

Looking Inward: Thrive Reflects on its Impact

In November 2015, Thrive hired an external consultant to assess its impact, as well as to capture important lessons and implications for Thrive as a social change initiative going forward. This brief shares an overview of the achievements, challenges and lessons that emerged between 2010 and 2015.

Thrive is, at its core, a collective effort to create a vibrant local economy that works better for more people. Businesses, individuals, non-profits and government representatives within Thrive's network are making significant contributions in shaping Calgary's local economy. Without them, we would have few achievements to celebrate. In sharing the lessons learned, collectively we can continue to advance a local economy for all.



Background

Thrive was created in 2006, as Calgary's Community Economic Development (CED) network. Our intent was to gauge interest of Calgarians in promoting and building support for CED in Calgary. In 2010, Thrive's network identified four central strategies to pursue this change:

1. Be a catalyst for learning, connecting, convening and action throughout the CED network;
2. Identify trends and opportunities;
3. Advocate for and influence policy and systems changes; and
4. Build relationships and stimulate collaborative action between not-for-profit, business, government and individuals to advance CED strategies in Calgary.

Thrive's approach has been to create learning opportunities, enable community engagement and facilitate connections to foster relationships as a pre-requisite for change. Thrive aims to be responsive, by providing support wherever

there is evidence of energy in the community. From 2011 – 2014, much of Thrive's work focused on:

- ✓ education and advocacy to enable policy change through the provision of training, awareness raising and community engagement activities;
- ✓ preparation of discussion papers, briefing documents and newsletters; and
- ✓ participation on government and community advisory boards and economic strategy consultation processes.

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The city has been transformed over the past ten years. There is a growing movement of people who are interested in environmental, social and economic sustainability. There are more and more people connected to these ideas. And not just this sector but in the energy sector as well.

- Key Stakeholder, December 2015

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Achievements and Results

Since 2010, Thrive has celebrated many achievements in contributing to systems and policy change that support CED. Thrive would be uncomfortable taking credit for many of these changes but there was consensus among stakeholders that Thrive's participation in and contributions to these efforts was instrumental. The following are three key highlights that Thrive and its community partners are proud to have accomplished.

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Because of Thrive and Momentum, CED is now featured in a range of City strategies in a way that it would not have been there otherwise. They [Thrive and Momentum] have influenced the overall development of strategy at the City and helped make the connections between social and economic solutions.

- Key Stakeholder, December 2015

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1. Changes in the landscape

Much of Thrive's work is focused on raising awareness and advocating for CED as an approach to poverty reduction, community building and economic planning. More than 1000 people attended Thrive-hosted events between 2010 and 2015, raising awareness of CED as a legitimate strategy to address Calgary's economic and social challenges.

Thrive staff and network members conducted research and developed briefing, strategy and policy papers for the provincial and municipal governments. These papers have been instrumental in influencing the way strategy and policy have evolved within government, business and non-profits in Calgary.

Significant changes in the landscape include:

- ✓ CED is an integral part of The City of Calgary's economic and social development policies
- ✓ CED is a main pillar of the Enough for All strategy
- ✓ CED is a core strategy for the Calgary Regional Partnership
- ✓ First Calgary Financial allocates 100% of its community investment funding to CED activities.
- ✓ Calgary EATs Food System Assessment and Action Plan integrates CED as a core principle

2. A network for action

Thrive has invested considerable effort in building the capacity of individuals to be CED champions and practitioners. This work includes delivering CED training workshops; partnering with Simon Fraser University (SFU) to deliver the CED Certificate Program in Calgary; and convening CED practitioners through the Thrive Steering Committee, conferences, short courses, and learning events. There is a growing number of Calgarians who have increased understanding of CED to support a diverse local economy, revitalize neighbourhoods and promote social inclusion.

Network growth milestones include:

- ✓ Over 150 Community Social Workers and other professionals have been trained in CED principles
- ✓ 42 graduates of the Simon Fraser University CED Certificate program now have the knowledge, skills and relationships to pursue CED initiatives in the communities of their choice
- ✓ 900 network members act as champions and advocates for CED as part of Calgary's changing economy

3. From learning to launching

Simon Fraser University's CED Certificate program was hosted in Calgary by Thrive in 2014 and 2015. This program is a part-time program over eight months that equips graduates with the knowledge and practical experience to pursue CED action in their communities.

