JUICY LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

SHARING LESSONS AND INTELLIGENCE FROM
FIVE YEARS OF SOCIAL R&D IN CANADA

WHY THESE OFFERINGS? WHY NOW?

Change is a long and winding road. We're feeling Canada is at a crossroads. Yes, the federal government has just committed $750 million over 10 years to social innovation. No, not any innovation will get to breakthrough change. If there is one thing we keep re-learning it's the difference between building capacity to innovate and creating the conditions to disrupt stagnant social outcomes. After five years in Canada, we're distilling our top lessons learned. Join us in our Summer of Taking Stock.

Five years, a small team and a big ambition:

What will it take to turn our social safety nets into trampolines? Our welfare state was constructed in a different era for a different purpose. Pieced together after World War II, the welfare state set out to protect workers from harm – from sickness, unemployment, and squalor. And it's done that, for some. Mean life expectancy rose. National poverty rates dropped. But, average gains obscure persistent margins. Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, and people living with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be living in poverty. Equity isn't simply about patching the holes of the safety net. To get to better outcomes for all, welfare can't just be about getting by, but *gaining* ground. Even a life free from harm isn't a life free to self-actualize. Indeed, a long life isn't necessarily a good life. Rather than repair the floor, we think we also need to raise the ceiling and tear down the walls, opening up possibilities for those most on the margins.

Five years ago, our small team with this really big ambition set-up shop in Canada. We were open about our history of failure. After a decade of trial and error in the UK, the Netherlands, and Australia, few of our solutions stood the test of time. Despite prototypes and blueprints, high fidelity implementation remained elusive.

So we took an alternative route. We started with the implementors: with the non-profits getting the government contracts to deliver the welfare state. In Canada, the welfare state is largely contracted out to social service providers. Tens of thousands of them. Our hunch was that partnering with social services would enable us to reach up and down, bringing us closer to the people they serve and to the government agencies who fund them.

TO GET BETTER OUTCOMES FOR ALL, WELFARE CAN'T JUST BE ABOUT GETTING BY, BUT GAINING GROUND.

Has our hunch played out?

Yes and no. Progress has certainly not been fast or linear, and neither is the kind of breakthrough change we're after. The kind of change that disrupts longstanding beliefs, logics and practices is unsettling in its surges and setbacks. Just look at the journey towards civil, women's, and LGBTQ rights.

We've learned lots about what it takes to prime the ground for disruption, and how it's distinct from innovation. Social innovation has made its way into the rhetorical water supply: government funders and organizations volley the word around, adding it to grants, strategies, and professional development plans. While innovation can yield disruption, it can also manufacture new ways to do more of the same. Mobile apps and coordinated services are often fresh coats of paint on the same load-bearing walls.

Getting to a different end state requires some deconstruction: picking apart the histories, ideologies, and theories that have led to and perpetuated marginalization. And that necessitates real engagement in content. We must understand the particular ideas and practices that shape people's experience of indigeneity, homelessness, addiction, criminal justice, immigration, etc.

So much of the social innovation space seems enamored with process, and devoid of context: removed from the particular knowledge and power bases that give rise to situated social realities. For example, to change developmental disability outcomes in B.C., Canada, we must contest dominant theories of intelligence and personhood, and understand how government and families wrestled for control, only for many families to eventually cede their power to organizations set-up to carry forth their vision. In our modern welfare state, it is funders and organizations who wrestle for power. One has money, the other has professional expertise. Both have protocol and procedure.

Where we have learned the most – and seen the most glimmers of change – is where the power imbalance starts to shift; where courageous leaders cede their power to people with lived experience, and to the families, hairdressers, bakers, convenience stores and pharmacies who have implicitly or explicitly rejected the way problems have long been defined and superficially addressed. In these moments, organizations act a lot less like implementors and a lot more like facilitators: finding and enabling the unusual suspects to liberate themselves from some of the professional dogmas, protocols, and procedures that keep things the way they are.

So where does that leave us, and where does that leave Canada?

Join us in our Summer of Taking Stock. We're putting on a program of time-limited events to share our top five lessons learned. Participate in one of our events, contribute your insights, and help us to revise our hunches – and yours.

