

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER



Anti-Poverty
Community
Organizing and
Learning (APCOL)
Conference

June 7 & 8 2011
Toronto

APCOL Conference: Learning from Each Other June 7 & 8 2011

People all across the city are struggling with housing, unemployment, educational access and hunger. Why do some people get involved in neighbourhood groups working for change, and others don't? What do people learn through their involvement – why do some stay involved, and others leave?

For the past two years APCOL community and university researchers have been asking these questions to hundreds of people. On June 7th & 8th we came together with community organizations to begin the work of making sense of the stories and numbers we've gathered so far, and to talk about what this might mean for us as community organizers and neighbourhood activists. Over 130 people from all across the city participated in the conference, and we had a lively two-day session.

Conference Objectives:

- to 'return' the data to the communities where it was generated
- to work through the meaning of the APCOL findings collectively as community/university partners
- to support the development of strategies for moving APCOL findings into action
- to build / strengthen connections between community activists from different neighbourhoods



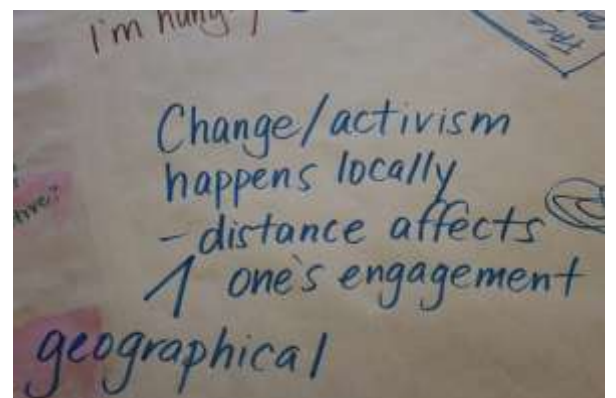
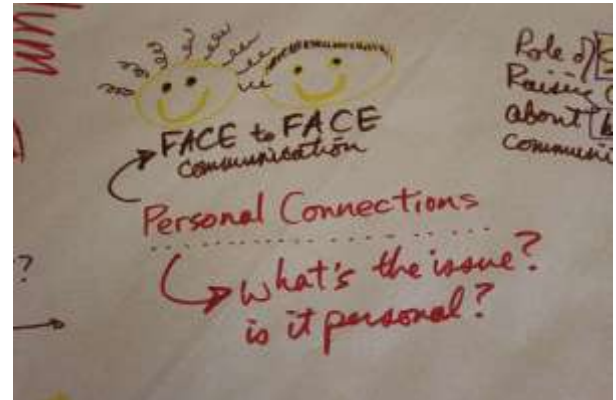
- to build/strengthen personal and institutional connections between the researchers, funders, community groups
- to spotlight community activities, practices, activism, as well as work in other research and community initiatives beyond APCOL
- to learn from each other about the role of popular education and organizing in building and sustaining activism

The conference began with ‘big picture’ discussions about activism in Toronto, led by Deena Ladd (Worker’s Action Centre) and Debbie Field (FoodShare). Both provided important concrete examples from their own experiences – Debbie on her own learning as an activist and Deena on WAC’s current Wage Theft Campaign. To view the video: click [here](#).

APCOL project co-leads Sharon Simpson (Toronto Labour Community Services) and Peter Sawchuk (University of Toronto) outlined the research project. They spoke explained that the APCOL project includes eight neighbourhood-based, intensive year-long case studies as well as two city-wide surveys. As they said, “Together we are researching questions of why and how people become involved (or not) in neighbourhood organizing for social change and what they learn in the process. There is lots of research available on poverty in Canada – our focus is specifically on the experience of *activism* on anti-poverty issues.” For ‘quick facts’ on APCOL click [here](#).

Workshops: Making sense of the research

In our workshops we discussed what survey respondents said about why they got involved in community organizing, how they first came to be involved, where they got involved, what obstacles/barriers they faced during their involvement, and what they learned through their involvement. We also looked at responses from people who say they have never been involved in neighbourhood organizing for social change – and what they say about why they aren’t involved, and what it would take for them to become involved. The workshops were intended as a starting point for thinking through how to connect what survey participants said with the way we do organizing and recruitment. Our approach to the data throughout was:



'What is the research telling us?'; 'So what is significant about this?'; and 'Now what?'. During the workshop we offered a three-part model for sustaining community action: relationship-building, learning from each other, and getting things done. For video clips from the workshop, click [here](#).

The data we looked at in the workshops was based on approximately half of the over 500 in-depth interviews from the survey (for a copy of the conference data worksheets, click [here](#)). We will continue to input the remainder of the survey data over the course of the next few months. The full data set will become available in 2012. However, this preliminary look at the findings proved important for people. Conference participants provided valuable feedback about the research findings, its meaning and the practical implications it has for organizing. For example, there is a keen interest in ensuring the final data is analyzed through an anti-oppression lens (the limited data at this point prevented us from making any meaningful cross-tabulations but this will come later). People noted some surprises in the information as well as some additional support for understanding what they are already doing well and how it can be extended. Participants said that the findings can help community groups make strategic decisions on such things as capacity building, recruitment and engagement of those in their neighbourhood.

