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DISCUSSION PAPER –

STORYTELLING IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS

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**The Storied Organization: Communicating Value, Inviting Caring,
Celebrating Success**

“...Wendy, the youth worker, was surrounded by a passel of enthusiastic street-engaged youth, and no mentors. Part of the deal was that we would feed the youth each evening, and so Wendy did that. All the kids were grateful for the food, and one said that this was the first time in two years she had sat down to a real dinner. That first night Wendy told the youth stories about Tuck, in whose honour the mural was constructed.

But for the first few nights there were no mentors. So the first night Wendy had the youth do drawings on paper. The second night she had them prime the wall. The third night, Big Bob, a friend of Tuck’s, came and told more stories and everyone painted the wall blue, from floor to ceiling. On night four, everyone worked on their paper drawings.

Week two and things perked up. Gerhard arrived, a laidback sweet tempered old hippie type who specialized in clouds and trees and mist. He showed the youth how to do amazing things with a palate of white and blue and purple. Softly, softly he instructed the youth, all the while sharing his memories of friendship with Tuck.

We applauded the arrival of John the mountain man, literally the mountain man, the artist who created the mountains. His trade secret, shared with the youth, was polyfilla, and there I was at 9 pm out in the dark on my scooter trying to find more polyfilla for more mountains. I cleaned out the 24 hour pharmacy on Davie Street and scooted back, for the first time feeling that I had a contribution to make.

The next night Jerry turned up, accompanied by his three youngsters who discovered pingpong and played their hearts out while their dad drew the circle of dancers. Then we were off and running. Some nights there wasn’t room to move, as 10 or 12 youth shared the 22 foot by 11 foot wall space with the four mentors. Some kids stood on chairs, some lay on the floor, others reached and leaned and stretched as they all attempted to fit their art into available space. From a distance it looked like some strange many-armed creature sprawled across the wall, spewing paints of many colours.

The project was supposed to last two weeks; it went three, and as I said, it’s still not finished.....”¹

¹ Project Report “Tuck Reid Memorial Mural” The Gathering Place Community Centre. October 1999

Why Tell Stories?

“Stories make us more alive, more human, more courageous, more loving. Why does anybody tell a story? It does indeed have something to do with faith, faith that the universe has meaning, that our little human lives are not irrelevant, that what we choose or say or do matters, matters cosmically.”

Madeleine L'Engle, author, The Writer (June 2002)

Canada's voluntary sector is made up of hundreds of thousands of charities, societies and informal associations, millions of paid staff and volunteers, and billions of dollars. But these numbers have little meaning without looking beyond them to what they really represent and what really matters – their relevance and value to the lives of every Canadian. However, in “a call to alms” a special report on the new face of charities in Canada, journalist André Picard notes that “Canadians lack basic knowledge about the voluntary sector and the role it plays in delivering the services and reflecting the values that define us as a nation.”

Whether they have attended university or treatment centres, symphonies or soup kitchens, toddler playgrounds or lawn bowling, all Canadians have been beneficiaries of voluntary sector organizations. And voluntary sector organizations are integral to healthy and sustainable communities, and to building civil society locally and globally. Yet, individually and collectively, their value is not widely recognized and their potential often unmet, because the multitude of diverse and compelling stories are seldom told, well told, or reaching the right people. Compounding this is the challenge of accessing mainstream media to reach a broader audience and to present alternatives to the typical news, op-ed and lifestyle content dominating much of the major press.

“Certainly the complexity and diversity of the sector, which is its greatest strength, is paradoxically its greatest weakness when it comes to telling a unified story. Certainly the higher values that the sector speaks to – citizen participation, the three pillars of society, the common good – are terribly abstract and of scant general interest.”

-Bronwyn Drainie, in a paper prepared for the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's 2001 Symposium “Telling Our Story: Communicating the Value of Philanthropy and the Voluntary Sector”.