FIVE THEMATIC LESSONS

01
REFRAMING PROBLEMS

Too big. Too small. Just right. What's the right size and shape problem to tackle? What are the reoccurring problems overlooked by the welfare state, and how can we use different types of data to reframe them? Find out where and how problem reframing has made a big difference.

02
FINDING THE HARD-TO-REACH

Who is in? Who is out? What does it look like to find the people not benefiting from policies and services? What have we learned about the folks who intentionally isolate themselves – and how to attract them on their terms? We call into question the social innovation adage that the "right people are in the room" and identify our best strategies for getting out of the room and getting into the spaces where people live, work and play.

03
LIVING WITH TENSION

Mac, PC, Linux are three different computer operating systems. We're not in the business of computers, but we are in the business of operating systems. How do we create a welfare system with multiple operating systems? Perhaps our biggest lessons to date have been about how organizations and funders can create the conditions for disruption: how they can hold space for best practices as well as experimental next practices, and not conflate one with the other.

04
GETTING DISCIPLINED

Design gets reduced to empathy maps, personas, prototypes. Social science gets reduced to interviews and nudges. What's it look like to blend disciplines and hone an interdisciplinary craft? What are the top mistakes we keep repeating? We'll explore how we reconcile a user-centered approach with top-down theories and values.

05
ROLES OF THE FUTURE

At the end of the day, change needs passionate people, not more process. Gain exposure to the roles of the future, and the cultural conditions to attract and sustain talent and teams. We're talking about why HR is really the linchpin of disruption.

Since coming to Canada in 2014, InWithForward
has written over 400 ethnographies of people's
experiences of addiction, aging, disability,
homelessness, mental health and immigration across
10 cities, supported 30 prototypes, and run six rounds
of capacity building with 100+ staff. If we're honest,
plenty hasn't worked. We embrace failure, provided
we use what hasn't worked as fodder to revise
assumptions and develop alternative ways forward.
This summer, we're making our learning transparent.
Come see and learn with us.

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OUR OFFERS

01   **REFRAMING PROBLEMS:** THE KIND OF DATA AND LEADERSHIP REQUIRED TO ADDRESS FIVE OVERSIGHTS OF THE WELFARE STATE

02   **FINDING THE HARD-TO-REACH:** HOW TO REACH PEOPLE EXCLUDED BY ACCIDENT, DESIGN OR PERSONAL CHOICE

03   **LIVING WITH TENSION:** WHAT IT TAKES TO DELIVER 'BEST' PRACTICE WHILE HOSTING 'NEXT' PRACTICE

04   **GETTING DISCIPLINED:** HONING THE CRAFT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND DESIGN

05   **ROLES OF THE FUTURE:** SOURCING TALENT AND CREATING CULTURES TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE

01

REFRAMING PROBLEMS:
THE KIND OF DATA AND LEADERSHIP REQUIRED TO ADDRESS FIVE OVERSIGHTS OF THE WELFARE STATE

Left: For Earl, rehab, housing, and Remand Centre are becoming revolving doors, and the interactions are always pretty much the same.

Right: For Jeremy and Anita, getting out of the rooming house and into an apartment means having space to grow their relationship, though housing supports largely ignore relationships.

DISCOVER WAYS TO COLLECT AND ACT ON DATA FOR CHANGE

Einstein said it best: "We can't solve problems using the same thinking that created them." So where does new thinking come from? We used to think it came from thick data: the kind of data collected in context with people on the margins. But after 16 thick data projects across Canada, we think it comes from the courage to redefine boundaries and advocate for different logics. It's not enough to commission new kinds of data. Where we've made headway, we've worked with leaders to ask a different set of questions, exploring the meaning of people's lives: their sources of purpose, agency, love, belonging and beauty. These human needs are different than service needs, cutting across issue-based silos like health, housing, justice and education. Real change happens at the nexus of human and service needs. We'll share examples of where thick data has led to real change, and what it's looked like for leaders, at all levels, to use new forms of data to reframe problems and redraw solution spaces. We'll also offer examples of when data has gone nowhere, and open-up conversation about how organizations and funders can set the stage for using data to generate alternative ways of thinking, being and doing.

