

A KINGDOM IN TROUBLE

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ABSTRACT

*Once upon a time there was a small kingdom of people with a dream. The dream was for a world where children could live free from harm. When any member of the kingdom found a child who had been harmed, the child was brought into the kingdom but those who hurt the child were never allowed in the kingdom....**even if they were children once too!***

And so the story begins. Child welfare agencies have struggled with finding ways to balance fulfilling their mandate of protecting children while still attending to broader social issues that cause problems for families in the first place. This paper uses story and metaphor to challenge the reader, and those working in child welfare, to consider some of the significant sources of oppression inherent in the work.

The purpose of this paper is to examine a small site of practice, located in a social housing neighbourhood, named New Beginnings that seeks to integrate community-based child protection work and community development. The study is based on findings from in-depth interviews with service providers, from both child welfare and other social agencies, affiliated with New Beginnings. The data is interpreted and discussed using a critical framework. Findings indicate that New Beginnings may be an example of innovation and creativity in a very financially restricted time for child welfare.

Despite the promise of the program, careful attention must be paid to the extraordinary power that those working with and for the very large kingdom embody.

This power cannot be extricated from the practice despite the friendly cover. The change in location, from a centralized to a community site, may create opportunities for relationship development and increased partnerships with neighbours to aid in community capacity building and system reform. However, this location change also has potential to create additional site of surveillance and ultimately greater oppression.

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Section 1

Introduction

Child welfare agencies have struggled with finding ways to balance fulfilling their mandate of protecting children while still attending to broader social issues that cause problems for families in the first place (Wharf, 2002). Child welfare itself has become more than a concept that promotes the wellbeing of children; it has also become an institution. As this institution - that set out at the beginning to help - has grown, the work that is done one family at a time has led to blaming of individuals and ultimately the pathologization of problems has permeated the field. (Swift 1995, Strega, 2007). Although there is some recognition of the systemic problems that marginalized people face, few child welfare agencies in Canada have found ways to balance the two views (Trocmé, Knoke and Roy, 2003, Wharf, 2002).

I began my work as a newly graduated social worker in child welfare and quickly became disillusioned with this large system and the prescriptive and limited approach to working with families. Working always with one family at a time, overwhelmed by mountains of paper work and mandatory administrative tasks that often had little to do with children or families, a huge caseload, heavy court involvement and constant worry that someone on my case load might get hurt, left me feeling powerless and ineffective in terms of making a difference. After fighting within the system to try and effect some change my frustrations peaked, when in my annual evaluation, I was told that my job was

to uphold the existing system not to change it. Knowing that this was not an option for me and somewhat disheartened, I left the field of child welfare and worked in other fields of social work and other industries for several years.

I eventually had the opportunity to experience the world of child welfare again but vicariously, this time from a service user's perspective as I supported young mothers living in a residence for pregnant and parenting women. The same work that I had done from the inside of a child welfare agency looked quite different as I experienced it alongside young women from the outside. The seemingly absolute power, which was sometimes used constructively to help young moms yet at other times, was used as a weapon, felt overwhelming and frightening to me even in the role as a support person. To the young moms the power was more than overwhelming and frightening, it was, for most, something to be avoided at all cost - one of their greatest fears was any sort of involvement by "the aid." These young women became my teachers about what it felt like and what actually happened when they had to work with the child welfare system. They taught me about what it felt like to be a crown ward and then shift over in the system from the one who was being protected to the mom who might now harm her child. They taught me that honesty on their part, with the Children's Aid Society, did not always bring about good results in terms of their ability to parent and receive support. They taught me that their fear was often so great that the angry person they presented as in front of child welfare workers for one or two hours a week had little or no resemblance to the person I saw daily parenting her child. They taught me about a broken system of child welfare that often was not able to support them as parents, sometimes took their

children, and frequently did not do a good job in parenting that same child, who then often ended up back in the system as a parent. Oh, there were some excellent workers who somehow could see beyond the large system and mitigate the impact on the young mom from the system, and there were workers who were difficult and hardened to the impact of the large system on the child. It was only the luck of the draw that separated the moms who got the former worker and the ones who got the latter.

When I had a chance to return to child welfare I took it hoping that I might be able to use what I was taught by many young mothers to improve the system. I found some opportunities to ‘tinker’ with the system and try to create a space for a different kind of knowledge about families but the large system seemed to require more than tinkering if it was to transform. Then I stumbled across a site of child welfare practice that seemed very different. This site involved working with multiple families and a community as opposed to the traditional approach of one family at a time. It involved working with families voluntarily, in the communities where they lived, spending time bringing families together to help them create a healthy and supportive neighbourhood. This was not only a change for social workers in the way they approached their work but also a change for those being ‘worked with.’ As a separate entity this was interesting work but when we were able to couple this community development practice with child protection practice the work took on a whole new look and feel for me. I began to see opportunities to do the work differently and a possible entry point for change within this large system. I needed some new teachers to help me understand what was happening in this site of practice.

This was really the beginning of my research journey. Although I was eager to find a different way to work with and for families, I also did not want to jump into a new kind of practice without some careful thought and consideration. I need to humbly acknowledge that I am part of a profession that has occasionally done harm, as Margolin (1997) points out *Under the Cover of Kindness*. I started reading and learning from others in the field of child welfare and found some interesting information but I wanted to balance this research with learning from those I considered ‘experts;’ those actively involved in the program and those most affected by the program.

I have always found that the best teachers are the families served and I do learn from them often in practice; however for research purposes I was unable to use these teachers. The procedures and protocol in research ethics, as governed in this study by McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), are put in place with good intentions to protect the integrity of the research process as well as for the safety of the research participants. The power inherent in my position within a child welfare agency precludes my doing research directly with this vulnerable population; the research could be negatively impacted by (even an unintended) inappropriate use of my power and a population group that might, more importantly, experience harm. Although I understand, from the perspective of power and safety, why this is not allowed it continues to be an area of disappointment for me as I believe that the voice of those served is most often the most necessary and valuable. The next best thing was seeking out those practicing directly in this site to learn about their work, their perspective and their understanding of

what is happening in this unique site of practice that combines child welfare services and community development.

This is where my research begins. In the pages that follow you will read about what I learned often directly through the words of those who participated in interviews. As I explored ways to share this knowledge I looked for alternatives to traditional academic papers. I pondered what was helpful to me in my attempts to understand the complex system of child welfare. I have found over the years that the language of metaphors and storytelling to be useful. I have been struck how families, as well as others working with families, could share a story and bring to life a concept better than any academic paper or research. This prompted me to consider story telling as a way to present my research. I looked for a metaphor to help describe child welfare. The sheer size of the child welfare industry brings to mind that of a kingdom. I have thus chosen to present the ideas expressed by the participants about the system in a storied form - a story about a kingdom in trouble - as a way to help understand and bring to life some very complex ideas about a complex system.

As you read through the pages you will find the parts of the research told in story form are presented in italics. I start the story with a description of the kingdom of child welfare, of some of the people involved, and of how the growth of this kingdom created some problems for both those working inside and for families. I continue in story form, telling of the efforts from some people, working inside the kingdom, who had a desire to bring about change – the result being the program of New Beginnings that I am exploring

in this research. Interspersed with the story you will find a more traditional academic format, presented in regular script, to provide the theoretical, research and methodological information. After the initial story and the introduction of my role in it, I move away from the storytelling to a present a literature review to give some context to this work in relation to the existing research. I continue in the academic format to present the methodology. I return to the story format and introduce the characters in the story who each represent one of those interviewed. I continue in the storied format to present the findings from the data. The discussion and implications for practice are presented in academic format with the conclusion returning to a story form.

There is no single way to interpret this story and the academic portions can be removed to leave only the tale of the kingdom and this story only format is included in the appendix. (Appendix A) The meanings these metaphors have for me as a seasoned social worker may or may not resonate with those of other seasoned social workers, or with someone who is new to the field. This is the beauty, richness and versatility of story-telling as it can be used in multiple settings by multiple people and the ‘truth’ that one finds may be quite unique to the ‘truth’ another finds. I am making reference to child welfare however with minor changes I feel the story could be also be about correction facilities, hospitals, schools or public health departments.

So, welcome to the kingdom. I warn you, it is a kingdom in trouble and for those looking for definitive answers, you may be disappointed as the answers do not lie in the pages that follow but instead with the one who is reading

Section 2

A Kingdom in Trouble

Once upon a time there was a small kingdom of people with a dream. The dream was for a world where children could live free from harm. When any member of the kingdom found a child who had been harmed, the child was brought into the kingdom but those who hurt the child were never allowed in the kingdom....even if they were children once too!

The kingdom, named Child Welfare, grew and those who were allowed in the kingdom continued to worry about children being hurt by those who did not live in the kingdom. Those within the kingdom vowed to watch so that children beyond the kingdom walls who were hurt, could be saved. These children were brought into the kingdom so that they could be safe and happy and most importantly never be hurt again. Soon the kingdom became concerned not only with those children who were hurt but also those who might become hurt. Now more children could enter the kingdom but the men and women (mostly women) who might harm them were never allowed into the kingdom....even if they were children once too!

Special people were chosen to work in the kingdom and most of them were called Social Workers. Not only were they special people but they also had special training, and more importantly they were nothing like those who had hurt children. They would never hurt a child! The children who lived in the kingdom were often sad and sometimes angry

*because most of them wanted their parents to live in the kingdom as well. The kingdom was a nice enough place but many people in the kingdom were very busy watching those outside the kingdom and making sure everyone knew that they were watching. This left less time for them to watch the children who were brought into the kingdom to make sure that they were **safe and happy**.*

*The special people in the kingdom (most of whom were social workers), the ones who did spend time with the sad and angry children, sometimes felt sad and angry too. Some of them were sad for the children. Some were angry at the parents. Some were sad for the parents **and** sad for the children. Some were angry at the parents **and** also angry at the children. All these sad and angry feelings took over the kingdom but people in the kingdom couldn't agree on who they should be angry with and much of the time they became angry at each other.*

*The safe kingdom now did not always feel so safe. Sometimes the children, who were brought inside the kingdom, did not feel safe and sometimes the children **were not** safe in the kingdom. Some children were hurt physically. Some children were hurt emotionally. Some children were hurt both physically and emotionally. But this did not seem to be as important as there continued to be the problem of all those outside the kingdom who were causing **more and more** children to need to come inside. These outside people, those who hurt children, were not like the special people in the kingdom. They did not speak the same language of those in the kingdom. They not only hurt the*

*children but they also did not understand what children really needed. **If only they could be more like us inside the kingdom.***

*Different rulers, both kings and queens (but mostly kings), watched over the kingdom and they tried to manage the problems inside because the kingdom was supposed to be a safe place. The rulers in the kingdom usually learned about the kingdom from those who were allowed inside but typically not from the children they had vowed to protect. Once upon a time, they too had a dream that they could keep children safe when they first entered. Some rulers continued to dream about safe children, other rulers worried about hurt children, and still others worried about the sad and angry social workers in the kingdom. Most did not worry about the people outside the kingdom. Why did the people outside the kingdom not change? What was wrong with them? The problems outside the kingdom continued to create problems inside the kingdom. **If only the people who hurt the children outside the kingdom would change, things might get better.***

The kingdom grew with more children and with more people who were trying to help. New people joined the kingdom, people who were experts of many kinds and big thinkers; some who thought they could predict what might happen in the future. Some people worked on new ways to help the children. They built many rooms in the kingdom and it continued to grow. Some of the experts took care of the money and some took care of the buildings and some tried to take care of the many more children who were being brought inside the kingdom. Bigger rooms were built and sometimes in places where

those inside did not have to worry about or see all those people outside who were not allowed in the kingdom.

*Some worried because if people outside the kingdom could hurt children they might just hurt kingdom social workers as well. The kingdom needed to protect children and now to do this they also had to protect themselves from those who didn't live in the kingdom. So they built thick walls and heavily clad windows (even bullet proof) to keep the kingdom safe from those outside. They created ways to look outside the wall of the kingdom to make sure they could better see the children. Very few people from the outside the kingdom could look back in. Even fewer could ever gain entrance. The kingdom became so large that sometimes people in the kingdom did not speak to each other or even know each other but...**they all were very busy watching and saving the children but in different ways.***

Some thought the kingdom was too big and some thought the kingdom was not big enough. But this kingdom, built on a dream, was now filled with even more sadness and anger. How could all the people who worked in the kingdom fit inside the thick walls? How could everyone be safe? As the rooms within the kingdom became more crowded some social workers, who were less afraid of those outside the kingdom (and maybe a little bit curious), decided to move to places where the people who were not allowed into the kingdom lived. When these social workers from the kingdom began to work closer to those who were not from the kingdom, they came to understand about the problems of living outside the kingdom. It was hard living outside the kingdom but people who lived

*outside had learned about how to survive. Some workers now began to ask these people, who once were children too, how to survive as well. The social workers in the kingdom were thankful for what they learned. The people outside the kingdom were not so bad after all. In fact they often looked scarier from inside the kingdom because of the thick glass and because they were so far away that it was hard to see them clearly. **Some kingdom social workers actually found out that they, themselves, were not so different than those who were never let inside the kingdom.***

*The view from the kingdom sure was different than the view from outside the kingdom! Even though everything looked different from inside the kingdom this was the only window that many social workers had ever looked out of and there were some who had stopped looking out the window altogether and only worked from deep inside the kingdom. For some inside the kingdom, it was too scary to look through any other window but the ones in the kingdom...what if they saw someone outside who looked just like them? **Then everything would have to change.***

*The kingdom was too big! There were many sad and angry children. There were many social workers in the kingdom who were sad and angry too. Children were not always safe in the kingdom. People outside of the kingdom were also sad and often very angry because no one would let them inside the kingdom where many of their children lived. **Oh what a mess the kingdom was in!***

But then, some of the workers, those who were not afraid to admit there was a problem (a very big problem), began to wonder what they could do. The kingdom was

broken and in need of a change. They started to ask questions of themselves and of those inside the kingdom. What if the kingdom didn't have such large walls? The kingdom is broken, who will fix it? What if more people from the inside the kingdom could work outside the kingdom? What could the special experts from inside learn from those outside the kingdom?

For some social workers just asking the questions made them more curious and strangely less angry and less sad. Could the kingdom ever change? Where could they find the answers? All this time they had been looking for answers inside the kingdom but maybe the answers were not to be found inside the kingdom. So the people from inside the kingdom, who worked outside, stopped looking inside the kingdom for answers. They joined hands with the people outside the kingdom and they looked back at the very large walls of the kingdom that said it protected children. They walked away from the kingdom still feeling sad and angry, not at each other but instead at the kingdom. Even though they did not always agree on everything, they did always agree on some things, like how much they loved their children. They all knew there was much work to do so they began to work together.

Taking a Closer Look

Greeting and Salutations! Please allow me to introduce myself; I am Curiosity and I have worked in and with this very kingdom for many years. Our kingdom is in trouble and despite the good intentions of others (including myself) we have not always protected children. As a social worker in the kingdom I am sworn to the protection of children and I am bound by traditions and the laws of the ruling class. Additionally, I am

a manager and as a leader in the kingdom I am held to a different level of accountability as I represent this kingdom that I now openly acknowledge as broken. I am accountable and perhaps even responsible for some of the problems in the kingdom. I worry and wonder what might help the kingdom (this is how I earned my name as Curiosity) and what I could do to bring about change. I struggle with whether I should stay in the kingdom or leave.

As I ponder this dilemma of whether to leave the kingdom or whether to stay I consider that the kingdom will not likely disappear. It is such a large kingdom and if it were to disappear, what would replace it? I think about my options; I could leave and work somewhere else but this may not bring about change....and what about the dream? I may not always agree with the way things are done in the kingdom but I do hope for a world where all children are safe.

I could stay and uphold the status quo but this would not be just. Many years ago I did leave the kingdom and I am thankful for the years I worked outside where I learned about the kingdom from a different position. But I did return as I believe that from the inside I have the ability to interact and affect people and processes in a way that I could not access from the outside. And so I have decided to stay for now and use my position in the kingdom to try and bring about change from within.

Now this may sound like a daunting and overwhelming task but fear not as I am not alone. I join others before me who seek to transform the child welfare kingdom knowing that change does not come easy in a place so large. I invite you to join me as I

set out on an adventure of discovery and learning. But before we begin please know that I am not a neutral observer. I am part of the story and seek to keep transparent the part I play in the kingdom as the storytelling unfolds. There are those who may refer to me and others who challenge the kingdom as crusaders, as rebels or as troublemakers. Yet others regard us as story tellers. Most of us hail from the privileged class yet feel compelled to act and each comes with a thirst for justice. I gladly take on all three identities and more as I search for a kingdom where life for those on the margins comes closer in quality and choice to that of the privileged. I am CURIOSITY and I am your story teller.

Section Three

Other Stories that have been told – Literature Review

The theoretical and research literature that is relevant as a base for this research is drawn from the fields of child welfare and community development. There are currently very few overlapping areas of child welfare and community development likely due to their very different theoretical and ideological underpinnings. In this review I will provide an overview of the pertinent literature in child welfare and in community development, as well as an overview of the much sparser literature that looks at community development and child welfare together.

Child Welfare

There is a large body of literature that agrees that the child welfare system is broken (Margolin, 1997, McKnight 1995, Swift, 1995, Swift, 1998, Parton, 1998, Trocmé et al, 2003, Blackstock 2006/7). There is significant disagreement as to the cause of the problem and the potential solutions. Some suggest that problems were created and sustained, with the shift in social welfare agencies to an emphasis on managerialism that is fed by the neo-liberal underpinnings (Savoie, 1998, Parton, 1997, Aronson & Sammon, 2000). The rise in managerialism has promoted cost savings and efficiencies - achieved often through fragmenting of service, privatisation and staff reduction - over the broader vision of child welfare. (Lawler, 2000, Aronson & Sammon, 2000). This ultimately put

the “interests of management” (Lawler, 2000, p.33) such as efficiency and cost containment over the needs of families and children.

Further, competing paradigms between those who look for proof and truth (under the name of *Evidenced Based Practice*) and those who seek a return to ambiguity and uncertainty also create tension within the system (Plath, 2006, Leonard, 2001, Parton, 1998). This particular dichotomy in child welfare practice is matched with a second: the competing arguments for an approach to practice that centres upon increased family support versus one that gives primacy to increased child protection, as if the two can be separated. (Dumbrill, 2006, Trocmé & Chamberland, 2003, Macaulay, 2002). “This “either/or” mentality projects a false image of what is possible and what is desirable.” (Cameron, Freymond, & Roy, 2003, p. 15). Most recently, governments (including the Ontario government) have promoted the narrowing of the mandate to manage increasing budgets and unsatisfactory outcomes in terms of numbers of children in care. “ There was a clear and worsening divide between the wide parameters and family support values of the legislation, and the funding constraints, external pressures, and child protection focus of service delivery” (Rodgers, 2003, p. 6). This decreases the amount of resources agencies allot to offer support services for families and children and ultimately agencies offer ‘child protection’ services only when families are in crisis. The opportunities for meaningful change and for avoiding the crisis are often missed.

The outcomes of reforms were entirely predictable. As services that help prevent child abuse and neglect were reduced and the capacity of child protection workers to

offer casework support was diminished, removal of children from their families became the primary means of protection (Dumbrill, 2006, p.12).

The financial costs associated with these changes and reform of the Child Welfare system have more than doubled in the years from 1996-2001 (Cameron et al, 2003, p. 15) and, despite rising budgets, agencies are falling behind and not able to contain these costs (OACAS 2008). I believe that in this climate, it has been difficult for child welfare agencies to move away from reactive solutions and, instead, to find ideas that speak to the heart of the matter; child protection cannot be separated from family support. The push to ‘protection only’ limits the possibilities for change and at the same time increases cost (Dumbrill, 2006, Trocmé, et al, 2003).

There is some literature that also looks or at the current system and suggests that solutions could be found in the overlaying of an anti-oppressive practice framework as a means to understand and challenge the current underpinnings in child welfare practice (Baines, 2007, Strega, 2007). This might involve social workers challenging the practice of solely working with one family at a time as well as an acknowledgement of the need for “political and structural change” to avoid the blaming of families for problems they may have little control over (Strega, 2007, p. 67). The mandatory nature of child welfare work adds additional tension and challenge for the social work client relationship.

Social workers must remain cognizant of the power dynamics that are inevitably part of the service-provider/service-user relationship. Anti-oppressive social work practice should begin with the social worker’s being vigilant of the potential role that such dynamics play in making anti-oppressive practice an oppressive experience for their service users (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p. 448-9).

Others argue that the suggestion of anti-oppressive practice in mainstream child welfare agencies may not be possible given child welfare's alignment with a form of social work practice that "maintains the status quo" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 39), as well as maintaining the dominant white, western middle class norms through "making singular truth claims" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 38). Dumbrill, (2003) asks "how can child welfare be transformed into an activity that challenges the dominant discourses that gave it birth while also protecting children" (p. 101)?

There are prescriptions, formulas and models of practice that center around the improved use of risk assessment. Despite some of the creativity of these models many are rooted in the evaluation of risk and support a system where "child welfare protects privilege by removing the children of those marginalized within society rather than examining the structural inequities that disadvantage these families" (Dumbrill, 2003, p. 106). One such model that is currently gaining popularity in Ontario child welfare agencies is the *Signs of Safety* model (Turnell & Edwards, 1999). These "how to" guides offer good advice but, it is argued, will never change the "bones" of child welfare (Blackstock, 2006/2007) as they do not challenge the foundation of current practice but instead build upon it. Individual pathology and risk assessment continue to dominate the field of child welfare in Canada (Swift, 1995, Blackstock, 2006/7, Trocmé et al, 2003, Wharf, 2002).

In its neglect of contextual social issues and networks of support, the risk paradigm presents a pathological view of those being served and reinforces an individualistic approach to practice. Such a view confirms prevailing impressions in the media and even among some practitioners that individuals coming to the attention of child welfare agencies are beset by personal

problems like addictions, unstable relationship, and immaturity. While most live in poverty, in inadequate housing, and in unsafe neighbourhoods, the personal problems dominate and occupy the foreground while the public issues fade into the background (Wharf, 2002, p. 185).

Child welfare agencies are continually challenged to find a way to balance protecting children with offering support to families and community. The individualized responses to allegations of child abuse, used in isolation, can be punishing for families (Swift, 1995, Strega, 2007, Margolin, 1997, Wharf, 2002, Parton, 1998). Involvement in community has often focused on policing and surveillance and has not balanced the need for child welfare agencies to consider root causes of problems or attend to preventative measures. This has led to a troubled image for child welfare and continues to maintain a gap between those who provide service and those who receive (Strega, 2007).

Much work that agencies have undertaken to respond to critics, has focused on changing the tools used to assess families but little has been done to make an effort to involve communities in finding solutions (Trocmé et al, 2003). Even less has been done to address some of the broad community deficits that negatively impact families such as poverty and multiple forms of violence. Child welfare agencies have focused on “risk management” and moved away from social work roots of social justice and emancipation. “There is agreement that office-based practice with individual clients who are diagnosed by experts as requiring professional help is not effective practice” (Wharf, 2002, p. 14). The increased scrutiny as a result of child death reviews and a neo-liberal government bent on managerialism, narrowing of mandate and saving money have all fuelled a system permeated with fear and a better safe than sorry attitude (Dudding, 2003,

p. v, Rodgers, 2003, p. 1). The end results are more children in care, a growing legal system, increased accountability measures and less time for traditional social work (Dudding, 2003, p. v).

Community Development

Community development and child protection agencies are rarely used in the same sentence and, by extension; it is rare to see community development work within child welfare agencies. Child welfare agencies are most often identified with (and criticized for) their role in the surveillance and policing of vulnerable populations (such as people living in poverty) who have the greatest need for emancipation (McKnight, 1995, Margolin, 1997). The child welfare institution is typically perceived as the oppressor and those receiving service as the oppressed and, as such, antithetical to traditional and contemporary understandings of community development (Margolin, 1997, McKnight, 1995, Blackstock 2006/7). The coming together of child welfare and community development is an unlikely marriage as many do not consider such a union possible or even desirable (Wharf, 2002).

“If community approaches are to move into the mainstream, a shift in the paradigms will be required: from the risk paradigm that dominates child welfare at present to a community paradigm that would be based on the approaches of community social work, community organizing and community control (Wharf, 2002, p. 185).

Nonetheless, some of the research on community development provides a good map for child welfare agencies, a source to use as an avenue to effecting real change within communities. The principles of community engagement, decision-making, consensus building, and conflict resolution (Lee, 1999, McKnight, 1995) are all skills that

have the potential to benefit child welfare workers. If there is some acknowledgment that structural factors such as poverty affect children then child welfare agencies and workers might find a common area of interest in which to work collectively with neighbourhoods that are impacted.

Lee suggests that there have traditionally been three levels of community development as developed by Rothman and Tropman, (1987 as cited in Lee, 1999, p. 30). He describes the levels of community development that starts with social planning, then locality development, and social action. He suggests an integrated approach called pragmatic community development, which “incorporate elements primarily of the locality development and social action model” (Lee, 1999, p.32). Social planning involves professionals or experts coming in to a community to offer help in areas they define as deficits for the community (Lee, 1999). Locality development offers support in areas that are identified by the community themselves as goals for change (Lee, 1999). Social action involves “organization of disadvantaged to make demands for social justice” (Lee, 1999, p. 31). He suggests that combining locality development with social action to create a “pragmatic” level of community development has a view with “empowerment and social justice” (Lee, 1999, p. 31) as the outcome. This would involve workers in the role as “facilitator/agitator & strategist” (Lee, 1999, p. 31).

Even if child welfare agencies try to participate in community development efforts, it may not be possible for them to reach “pragmatic” level of community development due to significant differences in power held by the child welfare agency

over that held by community members. Specifically it is challenging, if not impossible, for community members to see child welfare professionals as equal partners, knowing full well that these professionals have the authority to remove their children from their homes and from their care. Additionally, agencies may be hesitant to move along the community development continuum as this move may work to increase the possibility of conflict between citizens, clients, business or government (and possibly more) as well as the challenging of the policy makers and power-holders who fund the child welfare system (Lee & Richardson, 2003). However, there may be a possibility to do some community development work, such as at the level of locality development. If workers were able to engage in neighbourhood communities in tandem with their traditional role of working with individual families the quality of child protections services might improve, ultimately improving child welfare for all children (Hudson, 1999).

Using Wright's definition - "community development involves working with people at a local level to promote active participation in identifying local needs and organizing to meet those needs" (Wright, 2004, p.386) - it may be possible for child welfare agencies to participate in community development. McKnight suggests not only is it possible for institutions to participate in community development, it is an obligation; an obligation, however, that requires a shift for those institutions (such as child welfare) who are currently providing services based on deficit which McKnight (1995) refers to as the "manufacturing of need" (p.24). McKnight, (1995) suggests that this has more to do with creating jobs for professionals than it does with assisting those in need or helping to

build community capacity (p.34). “There is a clear need for public servants –not public servicers” (McKnight, 1995, p. 99).

Wharf (2002) refers to McKnight and suggests that he:

is critical of professionals, including community workers, who in his view usurped the natural helping capacity of ordinary people. McKnight argues strenuously that communities have an innate capacity to care for residents and that this ability should be nourished and supported by the state, by corporations, and by charitable organizations like the United Way (Wharf, 2002, p. 12).

Child Welfare and Community Development

Child welfare agencies are not likely to disappear. If we step back from the details of the work of child welfare and look to the vision, I believe there is room for community development to be included. The vision of safe communities, healthy families, and healthy children are fine companions to the goals and ideas of community development. A review of the literature revealed only a small compilation of stories about the various programs and attempts to integrate community development into child welfare practice (Wharf, 2002, Wright, 2004, Jack, 2004, Trocmé et al, 2003, Lee & Richards, 2003, Hudson, 1999). “Since child welfare agencies in Canada have made only sporadic attempts to use community approaches it comes as no surprise to learn that the literature is sparse” (Wharf, 2002, p. 18). There are challenges to combining child welfare and community development and significant commitment both philosophically and financially is required. Although some agency vision statements may include an acknowledgement of broader societal forces that impact the family, these visions are not always translated into practice. The day-to-day practice and the details of the work may not always reflect the broadest principles. When left unchecked, workers may easily slip

into traditional patterns of thinking and action where family's behaviours are pathologized and individuals blamed without ever connecting these issues to broader structural forces in society or to the vision of the agency (Wharf, 2002, p. 194, Strega, 2007, Swift, 1995).