Understanding the value of stories and learning how and where to effectively tell them should be a critical component of a voluntary sector organization's culture and its communications activities. Stories can illustrate concepts, explain data, inform policy makers, raise public awareness, and inspire donors and volunteers by providing context and meaning that people can understand, relate to, and remember. And this applies across cultures, classes, ages, and media, whether conveyed through video, websites, workshops, speeches, print, reports, meetings, or casual conversations.

“In a word, storytelling will add feeling to our written, and verbal communications. Telling the stories of the people (or animals) your work supports will engage readers more effectively than any list of statistics or facts ever could. A well-told story will allow the reader to use her imagination, will draw on her emotions, and will likely be remembered.”

-IMPACS eCatalyst newsletter May 2001

As an artform, storytelling is enjoying a resurgence in popularity, with guilds, performances, workshops, websites and associations. This “rediscovery” of the value of stories in our lives has more recently been extended beyond art and literature, to its application to leadership and management roles, and in family and organizational settings.

But many organizations do not understand the power of storytelling, or feel they have the skills or resources to employ storytelling effectively. They don’t know where to find their stories or which are the important ones to tell. Or they don’t understand how to reach their key audiences, and how to use their stories to effectively relate important information, experience and knowledge about their organization, the issues it addresses, or the community it serves.

In recent years, funders and donors have increasingly emphasized evaluation and accountability in the organizations they support. Voluntary sector organizations have generally responded by undertaking organization, program and project evaluation activities. And while support has often been provided to assist organizations in their evaluation efforts, there has been little focus on conveying the stories that are behind the evaluations. Dissemination of evaluation results has often not been undertaken, not reached relevant audiences, or not been communicated in an appropriate or meaningful way. Yet the organizations have never had a shortage of compelling stories to draw upon – they have just not often used them or been expected to use them in their reports, evaluations and other communications.

In describing a “Vision of Evaluation That Strengthens Democracy”, evaluation expert Michael Quinn Patton notes “Much of the evaluation these days (logic models, theories of action, outcomes evaluation) is driven by the need and desire to simplify and bring order to chaos.” Patton refers to the approach of Saville Kushner, who, in contrast, “embraces chaos and complexity because democracy is complex and chaotic. He challenges the facile perspectives and bureaucratic imperatives that dominate much of current institutionally-based evaluation practice. Over and over he returns to the people, to the children and teachers and parents, and the realities of their lives in program settings as they experience those realities.”²

Just as some people are natural storytellers, some organizations have instinctively used storytelling to great effect. But to realize the full potential of storytelling and the role it can play in its communications activities, an organization must be intentional in its approach. It must consider the purposes for telling stories, the different kinds of stories and how to capture and collect them, different audiences and the media to reach them, the elements of a good story and how tell it effectively, and the ethics and values involved in telling stories. It must develop a climate and culture where storytelling is recognized as an important and legitimate activity, and it must integrate it into its planning and practices. In short, it must become a *storied organization*.

²Patton, Michael Quinn. Keynote speech to the European Evaluation Society meeting, Switzerland

What are the stories? *Types of stories, purpose for telling them*

In the voluntary sector, stories can be used to: build awareness, educate, explain, guide or advise, give meaning, bear witness, provide hope, build team or community, influence, inspire, and motivate. The purpose for telling it, and the audience it seeks to reach, will largely determine what story to tell, and the medium through which to tell it. But in all cases, storytelling is used to add and evoke feeling, and to make the information or concept understandable and memorable.

