

Value Learning

MISSION STATEMENT

We believe we're all learning beings; that with the right stimulus, we can unlearn and relearn ways of seeing ourselves and the world around us. Our job is to continuously provide fresh stimulus, and enable people to be curious about themselves and their situations. After all, **"No person is a homeless person and nothing else"**

***“Well, everyday is
the same.”***

The story

When we ask Fred, one of our regular conversation partners, how he's going, he replies, "Well, everyday is the same." Fred is in his early 40s, with long salt-n-pepper hair. He's been on and off the streets for twenty years. He last had a roof over his head two years ago.

Fred never finished high school and sometimes works as a builder. He sees himself as an intellectual and once spent an entire winter working his way through transcendentalist philosophy books in the mil-dewy basement of the local library. And yet, whenever Fred is offered a place in an adult education class, he declines. He is disinterested in formal education. Besides, it's not worth doing algebra all over again. What Fred does have real interest in is meeting philosophy, astronomy or applied physics professors - people with actual knowledge in their subject matter. But, he doesn't want to have to go to a new place to meet them. He's worried people will judge how he looks. Plus, he is always carrying his pack on his back.

Like Fred, Cherry also didn't finish high school. Photography, media studies, and journalism interest her. As do zillions of other things. She just likes being a part of new, not boring things. Things that keep her mind busy, not thinking about her addictions, and that put her in the company of others. Learning for Cherry isn't about sitting in a classroom or even gaining specific job skills. It's about stimulating and social experiences.

So what would a drop-in centre where learning is the core value look like for people like Cherry and Fred?



In this scenario, learning isn't to be confused with schools, classrooms, credentials, or work. Learning is as much about un-learning destructive thoughts & actions as it is about re-learning fresh ways of thinking and doing. Indeed, it is a mindset of curiosity and inquiry, rather than success or achievement. And it is based on the latest neuroscience research showing that adult brains are not static. With practice, new neural pathways can form. In other words, we can get cognitively un-stuck.

Staff in this scenario would act as content curators. Their role would be to create an environment with fresh stimulus for thinking, for conversation, for mobilization. The drop-in becomes a hive of learning activity as well as a hub brokering people's learning to the broader world. Day retreats are arranged to introduce members to community events and surprising places - be it philosophy cafes or brain labs. Post-docs, professionals and folks with super specific know-how are regularly invited in to give pro-bono

talks, workshops, performances, and 1:1 skill shares. Rather than fit into a charity model whereby drop-ins accept extra food and clothes, learning centres would also activate community member's specific knowhow and skills. The narrative would be one of sharing and swapping conversation, ideas, politics, current events.

Members wouldn't be passive listeners in these talks and experiences, but co-producers. They would be encouraged to reflect afterwards, and to make content that can be shared with others. Indeed, staff would be equipped with all sorts of resources such as podcasts & stories written by members, book chapters, articles, videos, and exercises. These resources would be part of a continually growing content bank shared between centres. Content would be tagged by emotion (e.g. good when you're anxious), by medium (e.g. listening), and by specific topic (black holes).

As a content rich environment, drop-ins as learning centres would offer plenty of in-the-moment alternatives to boredom and idleness. That's not to say boredom and idleness don't also have a place, but they would not be the dominant place. Photos and quotes of people's latest experiences would adorn the walls, Facebook, and social media pages. The language would be of discovery, growth, and development. Fred would say, "Did you hear that talk yesterday on rational decision making? I'm listening to this podcast about a philosopher named Heidegger, but I reckon he got a few things wrong."

Beliefs

WE BELIEVE THAT...

Find new stimulants.

If you always do the same thing, you'll always get the same result. External stimulation - be it a new space, conversation, or thing to think about - opens up new pathways of possibility.

It's never too late to unlearn, and relearn.

Our brains are never done developing. With good nourishment, you can reprogramme old parts.

No learning without reflection.

Reflection means taking ownership of your learnings so they make sense for you.