There is some, albeit sparse, literature reporting on examples of child welfare practice where agencies have made attempts to integrate community development practices with child protection work. The Toronto Children's Aid Society has maintained a community development program that started with locality development. More recently, they have "extended their activities to include social planning and reform" (Wharf, 2002. P. 22). The program, funded by the Children's Aid Foundation, has changed over its thirty years from an integrated program to a full program under the direction of a dedicated supervisor (Lee & Richards, 2002). However, over the years "program staff has been reduced by almost 50 percent, while Toronto's population has grown" (Lee & Richards, 2002, p. 97). Lee & Richards (2002), list the successes and benefits of the program as: increased community participation, strengthening of existing organizations, high-risk neighbourhoods collectively solving their problems, increased understanding for families of how to use their collective voice to bring about social change, as well as bringing of concrete facilities, resources and programs to communities (p. 101-107). Additionally the program staff from Children's Aid Society of Toronto are "perceived by community residents as being non-threatening, positive and supportive" (Lee & Richards, 2003, p. 106) compared to the "agencies protective services, which is not always viewed as positively" (p. 106). Despite the benefits of the program for the

community there are financial pressures and even with the agency “commitment to prevention as a part of the spectrum of child welfare services....it is understandable when frontline protection and children’s service workers feel that caseload relief should take priority over maintaining a prevention service” (Lee & Richards, 2003, p. 111).

Lee & Richards (2002) further suggest that program reduction have been a result of multiple challenges. These challenges include a lack of social work education in community work, a lack of understanding and commitment to prevention, the conflict inherent in community development work, a conservative government seeking simple solutions and a funding model that does not embrace structural change (p. 107-112). A similar program in Winnipeg Family and Children Services (Hudson, 1999) started in the late 1990’s but “was cancelled abruptly and with no explanation after a scant two years” (Wharf, 2002, p. 22). Hudson (1999) suggests some similar issues but suggests the lack of integration of protection and community development work threatens not only the program but also the wellbeing of the community (p.346).

The Children’s Aid Society of Brant is committed to community-based practice but their resolve was seriously compromised with the introduction of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) in 1998/99 (Dumbrill, 2006, p. 45) that was understood by the agency to be forensic and intrusive in nature. Subsequent to the introduction of ORAM, the costs for delivering child welfare in Ontario dramatically increased mostly attributed to increased number of children coming into care as well as the increased

staffing costs to manage the growing case loads and child files. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services made the decision to reassess ORAM in 2005.

Today with these increased costs and the number of children in care at almost an all-time high, Ontario's Liberal government has initiated a process of transformation designed to undo the excesses cause by child welfare reform (Dumbrill, 2006, p. 12).

This reassessment resulted in newly developed and promoted legislation called the Transformation Agenda (Dumbrill, 2006, M.C.Y.S. 2007). This agenda offered hope that community-based work in child welfare might be more fully supported. It also promised a more flexible approach to child protection investigations. Transformation has not yet accomplished the goals it intended, and the philosophical underpinnings, of strengths-based and community-based child welfare work, are not translating into direct practice as the funds expected to support agencies and communities did not fully materialize. It is questionable whether the 'real' agenda for Transformation was cost containment or system improvement (Dumbrill, 2006, MCYS, 2007).

The Child Development Unit, within the Children's Aid Society of Brant, has been able to maintain funding outside the child welfare budget to offer tertiary prevention and community development services. The programs initiated in the early 1990's have grown and are located in several sites throughout the city. These are voluntary programs, and for the most part, ran separate from the child protection services offered in the agency. These programs offer services that range from parent-child drop in, community kitchen, before school breakfast, afterschool activities and a variety of other services offered both by Child Development Unit staff and community partners such as public

health, mental health services, housing. The location of these programs in ‘high-risk’ neighbourhoods, such as Eastdale, afforded Brant Children’s Aid Society the opportunity to participate in community capacity development as well as prevention programs not typically considered services within child welfare.

These sites created unique possibilities for offering child protection services as well as the voluntary services. The existing programs combined with child welfare workers offered a full continuum of services that promoted child well being and capacity building as well as the ability to respond to child protection concerns. Despite the restrictive financial climate in child welfare in Ontario, the Children’s Aid Society of Brant has been able to explore different ways of working in the community without a significant rise in cost for mandated services. The integration of services with programs funded outside child welfare and the support of community development has allowed the agency to consider a broader definition of child welfare while still meeting the expectation of the mandated services.

Jack, (2004) suggests that agencies need “a broader definition of child abuse that recognizes the harm done to a child by the way they are treated by society rather than just within the confines of their own home” (p. 377). The continued narrowing of the child welfare mandate as outlined earlier makes broadening of the mandate difficult in the current funding environment. I can’t help but imagine the possibilities if child welfare agencies were obliged to find solutions for ‘communities’ with a violence problem, not just a ‘parent’ with a violence problem. Not far behind those who are imagining the

possibilities that may accrue from consideration of a broader perspective of child abuse and maltreatment, are those who are imagining the perceived economic costs of such a proposal and, instead, pushing for a return to “the narrow child protection mandate that characterizes the current system” (Trocmé et al, 2003, p. vii).

The literature reveals advocacy for a shift in child welfare from seeing children in isolation from their families, to seeing children as part of families, and families as part of a neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood as part of broader society (Jack, 2004, Savoury & Kufeldi, 1997, Hudson, 1999, Wright, 2004, Wharf, 2002). A broader definition of the problem and the mandate allows for broader options with regard to the solutions available. Conversely, the narrow focus and definition of what is child protection that the field is currently operating under, narrows the solutions and continues to regulate and limit options for interventions to the individual parent and family while ignoring community-level interventions altogether.

It might be argued that a more holistic view of child protection and the factors that impinge on this could incorporate social and community factors, and indeed bullying, poverty, racial discrimination and safe outdoor spaces are all issues that child care organizations have addressed and campaigned on in the past (Wright, 2004, p. 390).

Herein lies the potential liberation available to all child welfare agencies and communities; agencies could continue to look at incidents of child abuse but they could also participate in prevention, community development and activism. These additional services should not be seen as peripheral but central to the goal of protecting children, by protecting families and ultimately building better communities. The argument against such a plan continues to rest on the potential financial cost of the interventions however

both the financial and human cost of waiting until problems are significant has not appeared to be an effective alternative in terms of cost containment. Perhaps the question needs to be reframed to ask: what is the financial and human cost of *not* offering broader community development services in child welfare agencies?

The large and powerful system of child welfare in Ontario will need more than rhetoric to change. The current framework centered on risk management has limited the resources attached to a prescribed method of intervention all based mostly on individuated responses. Until the system can accommodate and financially support other ways of intervening to supplement the individuated responses the system will not likely see any change.

“When a child welfare system believes that it has already found the truth, staffs itself with believers and routs out social innovation, it can stagnate – or worse, produce the very outcomes it was designed to fight against” (Blackstock, 2006/7, p. 7).

Section Four

Methodology: Foundation, Process and Decisions

As I have already been introduced through my character of Curiosity my biases should be quite clear. My practice is rooted in a critical approach to social work that combines the recognition of the possibility of multiple views and no single truth, yet without the futility of relativism. For within the multiple perspectives there still exists room for the understanding of the community as a whole and the possibility of a move toward a just society (Pease & Fook, 1999). Navigating the terrain in critical social work requires a comfort level with the unknown, with uncertainty, and the ability to ask questions of both self and of others. Within this I am able to admit to a broken system but still value a role for the state in offering support. I see a role for social workers in society both despite and because of our past mistakes particularly in the field of child welfare. As interesting and accurate as some critiques are of the field of child welfare, the suggestion that social work remove itself from the field (Margolin, 1997) does not seem like a realistic endeavour and the unintended consequences of such a move could be catastrophic. So I move ahead looking at alternate ways to increase transparency and accountability for service delivery while looking for opportunities to support emancipatory social work.

Critical social work provides opportunities for social workers to mix research and practice. (Fook, 2003). The active debate of “whether we can actually assist victims of the system, when we as social workers are part of the very structure that defines that victimhood” (Fook, 2003, p. 126) is alive and well. There is, however, hope in critical theory as it embraces the belief that the workplace can be a site for resistance if one is able to identify and challenge the prevailing power through thoughtful and careful use of self. Emancipatory social work is possible but requires venturing into places of uncertainty knowing that a single truth will not be found (Leonard, 2001, Healy, 2001, Pease and Fook, 1999).

The theory of critical social work values the multiple perspectives within the community but also allows for a social whole to be considered. As the field of child welfare attempts to redefine how to bring about transformation with reduced funding and increased scrutiny, the role of social work and community is called into question. “A new form of practice which is local and contextual, and linked to the politics of transformation needs to develop” (Camilleri, 1999, p. 33).

As a social worker in a mainstream and powerful agency I continually feel compelled to consider different ways to work so that there can be some shift in favour of families. I do not feel bad about acknowledging that our child welfare system is broken but I cannot admit this, stay working in the system and do nothing. When an opportunity for research presented itself I immediately wanted to look at the *New Beginnings* project as it is a quite unusual site of practice for a child welfare setting. Although there are monthly statistics and many numbers that are used to track the type of work done I was

not interested in the numbers. These numbers may be useful to watch for trends in practice, however, I believe that without some context the numbers could be misleading at best or at worst meaningless.

I looked to complete a qualitative piece of work, using a critical lens applied directly to this site of practice – the New Beginnings program in the community of Eastdale. As noted in the introduction, I initially hoped to explore this site of work through the words of the families currently using the program. This was not possible due to the significant power differential existing between me as a manager and the families using the services of the program who may have open files at our agency. The potential for abuse of power was so great that this type of research would not pass the requirements of the McMaster Research Ethics Board. So, sadly, the voice of the service user is absent in the research. I considered other options and arrived at the decision to conduct interviews with those doing direct service or working directly with the families and community of Eastdale at *New Beginnings*. This proposal for research was approved by the McMaster Research Ethic Board.

I used purposive sampling by identifying a group of service providers, affiliated with New Beginnings to approach to request an interview. Kreuger and Neuman, (2006) suggest that “purposive sampling is an acceptable kind of sampling for special situations. It uses the judgement of an expert in selecting cases, or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind” (p. 211). The group I selected to invite to participate have knowledge of *New Beginnings* due to their work with this project.

Thirteen people were invited through a general email (Appendix B) to participate in this research. A letter of information and consent, outlining details of the purposed research was attached to the email so that participants could understand the purpose of the study, the procedures involved in the research, the potential harms, risks or discomforts as well as benefits that might be associated with participation. This letter also outlined details related to how participation and confidentiality would be managed and contact information for myself, my thesis advisor and the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Appendix C). Of the thirteen people invited to participate, seven responded and agreed to be interviewed.

Two of the participants are senior managers in a child welfare agency; one is a manager, one a social worker, one holds an administrative position and two are professionals associated with New Beginnings from outside the child welfare agency. No other demographic information is provided on the participants in an effort to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Before the interview started each participant was presented with a consent form for consideration and signing. The participants were advised of their right to refuse to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time. A copy of the signed consent was given to each participant at the time of the interview. Each participant was provided with an interview guide which outlined a list of questions that served as a starting point for our discussions (Appendix D). The questions were developed to encourage the participant to share their particular knowledge, understanding and involvement with *New*

Beginnings, the neighbourhood, the families served as well as child welfare and community development in general. Krueger and Neuman (2006) describe the field interview as “a joint production of a researcher and a member. Members are active participants whose insights, feelings, and cooperation are essential parts of a discussion process that reveals subjective meaning” (p.382). The interviews all started with questions but became more like a discussion as they progressed. Participants each answered questions but also shared their unique stories about New Beginnings and the families they serve in Eastdale.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission. The tapes were then transcribed verbatim through a paid professional service. Each recorded interview was coded numerically and not identified by the names of the participants. The interviews were stored on a password protected computer and printed copies stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Once the research is complete all electronic data of recorded interviews will be deleted and printed copies will be shredded.

In analyzing the data I worked to balance the combing through of the paragraphs and lines to find themes with efforts to stay connected to the fuller story. “Part of interpretive work is gaining a sense of the whole – the whole interview, the whole story, the whole body of data” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 268). There are multiple technical references (I have cited only a few) that outline the process of coding data and organizing it into themes that provide a good overview of how to see and understand the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Bryman, 2001, Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, Kreuger & Neuman, 2006).

Although these were helpful I found that spending time with the data as a whole was the most fruitful place to start. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that “analysis is the interplay between research and data” (p. 13). This process then became a journey and an interplay that was very personal to me as a researcher. Bochner (2009), describes the researcher’s relationship to the data as “we take what we see with our eyes, grasp in our mind, and feel in our gut and we codify and express “it” in language” (p. 363) and he celebrates the subjectivity the researcher brings to the research suggesting that “our subjectivity is not a barrier between us and meaning, it is what make meaning possible” (p. 364).

As I sat with the data, read over the transcripts (first for the overall story and then multiple times for the details, the particularities), a number of themes emerged and were coded into categories and subcategories. The interactive process of interviewing, reading, and writing cumulated in the overall story that forms a foundations piece of this thesis and, incorporated into this larger story, four main constructs under which I organized the stories of the research participants. The constructs are location change, relationship change, a balance of power change and lastly a shift in the focus of the work. The story of inception and operation of New Beginnings follows a linear time line as well that was helpful in presenting the ideas however, in the writing of this thesis, the learning, the stories, the experiences of those interviewed are interspersed throughout this progression of time and interwoven with each other.

Data cannot tell us what to ask of them, nor what they mean. Thus the meaning of data are never beyond challenge, never closed to other meanings, never capable of absolutely falsifying or verifying. What we

do to or with data is an intellectual activity; and third, ideas are as important as facts and nowhere is it evident that they are inducible from them. We need imagination not rules; intuition not technique; warm ideas not cold facts; inventive people not conformists, fertile thinking not rigid rules to follow (Bochner, 2009, p. 363).

Presentation of Data

The problems in child welfare are well documented in multiple forms and places. The root of the problems is contested ground. Much of the information that I have read is often not accessible to all; either because it is cloaked in academic language, government rhetoric or political correctness. I yearned for something that could bring to life the problems in a child welfare system, a means of presenting my research findings so that conversations might be started at all levels of the organization. I had learned about the power of stories from my grandparents and parents, and from very young children, not from some great book or academic reference. I have personally seen stories bring to life statistics and positively change the atmosphere in otherwise meaningless meeting. I have seen and experienced stories that teach a lesson, motivate one to donate or participate, exemplify the truth, magnify the human spirit, reveal suffering and bring about hope as a human connection is made to the abstract and academic.

The families and workers involved at *New Beginning* use stories to explain their work and experiences. I have used metaphors in practice and seen how extracting the personal from the experience allowed people to better understand their own world and find options they did not think possible before entering the world of the imagined. As a result, story and metaphor provide the canvas for this research; the stories, told to me by

those interviewed, offer the colour and picture, and it is as a story that I present what I learned in this research project.

There are precedents for this method of presenting the results of research. Goodall Jr., (2009) offers a storied account of the tensions in the world of qualitative inquiry in his article *Why Writing Qualitative Inquiry Matters: A Factional Fable*. He defends the use of alternate forms and methods of expression for qualitative research from poetry and theatre to storytelling against those who promote science and evidence based work in traditional forms of writing (Goodall Jr., 2009).

Barone, (2008), in *Creative Non-Fiction and Social Research*, explores several examples of the use of creativity and performing arts to express information found through data collection in research. Speaking of his own storied account of teaching, *Touching Eternity*, he embraces the idea that the idea of the research and alternative presentation;

was not to bring readers closer to an answer to the question of what constitutes good teaching. Instead it was meant to disturb and puzzle, to promote reflection about what constitutes quality in teaching (Barone, 2008, p. 113).

In the same way that I present the metaphor of a kingdom in trouble to stir up some questions, I offer an alternative site – the story of *New Beginnings* - to explore and deconstruct the work done in child welfare. I hope to “entice the reader into experiencing the internal world of text, into leaving her own reality, nearby, extra-textual world, in order to dwell vicariously within the (presumably) actual world being portrayed” (Barone, 2008, p. 113) in the kingdom and the hamlet. I do not know what characters

that different readers may add or delete or substitute that can challenge her or his own site of practice. Who is missing from the story? Who could take on the role of hero/heroine and expose the villain/villainess? I invite you, as a reader, into a story about a small site of practice in child welfare and hope you might recognize some characters as people you meet or have met in your own experiences and encounters with social work practice. The power of storytelling coupled with reflexive practice may hold the answers to our troubled field of child welfare.

Our faith in the power of story is borne of sacred knowledge and classic texts that the work of speech in this world is to call a better world into being (Goodall Jr., 2009, p. 383).

Writing both in academic and storied form offered a way to present the data creatively and critically. The effect for me, as a writer/researcher, was the creation of two worlds that I had to work to bridge. The storied form allowed some latitude, creativity and freedom so that underlying constructs could be illuminated in the imagination. The move back into the academic writing required greater restraint both in terms of form and use of language. In some ways this process mirrors the complicated and complex way that the ‘world of abstract ideas’ interact with the ‘real world problems’ for social work. It was a process that was exhilarating and frustrating; both emotions familiar and necessary companions for researchers and social workers alike.

The next section of this paper returns to the story format. I will set the stage for the story and then introduce the characters who represent those who were participants in this research. The findings follow, again in story form and this section outlines, in both the direct words of the characters and story form, the perceptions of what has happened at

New Beginnings. Following this section of story is the discussion of the findings and this is presented again in a more traditional academic form. Although I entertained and dabbled in trying to write this in story form I decided against this format. The specific and complex constructs of location, relationship change, power shift and shift in work seemed too heavy and cumbersome and the simplicity of storytelling became lost. The implication for practice follows with then a return to the story form for the conclusion.

And now back to the story.....

Section Five

The Story and the Stage

I hold out hope for something different and I seek to learn how, and if, the large child welfare kingdom can in fact be transformed. If the kingdom is broken it may indeed follow that I am broken too. It is a wretched battle inside my head as I seek to balance the pain that I see and the inadequate solutions at hand. I have more questions than answers but in knowing that I am indeed part of the problem it follows that I could also be part of the solution. In my journey over the last several years, as I continued to seek out options or alternative ways to change the kingdom, I stumbled across a little hamlet where some of the social workers had moved when they left the protected walls of the big castle in the kingdom.

You may have heard of this small hamlet of “Eastdale” separated by both distance and status from the center of the kingdom: located on the margins of the kingdom, the fringe of the society, and often blamed for many of the ills of the larger village and city. Life is hard for those who live on the fringe and they struggle to survive. When families are struggling to survive it is much harder to keep their children safe. This is the hamlet where the New Beginnings program can be found.

New Beginnings program is located in a small dwelling, one of the fifty dwellings in the neighbourhood. This use of this building was given to some of us, some kingdom social workers, from those inside the kingdom to help us move outside to help the families struggling in this small hamlet. The families know the child welfare kingdom well as

many from this little hamlet have lost their children to the kingdom and others are afraid that this could happen to them as well. The social workers from the kingdom have come to this hamlet many times in the past to save the children from those parents who have harmed them. There is sadness and anger here too and much of it caused by the kingdom.

The building where the social workers and others work and where the activities take place is called “New Beginnings.” Unlike the large buildings in the kingdom, this building is quite small and humble. It is two stories tall with a basement. In these ways, it is like the other buildings in the hamlet. But, in many ways it is very different for whereas the other buildings serve as homes for the families in the hamlet, this building serves a different purpose. It is located in the center of the hamlet with an entrance from both the back and the front of the building. The kitchen and living room on the main floor serve as a gathering area for all those who visit. There are many activities going on at New Beginnings on the first floor and in the meeting room downstairs. School aged children come in for breakfast, and for after-school programs. Moms bring their children to play groups or to see the nurse. Each week families come together to make a meal to take home to their family. Sometimes families come to play games, like bingo, together with their neighbours. There are also barbeques in the small yard or community playground.

Most of the works done on the first floor is done by people on my team who offer voluntary support programs that any family in the Eastdale or surrounding area can choose to attend if they wish. They have been offering this kind of support to families for

many years. They cannot force people to come to programs so they try to make sure that what they offer is what people who live in Eastdale want. If you were to come and visit it would not be unusual to see families playing with their children, visiting with their neighbours while baking or cooking, and the sweet smell of their creations lingering in the air.

*On the second floor, in a space that usually serves as bedrooms in the neighbours' homes, there are offices with social workers and a leader from the kingdom. Some of the work done from this floor is voluntary and sometime they tell families that they have to work with them, just like the work of others from the kingdom. To get to their work space each day they have to walk from the parking lot and pass all the other houses before they come in the front or back door to the first floor of New Beginnings. This space is nothing like the large kingdom where the social workers used to be and where those from the hamlet (who the social workers now encourage to be inside New Beginnings) would never have been permitted entry. There is no thick glass, no waiting room, no big locked doors. There are many other workers from other kingdoms like health, housing, mental health, police, recreation, and early years that also come to work at New Beginnings. They don't have an office space but they come to spend time with the families to see how they might help to keep children **and** families safe. What an unusual place this is! People are from the kingdom, but they are not alone, they are with families and with other workers from other kingdoms.*

The social workers and workers from other kingdoms who come to the hamlet still share a dream of safe children. The families also share the same dream of a world where children are safe. The workers and social workers are sometimes not sure about how to do their work because it is so different from the kingdom. They have so many more questions! This is hard for social workers from the kingdom because they are supposed to have answers not questions. They all hope for something better for the kingdom but mostly for the children and families, and they all worry about whether things are getting better.

Could this humble abode replace the thick walls of the buildings in the kingdom? Can those of us who came from the kingdom and now work inside New Beginnings ever become part of this hamlet? What is different inside this small place? What is it that makes it different? Can we protect children from outside the kingdom? Will children and families be safer than before if we join them where they live? Could this small place ever begin to change the kingdom and those inside it?

With so many questions I set out on a journey to seek out answers and then tell the tale of New Beginnings. It is the story of those workers who came to this place from the kingdom and others who have joined them in the hamlet of Eastdale; the stories they shared with me. Come along as I share what I found, who I visited and what I learned from those who accompany me within the place called New Beginnings; a small outreach that started in a large, broken kingdom.

This tale is woven from the stories shared as I, being CURIIOUS, asked others about what is happening at New Beginnings. It looks at the world of child welfare and community development and asks questions of those involved who work for the kingdom and those associated with New Beginnings from outside the kingdom –those from other kingdoms who share the dream of keeping children safe and families well. It explores the work done by this group of workers, from inside and outside the kingdom, who ventured outside of the old walls of their respective kingdoms in an attempt to keep children safe. They have found a space, in the hamlet of Eastdale, to try something new in this small dwelling in the program called New Beginnings.

My story has many parts and as you read along you will meet some of the characters that work at New Beginnings. They all have a story to tell and I will share both what they told me and what I learned about them as I listened. After you meet the characters I will share what each of these characters have experienced and seen as they work in Eastdale.

There are many stories to be told about New Beginnings and Eastdale and this particular story is only one part of the tale. I hope the most important story about the families who live in Eastdale can be told but this could not happen now. I cannot tell the story on behalf of families as their story does not belong to me. So, for now, as a place to start, this story is about a few from a broken kingdom and some companions trying to do something different. This story then is but a beginning of the telling of working side by side with families, where they live, work and play.

Section Six

The Cast of Characters

I would like to introduce you to some of the characters who shared their work at New Beginnings with me. Some work for the child welfare kingdom and others work for other kingdoms in the area. All work with families who live in Eastdale or have some connection to the work done inside New Beginnings. You will meet these characters named PROTECTION, VISION, RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, HEALTH, BASIC NEEDS and SHARED HUMANITY.

PROTECTION

PROTECTION is the highest ranking official in our kingdom. He is concerned with the whole kingdom and all those who work inside. He often faces great pressure from those who collect the taxes, known as the Ministry, to do less and protect children without necessarily helping families. He must make decisions on how the tax money is spent within the kingdom, knowing that he must not only protect the kingdom but he also must protect children. He has also worked inside the kingdom for many years and he has seen the sadness of children and families. He also has seen and heard about children who were not protected by the kingdom and who have died. He knows that the kingdom alone cannot protect children and we must also help the parents to protect the children. He must balance these ideas with the need to protect those who work in the kingdom as well. He has a dream, that the kingdom not only protect children but also improve the

community at the same time. He even believes that the small hamlet of Eastdale could be improved. However, his job, ultimately, is to protect the existing kingdom that has been built and those who work inside.

PROTECTION worries about the kingdom and is aware that it is broken. He works with other child welfare kingdoms and their most senior officials and hears of their struggles too. He is proud of the courage he sees in those who have left the security of the kingdom walls to try something different. He is committed to ensuring this work can continue. He offers support and protection for those who try to do the work differently. He believes that all people, both those who the kingdom serves and those within the kingdom (and maybe even those in the Ministry) can change.

There is pressure from the government to “narrow the mandate” of child welfare to include only child protection. He states that “I’ve always seen child welfare as child welfare not child protection.” This philosophical view allows him to support programs “not just aimed at individual families or individual children but also a community”. His years of experience have reinforced the need for child welfare workers to move away from the “misconception of what protection, prevention or what child protection work really was....it was more of a monitoring” than a “counselling role.” He seeks to support a culture within the kingdom that encourages “refining our counselling and really insisting that it gets done.” He can use his power in the kingdom to make changes. PROTECTION feels this broader role for child welfare is supported, in theory, with the introduction of big rule books from the Ministry called Differential Response and the

Transformation Agenda. In the years preceding, the kingdom had to follow another rule book called the ORAM (Ontario Risk Assessment Model). These ORAM rules were very strict and they reduced the role of social work to case management and prescribed interventions. The hope that the new rules of transformation would make a change has gradually diminished as the dollars to support the initiatives have not materialized. This creates an environment of cutbacks and reductions in service which threaten the work done in non-traditional ways. The role of senior management then becomes to keep programs “off the radar” or at very least “below the radar as a possibility for...cuts.”

PROTECTION wants to challenge the traditional view of “child protection being viewed as individual pathology, when really there are the social issues” such as “poverty and education and marginalization, just prejudice and a whole bunch of other things that, you know, new immigrant, a number of factors that influence the individual pathologies. And so I think that the community development component is crucial if you really want to make long term change.”

The advice this senior manager gives to other kingdoms is that “they’ve got to make a commitment to it -- is what I’m saying otherwise it’s going to be an ‘add on’” He suggests that only the very few require the most invasive services, like children being taken away, but the “vast majority of the work” involves both protection and prevention work “but they’ve got to be seen as an integrated service.” This marriage of the work of protection and community development create the work done at New Beginnings and this is the model that the agency, under the direction of senior management, look to when

considering “expanding the program” and would “fight” for if the program is targeted for reduction. The job of those working in the agency is protection of children but this senior manager’s philosophy of protection includes protecting those who work inside as well, and it is this combination that earns him the name of PROTECTION in the story.

VISION

VISION is the most essential member of the kingdom’s outreach into the hamlet of Eastdale. She manages many of those who are leaders of social workers who have moved outside of the kingdom walls. She is creative and, committed to building and supporting relationships with all those in and outside of the kingdom. She believes that leaving the comfort of the center of the kingdom is required to bring about improvements in child protection and ultimately, to achieve true child welfare. She has learned this over many years and knows that safety is not found within the walls of the kingdom but in the people who live outside the kingdom.