In every organization there are several levels of stories to tell:

- the organization's own story – its vision, history, accomplishments, relationships;
- the issues or interests it addresses, the context, and environment – the bigger picture or sub-sector that it is a part of;
- the individuals involved – the people it serves, its volunteers, Board of Directors and staff

Different levels and types of stories may be told in combination to provide context, reinforce messages, or complete the picture, but many will also stand alone. Good communications planning will prioritize the purposes, consider the audiences and identify the appropriate media, as well as take into account new opportunities that may arise. In integrating storytelling into a communications plan, consider that:

- Reports of results from studies, consultations or evaluations tend to be one dimensional in their presentation, until they are brought to life with stories about what the information means at the level of real people. "It's a fact that statistics and facts are more likely to be remembered accurately when they are read in the context of a story. Stories remove the threat and guilt that some facts might otherwise leave the reader feeling. Good stories provide information to the reader in a way that she can relate to and accept."³
- In teaching, training, or professional development situations, stories are an effective tool, because they are easier to relate to than concepts or theories, and thus easier to learn from, and to remember. This is particularly true of adult learners, where interaction and relevance is critical to maintaining interest and retaining information.
- In an increasingly competitive environment, organizations seeking financial support must know how to tell their story in a compelling way that reaches the funders' head *and* heart; their proposal needs to not just make sense, but it must evoke an emotional response as to *why* someone would want to support it. It must connect with the reader, convince them of the difference it will make, and compel them to want to support it. A recent publication, "Storytelling for Grantseekers"⁴ frames the grant application as a narrative, addressing character and place, building tension and conflict, and moving to resolution.

³ IMPACS eCatalyst Newsletter May 2001

⁴ Clarke, Cheryl A. Storytelling For Grantseekers: The Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising, John Wiley and Sons, 2001.

- Beyond the initial funding support, the dissemination of stories of successful initiatives is also a priority for the storied organization. Foundations, as well as many other funders, tell their story through the grants they make, and so they often encourage, support, or even require opportunities for grant recipients to share their experiences in the media, at events or by publication.
- Individual donors also want to know that their support is making a difference, and exposing them to the stories of the people on the receiving end of their donations makes a powerful connection that can be made in few other ways.
- Personal stories, particularly those profiled in the media, have tremendous power to raise awareness and expose people to information or issues. In the non-public arena, support groups and other mutual aid programs also find stories effective in giving people hope, and a sense of not feeling alone with their problem or concern.
- Stories are also valuable tools in opening the door to addressing difficult or controversial issues. When clients, consumers, managers, bureaucrats, corporate executives, academics, politicians, and other “stakeholders” remove their labels and tell their personal stories and not recite their professional lines, a different kind of dialogue starts to take place, and a different message can be heard.

These are just a few of the purposes for storytelling - the storied organization will find many more.

Janice Eisenhower is Co-Founder of Women for Women in Afghanistan, a grass-roots network of nine chapters and affiliate groups dedicated to supporting the empowerment of Afghan women and girls by bringing their voices to the Canadian public. The organization was started as a result of stories: journalist Sally Armstrong’s article “Veiled Threat” in Homemakers magazine, and author Deborah Ellis’ writings and presentations. Now in operation for five years, Janice finds that the stories of Afghan women are critical to raising awareness and inspiring action among Canadian women. But also important are the Canadian stories of the action people are taking in response: the potluck dinners put on by junior high school students to raise funds for educating Afghan girls; the mother/daughter book club inspired by Deborah Ellis’ books and readings. The stories arrive everyday, unsolicited, and not only provide concrete examples of what individuals are doing to make a difference, but, like the stories of Afghan women, provide on-going inspiration to the organization. Recently, W4Wafghan was asked to document its organizational story for a recently published book, Canada and September 11: Impact and Response. Janice found it was a valuable exercise that not only captured their history and development as an organization, but that it was also a rewarding and empowering experience to have the organization’s own voice heard at a different level, by a different audience. “We’ve had very little exposure – it’s difficult for those of us involved in peace building, especially from a grassroots level, to get through to the traditional media. Many people are frustrated when they find out we’ve been around for five years while they’ve been wondering ‘what can I do’. Our sharing the stories provides inspiration and practical avenues for them to take action.”