We will be continuing the process of community-academic participatory analysis of the data this fall – for more information contact Grace Edward Galabuzzi, Ryerson University who will be leading this collaborative project (email address [here](#)). The full case study data will not be available until 2013; however, reports on the case studies that have been completed are available by clicking [here](#).

Popular Education Workshops

On our 2nd day, conference participants self-selected from the following workshops:

- Behind the Scenes: The Role of Popular Education in the Worker's Action Centre Wage Theft Campaign
- Intro to Popular Education
- Using Storytelling as an Organizing Tool
- Forum Theatre as Social Change
- Food Mapping
- Talking About Nutrition
- Mobilizing the friends that tag along

For workshop descriptions click [here](#); for information on workshop presenters click [here](#).



Workshop participants learn how to use mapping as community organizing tool



Participants engage in strategic planning and problem-solving using forum theatre

Research workshops

- So You Want to Engage Youth in Community-based Research? Lessons from the ACT for Youth Project
- APCOL Making sense of numbers: How to use research data for policymaking and social change
- Making research useful: Understanding our communities better through organizing and research
- Alternative Social Planning: How research is done in the community
- APCOL Community Based Researcher Forum

For workshop descriptions click [here](#).

For contact information for workshop presenters click [here](#).

For comments from participants on the workshops click [here](#).

Our 2013 Conference will include a more substantial focus on research findings and analysis. Our website will provide details of the 2013 conference as it becomes available. To join our mailing list, click [here](#).



Introduction to the spiral model of popular education



Using forum theatre to illustrate tensions and perspectives



Participants in WAC's Wage Theft Campaign Workshop

Panel: How Change Happens

Our final panel included speakers representing a diversity of strategies on how change happens. John Clarke from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, Judy Duncan from ACORN Canada, and Winston Tinglin from Social Planning Toronto offered three ideologically and strategically different approaches to confronting poverty and organizing for social change. John outlined how one's view of government determines strategy, and talked about the importance of disruptive collective action to challenging the status quo – he referred to OCAP's direct action service model (for example fighting evictions, deportations) and talked about OCAP's most recent mobilizing around the Special Diet Allowance, and the Raise the Rates campaign. Judy spoke about ACORN's efforts to create membership strength and leadership development through their door-to-door approach to community organizing – focusing on mobilizing efforts for tenant's rights, for changes to the Landlord Licensing Act, and highlighting Living Wage by-law successes in British Columbia. Winston linked analysis, with strategy, with ability to execute strategy; he spoke about immediate needs to 'ease pressures' on people but the importance of connecting that work with bigger efforts to change a 'stubborn system'. Winston invited participants to become part of the Toronto Working Group on Poverty. To see the video, click [here](#).



Judy Duncan, Winston Tinglin, John Clarke

Conference wrap-up

Winnie Ng, Social Justice Chair at Ryerson University had her ear close to the ground throughout the conference, and provided an important wrap-up to the conference. Winnie stressed the need for on-going partnership between university and community activists and again highlighted the importance of fully integrating an anti-oppression lens into the on-going analysis of APCOL research. Winnie closed by noting that the active participation of people from neighbourhoods across the city in a full two days of participatory and lively sessions had indeed been more useful than a standard written mid-term report!



Thank you!

To our APCOL Steering Committee, Conference Planning Committee, workshop facilitators, MCs, volunteers, childcare providers, FoodShare staff and volunteers, Dufferin Grove staff, Union Pride Canada, and all those who came out and participated and helped make the conference meaningful and worthwhile.

Contact list:

Worker's Action Centre:

www.workersactioncentre.org

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty www.ocap.ca

Catalyst Centre "One-Stop Pop-Ed Shop Worker Co-op" www.catalystcentre.ca

Social Planning

Toronto www.socialplanningtoronto.org

Social Justice, Sam Gindin Chair, Ryerson University www.ryerson.ca/socialjustice

APCOL www.apcol.org

FoodShare www.foodshare.net

Art of hosting www.artofhosting.org

St. Jamestown Youth www.st.jamestownyouth.com

ACTfor Youth York University
www.yorku.ca/act/people

Dufferin Grove Park www.dufferinpark.ca

Digital StoryTelling www.storycentre.wordpress.com

Branch Out Theatre

Company: <http://sites.google.com/site/branchouttheatreworkshops/>



Our loom represents the inter-connection of our neighbourhoods, our struggles, and our commitment to social change, in the areas of housing, jobs, food security, health, education and childcare.



Our bodies and our minds at work!



Now What? APCOL Co-lead Peter Sawchuk outlines next steps for the project.