

Youth Social Infrastructure (YSI) Collaborative

# Autumn Retreat

**B a n c r o f t**

**O c t o b e r 23 & 24, 2012**

## YSI Core Team

Transform our connected impact into collective impact

The YSI Collaborative is **driven by a core team** drawn from a broader community that identifies with YSI's aim to accelerate and amplify youth organizing in Ontario.

**Membership in the core team is fluid.** People step in and step out of the core team depending on their own interests, availability and what is happening in the collaborative.

Core Team members step in to **hold a piece of the work.**

## The Core Team was called to:

- Connect & build momentum.
- **Share stories, supports, skills.**
- Connect back to the land and spirit.

**“How can we **strengthen our Core** to build our community?”**

## Present at YSI Retreat:

Abe Drennan, Celebrate Youth  
Movement  
Cathy Dyer, New Mentality  
Dyneasti Williams, Sketch

Geoff Biss, Motivate Canada  
Gerard Sagassige, Curve Lake  
First Nation  
Jamiena Shah, in transition  
Jennifer Chan, Exhibit Change  
Jon Cada, Mississauga First  
Nation  
Kathy Hare, Motivate Canada  
Marilee D'Arceuil, Frontline

Partners with Youth Network  
(FPYN)  
Phyllis Novak, Sketch  
Robin Sutherland, in transition  
Roger Mak, FPYN  
Silvia Argentina Arauz, Youth  
Action Network (YAN)  
Violetta Ilkiw, Laidlaw  
Foundation

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**Fig 1: Building the Lodge**



Some of us met early in the morning and built the sweat lodge with Gerard. The men chopped wood & saplings & searched for rocks and the women wove the branches & trees together, and gathered cedar and berries (via Foodland and Gerard).

## In the beginning... (of the Gathering)

### **Gerard**

**sang us in** and reminded us of our gifts, and to remember our skills and what we bring to our communities; in working with young people in particular

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## Creating Social Infrastructure

- We create the infrastructure we want to see in the world.
- Our work intersects with something deeply personal for us
- We balance expectations and what we can actually do for others
- We hope that what we invest in will pay off somehow in the future
- We overcome so many barriers first before getting to the actual job
- Our work takes time and creativity that isn't valued by employers or funders;
- We wonder how to measure the profound work we do.
- We are often in transition and state of constant flux which makes it hard to transition

**Gerard's Wisdom:** Every culture has some form of fasting & meditation. If we don't know our inner selves, we'll never know the exterior. Balance the inner and outer worlds. Sometimes we try riding a bicycle without balance and end up scraping our knees.

Figure 2: "All it is, is a report!"