Where are the stories? *Capturing and collecting and keeping stories*

“Better the rudest work that tells a story or records a fact, than the richest without meaning.”

-John Ruskin

Unfortunately, many of the best, most effective stories rest in individual's heads, and not in the organization's consciousness or file cabinets. The storied organization makes a deliberate, continuous effort to capture and collect stories at all levels. It keeps an historical record of why and how the organization started, who was involved, and how it developed and evolved over time. It maintains an archive of program reports, evaluations, publications (such as newsletters and annual reports), press clippings and support letters, and it collects photos of its people and activities. But it doesn't only rely on paper and files for its stories, it actively solicits them by inviting its staff, volunteers and the people it serves to share their stories, both formally and informally. Through one-on-one interviews, requests for letters, focus groups, survey comments, and staff and board discussions, it captures anecdotes, testimonials, examples and “snapshots” about the value of the organization, what it means to people at a personal level, and the difference it has made. It trains its staff to listen for stories, and to use appropriate approaches, such as *Appreciative Interviewing* (see below), to engage people in thoughtful conversation to bring out their story. And it collects these stories in a format that can be shared among staff and volunteers, and easily accessed for use with different audiences and through various media.

At all times, consideration must be given to the ethical aspects of capturing, collecting and disseminating stories. Permission must be obtained to tell someone's story; they must be advised how it will be used, and, for those who may be in a vulnerable position, the organization must take into account that the individual may not be aware of all of the potential implications of such exposure. Issues of privacy, confidentiality, security, and respect must be paramount. While the use of names to attribute the story to real people is important to the credibility of the story, there may be times to compromise and use only initials, or pseudonyms, to protect privacy or for security reasons. Telling someone's story must never exploit them.

Lois Peterson teaches writing and does fund development for the Surrey Public Library. She realized that the Library puts out lots of communication materials, but in it, seldom talks about the people who use the library. She has started collecting stories by interviewing library patrons identified by front-line staff. Her goal is to incorporate stories into every piece of promotional material that the library produces. She hopes that by profiling the people who use the library and how they use it, people will realize that today's library is not just about borrowing books. Lois has found that most people don't want to be interviewed with a tape recorder, and so she takes extensive notes that she writes up within the next 12 hours. She also writes out her own impressions, often as soon as she returns to her car. Although Lois always starts her interviews with four or five set questions, she always ends by asking “What did you expect me to ask you that I didn't ask?” She concludes “that's how a lot of the really wonderful nuggets come out.”

Appreciative Interviewing is a component of Appreciative Inquiry, an organizational development and social change tool that uses an asset-based approach. The process of appreciative interviewing involves the interviewer asking open-ended questions that help to frame and guide the discussion around issues relevant and important to the organization. It aims to elicit experiences, hopes, and possibilities that build on individual and organizational assets, using such questions as “Tell me about a time when...”

Who should tell the story?

“To be a person is to have a story to tell.”

-Isak Dinesen

In the storied organization, everyone is a storyteller. When an organization develops a storytelling culture, its people understand that they all have their own stories to share, and that there are times when it is appropriate for them to share the stories of others. Who should tell the story will depend on several things: What is the purpose for telling the story? Whose story is it? Who is the audience? What is the medium?

The organization’s leadership must be equipped to tell all levels of stories, and to incorporate it into their communications with media, policy makers, staff and volunteers, donors and supporters, partner organizations and publics. They must recognize and act on opportunities: formal and informal, written and verbal. And they must understand the role of storytelling in effective leadership, but also ensure that others, too, are allowed and encouraged to tell stories.

The story will ideally be told by its “author”, and when this is clients or consumers, or volunteers, their voice will be allowed to be heard without censor. Sometimes, space limitations, the format of the medium, or the vulnerability of the author will require that the story be revised or edited. However, in doing so, it is critical that their voice still be heard and their point-of-view maintained. This also applies to situations where people are telling someone else’s story. Although another teller will not be speaking in the first person, and may have a different style, they can still capture the essence of the story, and convey it in a way that is true to the story and its author.