Good learning is co-produced

People don't learn in a vacuum but through experiences and interactions. Good learning connects your own experience.

Every moment is a teachable moment.

Learning is not limited to formal education, rather every lived experience is an opportunity to see things from a new light.

Outcomes

WE'RE AFTER ...

Improved sense of self

People report feeling more confident about their own skills and knowledge, and have a healthier sense of self. They are less fearful of interacting with community members.

Greater self-efficacy

People express greater control and competency (self-efficacy) over learning new things, and are more empowered to make their own informal decisions.

Diversified social network

People meet others who share their interest, not just their lifestyle, and take-up more opportunities.

Increased autonomy

People's increased engagement in bigger ideas and concepts increases their motivation to shape the world around them.

Increased coping mechanisms

People report greater awareness and usage of strategies and resources to redirect their thinking

Improved mental health

Spending time engaged, stimulated and active reduces boredom, self-destructive behaviors, and future orientation.

Improved employability

Learning can lead to development of 'soft' and hard skills necessary for finding or creating work.

Metrics

- % of people who take-up further informal or formal learning
- % of people who make new connections.
- % of people who are engaged in an organized activity or fieldtrip during the day.
- % of people reporting learning a new strategy or skill each month.
- % reduction in boredom and related substance usage.

Practices

MICRO

Topping and tailing (taster experiences)

How do you turn lectures, demos, workshops, and group conversations into great learning moments? By framing each one from start to finish as an explicit learning event. Drawing on andragogy (the pedagogy of adult learning), Learning Facilitators begin events by setting learning goals, and end them with a set of reflective questions. Research shows that clearly articulated goals enhance motivation and a sense of achievement. For example, although Alice comes to informal talks she often can't recall what the talks were about. With the practice of topping and tailing, Alice is not left to extract the interesting information on her own, but is guided to consider the relevance of what is being talked about through three layers of prompts: (1) what, (2) so what, and (3) now what?



MESO

Daily Retreats (bridging relationships)

Communities aren't just comprised of streets, homes, and services - but also cultural institutions, gardens, galleries, architecture, and the rest. How do we bridge people to enriching experiences and interest-based (versus lifestyle-based) communities? That's where Daily Retreats come in. Each day Learning Facilitators host curated tours, and introduce members to surprising spots. Drop-ins have a physical day travel agency desk, which provides annotated maps of the local area, DIY guides, and invitations to meet-up groups outside of the drop-in centre walls. Not wanting to go alone? Volunteer Guides can go with you. For example, Steven, who spends all of his days at the drop-in has walked past the AGO thousands of times, but never felt he could go in. On a Daily Retreat, he went in, for free, met a docent and had his first real conversation about art. He's fascinated by Picasso, and the guide invited him to an upcoming lecture series. We know from the adult learning literature that motivation is linked with relevancy. Now that Steven sees the relevancy of Picasso, he wants to learn more.

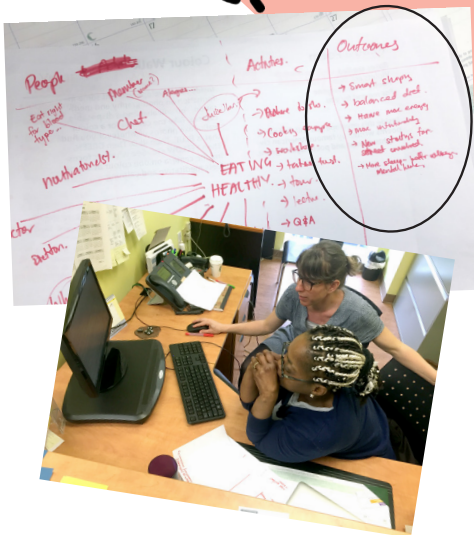


Read more about this practice & how we have been doing it! Go to page 48



=Spotlight practices

Practices that have been developed and practiced more than the others, follow the page numbers to see more.