VISION has built many friendships and alliances with those from other types of kingdoms, such as health, child care, education, security and kingdoms that provide services for women and children. She has done this by connecting the vision of our kingdom with the visions of these other kingdoms. These connections have created a solid foundation for the outreach that New Beginnings is involved in. She calls on her alliances to watch for and engage with our outreach outside the kingdom, and she believes that the child welfare kingdom, despite its great power, must take its place in the broader community, not above or beyond it.

VISION does not rely solely on the tax dollars that are provided by the Ministry for the kingdom to do this different work. She looks to other ways to create the money needed to work outside the walls of the kingdom. She relies on PROTECTION to guarantee a certain level of security from the tax dollars but she stretches what is provided and finds more. She can do this because she makes connections between what is done in the child protection kingdom and what is done in other kingdoms. After all, each of these kingdoms work with the same children and families and her ability to make and promote these connections earns her the name of VISION.

According to PROTECTION, VISION is the senior manager who is the “creative force” that helped build the foundation for the current program at New Beginnings. She believes in community-based work and understands it on a continuum, with the services at New Beginnings being the “ultimate community-based” type of practice. VISION states, “I don’t think people understood how important, when you’re working with the community, that you need to work from within.”

In addition to being a clinically sound way to practice VISION also sees the financial cost benefits to working in and with communities. She supports the targeted prevention work that is done but knows that work must also meet standards and rules as set out by the Ministry. She knows that with creativity that there may be ways to meet the rules and work outside the walls of the kingdom at the same time.

Since VISION understands child welfare as a community response, not an agency response, the community development role fits in naturally. “So if you look at child

welfare as a community response to keep kids safe then you have to have the community development piece” She urges workers to move away from only seeing the individual family. “I think we can only help families if we know what the bigger picture is.”

She sees the ultimate goal is to shift the need away from protection work as “a stronger community has less need for child welfare services or interventions....so the stronger the community the better the kids are.” She attends many meetings with other kingdom leaders not only because she has to be there to represent child welfare but because she wants to help “improve the community” and to do this you have to understand what is needed. VISION brings herself and her philosophy to the multiple community tables and is not looking for a “cookie cutter” response to improving communities but, instead, the understanding that “different communities require different things and we need to be a little more flexible in how we respond to that.”

All the details of how work is carried out are not as important to VISION as the big picture. She asks the difficult questions that surface in daily practice and she challenges the status quo. It is this quality, coupled with her ability to find common ground and build relationships within the community, which has earned her the name VISION.

RELATIONSHIP

RELATIONSHIP is the heart of the outreach to the hamlet of New Beginnings. She has worked with VISION and PROTECTION and she takes her role as leader outside

the walls of the kingdom seriously (but not too seriously). She leads a small team of people and works to instil her passion for people and her fervent belief that child protection and child safety cannot be done “to” families; it must be done “with” families. She knows that this happens when the people on her team and those who live in the hamlet, become familiar with each other and this brings child welfare one step closer to becoming part of the neighbourhood.

She works to get to know and understand her own workers but also the workers that work for me, CURIOSITY. She hopes that these workers will learn what VISION has taught by building relationships and working toward becoming a neighbour. Her office is in the hamlet of Eastdale in the house known as New Beginnings. She walks daily the pathway from her car to her office. She is known for her hardy laugh and families in the community know she is around when they can hear her. She knows that people should be at the center of all the work done in the child protection kingdom and she works to understand people and their community thereby earning the name RELATIONSHIP.

Having worked both inside the big kingdom as well as at New Beginnings she believes that she is currently doing something both worthwhile and different. She describes her team at New Beginnings as being “more connected, more informed as to what’s happening in the community” thereby being able to find solutions that are also connected to the community and build upon the strengths with that same community. She states:

We have a greater insight as to what some of the challenges that families are facing.... when we get a report-what we know about families will help us to

inform what is a safety concern- are there really risks, and that information that we know about the families helps us to be able to do different types of interventions.

She contrasts her current experience with her past work where as a kingdom social worker “you get the call, you go out, you meet the family once, maybe twice, you make your conclusions based on that and you go back to your office and wrap it up”. She is committed to a community-based practice and sees that her roles as neighbour and as social worker are not mutually exclusive. “The social work values you know are neighbourhood values too and you need to be able to have the relationships with families in order to be able to help”. She states “when you’re part of that community then you’re able to get a better picture of what that is and connect with more meaningful services.”

There are frustrations that stem from being part of the larger kingdom of child welfare. The kingdom was built on working with one family at a time when families are in trouble. RELATIONSHIP speaks about prevention in child welfare:

Prevention work should actually be the work because then it helps, that really is what helps to protect and I think we missed the boat and we think, we go straight to protect and don’t worry about any of the other pieces, don’t recognize it as valuable. Basically we say we’re going to fund it once there’s a crisis

The need to account for the work done to maintain funding is a constant pressure and the paperwork alone consumes a great deal of time. This leaves less time and energy to maintain a focus on “the long term.” This sometimes limits RELATIONSHIP and her team to doing the prevention work as “just an add on.” because the rule books from the Ministry don’t count (or pay for) prevention work.

The location of the New Beginnings office increases accessibility, for families to both the program (such as community kitchen, baking, school aged breakfast, crafts) but also to the support from the protection team. The more the team works in the community the more the attitudes, and ultimately the behaviour of workers, change because they become more aware of the issues facing the whole community. According to RELATIONSHIP, it becomes difficult to lay blame on one family knowing that “if the community is vulnerable then the kids will remain vulnerable.”

The leadership required to manage work in the neighbourhood is part of RELATIONSHIP’s job. She works to connect the work done with families to the philosophy of service. Her team learns from her and from each other but most importantly they learn from the families who live in the neighbourhood.

I think for workers they get, they learn more skills on how to work collaboratively, how to be a part of an engine that’s bigger than the child welfare engine which you know can mow people over and so I think that reduces anxiety, increase satisfaction in the work, they see that they’re able to have impacts on different corners of the world that’s outside just what they might be able to do with one family.

The people on her team look to her and see RELATIONSHIP guided by VISION and able to do her work with PROTECTION. She believes in the capacity of people to change and adapt. She understands that much of her work is about how people interact and this is why she earns the name of RELATIONSHIP in this story.

COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY works as part of RELATIONSHIP's team. He works with children and families especially when they are struggling. He is committed to working outside the kingdom walls and he has an office in one of the schools located the hamlet. Within the child welfare kingdom, he does not know any other way of helping children and families as he has only ever worked outside the walls of the kingdom and he likes this. He believes in himself and the role he plays with others who share common space or live in the same area. He is known outside the kingdom walls and creates a space for himself so that child welfare is not all alone.

His work within the education kingdom is the result of VISION's work to create relationships with education....after all many of the children the kingdom must save go to the schools. She developed this plan with the leadership of those in the education kingdom, as she wanted to find ways for the kingdom to get out into other places nearer to those families who are struggling. It is hard to tell if COMMUNITY is doing child protection work or counselling or relationship-building as he is part of the hamlet he serves. He knows that his work with a school or a nearby community center make his work in the child protection kingdom easier and better. He believes in working with others and not working in isolation and this earns him the name COMMUNITY.

COMMUNITY's office, in the school, looks different than other offices in the child welfare kingdom. You enter through the doors within the school library. His job is to respond to calls regarding child protection but it is really so much more. He identifies a

different kind of work. Part of his job is to learn about the school he is placed in and become familiar with the both the people and the hamlet where the families live. He is building relationships and working toward being a friendly face to any child, parent or teacher he encounters even if they will never become an “open” client file with the kingdom.

He understands that the families who live in this hamlet of Eastdale are poor. Poverty sets them at a disadvantage and “sometimes they don’t have the power to influence their environment.” COMMUNITY cites an example of the work he might do: if one of the boys in the school is struggling he might seek out COMMUNITY and when the boy enters the office he might grab “an apple or a pudding” and then they chat. “And we talk about it for a couple of minutes and I think he’s redirected back to his mom but he feels like he can search out an answer, he feels like he can come back ask somebody and get some support and I think that that’s important. He’ll remember that forever.” A new relationship is fed or born and child welfare work is spread across a hamlet and into the education kingdom as well.

He knows that being located in the hamlet has benefits for both him and the families. “Some of the clients that we have real concerns about then we’ll see them in a completely different setting and it helps us understand maybe their lives a little better, see them in a different light, maybe readjust or re-hypothesize how we are looking at them because that’s (Eastdale) a tough area to live in.” COMMUNITY knows that this works both ways and in addition to the worker seeing the clients differently the clients also see

the workers differently “they see me often and they know who I am, they get to see me as a real person, they know that we want to understand their issues” because the families have a chance to interact with the worker in their own space outside the realm of a intervention or interview or the walls of the kingdom.

COMMUNITY believes he is making a difference “because my clients will come in and share with me. I think that my clients will self refer. I think that they see me as a little bit less threatening because they know my history. I’m familiar. They know the history of our team...they know RELATIONSHIP. They know that we will advocate for them and we will go to bat for them.”

He can list off the other workers from other kingdoms that he works with -, teachers, principal, police - and where he can refer people to get their basic needs met. He helps families solve problem but when it comes to families looking for solutions he states “they’re the authority too” believing solutions for problems lie within the family and community, not in one worker’s possession.

He would like to do more, “like would I play street hockey with those kids on the court? Yeah, I would love to do that but my day ends at 4:30 and I’m not given the credit for that time.” He takes it that one step further “then you get a police officer to come out and play street hockey with a social worker and maybe you have you know a teacher come out and play street hockey in that community and now they’re seen as very different people”. He believes in the power of working with other kingdoms as well as the neighbours and this is how he earns the name COMMUNITY.

SHARED HUMANITY

SHARED HUMANITY also works outside of the kingdom and acts as support to RELATIONSHIP and COMMUNITY but more importantly to the whole hamlet of Eastdale. She has worked in the kingdom for many years and at the very center of it for much of that time. In the big kingdom she did the same work as she does now but, before, she rarely met those outside the kingdom. She believes in the people who live outside the kingdom and she has become a neighbour in the hamlet.

She does not see the families' served as "clients" but as people. She knows the important role RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, VISION and PROTECTION play and she does everything in her power to support them. She has seen others come before to do work with families and has seen them work "position to people" but she believes the best work can be done "people to people." She loves her work and does it well because SHARED HUMANITY understands we all are, after all, just people like those who live in the hamlet, even if we do work for the kingdom.

She knows her primary role is administrative support to the protection team but she has become part of the neighbourhood. She knows the children by name and they know her. She says of the hamlet, "they know who I work with; they know who my manager is." When working inside the kingdom she felt distant from the families. "You don't even see who comes into the main entrance to say hello." She is quite aware that the roles of those doing community development on the first floor and the protection team on the second floor are quite different. She believes that the community "figure all that

out rather quickly and they know that we work together.” She sees the purpose of the work as “in this environment again people learn how to not need protection” and this works well because “whatever we teach in the community is reinforced in the community.”

She has seen the shift in the work of protection when community development is added. “I think our role becomes a little different, it’s not...it’s not from the sense of you know we’re the authority and we’re the ones in charge to tell you how to do this with your family or how to do that it becomes this is the right thing to do and they already know and they sometimes need encouragement and they get that from us or their neighbours.”

In the end there is a mutual relationship that develops and she speaks about the sense of community in Eastdale:

They really do get, they get closely connected and sometimes more so than they do with their own family and they watch over each other’s children and they take care of each other’s children, they drive each other to appointments and its, so it’s the whole sense of community that when we work here every day that we sort of become part of that. And in a strange sense they watch over us too even though we’re Children’s Aid, they take care of us when they think we need something.

This is an interesting contrast to how the general community would describe Eastdale as a place to avoid and that is dangerous.

She knows that she too could be in the same place as the families who live in Eastdale and she knows as SHARED HUMANITY, that what she needed as a child is what the children in the community need. “I put myself in their shoes and I remember or

think...what do they need?" She sees herself as part of the solution and so her role is so much more than that of administrative support. This is how she earned the name SHARED HUMANITY.

HEALTH

HEALTH knows that access to her care, for those on the fringe of the kingdom, is hard to find. She also left the comfort of the center of the medical kingdom and regularly ventures into the small hamlet of Eastdale to New Beginnings. As part of the medical kingdom she also knows how hard it is to understand the needs of families from the middle of a kingdom with thick walls and separated from the families served. These very thick walls built around the kingdom from where she comes are strengthened by the language of science that proclaims a single truth may be found. She understands her job is to teach, support and refer so that families can be healthy and she is well aware that none of this can happen when people in the hamlet are hungry. "They need food...I just think you can't talk to a parent about how to do this, that or the other thing if they didn't pay the rent and they don't have food " HEALTH is part of the team at New Beginnings working with some of those on CURIOUSITY's and RELATIONSHIP's teams.

HEALTH does not come to bring foreign medicines but the things that are basic needs for families. She brings milk, food and a listening ear. She is concerned about children being safe but knows that they cannot learn about HEALTH if those who help only look at sickness. HEALTH looks to find what is going well and builds from there. She knows the value of the work done by RELATIONSHIP and tries to bring this together

with her work. Her commitment to wellness and resources for families has earned her the name HEALTH.

She sees the work at New Beginnings as “simple family development, helping kids develop and then helping that neighbourhood develop.” She has worked with other workers from the child welfare kingdom and she sees a difference. Referring to one of the workers on RELATIONSHIP’s team she said “if I watch her walk down they come out, they say hi, the kids know her by name which I think is a big thing right and they know her and they come to her and they say oh you know I had this great day at school.”

HEALTH’s experience is that families often have a hard time asking for help. In other parts of the community where she works, places outside of the reach of New Beginnings, she sees the difference in families’ willingness to ask:

They don’t see that there’s support available they just see it as protection. Clearly. Only. Which is interesting from our perspective because I’m always saying well you know ask your worker, talk to your worker, they can do this. And I know cause I work at this other place (New Beginnings) and they do it right. And they say oh no, no, no, and they can’t. I could never ask my worker for food because then they would think I don’t have food but ...right...but we say oh they would see it as a good thing and families we work with don’t believe that to be true whereas at New Beginnings that’s the first thing they would do.

She sees her role as one that takes time and patience. With a three hour commitment per week she is able to come back each week and say “we’ll do it together...step by step” thereby playing an instrumental role herself in community development. She not only has come to know families and the community, but also workers from other areas of work in the community. Her biggest revelation has come in

understanding the work of child protection at New Beginnings “and the power is completely different” and she is happy to be a part of the work done in this hamlet.

BASIC NEEDS

BASIC NEEDS, much like HEALTH, is aware of what is needed to survive outside the kingdom. She knows that without adequate housing people are not safe. She works to make sure that those in the hamlet of Eastdale have safe housing and a safe environment to live in. She is generous as a landlord and works to make the area better by sponsoring events such as ‘planting day’. Aware that life can be hard in the hamlet she has created space for help to be brought to those living in the small area. She has arranged for services such as dental, breast feeding support, and healthy living classes, to come on site during her program time. Knowing that this hamlet is “housing of last resort” and that even then many cannot manage to pay their rent, is overwhelming to her at times. Her job is to manage the property but she is keenly aware that this involves managing relationships.

She has worked with the team I, CURIOSITY, lead for many years and has helped to maintain a space for the community development work at the centre. She knows that she is a landlord and has to ‘take care of business’ but she cares about the families she serves and wants them to maintain their home so that they will not be asked to leave the hamlet. She is aware that housing is one of the most basic needs and that although many in the hamlet of Eastdale have housing; they still need so much more. Child protection for her starts with having the ability to meet our basic needs.

She has always seen the work of CURIOSITY's team as supportive but she has not always seen the protection work of the child welfare kingdom as supportive. Over the last few years she sees child protection changing and she is happy for the change.

BASIC NEEDS sees firsthand the poverty that families face and the multi-generational impact that poverty has. She relies on the New Beginnings center to support families. When asked what she thought would happen if the center was gone she said "wow, it would create a huge void. It would isolate the families and children. It would take away the opportunity to experience things that they would not have the funds to or wouldn't have the time or would have the ...the ...energyit would depower the community. And it would make my job ten times harder. You know honestly I rely on the resource center to be there. It's a wonderful positive connection for everybody. It's a win, win, win."

As part of a very large kingdom herself, she has seen the work done at the center change the system too. She talks about a Bike Rodeo that was organized by the kingdom workers, community development, and the housing kingdom. It was such a big success and although "it wasn't something that we had ever budgeted for and now it's mandated."

She knows that families have difficulty accessing services and having the services on site makes them available to everyone. She takes pride in the neighbourhoods she manages and wants to maintain the area so that it is a place that all can enjoy. Each year she organizes a planting day to promote neighbourhood pride. The Housing

kingdom provides the flowers and soil and together the others working at New Beginnings center provide for the barbeque. Neighbours come out of their houses in the spring and take time to plant some flowers and at the same time reconnect with each other. She understands this not only as a housing event but community development. She is also aware that this kind of event is not as important as having food and shelter and that pride in a neighbourhood cannot happen unless basic needs are met. This has earned her the name BASIC NEEDS.

Section Seven

Findings

*As a storyteller I look to those around me to find the part of the story that is important to tell. The characters I met told me about a journey that started with a change when they left the kingdom to find a new **location**. They said that this change in location helped them to get to know the families in Eastdale and they started to develop a **relationship** with many neighbours in the hamlet. Those from the kingdom were used to being 'the expert' and having all the power in decision-making. But something different happened as they spent more time with the families. The more they got to know the neighbours and the more time they spent together, the more they learned about what the neighbours needed for help and support...(even though they had thought they knew this before hand). The more the people who worked for the child welfare kingdom (as well as those who worked for other kingdoms) learned, the more they found out how little they really knew in the first place. Those workers began to ask the question of **who really is the expert**. Then the most remarkable thing happened, instead of always taking the children away from those who hurt them, they found new ways to help the family stay together. After the families had more say, the workers from the kingdom began to **shift the work** they did...but don't take my word for it...this is what this cast of characters told me when we met.*

The Castle is too small....making the move to the Community.

The kingdom continued to grow and the number of rooms in the castle also grew. PROTECTION and VISION had big decisions to make. Where should all the workers in the kingdom be? Should they work inside the walls of the castle? Should they build a bigger castle? Other kingdoms had done this very thing and built larger castles with more walls and thicker glass and more distance from those who hurt the children. But somehow this did not seem right to PROTECTION and VISION, not the least of reasons being that building a new castle was very expensive.

VISION said, she thought it was time for some of the kingdom workers to move into the community and “work from within.” PROTECTION agreed, stating the move out of the castle into the same places those who hurt the children lived made sense “from a philosophical standpoint” where the agency could work on promoting child welfare not just child protection.

So VISION spoke to RELATIONSHIP and told her to go ahead and find a place where she and her protection team could move. RELATIONSHIP looked and wondered where this new location should be. Some of her team members were already working outside the kingdom at local schools. COMMUNITY was happy to be in the school and he thought he should stay. “I am a familiar face” he said, adding that sharing space is just one part of the move because having “community philosophy of the worker” is important as well.

RELATIONSHIP knew BASIC NEEDS and she knew many of the families where BASIC NEEDS collected the rent. My (CURIOSITY's) team was already in the hamlet of Eastdale and working to help and bring resources to families. Maybe the protection team could move into New Beginnings as well, thought RELATIONSHIP. BASIC NEEDS had always had a good working relationship with my team. Would working with RELATIONSHIP's team be different? She knew that some of the families in the hamlet had some bad experiences with workers from the kingdom. Would this little hamlet accept RELATIONSHIP's team as a neighbour? Although both my team and RELATIONSHIP's team work for the same kingdom, BASIC NEEDS sees the work they do as being "totally different."

Despite BASIC NEEDS reservations about including the different team, RELATIONSHIP asked her to consider the request to move into the hamlet. Approval from the housing kingdom was sought and obtained. RELATIONSHIP and her team now had a new home base...they were finally outside the walls of the kingdom. What would living in the same neighbourhood mean for the work that had to be done...after all there still were children to protect?.

When it came time for HEALTH to come to the hamlet many people from her kingdom could not understand why she would want to go and work in Eastdale. When they find out she is working at New Beginnings. "Their eyes get big and they say "Oh, you know, how did you get stuck there?" HEALTH doesn't see it this way and describes

New Beginnings as a place “where neighbours who go there, it’s just regular folk who go there, people you’d be comfortable with.”

There was definitely some work to be done. BASIC NEEDS reservations and the existing judgement, like those in HEALTH’S kingdom could be seen as good reasons to change plans to move into Eastdale. But the strength of VISION’s commitment to working in the community and resolve for the success of the move encouraged RELATIONSHIP to move forward with her team.

Well this is where the story really starts. The change of location changes everything for those of us working in the kingdom. The people who live in the hamlet of Eastdale seem a little different than before. It seemed that the more time RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, BASIC NEEDS, SHARED HUMANITY AND HEALTH spent with people from Eastdale the more they seemed to understand what they needed. Now, instead of only meeting families when there was a problem reported about a child who is in danger, RELATIONSHIP’s team met many other families in the neighbourhood too....even some who might never harm a child!

The other interesting thing that happened was that the families living in the neighbourhood could see those protection social workers who came from the kingdom more closely as well. Many families from Eastdale had worked with my team and might come to a cooking class or a game of bingo but they were afraid, and sometimes angry with RELATIONSHIP’s team because they knew that if someone from her team came to visit from the big kingdom that trouble often followed. Sometime the children were taken

away or sometimes the workers kept coming back to check on the children. Many were very fearful that people from the kingdom didn't understand how hard it could be to live in the hamlet.

SHARED HUMANITY saw moving into the neighbourhood as an opportunity for families to learn more about her team and the work they do. "They see us and we see them" as opposed to the centralized system where "you don't even see who comes into the main entrance to say hello." As an added bonus those who live in the neighbourhood also get to know those who are working in the community.

In the past, families who had to work with the child welfare kingdom or other kingdoms sometimes had a hard time getting to the far off places where the offices were built. BASIC NEEDS could see that having people from the kingdom right in Eastdale improved accessibility so that families were able to access what they previously were unable to: "transportation isn't an issue, it's right there." Knowing also that families struggle to get to services due to poverty and overwhelming life circumstances made HEALTH see the difference created at New Beginnings by "bringing services to families instead of expecting families to come to us." She further noted that this program has created a space where "it allows us to get to know each other" both the neighbours and service providers.

BASIC NEEDS knows that people in the neighbourhood will still have times when they need help so that they do not hurt their children or when there is an emergency. When this happens having the protection team on site increases how quickly workers

from the kingdom respond to the situation. When there are “urgent situations obviously you can get an immediate response...You can just walk out the door, walk down to the unit and verify whereas if you’re at another location, it could take an hour to get there and by the time you clear off your desk, finish your email, I mean you’re right on site.”

Oh there are many, from the far off kingdom and other very educated people from the learning kingdom, who criticize the move to the community. They think that a work place for the social workers from the child welfare kingdom, in the center of a hamlet, like Eastdale, could be unsafe for workers. Other worry it will increase the surveillance of families. RELATIONSHIP answers the critics as she sees the sharing of space as allowing her and her team to do a different kind of work supported by a philosophy of service and strengths-based social work:

We have greater insight as to what some of the challenges that families are facing as opposed to trying to catch them at something where we really come at from the point of when we get a report what we know about families will help us to inform what is a safety concern, are there really risks and that information that we know about the families helps us to be able to do different types of interventions rather than actually, you know, looking out the window trying to see what is wrong with families.

Getting to know the New Neighbours in the Hamlet of Eastdale?

Things started to look differently from inside the walls of the small two story dwelling of New Beginnings. Some of the people who looked and acted very angry began to act less angry more like a neighbour. Something was changing between workers and the families in the hamlet; their relationship was changing. COMMUNITY noticed the difference as he sees families differently and he is able to “understand a bit better or see them in a different light.” In the past where he might not see the challenges of living in a

hamlet like Eastdale he now understands that many families face the same type of problems. He sees them playing with their children and when they are doing things right, not only when they are having problems. Conversely the families see him differently “they see me often and they know who I am, they get to see me as a real person, they know that we want to understand their issues, we experience the same type of things that they experience, you know problems communicating or stresses with children or financial stresses, a lot of that stuff is the same.”

VISION had hoped for this type of outcome, where the work of the kingdom could be more transparent and more meaningful relationships between social workers and families could be developed. Remembering the first move of kingdom workers into the neighbourhood, VISION shares that building relationships does not mean that difficult decisions won't have to be made but that there is greater chance of understanding from both those being served and those serving. VISION recalls:

I knew that was a much better intervention of people getting used to knowing us from other kinds of initiatives as the more they understand you the more likely they're going to accept what you have to do. They might not like what the interventions are but they will be able to accept and understand. And I think New Beginnings is probably an example of transparency for child protection.

As RELATIONSHIP's team spent more time in the small hamlet, news spread of their work. SHARED HUMANITY knew that the neighbours were watching and said:

If one person knows or has an experience with protection that goes all over the place. So if it's a good, positive experience that you know the Children's Aid helped them with something, we encourage them somehow, you know we assisted in a positive way, then they pass that on to other people and say you

know if you need help go and ask or they don't just take your kids you know or they support you, they help you in lots of other ways.

As the team spent more time with families in the hamlet by virtue of location it allowed for more time and opportunity for people to interact. SHARED HUMANITY could see a shift in how things were done because relationships were being developed. "The shift in attitude didn't just come from them, it come from us [kingdom workers] as well and I think when we meet in the middle like that then things start to change and happen." She was patient and knew that as part of RELATIONSHIP's team she and her workmate had to show a "warm endearing kind of patience and the willingness to be supportive and helpful." She shared the difference she could see:

It's that whole sense of community that when we work here every day that we sort of become a part of that. And in a strange sense they watch over us too even though we're Children's Aid, they take care of us when they think we need something. (Shared Humanity)

VISION continued to encourage RELATIONSHIP and her team to build relationships in the neighbourhood. VISION understood that things were different and being away from the kingdom helped to change the work. There is still 'protection' work to be done that must be done by those working for the kingdom, but improved relationships make the work easier to do. The community learns by watching and VISION believes "the more they understand you the more likely they're going to accept what you have to do." She sees this as different from how others inside the big kingdom see protection where "they would rather swoop in and protection to them is making hard and fast decisions." It was different and this is what VISION and PROTECTION had hoped for... maybe the big kingdom could change after all!

RELATIONSHIP suggests that the work she and her team does is guided by what people living in the area want. “I think most importantly you recognize you’re a partner with the actual people that are living there” and working where people can see what is being done creates a different level of accountability. She is aware that if workers “don’t really consider the decision that you make and... the people can challenge you on how you’re doing the work and you’re not protected by the same four walls.” She cares what the families have to say about the work done by her team and she looks to families for help. RELATIONSHIP states:

I think we are able to then to have different information, different relationships with families to get a different understanding as to what the protection issues are, what are some of the things that they might be able to access to help make things different, what some of those strengths are.

There are those from deep inside the kingdom who prefer to keep their distance from those who might hurt the children. They might suggest that getting too familiar with families served in child protection could make decision-making more difficult. But for RELATIONSHIP, knowing the community served helps to increase options available that help to mitigate the problems with individual families as they arise. For example, familiarity helps RELATIONSHIP’s team to identify and reach out to a neighbourhood friend who is available to offer some respite or the grandmotherly neighbour who always watches out for the children.

RELATIONSHIP has seen that families now can talk to social workers about more than just their own children and concerns. She now sees groups of people talking about what the protection team does (and could do differently). She also has become

aware of how they are now able to ask questions of the social workers. This may be a result of families feeling more comfortable and safe in asking questions:

I think even most recently as there seems to be an increase in communication even just to talk about what that really needs to look like which I don't think three years ago they would have even felt that they could put on the table to talk about what kind of roles or what we're all doing in the building because there would have been no trust, no relationship and now we can actually have those conversations. So it has definitely has grown.

The shared space has increased opportunities for workers and families alike to see what is happening in the community. RELATIONSHIP speaks to situations she has seen outside of child protection issues that “gave me an understanding and connection and engagement with that family”, information that was later used to offer support instead of increase surveillance or opening a file to protection. She tells of getting a call about a neighbour from someone inside the kingdom saying the children were left unattended. RELATIONSHIP knew that this mother had just had dental surgery and was in fact home. She was able to send one of her team to offer some support with the children and see if the mom had what she needed. This is far different than what might be offered if someone from the big kingdom came to visit. The main purpose would be to see if the children were alone or not. This would not likely happen as quickly and once the concern was resolved there would likely be little support offered to the mother.

