means possible. This often leads to behaviour that further isolates them."

Therefore, "closing the distance" between children and adults in positions of authority and control in neighbourhoods and schools became a clear and consistent goal of the Sudbury Project from the outset.

Finally, although broadly focused on all children, the Sudbury Project was able to identify and work intensively on several particularly vulnerable major segments of this age group in the community: Francophone and Aboriginal children and youth. Further, the Project's work in one local school focused on the particular struggles of creating an inclusive environment for immigrant children and youth. Therefore, as well as "closing the distance" between young people and adults, the Project has also worked on closing the distances among children and youth themselves in terms of promoting dialogue, understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for their peers from different backgrounds and origins.

Therefore, in terms of understanding the context within which it was working, the critical community relationships that it would have to address itself to, and how its notion of inclusion applied to this environment, the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project shows clarity and strength in the conceptual framework element of Kaplan's capacity-building framework.

Organizational Attitude

Summary:

In terms of confidence to act positively in its environment, sensitivity to the needs and conditions of its community, and responsibility to its community and the larger initiative of which it was a part, the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project consistently demonstrated a strong organizational attitude, the second essential element in Kaplan's building capacity framework. It not only developed a strategy that directly engaged and mobilized the voices of children, but the Project also built support or itself and receptivity to the voices of children with other sectors, institutions and systems in the community.

Discussion:

The Community Leadership Group constructed for the Project was and remains strong. By the time it was fully developed, the Leadership Committee included representatives from the health, education, and social service sectors, the

Francophone and Aboriginal communities and municipal and provincial governments. This wide- ranging involvement created the capacity for impact in the community.

Importantly, at the leadership and the activity level, the Project made both “horizontal” or cross-community connections and “vertical” linkages (connections between community groups to policy-making and institutional bodies). Bringing together community organizations concerned about Sudbury’s children created a broad base of community support. Linkages with the municipality, school boards, and other sectoral and institutional resources such as business (Rotary Club), the United Way and Laurentian University (Faculty of Education) gave the initiative further legitimacy and access to influence on policy and practice affecting children in schools and neighbourhoods.

Although confident and positioned to have community impact, sensitivity to local history and conditions is also an important part of organizational attitude. The Sudbury Project could have been seen as usurping or co-opting other community work focusing on children. Early on, the Project declared an interest in building on the work for children already being done in the community. Its first focus was on promoting implementation of the City’s Children’s First Charter. The Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project framed *“the Children’s Charter as the main door opener and pivot for change [to] sell the common dream for the City of Greater Sudbury. . . . a community where all children belong.”* The messages of the Children’s First Charter formed the primary substance of the Sudbury Project in its first outreach efforts. This respect for work already done in the community built local support for the initiative.

As the Project built up its own field experience and information base from working with children in recreation programs and schools, the issues and images generated by children became the main message presented to communities and sectors interested in the Project. Rather than depending on other material to make the case for inclusion for children, the Project has come to use material produced out of its own work with children and teenagers.

Also, related to organizational attitude, the Sudbury Project demonstrated strength in its openness to external support and in its capacity to model for the larger Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative. On the first point, the Sudbury Project welcomed training and strategic planning consultations from the SPNO Central Support Team and used these resources to good effect. For example, one of its community workers developed her own expertise in graphic facilitation from exposure to and use of the SPNO’s graphic arts facilitator locally. In terms of modeling for the larger Project, the SPNO asked the Sudbury Project to make presentations on its experience at several All-Region Workshops. These requests were enthusiastically received and fulfilled well.

The Sudbury Project also worked with SPNO Central Support to develop resource materials for the *Closing the Distance* web site. The Sudbury Project offered its staff expertise also to translate Project materials into French for use in its own community but also for Central Support to use in other parts of the province.

