

First Virtual Convening of The Institute of Southern Georgian Bay

May 6, 2020

Mapping Our Road to Recovery

Part 1: Using Social Innovation to Inspire Regional Resilience

Moderator: Rosalyn Morrison, Board Chair with facilitation support from **Liz Rykert**, volunteer.

Report Presenter: Marilyn Struthers, Author of the report on Social Innovation generated from the fall 2019 gathering.

Panellists:

Four speakers who provided insight about both the findings in the report and the current context of COVID-19's impact on their sector and what it means for recovery:

- Business Sector: **Martin Rydlo**, Director, Marketing and Business Development, Collingwood
- Nonprofit/Charitable Sector: **Dale Biddell**, CEO, United Way Simcoe Muskoka
- Government Sector: **Shawn Everitt**, CAO, The Blue Mountains
- Philanthropic Sector: **Barbara Little**, Chair, Meaford Hospital Foundation

Participants:

There were 119 registrations and 95 participants in the session. Participants were from Barrie, Clearview, Collingwood, The Blue Mountains, Meaford, Wasaga Beach, Owen Sound, Orillia, Grey County, Simcoe County. *Note: we included the communities as participants described them.*

Participants were asked to indicate why this discussion was important to them upon registration. Some common themes were:

- Keen interest in the recovery of the region both in general and for their specific organization or business. Interest in a regional approach.
- Looking for inspiration and ideas to get through this period and to recover.
- Acknowledging a need for a different way forward.
- Wanting to know what is happening and how they can help or get involved.
- Wanting to see the tools and structures put in place to support the recovery of businesses and communities.

Introduction

Rosalyn opened the gathering acknowledging the new format using the Zoom platform in Webinar mode and thanking the Town of Collingwood for their support and hosting of the

event. **Karen Clegg** was invaluable in assisting with preparations and support to ensure the event is a success.

In her comments, Rosalyn noted that this is the first event in a series of virtual convenings planned by the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay (TISGB) called ***Mapping Our Road to Recovery***. It is hoped this is the beginning of an opportunity to learn, share knowledge and align actions to create a resilient and sustainable future together. She acknowledged how we have all seen innovations as the crisis has unfolded. People have had to pivot, retool, rethink what needs doing and how to do them. She also noted how in parts of the world it has been a time for the planet to heal. Rosalyn summarized her introduction by stating as we look to the future we will be better together.

Welcome chat with participants

Participants were asked to reflect on the question: What is a surprising strength you have discovered about yourself during this period of COVID-19? And then share their responses in the chat with everyone. Some of the themes that emerged were:

- Patience, calmness, a positive attitude (especially after the down days),
- Adaptability and Resilience
- Ability to work in new ways, play and create in new ways (Poetry Porch Parties)
- Learning to create new business processes and ways to engage or work with customers
- Finding new connections or reconnections; breaking through imagined social barriers
- Processing grief in different ways

Presentation of the report *Social Innovation in Southern Georgian Bay: What is it and why now?*

Marilyn Struthers presented the report she authored based on the event held in the Fall of 2019. That event brought together a wide range of people to both hear Tonya Surman from the Centre for Social Innovation speak and to work together to imagine a series of possible futures for the region. The [report itself can be found here](#).

Marilyn described social innovation as a growing field of community organizing that focuses on:

- Systems change
- Solution finding for complex social problems
- Processes that engage diverse players

- New hybrid forms of capital and organizations
- Measurable impact for public good

Social innovation approaches and methods grew out of a need to address increasingly complex problems. They are approaches that engage diverse sets of players who bring a wide range of experience and expectations. It works at a systems level to create social change and social good. She demonstrated with her slides how shifts in the way the social sector (namely non-profits and charitable organizations) have, over the last twenty years, moved from being more closely aligned with government as a source of funding to finding ways to learn from business and adopt innovating practices to sustain and transform their organizations. By these two systems working together we have seen the emergence of [Certified B Corporations](#) where businesses included and are rewarded for including a social mission, innovation in financing such as [social impact bonds](#) and the use of public-private partnerships. The approach includes understanding the measurable impact of the work. Essentially social innovation sites are the intersection between invention, social justice and social change.