BASIC NEEDS noticed a difference too as “we have more of a personal relationship and it does make it a little easier to approach them [protection workers] regarding mutual clients....there is a level of trust which I think is developing with the

residents as well.” *BASIC NEEDS* has used the same principle of relationship building when she collects the rent and supports housing:

I feel very strongly that is also a tool in being a property manager, building relationships with your residents. It's not just the landlord, the tenant, the Children's Aid Society protection worker, it is a relationship. We have to work together and together we seem to be able to make it a better environment for everybody.

BASIC NEEDS had worried about what would happen when the protection team moved into the hamlet. She worried people might feel “uncomfortable in their own homes, that they're being scrutinized” but, for the most part, this has not happened and over time she has seen a change. “Slowly... we're seeing people actually voluntarily calling the protection unit to discuss issues.” She sees child protection changing and believes that this in turn then improves the community as a whole.

HEALTH works in other parts of the child welfare kingdom as well as at New Beginning, and she sees a difference in what is happening at New Beginnings. She believes that having the work of the kingdom right in the midst of a neighbourhood makes the work more visible and this has contributed to the changing relationship between families in the hamlet of Eastdale and *RELATIONSHIP*'s team. She says:

It's about, I think it's about they know the worker, they trust them and they know....and they don't see babies getting apprehended every other day right. Our families don't in other parts of the city either but they think it right, they... they think that's what's going to happen. But I think at New Beginnings they see protection happening every day but they don't see the end of protection right, they just see the everyday helping, supporting, keeping your family and helping your kids. So they just trust that it's going to be a good answer.

Who's the Expert?

So far in our story we have a powerful kingdom wanting to protect children but filled with problems, and we have a small group of people from that very kingdom who have decided to leave the safe walls in the center of the kingdom to move closer to the families who may need help. There are some other folks from other kingdoms who have joined this small group and they come and visit and work in the hamlet of Eastdale each week. Living in the same area has allowed the kingdom workers, and their companions from other kingdoms to spend time getting to know the families of Eastdale. The workers are learning something from the families and it appears that the families are learning something from the workers especially about the very big kingdom these families are often afraid of. But I wonder (being CURIOSITY) who is really the expert?

The people who work for the kingdom still have a great deal of power. RELATIONSHIP shudders when she thinks about how the system considers those it serves. Families “feel the distance of the decision-making” she said. She remembered a story about two families who had a different experience with the big kingdom during a time when she was away from New Beginnings:

The family was telling me what had happened. They said you know if you had been here then we know that it would have looked differently because you would have known, you would have been able to see the house, you see the kids every day, you know that we're in the program so that you know even that second visit wouldn't have been necessary because you already would have seen us because we would have been at the kitchen that morning or we would have been at the “community chat” that day.

RELATIONSHIP acknowledges that her team has decisions to make and they have to protect children because that is what is mandated by the Ministry to do. However, how she chooses to work with the families and how she directs her team to work with families is based on how well she understands these families and the community philosophy that believes families can be experts too:

I think most importantly you recognize that you're a partner with the actual people that are living there and that neighbours really you know at the end of the day none of the rest of us are there and neighbours connecting with other neighbours is where you're going to build in safety. So you are sharing the responsibility among people who are actually going to be there as opposed to us that aren't there at night.

VISION knew this when she supported the move to a community space. She hopes to see a move to shared community accountability. She is aware that who gets to decide what the community needs is an issue that is at the heart of much of the conflict in child welfare. In a community-based system there can be some services where the workers "offer something that the community needs, not what we decide the community needs." VISION notes the difference: "It's not the traditional intervention of the expert coming in and telling the family what's wrong, its more coming in and doing it through assessment" and the relationships that are built between agency staff and neighbours creates a place where "they're getting clearer information."

VISION sees a role for those from the child welfare kingdom to participate in supporting community development. When the community improves then outcomes for children improve. She believes that "a stronger community has less need for child

welfare services or interventions... so the stronger the community, the better the kids are.”

SHARED HUMANITY agrees that “in this environment again people learn how to not need protection.” Although the protection team does some teaching and offers support, SHARED HUMANITY believes that the families “learn from each other.”

HEALTH is used to working in the large kingdom, both hers and the one that RELATIONSHIP and I work for. Comparing New Beginnings to the larger child welfare kingdom HEALTH sees the difference “and the power is completely different.”

Most of the work of the big kingdom continues to be directed toward one family at a time. The power that the worker brings to these individual family meetings feels very real to the families. They know that the worker has the ability (and they know worker have used this power many times before) to take the children away from them. New Beginnings protection team still work with families one at a time but they also have an opportunity to offer something different. They can consider offering groups to families they are working with and they can participate in community kitchens or other programs but they have chances throughout the day to spend time with families when there is not task to achieve or purpose other than connecting as people who work or live in the same neighbourhood. They can pick up a hockey stick to play a game, share a hot dog at the BBQ, stop and smell the casserole or baking a neighbour might be preparing in the kitchen or they might dress up like an elf for a Christmas celebration. COMMUNITY sees his work as being driven by his “community-based philosophy” and his presence in

the community over the years has helped the whole agency become “ingrained in the community.” Most importantly for COMMUNITY, “it doesn’t feel like ‘power over’.”

*The work done by RELATIONSHIP’s team is different because they are able to develop a better understanding **with** the families and thus they understand more about what solutions might be right for the neighbourhood. He is aware that understanding families better helps him to do his job and to move away from the role of expert and ask more questions. He sees his role to seek to understand rather than approaching the families thinking he has all the answers.*

Some of the clients that we have real concerns about then we’ll see them in a completely different setting and it helps us understand maybe their lives a little bit better, see them in a different light, maybe readjust or re-hypothesize how we are looking at them because that’s a tough area to live in.

When families’ problems are seen differently hopefully the solutions that might be explored or endorsed can be different as well. PROTECTION is glad to hear this as he is concerned that “too much of child protection is being viewed as individual pathology....chronic social issues of poverty and education and marginalization” are a few he mentions. He adds that solutions may not be found in the work done with individual families and “the community development component is crucial if you really want to make long term change.” Moving away from blaming the family helps workers to see families as experts in their own lives. Speaking of the families, COMMUNITY adds, “They’re the authority too.”

As families come together for various groups and meetings, they begin to find a single voice. SHARED HUMANITY noticed this too:

People want to have their voices heard. They have a lot of questions about things and I'm sure those questions have been there for a long time but now they're asking and now they're starting to say we want to do this, we want to try that....So its building the relationship and going a little bit further. ... People would say this or that but not really as a group and not really you know with a full loud voice to say this is really our concern. And repeating those issues until they do really get heard.

The families started to band their voices together and stand up to the people who worked in the small two storied building right next door. It felt good to have others to help them speak, and it felt even better having someone listen. "We want a group on how to talk to our kids about sex" one neighbour said and others joined in ... "Yeah I need that information too." HEALTH and people from my team heard their voices and together they planned a group to address these issues the following week. And now people remember there was one time that someone from a big kingdom listened.

Later on the group of voices met and told BASIC NEEDS, 'we want to recycle.'" BASIC NEEDS said "oh we tried that before and it didn't work." But the group spoke louder and asked again. "We want to recycle".....and BASIC NEEDS said okay. BASIC NEEDS has seen this voice grow at New Beginnings and "I've seen [a change] from total apathy to a community chat group that really wants to get together once a week." The families in the hamlet seem more willing to get involved and participate in neighbourhood improvements.

PROTECTION AND VISION AND RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY still have a job to do to keep children safe in the kingdom. HEALTH still has to help families with their health and BASIC NEEDS still has to collect the rent however in the hamlet of

Eastdale the families who live there know who they can speak to if they are upset and they know that they can join voices with other neighbours and be heard. The kingdoms are still powerful but the work can change because the families now have a say. This raises the question of who is the expert? Can families participate in deciding what will happen in their home and community? In speaking about the families in the hamlet, HEALTH offers this advice to anyone working at New Beginnings “They have all sorts of interesting stories, just listen and hear...learn from it and change your practice.”

A Shift in the work: Different work ...Same kingdom!

Now for one more recap...the people working in the big kingdom decided to leave the castle and move into the hamlet of Eastdale so that they could be closer to the people who they worked with. Some people from other kingdoms such as the landlord and health and some teachers from my team joined with RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY and SHARED HUMANITY and the rest of their team and they are becoming part of the neighbourhood too. But, things don't always look as clear and simple to this group as they did when they were working in the center of the kingdom. From closer up, the people who used to be called “the ones who hurt the children” now do not look much different than anyone else. Now these experts were not so sure of anything. They had more questions and felt uncomfortable and strangely unsettled. This was a new kind of feeling but it made them all the more curious about what they might learn. They wondered about how they might have to change their work. They wondered about all the sadness and anger in the kingdom and if maybe the kingdom was broken.

It is hard to live outside the kingdom. Everyone who worked in the kingdom had enough to eat but many who lived in the hamlet do not have enough to eat. It is hard to fight the kingdom if you are hungry and poor. This was not something that many working inside the kingdom considered. They had been worrying so much about saving the children that they did not stop to think about what may have caused the children to be unsafe in the first place. These now seemed like very important things to know about families. RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARED HUMANITY, HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS were learning a great deal about life outside the kingdom. The neighbours in the hamlet were joining their voices to tell them stories of how hard life can be but, interestingly, they were also sharing with workers just how good life can be. Everyone working inside New Beginnings began to understand that they had more to learn. The big kingdom is broken and some of the things that people inside the kingdom think about those who hurt the children are wrong. The kingdom has been blaming the people who hurt the children without helping to fix the things that cause some of the problems in the first place.

RELATIONSHIP likes to be at New Beginnings. It helps her understand things better and it help her change the work that she and her team do. It was easier to think about one family at a time but something about this never felt right for RELATIONSHIP. Being in the community helps her to remember to try and make things better, not just for one child but for the whole family and maybe even the whole hamlet or kingdom. She states:

I think it doesn't allow us to focus on the deficits of one family. I think it helps us to be able to find strengths and support to families in a more meaningful way. I also think that if you're doing that (community development) you're going to have longer lasting change. But I really think that you'll you know you develop, you help be part of developing a foundation that will last as opposed to coming in and maybe just painting a wall or fixing a window and still have a foundation that cracked.

RELATIONSHIP still knows that she has a job to do that protects children but she thinks about it differently now. She feels that she has a better understanding of the challenges some of the families in the hamlet face and she also has a better idea of the support available from other families in the same hamlet. This opens the options available to her team and she can now see more ways to help fix problems, and for the most part, use other options instead of having to take the children away inside the big kingdom.

HEALTH sees this difference as well at New Beginnings. She sees how families living in other places in the kingdom think about the big kingdom that tries to keep children safe. She knows that many families are afraid of the workers from the child welfare kingdom and many would not consider asking for help as it might be considered, by the kingdom, as a weakness. There is a difference...she said:

it's like a two way relationship, families know that and I don't even find they talk about it the same way. Like they don't talk about the protection piece the same way as they do in other places. In other places it's just about the protection and they (families) don't see the support.

She knows at New Beginnings that the work being done is about more than just 'protection': families can ask for and get support, such as assistance with a school meeting or the use of a fax machine, whereas in other places where she works families

feel they can't ask. HEALTH sees families being more involved in determining and asking for what they need. They seem more able to describe what type of support and information they would find most helpful instead of workers prescribing support.

Describing this difference HEALTH says:

I think that New Beginnings is good at asking those questions what do people want and then responding. Like too often we ask the question and then we don't implement what it is they asked for and I think that that's something I notice since I came back because I had that year off. Right...and so I've noticed that since I came back that there's a lot of asking questions.

The traditional work in the kingdom has often been about finding those who hurt the children and stopping it. The work in the hamlet is different as it has helped to identify where there are bigger issues causing families to not be able to care properly for their children or to hurt their children. Sometimes people from the kingdom are considered the experts with the answers, but now at New Beginnings workers seem to have more questions. Asking questions has helped RELATIONSHIP and her team to think "differently." The work shifted after the location of their work changed. The change in location led to a different type of relationship with families this in turn challenged what workers thought they knew about families and led them to ask more questions about what might be helpful. RELATIONSHIP believes this change "allows us to be able to make greater holistic decisions around what is mitigating the risk, what are the strengths, who are the supports in place. It broadens our horizons so it allows us to be able to do things, I think, differently."

This is what PROTECTION has hoped for; that Social Workers move beyond case management to social work. When staying inside the kingdom, it was easy to forget

which part of the work is most important. Now RELATIONSHIP's team can be part of a bigger team who all can learn from the families. The children are not seen as separate from their parents but instead as part of a family and these families are not seen separate from their community. Although there still are times when children cannot stay with their family it happens less often. VISION has committed to supporting the teaching and support work done at New Beginnings by my team. The joining of the work done by RELATIONSHIP's team, my team, HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS has helped each of us to rethink our work and shift toward community development. Doing the work of community development sometimes even helps people working in the little hamlet feel less sad and angry. SHARED HUMANITY sees the benefits as:

If the community gets stronger they get stronger from helping each other and they do that with or without Children's Aid. I think the protection piece, they protect each other too in that sense of you know watching over each other's families and help them with that. I think our role becomes a little bit different, it's not ...it's not from the lens of you know we're the authority and we're the ones in charge to tell you how to do this with your family or how to do that. It becomes this is the right thing to do and they already know and they just sometimes need encouragement and they get that from us or their neighbours.

Now the people who were seen as "the ones who hurt their children" also take a role in protection of children. The whole hamlet becomes involved. HEALTH comments on this shift:

There are lots of people watching. I know they were saying oh there's not enough look at those kids running wild and protection, the workers are right there and why aren't they doing anything? Because we know that lots of people are watching those kids and I think the families know it too and it develops neighbours and friendships that I don't see everywhere else.

HEALTH has a better relationship with REALTIONSHIP and her team as well as BASIC NEEDS. They help and support each other as they work in the hamlet. Then they can also work together to advocate for more help. HEALTH recalls:

I think to myself, huh, right there's something weird going on here, but I maybe it's just me. But then you put it out there with all sort of community partners and everybody says the same things you think oh there's something that needs to be done at the community level, we need to look at hunger from a community level instead of just this family seems hungry to me. There's something going on here and it allows you to open it up a little bit I think and think broader.

Now COMMUNITY helps to speak out for resources for the families in Eastdale. He feels that he has to do this. The work he does "needs to challenge us to advocate for those bigger and broader social issues and see those connections." He still mostly works with one family at a time but he thinks about the whole area and how he might make things better.

Oh there are still angry people and sad people and some people who hurt their children.....it just isn't most people who live in the hamlet. The ones who know most about how hard it is to live in the hamlet are the neighbours who live there. The experts become the neighbours and the neighbours become the experts and the relationships improve leaving both sides feeling different. The kingdom workers like their work more because they feel they can make a difference. The neighbours can talk to and be angry at the "experts" from the kingdom and they can ask for support and get it. It becomes as SHARED HUMANITY states a "back and forth" relationship and it does not feel the same as the work done from the center of the kingdom. The big thick walls and the

windows are gone and now the people outside the kingdom look different.....after all we all were children once too!

SHARED HUMANITY shared how she sees the interaction between her team and the neighbourhood:

You're still going to have bumps on the road, you're still going to have ups and downs and all of it, we're still going to hit barriers where the community's upset with something and we can't really fix it or change it but we get through it all and I think it comes from the constants, it comes from always coming back to okay, that didn't work so let's try this....and doing that together you know. Okay what happened here? Where you know you were upset with us because we did that, okay we won't do that anymore and then we'll do this instead...and it's kind of back and forth.

Section Eight

Discussion – Back to Reality

I step outside of my role as Curiosity in the story to firmly ground the findings of this research in the real world context of child welfare in Ontario. As useful as metaphors are, to tell a story and to help enhance our understanding of everyday issues, the return to reality is important as real people's lives are impacted by the multiple service decisions reflected in this story. As a person new to research and research dissemination I struggled with using a story only format without some academic form to address the 'real story' behind the story. It was important to me to meet the requirement of a thesis while creating something accessible to others who many never read a research paper. But in truth my need has very little bearing on the lives of many families who have no choice but to be involved with a child welfare agency. The actions of powerful agencies such as Children's Aid Societies and the powerful people within it, like me, have the ability to irrevocably change the lives of children and families; for the better or for the worse. The same power that can be used to oppress can be used to bring to life emancipatory practices (Sellick, Delaney & Brownlee, 2002, p. 495). The gravity of this reality can have the effect of making choices to maintain the current course and/or staying on safe or neutral ground (as if there is such a thing). However, doing nothing new within child welfare practice is not a neutral step but, instead, it maintains the status quo which upholds and reproduces the existing oppression of the families served. Conversely making changes or trying new ideas has the same potential to impact the

lives of families and children in the community. There are no guarantees that trying new ideas will be successful and the risk involved for those in child welfare who are willing to try something new can feel overwhelming. Who will get blamed if this program is not successful? Is it worth the risk? These are questions that those of us trying to bring about change and challenge the existing structures face. This presents a dilemma for each person associated with the child welfare system, and this unresolved paradox can be used as justification to do nothing, despite the consequences, to avoid any responsibility to change.

We have to take a stand. The alternative – neutrality-is only a fashionable way to hide our values and interests and perpetuate our power silently. But when we open a conversational space in which our clients are invited to engage with our knowledge, not as passive beneficiaries but active world-makers, and they in turn can offer their knowledge for inquiry and dialogue, which have the possibility of genuine mutual learning and understanding. This is true accountability and the essence of emancipatory practice” (Sellick, et al , 2002, p. 497).

The findings from this research identify areas where there have been changes made in one small site of child welfare practice. For those who have participated in taking the risk to work at New Beginnings, they did so in the hope of work toward what Sellick et al (2002) refer to as “emancipatory practice.” The changes started with a **change in location**, this in turn **changed relationships**, which affected the **balance of power between neighbour and the agency**, and then in turn **shifted the focus of the work**. In this section, using a critical lens and carefully considering the use of power, I will discuss these interconnected ideas using the literature and words of the participants to examine the findings of the research.

Location Change

The change in location for the New Beginnings protection team was born from both necessity and philosophy. The Children's Aid Society of Brant, as well as most other child welfare agencies in Ontario, had experienced unprecedented growth from 1999- 2001. This was a direct result of the move to the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) which increased agencies ability to intervene with families (Dumbrill, 2006). Other agencies in the province also struggled with having enough office space for the growing staff. Some agencies built or renovated, others moved into branch offices and some did combinations of both. Children's Aid Society of Brant had a well established outreach and community development team, funded outside the child welfare budget, in three neighbourhood centers offering tertiary prevention programs. So the move to Eastdale at the New Beginnings site was a viable and quick option to manage the necessity for more space for social workers

Philosophically, the agency had committed to a community-based model as evidenced by its practice of placing social workers in the schools and multiple community offices. This model takes social workers from centralized locations and moves them into community sites in the hope of sharing the responsibility for child welfare with the full community. Although Brant CAS has seen this as a positive move there are others who criticize the move into the community, especially in the neighbourhood centre, as an extension of surveillance of government. As a site in the middle of a housing complex it could be compared to Foucault's "panopticon, a mechanism of surveillance" (Moffat, 1999, p. 224).

Coupled with the good intentions of the agency, the change in location fits a central principle of the panopticon which is “that power itself be visible but at the same time unverifiable” (Moffat, 1999, p. 225). The agency, in its friendlier neighbourhood form, presents itself as a ‘support’, as wanting to help and more accessible to people before problems escalate to a crisis. Simultaneously, it clearly has access and ability to watch the people in the neighbourhood as they move about the daily lives. Families may come to the center to receive support but be confused about whether the center is a place to go for help or a place where their daily activities are scrutinized; a scrutiny that potentially might result in the removal of children from the home and the neighbourhood. These concerns were voiced by BASIC NEEDS when she expressed concern that with a child welfare agency in the neighbourhood people might feel “uncomfortable in their own homes, that they’re being scrutinized”(Basic Needs).

This lends support to Margolin’s (1997) notion expressed in his consideration that “aggressive social work did not die or wither away. It was improved” (p. 135). The change of location, into the heart of a neighbourhood, if coupled with the traditional and punitive attitudes toward parents could in fact be labelled as aggressive. This opportunity for agency workers to ‘catch’ parents doing something wrong increases dramatically as does the ability to intervene quicker by ‘swooping in’ and potentially increase the number of children removed from homes. Without a strong philosophical base and practice rooted in critical reflection, the amount of harm that could be done to a neighbourhood is frightening. If not properly managed, supported and monitored, the very oppressive

nature of child welfare that neighbourhood centre work was created to address could be reproduced.

In response to the critics, RELATIONSHIP was quick to balance their critique with the argument that increased exposure, instead, makes workers aware of “what the protection issues are, what are some of the things that they might be able to access to help make things different, what some of those strengths are.” This increased understanding of individual families serves as a starting point to understand some of the broader issues that impact all families living in the neighbourhood. RELATIONSHIP supports her team in understanding these broader issues; “instead of saying that that’s an individual deficit or problem there’s social constructs that are, you know, that are impacting the families overall rather than it being somebody, one person’s problem.” This goes a long way to reduce the blaming that often occurs in child welfare (Swift, 1995)

This duality of possible understandings can create a double bind for social worker in child welfare. Trying to bring about change through innovation in practice can be interpreted through multiple lenses, both negatively and positively. Some suggest that the negative camp has roots in the purer post-modernist understanding that challenges the very existence of an agency such as child welfare (Margolin, 1997, Moffat, 1999). Yet, those who suggest that change could be positive may also use a post-modern understanding, in particular the existence of multiple truths, but couple this with an obligation to embrace and act upon the emancipatory principles contained within. (Healy, 2001, Leonard, 2001, Pease & Fook, 1999). While this duality can create confusion and

uncertainty, adherence to this latter perspective with its focus on emancipation, allows for multiple understandings and interpretations and creates space for creating opportunities for change.

The need for social work to transform itself from a traditional profession with a unified theory and practice base and to learn to operate in diverse settings, with diverse value systems and populations groups (Pease & Fook, 1999, p. 10).

The change in setting, as suggested by Pease and Fook (1999), set the stage at *New Beginnings* for the possibility of a new understanding that challenges some of the long-standing assumptions that the child welfare kingdom was built on. Living as a neighbour in the Eastdale community allows the professionals to see families beyond being individual units. As noted above by RELATIONSHIP, one of the underpinnings of a punitive child welfare system has been the individuation of problems and failing to see families within the context of the community in which they live.

The notion of parents as the exclusive and usually only caregiver for their children is closely wedded to the individualistic philosophy that is so basic to our social and economic life. Individuation provides the logic and moral force supporting delegation of caring responsibilities to individual parents, regardless of resources to carry them out”(Swift, 1995, p. 101).

By virtue of being on site the collective ability of the neighbourhood to parent their children became evident. Eastdale, and in particular the address where *New Beginnings* is located, is seen in the city of Brantford as “a rough area” (Shared Humanity) or “tough area to live in” (Community). It is not unusual to attend meetings with other professionals in the community and hear stories of high drug use and criminal activity in Eastdale. The families who are successfully caring for their children and

community are not mentioned in the same conversations, leaving Eastdale understood as an area to be feared, not engaged with. The individuation of problems as noted by Swift (1995) and focus on deficits of the family as a single unit not only limits the individual family but also the community. Individual, families and communities may find success if they can build on their strengths as opposed to deficits. The deficits of the community, both real and perceived, form the basis for interventions by professionals. McKnight warns that community development cannot be borne from deficit identification and matching this to service but instead on the identifying and building on strengths and capacity of each within the community as a whole (McKnight, 1995).

In the case of *New Beginnings*, participants report that the more intensive exposure for staff and community partners has normalized what families in Eastdale do “and we see children playing outside, having fun, getting along, we see parents doing fun things with their family, just like any neighbourhood” (Shared Humanity). This in turn has allowed workers, both inside the child welfare system and in other community agencies, to begin to challenge their preconceived notions of the families in Eastdale. COMMUNITY describes this when he is able to “see them in a different light, maybe readjust or re-hypothesize how we are looking at them”.

The protection team, by virtue of location in the center of a housing complex, have come to consider themselves ‘neighbours’ of the residents of the community and there is some evidence that some surrounding families may see them as neighbours as well. It is not unusual for the families in the surrounding units to come to *New Beginning* to use the phone, borrow a cup of sugar or ask to use the fax machine. It should be

considered that there are some limitations to what type of neighbour that those working at *New Beginnings* can be. They do not stay overnight in the building and workers go home to their own neighbourhood at the end of each day. As with any neighbourhood there occasionally are some neighbours that we might prefer not to live so close. Although they participate in community events it is for different reasons than others who attend. Despite the enthusiasm of some of the participants in this study the ability of any worker to be a neighbour has limitation. At a lesser level however it may also hold possibilities that are not available to institutions....or large faraway kingdoms.

In the neighbourhood where I currently live, there is a group home several homes down the street. Sadly I do not know the people that live in the home and I rarely see them. A large blue van, with a clearly identified association painted on the side, can occasionally be seen leaving the building. For the most part what I, as a neighbour see, is staff working various shifts coming and going from the house. McKnight (1995) challenges the notion of what integration of group homes really means. Once the group home is located in a neighbourhood those living at the home may be identified as ‘deinstitutionalized.’ When McKnight spoke to the residents in one such home, he realized that they did not know the neighbours and were not involved with community events (p. 115-119). For these group homes and for community-based child welfare worker it may not be possible to become a neighbour just for the simple fact of being located in the community. However without a location change it would be much less likely that child welfare could ever become a neighbour either.

McKnight (1995) further identifies three “kinds of associations that express and create community” (p. 118). One type is a formal group such as an association or club that might be clearly named and have elected position. The second type is less formal and

represents a gathering of citizens who solve problems, celebrate together, or enjoy their social compact. These associations could be a poker club, a coffee klatch, or a gathering of neighbours who live on the block” (McKnight, 1995, p. 118).

The third kind of association that McKnight (1995) refers to is a place of business such as a bank, restaurant or salon (p. 118). He suggests that these places are often the locations where many meaningful contacts with other community or neighbourhood members take place.

These three types of association represent the community from which most labelled people are excluded, and into which they need to be incorporated if they are to become active citizens at the associational center of a democratic society (p. 118).

According to McKnight’s definition of community it could be argued that based on developing relationships that are described by the participants in this study that they do have an association with the community or might be considered neighbours within Eastdale. The involvement of RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARED HUMANITY, HEALTH and BASIC NEEDS in spending time and developing relationship in a common location as well as their participation in the community to “solve problems, celebrate together, or enjoy their social compact” (McKnight, 1995, p. 118).

As neighbours (appreciating the limitations of this construct), the protection team social workers participate in many activities that mainstream child welfare agencies would not typically be invited to such as planting days, barbeques, seasonal celebrations and community events. RELATIONSHIP has managed another protection team in a centralized location before and their involvement in community events was limited. She described the process from a centralized office of responding to calls and making decisions without having involvement outside the context of the call or concern. This type of ‘home visit’ contact with families did nothing to build relationships with the family in their community or with the community as a whole. The worker would not participate in any way in community events as they typically were the unwelcome visitor that the family was happy to be rid of. In terms of being invited to a community barbeque, RELATIONSHIP acknowledged that in her past experience of practice, “no one would think to invite us let alone let us know that it’s even going on.