Vision, Strategy and Culture

Summary:

From the outset, the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project took a careful and deliberate approach to pursuing its vision, acutely assessed its community environment to build community support, showed a capacity to innovate and adapt to conditions and opportunities that presented themselves (e.g. starting its work with children in the summer recreation programs), and effectively used the resources available to implement Project objectives. Further, the Project maintained its strong strategic planning orientation to make progress on sustainability beyond the project period funded by Health Canada. On this evidence, the Sudbury Project meets the test of the third element of Kaplan's capacity-building framework.

Discussion:

The Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project has held very true to its vision of creating a city "*where all kids belong*" since its Community Visioning Day in November 2002. This has necessitated careful strategic planning and implementation, which it has done very well.

A project promoting social and economic inclusion must, of course, employ inclusive and open approaches in its own community process. In a wide-open invitation to work on a funded project, identifying a clear focus and "priority population" can be a major challenge for communities in which there are obviously many issues deserving of attention. This challenge was met successfully in Sudbury, although arriving at community consensus for the Project did require a lot of work.

The first roundtable in February 2002 and the follow-up meetings in August and September 2002 to pursue Project development in Sudbury generated many possibilities for a Project focus. Each meeting also identified more organizations and groups that should be invited to participate. As the community participants decided to build on previous community work related to children, the focus became sharpened, and so did the logical group of partners to invite to the Community Visioning session. This was a deliberate and extended discussion over three meetings in the summer-fall of 2002. It hinged, however, on strong meeting facilitation provided by the Executive Director of the Sudbury SPC.

Entering Phase 1, the Sudbury Project was well positioned to identify prospects for engagement in its community mobilization strategy. Several times during Phase 1 the Project leadership addressed itself to groups and sectors for outreach and mobilization. First, in the Community Visioning session participants brainstormed a long list of individuals and groups to take their message to. A broad spectrum of sectors was identified including business leaders, families, children, law enforcement officials, planners, schools and school board leaders, recreation and sports leaders, Francophone community leaders, health practitioners, leaders from the healthy community movement, Native elders, and shelter providers.

The first actual outreach in the December 2002 -January 2003 period was to make presentations to the business community (Rotary Club) and a municipal-community working group (Children's Roundtable). The latter, in particular, was an important strategic move so that the Project's work would be seen and supported as complementary to and not competitive with other community action for Sudbury's children. This was successful, leading to the Public Health Unit's assignment of staff time to the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project, evidence of an effective and productive outreach strategy.

The Project was faced, however, with framing a more specific outreach and community mobilization strategy in preparing its proposal for Phase 2. The workplan identified more specifically which groups and sectors were targeted for mobilization: the four boards of education, neighbourhood associations, parent school councils, City Council and City Departments (specifically, Parks and Recreation), the Sudbury and District Health Unit, the business community, and the general public.

When the Sudbury Project team identified its allies, potential allies, and areas of resistance at the All-Region Workshop in Toronto at the end of Phase 1 in March 2003, there was a lot more detail in its list. More than 35 specific groups were identified. The reality of the Project's challenge in closing the distance for children struck home when the Sudbury Project Team assessed "leading activists" on the list who could help them advance their cause. Several school boards and groups such as "teachers, principals, and parents" were not all necessarily allies and some were identified as generally resistant. Especially since it was the end of the school year, the Project was uncertain about how to make any progress in the local school system.

A mark of the Project's capacity to adapt and plan an alternative course of action was designing a way to test out its approaches in the municipal summer recreation programs and to create a climate for gaining entry to schools in the fall. The key breakthrough for the Project came with the success of the "walk

arounds”, making connection with parents, children, and staff of supervised summer recreation programs. This led to facilitated sessions with children that not only generated stories from children about their concerns and hopes for an inclusive community, but it also set up the media event at the end of the summer. This event attracted wide community interest, including among several school boards. The direct participation of children in this public media event also showed clearly the Project’s commitment to empowering their voices as primary stakeholders.