Marilyn reviewed the eight big ideas from Tonya Surman's talk in the Social Innovation report including the use of shared space where there are opportunities to create and animate community. Examples of these shared hubs are found within the region. The other ideas included new financing models, owning the means of production (CSI now owns three buildings in Toronto), working with municipalities as the new partners of choice, measuring impact collectively, finding ways to scale innovations and work with networks, supporting connectivity to support acceleration and build impact, and, imagining the next economy, one that places people and planet over profit.

Finally, Marilyn shared the top things participants at the fall event said we should be paying attention to as we swing into action planning. Many of these feel even more relevant in our current context. The ideas included finding ways to "tear up the turf" and work and think regionally, make more strategic use of community assets to leverage capital for community investment and create community infrastructure and leadership at the grassroots level to develop an innovation strategy.

Responding to the Report in our current context of COVID-19 and mapping a road forward

Four people from the different sectors (Business, Government, Nonprofit/Charitable, Philanthropy) shared their insights and ideas for the region. Each panelist was asked, from their perspective, to paint a quick picture of their sector pre-COVID, to identify specific challenges and lessons learned as we think about the future and to share what resonates for them from the Social Innovation report as an opportunity moving forward.

The first panellist **Martin Rydlo** was speaking from the Business Sector perspective. Martin is the Director, Marketing and Business Development in Collingwood. He noted he also is responsible for the regional business development centre based in Collingwood but designed to support people from Meaford, Town of Blue Mountains, Clearview, Wasaga Beach and the

Simcoe and Grey Counties. Pre-COVID-19 Martin described the region as bustling, robust and vibrant. In mid-March they were in the midst of finalizing an Action Plan that needed to be placed on hold. He described the response to the crisis as one that has three phases: The first being a focus on the health and safety of everyone living and working in the community; the second phase as structuring the recovery; and third phase as the new normal.

A fifteen-member Economic Support and Recovery Task Force has been created. As things begin to reopen there are many challenges including responding to constantly changing realities being announced, for example curbside retailing, and being able to respond in a nimble and responsible way. Martin noted the shift to digital ways of doing things is irreversible. He shared how five local businesses reported how their business was either up or only down between 20-25% because of the digital tools they were using. He said the crisis has shifted people from seeing the digital channels of doing business as a “nice to have” to being critical for success. He also noted how the shift to virtual Council meetings will likely lead to future practices that will not go away.

Digital Mainstreet has been developed through the Business Development Centre and the Digital Business Squad. These shifts will influence how we connect in the future. Martin noted how events and festivals are so much a part of Southern Georgian Bay. He expects we will see a change in how we engage in these larger events. Martin saw four key areas within the report on Social Innovation. These include the idea of measurable impact and determining what metrics are key so we can learn which efforts are actually make a difference. He is very interested in seeing how to advance the role of municipalities and sees connectivity as critical. Finally he indicated social innovation will be key and cited the example of the [Collingwood Optimist's Club](#) stepping up with Personal Protective Equipment.

Dale Biddell, CEO, United Way Simcoe Muskoka was the next panelist to comment and bring the perspective of the Nonprofit/Charitable Sector. Prior to the start of the COVID crisis the sector was challenged by a multiplicity of diverse needs and uncoordinated approaches to generating resources to address both entrenched and emerging social issues. She noted some examples of groups within the sector that are doing well including the hospitals, hospice care and animal welfare. There is a history of doing great work in the region but there is a resource issue as the population has expanded. Dale noted there are a lot of people moving into the community and this is shaping the retail and service sector in the region. It means there are lot of people now working in service jobs. It also means there is a growing gap between those with enough resources and those without. Local agencies are working to address these challenges.