The location of *New Beginnings* was also purported to further benefit families as other services (such as the library, nurse, local counsellors, church programs, and recreations programs) come to New Beginnings to offer additional service. The barriers to participation in other programs in the community (such as lack of money for transportation, lack of child care or lack of energy to travel) are lessened, if not removed by bringing programs into the center. From the perspective of the participants in this study the location in a housing complex was a particular benefit as it increased the ability for families to access the support programs and “so many of the moms are amazed that it’s available and thankful that it’s right on site. Transportation isn’t an issue, it’s

right there” (Basic Needs). Participation in support programs (e.g., the Public Health parenting support and information program called *Room to Grow* or community kitchen) may be considered a measure of success for families, particularly in open child welfare cases. Often families are mandated to attend programs as a part of their service plan or as a condition of keeping their child in their care, and when families fail to attend prescribed programs, workers may consider the “no show” as lack of commitment as opposed to crediting other causal factors as the explanation. “I think it’s an accessibility that is remarkable and that other people don’t have” (Health). Conversely the location of the program makes it easier for child welfare workers to ensure that their families do attend. It could be interpreted as Margolin (1997) describes yet another improvement in “aggressive social work” (p. 135). The service user or neighbour may be the best judge of whether it is a convenience and benefit or an imposition of power. It is also possible that it could be both.

HEALTH works in other programs with mothers and children and she talks about how uncomfortable it is for some of the moms living in poverty to attend groups with other moms who are arriving in minivans and designer clothing. Their resistance to attend these programs is not due to lack of commitment but more likely to a lack of fit between the program (its typical demographic) and these women being referred by child welfare. HEALTH started a program at *New Beginnings* for moms as it was a setting that was both more convenient but also more comfortable. She was able to help break down the barriers to participation by creating a space for families to address the exclusion experienced in other programs. Families come to welcome this support and in turn were

able to open their program to a more diverse group. HEALTH shared a story of a grandfather wearing a suit bringing his daughter and infant grandchild, living outside the community, to the *New Beginnings* site. After some initial reservations they came into the program “and before you know it mom was having a snack, he was chatting and they were all very welcoming of this family who looked nothing like them but, at the same time, had the same issues right, newborn baby, first baby and our families were so welcoming. But when it goes the other way we don’t see that as much.” HEALTH’S attention to allowing families to participate in developing the type of group where they felt welcome allowed them to extend this same welcome to others from outside the neighbourhood.

RELATIONSHIP shares the story of a mom with a long history of struggle with the agency. She was facing some current challenges and decisions that without remedy might mean her children would be removed from her care. This mom approached RELATIONSHIP during a community BBQ. “You want to see me,” the mom said. “Yeah, come, let’s walk and chat” said RELATIONSHIP. What happened next was different from what typically occurs following such discussions – after delivering the difficult news the mom returned to the center with RELATIONSHIP requesting some personal care supplies. The mom appeared to still recognize that the worker could provide support to help her with parenting her teens. “Clients value workers who will use their power to assist with practical, concrete needs and workers earn legitimacy and credibility by doing what they say they are going to do” (Strega, 2007, p. 77).

The worker clearly had to deliver a message that was steeped in the power inherent in child welfare work. The power of the worker is clearly greater than that of the mom. Child welfare workers still have and will use this power to remove children but they can also use the power in other ways such as bringing of concrete resources to families. The message was delivered and mom returned home with some decisions to make. No bus tickets were required, no waiting room, no glass divider, and no unfamiliar face at the front desk to get through before seeing the manager or worker.

Relationship Change

The forging of a new relationship that incorporates giving power and knowledge to recipients of service is still within the crucible of change. A new form of practice which is local and contextual, and linked to the politics of transformation, needs to be developed. This involves a very different sense of citizenship. The emerging relationship between the state and the citizens may well provide for a radical framework of practice” (Camilleiri, 1999, p. 33).

The change in location created opportunities for a change in relationships between the multiple workers both from child welfare and other community services with the families living in the Eastdale area. The location allowed opportunities for workers, community partners and the neighbours to encounter each other outside the context of a child maltreatment investigation or intervention.

According to those working directly in child welfare at the New Beginnings site, the relationship change happened as they began to think of the families differently. The ability of workers to assume primary responsibility for the nature of relationship in the neighbourhood is yet another indication of the power they hold. By virtue of location all

staff increased their direct exposure to families. This is equally true for the social worker as it is for the secretary: in the context of *New Beginnings*, it may actually be the administrative support person who offers the most meaningful exchange with the community or individual on any given day. SHARED HUMANITY described her interactions with a young girl on her way into work one day.

I remember seeing this little girl outside and she had on a skirt and a top and it was the day of the Father's Day thing and so she was dressed up and you know someone would have looked at that and perhaps thought it's all tattered and little bit frumpy but for whatever reason in my mind I went, "Wow", like she's all fancy right. So I made a comment to her about wow, you look so pretty, I like your dress and you could just see it and I thought see, I remember this from my own, from being a kid, I remember somebody would have said and I would have thought oh wow they don't see that it's not like brand new and it's not the best but it just made you feel like my dress is really nice you know. And it's just those kinds of things that I really think that's what makes a difference and it may not be a big thing.

Beyond the mandated roles, many of the exchanges between staff and neighbours occur, as SHARED HUMANITY suggests, as a "people to people" thing, that's not a "position to people" thing. She remembers working inside the agency at a central location where she rarely even encountered the families and children that others on her team worked with. The New Beginnings location creates opportunities for relationship-building that are not possible in centralized settings. However, despite the location change staff needs to be constantly aware of the power they embody.

Power cannot be removed from the encounter between worker and service users, no matter how kind, self aware or careful the worker may be. No risk assessment tools on the one hand, nor widely discretionary model of child protection that I am aware of on the other, can eliminate the vulnerabilities inherent in the moment on both sides when mandated worker meets parents in order to make potentially life altering judgments (Mandell, 2008, p. 244-5).

SHARED HUMANITY is still employed by a child welfare agency, yet in a position that does not have authority to remove children. She still could be considered part of the surveillance in the neighbourhood by those living there due to her direct affiliation with the agency. As I pondered SHARED HUMANITY's story I wonder if the little girl in the story felt the power of SHARED HUMANITY's position or if she saw the power of an adult? Perhaps she instead saw only a kind person? I wonder, too, how her parents may have seen this exchange. I wonder when she and her dad attended the center for the Father's Day event if the power that cannot be removed from the relationship was palpable. And I wonder how this might compare to other times this family may have encountered child welfare staff in other settings. Although SHARED HUMANITY did not arrive at these considerations of power in her interview other participants did as evidenced in RELATIONSHIP's experience at the BBQ.

The research participants observed that at *New Beginnings* opportunities increased for workers and other staff to meet neighbours at times and in circumstances other than when a report of child maltreatment was received. Similarly, the neighbours see the workers outside the confines of a child welfare office: walking in the neighbourhood, going to their car, sitting on the back patio having a break, and walking through the building during a community program session. Talking about a mutual client who moved into the Eastdale area, HEALTH observed this difference in resident perception of workers:

I said to her one day well what do you think about living here and how's it all going? It's great. I see my worker just walking down the hallway so if I need something hey how about it right? And that's a

huge difference I think for families who live there. And I think that the families like their workers more. Right. They see them as people right they don't think oh they're here to snatch my kids or whatever or other things they think but they hear them talk about their own families they seem the you know walking in with their lunch. Hey, how's it going? Chatting....and I think it makes a huge difference in that piece we're here for support. I don't know how it helps with protection but I think for the support piece that allows families to stay together and then that other piece doesn't need to come in, right.

By virtue of location, staff become neighbours, albeit a different kind of neighbour and they become part of the neighbourhood. This change in location appears to create a starting point for a change in relationship between child welfare and the community. The changes started with seeing 'clients' and Eastdale residents as 'people' and coming to this knowledge by virtue of seeing them in their home community which leads not only to an improved relationship with the individual but also to the whole community. SHARED HUMANITY describes the change in understanding of "a whole sense of that community and when we work here every day we sort of become part of that". The individual and families are seen from a strength-based perspective and as participants not recipients of service. These families bring knowledge, skill and expertise that the child welfare worker does not have. Participant's identified that the families are the experts in their lives, their community and that some of the complex problems the community experiences cannot be addressed with simple (even if powerful) solutions. This recognition is coupled with a recognition from the community that powerful child welfare workers may bring positive contributions to the community and relationship. It's a reciprocal relationship that appears to develop and the attitudinal change is evidenced on both sides. "The shift in attitude didn't just come from them; it came from us as well.

And I think when we meet in the middle like that then things start to change and happen” (Shared Humanity). This becomes a work in progress where a different kind of exchange may begin to happen, an information exchange that is, at its heart, more about a respectful reciprocity? It is a step towards what Dumbrill (2003) recommends: that “social work needs to listen to remedies rather than generate them-it needs to decentre its own dominant knowledge and make space for service users knowledge” (Dumbrill, 2003, p. 107). The information exchanged and ultimately the families in the community help to inform practice. RELATIONSHIP reports that “I’m learning sometimes how to do things a little bit differently.”

The location change to Eastdale created a place where workers could find a different, more relevant and in-depth context (above and beyond policy documents and child welfare standards as set out by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services) to their decision-making. RELATIONSHIP remarked that families “feel the distance of the decision-making [in child welfare].” Strega (2007) speaks to the relational distance as well when she says: “we can decrease the distance between ourselves and our clients by ensuring rather than casting ourselves in the role of expert we are prepared to work with the client’s definition of the problem” (p. 77). The physical proximity to clients created opportunities to address the gap in understanding between service providers and service users through increased exposure and interactions outside the mandate roles of child welfare.

The critics suggest, however, that this is an artificial construct and the roles of client worker remain imbalanced. “The dyad of worker and client is imbalanced – the

worker is constantly seeing while the client is being seen” (Moffat, 1999, p. 226). Speaking directly to processes in social welfare organizations, Moffat (1999) goes on to explain that the paperwork requirements in these welfare organizations reinforce this “imbalance” (p. 226). In the field of child welfare the requisite paperwork for RELATIONSHIP’s protection team still has to be completed when a family file is opened, irrespective of the program’s location. The benefits articulated by participants that can accrue from the increased opportunity to build positive relationship must be challenged with awareness of the simultaneous increase in opportunities to gather information and collect data. Like the staff in a welfare office that are the focus of Moffat’s analysis, child welfare social workers working in community-based sites may “feel their work is visible, yet the nature of the decisions made about the work is obscured” (1999, p. 237).

This poses a serious ethical dilemma for child welfare agencies interested in considering community-based work. Can child welfare agencies participate in community life in ways other than protection interventions or is anything additional simply creating sites of additional surveillance? The question that child welfare agencies and workers need to address is whether the potential risk of creating sites that simply increases surveillance and policing of families is greater than the potential benefit of creating partnerships with those served. It is likely that there are no simple answers to this dilemma. The way decisions are made in child welfare, such as what is included in case notes and how data is collected, rests with social workers, their managers and their

agencies. This fact does not change with the location and the desire to be transparent alone is not enough.

The delicate balance is the same one that workers, who are centrally located, face as they approach individual families and seek to develop a relationship. The increased trust may encourage families to open up and reveal more information that could be used against the family later on but it also can allow workers to use their power to bring meaningful resources that might be helpful in keeping the family together. With a location change, it is a risk and benefit analysis that should be calculated and revisited regularly. There may be ways to measure if the neighbourhood site has in fact increased surveillance and if this in turn has increased agency involvement with individual families in the neighbourhood. This could include monitoring how often courts are used to enforce decision making or if there is greater use of alternate dispute mechanisms, as well as changes in the number of children removed and/or returned home. The change in outcome might be an indicator of whether the agency in a community based location is offering support or surveillance.

Research participants note that the ability for staff and community partners to learn from families is paired with the ability for neighbours in the Eastdale community to see the work of child protection as well. RELATIONSHIP states:

They can look in and see what you're doing too, so you're more accountable then and you don't, you really consider the decisions that you make and you, and people can challenge you on how you're doing the work and you're not protected by the same four walls.

Social workers, like any person, will make mistakes, they are not perfect and the neighbourhood setting makes mistakes less easy to hide. Not being able to always present as the expert and not always having to have the answers brings a “sense of humility about the work” (Relationship). This is what SHARED HUMANITY commented on that the relationships in the neighbourhood become about “people to people not position to people.” She is able to acknowledge that once the privilege of education and regular work and benefits are stripped away each of those working at the neighbourhood location are people who are fallible....not unlike those living in Eastdale. Those who work at *New Beginnings* have to travel a walkway between their car and the centre at the beginning and end of each day. Mistakes such as locking your keys in the car or slipping on ice are visible to the whole neighbourhood. Although some expressed worry about this vulnerability others expressed relief in not having to keep up a false sense of self under the guise of being a professional. RELATIONSHIP talked about how difficult this was at the beginning. This tension increases if there has been a crisis in the neighbourhood, but both SHARED HUMANITY AND RELATIONSHIP talked about how support has also increased. However, despite the positive outcomes of this greater transparency witnessed by RELATIONSHIP and others in terms of improved relationship, it is crucial to proceed with caution. There is a need to keep being mindful and aware “of how each power relationship is dangerous” (Moffat, 1999, p. 243).

The participants reported on a particularly important outcome of this shift in relationship, in particular the recognition of the expertise and ability of the community members. The neighbours become partners in ensuring the protection of children and, by

“sharing some of that responsibility” (Relationship) for child welfare, the safety of the whole neighbourhood increases and the role of expert no longer rests solely with the child welfare professional. Wright (2004) articulates the importance of “attempting to embrace community development approaches which necessitate ‘professionals’ being prepared to relinquish some of their authority and power to local communities” (p. 391). Everyone plays a role in creating a safer community. For example: “One community member, she quite proudly wears the role of being, you know, right at the parking lot, she sees the when kids are coming, they see it straight away and in fact now at this point the whole community accepts the role of her redirecting the children back to their home.”(Relationship) This neighbour provides active intervention and direction. This role was not prescribed by the agency or any staff member but is a role taken on by the community member. The reaction by the neighbours to this role or any other, not unlike what occurs in other neighbourhoods, can be a source of tension and discord or a source of pride. For the most part neighbours sort these relationships out for themselves. When neighbours are unable to do this they can turn to New Beginnings center for support if they wish.

For the child welfare staff and community partners they see firsthand how the people in this neighbourhood, that is considered a rough place to live, take care of each other. From their perspective children are safer because this particular neighbour has become more involved. The child welfare agency sees additional signs of safety in the community as the partnerships continue to grow.

Families are beginning to ask for what they want and need in the community. For example, they asked for babysitting courses for their youth when they realized some teens were not ready to care for younger children; a bike rodeo was organized when a young boy, who had no helmet, was hit by a car while riding a bike; and families are planting flowers and grass to aesthetically improve the surroundings.

I think most importantly you recognize you're a partner with the actual people that are living there and that neighbours really, you know, at the end of the day none of the rest of us are there and neighbours connecting with other neighbours is where you're going to build in safety. So you're sharing that responsibility among people who are actually going to be there as opposed to us that aren't there all night" (Relationship).

Despite the construction of the idea of neighbour, it is clear that the child welfare employees and the community partners are a different kind of neighbour. There are critics of the type of new relationships articulated by the participants in this study: the "rationalities that reconstruct the client as human.....that these little acts are little more than new techniques within the innumerable strategies of power" (Moffat, 1999, p. 243). However there are others who suggest that "social workers should try to humanize their work and make their work more responsive to people's needs" (deMontigny, 1995, p. 219). The role of 'neighbour' for social work has the ability to be both - manipulation and/or responsive action. Much of the control over which way the service unfolds lies in the hands of those providing it; I understand this to be a definite confirmation of where the power lies.

With a commitment to social justice, others framed the idea of a change in role as one where those working in child welfare, such as RELATIONSHIP, SHARED

HUMANITY and COMMUNITY, have a new opportunity to “become(s) a collaborator with her community, someone who offers her knowledge as a work in progress, not as a fixed and final project” (Sellick, et al , 2002, p. 496). As the relationship continues to develop, the power shifts and the families living in the neighbourhood take on a role of caring for their own and creating a safe neighbourhood for all. Strega (2007) suggests that, despite the power difference, working relationships can and should be achieved in child welfare settings between worker and client. She describes this as mutual involvement:

Mutual involvement refers to a social work technique that nurtures the active and equal involvement of both social worker and the client in building case plans and goals as well as a strong helping relationship (Strega, 2007, p. 77).

According to Strega’s formulation, the responsibility for improving the relationship rests squarely with the worker and child welfare agency and “the worker committed to anti-oppressive practice must understand that how clients respond to them is primarily dependant on how workers engage with clients” (2007, p. 79).

Power Change

“Power is relational” (Strega, 2007, p. 73) and, as should be becoming clear from the analysis thus far, with a change in relationship there may also be a simultaneous change in the balance of power shared between the child welfare staff and the families. Whether this change is for the better or the worse is largely dependent on the workers involved. The need for workers to be aware of the ominous power they hold and the

responsibility to use this power to increase access to meaningful resources for families and work toward a more just society cannot be underestimated.

Critical practice ideals have the potential to do good and to do harm...In order to minimize the negative effects for service users, it is essential that critical social work theories are open to the contextual and interpersonal aspects of practice that shape the expression of critical practice ideals (Healy, 2001, p. 5).

In Eastdale, at New Beginnings, it could be suggested that the neighbourhood and people living there provide the context, and the changing relationships between residents and child welfare staff, offer the interpersonal aspect.

The move into the neighbourhood by the protection team may have been perceived by residents as increased scrutiny (Basic Needs) – an explicit form of ‘power over’ - but for the protection team this move meant a change in their use of power as well. As participants noted, the change of location increased exposure by child welfare and other social service providers to all the families, both those who may have had open protection files and those who might never come to the attention of a child welfare agency. This in turn, to some extent, changed the power relationship between those who traditionally serve (the workers) and those who are service recipients (the families). Locating service directly in high risk areas and “involving those being served in defining and suggesting responses to their problems represented at the time – and still does today – a radical departure from traditional forms of practice” (Wharf, 2002, p. 22) and has the “potential to alter the balance of power between professional social workers and their clients (Wharf, 2002, p. 22).

Spending time directly with neighbours and in the neighbourhood is a frequent occurrence for RELATIONSHIP and her team, as well as for HEALTH and BASIC NEEDS. For child welfare professionals, where traditionally “the child is the primary or only client” (Strega, 2007, p. 68), shifting to working with families and a whole neighbourhood is a definite change. “They (the community) see us outside of just this investigative role that we’re, you know, you’re able to interact and relax” (Relationship). This provides an opportunity for workers to see families differently and families to see workers differently. “When you see people at a barbecue its completely different what they’ll tell you right, cause they’re comfortable and you’re on their turf and the power is completely different”(Health). The worker (child welfare workers and community partners) becomes “someone who is willing to learn and start at the level that families are at and then become an expert while you’re there, on the job....but you have to be someone who’s willing to say gosh I have no idea” (Health).

Social workers use “power over” when we encourage, manipulate or force a client to comply with or conform to our instructions, goals or agenda. We are using “power with” when worker and client mutually agree on objectives and strategize about how they can work together to achieve these” (Strega, 2007, p. 78).

The move into the neighbourhood could be understood as “power over” as the choice was not given to families. The ability of a child welfare agency to make such a move speaks to the power available to persuade and coax, but it also speaks to the power to access and mobilize resources to bring to families. The intentions behind the move and the rooting of this site of practice in principles of social justice provide some context for the decision taken by PROTECTION and VISION to move into the community. The

move initially created an uncomfortable position for the more powerful child welfare agency and the less powerful neighbours. Participants reported that this very uncertainty created an opportunity for RELATIONSHIP's team to revisit and challenge their traditional role of expert and work towards a new understanding.

“When we first moved in I think all of us were a little nervous around what it was going to look like. And I think on some level unguided and trying to figure out what it was” (Relationship). Over the years, the team has spent time with families and, as the community has been able to come together and speak in one voice, they have been able to advocate for their own needs and express their concerns. Speaking about a meeting where families came together to challenge the protection team RELATIONSHIP noted, “I don't think three years ago they would have even felt that they could put on the table to talk about what kind of role or what we were all doing in the building because there would have been no trust, no relationship and now we can actually have those conversations. So, it definitely has grown.”

The one perceived as having the knowledge shifts and the families become the expert in their own neighbourhood, “they're the authority too” (Community). While acknowledging that he cannot speak for families, COMMUNITY does believe that his current role does not “feel like power over.” Dumbrill (2003) suggests that this is the place to start the journey toward anti-oppressive practice in child welfare. “It should be possible, with further assistance of parents, to gain more information about the ways to

minimise the use of “power over” and maximize the use of “power with” in micro child protection casework” (p. 116).

Shift in the Work

The community development approach offers a model for actively engaging communities in promoting children’s welfare and also extends responsibility for safeguarding children beyond the domain of health and social care professionals” (Bell, 2004, p. 364).

As the protection team continues their work alongside the community partners, the support staff, and the neighbours, they begin to think about families differently and to consider different ways to be helpful. The shift away from the focus on ‘one family at a time’ creates an opportunity to “think broader” (Health) and to work differently. “I think we can only help families if we know what the bigger picture is” (Vision). This opens the doors for both the protection team and community partners to work on broader issues (such as improved resources for the neighbourhood, food provision and community safety) and community development. “If you look at child welfare as a community response to keep kids safe then you have to do the community development piece” (Vision).

If community approaches are to move into mainstream, a shift in paradigm will be required: from the risk paradigm that dominates child welfare at the present time to a community paradigm that would be based on the approaches of community social work, community organizing and community control (Wharf, 2002, p. 195).

For a large and powerful social welfare agency such as child welfare, giving up some of the control to the community would mean less control for themselves. This

requires an additional shift from the known to the unknown, from the certain to the uncertain and the need to move away from the comfort of choosing from a set of prescribed interventions (Parton, 1998). “If we’re really talking about ‘child welfare’ and ‘families’ then community development is intrinsic in that.” (Relationship).

While the potential for more community development is touted by participants as an opportunity created by the location of *New Beginnings*, the shift in relationships and the more equal sharing of power thus resulting, the limits to community development are also noted. RELATIONSHIP feels the pull of responding to the child maltreatment reports and individual calls, as well as keeping her eye on more macro level issues. On the one hand, she finds that being at New Beginnings helps to increase her ability to “make greater holistic decisions...it broadens our horizons so it allows us to be able to do things I think differently” (Relationship).

Agencies cannot be held directly responsible for the impossibly low income assistance rate, the absence of family supports, or the dearth of adequate, affordable housing which stabilizes communities. However, they ought to be charged with, or themselves assume, the grave responsibility of documenting this situation and campaigning for corrective measures. These communities are the very ones from which children in care originate, or which are subject to the constant surveillance of protection workers (Hudson, 1999, p. 351).

There is consensus among research participants that “the community development component is crucial if you really want to make long term change” (Protection). “If the community is vulnerable then the kids will remain vulnerable” (Relationship). However, the challenge to doing it successfully continues to be the finding time and funding to mesh the roles of child protection and community development. “It seems to be

recognized as a separate role and quite frankly as much as I'm passionate about it I don't have near enough time to do what I would, you know, like to be doing (Relationship). She continues to have the same responsibilities as managers in centralized settings to meet the standards as set out by the Ministry and to reflect the work in standardized forms. This reality leaves less time for relationship-building and work toward community capacity building, which she sees as an obligation of a good neighbour.

Research participants across different levels of the *New Beginning* program appear to recognize this. PROTECTION notes that senior management at Children's Aid Society of Brant receive pressure from the Ministry of Children and Youth to "drop everything but the mandate." This pressure is rooted in narrow thinking that separates "child protection" from "child welfare" and specifically from community development. Jack (2004) argues that child welfare reform cannot occur without "a broader official definition that recognizes the harm done to children by the way that they are treated in society" (p.377). Despite the cost savings of a model such as that at New Beginnings, there is continued pressure to narrow the mandate, to protection, and not include what is considered prevention. Speaking about the programs at New Beginnings, VISION acknowledges that it...

saves me money. It's actually cost effective way of doing business from a purely organizational pragmatic point of view. From a social point of view it puts service and keeps people outside our doors that might have come before and improves communities and kids lives (Vision).

Given that there is an acknowledgement that this type of model may be less expensive and that it may improve outcomes for families it is curious that there is

resistance to adapting it. The experience of workers at New Beginnings has shown that some integration of protection work and community development is possible, even in the current challenging child welfare environment. For workers like COMMUNITY, he does not know any different way of working. For others, like SHARED HUMANITY, it has taken an experience like that at New Beginnings to help her understand her role and how those working on protection teams might work differently. She now thinks differently about what protection work is. She remembers her earlier days working in the main office:

I guess one thing that stands out in my mind and I mean I was guilty of this just as everyone else I think in the agency is. I didn't realize what it was like in the community, what the community teams really did and how they worked together with the child development unit and the center and what happens, I kind of knew some the things but I didn't really understand what it was and I always, I mean I used to always hear that comments about you know they just make cookies, they just do baking and crafts at the centre and that kind of thing but I didn't really have a sense of ...all of the programs and all of the service providers involved and exactly how all of those things worked together along with the protection team and how you know it's really just one house with a variety of services and things that the community needs"(Shared Humanity).

Hudson (1999) suggests that a total overhaul of the system is not necessary to consider how to integrate child protection and community development (p. 354). He suggests that "some form of greater integration would appear to be desirable, though, however incrementally or experimentally implemented" (Hudson, p. 354). From the information gathered in this study, it would seem arguable that New Beginnings is one such site of experimentation.

The experiences of those interviewed shared a common thread, noting that doing work at New Beginnings was similar in some ways to traditional work done in child welfare and social service agencies but in other ways dramatically different. This caused a great deal of uncertainty as the ‘black and white’ rules that govern institutional work that don’t always fit the need. Despite a unanimous sentiment that the work brought with it great satisfaction, there was also a sense of frustration that others within their agencies did not always understand their unique role. Each person interviewed had a commitment to social justice work however, as Healy (2001) reports, “many social workers, particularly those working in mainstream welfare organizations, experience difficulty in translating a radical philosophical commitment to practice” (p. 3). Despite the difficulties and challenges in working in a new and unusual site of practice each of the participants in this research project appeared to embrace their work at New Beginnings with hope and determination. “Risk and uncertainty will be the characteristics of social work practice in the coming decade” (Camillieri, 1999, p. 37).

Section Nine

Implications for Practice

New Beginnings may be an example of a promising practice model for change in child welfare. This model challenges the office based work that has become standard in child welfare work in much of Ontario. The potential benefits need to be balanced with recognition of the significant risk that are inherent in the model due to the close proximity to families served. This delicate balance is one that needs to be carefully maintained with a strong philosophical foundation tightly knitted to social justice principles and strengthened and reinforced in practice through supervision and a careful monitoring of outcomes.

The change in location can create opportunities for relationship development and partnerships with neighbours to aid in community capacity building however it also has potential to create additional site of surveillance and ultimately greater oppression. As ominous as this sound it is truly the same dilemma each and every time a worker enters the house of family to begin a child protection investigation. The one balance in a neighbourhood is that neighbours can use a collective voice, they may have other allies or service providers and the visibility of the work increases as it is done in view of multiple families as opposed to solely one family at a time.

Child welfare agencies have important work to do. Each time I begin to wonder and consider how necessary some of the intrusive measures that child protection workers use I hear about a young child who has been seriously hurt or neglected or I meet someone who did not receive the help needed as a child. The ongoing debate and swing from family preservation to child safety is not likely to disappear. As the debate rages and impacts on

policy and senior decision makers, front line social workers continue to see families and children and have to interpret what they see and make choices on how the family is represented within the system. The families don't wait for decision makers to change the rules. Opportunities do exist now to work creatively with community partners within the existing rules. New Beginnings is an example of a change that is a possible without having to make huge policies changes.

This research is just a beginning as it describes a current site of practice and some service providers affiliated with the site. If this research stands alone it is merely an interesting story to read. However, a next step that creates space for voice of the families in the neighbourhood would be a good companion to this initial work. The metaphors in the story may provide a way to help families understand and address their existing concerns about a large powerful system. Additionally workers in permanency services, adoption and foster care could consider what character each of their positions play in the kingdom and whether they have potential to change the kingdom or maintain the status quo.

