

Conversations Grow Community

In 2002 Building Community Solutions (BCS) embarked on a series of community consultations designed to help residents connect with each other and discuss their community visions. During this process two different models were used to frame the conversations – study circles and conversation cafes.

Study circles were initially used to explore the concept of community involve a group of 8 – 15 people who meet several times to discuss an issue. Through dialogue the group builds stronger connections with each other, develops a more in-depth understanding of the issue and outlines steps for success. Study circles are followed by an action forum where an action plan is created using the information and ideas gathered.

Conversation café's are hosted conversations that are held in public settings to explore set themes. Everyone is encouraged to join the conversation. The purpose is to collectively learn from each other, safely share differing ideas, improve our understanding of other points of view, and have some fun while doing it. The success of a conversation café is built on everyone agreeing and following set criteria that govern "good" conversations including being open minded, curious, open to new discoveries, sincere, and brief.

For BCS the Study Circles and Conversation Cafés have been instrumental to determining the direction of this community based initiative. Residents involved in these conversations have identified and prioritized themes and action items for the BCS Steering Committee and Coordinator to move forward on. The outcomes of these

conversations provide a solid basis for strengthening community connections – the top action them arising from the 2002 Study Circles process.

In the Fall of 2007, BCS is hosting a “Connections Café” to explore global, community, neighbourhood, and individual connections and our role as an individual in these communities. The goal of this event is to have open conversations between local residents, explore shared values and experiences, and reflect on how each individual plays a role in creating a healthy and sustainable community.

The “Connections Café” will be modeled on the Philosopher’s Café, developed locally by SFU. This conversation model encourages individual’s participation in a moderated and vibrant street level discussion in a casual, comfortable environment with pre-set conversation rules.

To learn more about the various conversation models check out these links:

- Study Circles - <http://www.studycircles.org/en/index.aspx>
- Conversation Café - http://www.conversationcafe.org/join_main.html#anchor3
- Philosopher’s Café - <http://www.sfu.ca/philosopherscafe/>