Offerings	Intro Learning Outcomes	Applied session outcomes
Intro One hour introductory webinar. $100pp	• Understand how to ask questions and reframe problems from a human-centred perspective.	• Map your sources of data and intelligence.
Applied session Full day session with 5-20 people, and two InWithForward Facilitators. $5000	• Gain reference points for how to use data along the policy cycle from definition to evaluation.	• Brainstorm and refine key questions to ask.
	• Identify the leadership conditions for data as a tool for change.	• Explore the conditions for data leadership in your own context.
		• Unpack data case studies and see the steps to move from data, to user segments, to design principles, to policy & program interventions.

FINDING THE HARD-TO-REACH:
HOW TO REACH PEOPLE EXCLUDED BY ACCIDENT, DESIGN OR PERSONAL CHOICE

Above Bob chooses his top three values: self-sufficiency, security & comfort, and independence.

Right: Jean jokes that the plants are her children and the TV is her husband. "My number one policy is to keep to myself."

EXPLORE STRATEGIES FOR FINDING AND ENGAGING THE HARD-TO-REACH

Meet Marco, Bob, and Jean: three people over 55 who have intentionally isolated themselves, even in the midst of busy rooming houses and apartment buildings. They won't show up to your focus groups or fill out your surveys. They prefer to keep to themselves, even as challenges accumulate.

Our most bedeviling social problems require understanding the people most left out of our systems & structures whether by omission, choice, or deliberate design. More and more organizations have an equity lens and seek to extend their reach – and yet time & dollars go towards the same old engagement strategies: one more consultation or focus group.

In this session we share techniques we've learned to find and connect with people who avoid services, the people who are unaware of services, and the people who are excluded from services. We'll address the rub between dominant risk protocols and meaningful citizen engagement. Our case studies reveal how interactions with the so-called "hard-to-reach" provide clues to design more attractive and inclusive supports. The material will span research from aging, disability, homelessness and housing, as well as newcomer settlement.

Offerings	Intro Learning Outcomes	Applied session outcomes
Intro One hour introductory webinar. $100pp **Applied session** Full day session with 5-20 people, and two InWithForward Facilitators. $5000	• Expand your reference points for alternative engagement strategies. • Learn what about look, feel and tone matters. • Identify ways to frame research and prompt conversation to get greater buy-in.	• Identify population groups left out or under-served by your policies and programs. • Develop a recruitment strategy for upcoming work; or, new perspectives on where to go for the unusual suspects and left behind users. • Unpack case studies to re-frame the typical barriers to meaningful engagement: budget, timing, health & safety and ethics. • See risk in a new light.

03

LIVING WITH TENSION:
WHAT IT TAKES TO DELIVER 'BEST' PRACTICE WHILE HOSTING 'NEXT' PRACTICE

Above: Our Grounded Space organizations' leaders map out the kind of work they're grappling with.

RECOGNIZE PRODUCTIVE TENSIONS IN ALL THE WAYS THEY MAY SHOW UP

Consensus rarely yields breakthrough change. Embracing, rather than resolving, tension is at the core of our systems change practice. What keeps us up late at night? Figuring out how to help organizations hold the space for two distinct ways of operating, resisting the urge to make one way look more like the other. To address root causes and develop next generation support models, we must get comfortable with values & logics that are distinct from the best practices of today -- without sparking shame, blame and defensiveness.

In this session, we'll share the "dual operating system" framework that's helped us recalibrate our partnerships, and channel tension towards transformation. Curious about how productive versus destructive tension shows up? Want examples for how to avoid lowest common denominator compromises and find practices to help you navigate collaborative terrain in new ways? Join us for a frank exploration of what it really means to build partnerships that can tolerate high uncertainty & ambiguity.

Offerings	Intro Learning Outcomes	Applied session outcomes
Intro One hour introductory webinar. $100pp **Applied session** Full day session with 5-20 people, and two InWithForward Facilitators. $5000	· Gain productive language for partnership dynamics, values, and ambitions · Identify core tensions and strategies for living with rather than resolving tension · Have a clear sense of roles vital to partnerships	· Unpack case studies of productive versus unproductive partnerships, and ways to reconceptualize the role of organizations in breakthrough change · Use prompts to reflect on current partnership practices · Explore practices for naming and embracing tensions · Swap strategies for ways to honour the emotional undercurrents of change (fear, worry, surprise, hopefulness) without shame

04

GETTING DISCIPLINED:
HONING THE CRAFT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND DESIGN.