More research is needed to continue to explore the complicated dynamic that exists between powerful child welfare agencies and the community. Do child welfare agencies have an obligation to contribute to community capacity building or is any involvement, by child welfare agencies, in non-protection type of activities simply sites for increased surveillance of families? Families may have some valuable insight into this question. Consideration could be given to using the kingdom metaphor as a means to increase accessibility to concepts of power in child welfare for families. Families may be able to use the metaphor to begin to tell their own stories and experiences with the kingdom. Families could be consulted through a

variety of ways, focus groups, interviews, or perhaps enhanced involvement (or leadership) in a project such as participatory research or other forms of community based research.

The current atmosphere in today's competitive environment, ripe with neo-liberal strategies to reduce government spending and reliance primarily on market forces, sets a difficult stage for social work. The need for emancipatory principles and social justice has never been greater as an overlay to keep resistance active against this ever present force that look to reduce the welfare state through rhetoric of exclusion and self reliance. The call for black and white answers, evidence based practice and simple solutions despite complex problems are not conducive to working in ambiguity and uncertainty. The use of story may provide a way to engage interest and peak curiosity. The questioning and exploration may have value in themselves regardless of outcome because at the very least, this process challenges the foundation the "kingdom" was built on.

A move to a community based site cannot be created from a cookie cutter approach. As a storyteller, CURIOSITY might encourage others in child welfare to write and tell their own story and she offers these tips:

- 1) Ensure your kingdom's current vision and philosophy statement acknowledges systemic oppression and supports social justice work in community. Keep these statements alive and use them as a constant guide and reference point.*
- 2) Acknowledge that our child welfare kingdom is broken and has made mistakes.*
- 3) Build relationships and create partnerships with kingdoms outside of child welfare and find places where the work of each overlaps with that of child welfare and use this as a starting point to begin work together, maybe even in shared sites. This might include but not limited to early years services, public health, the library, schools and parks and recreation departments.*
- 4) Hire people who are comfortable knowing that they personally do not have the answers to keep children safe. The answer for this only can be found in the community with families who are directly impacted.*

- 5) *Ensure that managers embrace the vision and philosophy and promote it by offering regular supervision to create a workplace where reflexive practice and ongoing learning is encouraged.*
- 6) *Encourage and promote higher learning for all in the workplace and forge connections that link the daily work in child welfare to research opportunities.*
- 7) *Think creatively and start telling stories of your success in the community.*
- 8) *Looks for opportunities to contribute to building your community's capacity to care for each other and children and for working with a collective or groups as opposed to always working one family at a time.*

It is quite possible that child welfare agencies could move into a neighbourhood without becoming a neighbour. However should agencies make decisions to move into neighbourhood sites and partner with other agencies and families with a result of becoming a neighbour, then their practice will have to change. This move coupled with training and support, that helps to put language on what changes are taking place to promote dialogue, can create active sites of resistance in a very traditional place of practice. The kingdom needs to continue to ask more questions and look to families and community for answers for this is the only place that child welfare can truly exist.

As a worker and more recently a manager in child welfare I am keenly aware and have experienced some of the sadness and upset that can come with the job. For me the sadness came when I realized that the very system that was designed to help children had in fact hurt them and upset at the few solutions that seemed available to effect change. As we have begun to tell the story of New Beginnings to others in the child welfare community the reactions have been very encouraging. There are those who just don't get it as a change to this model means giving up the role of expert and some power. However for those looking for something different to help families I hear people saying they are excited for the first time in a long time about the possibility of change within a child welfare agency. The relative

accessibility of this type of practice that can be achieved with a change of thinking and a change of location has significant implications. With new possibilities there comes hope for a different kind of future for child welfare but more importantly for families and communities.

“There is no change without the dream, as there is no dream without hope.”
Paulo Freire

Section Ten

Happily Ever After ...Not Quite!

So, the kingdom did not change right away, in fact, it still has not changed and everyone does not live happily ever after, like in a fairy tale. For those who left the kingdom to work outside they learned many things from the families living in Eastdale, outside the kingdom. Here is what they learned:

***Oh what a mess the kingdom was in!** The kingdom is a mess, some might call it broken, but admitting this was the first step to trying something new.*

***Everything does have to change.** There are some, although not many, that think the current kingdom is fine without any changes, but most would agree that something does have to change. There are many people who have been hurt by the kingdom. The very kingdom that wants to save children has sometimes hurt children and their families. This cannot continue to happen.*

Some kingdom social workers actually found out that they, themselves, were not so different than those who were never let inside the kingdom.** And this just might be the key to the change, a kingdom that is not filled with experts and people removed from those who need support, but instead filled with people.....**who all were children once too!

For those who are all very busy watching and saving the children but in different ways...it will be important to stop and work together to think about the very best

way to make children safe, instead of just saving children. The families who sometimes hurt the children will be our best teachers.

*For those who think, **if only the people who hurt the children outside the kingdom would change, things might get better...**could consider what they, personally, have to do to bring about change.....if those who work in the kingdom change what they do, then maybe the families who are outside can begin to make changes too. The kingdom may be too big but it is made up of people who each have a responsibility to protect children.*

*For those who think, **if only they could be more like us inside the kingdom...**it is time to consider that some of us inside the kingdom are causing the problems outside the kingdom and those outside the kingdom may not be so different after all.....because it is true that we all **were children once too!***

In the meantime, there are more people in the kingdom who sometimes wonder about these others from the kingdom who went to work outside in Eastdale, with those who can never be let in. Those who work inside continue to sometimes feel uncomfortable and sometime they just continue feeling sad and angry. For those who have tried doing something different outside the walls of the kingdom, and the few people from the kingdom that joined them, they too still feel uncomfortable sometimes and they feel sad and angry sometimes too, but more often now they feel something different. PROTECTION, VISION, RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARED HUMANITY, HEALTH worked together with BASIC NEEDS and me, CURIOSITY, knowing that

together we can find new companions of OPTIMISM and HOPE. And unlike anger and sadness these are helpful companions on any journey. And with this knowledge they have a new dream.....for a new story. The new story started with leaving the kingdom and standing side by side with families and then building new pathways, and changing the journey. It will be important that this journey does not end up in the same place as those who began with such good intentions in the past.

And so the story continues...

Once upon a time there was a small kingdom of people with a dream. The dream was a world where all creatures, animal and human, could live free from harm. This kingdom took it upon itself to watch out for.....

Appendix A

The Story Alone

A Kingdom in Trouble

*Once upon a time there was a small kingdom of people with a dream. The dream was for a world where children could live free from harm. When any member of the kingdom found a child who had been harmed, the child was brought into the kingdom but those who hurt the child were never allowed in the kingdom....**even if they were children once too!***

*The kingdom, named Child Welfare, grew and those who were allowed in the kingdom continued to worry about children being hurt by those who did not live in the kingdom. Those within the kingdom vowed to watch so that children beyond the kingdom walls who were hurt, could be saved. These children were brought into the kingdom so that they could be safe and happy and most importantly never be hurt again. Soon the kingdom became concerned not only with those children who were hurt but also those who might become hurt. Now more children could enter the kingdom but the men and women (mostly women) who might harm them were never allowed into the kingdom....**even if they were children once too!***

*Special people were chosen to work in the kingdom and most of them were called Social Workers. Not only were they special people but they also had special training, and more importantly they were nothing like those who had hurt children. They would never hurt a child! The children who lived in the kingdom were often sad and sometimes angry because most of them wanted their parents to live in the kingdom as well. The kingdom was a nice enough place but many people in the kingdom were very busy watching those outside the kingdom and making sure everyone knew that they were watching. This left less time for them to watch the children who were brought into the kingdom to make sure that they were **safe and happy**.*

*The special people in the kingdom (most of whom were social workers), the ones who did spend time with the sad and angry children, sometimes felt sad and angry too. Some of them were sad for the children. Some were angry at the parents. Some were sad for the parents **and** sad for the children. Some were angry at the parents **and** also angry at the children. All these sad and angry feelings took over the kingdom but people in the kingdom couldn't agree on who they should be angry with and much of the time they became angry at each other.*

*The safe kingdom now did not always feel so safe. Sometimes the children, who were brought inside the kingdom, did not feel safe and sometimes the children **were not** safe in the kingdom. Some children were hurt physically. Some children were hurt emotionally. Some children were hurt both physically and emotionally. But this did not*

*seem to be as important as there continued to be the problem of all those outside the kingdom who were causing **more and more** children to need to come inside. These outside people, those who hurt children, were not like the special people in the kingdom. They did not speak the same language of those in the kingdom. They not only hurt the children but they also did not understand what children really needed. **If only they could be more like us inside the kingdom.***

*Different rulers, both kings and queens (but mostly kings), watched over the kingdom and they tried to manage the problems inside because the kingdom was supposed to be a safe place. The rulers in the kingdom usually learned about the kingdom from those who were allowed inside but typically not from the children they had vowed to protect. Once upon a time, they too had a dream that they could keep children safe when they first entered. Some rulers continued to dream about safe children, other rulers worried about hurt children, and still others worried about the sad and angry social workers in the kingdom. Most did not worry about the people outside the kingdom. Why did the people outside the kingdom not change? What was wrong with them? The problems outside the kingdom continued to create problems inside the kingdom. **If only the people who hurt the children outside the kingdom would change, things might get better.***

The kingdom grew with more children and with more people who were trying to help. New people joined the kingdom, people who were experts of many kinds and big thinkers; some who thought they could predict what might happen in the future. Some people worked on new ways to help the children. They built many rooms in the kingdom and it continued to grow. Some of the experts took care of the money and some took care of the buildings and some tried to take care of the many more children who were being brought inside the kingdom. Bigger rooms were built and sometimes in places where those inside did not have to worry about or see all those people outside who were not allowed in the kingdom.

*Some worried because if people outside the kingdom could hurt children they might just hurt kingdom social workers as well. The kingdom needed to protect children and now to do this they also had to protect themselves from those who didn't live in the kingdom. So they built thick walls and heavily clad windows (even bullet proof) to keep the kingdom safe from those outside. They created ways to look outside the wall of the kingdom to make sure they could better see the children. Very few people from the outside the kingdom could look back in. Even fewer could ever gain entrance. The kingdom became so large that sometimes people in the kingdom did not speak to each other or even know each other but...**they all were very busy watching and saving the children but in different ways.***

Some thought the kingdom was too big and some thought the kingdom was not big enough. But this kingdom, built on a dream, was now filled with even more sadness and anger. How could all the people who worked in the kingdom fit inside the thick walls?

*How could everyone be safe? As the rooms within the kingdom became more crowded some social workers, who were less afraid of those outside the kingdom (and maybe a little bit curious), decided to move to places where the people who were not allowed into the kingdom lived. When these social workers from the kingdom began to work closer to those who were not from the kingdom, they came to understand about the problems of living outside the kingdom. It was hard living outside the kingdom but people who lived outside had learned about how to survive. Some workers now began to ask these people, who once were children too, how to survive as well. The social workers in the kingdom were thankful for what they learned. The people outside the kingdom were not so bad after all. In fact they often looked scarier from inside the kingdom because of the thick glass and because they were so far away that it was hard to see them clearly. **Some kingdom social workers actually found out that they, themselves, were not so different than those who were never let inside the kingdom.***

*The view from the kingdom sure was different than the view from outside the kingdom! Even though everything looked different from inside the kingdom this was the only window that many social workers had ever looked out of and there were some who had stopped looking out the window altogether and only worked from deep inside the kingdom. For some inside the kingdom, it was too scary to look through any other window but the ones in the kingdom...what if they saw someone outside who looked just like them? **Then everything would have to change.***

*The kingdom was too big! There were many sad and angry children. There were many social workers in the kingdom who were sad and angry too. Children were not always safe in the kingdom. People outside of the kingdom were also sad and often very angry because no one would let them inside the kingdom where many of their children lived. **Oh what a mess the kingdom was in!***

But then, some of the workers, those who were not afraid to admit there was a problem (a very big problem), began to wonder what they could do. The kingdom was broken and in need of a change. They started to ask questions of themselves and of those inside the kingdom. What if the kingdom didn't have such large walls? The kingdom is broken, who will fix it? What if more people from the inside the kingdom could work outside the kingdom? What could the special experts from inside learn from those outside the kingdom?

For some social workers just asking the questions made them more curious and strangely less angry and less sad. Could the kingdom ever change? Where could they find the answers? All this time they had been looking for answers inside the kingdom but maybe the answers were not to be found inside the kingdom. So the people from inside the kingdom, who worked outside, stopped looking inside the kingdom for answers. They joined hands with the people outside the kingdom and they looked back at the very large walls of the kingdom that said it protected children. They walked away from the kingdom still feeling sad and angry, not at each other but instead at the kingdom. Even though they did not always agree on everything, they did always agree on some things, like how

much they loved their children. They all knew there was much work to do so they began to work together.

Taking a Closer Look

Greeting and Salutations! Please allow me to introduce myself; I am Curiosity and I have worked in and with this very kingdom for many years. Our kingdom is in trouble and despite the good intentions of others (including myself) we have not always protected children. As a social worker in the kingdom I am sworn to the protection of children and I am bound by traditions and the laws of the ruling class. Additionally, I am a manager and as a leader in the kingdom I am held to a different level of accountability as I represent this kingdom that I now openly acknowledge as broken. I am accountable and perhaps even responsible for some of the problems in the kingdom. I worry and wonder what might help the kingdom (this is how I earned my name as Curiosity) and what I could do to bring about change. I struggle with whether I should stay in the kingdom or leave.

As I ponder this dilemma of whether to leave the kingdom or whether to stay I consider that the kingdom will not likely disappear. It is such a large kingdom and if it were to disappear, what would replace it? I think about my options; I could leave and work somewhere else but this may not bring about change....and what about the dream? I may not always agree with the way things are done in the kingdom but I do hope for a world where all children are safe.

I could stay and uphold the status quo but this would not be just. Many years ago I did leave the kingdom and I am thankful for the years I worked outside where I learned about the kingdom from a different position. But I did return as I believe that from the inside I have the ability to interact and affect people and processes in a way that I could not access from the outside. And so I have decided to stay for now and use my position in the kingdom to try and bring about change from within.

Now this may sound like a daunting and overwhelming task but fear not as I am not alone. I join others before me who seek to transform the child welfare kingdom knowing that change does not come easy in a place so large. I invite you to join me as I set out on an adventure of discovery and learning. But before we begin please know that I am not a neutral observer. I am part of the story and seek to keep transparent the part I play in the kingdom as the storytelling unfolds. There are those who may refer to me and others who challenge the kingdom as crusaders, as rebels or as troublemakers. Yet others regard us as story tellers. Most of us hail from the privileged class yet feel compelled to act and each comes with a thirst for justice. I gladly take on all three identities and more as I search for a kingdom where life for those on the margins comes closer in quality and choice to that of the privileged. I am CURIOSITY and I am your story teller.

The Story and the Stage

I hold out hope for something different and I seek to learn how, and if, the large child welfare kingdom can in fact be transformed. If the kingdom is broken it may indeed follow that I am broken too. It is a wretched battle inside my head as I seek to balance the pain that I see and the inadequate solutions at hand. I have more questions than answers but in knowing that I am indeed part of the problem it follows that I could also be part of the solution. In my journey over the last several years, as I continued to seek out options or alternative ways to change the kingdom, I stumbled across a little hamlet where some of the social workers had moved when they left the protected walls of the big castle in the kingdom.

You may have heard of this small hamlet of “Eastdale” separated by both distance and status from the center of the kingdom: located on the margins of the kingdom, the fringe of the society, and often blamed for many of the ills of the larger village and city. Life is hard for those who live on the fringe and they struggle to survive. When families are struggling to survive it is much harder to keep their children safe. This is the hamlet where the New Beginnings program can be found.

New Beginnings program is located in a small dwelling, one of the fifty dwellings in the neighbourhood. This use of this building was given to some of us, some kingdom social workers, from those inside the kingdom to help us move outside to help the families struggling in this small hamlet. The families know the child welfare kingdom well as many from this little hamlet have lost their children to the kingdom and others are afraid that this could happen to them as well. The social workers from the kingdom have come to this hamlet many times in the past to save the children from those parents who have harmed them. There is sadness and anger here too and much of it caused by the kingdom.

The building where the social workers and others work and where the activities take place is called “New Beginnings.” Unlike the large buildings in the kingdom, this building is quite small and humble. It is two stories tall with a basement. In these ways, it is like the other buildings in the hamlet. But, in many ways it is very different for whereas the other buildings serve as homes for the families in the hamlet, this building serves a different purpose. It is located in the center of the hamlet with an entrance from both the back and the front of the building. The kitchen and living room on the main floor serve as a gathering area for all those who visit. There are many activities going on at New Beginnings on the first floor and in the meeting room downstairs. School aged children come in for breakfast, and for after-school programs. Moms bring their children to play groups or to see the nurse. Each week families come together to make a meal to take home to their family. Sometimes families come to play games, like bingo, together with their neighbours. There are also barbeques in the small yard or community playground.

Most of the works done on the first floor is done by people on my team who offer voluntary support programs that any family in the Eastdale or surrounding area can choose to attend if they wish. They have been offering this kind of support to families for many years. They cannot force people to come to programs so they try to make sure that what they offer is what people who live in Eastdale want. If you were to come and visit it would not be unusual to see families playing with their children, visiting with their neighbours while baking or cooking, and the sweet smell of their creations lingering in the air.

*On the second floor, in a space that usually serves as bedrooms in the neighbours' homes, there are offices with social workers and a leader from the kingdom. Some of the work done from this floor is voluntary and sometime they tell families that they have to work with them, just like the work of others from the kingdom. To get to their work space each day they have to walk from the parking lot and pass all the other houses before they come in the front or back door to the first floor of New Beginnings. This space is nothing like the large kingdom where the social workers used to be and where those from the hamlet (who the social workers now encourage to be inside New Beginnings) would never have been permitted entry. There is no thick glass, no waiting room, no big locked doors. There are many other workers from other kingdoms like health, housing, mental health, police, recreation, and early years that also come to work at New Beginnings. They don't have an office space but they come to spend time with the families to see how they might help to keep children **and** families safe. What an unusual place this is! People are from the kingdom, but they are not alone, they are with families and with other workers from other kingdoms.*

The social workers and workers from other kingdoms who come to the hamlet still share a dream of safe children. The families also share the same dream of a world where children are safe. The workers and social workers are sometimes not sure about how to do their work because it is so different from the kingdom. They have so many more questions! This is hard for social workers from the kingdom because they are supposed to have answers not questions. They all hope for something better for the kingdom but mostly for the children and families, and they all worry about whether things are getting better.

Could this humble abode replace the thick walls of the buildings in the kingdom? Can those of us who came from the kingdom and now work inside New Beginnings ever become part of this hamlet? What is different inside this small place? What is it that makes it different? Can we protect children from outside the kingdom? Will children and families be safer than before if we join them where they live? Could this small place ever begin to change the kingdom and those inside it?

With so many questions I set out on a journey to seek out answers and then tell the tale of New Beginnings. It is the story of those workers who came to this place from the kingdom and others who have joined them in the hamlet of Eastdale; the stories they

shared with me. Come along as I share what I found, who I visited and what I learned from those who accompany me within the place called New Beginnings; a small outreach that started in a large, broken kingdom.

This tale is woven from the stories shared as I, being CURIOUS, asked others about what is happening at New Beginnings. It looks at the world of child welfare and community development and asks questions of those involved who work for the kingdom and those associated with New Beginnings from outside the kingdom –those from other kingdoms who share the dream of keeping children safe and families well. It explores the work done by this group of workers, from inside and outside the kingdom, who ventured outside of the old walls of their respective kingdoms in an attempt to keep children safe. They have found a space, in the hamlet of Eastdale, to try something new in this small dwelling in the program called New Beginnings.

My story has many parts and as you read along you will meet some of the characters that work at New Beginnings. They all have a story to tell and I will share both what they told me and what I learned about them as I listened. After you meet the characters I will share what each of these characters have experienced and seen as they work in Eastdale.

There are many stories to be told about New Beginnings and Eastdale and this particular story is only one part of the tale. I hope the most important story about the families who live in Eastdale can be told but this could not happen now. I cannot tell the story on behalf of families as their story does not belong to me. So, for now, as a place to start, this story is about a few from a broken kingdom and some companions trying to do something different. This story then is but a beginning of the telling of working side by side with families, where they live, work and play.

The Cast of Characters

I would like to introduce you to some of the characters who shared their work at New Beginnings with me. Some work for the child welfare kingdom and others work for other kingdoms in the area. All work with families who live in Eastdale or have some connection to the work done inside New Beginnings. You will meet these characters named PROTECTION, VISION, RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, HEALTH, BASIC NEEDS and SHARED HUMANITY.

PROTECTION

PROTECTION is the highest ranking official in our kingdom. He is concerned with the whole kingdom and all those who work inside. He often faces great pressure from those who collect the taxes, known as the Ministry, to do less and protect children without necessarily helping families. He must make decisions on how the tax money is spent within the kingdom, knowing that he must not only protect the kingdom but he also

must protect children. He has also worked inside the kingdom for many years and he has seen the sadness of children and families. He also has seen and heard about children who were not protected by the kingdom and who have died. He knows that the kingdom alone cannot protect children and we must also help the parents to protect the children. He must balance these ideas with the need to protect those who work in the kingdom as well. He has a dream, that the kingdom not only protect children but also improve the community at the same time. He even believes that the small hamlet of Eastdale could be improved. However, his job, ultimately, is to protect the existing kingdom that has been built and those who work inside.

PROTECTION worries about the kingdom and is aware that it is broken. He works with other child welfare kingdoms and their most senior officials and hears of their struggles too. He is proud of the courage he sees in those who have left the security of the kingdom walls to try something different. He is committed to ensuring this work can continue. He offers support and protection for those who try to do the work differently. He believes that all people, both those who the kingdom serves and those within the kingdom (and maybe even those in the Ministry) can change.

There is pressure from the government to “narrow the mandate” of child welfare to include only child protection. He states that “I’ve always seen child welfare as child welfare not child protection.” This philosophical view allows him to support programs “not just aimed at individual families or individual children but also a community”. His years of experience have reinforced the need for child welfare workers to move away from the “misconception of what protection, prevention or what child protection work really was....it was more of a monitoring” than a “counselling role.” He seeks to support a culture within the kingdom that encourages “refining our counselling and really insisting that it gets done.” He can use his power in the kingdom to make changes. PROTECTION feels this broader role for child welfare is supported, in theory, with the introduction of big rule books from the Ministry called Differential Response and the Transformation Agenda. In the years preceding, the kingdom had to follow another rule book called the ORAM (Ontario Risk Assessment Model). These ORAM rules were very strict and they reduced the role of social work to case management and prescribed interventions. The hope that the new rules of transformation would make a change has gradually diminished as the dollars to support the initiatives have not materialized. This creates an environment of cutbacks and reductions in service which threaten the work done in non-traditional ways. The role of senior management then becomes to keep programs “off the radar” or at very least “below the radar as a possibility for...cuts.”

PROTECTION wants to challenge the traditional view of “child protection being viewed as individual pathology, when really there are the social issues” such as “poverty and education and marginalization, just prejudice and a whole bunch of other things that, you know, new immigrant, a number of factors that influence the individual pathologies. And so I think that the community development component is crucial if you really want to make long term change.”

The advice this senior manager gives to other kingdoms is that “they’ve got to make a commitment to it -- is what I’m saying otherwise it’s going to be an ‘add on’” He suggests that only the very few require the most invasive services, like children being taken away, but the “vast majority of the work” involves both protection and prevention work “but they’ve got to be seen as an integrated service.” This marriage of the work of protection and community development create the work done at New Beginnings and this is the model that the agency, under the direction of senior management, look to when considering “expanding the program” and would “fight” for if the program is targeted for reduction. The job of those working in the agency is protection of children but this senior manager’s philosophy of protection includes protecting those who work inside as well, and it is this combination that earns him the name of PROTECTION in the story.

VISION

VISION is the most essential member of the kingdom’s outreach into the hamlet of Eastdale. She manages many of those who are leaders of social workers who have moved outside of the kingdom walls. She is creative and, committed to building and supporting relationships with all those in and outside of the kingdom. She believes that leaving the comfort of the center of the kingdom is required to bring about improvements in child protection and ultimately, to achieve true child welfare. She has learned this over many years and knows that safety is not found within the walls of the kingdom but in the people who live outside the kingdom.

VISION has built many friendships and alliances with those from other types of kingdoms, such as health, child care, education, security and kingdoms that provide services for women and children. She has done this by connecting the vision of our kingdom with the visions of these other kingdoms. These connections have created a solid foundation for the outreach that New Beginnings is involved in. She calls on her alliances to watch for and engage with our outreach outside the kingdom, and she believes that the child welfare kingdom, despite its great power, must take its place in the broader community, not above or beyond it.

VISION does not rely solely on the tax dollars that are provided by the Ministry for the kingdom to do this different work. She looks to other ways to create the money needed to work outside the walls of the kingdom. She relies on PROTECTION to guarantee a certain level of security from the tax dollars but she stretches what is provided and finds more. She can do this because she makes connections between what is done in the child protection kingdom and what is done in other kingdoms. After all, each of these kingdoms work with the same children and families and her ability to make and promote these connections earns her the name of VISION.

According to PROTECTION, VISION is the senior manager who is the “creative force” that helped build the foundation for the current program at New Beginnings. She believes in community- based work and understands it on a continuum, with the services at New Beginnings being the “ultimate community-based” type of practice. VISION

states, “I don’t think people understood how important, when you’re working with the community, that you need to work from within.”

In addition to being a clinically sound way to practice VISION also sees the financial cost benefits to working in and with communities. She supports the targeted prevention work that is done but knows that work must also meet standards and rules as set out by the Ministry. She knows that with creativity that there may be ways to meet the rules and work outside the walls of the kingdom at the same time.

Since VISION understands child welfare as a community response, not an agency response, the community development role fits in naturally. “So if you look at child welfare as a community response to keep kids safe then you have to have the community development piece” She urges workers to move away from only seeing the individual family. “I think we can only help families if we know what the bigger picture is.”

She sees the ultimate goal is to shift the need away from protection work as “a stronger community has less need for child welfare services or interventions....so the stronger the community the better the kids are.” She attends many meetings with other kingdom leaders not only because she has to be there to represent child welfare but because she wants to help “improve the community” and to do this you have to understand what is needed. VISION brings herself and her philosophy to the multiple community tables and is not looking for a “cookie cutter” response to improving communities but, instead, the understanding that “different communities require different things and we need to be a little more flexible in how we respond to that.”

All the details of how work is carried out are not as important to VISION as the big picture. She asks the difficult questions that surface in daily practice and she challenges the status quo. It is this quality, coupled with her ability to find common ground and build relationships within the community, which has earned her the name VISION.

RELATIONSHIP

RELATIONSHIP is the heart of the outreach to the hamlet of New Beginnings. She has worked with VISION and PROTECTION and she takes her role as leader outside the walls of the kingdom seriously (but not too seriously). She leads a small team of people and works to instil her passion for people and her fervent belief that child protection and child safety cannot be done “to” families; it must be done “with” families. She knows that this happens when the people on her team and those who live in the hamlet, become familiar with each other and this brings child welfare one step closer to becoming part of the neighbourhood.

She works to get to know and understand her own workers but also the workers that work for me, CURIOSITY. She hopes that these workers will learn what VISION has taught by building relationships and working toward becoming a neighbour. Her office

is in the hamlet of Eastdale in the house known as New Beginnings. She walks daily the pathway from her car to her office. She is known for her hardy laugh and families in the community know she is around when they can hear her. She knows that people should be at the center of all the work done in the child protection kingdom and she works to understand people and their community thereby earning the name RELATIONSHIP.

Having worked both inside the big kingdom as well as at New Beginnings she believes that she is currently doing something both worthwhile and different. She describes her team at New Beginnings as being “more connected, more informed as to what’s happening in the community” thereby being able to find solutions that are also connected to the community and build upon the strengths with that same community. She states:

We have a greater insight as to what some of the challenges that families are facing... when we get a report-what we know about families will help us to inform what is a safety concern- are there really risks, and that information that we know about the families helps us to be able to do different types of interventions.

