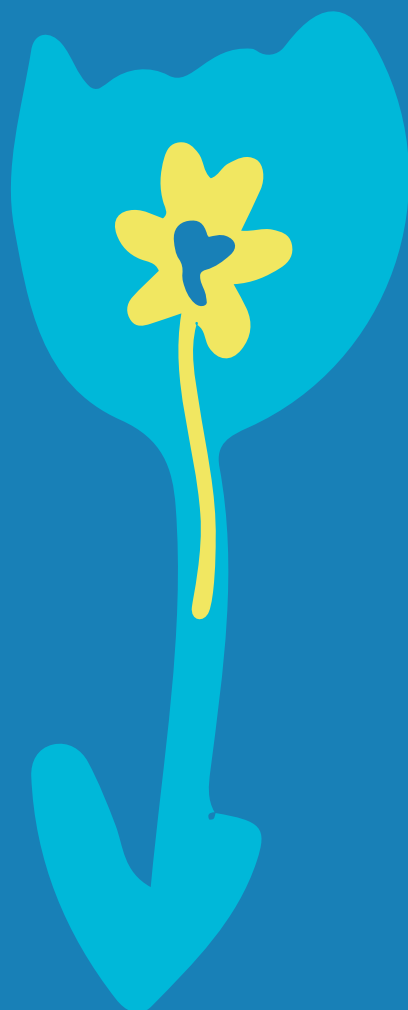




Impact Report
2018 - 2020





Mary-Ellen Gurnham, Stephanie Pronk, Jill Provoe, Joanne Linzey, Mike Davis. Missing from picture: Pam Cooley.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am excited to share with you the work of the organization and the vision and values that underpin all that we do.

Inspiring Communities was founded on an investment made by the Province of Nova Scotia to explore different ways of working with residents, across sectors, and move beyond “one-size-fits-all” approaches to social change. We are grateful for the willingness to be bold and experiment in the pursuit of shaping a better future, and for the expertise and advice that have been shared along the way.

More recently we have grown and new projects and partnerships have come into the fold. We have diversified our funding to other provincial government departments, the federal government and the McConnell Foundation, all of whom are embracing an openness to taking risks. We are innovating as we explore new ways to change structures and systems to reflect the lived lives of people in our communities. By investing in our evaluation approach and team, we are constantly learning and adjusting.

The work of Inspiring Communities is particularly important in this time of uncertainty. Our staff have a deep knowledge of the communities they serve and have been able to pivot quickly to address new challenges due to Covid 19. Working virtually, they continue to provide much needed support, advice and tools to colleagues and partners across the province and exhibit strong leadership in these unprecedented times.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated and energetic volunteer Board of Directors supporting and guiding our work. Much work has been done over the past year and a half to set up the organization and develop a Theory of Change for the work. Over the next year we will be further developing our strategic plan along with the policies that will ensure that the organization will continue to flourish.

Joanne Linzey
Chair, Board of Directors



Tyler Colbourne, Annika Voltan, Cari Patterson, Kristen Faulkner and Nicole Davis. Missing from picture: Olu Osunrinde

On behalf of the Inspiring Communities staff team, I am excited to be able to share our first annual impact report with you!

Inspiring Communities was born in 2016 as a project focused on establishing and supporting local community networks for identifying and addressing complex social issues on the Northside in Cape Breton, and in the Digby area. It was a bold idea for thinking differently about how communities and government work together that recognized the need for developing trusting relationships over the long term, and was supported by a group of forward thinking Deputy Ministers in Nova Scotia.

In the fall of 2018, Inspiring Communities was established as a standalone not-for-profit organization, opening the door to widen our scope of work. We play a unique role in the region - we are not focused on any one geographic area, community, sector or issue. We support collaborative networks and projects, and build the knowledge and skills needed to create positive systems change. The principles of abundance and equity guide all that we do.

We have grown significantly over the past year and a half, and have built an amazing team that is passionate about creating positive change for all. We are working behind the scenes to foster an environment where those we support on the front lines can thrive.

Inspiring Communities is still in its infancy, and much of our work so far has been setting up community initiatives and networks for change, building our team and our organization. We are committed to paying attention to our impact and we can't wait to share with you what we're already doing and learning in our journey!

Annika Voltan
Executive Director





Inspiring Communities

Inspiring Communities supports the growth of the field of systems change in Atlantic Canada. We provide a nest for experimentation, develop leadership in the field, and cultivate a culture of learning and evaluation for social change. We are helping shift communities and change makers, moving our mindsets from one of competition and scarcity to one of collaboration and abundance, creating greater equity and wellbeing in Atlantic Canada.