Initiatives launched by graduates:

- ✓ The Calgary Tool Library
- ✓ The Bridgeland Riverside Community Association Farmer's Market
- ✓ REAP Community Orchards Program
- ✓ Momentum's Matched Savings Program for Entrepreneurs
- ✓ The Aging in Place Housing Cooperative
- ✓ Calgary's Community Food Centre

CED initiatives underway:

- ✓ The Alberta Impact Fund
- ✓ The Calgary Opportunity Development Cooperative

Lessons and Implications

Much was learned through the experiences of network members who participated in the assessment. Below is a summary of lessons that emerged from this assessment and the interviews with key stakeholders.

Capacity building is essential.

Partnering with a higher learning institution (SFU) to bring a CED certificate program to Calgary has been important to Thrive's work over the past four years. Continuing to offer CED training in Calgary that is applicable to the Alberta context is essential to support local entrepreneurs, communities and systems to understand and apply CED principles.

The Constellation Model was not a good fit to support the work of Thrive.

In 2010, a constellation model was selected as the best approach to enable this emergent and ever-changing work. It became evident over the following four years that this model was not ideal to guide and support Thrive. The Steering Committee was meant as a secretariat for the constellations, but these constellations did not materialize as envisioned in the Strategy Map.

People connected to Thrive are like-minded. This is both a good and a bad thing.

Since its inception, Thrive has brought like-minded people together around a common issue. People active in the network tend to be from the non-profit, voluntary, and public sectors. Some stakeholders feel it is time for Thrive to identify and engage with "unusual suspects" connected to Calgary's mainstream entrepreneurial strength and nurture these people to become social entrepreneurs.

Balancing Thrive's community ownership with Momentum's accountability to funders was tricky.

Thrive is a community-driven network that is nimble and responsive to the community's energy to support CED efforts. At the same time funding for Thrive flows through Momentum and Momentum is ultimately accountable for results from the network. This is challenging and requires a unique relationship with network members and funders. Thrive and Momentum have maintained this balance well. Moving forward, Thrive can be even clearer about the outcomes it is trying to achieve for Momentum to more effectively report on these.

CED Professionals need to be connected to real CED opportunities and resources.

Connecting CED practitioners with CED initiatives in priority neighbourhoods is essential to the next phase of Thrive's work. Additional strategies and activities for consideration include:

- ✓ Connect CED enthusiasts to communities that could most benefit from CED
- ✓ Support CED initiatives through technical support such as business modeling, feasibility testing and mentoring, and access to patient capital
- ✓ Forge connections to forward thinking entrepreneurs in the mainstream economy

What's next?

As a learning organization Thrive takes the lessons from this evaluation to heart. We are integrating these lessons into a revised approach — one that unites CED practitioners with tangible and deliberate community inspired CED initiatives. Our ultimate goal is to transform Calgary's social and economic landscapes, eliminating reasons why people find themselves in poverty. Momentum, Thrive's host organization, has been working on CED at the neighbourhood level since 2013, through a program called Strong Neighbourhoods. This program provides more direct opportunities for residents in priority neighbourhoods to take CED action in their communities. Our new approach integrates Thrive and Strong Neighbourhoods into one initiative.

This new model connects unique learning and purposeful initiatives with local neighbourhoods, leaders and entrepreneurs to reach real people, create real opportunities and champion real change. Thrive seeks long term solutions that are inclusive, believing that Calgary's entrepreneurial spirit lives in everyone who wants to make their contribution to society and make a difference in their communities. The new approach will launch formally in the fall of 2016.

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I was in the [SFU] CED certificate program and without that training and the relationships I made I would not have had the confidence, skills, expertise or connections that I needed to bring [a social enterprise] to fruition.

**- SFU CED Certificate Program Graduate
December 2015**

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To make change you need to build the capacity of a group of people who can speak the same language and move together. You need non-profits, businesses and credit unions – building together towards change. I think this is most the important thing that Thrive achieved. We have a movement now and it is no longer on the margins.

- Key Stakeholder, December 2015

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EVALUATION FUNDED BY:
United Way of Calgary & Area
calgaryunitedway.org

EVALUATION BY:
MPI Associates
Melissa Innes
melissa.p.innes@outlook.com

THRIVE IS FUNDED BY:
**Family & Community Support
Services (FCSS)**
calgary.ca
United Way of Calgary and Area
calgaryunitedway.org

CONTACT THRIVE BY:
P: 403 204 2668
E: info@thrivecalgary.org