Bringing-in external resources (taster experiences)

In cash scarce environments like drop-ins, how do you find the resources for inspiring programming? Where do new ideas and topics of conversation come from? Learning Facilitators spend time each week creating value propositions and reaching out to postdocs, professionals, and community members with niche knowhow. They work with them to design and deliver pro bono lectures, demos, workshops, performances, small group conversations and casual sharing of interests. Facilitator Laura reflects that she always thought not having a budget was a barrier to contacting external people. Discovering how to create a pool of pro bono resource has opened up all sorts of new possibilities. She doesn't deliver the same program week after week anymore; instead, there are new offers each week. We know from the education literature that it is much more powerful to learn from someone passionate about their craft - and that this increases the likelihood of them being bridged to future opportunities and networks.

Read more about this practice & how we have been doing it! Go to page 56

MACRO

Premium Membership Cards (Barrier Busting)

How do you encourage street-involved adults to use the many resources of the city - the museums, libraries, concert halls, etc? By eliminating two of the biggest barriers - the entrance fee, and the perception of being unwelcome. Many community centres already have arrangements for free admittance with these institutions, yet most members of drop-ins aren't aware of this. Premium membership cards list all the places in the city participants can go, for free. Facilitators work to broker more deals with institutions, and help them to feel comfortable engaging with street-involved adults. Steven who enjoyed learning about Picasso at the AGO is now also spending a few hours every week at the ROM. During these hours he engages his brain in a different way and reports feeling less bored, and less compelled to use.

Practice: Daily Retreats

Daily retreats are about introducing people to places rich with inspiration and intellectual stimulation - along with the norms and motifs of those settings. These are settings like the brain lab, the art gallery or the medicinal herb garden where your primary identity is not that of a street-involved adult but as learners or connoisseurs. The physical objects you are surrounded with, the words, and the routines convey something different to those of a shelter or a drop-in centre.

We see this as a meso practice because it's about switching-up the environment in which people are steeped, and therefore the expectations about how you are supposed to act, the roles you are supposed to assume, and the visual and verbal cues you get.

When Fred visited a neuroscience research lab, his reality momentarily shifted. He was treated not as an uninvited outsider, but as any other interested person. His curiosities and questions were encouraged. His niche know-how was respected.

Whilst outings are not new practices for drop-in centres, shelters or community centres, outings as a regular and intentional part of the day-to-day may be. Rather than a special event, intentional outings would become part of the daily fabric. Opportunities to leave the dominant space, enter a new setting as a learner / critic / appreciative inquirer, and interact with people based on a shared interest, would be as normal as playing pool or dominoes.

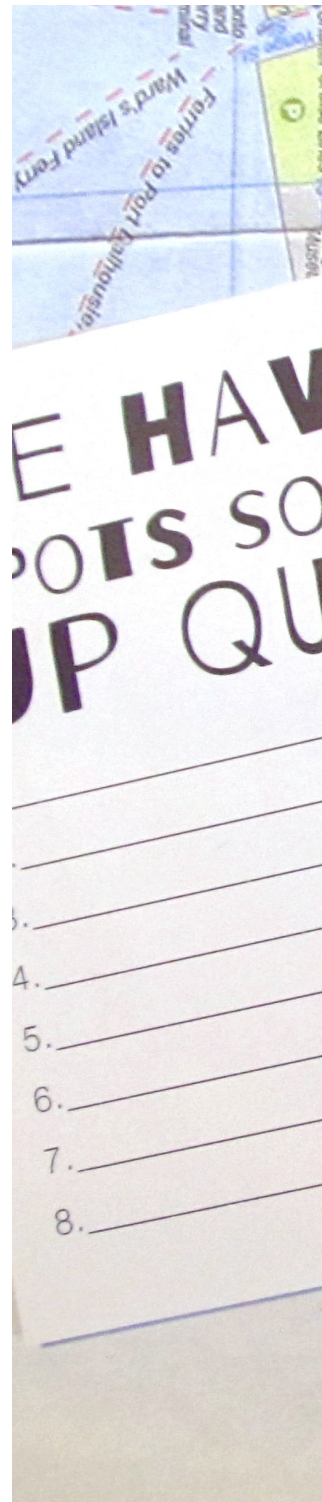
Outcomes

Improved sense of self

People report feeling more confident about their own skills and knowledge, and have a healthier sense of self. They are less fearful of interacting with community members.