Changing relationships and mindsets is long term work and results can be difficult to see. We are at the beginning of our journey, so this report is about sharing our story and experiences so far, as well as our early impacts. We hope you gain greater understanding of what we do and why it's important.

Our Vision: Collective Action for Change

Positive social change is happening across the Atlantic Region, based on new voices at the table, capacity to act, and a culture of collaboration and abundance.

CHANGE

OTHER

ACADEMIC

BUSINESS
- consultants

PUB
GOV.
- municipal
- provincial
- federal

NON
PROFIT
- SOCIAL
Environmental

Indigenous

Existing ? in perspective? Emerging



Three Areas of Focus



Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change guides our work by helping us think through what we do and why, and developing a common sense of purpose. We use it as our framework for strategic planning, decision making and assessing our impact.



Initiatives We Support

Inspiring Communities hosts and supports a range of community-based initiatives and networks. We connect changemakers and create opportunities for new approaches to tackling social issues. We help each initiative maximize its own impact, with the belief that the sum is greater than its parts.



Between the Bridges

Between the Bridges takes a Collective Impact approach to addressing complex social issues identified and prioritized by the community of Dartmouth North including student success, health, housing and capacity building. Residents, community organizations, government and businesses are working together at the same tables to 'Break the Cycle' in Dartmouth North.



Northside Rising

Northside Rising is a collaborative effort to build a healthy, vibrant Northside, with a strong focus on substance use. It engages residents, community organizations, business and government to work together for the communities in the Northside area of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality.



Turning the Tide

Turning the Tide in Digby is building on the strong spirit of the community and helping residents to create a shared vision for change. Working with residents, community organizations, and government, solutions to the complex issues for their communities such as health care, the economy and environment are being explored.



Nova Scotia Network for Social Change

Our partnership with NS GovLab, a social innovation lab with the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, aims to co-create the Nova Scotia Network for Social Change - for those working on issues related to aging well.



WeavEast

WeavEast is a regional platform for serving people and organizations who are making positive social change in Atlantic Canada. By connecting changemakers across the region, it helps strengthen relationships, reduce fragmentation, amplify each other's work and catalyze collaborative efforts for social change.

A survey of 550 people revealed that

38%

see substance use as a top priority in the Northside community in Cape Breton.

Partnerships

To achieve our vision it is critical that we work collaboratively with partners who see the potential to do things differently, break down silos and bridge divides.



How We Thrive

How We Thrive brings people together to reimagine how we live together on this land of Mi'kma'ki. Through gatherings and online conversations we strengthen our relationships and build capacity for transformative change. In 2019 we helped to support a regional gathering and we are now in partnership with the Narrative Project through WeavEast.



Social Innovation Canada

Nationally we are Atlantic Canada's node in the emerging Social Innovation Canada network, aimed at connecting and supporting social changemakers across Canada. We are showcasing and connecting work from our region across the country, to build relationships, partake in national capacity building opportunities and align our action to grow our collective impact and voice.



Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Blueprint Evaluation

We are partnering with the Province of Nova Scotia to evaluate projects funded through its Poverty Reduction Blueprint work. The Province is funding action-oriented initiatives that test innovative ways of addressing poverty, through three funding streams: community projects, strategic government projects, and social innovation labs. The evaluation approach is developmental and appreciative, designed to build people's comfort and capacity with evaluation itself.



The Between the Bridges network includes 6 groups and 87 members.



Community engagement is high for Turning the Tide, with 809 community surveys completed and 260 participants attending 14 World Cafe events.



Our Impact

Our impact stems from the initiatives we create and support, and from the relationships, learning opportunities, and space for experimentation that we cultivate. We act as a bridge across sectors and value the inclusion of local voices who know the needs of their communities best.

Creating Relationships Across Sectors

Government officials are participating in community tables, gaining exposure to local issues and providing strategic input. This approach is building a shared understanding about the long-term commitment needed to achieve lasting change.

Nurturing Inclusion, Diversity and Participation

We are building relationships with people who have lived experiences of the issues being addressed. Partners around the table are gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences, and working together to develop new approaches to tackle complex issues.

Creating a Culture of Learning and Experimentation

We are modeling the change we want to see in the world inside the organization. A culture of learning, reflection, creativity and experimentation exists at Inspiring Communities. Our learning sessions and retreats offer space to share across initiatives, discuss complex problems, and enable out of the box thinking. We've committed to examining power and privilege, and considering its implications in the way we work.