Many people will be happy to tell their story in print, but terrified at the prospect of speaking in person, particularly to an audience of strangers. Others will be pleased to be recognized, or have the opportunity to be heard. But whether in print or in person, the storyteller should be offered support and encouragement, information about the event or publication, helpful hints, and the opportunity to change their mind, if they so choose.

One of the first grants made by Vancouver Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council was to the Downtown South Gathering Place for a project to have street-engaged youth mentored by professional mural artists to create a wall mural on the Gathering Place's cafeteria wall. When the mural was unveiled, Youth Philanthropy Council members were invited to attend and to meet the artists and mentors and hear their stories first hand. The story of the project and its participants was also written as a report to the Foundation. Because it so effectively conveyed the value of the project and the difference it made to the participants, the report was widely circulated among Vancouver Foundation staff and Board members, and was also highlighted in the Foundation's annual report. When Youth Philanthropy Council members are asked about the grants that they make, usually the first one they mention is the Gathering Place Mural Project. And when they talk about it, they tell the story not only of the grant they made, but also the story of Tuck, the First Nations mural artist who had the vision to help street kids by teaching them the skills of mural painting. And how Tuck died, but his vision lived on, and was made real by the people of the Gathering Place. And how they met Tuck's mother when they went to see the finished mural, and how proud she was of Tuck, and of his friends who made it happen, and of all the youth who painted the mural. It's a story that the Council members love to tell, "because it helps other people understand what we do, and it reminds us that our support is helping to make a difference."

When and where should stories be told?

***"The head does not hear until the heart has listened. Stories open up the heart so the head can hear."*⁵**

Tell stories whenever and wherever you can tell them! The storied organization uses the 3 foot and 12 storey rules: whenever anyone gets within 3 feet of you, tell them a compelling story about your organization, and not only get your point across in the time it takes to go up 12 storeys in an elevator, but do it in a way that has them asking for more!

Of course there are many other times and places to tell stories, but the key point is to take advantage of opportunities, and do so in the most appropriate and effective way possible. Stories should be told when your organization has an opportunity to:

- Reach the general public, or specific individuals or groups.
- Apply or report to funders, donors, or other supporters.
- Participate in evaluation activities.
- Train or orient staff, board members, other volunteers.
- Educate and influence policymakers.
- Start a dialogue on a difficult subject.
- Speak to or through the media.
- Announce new initiatives, celebrate success, recognize supporters, honour the people it serves.

⁵ Calvi, Italo. Lecture notes: Module 1, McGill-McConnell Masters of Management Program for National Voluntary Sector Leaders, 2001.

The storied organization will use a variety of “locations” in acting on these opportunities. Internally, in working with staff, volunteers, Board and clients or consumers, it may use meetings, training or planning sessions, e-mail and list-serves. Some organizations set aside time for story-sharing at every staff or board meeting as a way to ensure that everyone knows the organization’s stories, to learn new stories, and to encourage a storytelling culture.

Externally, it will use print and electronic publications, presentations, displays, the media, training events, and, possibly, artistic approaches such as theatre, dance, song, poetry, photography or film:

- Publications: annual reports, newsletters, promotional brochures, direct mail, website; also, “piggybacking” in publications of partner organizations or other supporters.
- Presentations: annual meetings, public meetings, speeches to specific audiences, such as service clubs, policy makers, conferences.
- Displays: public spaces such as malls, businesses, exhibitions; or at specific events planned by the organization, partner organizations or other supporters.
- Media (radio, television, print) - interviews, press releases, press conferences, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photos, video.
- Education and training: print materials, video, instructors’/facilitators’ and participants’ verbal stories.
- Artistic performances/displays: at specially planned events, or incorporated into regular activities, such as annual meetings or donor recognition events.