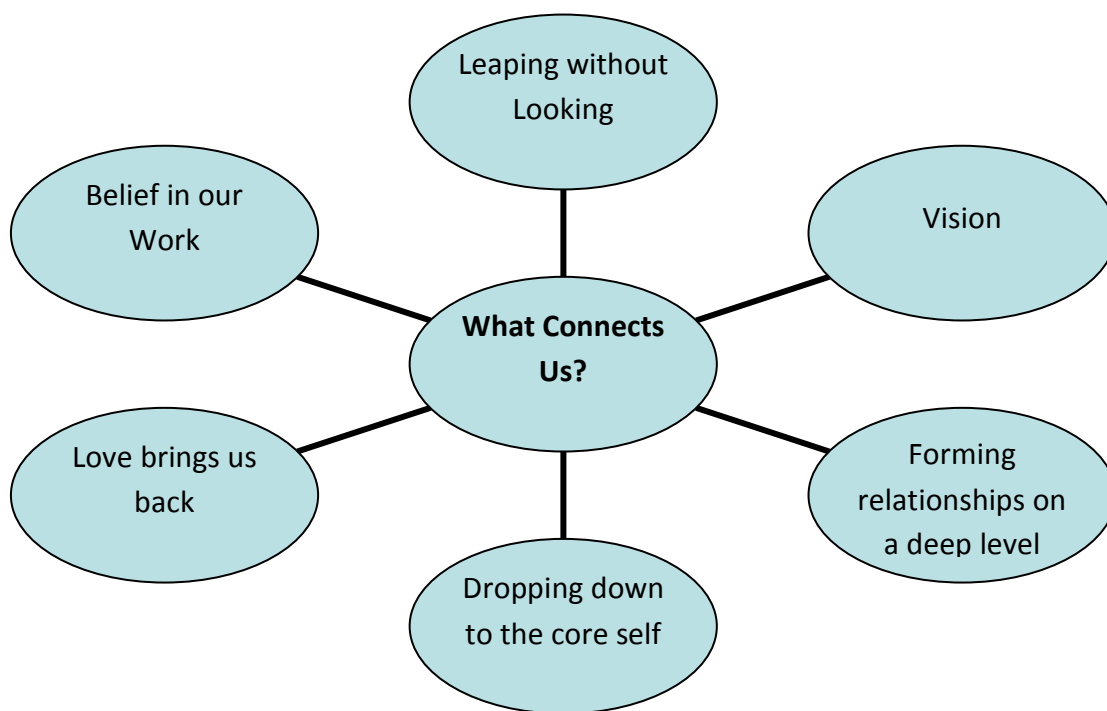


Silvia Argentina exclaimed, "all it is a report!" As youth workers, we have to write funding reports all the time. It can feel so serious. So difficult. So much at stake. But with Gerard's help, she saw that all it is, is a report. What relief!

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**Fig 3: Connections**



Geoff and Abe hosted us in World Café to discover what we share in common.

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**Remember, we are infrastructure!**

Ask for what you need.  
Share freely with YSI Collaborative.

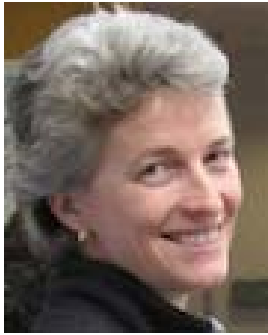
## We Offer to the YSI...

- north-south connections,
- projects that have real impact,
- strong networks,
- training ,
- coordination,
- buy-in from decision-makers,
- grant-writing skills
- mentorship skills
- creative artists
- financial support for physical activity; microgrants
- balance
- awesome interactive performance
- engage people share their opinions
- help to name a problem
- translation into plain language
- community advocacy
- charitable number
- money for shared platforms
- conference coordinating
- community hosts with access to space for recreation
- experts in field of sport
- facilitators
- design thinking,
- system thinking;
- Curricula
- Art of Hosting
- Developmental Evaluation
- Deep Democracy
- ceremony and cultural diversity



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## Developmental Evaluation



with Kathy Hare,  
Motivate Canada

**“YSI is an innovation...  
to what?  
so what?  
and now what?”  
- Kathy**

DE is real time learning designed to be used in social change environments. It is good for complex adaptive systems. It is used in situations with a lot of stakeholders who don't all agree on the key issues or how to address the issues. It is helpful when sense making in new environment or entering a new phase in your work. The point is to learn to effectively adapt using real time feedback

Testing assumptions is very important. It provides questions and data to raise up those assumptions and test them. This process can help with traditional accountability - to funders, youth, ourselves as core team members, broader collaborative.

DE is used before a model exists and when it's still being formed, before clarity what the model will look like in the end. It is beyond data collection and analysis. DE helps shape the course of development, informs decision-making and facilitates learning. It is designed to capture system dynamics and surface innovative strategies and ideas. It has a flexible approach, with new measure and monitoring mechanisms evolving as understanding of the situation deepens and the initiatives goals emerge. DE is not process based. It helps groups make real time decisions

The Developmental Evaluator is part of the team and takes an active vs. objective role. DE is an embedded process. He/she aids in making sense and distilling story for the team and that everyone can tell the story, not just the core team.