The Sudbury Project also strategically positioned itself for impact at the systems and policy levels. It is clear that the Project leadership had strong vertical linkages with important institutional authorities. The future Mayor of Sudbury was a participant in the first roundtable and has publicly endorsed and represented the work of the Project since election as Mayor in November 2003; the head of the Sudbury and District Health Council participated in the second roundtable and contributed staff time to Project development; the SPC Executive Director was a former trustee of the Board of Education and was elected as Sudbury City Councillor in November 2003. She also assumed a strong role in presenting the Project to non-community based groups, such as the Principals Meeting of the English Catholic School Board, the United Way’s corporate campaign, the Sudbury Rotary Club, etc.

Strategic positioning between community and policy levels and bridging capacity both horizontally and vertically are important success factors in an initiative that aims to create higher level change out of community experience.

The Project’s sense of purpose is now challenged by follow-up work to help teachers and principals hear and act on the issues identified by children and youth. It is taking on this challenge. First, it plans to follow up with schools and classrooms by summarizing students’ recommendations and helping the children and youth negotiate with their teachers and principals for some of the changes they have identified as important to create more inclusive schools.

Secondly, the Project plans to build a critical mass of experience working with children and youth in more schools so that it can confidently identify areas of change in broad school policy and practice that would create more socially inclusive school environments and programs. These objectives are included in proposals submitted in late 2003, which have successfully secured sustaining funding support for another two-year period.

In terms of long-term sustainability, the plan is to develop the resource capacity within school boards (i.e. materials and trained board personnel) with the aim of institutionalizing recognition and responsiveness to the voices of children and

youth in the school system. This is the Project's ultimate goal for transformative change and influence on healthy public policy and practice.

Structures and Procedures

Summary:

As a trusted community organization, the Social Planning Council of Sudbury served a lead organizational role in the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project: convening meetings, hiring and supervising Project staff, managing Project funding, and taking the primary role in coordinating Project activities. A stable, respected, and competent community organization is clearly an important success factor in “anchoring” a project dependent on outreach and collaboration with many partners.

Discussion:

Collaborations bringing together leadership from many community organizations are challenging structures. Community groups are prepared to confer leadership responsibilities for a shared community initiative on one respected and trusted organization, when they are confident that the organization will fulfill the requirements of project management and coordination (i.e. staff recruitment and supervision, financial accounting and reporting, communications and administration).

This proved to be the case in the Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project. Relieved of the burdens of project management and administration taken on by the Sudbury SPC, community partners could make themselves available for contributions appropriate to their own organizational mandates and skills. They trusted that the Project staff based at the Sudbury SPC would call on them to contribute or participate in project activity appropriately (e.g. decision-making on Project direction) and use what they had to offer well (e.g. use of facilitation skills of local Ontario Healthy Communities staff with school children in classrooms).

A stable, respected, and competent community organization is clearly an important success factor in “anchoring” a project dependent on outreach and collaboration with many partners.

Skills and Competencies

Summary:

On the staff skills and competencies element of the capacity-building framework, the Sudbury Project scores highly in terms of leadership, personnel management and supervision, and the quality and performance of the staff in the field. The Executive Director of the Sudbury SPC skillfully led an open participatory process to build consensus among

many partners on the Project's focus. A Project staff team reflective and knowledgeable of the Francophone and Aboriginal communities was recruited and smoothly adjusted between Phases 1 and 2 in order to ensure the appropriate skill base for changing Project tasks. Other community groups assigned some staff time to the initiative reinforcing and complementing the Project human resource skill base.

Discussion:

The conditions for developing and implementing the Sudbury Project presented some challenges to community cooperation and collaboration, demanding skilled facilitation and management. At the outset, there was an invitation to the community to participate in a Project that would be funded at the level of about \$150,000 for a relatively short time frame of eighteen months. There was no defined focus or priority population designated and local leadership would have to generate that focus and identify the priority population itself. Finally, as a Project on social and economic *inclusion*, the process for Project definition and development was necessarily wide open.

Over the course of the planning meetings in 2002 an open, participatory process involving many players managed to move from a broad list of possibilities to community agreement on a clear focus on children. Such consensus-building and cooperation may be part of Sudbury's community culture, but there is also strong evidence of careful guidance and skilled facilitation through the deliberations by the Executive Director of the Sudbury SPC, who has training and expertise in consensus-building methods from an International organization (National Coalition Building Institute) that teaches a prescribed set of skills for building inclusive communities.