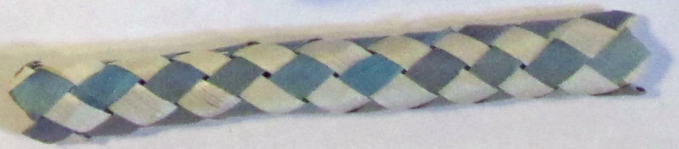
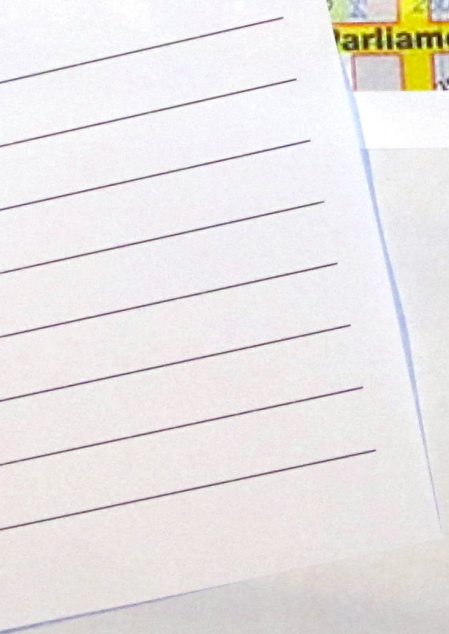
Diversified social networks

People meet others who share their interest, not just their lifestyle, and take-up more opportunities.





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SIGN
DICK



HOW

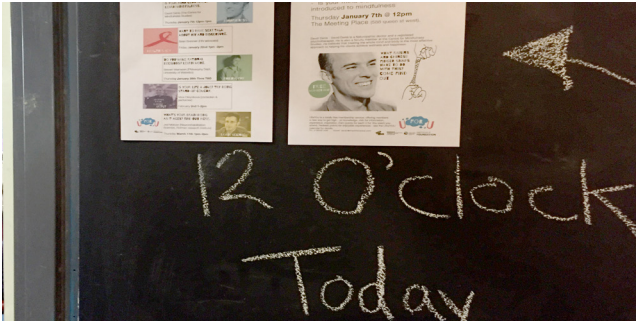
WHY

As a starting point for imagining a day retreat, ask these questions:

- What specific outcomes do you want to achieve? Is it about introducing people to novelty? Is it about brokering people to a wider network? Is it about giving people a fresh perspective, and improved sense of self?
- Think about the types of places you could go to archive this, and the type of learning you'd like to impart? For example, maybe a new gallery has opened up, and you'd like to introduce people to a new style of postmodern art?

While field trips aren't new, we define a good day retreat as one where the theme and the outcomes are clearly articulated. One intention of day retreats is to bridge folks to new people, contexts, and experiences. Providing a bridge to something new widens what is possible for a person.

ADVERTISE THE RETREAT



How will you let people know about the latest day retreat? Some advertising options include:

- Signage: chalk, postcards, travel guides
- Word of mouth: recruit a member to help
- Social media: post to Facebook group

Come up with a provocative title, that draws out the themes or questions you want to explore. Instead of something like 'Alley Walk' you could call it 'Is it graffiti or is it art?'

Think like a travel agency. How would a travel agency package the experience - what would be included? What would make it sound attractive?

RECRUITING



Part 1 - a few days before

- Use the signage as a prop, or conversation starter to peak people's interest.
- Go bigger - set up a table or a stand to attract people to you and then talk about the day retreat.
- Text and Facebook people that showed interest. Stuff a postcard into their mailbox.