What are we developing? If you can't answer this question, DE is not the tool for you. What are you developing that's adapting to new conditions? YSI is an innovation... to what? so what? and now what? It is most useful for the pre-formative development of a potentially scalable innovation. One can start to use DE at the start of a kernel of an idea when deciding how to move forward on something.

DE is not exclusive of traditional forms of evaluation, applicable in every situation static, linear or point in time, and not about the quantitative. It is a part of it, but not the main focus. It's more dynamic

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## Developmental Evaluation Tools

- key informant **interviews**
- baseline **data collection**
- appreciative inquiry
- sharing circles, **oral storytelling**
- **forks in the road** (tracking)
- journaling – “What was just going on and what’s the impact?”
- Network mapping
- Theory of change
- 

..... endless tools - whatever tools work with the environment and stakeholders .... whatever will assist you with rapid feedback and to tell the story

## YSI Assumptions:

- youth organize
- youth serving/organizing sector needs support
- youth organizing is healthy for communities
- there is a social infrastructure that helps youth organize
- linking small systems of change will create large systems change (Wheatley’s emergence theory)
- youth organizers out there
- if youth organizers show up they will bring something
- **strengthening relationships will accelerate the work and possibility of systems change**

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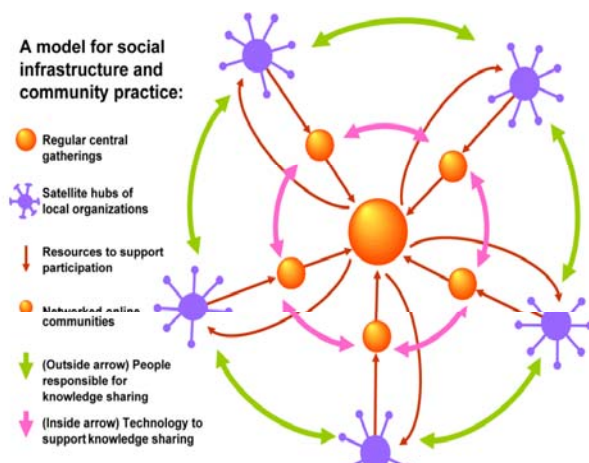
## Theory of Change for YSI (Group 1)

### Theory, Practice, Reflection (praxis)

**Roger: “It’s like electrons that have the same spin even when removed from the original atom”**

YSI is all about spending time connecting, building trusting relationships so that they collective work happens quickly. Members have to show up and not marginalize any part of his/herself. Conversations repeat so that each member discovers for his/herself what the YSI pattern is. The conversation each time begins to build on the pattern and crystalize it. If you keep doing this with some rhythm, it keeps evolving and supports healthy communities.

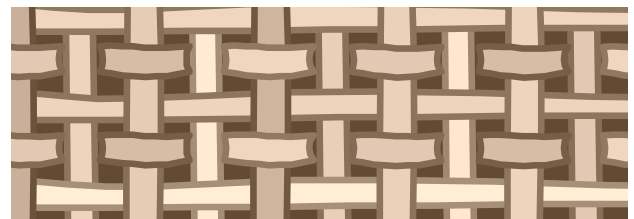
YSI is reflexive and cross-scaling and cyclical. Collisions happen in middle, with caring, relationships and love. There’s lots of pushing and pulling around the middle that make ysi what it is. Things happen in outer world that are sometimes loosely connected or needs to be better connected.



## Theory of Change for YSI (Group 2)

### What is Ontario if youth organizing is at its peak?

YSI is a weaving roadway **or bones of the ribcage that run over and under**, like opportunities woven together. It’s a network of networks... interweaving of all the different snapshots - maybe it’s a huge basket with all this great stuff (indicators...impact)



This was a YSI drawing done by former Core Team member, Justine Greenland-Duke in 2010 that reflects (sort of) what this group was saying.