When an organization is new and it doesn’t yet have many of its own stories, it can look to telling relevant stories of partner organizations, and stories about the issues or sub-sector it is involved in. However, in doing so, and in any other “piggybacking” situation where you are using other organizations’ stories, publications, venues, etc., it’s always appropriate to seek permission, be respectful, and provide recognition and acknowledgement, as any good “guest” should.

The media, as both audience and medium, presents special challenges, as the organization usually must give up control over many elements of the story. The potential to be misquoted, have comments taken out of context or important parts of the story not included is very real. Particular care must be exercised when vulnerable individuals tell their stories through the media to ensure that the immediate experience and longer term effects are not harmful in any way.

Community Foundations of Canada is a national membership organization of over 120 community foundations. It recognizes the importance of using stories, and incorporates them into its professional development activities, website, conferences, annual reports and newsletters. Member organizations are encouraged to contribute stories about their activities for use in regular communication tools, and stories are also collected when specific opportunities arise. This can include responding to requests from “trade” and general interest media, but also promoting specific stories or themes to targeted print or broadcast media. An interactive session sharing “Great Grant Stories” is a staple at CFC’s national

conferences, and the most recent conference included a “how-to” session called “Telling Our Stories”. “Explorations”, the publication that articulates the “Principles for Community Foundations”, includes short, descriptive stories of how different community foundations bring the principles to life. A new companion document, “Discoveries”, expands upon the theme, bridging principles and practice through the use of stories. Monica Patten, the organization’s president, says “CFC works in the tradition of storytelling to bring the community foundation concept alive. The stories are about donors, grants, special initiatives and the ways community foundations play a part in the healthy development of communities. Our members are eager to share their stories, and that allows us to keep our Web site collection and other communications current and updated.”

What makes a good story? How should the story be told?

“Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it and deconstruct it...and change it as times change truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts.”

-Salman Rushdie

The act of storytelling is more than just a form of discourse, of someone relating something to someone else. It is a powerful form of human communication that serves to connect us and shape us. We have all grown up with stories, and continue to be surrounded by stories – in news, advertising movies, television, books, magazines, social relationships. So how does the storied organization contribute its own stories in a way that they will be heard and achieve the desired effect? How does it tell a good story?

The primary elements of the story are the message, the “author”, the storyteller, and the audience. But other elements that enter into the equation include the medium, time, setting, history, culture, ethics, values, language and style, and voice or point of view. What elements do you emphasize, and what do you minimize? What is relevant and necessary, and what is dispensable? What about embellishment, drama, poetic license?

The answer to all of these questions will depend on the storyteller, the message, the audience and the medium used. However, in general, it can be said that a good story moves us away from more traditional or academic approaches to conveying information with a focus on data, concepts and case studies, to a focus on *credibility*, *connection*, and *conviction*. It brings facts to life, and makes the abstract concrete. It clarifies, explains, inspires, and transforms, reaching both the head and the heart. How does it do this?

By:

- getting our attention with a strong lead, for example, a quote, a statistic, a single word, a question, a comparison.
- having a beginning that introduces characters and setting and lays the foundation for action or conflict; a body where the action occurs; and an ending with climax and resolution, making a point.

- having a message that people can understand or relate to in a single, clearly defined theme.
- being relevant to the organization or issue, and consistent with its mission, vision and values.
- being told in the appropriate context, and tailored to its audience.
- being direct and easily understood.
- using clear and simple language, avoiding jargon.
- using details and images to bring the story to life; also analogies, metaphors.
- stimulating the senses.
- not getting bogged down by minutiae.
- conveying and evoking feeling through personal language.
- being truthful, and told from a place of authenticity.
- making connections between the audience, the storyteller and the message.
- suiting the personality of the teller, demonstrating their interest or passion for their message.
- taking into account the cultural context.
- being brief enough to sustain interest, but long enough to get the message across.
- including a call to action, either in the story itself, or in the framing of the story.
- being strong enough to stand alone or capable of being used in combination with other stories.
- (almost always) being about real people.