She contrasts her current experience with her past work where as a kingdom social worker “you get the call, you go out, you meet the family once, maybe twice, you make your conclusions based on that and you go back to your office and wrap it up”. She is committed to a community-based practice and sees that her roles as neighbour and as social worker are not mutually exclusive. “The social work values you know are neighbourhood values too and you need to be able to have the relationships with families in order to be able to help”. She states “when you’re part of that community then you’re able to get a better picture of what that is and connect with more meaningful services.”

There are frustrations that stem from being part of the larger kingdom of child welfare. The kingdom was built on working with one family at a time when families are in trouble. RELATIONSHIP speaks about prevention in child welfare:

Prevention work should actually be the work because then it helps, that really is what helps to protect and I think we missed the boat and we think, we go straight to protect and don’t worry about any of the other pieces, don’t recognize it as valuable. Basically we say we’re going to fund it once there’s a crisis

The need to account for the work done to maintain funding is a constant pressure and the paperwork alone consumes a great deal of time. This leaves less time and energy to maintain a focus on “the long term.” This sometimes limits RELATIONSHIP and her team to doing the prevention work as “just an add on.” because the rule books from the Ministry don’t count (or pay for) prevention work.

The location of the New Beginnings office increases accessibility, for families to both the program (such as community kitchen, baking, school aged breakfast, crafts) but also to the support from the protection team. The more the team works in the community the more the attitudes, and ultimately the behaviour of workers, change because they become more aware of the issues facing the whole community. According to RELATIONSHIP, it becomes difficult to lay blame on one family knowing that “if the community is vulnerable then the kids will remain vulnerable.”

The leadership required to manage work in the neighbourhood is part of RELATIONSHIP’s job. She works to connect the work done with families to the philosophy of service. Her team learns from her and from each other but most importantly they learn from the families who live in the neighbourhood.

I think for workers they get, they learn more skills on how to work collaboratively, how to be a part of an engine that’s bigger than the child welfare engine which you know can mow people over and so I think that reduces anxiety, increase satisfaction in the work, they see that they’re able to have impacts on different corners of the world that’s outside just what they might be able to do with one family.

The people on her team look to her and see RELATIONSHIP guided by VISION and able to do her work with PROTECTION. She believes in the capacity of people to change and adapt. She understands that much of her work is about how people interact and this is why she earns the name of RELATIONSHIP in this story.

COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY works as part of RELATIONSHIP’s team. He works with children and families especially when they are struggling. He is committed to working outside the kingdom walls and he has an office in one of the schools located the hamlet. Within the child welfare kingdom, he does not know any other way of helping children and families as he has only ever worked outside the walls of the kingdom and he likes this. He believes in himself and the role he plays with others who share common space or live in the same area. He is known outside the kingdom walls and creates a space for himself so that child welfare is not all alone.

His work within the education kingdom is the result of VISION’s work to create relationships with education....after all many of the children the kingdom must save go to the schools. She developed this plan with the leadership of those in the education kingdom, as she wanted to find ways for the kingdom to get out into other places nearer to those families who are struggling. It is hard to tell if COMMUNITY is doing child protection work or counselling or relationship-building as he is part of the hamlet he serves. He knows that his work with a school or a nearby community center make his

work in the child protection kingdom easier and better. He believes in working with others and not working in isolation and this earns him the name COMMUNITY.

COMMUNITY's office, in the school, looks different than other offices in the child welfare kingdom. You enter through the doors within the school library. His job is to respond to calls regarding child protection but it is really so much more. He identifies a different kind of work. Part of his job is to learn about the school he is placed in and become familiar with the both the people and the hamlet where the families live. He is building relationships and working toward being a friendly face to any child, parent or teacher he encounters even if they will never become an "open" client file with the kingdom.

He understands that the families who live in this hamlet of Eastdale are poor. Poverty sets them at a disadvantage and "sometimes they don't have the power to influence their environment." COMMUNITY cites an example of the work he might do: if one of the boys in the school is struggling he might seek out COMMUNITY and when the boy enters the office he might grab "an apple or a pudding" and then they chat. "And we talk about it for a couple of minutes and I think he's redirected back to his mom but he feels like he can search out an answer, he feels like he can come back ask somebody and get some support and I think that that's important. He'll remember that forever." A new relationship is fed or born and child welfare work is spread across a hamlet and into the education kingdom as well.

He knows that being located in the hamlet has benefits for both him and the families. "Some of the clients that we have real concerns about then we'll see them in a completely different setting and it helps us understand maybe their lives a little better, see them in a different light, maybe readjust or re-hypothesize how we are looking at them because that's (Eastdale) a tough area to live in." COMMUNITY knows that this works both ways and in addition to the worker seeing the clients differently the clients also see the workers differently "they see me often and they know who I am, they get to see me as a real person, they know that we want to understand their issues" because the families have a chance to interact with the worker in their own space outside the realm of a intervention or interview or the walls of the kingdom.

COMMUNITY believes he is making a difference "because my clients will come in and share with me. I think that my clients will self refer. I think that they see me as a little bit less threatening because they know my history. I'm familiar. They know the history of our team...they know RELATIONSHIP. They know that we will advocate for them and we will go to bat for them."

He can list off the other workers from other kingdoms that he works with -, teachers, principal, police - and where he can refer people to get their basic needs met. He helps families solve problem but when it comes to families looking for solutions he states "they're the authority too" believing solutions for problems lie within the family and community, not in one worker's possession.

He would like to do more, “like would I play street hockey with those kids on the court? Yeah, I would love to do that but my day ends at 4:30 and I’m not given the credit for that time.” He takes it that one step further “then you get a police officer to come out and play street hockey with a social worker and maybe you have you know a teacher come out and play street hockey in that community and now they’re seen as very different people”. He believes in the power of working with other kingdoms as well as the neighbours and this is how he earns the name COMMUNITY.

SHARED HUMANITY

SHARED HUMANITY also works outside of the kingdom and acts as support to RELATIONSHIP and COMMUNITY but more importantly to the whole hamlet of Eastdale. She has worked in the kingdom for many years and at the very center of it for much of that time. In the big kingdom she did the same work as she does now but, before, she rarely met those outside the kingdom. She believes in the people who live outside the kingdom and she has become a neighbour in the hamlet.

She does not see the families’ served as “clients” but as people. She knows the important role RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, VISION and PROTECTION play and she does everything in her power to support them. She has seen others come before to do work with families and has seen them work “position to people” but she believes the best work can be done “people to people.” She loves her work and does it well because SHARED HUMANITY understands we all are, after all, just people like those who live in the hamlet, even if we do work for the kingdom.

She knows her primary role is administrative support to the protection team but she has become part of the neighbourhood. She knows the children by name and they know her. She says of the hamlet, “they know who I work with; they know who my manager is.” When working inside the kingdom she felt distant from the families. “You don’t even see who comes into the main entrance to say hello.” She is quite aware that the roles of those doing community development on the first floor and the protection team on the second floor are quite different. She believes that the community “figure all that out rather quickly and they know that we work together.” She sees the purpose of the work as “in this environment again people learn how to not need protection” and this works well because “whatever we teach in the community is reinforced in the community.”

She has seen the shift in the work of protection when community development is added. “I think our role becomes a little different, it’s not...it’s not from the sense of you know we’re the authority and we’re the ones in charge to tell you how to do this with your family or how to do that it becomes this is the right thing to do and they already know and they sometimes need encouragement and they get that from us or their neighbours.”

In the end there is a mutual relationship that develops and she speaks about the sense of community in Eastdale:

They really do get, they get closely connected and sometimes more so than they do with their own family and they watch over each other's children and they take care of each other's children, they drive each other to appointments and its, so it's the whole sense of community that when we work here every day that we sort of become part of that. And in a strange sense they watch over us too even though we're Children's Aid, they take care of us when they think we need something.

This is an interesting contrast to how the general community would describe Eastdale as a place to avoid and that is dangerous.

She knows that she too could be in the same place as the families who live in Eastdale and she knows as SHARED HUMANITY, that what she needed as a child is what the children in the community need. "I put myself in their shoes and I remember or think...what do they need?" She sees herself as part of the solution and so her role is so much more than that of administrative support. This is how she earned the name SHARED HUMANITY.

HEALTH

HEALTH knows that access to her care, for those on the fringe of the kingdom, is hard to find. She also left the comfort of the center of the medical kingdom and regularly ventures into the small hamlet of Eastdale to New Beginnings. As part of the medical kingdom she also knows how hard it is to understand the needs of families from the middle of a kingdom with thick walls and separated from the families served. These very thick walls built around the kingdom from where she comes are strengthened by the language of science that proclaims a single truth may be found. She understands her job is to teach, support and refer so that families can be healthy and she is well aware that none of this can happen when people in the hamlet are hungry. "They need food...I just think you can't talk to a parent about how to do this, that or the other thing if they didn't pay the rent and they don't have food " HEALTH is part of the team at New Beginnings working with some of those on CURIOSITY's and RELATIONSHIP's teams.

HEALTH does not come to bring foreign medicines but the things that are basic needs for families. She brings milk, food and a listening ear. She is concerned about children being safe but knows that they cannot learn about HEALTH if those who help only look at sickness. HEALTH looks to find what is going well and builds from there. She knows the value of the work done by RELATIONSHIP and tries to bring this together with her work. Her commitment to wellness and resources for families has earned her the name HEALTH.

She sees the work at New Beginnings as “simple family development, helping kids develop and then helping that neighbourhood develop.” She has worked with other workers from the child welfare kingdom and she sees a difference. Referring to one of the workers on RELATIONSHIP’s team she said “if I watch her walk down they come out, they say hi, the kids know her by name which I think is a big thing right and they know her and they come to her and they say oh you know I had this great day at school.”

HEALTH’s experience is that families often have a hard time asking for help. In other parts of the community where she works, places outside of the reach of New Beginnings, she sees the difference in families’ willingness to ask:

They don’t see that there’s support available they just see it as protection. Clearly. Only. Which is interesting from our perspective because I’m always saying well you know ask your worker, talk to your worker, they can do this. And I know cause I work at this other place (New Beginnings) and they do it right. And they say oh no, no, no, and they can’t. I could never ask my worker for food because then they would think I don’t have food but ...right...but we say oh they would see it as a good thing and families we work with don’t believe that to be true whereas at New Beginnings that’s the first thing they would do.

She sees her role as one that takes time and patience. With a three hour commitment per week she is able to come back each week and say “we’ll do it together...step by step” thereby playing an instrumental role herself in community development. She not only has come to know families and the community, but also workers from other areas of work in the community. Her biggest revelation has come in understanding the work of child protection at New Beginnings “and the power is completely different” and she is happy to be a part of the work done in this hamlet.

BASIC NEEDS

BASIC NEEDS, much like HEALTH, is aware of what is needed to survive outside the kingdom. She knows that without adequate housing people are not safe. She works to make sure that those in the hamlet of Eastdale have safe housing and a safe environment to live in. She is generous as a landlord and works to make the area better by sponsoring events such as ‘planting day’. Aware that life can be hard in the hamlet she has created space for help to be brought to those living in the small area. She has arranged for services such as dental, breast feeding support, and healthy living classes, to come on site during her program time. Knowing that this hamlet is “housing of last resort” and that even then many cannot manage to pay their rent, is overwhelming to her at times. Her job is to manage the property but she is keenly aware that this involves managing relationships.

She has worked with the team I, CURIOSITY, lead for many years and has helped to maintain a space for the community development work at the centre. She knows that

she is a landlord and has to 'take care of business' but she cares about the families she serves and wants them to maintain their home so that they will not be asked to leave the hamlet. She is aware that housing is one of the most basic needs and that although many in the hamlet of Eastdale have housing; they still need so much more. Child protection for her starts with having the ability to meet our basic needs.

She has always seen the work of CURIOSITY's team as supportive but she has not always seen the protection work of the child welfare kingdom as supportive. Over the last few years she sees child protection changing and she is happy for the change.

BASIC NEEDS sees firsthand the poverty that families face and the multi-generational impact that poverty has. She relies on the New Beginnings center to support families. When asked what she thought would happen if the center was gone she said "wow, it would create a huge void. It would isolate the families and children. It would take away the opportunity to experience things that they would not have the funds to or wouldn't have the time or would have the ...the ...energy ...it would depower the community. And it would make my job ten times harder. You know honestly I rely on the resource center to be there. It's a wonderful positive connection for everybody. It's a win, win, win."

As part of a very large kingdom herself, she has seen the work done at the center change the system too. She talks about a Bike Rodeo that was organized by the kingdom workers, community development, and the housing kingdom. It was such a big success and although "it wasn't something that we had ever budgeted for and now it's mandated."

She knows that families have difficulty accessing services and having the services on site makes them available to everyone. She takes pride in the neighbourhoods she manages and wants to maintain the area so that it is a place that all can enjoy. Each year she organizes a planting day to promote neighbourhood pride. The Housing kingdom provides the flowers and soil and together the others working at New Beginnings center provide for the barbeque. Neighbours come out of their houses in the spring and take time to plant some flowers and at the same time reconnect with each other. She understands this not only as a housing event but community development. She is also aware that this kind of event is not as important as having food and shelter and that pride in a neighbourhood cannot happen unless basic needs are met. This has earned her the name BASIC NEEDS.

*As a storyteller I look to those around me to find the part of the story that is important to tell. The characters I met told me about a journey that started with a change when they left the kingdom to find a new **locution**. They said that this change in location helped them to get to know the families in Eastdale and they started to develop a **relationship** with many neighbours in the hamlet. Those from the kingdom were used to being 'the expert' and having all the power in decision-making. But something different*

*happened as they spent more time with the families. The more they got to know the neighbours and the more time they spent together, the more they learned about what the neighbours needed for help and support... (even though they had thought they knew this before hand). The more the people who worked for the child welfare kingdom (as well as those who worked for other kingdoms) learned, the more they found out how little they really knew in the first place. Those workers began to ask the question of **who really is the expert**. Then the most remarkable thing happened, instead of always taking the children away from those who hurt them, they found new ways to help the family stay together. After the families had more say, the workers from the kingdom began to **shift the work** they did...but don't take my word for it...this is what this cast of characters told me when we met*

The Castle is too small....making the move to the Community

The kingdom continued to grow and the number of rooms in the castle also grew. PROTECTION and VISION had big decisions to make. Where should all the workers in the kingdom be? Should they work inside the walls of the castle? Should they build a bigger castle? Other kingdoms had done this very thing and built larger castles with more walls and thicker glass and more distance from those who hurt the children. But somehow this did not seem right to PROTECTION and VISION, not the least of reasons being that building a new castle was very expensive.

VISION said, she thought it was time for some of the kingdom workers to move into the community and "work from within." PROTECTION agreed, stating the move out of the castle into the same places those who hurt the children lived made sense "from a philosophical standpoint" where the agency could work on promoting child welfare not just child protection.

So VISION spoke to RELATIONSHIP and told her to go ahead and find a place where she and her protection team could move. RELATIONSHIP looked and wondered where this new location should be. Some of her team members were already working outside the kingdom at local schools. COMMUNITY was happy to be in the school and he thought he should stay. "I am a familiar face" he said, adding that sharing space is just one part of the move because having "community philosophy of the worker" is important as well.

RELATIONSHIP knew BASIC NEEDS and she knew many of the families where BASIC NEEDS collected the rent. My (CURIOSITY's) team was already in the hamlet of Eastdale and working to help and bring resources to families. Maybe the protection team could move into New Beginnings as well, thought RELATIONSHIP. BASIC NEEDS had always had a good working relationship with my team. Would working with RELATIONSHIP's team be different? She knew that some of the families in the hamlet had some bad experiences with workers from the kingdom. Would this little hamlet accept RELATIONSHIP's team as a neighbour? Although both my team and

RELATIONSHIP's team work for the same kingdom, BASIC NEEDS sees the work they do as being "totally different."

Despite BASIC NEEDS reservations about including the different team, RELATIONSHIP asked her to consider the request to move into the hamlet. Approval from the housing kingdom was sought and obtained. RELATIONSHIP and her team now had a new home base...they were finally outside the walls of the kingdom. What would living in the same neighbourhood mean for the work that had to be done...after all there still were children to protect?.

When it came time for HEALTH to come to the hamlet many people from her kingdom could not understand why she would want to go and work in Eastdale. When they find out she is working at New Beginnings. "Their eyes get big and they say "Oh, you know, how did you get stuck there?" HEALTH doesn't see it this way and describes New Beginnings as a place "where neighbours who go there, it's just regular folk who go there, people you'd be comfortable with."

There was definitely some work to be done. BASIC NEEDS reservations and the existing judgement, like those in HEALTH'S kingdom could be seen as good reasons to change plans to move into Eastdale. But the strength of VISION's commitment to working in the community and resolve for the success of the move encouraged RELATIONSHIP to move forward with her team.

Well this is where the story really starts. The change of location changes everything for those of us working in the kingdom. The people who live in the hamlet of Eastdale seem a little different than before. It seemed that the more time RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, BASIC NEEDS, SHARED HUMANITY AND HEALTH spent with people from Eastdale the more they seemed to understand what they needed. Now, instead of only meeting families when there was a problem reported about a child who is in danger, RELATIONSHIP's team met many other families in the neighbourhood too...even some who might never harm a child!

The other interesting thing that happened was that the families living in the neighbourhood could see those protection social workers who came from the kingdom more closely as well. Many families from Eastdale had worked with my team and might come to a cooking class or a game of bingo but they were afraid, and sometimes angry with RELATIONSHIP's team because they knew that if someone from her team came to visit from the big kingdom that trouble often followed. Sometime the children were taken away or sometimes the workers kept coming back to check on the children. Many were very fearful that people from the kingdom didn't understand how hard it could be to live in the hamlet.

SHARED HUMANITY saw moving into the neighbourhood as an opportunity for families to learn more about her team and the work they do. "They see us and we see them" as opposed to the centralized system where "you don't even see who comes into

the main entrance to say hello.” As an added bonus those who live in the neighbourhood also get to know those who are working in the community.

In the past, families who had to work with the child welfare kingdom or other kingdoms sometimes had a hard time getting to the far off places where the offices were built. BASIC NEEDS could see that having people from the kingdom right in Eastdale improved accessibility so that families were able to access what they previously were unable to: “transportation isn’t an issue, it’s right there.” Knowing also that families struggle to get to services due to poverty and overwhelming life circumstances made HEALTH see the difference created at New Beginnings by “bringing services to families instead of expecting families to come to us.” She further noted that this program has created a space where “it allows us to get to know each other” both the neighbours and service providers.

BASIC NEEDS knows that people in the neighbourhood will still have times when they need help so that they do not hurt their children or when there is an emergency. When this happens having the protection team on site increases how quickly workers from the kingdom respond to the situation. When there are “urgent situations obviously you can get an immediate response...You can just walk out the door, walk down to the unit and verify whereas if you’re at another location, it could take an hour to get there and by the time you clear off your desk, finish your email, I mean you’re right on site.”

Oh there are many, from the far off kingdom and other very educated people from the learning kingdom, who criticize the move to the community. They think that a work place for the social workers from the child welfare kingdom, in the center of a hamlet, like Eastdale, could be unsafe for workers. Other worry it will increase the surveillance of families. RELATIONSHIP answers the critics as she sees the sharing of space as allowing her and her team to do a different kind of work supported by a philosophy of service and strengths-based social work:

We have greater insight as to what some of the challenges that families are facing as opposed to trying to catch them at something where we really come at from the point of when we get a report what we know about families will help us to inform what is a safety concern, are there really risks and that information that we know about the families helps us to be able to do different types of interventions rather than actually, you know, looking out the window trying to see what is wrong with families.

Getting to know the New Neighbours in the Hamlet of Eastdale?

Things started to look differently from inside the walls of the small two story dwelling of New Beginnings. Some of the people who looked and acted very angry began to act less angry more like a neighbour. Something was changing between workers and the families in the hamlet; their relationship was changing. COMMUNITY noticed the

difference as he sees families differently and he is able to “understand a bit better or see them in a different light.” In the past where he might not see the challenges of living in a hamlet like Eastdale he now understands that many families face the same type of problems. He sees them playing with their children and when they are doing things right, not only when they are having problems. Conversely the families see him differently “they see me often and they know who I am, they get to see me as a real person, they know that we want to understand their issues, we experience the same type of things that they experience, you know problems communicating or stresses with children or financial stresses, a lot of that stuff is the same.”

VISION had hoped for this type of outcome, where the work of the kingdom could be more transparent and more meaningful relationships between social workers and families could be developed. Remembering the first move of kingdom workers into the neighbourhood, VISION shares that building relationships does not mean that difficult decisions won't have to be made but that there is greater chance of understanding from both those being served and those serving. VISION recalls:

I knew that was a much better intervention of people getting used to knowing us from other kinds of initiatives as the more they understand you the more likely they're going to accept what you have to do. They might not like what the interventions are but they will be able to accept and understand. And I think New Beginnings is probably an example of transparency for child protection.

As RELATIONSHIP's team spent more time in the small hamlet, news spread of their work. SHARED HUMANITY knew that the neighbours were watching and said: If one person knows or has an experience with protection that goes all over the place. So if it's a good, positive experience that you know the Children's Aid helped them with something, we encourage them somehow, you know we assisted in a positive way, then they pass that on to other people and say you know if you need help go and ask or they don't just take your kids you know or they support you, they help you in lots of other ways.

As the team spent more time with families in the hamlet by virtue of location it allowed for more time and opportunity for people to interact. SHARED HUMANITY could see a shift in how things were done because relationships were being developed. “The shift in attitude didn't just come from them, it come from us [kingdom workers] as well and I think when we meet in the middle like that then things start to change and happen.” She was patient and knew that as part of RELATIONSHIP's team she and her workmate had to show a “warm endearing kind of patience and the willingness to be supportive and helpful.” She shared the difference she could see:

It's that whole sense of community that when we work here every day that we sort of become a part of that. And in a strange sense they watch over us too

even though we're Children's Aid, they take care of us when they think we need something. (Shared Humanity)

VISION continued to encourage RELATIONSHIP and her team to build relationships in the neighbourhood. VISION understood that things were different and being away from the kingdom helped to change the work. There is still 'protection' work to be done that must be done by those working for the kingdom, but improved relationships make the work easier to do. The community learns by watching and VISION believes "the more they understand you the more likely they're going to accept what you have to do." She sees this as different from how others inside the big kingdom see protection where "they would rather swoop in and protection to them is making hard and fast decisions." It was different and this is what VISION and PROTECTION had hoped for... maybe the big kingdom could change after all!

RELATIONSHIP suggests that the work she and her team does is guided by what people living in the area want. "I think most importantly you recognize you're a partner with the actual people that are living there" and working where people can see what is being done creates a different level of accountability. She is aware that if workers "don't really consider the decision that you make and... the people can challenge you on how you're doing the work and you're not protected by the same four walls." She cares what the families have to say about the work done by her team and she looks to families for help. RELATIONSHIP states:

I think we are able to then to have different information, different relationships with families to get a different understanding as to what the protection issues are, what are some of the things that they might be able to access to help make things different, what some of those strengths are.

There are those from deep inside the kingdom who prefer to keep their distance from those who might hurt the children. They might suggest that getting too familiar with families served in child protection could make decision-making more difficult. But for RELATIONSHIP, knowing the community served helps to increase options available that help to mitigate the problems with individual families as they arise. For example, familiarity helps RELATIONSHIP's team to identify and reach out to a neighbourhood friend who is available to offer some respite or the grandmotherly neighbour who always watches out for the children.

RELATIONSHIP has seen that families now can talk to social workers about more than just their own children and concerns. She now sees groups of people talking about what the protection team does (and could do differently). She also has become aware of how they are now able to ask questions of the social workers. This may be a result of families feeling more comfortable and safe in asking questions:

I think even most recently as there seems to be an increase in communication even just to talk about what that really needs to look like which I don't think three years ago they would have even felt that they could put on the table to talk about what kind of roles or what we're all doing in the building because there would have been no trust, no relationship and now we can actually have those conversations. So it has definitely has grown.

The shared space has increased opportunities for workers and families alike to see what is happening in the community. RELATIONSHIP speaks to situations she has seen outside of child protection issues that "gave me an understanding and connection and engagement with that family", information that was later used to offer support instead of increase surveillance or opening a file to protection. She tells of getting a call about a neighbour from someone inside the kingdom saying the children were left unattended. RELATIONSHIP knew that this mother had just had dental surgery and was in fact home. She was able to send one of her team to offer some support with the children and see if the mom had what she needed. This is far different than what might be offered if someone from the big kingdom came to visit. The main purpose would be to see if the children were alone or not. This would not likely happen as quickly and once the concern was resolved there would likely be little support offered to the mother.

BASIC NEEDS noticed a difference too as "we have more of a personal relationship and it does make it a little easier to approach them [protection workers] regarding mutual clients....there is a level of trust which I think is developing with the residents as well." BASIC NEEDS has used the same principle of relationship building when she collects the rent and supports housing:

I feel very strongly that is also a tool in being a property manager, building relationships with your residents. It's not just the landlord, the tenant, the Children's Aid Society protection worker, it is a relationship. We have to work together and together we seem to be able to make it a better environment for everybody.

BASIC NEEDS had worried about what would happen when the protection team moved into the hamlet. She worried people might feel "uncomfortable in their own homes, that they're being scrutinized" but, for the most part, this has not happened and over time she has seen a change. "Slowly... we're seeing people actually voluntarily calling the protection unit to discuss issues." She sees child protection changing and believes that this in turn then improves the community as a whole.

HEALTH works in other parts of the child welfare kingdom as well as at New Beginning, and she sees a difference in what is happening at New Beginnings. She believes that having the work of the kingdom right in the midst of a neighbourhood makes the work more visible and this has contributed to the changing relationship between families in the hamlet of Eastdale and RELATIONSHIP's team. She says:

It's about, I think it's about they know the worker, they trust them and they know....and they don't see babies getting apprehended every other day right. Our families don't in other parts of the city either but they think it right, they... they think that's what's going to happen. But I think at New Beginnings they see protection happening every day but they don't see the end of protection right, they just see the everyday helping, supporting, keeping your family and helping your kids. So they just trust that it's going to be a good answer.

Who's the Expert?

So far in our story we have a powerful kingdom wanting to protect children but filled with problems, and we have a small group of people from that very kingdom who have decided to leave the safe walls in the center of the kingdom to move closer to the families who may need help. There are some other folks from other kingdoms who have joined this small group and they come and visit and work in the hamlet of Eastdale each week. Living in the same area has allowed the kingdom workers, and their companions from other kingdoms to spend time getting to know the families of Eastdale. The workers are learning something from the families and it appears that the families are learning something from the workers especially about the very big kingdom these families are often afraid of. But I wonder (being CURIOSITY) who is really the expert?

The people who work for the kingdom still have a great deal of power. RELATIONSHIP shudders when she thinks about how the system considers those it serves. Families "feel the distance of the decision-making" she said. She remembered a story about two families who had a different experience with the big kingdom during a time when she was away from New Beginnings:

The family was telling me what had happened. They said you know if you had been here then we know that it would have looked differently because you would have known, you would have been able to see the house, you see the kids every day, you know that we're in the program so that you know even that second visit wouldn't have been necessary because you already would have seen us because we would have been at the kitchen that morning or we would have been at the "community chat" that day.

RELATIONSHIP acknowledges that her team has decisions to make and they have to protect children because that is what is mandated by the Ministry to do. However, how she chooses to work with the families and how she directs her team to work with families is based on how well she understands these families and the community philosophy that believes families can be experts too:

I think most importantly you recognize that you're a partner with the actual people that are living there and that neighbours really you know

at the end of the day none of the rest of us are there and neighbours connecting with other neighbours is where you're going to build in safety. So you are sharing the responsibility among people who are actually going to be there as opposed to us that aren't there at night.