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## **The environment - then & now**

**discuss feeling of tension and angst with ysi right now, of how to move forward**

**What's different now than it was 4 years ago?**

YSI Collaborative is stronger because when we first started we just realized there is a name for what's happening. Now, we're hearing even more about it. This has busied us up with trying to connect with one another; to run and catch up to the organizing that's happening, to put some structure beneath it so people collapsing under it don't get hurt. The business makes it harder to convene and track forks in the road.

In times of austerity, we feel we need to step up and be louder and stronger, to further mobilize. The scarcity in funding has strengthened us too. Gerard's wisdom reminds us that we need to hear 'no' to propel us, to push our energy into those pieces that bring most light to YSI; capturing and capitalizing on that rather than focusing on lack of resources.

There has been real gradual amplification of this work. We are now realizing our story needs to be told. We need to map the intergenerational learning that has taken place, map the sector –

How can we create a peer mentoring network?

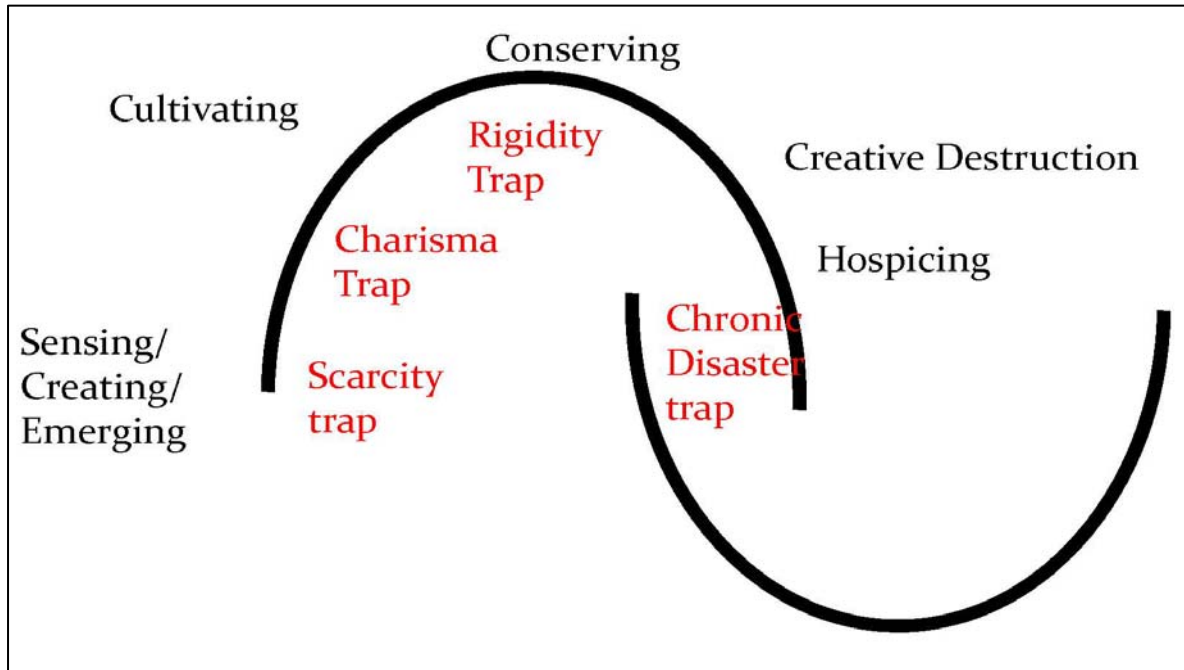
Once you tell your story, see that you are part of the snapshot. We get together in these meetings to share ideas, talk about problems we're facing can get put to the wayside. It would be good to have a website that allows people to engage, share what they are working with, and get ideas of how to move forward.

