

Introduction

The origins of this manual are rooted in our organization's desire to become more inclusive of the more marginalized members of our community, including people with developmental disabilities and visible minorities. As a community development organization, our work focuses on providing all individuals with opportunities to actively and meaningfully participate in their community. Yet, we recognized that many marginalized community members were being excluded from our work.

For us, the first step in this process was to understand the barriers that limited their participation in our programs and organization and to identify concrete strategies to ensure the rich diversity of community members were represented in our work.

What began as an internal staff training program expanded into a series of 17 workshops designed to strengthen the capacity of our staff and those in other agencies to recognize the value of diversity and collectively learn how to make our workplaces and communities more inclusive. 78 individuals from 31 organizations, as well as other community members, attended the workshops which ran from May 2005 to February 2006. A wide range of participatory facilitation techniques were used to develop the workshops, and emphasis was placed on recognizing and drawing of the wealth of knowledge and experience of each and every participant. Participants had an opportunity to learn from the experience of diverse presenters, as well as other participants, and to openly discuss and debate issues in a safe and supportive environment.

This manual is designed to support the work of social development organizations and community groups interested in becoming more inclusive of diverse community members. It is comprised of two sections: a Social Inclusion Curriculum, which draws on our learnings from the workshop series, and memories of the original workshops, which document our experience.

The Edmonton Healthcare Citizenship Society, known more commonly as Action for Health Communities, is a community development organization working in 10 central Edmonton neighborhoods. Our vision is to create a vibrant central Edmonton full of active citizens committed to using their skills, knowledge, culture and values to work with others in addressing community health issues and building stronger communities. We work with economically challenged individuals and self-defined communities and groups, defined by age, ethnicity, ability, geography, life stages and values, and support them to use their skills, talents and resources to develop and carry out initiatives that improve community well being. Our work, based on a multidisciplinary approach to community development, incorporates five key interrelated elements:

- relationship building
- re-sourcing
- capacity building
- community building
- community economic development

For more information about our organization and programs, visit our website at www.a4hc.ca.

ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
SOCIAL INCLUSION CURRICULUM

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