Above Daniela, our Lead Ethnographer and Melanie, one of our designers, working with a crew member to ideate and role play new social supports.

Right: Co-designing a new service for newcomers. All materials were co-created with a team of designers, social scientists, newcomer settlement workers, and newcomers themselves..

GOING BEYOND DESIGN THINKING & BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TO REAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The methods we use to solve problems draw equally from design (service, industrial, graphic, interaction, strategic and foresight design) and social science (psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, critical theory). Blending the two is very much a case of 'opposites attract.' Where design is nimble and responsive, social science is rigorous and cautious. The latter helps us understand how to shape human behaviour. The former helps us co-create a journey from how things are today to how they could be tomorrow.

In the past, we've tried to reduce design and social science to teachable tools and paint-by-numbers-frameworks. We're not alone. There's a flourishing industry of webinars, workshops and toolkits around user-centred design, design thinking, business canvas modeling, nudge theory, etc.

But workshops and worksheets cannot convey the craft of design and social science. Honing a craft requires deep appreciation of the discipline, a hefty dose of discernment, lots of reference points, and ongoing feedback. Hear from our designers and social scientists about what it's taken them to meaningfully combine their crafts and get the most value from this unusual pairing.

Offerings	Intro Learning Outcomes	Applied session outcomes
Intro One hour introductory webinar. $100pp **Custom session** For students and professionals. Price dependent upon length.	• Understand the different types of design and social science • Gain concrete reference points for how design and social science have combined to produce social benefit for people on the margins	• Walk away with an appreciation of tension points between methodological traditions • Learn how to recruit and hire designers and social scientists • Unpack in-depth case studies of how we use blended methods, from initial research to scalable solutions • Use design and social science to tighten connections between the elements of your theory of change, and spot gaps

05

ROLES OF THE FUTURE:
SOURCING TALENT AND CREATING CULTURES TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE

Above: A map of neighbourhood hotspots, characters, informal & formal resources in Strathcona, Edmonton, annotated with questions and curiosities.

CREATING HUMAN RESOURCING SYSTEMS THAT ARE MORE HUMAN.

Meaningful change comes down to people, not process. Ideas stay as abstracted ideals unless we find dedicated and invested individuals willing to inhabit new roles and adopt fresh practices. Over the last five years, we've created a slew of new job types: community catalysts, experience coaches, family mobilizers, reflectors, culture curators, etc. The common thread behind these roles? A re-calibration of what it means to be a professional, where & how work happens, and what constitutes the job to be done. Writing new job descriptions is the easy part. Far harder is building the culture to support experimentalism. Social services are largely command-and-control organizations, set-up to maximize compliance and minimize risk. From lots of trial and error, we've started to learn how to reset accountabilities, feedback loops, and work flows to both develop & deliver solutions that can disrupt the status quo.

Come along to gain a glimpse of HR practices of the future, and share your own experiences with re-inventing how we organize people to move towards change.

Offerings	Intro Learning Outcomes	Applied session outcomes
Intro One hour introductory webinar. $100pp **Custom session** For students and professionals. Price dependent upon length.	• Get exposed to the job types and roles of the future of social services • Identify the elements of an experimental culture • Take a user-centred design lens on human resourcing, in your own context	• Create an HR journey map, and learn how to make visible the experiences and assumptions of your staff • Unpack case studies of successful (and unsuccessful) innovation teams, looking at roles, structures, and management. • Try your hand at customizing some of the routines and practices supporting innovation teams

GET IN TOUCH

You've been looking at our first iteration of a new intelligence-sharing series. We'd love your feedback!

Can we chat?
We wanna know what grabs you, strikes you as novel, or too obvious, fresh or stale, above or below your price point, etc. We promise not to be precious.

Reach out to our Lead Trainer, Natalie Napier
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