**What principles govern YSI?  
Have they changed?**

**Yes, they still hold!**

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## Emergence Theory – Berkana



ysi is in phase of conserving and creative destruction - with something new emerging

ysi is in phase of cultivating, still emergent, we haven't plateaued at any place to conserve yet; still creatively destructing some of the old systems that have informed our practices

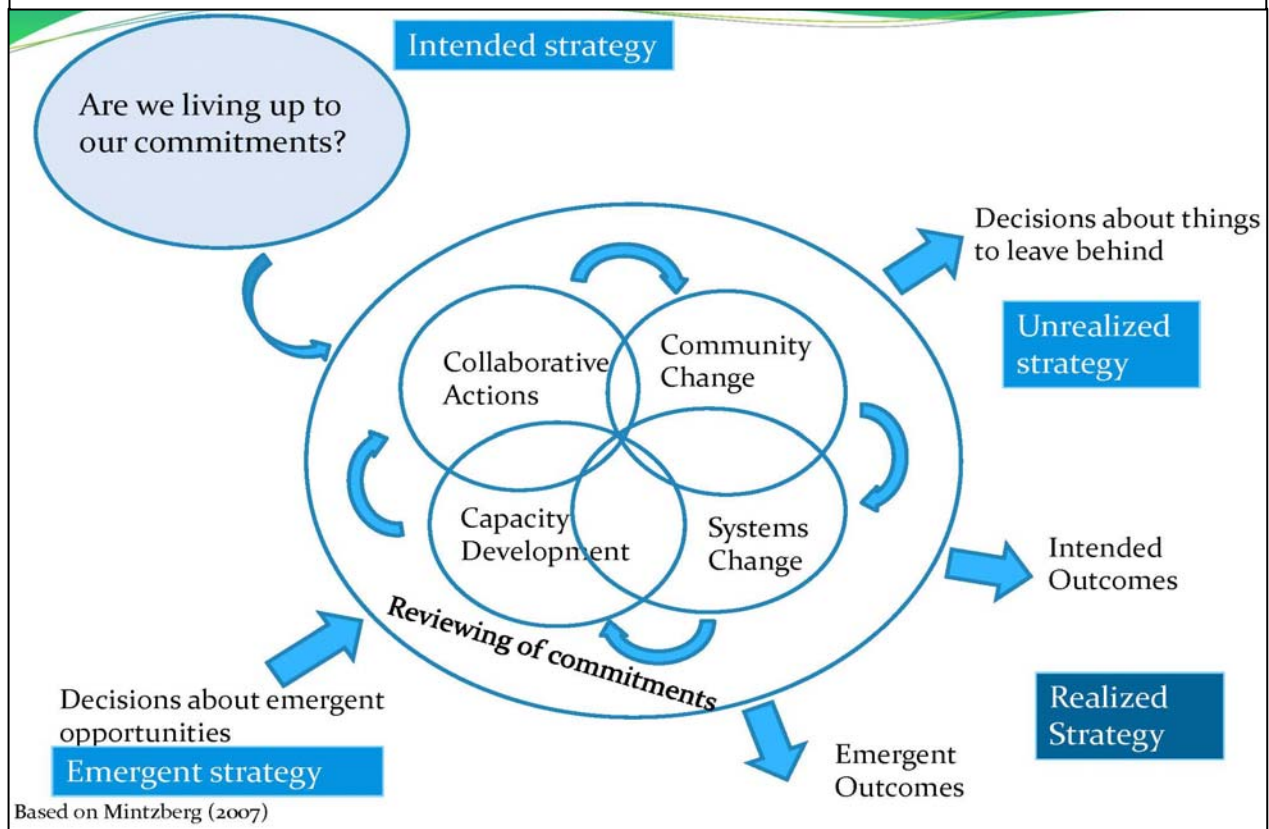
ysi has gone through this cycle many times without actually falling apart; we are prototyping, innovating constantly

In emergence theory there is the charisma trap that leads to rigidity - core team is always changing, there is renewal which has avoided this

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Diagram below: Kathy Hare's Theory of Change for the YSI



The circles within the circles; the systems within the systems; everything is a system - and we are enabling systems change within each system which then go outward  
Eg. website redevelopment affects bringing in more people which effects wider public system change

## YSI's DE Learning Questions

What systems change are we targeting?