Dale noted The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation as an example of this response. She noted the benefit of engaging with a broader sector of partners including municipalities, the development community, the hub concept and the sharing of resources by organizations such as the Rotary Club. She believes that post-COVID requires sector stabilization and that we can go further with a more collective approach to solving social issues. This includes exploring a social economy. It might mean we need to pull out of our comfort zones but will lead to something we all want to achieve.

The Public Sector perspective was shared by **Shawn Everitt**, CAO of The Blue Mountains. Shawn opened his comments by noting The Blue Mountains was just finalizing its operating and capital budgets when the COVID-19 crisis hit. They went on to approve the budget virtually. It was a demonstration of how they have become very nimble and creative in maintaining momentum and responding to the crisis. Building on Dale's comments he noted the Attainable Housing Committee has maintained its work through the period of the crisis. While acknowledging the team at The Blue Mountains hasn't missed a beat, he believes the nature of the work has changed and will not go back to the way things were. Shawn supports the hub concept and the sharing of resources but believes we can go further with a collective approach to solving social issues.

The Blue Mountains has also established a Community Recovery Task Force to work through and plan for post-COVID. One of the new things launched during this period is a new electronic platform called [ExploreBlue.ca](https://www.exploreblue.ca). It supports visitors to visit the area virtually now via web-based videos on a wide range of topics. It also profiles local business and provides the ability to make donations.

Shawn noted from the Social Innovation Report the idea of working collaboratively as a region is something he supports. He gave the example of how the municipalities surrounding Nottawasaga Bay are meeting to coordinate the process and rules for how parks, trails and regional conservation areas will reopen and what will be available.

The final panelist was **Barbara Little** from the Meaford Hospital Foundation bringing the perspective of the Philanthropic Sector. The Meaford Hospital is part of the Grey Bruce Health System and is one of five foundations that support the Owen Sound Regional Hospital. Barb noted she has 10,000 people in her donor base and annually has raised \$800,000.00. Primarily these funds help with capital purchases like an MRI machine now located at the Owen Sound Hospital. A resource serving the whole region.

With the onset of the pandemic, she found the Foundation needed to shift their focus quickly to raise funds for personal protective equipment, to provide lunches and snacks to staff, to provide ipads for patients to keep in touch with families, and to secure hotel rooms for staff that could not return home to their families. All this was made possible by collaborating with local retailers and restaurants, service clubs, and community groups. Barb also described the experience of collaborating with industry, the military, community groups and local municipal services to create the Bayshore Field Hospital in the Arena in Owen Sound. She commented how effectively people came together to accomplish the field hospital, how collaboration with social innovators produced face shields, and emphasized that more than ever, we must adapt, innovate, communicate, and partner.

Gathering Feedback from Participants

Liz invited all participants to post in the chat the ideas that most resonated with them both from the report and the panelists. The questions asked were:

What themes from the report and the speakers are resonating with you? Share the one that is the most important to you. What actions do you now recommend?

The key themes were:

- Adopt a regional approach to recovery with municipalities, business sector, non-profit/charitable sector and philanthropy working together. Be inclusive of climate action and the arts.
- Develop a common platform or structure for this collaboration to happen in a way that brings transparency and openness to the process and ensures access to everyone including those with limited technology.
- Approach the collaboration in a way that builds a regional approach while maintaining each town's unique character, concerns and realities at the same time.
- Use the momentum generated by the threat of the crisis to push harder for a regional approach. Fear of the loss of our way of life, our planet is driving change. Now is the time to work together.
- As one participant said: This unprecedented situation has created a crack in the foundations of so many organizations and structures - and of course, "that's how the light gets in" (L.Cohen)
- COVID-19 has revealed the cracks in our systems. Systems cross geographic and social lines and require everyone to join together.

Next steps

The Institute will summarize the session and share the outcomes in the next newsletter.

Rosalyn thanked everyone for joining the first virtual convening of The Institute of Southern Georgian Bay. She invited people to go to the Institute's web site at www.tisgb.ca to sign up for the newsletter, stay connected, and to extend invitations to the next convening on May 27th at 4:30 pm. The focus will be developing a Regional Arts Strategy.