

SEMINAR

The Dynamics of Support for Community Development & Organizing in Community Service Agencies

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University College, 15 King's College Circle, Room 177

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/communitydevelopment.html

Community agencies have played a major role in almost all significant community development initiatives in Toronto in the last few decades, and are arguably the main institutional base for community development and organizing. They have also been important in sparking and maintaining advocacy campaigns that have resulted in major reforms and improvements in the life-world of their clients and the community generally.

However, the level of support for community development, as opposed to service delivery to individuals, varies with political conditions, agency leadership and ideology, funding sources, and accountability requirements. Recent periods of political “discouragement” and “deadening accountabilities” have nearly eliminated community development, community organizing, and advocacy from the practice, budgets, and vocabulary of many community agencies.

Threats to funding have led in some cases to what might be considered a “policing” approach to clients and communities. Meanwhile, corporate ideas about management have gained legitimacy and tended to eliminate practices like community development, which may not be able to demonstrate “measurable” short-term gains – as business-oriented minds perceive them.

Currently, we are in a period of relative openness in agencies to community development and advocacy. We will discuss these developments and try to draw some useful lessons for community development workers.

Bob Luker is a professor in Community Work at George Brown College who has worked with urban youth, native communities, co-operative housing and various anti-poverty and social justice movements since 1968.