The Government of Nova Scotia committed 3 years of funding to Collective Impact initiatives in 3 communities, championed by 8 social policy government departments which recognize the need for collaboration on complex issues.

“

It opened discussion space for everyone to think [about our work] and goals. It was a challenging discussion at times, but that's where the growth and the value is.

- WeavEast team member

“

We were trying to get people to access our programs, and having no luck. Through my involvement with Between the Bridges, we could learn what the community was already doing and how we could help.

- Public sector leader



Nesting

We take a “nesting” approach to supporting our initiatives so they are set up to have the greatest impact possible.

Focused Efforts for Greater Impact

Social change initiatives have greater impact in their communities as they are not bogged down by operational burdens. With access to communications, financial, administrative and other supports, they are spending more time where it matters most.

Stability Through Change

Initiatives in the nest draw on our credibility and support during various stages of development, both early on, and while navigating change. This provides stability to navigate staffing transitions and other changes in the community through consistent leadership.

Insights from Systems Leadership

Access to thought partnership and systems thinking frameworks sets strategic direction and identifies clear mandates as the work of the initiatives unfold. Capacity for long-term change is developed through a connection to the leadership team and wider network.

Efficiency of Efforts

A community of practice has developed, encouraging initiatives to reach out to each other for support, advice, and tools. There is less duplication, and greater efficiency of efforts as we learn from each other and build on one another’s successes.

Innovative New Approaches

A space for innovation, creative thinking and risk-taking grows from the nesting structure that supports experimentation, and a culture of learning and trying, without being afraid to fail.



“

Knowing that there are people specific in terms of budget and what we need to operate... It's really reassuring and beneficial. Knowing that they are invested in the work in that capacity is a perfect example of how we're able to do our job and the greater team is there to support us.

- Inspiring Communities staff



“

The lab process itself was instructive. Prototypes are better than committing whole to a new way of doing things - adopt, adapt, improve,

- Between the Bridges resident



Nesting Case Study

1



Social Innovation at Between the Bridges

Between the Bridges hosted a social innovation lab to address housing issues in Dartmouth North. Participants learned about systems thinking, prototyping for complex issues, and explored planning projects with the mindset of continual learning and adaptation. The process strengthened relationships between residents, government, landlords and community housing leaders and helped develop a shared understanding of the issues. Three task teams continue to learn and adapt as they take action on this complex issue.

The Between the Bridges team has implemented a process for co-creating agendas introduced at an Inspiring Communities retreat. The tool is building the capacity of the Residents' Roundtable. Members create content for meetings, step into leadership and take ownership of actions between monthly gatherings. The Residents' Roundtable is now actively identifying strategies for issues in the community and working on ways to host learning opportunities for the broader community.

“

Watching residents run sections of the meeting themselves [is the best part]! And seeing folks co-create the agenda. Very inspiring to see so many people who care working together.

- Between the Bridges resident

Nesting Case Study

2



WeavEast Emerges through Systems Leadership

WeavEast is a collective platform to strengthen the social innovation ecosystem of Atlantic Canada. It was critical to cultivate space for emergence, innovation and risk taking, enabling a network to form and take collective ownership for its own direction.

The first year of WeavEast was a learning journey led by a team of 9 fellows from across the region who explored community needs and identified where social innovation is already happening. The spirit of learning and adapting has become embedded in how WeavEast operates, creating transparent, participatory decision making processes.

We're building on that learning to grow the network and support experiments from across Atlantic Canada that are helping to shape a regional voice on the issues that affect us. A partnership has emerged from the connections made with How We Thrive and new collaborations are emerging, further expanding these networks.

“

*There was enough space for WeavEast to experiment, and Inspiring Communities was providing support for an entire year of sense making and figuring out whether or not the need we had felt [was there] was validated by the community.
- WeavEast network member*

Our evaluation team is shifting how we think about impact in the field, and using approaches that engage community members in meaningful ways.

Building an Evaluation Culture across Networks

Changemakers across Atlantic Canada are interested in the evaluation culture we are creating. Funding is designated to evaluation activity at both the provincial and local levels signaling a strong commitment.

Embedding Evaluation within Initiatives

An embedded evaluator within each social change initiative fosters a culture of research, learning, and evaluation across the organization. Working as a team, the evaluators share and facilitate learning across initiatives.

Deepening Shared Understanding of Change

Evaluation tools, processes, and resources enable project teams to create a shared and deeper understanding of their collective goals, and a baseline to measure their impact.