Part 2 - day of

- Use the poster or postcards to recruit new folks. Point to photos from past day retreats as evidence of what they'll be missing if they don't come along.

Behind clear advertising is a concept called hierarchy of information. What's the most important detail to walk away with? Use at least two different font sizes to differentiate more important information from less important information.

MEETING POINT



- Try creating a consistent meetup spot in your space where people expect to find out about the latest day retreats and schedule their next learning adventure.
- At the meetup spot, you can have maps of the latest adventure and photos from last adventures.

One of the best ways to create a new social norm is to curate a distinct physical space, with distinct routines. Just like a travel agency sparks feelings of curiosity with a board of destinations and a wall of beautiful brochures, you can create a physical space that engenders a similar feeling with a board of local retreats and lovely photos.

THE RETREAT



- Think of yourself as a tour guide. Introduce yourself. State the goals for the day. Describe the route.
- Distribute roles to members. One member could be the photographer. Another member could be the sound recorder (using a phone or dictaphone). Yet another member could be the navigator.
- Bring along printed materials to read (i.e. a definition of graffiti) or props to distribute (i.e. notebooks or disposable cameras)
- Encourage members to ask questions and share what they know. How does this compare to other experiences they've had?

In adult learning theory, great learning feeds off of participant's interests, builds competencies, and feels relevant. Explore the relevancy of day trips on people's lives by asking direct questions, and making connections to bigger concepts and ideas. You can use small moments - i.e. commenting on a building's architecture - to raise bigger questions about people's sense of place.

REFLECTING + FEEDBACK



On your way back ask people to reflect on the field trip and activity. Some things you can ask are

- Was it a good way for them to spend their time? What did they learn? Have they been inspired? What else would they like to do?

Also ask for feedback about how it went. Some things you can ask them:

- What did they like? What did they not like? What would they like to see different?

It's good to ask for feedback. Feedback strengthens the work you do. Additionally, in this case, giving people the option for feedback is a way to include folks in the process. Through co-creation folks can gain a greater sense of self-value, and confidence in their abilities.

FOLLOW-UP



- Print out photographs taken during the field trip and display them on a wall (this is also good advertising for future field trips).
- Announce the next field trip.

When a fieldtrip ends it does not mean that the experience is over. Returning a memento or photograph of the experience is a nice way to help folks remember it. Moreover it can remind folks about how it felt trying something new and the reminder might encourage them to do it again.

Practice: Bringing in external resources

Bringing external people in is all about infusing new topics and fresh faces into places like drop-in centres. Post-docs, professionals and community members with expertise are invited to share their skills, knowledge, and passions. The focus is on the exchange of rich inspiration and giving street-involved adults opportunities to open their minds, discover new things, explore different realities, and create new pathways for future learning. It's about people doing something different, acknowledging that: "if you always do the same thing, you will always get what you always got".

Bringing new people in is a meso practice, in that it changes up what happens in the surrounding environment, and adds external stimulation.

When Mike met the astronomy professor, he was pretty surprised. Finally, here was a chance to ask the specific questions about the universe that had been piling up in his head. The astronomer gave more than just basic answers and introduced Mike to concepts he never knew and hadn't read online. Before the astronomer left, he invited Mike to his monthly open telescope night and to join a group of other amateur astronomers. Mike has never had a chance to look through a telescope, and now that he knows this astronomer personally, he definitely plans to go. He is super excited that his long-held passion for the universe has been re-ignited.

Whilst bringing people into a community centre context is not a new practice, building up a free pool of informal resource may be. There are tonnes of untapped and underutilized resources in the community, and many people who are willing and surprisingly eager to give their time. This practice also creates an environment of learning that goes both ways. While street-involved adults are stimulated with new content, the stigmas external people might hold about street-involved adults can be broken down by means of their close engagement with folks at the centre.