In addition to strong leadership, a successful project needs qualified field staff for effective community mobilization. With a short project timeframe, it is also important that field staff work effectively together and with the Project leader as a team. Although there were internal staff team issues that needed to be managed, the Sudbury Project not only assembled and deployed a strong staff team, it also made a smooth transition between Phases 1 and 2 to a reconstituted team that maintained the Project's very high level of performance.

Three elements explain Sudbury's success with its Project staff team:

- (a) *Appropriate skill base.* The team was made up of workers with strong relationships to their communities and the capacity and skills to do both community education and mobilization. In Phase 1, one team member with strong writing skills and proposal development experience was hired expressly for the purpose of communications and proposal writing for Phase 2, which was a known task for

completion by January 2003. Also, other community groups assigned some staff time to the initiative reinforcing and complementing the Project's human resource skill base.

- (b) *Explicit up-front two-way commitments.* Two team members hired for Phase 1 were hired on the understanding that they were making a commitment only for Phase 1, and that they had particular contributions to make in Phase 1. This created no false expectations with respect to employment in Phase 2 and could only be negotiated to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned at the outset of the Project. In a short-term Project such as this in which the activities for Phase 2 were being planned, the staff requirements through the whole Project period were not fully determined. To assemble a staff team that understood and accepted the need for Project management to have flexibility with respect to personnel over the duration of the initiative was an important achievement.
- (c) *Cultural reflectiveness and sensitivity in staff.* In both Phases 1 and 2, the Sudbury Project staff team included an Aboriginal and a Francophone team member. Given the Project's particular attention to the inclusion of children from these two communities, it was important for its staff to be familiar with the issues and experiences of these communities and to work with children and youth in their own languages (English, French and Ojibway). This opened doors to community cooperation and brought additional benefits to the Project (e.g. translation of materials to French, Native focus groups both on and off reserves).
- (d) *Multiculturalism and leadership training.* Specific training in cultural appropriateness, leadership and basic community development techniques are crucial components when addressing social inclusion. Continuous training in consensus building and conflict resolution received from the National Coalition Building Institute, to which the SPC Executive Director was connected, proved to be a key tool in achieving and maintaining diversity within the Sudbury Project.

Resources

Summary:

The stability of the Sudbury SPC enabled it to provide consistently strong administrative support to the Project throughout and to focus staff energies on achieving the Project objectives, which included securing external sustaining funding support for the next two years.

Discussion:

The Sudbury SPC is a community organization with a stable funding base. It had the organizational infrastructure to take on a project of this scale without

stretching its administrative capacities. It managed the Project funding resourcefully to provide the necessary level of staff support in the field and to produce impressive Project resource materials, such as a colourful pamphlet with visuals and text from focus groups with children as well as a short videotape.

The main financial concern was the sustainability of the initiative, which was resolved for the next two-year period through funding secured from two different sources.

Conclusion

The Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project's major contribution to transformative change is legitimating the voices of children in the community. Starting with its work with children in the summer program, continuing in classrooms in the 2003-04 school year, and being validated by the newly elected Mayor in his Inaugural Address to City Council, the Project has established the expressed thoughts, feelings, and ideas of children and youth as voices of significance in defining the kind of community and City that Sudbury can become.

This achievement originates with the strength of the local leadership's understanding of the place of children and youth in an adult controlled world and its clarity of purpose in giving voice to young people in schools and neighbourhoods. This was the path to closing the distance between children/youth and adults in Sudbury. This purpose and vision was pursued via sound strategic planning to build broad community support and to make important linkages with important local institutions such as the school boards and municipality. It was implemented through a collaborative community leadership anchored by the organizational capacity and staff skills of the Sudbury Social Planning Council. The Sudbury *Closing the Distance* Project was well positioned to continue and to extend its early success as the project-funded period ended.

The Sudbury Project serves as a good model for community capacity-building using Kaplan's capacity-building framework.