Research-Based Decision Making

Embedded evaluation practices foster a culture of using data, evidence and community input in real time for adapting the work of nested initiatives.

Communicating Impact

Community members have a deeper understanding of the ongoing impacts of the work as evaluation practices share data and findings along the way. The work is strengthened as we learn and adapt in response to impact results.

Evaluation



“

Having an evaluation team is an important feature of our organizational environment, where staff can come together as a team to learn from one another, challenge and support one another.

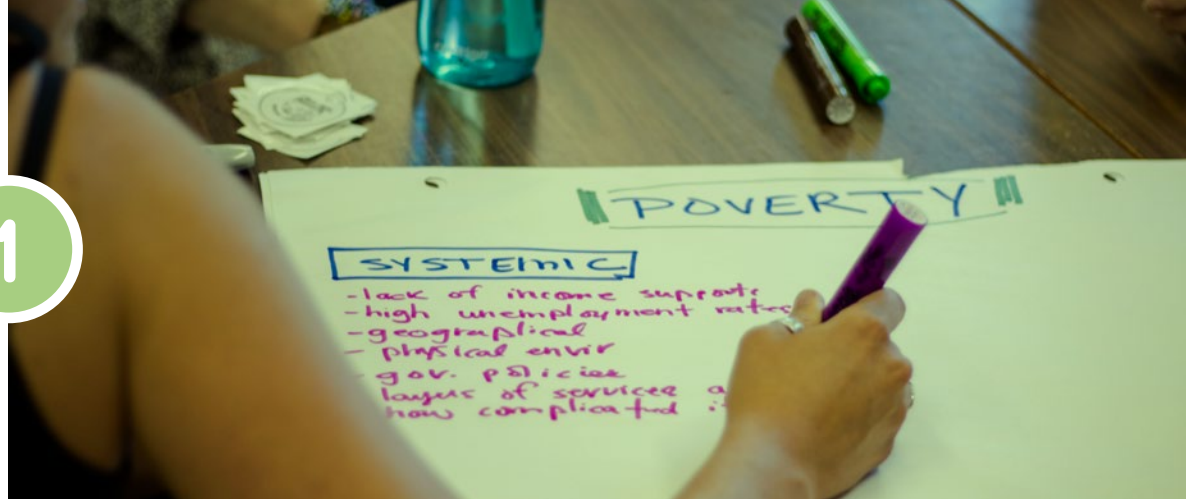
- Inspiring Communities staff



The Developmental Evaluation community of practice we started in Nova Scotia is thriving, with 14 members from community organizations, government and the private sector.

Evaluation Case Study

1



A Culture of Innovative Thinking at Northside Rising

The Northside is facing important issues related to substance use and associated stigma. Northside Rising is working closely with people with lived experience to understand and address this priority concern.

At the same time, its early phase evaluation highlighted the long-term aspiration of many participants to build a vibrant, healthy Northside community. It focussed attention on the need for a Theory of Change geared to this overall

goal. This is a working hypothesis for how groups will achieve their goals.

With the Northside Rising Backbone team, a developmental evaluator is drafting this shared understanding of the initiative's work. Already the Theory of Change is helping to enhance communication, align activities, and establish the baseline data needed to measure progress and support learning. It is just the most recent tool used by Northside Rising to help build a culture of innovation. "Collective

Impact" and "Systems Thinking" have also framed the work.

A Data Working Group is tapping talent from universities, government, community partners and people with lived experience to lead a research project exploring the state of hope and agency on the Northside. The group is bridging the gap between research and community action providing concepts and data critical to Northside Rising's efforts to address substance use and its broader goal of community renewal.

“

I think it [Northside Rising] has re-created an identity of the Northside that it is a functioning unit that can do stuff. I think that got lost over the years.”
- Community member

Evaluation Case Study

2



Community Conversations Build a Learning Culture

A partnership with the Government of Nova Scotia is creating a culture of evaluation and learning across the province. The Government is funding initiatives that test innovative ways of addressing poverty through three funding streams: community projects, strategic government projects, and social innovation labs. Practices and learnings that emerge through the evaluation will inform the Poverty Reduction Blueprint for the Province.

The approach is developmental, and aims to build people's comfort and capacity with evaluation itself. We hosted community conversations across Nova Scotia with project leads, partners, and participants to reflect on their achievements, discuss evidence of their successes, and identify the strategies they used for success. Everyone could see the bigger picture of their work together, celebrating their project's achievements.