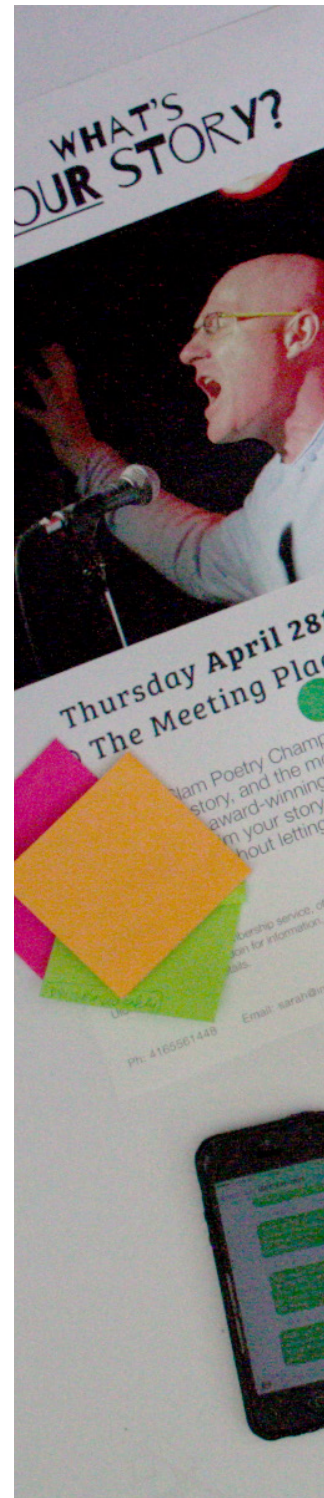
Outcomes

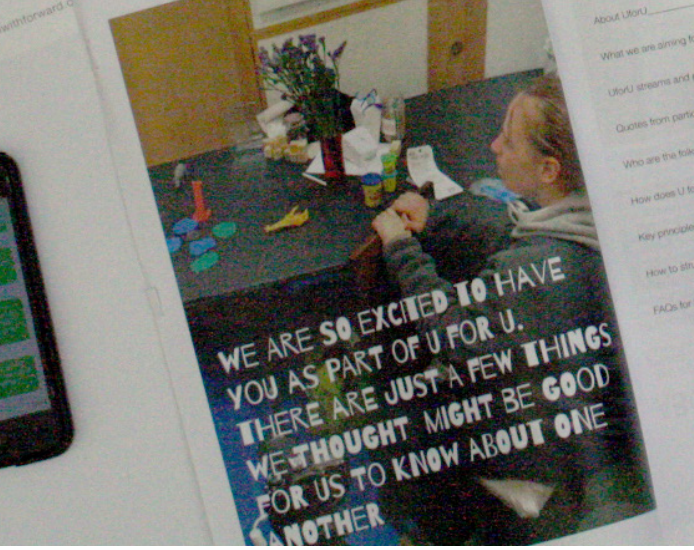
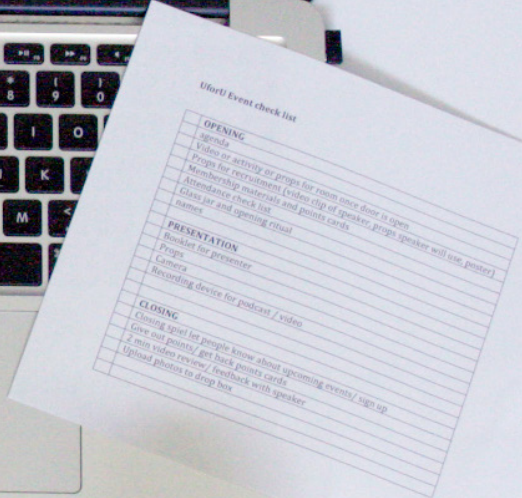
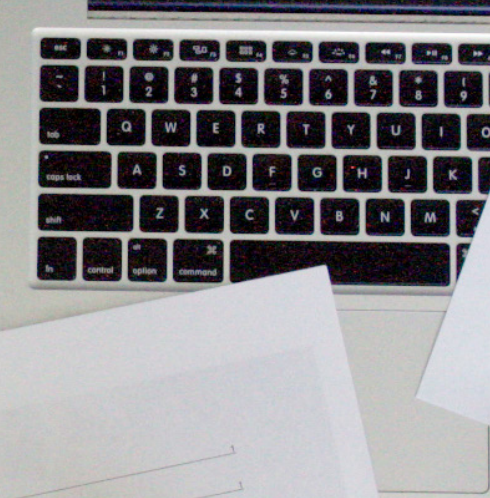
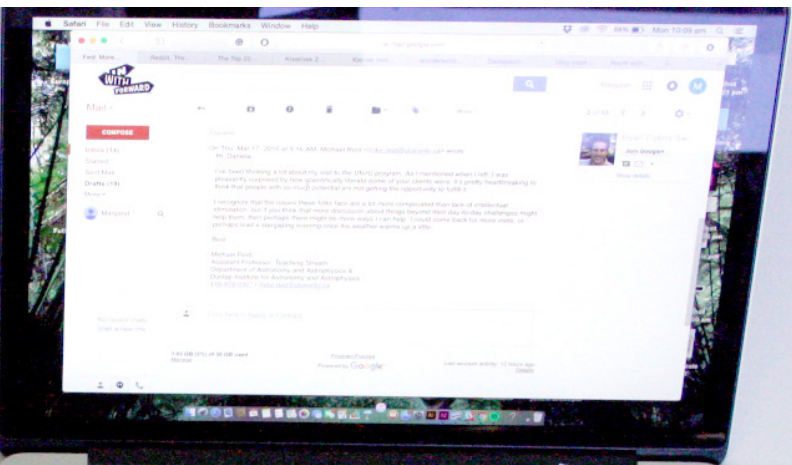
Diversified social network

