

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to contribute to both the growing body of Community Economic Development (CED) case research and to the application of this research in communities. In this regard, I address the following questions in the context of the experiences of Work Alive: What CED approach was taken?; What has this approach produced or accomplished to date?; What are the lessons learned or experiences gained?; and What approach might be taken in the future?

CED is characterised by: a community's desire to control economic development initiatives to maintain a higher degree of self-determination and self-reliance; a focus on service sectors or several sectors; an increased emphasis on "the community"; a reduced emphasis on growth; long-term attainment of economic and non-economic (social) goals; and roots in community development. Seasons (1989, 278-280) explains that CED and community development are inextricably linked since "*Economic development cannot proceed without recognition of community values and quality of life expectations*" (278) and "*...community development will always depend on the contribution of the economic base to community vitality*" (278).

CED is not a new concept. In fact, it has been in existence in many forms for many years to overcome factors beyond a community's control; CED originates when a community experiences "*external pressures undermining the foundations of community life*" (Nozick 1994, 74); and "*CED seeks to change the structure of the community and build permanent institutions within a community. As a result, the community begins to*

play a more active role vis-à-vis the institutions outside the community, and the residents of the community become more active in the control of the community's resources" (Nutter and McKnight 1994, 95).

A CED program often has a multi-functional approach that includes: *"equity investment; lending accompanied by technical assistance to borrowers; human resource development; and research, planning, advising and advocacy services"* (Perry and Lewis 1994, 193). Strategies also include a social component that adds value to, or helps to develop, a community. A social component may include: long-term jobs for un- or under-employed persons; training for marketable skills; cultural opportunities for community residents; and goods or services that a community needs. Community action is usually spurred by a key individual (or group) who is visionary and possesses strong leadership skills that catalyses community action.

Key factors of successful CED programs can be summarised as the following: process (a formal planning structure that includes vision, goals, objectives, evaluation and feedback); targeting self-sustainability; successful visioning; inclusion of community members, development of energy and enthusiasm in the community; establishing information networks; and networking with other organisations (CED and others).

From the goals, strategies, objectives, models and key success factors, two broad concepts emerge--community and comprehensiveness. Community definition affects the type of approach applied and the success of the approach. CED tends to use a more "interest" based definition, tends to emphasise *"...bringing disadvantaged groups into the*

economic mainstream..." (Ontario 1992, iv) and stresses the "*need for collaboration, equal representation and "people-initiated" strategies*" (iv). Comprehensiveness is described as being crucial to the success of an economic development strategy because of the interconnectivity of all the activities in a community. For similar reasons, a development strategy must maintain an ecosystem perspective to be successful. Also, many writers recommend a planned approach to developing a comprehensive strategy. Therefore, there are two types of comprehensiveness: economic components and social/environmental components of a program.

Work Alive is a community economic development organisation established in Kingston in 1994. The purpose or goal for the project was to "*facilitate community awareness of the principles of CED and to educate and support the development of small business and co-operatives that adhere to CED principles in North Kingston*" (Ontario 1995a, 3). Their expressed objectives included: to increase outreach and education around co-operatives and small business; to increase opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures and employment; to increase knowledge and opportunities for "alternative" economic activities; and to strengthen community confidence, self-esteem, and group work.

In six months, the project helped a number of people with business advice, information, resources and networking. They also helped people "*define possibilities*" and nurture creativity (Work Alive 1995a, 1). Tangibly, the project: changed its name to "Work Alive;" defined a "*basic framework and aims;*" developed "*the organization's information support system,*" logos, letterhead, slogans and communication materials (2).

Over time, further achievements included: counselling for individuals who phoned or came by the office; networking with other community groups; organising a conference that presented alternative methods of working and living; presenting “Wizzard of Work” to a grade one class; funding peer group lending training for the CED co-ordinator and a community member; conducting an auction with donated office furniture and computers; securing funding for a peer group lending program; and launching of a peer group lending program.

Work Alive’s mission, objectives and strategies clearly denote an economic development program that is focused on community-driven job creation. Comparing Work Alive with community-based approaches to economic development, it is apparent that their goals are similar to those in the CED literature. Work Alive’s strategies are also similar to CED strategies since their strategies focus on marginalised groups, finance and support for entrepreneurs, community confidence and others. However, the similarities end when the process of CED is considered.

In an analysis of successful CED cases, Douglas (1993, 19; also Perry and Lewis 1994, 197) identified a visionary leader that emerges from within the community as a key to a successful CED process. In North Kingston, the ‘visionary’ leader was recruited from outside the community (geographic and interest) and his dedication was limited to the length of his contract.

Similar to other CED programs, Work Alive established long term goals and objectives and some mid-term strategies. However, when it came to short term strategies

and actions, Work Alive only developed one concrete action plan and its use was short-lived. This lack of planning made it easier for them to react to and become preoccupied with issues such as finances and guideline development at the cost of community organising and recruiting.

Work Alive had a confusing definition of “community.” First, they defined their “community” as North Kingston, a depressed and marginalised community with some problems that will not be solved with simple strategies. Yet, community involvement in Work Alive was severely limited in terms of participation by people with low incomes who live in North Kingston. Instead, North Kingston’s low income community of interest was presumed to be represented by community-based social agencies that served them. Following Douglas, it is clear that Work Alive may have planned “...*in the community...*” and “...*for the community,*” [(original emphasis) Douglas 1994, xxiii] but, in terms of North Kingston’s socio-economic data their plans did not come “...*from the community...*” and were not “... *undertaken by the community...*”(xxiii).

If Work Alive wishes to pursue their original goals and objective, I would recommend that they:

1. recognise their role as a CED program within a broader community development model. This would enhance their community definition and acknowledge the diversity and interdependence of that community;
2. focus on the community and plan or devise a strategy to mobilise and involve people from North Kingston;

3. recognise the need for a planned approach to CED and apply it, rather than rejecting it as too “corporate” or “traditional.” This may help Work Alive achieve more of their objectives and clear hurdles such as: defining visions and missions, forming guidelines, developing strategy, etc., without losing focus on goals that they considered important. Combined with the preceding recommendation, the mission, guidelines, etc., could be shaped with more community involvement.
4. have a person on staff who is familiar with CED literature, has well developed administrative and technological skills, and is an experienced fund-raiser.