

APCOL Push Back, Move Forward! Conference Report

Prepared by Katheryne Schulz, November 28, 2013

What is the Anti-Poverty Community Organising and Learning research project?

The APCOL project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for

alliances and strengthening low-income neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods need to develop a critical, collective ability to negotiate with each other as part of their local capacity building.

2) Disseminate the results of the APCOL survey by providing information on our survey findings to all participants through a research handout included in the conference package and detail with our Primary Investigator, Grace Edward Galabuzi.

3) Invite experienced community organisers as keynote speakers and panellists to share their knowledge with participants.

4) Provide a collective space for community activists and students to come together to reflect on their work and to connect with one another.

5) Organise participatory workshops for community members and students to share and improve their community development skills.

6) Recognise community researchers for their contribution to the project.

Conference Design

Planning

Planning for the conference began in May 2011 and the first step was to assemble a conference planning team and identify a conference coordinator. The conference coordinator worked with the planning team to produce a conference plan including the venue, the budget, a timeline, identifying speakers and recruiting project teams. In addition to the planning team, there were three other conference teams:

1. Training team
2. 11 Workshop Facilitation teams
3. Conference Volunteer team

*See Appendix 1 for a list of conference teams and their members.
See Appendix 2 for a list of conference speakers.*

Facilitation training

A one day training session for workshop facilitators was held on September 14, 2013 at the

Conference program

The conference committee wanted a balance of speakers, interactive plenaries and workshops. To this end, the conference opened with a key note speech by Uzma Shakir, Director of the Office of Equity, Diversity & Human Rights, City of Toronto. In her address, Ms. Shakir -poverty policy and encouraged participants to become active in City issues.

Ms. Shakir was followed by Naomi Tessler and the KGO Spoken Forum Collective who presented an interactive theatre performance on housing issues. It was a lively performance with strong audience participation. The Spoken Forum Collective was organised with the support of APCOL as part of its arts-based research initiative and includes resident actors from the Kingston Galloway neighbourhood.

The following morning, the opening plenary featured a key note speech by Nina Wilson, one of the original founders of Idle No More. Ms. Wilson explained to conference participants how Idle No More began, some of the challenges she has confronted as a community organizer and the key environmental and political concerns facing Aboriginal communities in Canada today.

Participants then attended the morning workshops of their choice. They reunited at noon for lunch and to witness the recognition awards for APCOL community researchers who were instrumental in making the project a success.

Community groups presented the remaining five Popular Education workshops. These sessions focused on strengthening neighbourhood coalitions and organisations, and improving organising and media skills.

See Appendix 3 for the APCOL Survey Research Handout

See Appendix 4 for the Workshop Program

Closing plenary

Keisa Campbell, Manager, Neighbourhoods and Community Investment at the United Way of Greater Toronto acted as the conference reporter. She told conference participants that the workshops generated a great deal of dialogue about how to initiate change in local neighbourhoods, and she highlighted the challenges people face including the lack of resources and appropriate supports for local activists, and the need for more opportunities for activists to connect across neighbourhoods to share their experiences.

Financial summary

See Appendix 5 for the Conference Budget

Evaluation, follow-up and dissemination

Anonymous participant evaluations of the conference were overwhelmingly favourable with the speech by Nina Wilson and the interactive theatre performance named as plenary session highlights. There were f
participants and its content. Some participants also noted that the issues discussed in the
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5. Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, University of Toronto
6. Gabrielle de Montmollin, University of Toronto
7. Ushnish Sengupta, University of Toronto
8. Miranda Saroli, York University
9. Hani Ali, TCDI
10. Sarah De Gasperis, University of Toronto
11. Agnes Thomas, University of Toronto
12. Gita Madden, University of Toronto
13. Aryan Esgandanian, TCDI
14. Jaycel Murphy, George Brown College

Appendix 2 Conference Speakers

1. MCs Professor Peter Sawchuk, University of Toronto and Sharon Simpson, Labour Community Services.