



Musings on community care

by Jennine Wilson

I've heard many stories about communities struggling – things are more difficult than they used to be, systems are stressed and needs are unmet. I get revved and dejected as these stories pile up. But then I hear stories about community care – acts of kindness, mutual support and connection – that deeply move me. They have me musing over community care: what is it and how do we create more of it?

I came across a powerful quote from Bryan Garcia in his article [Some Thoughts on Community Care](#): "While self-care can sustain us, community care can help us thrive." This resonated with me deeply and I found myself diving deeper into the subject.

In a [recent webinar](#) hosted by the Coady Institute, Cormac Russell and John McKnight presented a synopsis of their book *The Connected Community*. Here's what I learned.

Building community care

John McKnight explored communities that were working together to make things better. His research focused not on their needs, but their assets, resources. His work asks: "What have people in this community done together that has made things better?"

He identified six key resources that communities can leverage to make things better:

1. [Residents](#) – the skills, capacities, passions and knowledge of local people.
2. [Associations](#) – groups and organizations that help connect.
3. [Local institutions](#) – the further away the institution is from the neighbourhood, the less impact it has on it.
4. [Exchange](#) – sharing, trading, bartering and selling within the community.
5. [Places and spaces](#) – the most significant aspects of a place are often invisible from the outside.
6. [Stories](#) – building blocks of culture. A way of capturing what has been done, what worked and hasn't in the community.

Everyone must be included to build a strong community. Contributions from young people in associations benefit community care and build it as an integral part of culture.

Principles of abundance

Karri Lynn Paul, educator at the Coady Institute, reflected on the indigenous approach to community care. Pre-colonial indigenous nations practiced community care for generations. The communities of today are reclaiming the concept, rooting it in abundance, not scarcity.

These are the indigenous principles of abundance:

1. Every person and community have gifts within.
2. Start with what we already have.
3. Start with spirit.
4. Relations and connections are always at the centre.
5. Asking, listening and sharing our stories is key.
6. Indigenous leaders involve others.
7. Shared vision and decision-making that honours the commitment to future generations.

Principles of abundance

Cormac Russell shared that when people look at what they might do together and why, they will discover, connect, and mobilize.

The heart of community care lies in what people care enough about to act on together. Moving from "ego to eco," from "me to we" and from being self-reliant to being other-reliant is at the core of building a thriving community.

The clearer we are about the roles we can play as citizens in our neighbourhoods – whether on the street, in the village or in the broader community – the easier it becomes to identify the resources and assets available to us.

Russell outlines seven community care functions to make a better life:

1. Enabling health
2. Assuring security
3. Stewarding ecology
4. Shaping local economies
5. Contributing to local food production
6. Raising our children
7. Co-creating care

Personal reflections

I see these principles come to life in my own community.

- Gathering together at the community oven.
- Sharing meals and stories at Soup and Sides Mondays.
- Delivering delivering local ingredient, frozen meals from the market to a neighbour in need.
- Playing games with the neighbourhood kids.
- Participating in work parties and being a part of memory cafes.

All of these small acts connect us in a meaningful way.

I know I'm not alone in these musings. When I shared the idea of writing about community care with my director, she excitedly mentioned that she had just attended a conference where Cormac Russell was the keynote speaker. She even bought his book *The Connected Community*. Guess what I'll be borrowing?

I care deeply about these principles, and in the words of Moses Coady, I believe in "a full and abundant life for all." This is why I'll continue to reflect in my musings and look for ways to grow these actions with others in my community.

Imagine a world where children are raised in environments rich with community care – where this sense of connection and support shapes their lives and where everyone's needs are creatively taken care of.