Systems change for the collective; systems change for the people who attend and are fluid members of the team; systems change of core group within the team

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**Do we have the internal capacity or do we need to look for paid help?**

**Who's doing what?**

A fluidity of core team is wonderful and keeps us out of charisma trap but within fluidity there is a core team that gets stuff done and within that focalizes. People show up differently - visionaries, doers, and logistical. This means some people have way more to do. What would it look like if we tracked our hours?

## HOW IS THE WORK GETTING DONE?

It's not happening at our core team meetings. This creates sense that it "just gets done magically." There is an in and out group so we need to have increased transparency. There is a central team within the core team so we need to capture the work behind the work. Perhaps we should have different listserves that people can plug into and tap out of at will (like CSI and Art of Hosting listserves) to keep people in touch with what is happening.

We should bring challenges online and have a way to talk about them, allowing the conversations to be alive; anyone can jump in at any time.

## What are the decision points and who is there to witness them?

Jamiena is an Extra Super Volunteer. It is important to know who to go to and who does what

A principle as YSlers is that we practise, implement and test things out right away **CROSS SCALING.**

When we come back together we share the stories and that's how we gather the impacts - build relationships - build larger sector learning - fuel each other with new questions to go on.

## Curiosity and

**generosity:** we are curious people and we are not holding information, we are all co-learners and inherently generous

Constantly living hypothesis: we are not arriving at a secure answer but always questioning

Always accessibility and inclusion into process: how does this affect every new person's life and work needs to always be thought of.

Made an assumption that some people will step out and some will step in but **there needs to be a transitioning, support and mentorship relationship**

Annual regeneration but core team would stay fixed for at least a year but in reality people have been in and out

**How does money effect the structure and infrastructure?** Lead organizations doing admin for grants and taking care of the details are not necessarily made transparent.

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## How do we write grants as a collective?!

How are we driven in our own constellations? We all want to make money but make it doing stuff we want to do!

## What new capacity has been generated?

### Cross collaboration between programs

Partnered in five minutes! It's that simple! I have what you need, you have what I need, let's go!

There are real relationships that have developed and we can then apply it in real time

**Art of hosting, world cafe**, bringing together concepts that crystallize what we are doing

Getting rid of fear to ask for partnerships  
There are a lot of untangibles in what we do but we are creating very tangible resources (network map, tree of resources and gifts) that can be taken and used in practice

## Kathy Hare's Suggested Learning Questions ...

Learning questions build toward your theory of change: they are testing your theory of change. Is this an accurate description of what we are trying to do?

## Collaborative Actions

1. What are the most important decisions that have been made?
2. Why did we select these as important?
3. Do they reflect YSI aspirations & principles?
4. What have we been able to do together that we could not do alone?
5. What possibilities or impact has this asset created?

## Capacity Development

1. What new capacity has been generated?
2. What possibilities or impact has this capacity created? (within individuals, funders, gov't, NGO's, communities)

## System Change

1. What principles & goals guide our work?
2. What systems change are we targeting?
3. What systems changes have been observed?
4. What possibilities or impact has this change created?

## Community Change

1. What principles & goals guide our work?
2. What changes have been observed in individual & collective attitudes, skills & knowledge? Why are these important?



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## Reviewing of commitments

1. How well are we living up to our
2. commitments?
3. What important observations and/or development questions have emerged? What is their significance?
4. What else has emerged from our work that we should be paying attention to?

## Next meeting:

### 1. Landing the theory of change!

### 2. Land on Learning Questions

### 3. Forming a DE team.

### 4. Forming a Communications team

Over the next two years we'll:

Track what happens when we meet together

Track what happens outside of the meetings

Share it on the website and newsletters

Where should the money go?  
Who is going to do the paid work?

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