If you think about memorable stories that you have heard or read, they are effective because they establish their *credibility* by being honest and direct. They *connect* you with the storyteller by creating a context, a reason why you would be interested, a link to the subject at hand. They demonstrate *conviction* through the action in the message – what happened that makes this a story worth telling.

These characteristics apply to both written and spoken stories. Obviously, the spoken story will also include additional characteristics, such as a good sense of timing, appropriate body language, and eye contact with the audience. In printed communications, such visual or dramatic effects are difficult to replicate; however, publications can offer greater versatility by being able to incorporate brief vignettes, anecdotes, quotes or testimonials from individuals, and photos in appropriate places, e.g. integrated into text, in margins, or as sidebars. Websites can be particularly effective in featuring new stories on a regular basis, archiving earlier stories so that they are still readily available within the site, linking to other relevant or related stories on other sites, and collecting new stories through forums, discussion groups or other interactive components.

Volunteer Canada is the lead national organization responsible for promoting volunteerism. In conjunction with the United Nations International Year of the Volunteer in 2001, the organization implemented a social marketing campaign with the theme “I Volunteer. The Value of One. The Power of Many.” Intended to stimulate dialogue and inspire volunteering, the campaign made a variety of materials available, and included individual volunteer stories specifically collected for the campaign, but also drew upon information such as The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement and The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The IYV website collected and displayed “Volunteer Stories”, and a video was produced, titled “The Power of Many”. The four and a half minute production effectively blended information about numbers of volunteers in Canada and the kinds of activities they are involved in, with very brief, powerful stories that brought the information alive at a personal level. Few people ever watch this video without experiencing the “goosebump factor”—and it encompasses all of the above characteristics of what makes a good story.

The possibilities are almost limitless. Once an organization recognizes the value of telling its stories, it will become more aware of its own stories as well as the stories of others. It will learn from its peers and from its own experiences about how to tell a good story. Organizations don’t become storied overnight; rather it is a process that is *intentional, iterative, intuitive* and *integrated*. It is a focus the organization chooses to take; it builds on its experiences, both positive and negative, and takes time to create a level of comfort with storytelling at all levels of the organization; it develops the instincts to recognize story opportunities; and it integrates storytelling throughout the organization and its communications activities. It may sound like a lot of work, but those that take the steps in this direction find it a road worth taking.

One of the dictionary definitions of the word *story* is “facts or experiences that deserve narration”. The word *storied* is defined as “celebrated in or associated with stories or legends”. The voluntary sector is brimming with facts and experiences that deserve narration. And organizations that celebrate their stories and integrate storytelling into their activities at all levels will benefit not only their own organization and its people and partners, but will contribute to building awareness and deepening understanding of the voluntary sector itself.

“...Although not entirely unexpected, opportunities to connect those at highest risk with health and addiction issues were connected with support services, and in one case the intervention by the Outreach Nurses saved one of our youth from a debilitating infection that would have meant hospitalization. Pride and enthusiasm for the project were evident from the beginning; however when I saw one young artist reunite with a parent not seen in over three years just to show them what they were doing and what they had accomplished, I was delighted at this unexpected turn of events. The youth remains in contact with the parent, and the parent now treats the youth with love, support and pride.”⁶

-Wendy, project coordinator

“I look at the mural now and find it hard to believe we accomplished something so incredible! The mentors were fantastic! I loved learning about Tuck Reid and about native beliefs – I wish I could have met Tuck. I haven’t eaten so well in a long time and I think I gained some weight. The staff and volunteers at the Gathering Place were totally supportive and even the people who go there will stop me and talk about the mural. I would love to do more.”⁷

⁶ Project Report “Tuck Reid Memorial Mural” The Gathering Place Community Centre. October 1999

⁷ *ibid*

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