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Increased autonomy

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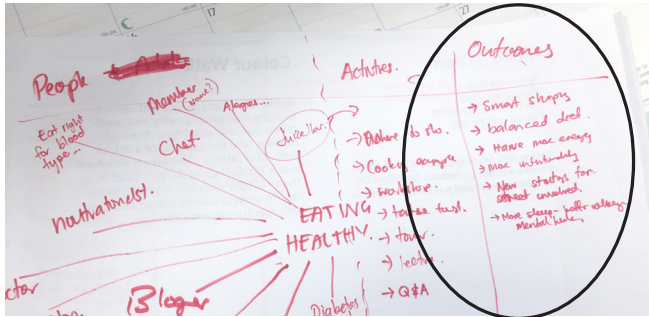




Blank lined paper with a purple crayon and a small clear container filled with colorful beads or markers.

SPOTLIGHT-Bringing in external resources

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?



Ask yourself and members, what might come from exploring this topic and bringing someone with niche know-how in?

Some examples:

- Practical strategies for eating well in shelters
- A new recipe to try without a stove
- Learning what to eat to have more energy
- Greater confidence & control in eating well
- New insights into the food production system
- Finding out about volunteer and job opportunities in the sustainable food industry

Before running a session on the chosen topic, ask what is the intentionality behind the learning session? Who are you doing this for and why? What does success look like?

SEARCH



- Take the topics you brainstormed, and run a Google search for local experts. The more specific your topics (i.e. urban gardening), the better your results will be.
- Try several different keywords. For example, “urban gardening” and “expert” and “Toronto.”
- University department websites are great places to start a search. For example: trying to find a nutritionist? Check the local University’s Department of Health or Nutrition.
- Meet-up groups, local networks, or professional bodies are also a good port of call. For example, there is the ‘Dieticians of Canada’ group.
- It is best to contact people directly - to find individuals’ emails as opposed to general administrators.

