

## **FCE Mission Statement**

The Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE) encourages people, in a fragmented world, to discover new and better ways of being together.

Living, learning, and teaching the principles of community, we serve as a catalyst for individuals, groups, and organizations to:

- Communicate with authenticity,
- Deal with difficult issues,
- Welcome and affirm diversity
- Bridge differences with integrity,
- Relate with compassion and respect.

FCE's approach encourages tolerance of ambiguity, the experience of discovery, and the tension between holding on and letting go.

In our work to empower others, we remember our reliance upon a spirit within and beyond ourselves.

## **Community Building Insights**

The Foundation for Community Encouragement, Inc. (FCE) model of community building is experiential in nature. After attending a community building event, most individuals feel they have learned a great deal from the experience. Exactly what has been learned is sometimes difficult to put into words.

This handbook has been prepared to help you identify and understand what you learned during the community building process, and how you might apply it to your everyday life.

One of the goals of a Community Building group is for the participants to reach true community. FCE believes that community is a gift of the Spirit and as such, cannot be programmed or manipulated.

While each community building experience is a new adventure, there are certain rules a group follows during the process and principles a group uses to identify its sense of community. As your group built community, you learned many of these rules and principles experientially.

## **The Process of Community Building**

Most groups pass through four stages in the community building process; each stage is essential to the outcome.

**Pseudo-community** is the first stage. During this stage, the group is polite and not very authentic. In fact, some groups try to fake community at this stage by pointing out the similarities between members. Differences are ignored or glossed over.

**Chaos** is the second stage. During this stage, differences are not longer ignored. Individuals try to heal or convert other to their ways of thinking. Frequently group members do not listen to one another. The group acknowledges that there are differences among the members and then tries to obliterate them. There are only two ways out of chaos - organization or emptiness.

**Emptiness** is the third stage. During this stage, individuals in the group examine their barriers to authentic communication. These barriers include preconceived expectations, prejudices, cherished beliefs, the need to control, and the need to solve one another's' problems. Effective listening, authentic sharing and periods of deep, comfortable silence are characteristics of emptiness.

**Community** is the fourth stage. When this stage is reached the full range of emotions can be expressed. Even though community is the ideal, it is not a static state that once reached never changes. Community can be palpable to some and subtle to others.

A group may be in a very profound state of community and yet there may be an individual who does not feel as if he or she is a part of the group. Everyone in the group does not always experience community at the same time.

These stages of the community building process are not linear; they do not necessarily happen in order with one stage immediately following the other. A group may touch emptiness and then quickly return to chaos. Or a group in chaos may go back to a more subtle form of pseudo-community. Community building is a dynamic process. Identifying the stages is a guideline for understanding both the process a group goes through to become a community and the most common behavior of individuals during this process.

## **Some Rules of Community Building**

One of the most important elements of community is authentic, effective communication. The following communication skills are essential:

Use "I" statements

To communicate effectively, speak personally and specifically rather than generally and abstractly.

Listen to your inner voice. Become aware of when you are moved to speak and when you are not moved to speak.

Listen carefully and with respect to what another person is telling you. Do not formulate your response while someone is speaking but wait until the other has completely finished.

Be aware of your own barriers, such as prejudices, expectations, ideologies, judgments, or a need to control, which are obstacles to community.

Be willing to share your own woundedness. This way you invite others to be vulnerable with you.

Sharing brokenness as well as heroism is an essential part of maintaining community. Both the darkness and light can be expressed.

Understand the value of silence in communication. Be comfortable with silence, your own and others.

### **Some Principles of Community**

Community is inclusive. Individual differences are celebrated. Soft individualism, rather than rugged, can flourish.

Community is realistic and multi-dimensional. Each member is free to experience his or her own facet of reality.

Community facilitates healing once its members stop trying to heal or fix one another.

Community is reflective, contemplative, and introspective.

A community's members can fight gracefully.

A community is a group of all leaders who share equal responsibility for and commitment to maintaining its spirit.

A community is a highly effective work group.

A community is the ideal consensual decision making body.

In a community a wide range of gifts and talents is celebrated.

## **Integrating Your Community Building Experience**

You may find that you continue to have new insights and understandings about your response to the experience in the weeks after the event is completed. Many participants report that their learning continues to unfold and their understanding of the process increases at deeper levels.

Whether this event was your first experience building community using FCE's model or your tenth, each experience adds insights and awareness that may not have been present before. Community building can cause real changes in your relationships with others and in your relationship with yourself.

For some participants, building community where they live and/or work may seem like an impossible task. It is important to remember that all community begins with you. By focusing on how you communicate with others and how you listen, by expressing yourself honestly and vulnerably, by examining your expectations and assumptions, you can build community in any environment.

Here are some suggestions to help integrate community building experience into your daily life.

- Not everyone is interested in or wants to build community. Take care of yourself by sharing your experience only with those whom you think will take the time to really listen to you.
- Proselytizing is a form of fixing and will create resistance. You cannot convert someone to a desire for community in their lives.
- If the community building experience has touched you deeply, others will become aware of the effect more by how you behave toward them than by what you say. One way to avoid proselytizing is to wait until you have fully integrated your community building experience before trying to share it.
- As time passes, you may tend to lose the momentum of the community building event unless you take steps to keep it alive for yourself. First, reflect on the experience and listen to your inner voice. Second, begin putting into practice what you have learned during the event. You may also want to engage in community building wherever it feels appropriate. Whatever approach you take, it is important to create a supportive environment for yourself.
- You might consider starting an ongoing community group, if you do not already have one, which would meet on a regular basis.
- You may want to attend another community building event in the future to re-experience community with a different group. Alumni of FCE workshops and conferences report that their understanding of the community building process deepens with each successive experience.