VISION knew this when she supported the move to a community space. She hopes to see a move to shared community accountability. She is aware that who gets to decide what the community needs is an issue that is at the heart of much of the conflict in child welfare. In a community-based system there can be some services where the workers "offer something that the community needs, not what we decide the community needs." VISION notes the difference: "It's not the traditional intervention of the expert coming in and telling the family what's wrong, its more coming in and doing it through assessment" and the relationships that are built between agency staff and neighbours creates a place where "they're getting clearer information."

VISION sees a role for those from the child welfare kingdom to participate in supporting community development. When the community improves then outcomes for children improve. She believes that "a stronger community has less need for child welfare services or interventions... so the stronger the community, the better the kids are."

SHARED HUMANITY agrees that "in this environment again people learn how to not need protection." Although the protection team does some teaching and offers support, SHARED HUMANITY believes that the families "learn from each other."

HEALTH is used to working in the large kingdom, both hers and the one that RELATIONSHIP and I work for. Comparing New Beginnings to the larger child welfare kingdom HEALTH sees the difference "and the power is completely different."

Most of the work of the big kingdom continues to be directed toward one family at a time. The power that the worker brings to these individual family meetings feels very real to the families. They know that the worker has the ability (and they know worker have used this power many times before) to take the children away from them. New Beginnings protection team still work with families one at a time but they also have an opportunity to offer something different. They can consider offering groups to families they are working with and they can participate in community kitchens or other programs but they have chances throughout the day to spend time with families when there is not task to achieve or purpose other than connecting as people who work or live in the same neighbourhood. They can pick up a hockey stick to play a game, share a hot dog at the BBQ, stop and smell the casserole or baking a neighbour might be preparing in the kitchen or they might dress up like an elf for a Christmas celebration. COMMUNITY sees his work as being driven by his "community-based philosophy" and his presence in the community over the years has helped the whole agency become "ingrained in the community." Most importantly for COMMUNITY, "it doesn't feel like 'power over'."

The work done by RELATIONSHIP's team is different because they are able to develop a better understanding with the families and thus they understand more about what solutions might be right for the neighbourhood. He is aware that understanding families better helps him to do his job and to move away from the role of expert and ask more questions. He sees his role to seek to understand rather than approaching the families thinking he has all the answers:

Some of the clients that we have real concerns about then we'll see them in a completely different setting and it helps us understand maybe their lives a little bit better, see them in a different light, maybe readjust or re-hypothesize how we are looking at them because that's a tough area to live in.

When families' problems are seen differently hopefully the solutions that might be explored or endorsed can be different as well. PROTECTION is glad to hear this as he is concerned that "too much of child protection is being viewed as individual pathology...chronic social issues of poverty and education and marginalization" are a few he mentions. He adds that solutions may not be found in the work done with individual families and "the community development component is crucial if you really want to make long term change." Moving away from blaming the family helps workers to see families as experts in their own lives. Speaking of the families, COMMUNITY adds, "They're the authority too."

As families come together for various groups and meetings, they begin to find a single voice. SHARED HUMANITY noticed this too:

People want to have their voices heard. They have a lot of questions about things and I'm sure those questions have been there for a long time but now they're asking and now they're starting to say we want to do this, we want to try that....So its building the relationship and going a little bit further. ... People would say this or that but not really as a group and not really you know with a full loud voice to say this is really our concern. And repeating those issues until they do really get heard.

The families started to band their voices together and stand up to the people who worked in the small two storied building right next door. It felt good to have others to help them speak, and it felt even better having someone listen. "We want a group on how to talk to our kids about sex" one neighbour said and others joined in ... "Yeah I need that information too." HEALTH and people from my team heard their voices and together they planned a group to address these issues the following week. And now people remember there was one time that someone from a big kingdom listened.

Later on the group of voices met and told BASIC NEEDS, 'we want to recycle.'" BASIC NEEDS said "oh we tried that before and it didn't work." But the group spoke louder and asked again. "We want to recycle".....and BASIC NEEDS said okay. BASIC

NEEDS has seen this voice grow at New Beginnings and “I’ve seen [a change] from total apathy to a community chat group that really wants to get together once a week.” The families in the hamlet seem more willing to get involved and participate in neighbourhood improvements.

PROTECTION AND VISION AND RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY still have a job to do to keep children safe in the kingdom. HEALTH still has to help families with their health and BASIC NEEDS still has to collect the rent however in the hamlet of Eastdale the families who live there know who they can speak to if they are upset and they know that they can join voices with other neighbours and be heard. The kingdoms are still powerful but the work can change because the families now have a say. This raises the question of who is the expert? Can families participate in deciding what will happen in their home and community? In speaking about the families in the hamlet, HEALTH offers this advice to anyone working at New Beginnings “They have all sorts of interesting stories, just listen and hear...learn from it and change your practice.”

A Shift in the work: Different work ...Same kingdom!

Now for one more recap...the people working in the big kingdom decided to leave the castle and move into the hamlet of Eastdale so that they could be closer to the people who they worked with. Some people from other kingdoms such as the landlord and health and some teachers from my team joined with RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY and SHARED HUMANITY and the rest of their team and they are becoming part of the neighbourhood too. But, things don’t always look as clear and simple to this group as they did when they were working in the center of the kingdom. From closer up, the people who used to be called “the ones who hurt the children” now do not look much different than anyone else. Now these experts were not so sure of anything. They had more questions and felt uncomfortable and strangely unsettled. This was a new kind of feeling but it made them all the more curious about what they might learn. They wondered about how they might have to change their work. They wondered about all the sadness and anger in the kingdom and if maybe the kingdom was broken.

It is hard to live outside the kingdom. Everyone who worked in the kingdom had enough to eat but many who lived in the hamlet do not have enough to eat. It is hard to fight the kingdom if you are hungry and poor. This was not something that many working inside the kingdom considered. They had been worrying so much about saving the children that they did not stop to think about what may have caused the children to be unsafe in the first place. These now seemed like very important things to know about families. RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARED HUMANITY, HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS were learning a great deal about life outside the kingdom. The neighbours in the hamlet were joining their voices to tell them stories of how hard life can be but, interestingly, they were also sharing with workers just how good life can be. Everyone working inside New Beginnings began to understand that they had more to learn. The big kingdom is broken and some of the things that people inside the kingdom think about

those who hurt the children are wrong. The kingdom has been blaming the people who hurt the children without helping to fix the things that cause some of the problems in the first place.

RELATIONSHIP likes to be at New Beginnings. It helps her understand things better and it help her change the work that she and her team do. It was easier to think about one family at a time but something about this never felt right for RELATIONSHIP. Being in the community helps her to remember to try and make things better, not just for one child but for the whole family and maybe even the whole hamlet or kingdom. She states:

I think it doesn't allow us to focus on the deficits of one family. I think it helps us to be able to find strengths and support to families in a more meaningful way. I also think that if you're doing that (community development) you're going to have longer lasting change. But I really think that you'll you know you develop, you help be part of developing a foundation that will last as opposed to coming in and maybe just painting a wall or fixing a window and still have a foundation that cracked.

RELATIONSHIP still knows that she has a job to do that protects children but she thinks about it differently now. She feels that she has a better understanding of the challenges some of the families in the hamlet face and she also has a better idea of the support available from other families in the same hamlet. This opens the options available to her team and she can now see more ways to help fix problems, and for the most part, use other options instead of having to take the children away inside the big kingdom.

HEALTH sees this difference as well at New Beginnings. She sees how families living in other places in the kingdom think about the big kingdom that tries to keep children safe. She knows that many families are afraid of the workers from the child welfare kingdom and many would not consider asking for help as it might be considered, by the kingdom, as a weakness. There is a difference...she said:

it's like a two way relationship, families know that and I don't' even find they talk about it the same way. Like they don't talk about the protection piece the same way as they do in other places. In other places it's just about the protection and they (families) don't see the support.

She knows at New Beginnings that the work being done is about more than just 'protection': families can ask for and get support, such as assistance with a school meeting or the use of a fax machine, whereas in other places where she works families feel they can't ask. HEALTH sees families being more involved in determining and asking for what they need. They seem more able to describe what type of support and

information they would find most helpful instead of workers prescribing support. Describing this difference HEALTH says:

I think that New Beginnings is good at asking those questions what do people want and then responding. Like too often we ask the question and then we don't implement what it is they asked for and I think that that's something I notice since I came back because I had that year off. Right...and so I've noticed that since I came back that there's a lot of asking questions.

The traditional work in the kingdom has often been about finding those who hurt the children and stopping it. The work in the hamlet is different as it has helped to identify where there are bigger issues causing families to not be able to care properly for their children or to hurt their children. Sometimes people from the kingdom are considered the experts with the answers, but now at New Beginnings workers seem to have more questions. Asking questions has helped RELATIONSHIP and her team to think "differently." The work shifted after the location of their work changed. The change in location led to a different type of relationship with families this in turn challenged what workers thought they knew about families and led them to ask more questions about what might be helpful. RELATIONSHIP believes this change "allows us to be able to make greater holistic decisions around what is mitigating the risk, what are the strengths, who are the supports in place. It broadens our horizons so it allows us to be able to do things, I think, differently."

This is what PROTECTION has hoped for; that Social Workers move beyond case management to social work. When staying inside the kingdom, it was easy to forget which part of the work is most important. Now RELATIONSHIP's team can be part of a bigger team who all can learn from the families. The children are not seen as separate from their parents but instead as part of a family and these families are not seen separate from their community. Although there still are times when children cannot stay with their family it happens less often. VISION has committed to supporting the teaching and support work done at New Beginnings by my team. The joining of the work done by RELATIONSHIP's team, my team, HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS has helped each of us to rethink our work and shift toward community development. Doing the work of community development sometimes even helps people working in the little hamlet feel less sad and angry. SHARED HUMANITY sees the benefits as:

If the community gets stronger they get stronger from helping each other and they do that with or without Children's Aid. I think the protection piece, they protect each other too in that sense of you know watching over each other's families and help them with that. I think our role becomes a little bit different, it's not ...it's not from the lens of you know we're the authority and we're the ones in charge to tell you how to do this with your family or how to do that. It becomes this is the right thing to do and they already know and they just sometimes need encouragement and they get that from us or their neighbours.

Now the people who were seen as “the ones who hurt their children” also take a role in protection of children. The whole hamlet becomes involved. HEALTH comments on this shift:

There are lots of people watching. I know they were saying oh there’s not enough look at those kids running wild and protection, the workers are right there and why aren’t they doing anything? Because we know that lots of people are watching those kids and I think the families know it too and it develops neighbours and friendships that I don’t see everywhere else.

HEALTH has a better relationship with REALTIONSHIP and her team as well as BASIC NEEDS. They help and support each other as they work in the hamlet. Then they can also work together to advocate for more help. HEALTH recalls:

I think to myself, huh, right there’s something weird going on here, but I maybe it’s just me. But then you put it out there with all sort of community partners and everybody says the same things you think oh there’s something that needs to be done at the community level, we need to look at hunger from a community level instead of just this family seems hungry to me. There’s something going on here and it allows you to open it up a little bit I think and think broader.

Now COMMUNITY helps to speak out for resources for the families in Eastdale. He feels that he has to do this. The work he does “needs to challenge us to advocate for those bigger and broader social issues and see those connections.” He still mostly works with one family at a time but he thinks about the whole area and how he might make things better.

Oh there are still angry people and sad people and some people who hurt their children.....it just isn’t most people who live in the hamlet. The ones who know most about how hard it is to live in the hamlet are the neighbours who live there. The experts become the neighbours and the neighbours become the experts and the relationships improve leaving both sides feeling different. The kingdom workers like their work more because they feel they can make a difference. The neighbours can talk to and be angry at the “experts” from the kingdom and they can ask for support and get it. It becomes as SHARED HUMANITY states a “back and forth” relationship and it does not feel the same as the work done from the center of the kingdom. The big thick walls and the windows are gone and now the people outside the kingdom look different.....after all we all were children once too!

SHARED HUMANITY shared how she sees the interaction between her team and the neighbourhood:

You're still going to have bumps on the road, you're still going to have ups and downs and all of it, we're still going to hit barriers where the community's upset with something and we can't really fix it or change it but we get through it all and I think it comes from the constants, it comes from always coming back to okay, that didn't work so let's try this....and doing that together you know. Okay what happened here? Where you know you were upset with us because we did that, okay we won't do that anymore and then we'll do this instead...and it's kind of back and forth.

Happily Ever After ...Not Quite!

So, the kingdom did not change right away, in fact, it still has not changed and everyone does not live happily ever after, like in a fairy tale. For those who left the kingdom to work outside they learned many things from the families living in Eastdale, outside the kingdom. Here is what they learned:

***Oh what a mess the kingdom was in!** The kingdom is a mess, some might call it broken, but admitting this was the first step to trying something new.*

***Everything does have to change.** There are some, although not many, that think the current kingdom is fine without any changes, but most would agree that something does have to change. There are many people who have been hurt by the kingdom. The very kingdom that wants to save children has sometimes hurt children and their families. This cannot continue to happen.*

***Some kingdom social workers actually found out that they, themselves, were not so different than those who were never let inside the kingdom.** And this just might be the key to the change, a kingdom that is not filled with experts and people removed from those who need support, but instead filled with people.....who all were children once too!*

***For those who are all very busy watching and saving the children but in different ways...it will be important to stop and work together to think about the very best way to make children safe, instead of just saving children.** The families who sometimes hurt the children will be our best teachers.*

***For those who think, if only the people who hurt the children outside the kingdom would change, things might get better...could consider what they, personally, have to do to bring about change.....if those who work in the kingdom change what they do, then maybe the families who are outside can begin to make changes too.** The kingdom may be too big but it is made up of people who each have a responsibility to protect children.*

For those who think, if only they could be more like us inside the kingdom...it is time to consider that some of us inside the kingdom are causing the problems outside the

*kingdom and those outside the kingdom may not be so different after all.....because it is true that we all **were children once too!***

In the meantime, there are more people in the kingdom who sometimes wonder about these others from the kingdom who went to work outside in Eastdale, with those who can never be let in. Those who work inside continue to sometimes feel uncomfortable and sometime they just continue feeling sad and angry. For those who have tried doing something different outside the walls of the kingdom, and the few people from the kingdom that joined them, they too still feel uncomfortable sometimes and they feel sad and angry sometimes too, but more often now they feel something different. PROTECTION, VISION, RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARED HUMANITY, HEALTH worked together with BASIC NEEDS and me, CURIOSITY, knowing that together we can find new companions of OPTIMISM and HOPE. And unlike anger and sadness these are helpful companions on any journey. And with this knowledge they have a new dream.....for a new story. The new story started with leaving the kingdom and standing side by side with families and then building new pathways, and changing the journey. It will be important that this journey does not end up in the same place as those who began with such good intentions in the past.

And so the story continues...

Once upon a time there was a small kingdom of people with a dream. The dream was a world where all creatures, animal and human, could live free from harm. This kingdom took it upon itself to watch out for.....

Appendix B
Recruitment Email

Hello all,

If you have received this email it is because you have had some involvement with New Beginnings, either as an employee of Brant CAS or as a community partner. Some of you will know me and others may not. My name is Jill Esposto and I am the Manager of the Child Development Unit at the Children's Aid Society of Brant. I am completing my MSW and as a thesis I am interested in telling the story of New Beginnings from multiple perspectives.

It is somewhat unusual for someone employed at an agency to do research within their own agency. However, since New Beginnings is a very unique site, there are no other places that offer a similar service. I am doing this research on my own time, as a student, but I will also continue working at the agency. I am looking for several volunteers to agree to be interviewed by me. You are not obligated in any way to be interviewed unless you are interested.

I am attaching a letter of information and consent form. I have also included an interview guide that will give you an idea of the type of questions I will ask. I am interested in hearing stories that you may have about New Beginnings. There are no right or wrong answers and I suspect I will hear some good things about New Beginnings as well as some not so good things. Although I will be sharing the final report, I will not let anyone know, including individuals involved in any of the agencies connected to New Beginnings, who chose to participate in the study and who did not.

I will not approach you directly to be interviewed and I do not want you to feel any pressure to participate. If you choose to participate, you need to know that what you share may be included in the research thesis. I will not use real names in the research and will not include anything that would clearly identify you. Although I will take every precaution to not identify who you are, there is a chance that someone might be able to identify you by a story that you share or something that you say. This will be especially true if you hold a unique position in the agency or community.

Before submitting my report I will offer you a chance to see any information that you shared that will be included, for example a direct quote. You may request to have a direct quote that might identify you be removed or modified to remove identifying details.

I want to assure you that whether you agree to participate or not, no information will be shared with the Children's Aid Society of Brant or anyone in their employ, or any community agency. If you decide to participate and then change your mind at any time,

including after the interview has occurred, you have the right to withdraw and there will be no consequence to you.

I am attaching a letter of information with further details, a copy of the consent form, and the interview guide so that you will be able to make a decision if you wish to participate. If you are interested in participating please let me know how you wish to be contacted.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at:
espostjr@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca or by phone at 519-754-7120.

Your questions and comments will be kept in confidence.

Thank you for taking time to read my request. I understand that not all people will be comfortable participating in this type of research.

There is no obligation to participate and I will not speak to you directly about the interviews unless ask me directly.

Sincerely,

Jill Esposto



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

Appendix C (a)

June 10, 2009

Letter of Information /Consent (Agency Employee)

Research Title:

The Unlikely Marriage of Child Welfare and Community Development: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Jill Esposito. BA, BSW
MSW Student
c/o Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Research/Thesis Advisor: Ann Fudge Schormans PHD, (ABD)
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23790
fschorm@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study:

Child welfare agencies continue to struggle with finding ways to fulfill the mandate of protecting children, while supporting families and building on strengths both within the community and the family. Despite recent changes in legislation in Ontario that was developed to support such changes many child welfare agencies have struggled changing service delivery. New Beginnings Resource Center is a unique initiative in Ontario within the field of child welfare that combines both community development and child welfare.

In this study, I want to learn more about New Beginnings through the stories of those who have participated in work or programs at the center. I am hoping to learn more about how New Beginnings is working and how people who have worked with the program understand it. By asking those who are offering services to explain their role, I hope to learn how programs and services at New Beginnings could be modified or improved.

Procedures involved in the Research:

If you decide to continue with an interview your participation will involve the following. I will be asking you some questions about your involvement with New

Beginnings. After you agree to be interviewed we can negotiate the best time and place for the interview to take place. The interview should take about one hour. I will like to audio tape the interview as well as take notes, but will do so only with your permission. If you have not yet had a chance to review the interview guide I will be using and would like to do so at this point, please let me know.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

Talking about New Beginnings may generate strong feelings for you, either positive and/or negative. Also, you may worry about how others will react to what you say if they are able to connect the comments you make to you. I am taking a number of steps to try to lessen these risks. You do not need to answer questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. You may ask for the digital recording to be stopped at any time during the interview.

You do not need to answer any question you would prefer to skip. You can stop the interview at any time and decide whether you want to continue or not. I will assign pseudonyms to each participant so actual names will not be attached to any ideas including support or criticisms of the program. However, although I will make every effort to keep information that you share in the interview confidential, it is possible that you might be identified by what you say or by a story that you share. For some people who occupy a unique role in the community it may be possible that you could be identified through your participation. Please keep this in mind in deciding whether or not to participate and through the interview if you decide to go ahead with it.

Before submitting my report I will offer you a chance to see any information that you shared that will be included. For example, if I will be using a direct quote from you, I will share with you the direct quote. I will also provide the context within which the quote is being used. You will have to the opportunity to request that a direct quote that might identify you be removed.

No one but me will know whether you decided to participate in this project or not. I will not be sharing this information with the Children's Aid Society of Brant, the agency where you are employed or any community agency.

Potential Benefits:

This research will provide a record of the New Beginnings project. The analysis will contribute towards a better understanding of how initiatives like New Beginnings work.

Confidentiality:

I will make every effort to keep your participation confidential. I will not use names and I will be careful to avoid using information that may make you identifiable. However, I would like to remind you once again, that you may be identifiable on the basis of a reference you make or a story you tell. Please keep this in mind while

participating. Your participation in this research will not be shared with the Children's Aid Society of Brant, anyone in their employee, your agency or any other agency partner. Your privacy will be respected. The information obtained by me will be kept in a password protected computer and will only be available to myself and my research supervisor. All information and data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office until I am finished my research. I will keep the information for one year. After this time all written documents will be shredded. Any taped or computer information will be erased.

Participation:

It is your choice to be part of the study or not. You do not have to answer all of the questions. If you wish to skip a question you may do so. If you wish to stop the digital recording at any time you may also do so. If you decide not to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you. If you change your mind and do not want to be part of the study any information you already have shared with me will be destroyed unless you tell me otherwise.

Information about the Study Results:

I expect to have my study completed by December 2009. If you would like a brief summary of the results or to see a full copy of my report, please get in touch with me.

Information about Participating as a Study Subject:

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact Jill Esposto at espostjr@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca or by phone at 519-754-7120. Should you have other questions, comments or concerns you can also contact the research supervisor Ann Fudge-Schormans at fschorm@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Jill Esposto
MSW Student

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jill Esposto of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, any information I share will be destroyed unless I agree to allow the use of this data. I have been given a copy of this form.

With your permission I will be digitally recording the interview.

Yes _____ No _____

I am willing to have direct quotes from the interview included in the final paper.

Yes _____ No _____

I would like a copy of a two page summary of the findings from the research.

Yes _____ No _____

If yes I would like to receive the summary by:

Email: _____ Mail: _____

Name and Signature of Participant:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

Appendix C (b)

June 10, 2009

Letter of Information /Consent (Agency Partner)

Research Title:

The Unlikely Marriage of Child Welfare and Community Development: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: **Jill Esposto. BA, BSW
MSW Student
c/o Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**

Research/Thesis Advisor: Ann Fudge Schormans PHD, (ABD)
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23790
fschorm@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study:

Child welfare agencies continue to struggle with finding ways to fulfill the mandate of protecting children, while supporting families and building on strengths both within the community and the family. Despite recent changes in legislation in Ontario that was developed to support such changes many child welfare agencies have struggled changing service delivery. New Beginnings Resource Center is a unique initiative in Ontario within the field of child welfare that combines both community development and child welfare.

In this study, I want to learn more about New Beginnings through the stories of those who have participated in work or programs at the center. I am hoping to learn more about how New Beginnings is working and how people who have worked with the program understand it. By asking those who are offering services to explain their role, I hope to learn how programs and services at New Beginnings could be modified or improved.

Procedures involved in the Research:

If you decide to continue with an interview your participation will involve the following. I will be asking you some questions about your involvement with New Beginnings. After you agree to be interviewed we can negotiate the best time and place

for the interview to take place. The interview should take about one hour. I will like to audio tape the interview as well as take notes, but will do so only with your permission. If you have not yet had a chance to review the interview guide I will be using and would like to do so at this point, please let me know.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

Talking about New Beginnings may generate strong feelings for you, either positive and/or negative. Also, you may worry about how others will react to what you say if they are able to connect the comments you make to you. I am taking a number of steps to try to lessen these risks. You do not need to answer questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. You may ask for the digital recording to be stopped at any time during the interview.

You do not need to answer any question you would prefer to skip. You can stop the interview at any time and decide whether you want to continue or not. I will assign pseudonyms to each participant so actual names will not be attached to any ideas including support or criticisms of the program. However, although I will make every effort to keep information that you share in the interview confidential, it is possible that you might be identified by what you say or by a story that you share. For some people who occupy a unique role in the community it may be possible that you could be identified through your participation. Please keep this in mind in deciding whether or not to participate and through the interview if you decide to go ahead with it.

Before submitting my report I will offer you a chance to see any information that you shared that will be included. For example, if I will be using a direct quote from you, I will share with you the direct quote. I will also provide the context within which the quote is being used. You will have to the opportunity to request that a direct quote that might identify you be removed.

No one but me will know whether you decided to participate in this project or not. I will not be sharing this information with the Children's Aid Society of Brant, the agency where you are employed or any community agency.

Potential Benefits:

This research will provide a record of the New Beginnings project. The analysis will contribute towards a better understanding of how initiatives like New Beginnings work.

Confidentiality:

I will make every effort to keep your participation confidential. I will not use names and I will be careful to avoid using information that may make you identifiable. However, I would like to remind you once again, that you may be identifiable on the basis of a reference you make or a story you tell. Please keep this in mind while participating. Your participation in this research will not be shared with the Children's

Aid Society of Brant, anyone in their employee, your agency or any other agency partner. Your privacy will be respected.

The information obtained by me will be kept in a password protected computer and will only be available to myself and my research supervisor. All information and data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office until I am finished my research. I will keep the information for one year. After this time all written documents will be shredded. Any taped or computer information will be erased.

Participation:

It is your choice to be part of the study or not. You do not have to answer all of the questions. If you wish to skip a question you may do so. If you wish to stop the digital recording at any time you may also do so. If you decide not to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you. If you change your mind and do not want to be part of the study any information you already have shared with me will be destroyed unless you tell me otherwise.

Information about the Study Results:

I expect to have my study completed by December 2009. If you would like a brief summary of the results or to see a full copy of my report, please get in touch with me.

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If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact Jill Esposto at espostjr@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca or by phone at 519-754-7120. Should you have other questions, comments or concerns you can also contact the research supervisor Ann Fudge-Schormans at fschorm@univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

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c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Jill Esposto
MSW Student

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jill Esposto of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, any information I share will be destroyed unless I agree to allow the use of this data. I have been given a copy of this form.

With your permission I will be digitally recording the interview.

Yes _____ No _____

I am willing to have direct quotes from the interview included in the final paper

Yes _____ No _____

I would like a copy of a two page summary of the findings from the research.

Yes _____ No _____

If yes I would like to receive the summary by:

Email: _____ Mail: _____.

Name and Signature of Participant:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide - Brant CAS Employees

1. How would you describe what is happening at Unit 17 – 359 Darling St. – New Beginnings?
2. Tell me how you are involved with New Beginnings?
3. Do you think the programs are working? Probe: Why are they working or not working? What works well? What could use more attention?
4. Tell me about your past experience in child welfare? How does your work at New Beginnings compare or contrast with your past experience?
5. Do you think there are particular challenges in offering protection and prevention services in a neighbourhood setting? If yes could you describe them to me?
6. Do you think there are particular benefits offering protection and prevention services in a neighbourhood setting?
7. How do you see community development fitting in with the mandate of child protection? Is it helping? If yes how? If not why?
8. Do you think it is useful to offer other programs as well as having a protection team on site?
9. What is the future of a program like New Beginnings in Brantford? In Ontario?
10. How do you know if you are helping the community by offering a service like those at New Beginnings?
11. What kinds of resources are needed to keep a program like New Beginnings operating?
12. What is the role of a Family Service Worker in community capacity building?
13. Does knowing the family make your job harder or easier? Tell me how.
14. Does knowing the community make your job harder or easier? Tell me how.
15. How does community development change child welfare?

16. If they told Brant CAS tomorrow that we need to move out of New Beginnings ...what would this mean to the agency and the community?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add or tell me?

Interview Guide - Community Partner Interviews:

1. How would you describe what is happening at Unit 17 – 359 Darling St. – New Beginnings?
2. Tell me how you are involved with New Beginnings?
3. Do you think the programs are working? Probe: Why are they working or not working? What works well? What could use more attention?
4. Tell me about your past experience in child welfare? How does your work at New Beginnings compare or contrast with your past experience?
5. Do you think there are particular challenges in offering protection and prevention services in a neighbourhood setting? If yes, could you describe them to me?
6. Do you think there are particular benefits offering protection and prevention services in a neighbourhood setting?
7. How important is it to offer other programs as well as having a protection team on site?
8. What is the future of a program like New Beginnings in Brantford? In Ontario?
9. How do you know if you are helping the community by offering services like those at New Beginnings?
10. What kinds of resources are needed to keep a program like New Beginnings operating?
11. What is the role Community Partners at New Beginnings?
12. Does knowing the family make your job harder or easier? Tell me how.
13. Does knowing the community make your job harder or easier? Tell me how.
14. How does community development change child welfare?

15. If they told Brant CAS tomorrow that we need to move out of New Beginnings
...what would this mean to you, your agency and the community?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add or tell me?

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