Helpful keywords include:

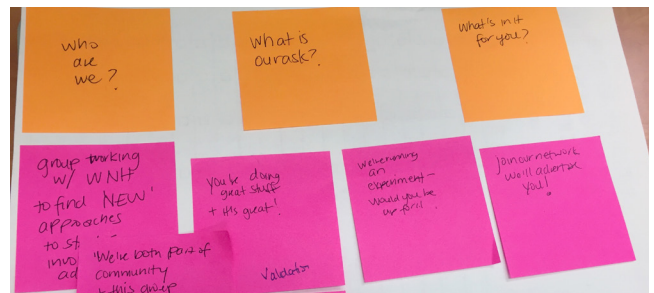
- The area of the city (e.g. Downtown Toronto)
- The topic (urban gardening)
- Possible job titles of experts (nutritionist, herbal medicine doctor)
- The skills you are interested in (healthy cooking)

MAKE A SPREADSHEET

Food and Healthy Eating	
Person	Contact info
Tara Miller, nutritionist	http://taramilernutrition.com/services/
Tony robin	tony_robin@camh.net http://nutrition.med.utoronto.ca/tauty/Cahm/n/
Moira Cockburn, Program Co-ordinator, Centre for hospita	E.mail: chufchool@asscrabrown.ca http://www.georgebrown.ca/H119-2015-2016/
nicole benson	Contact Information www.nourishyourbodyinspired5oul.com nourishyourbodyinspired5oul@gmail.com

- Use a 'Contact Management System' (we use a program called HighRise) or just use a simple spreadsheet to keep track of the people you are contacting. You can use our template.
- We find these headings helpful:
 - Name
 - Credential
 - Email
 - Website address
 - Biographical details
 - Date of first contact
 - # Of contact attempts

BRAINSTORM WHAT YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE

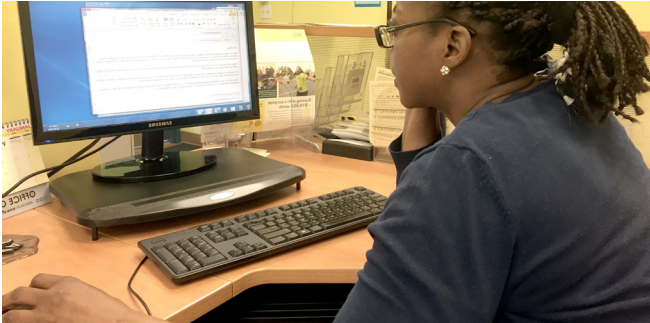


- Brainstorm why an outside expert would want to share their skills and know-how, pro-bono.
- Develop the value proposition. That's answering the question: what will they get out of coming in?
- Get clear on the ask. What do you want from them? How long? In what format - a workshop, a performance, 1:1 meet-up, a tour?
- Figure out the framing. What language might be attractive to them? Do you have testimonials from others?

Here we are drawing on sales & marketing theory to figure out what appeals to people. We try to think about what might matter to them. Is it validating their expertise? Is it drawing on their desire to be altruistic? Is it building up their resume? Is it helping them to feel part of their community? We are explicit about the value-add to them in our communications.

SPOTLIGHT-Bringing in external resources

WRITE AN EMAIL



- Write the person a personal note. Not a form letter.
- It is helpful to think in terms of different headings for your email. Plus, what will get them to read our email? (We like the heading: “seeking your expertise on ...”)
- In the email:
 - Be confident.
 - Use short sentences and clear language.
 - Tell them who you are, and why their skills matter to this population group.
 - Be upfront with your ask.
 - Clearly state what they will get in return (experience, helping people etc.)

The best emails are ones that are personal. What struck you about their biography? Read their bio & webpage to choose your framing accordingly. If they say they already run free classes at a community centre, say you are very interested in bringing their experience into a new context like a drop-in. Describe why that matters.

You don't need to mention that you are asking for their time for free, it will be implicit in your framing of the email.