Through these conversations we built connections and planted seeds for new partnerships. The process and using a practical evaluation tool (Success, Evidence, Strategies) helped demystify evaluation, spreading the culture of evaluation further across Nova Scotia.

19 community conversations were held
across Nova Scotia in 2019 that engaged

199 participants.



Learning

We know that to shift culture and build social movements for change, systems leadership skills are needed and we are actively working to offer resources to changemakers.

Building Capacity

Skills for systems leadership, seeing interconnectedness, removing barriers to inclusion, and coalition building are growing and building a stronger ecosystem for systems change.

Staff and community members are gaining skills and capacity through formal opportunities and shared learning from a connection to peers.

Increased Ownership

Individuals and groups develop greater ownership of the work as their leadership skills grow. Greater collaboration and shared responsibility are a result of strengthening leaders across the teams.

Emergence and Flexibility

Ongoing reflective learning and feedback leads to adapting the work in response to impact and the needs of the local networks.

Diverse Perspectives

Intentionally reaching out to people in marginalized groups is diversifying perspectives, actions, and world views. Seeing different ways of knowing and acting leads to developing systems that will serve all communities and shift traditional power structures.

Convening and Collaborating

Opportunities for partnerships and augmenting ideas are coming from the connections to a bigger movement and leadership in the sector. Bringing people together across networks offers space to convene and share knowledge, model inclusive practices, and nurture an abundance mindset.

“

*Information was flying around...
it brought the community together.
- World Cafe participant*



*12 volunteers trained as Community Ambassadors,
conducting surveys and hosting World Cafe events
in micro-communities across the Digby area.*

Learning Case Study

1



World Cafes Amplify Community Voice in Digby

A series of community conversations, known as World Cafés, were hosted within the micro-communities across the Digby area to unearth the concerns, issues and priorities of these communities.

Turning the Tide started the World Cafés after completing a community survey and sharing findings from the survey with Digby residents. Feedback showed a need for smaller, more intimate events for local residents to bring their voices

and perspectives to issues identified through the community survey.

The World Café events are not only providing insight into how these issues show up in local communities, they are also helping residents connect, and learn more about one another and about their communities. Participants experienced the value of these events as opportunities to get together, learn from each other and have their say in everyday concerns.

The Turning the Tide team is building leadership and convening skills through Community Ambassadors, who organize, host and facilitate the World Cafes, while establishing ongoing connections within their communities. Through shared learning opportunities and experience, Community Ambassadors are developing their leadership capacity to enable them to become champions in their own communities.

“

*I'm not educated, but I feel like
someone's listening to me.
- World Cafe participant*

Learning Case Study

2



Building a Network Through Creativity and Learning

In 2019 the Nova Scotia Network for Social Change hosted an event called Co-Create Wellbeing, which brought together members from the WeavEast and NS GovLab networks. The evening used prototyping and ideation as a means to learn together.

Together social innovators who otherwise wouldn't collaborate envisioned ideas to connect newcomers and older adults. Deep relationships formed across networks through creativity

and learning. Two participants were partnered up after they individually shared ideas rooted in theatre. Through design principles and social innovation practices they explored and connected their ideas, taking ownership of and developing a project that is now underway.

The project launched a Masterclass learning series, aimed to develop capacity building across communities of practice. One outcome was to develop the capacity of unlearning; to reflect and question

the ways in which current systems have been built and to unlearn together. In the first two day Masterclass - Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, facilitated by Vanessa Andreotti - we saw participants from across levels of government, the community sector, Indigenous communities and various networks. There were people of different identities and power in the room, to explore how colonialism and eurocentrism are entangled in the ways that we work.

“

This learning has been so valuable to me personally for COVID-19. It was about building resilience and compassion to weather the storms; to build our capacity to see beyond systems, and to question the root of systems. It was very deeply moving and challenging, and shows up in our work a lot.
- Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures workshop participant

What's Next

We've done a lot in a short period of time to create a space for new thinking, collaboration and systems change - and we continue to be inspired to go further. Some things we are looking forward to over the next year include:

- Co-locating with other organizations leading systems change so that we can share the administrative burden and explore opportunities for collaboration - our new space is at 1531 Grafton Street in Halifax
- Continuing to support our current initiatives and finding new ways to nurture and support others who could benefit
- Launching Wayside, our online learning platform - a place to learn, connect, and exchange knowledge
- Developing an online course about developmental evaluation
- Building partnerships with others and exploring opportunities to shape what a post-COVID-19 world looks like in the social sector

