



ADR Perspectives *Perspectives PRD*

September 2014 / septembre 2014

Community Resilience & Healing in the Face of Violence

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Darlene writes of the recent experience that has become known as the “Moncton Tragedy” where three RCMP officers were killed. She explains, from a mediator’s view, how that horrific incident became the catalyst for the expression of positive sentiment, healing and community love.

Indeed, we start every day not knowing exactly what to expect. Life brings lessons and opportunities to people and communities which forces us to become vulnerable and open ourselves to the unknown at times when we may least expect it. As we know in our field, part of this unknown world involves conflict and crises. The Chinese word for conflict or crises is comprised of two symbols: “danger” and “opportunity”. In essence, this would suggest that when conflict manifests, it holds the potential for great good or tremendous disaster.

After the tragic death of three police officers in June 2014 in Moncton, NB and a 30-hour search that saw the community locked down, crisis in Moncton ensued and following this crisis came an overwhelming abundance of a compassionate presence. Through this, I have been struck by the devastation and courage of those whose lives will never be the same again, but who refuse to allow violence to have the final word. Healing from the wounds of violence requires enormous commitment, dedication and patience. The phrase “Moncton Strong”, the story of a community coming together to find peace, was coined to describe the resilience of Monctonians and offered a meaningful path to convert overwhelming pain into a state of communal inspiration and connectedness.

With every word and every moment of silence so many aspects brought me to see both people’s tears as well as their resilience. For me, resilience can be understood as the ability and determination to adapt to adversity. Reading different definitions I actually don’t think that resilience is about “thinking it out” when things are getting difficult or trying to avoid pain and stress at all costs. Instead I see the road to resilience as relating more to a collective strength of working and learning from our emotions. Resilience is indeed a powerful state which teaches that we cannot always control what happens in life but we can control the way we perceive and make meaning of it.

In my work as a Conflict Management Practitioner there is an awareness of the many factors that increase resilience: close relationships with family and friends, a sense of confidence in being able to adapt to adversity, good problem solving and communication skills, and an ability to frame negative events within a context that allows the perception of at least a partial positive meaning. Since resilience is vital to survival, it is not surprising that social activities and rituals that support and grow these factors, at both the individual and community level, are all part of how we respond and cope.

In the space created by this horrific loss, Resilience in Moncton was strengthened out of fear, vulnerability and the depth of love for those lost. Many of the family, friends, colleagues and members of the community acted on their desire to honor the fallen ones. One such event I participated in was the Father’s Day Run called “Three Kilometers for Three Fathers”, where I experienced an overwhelming sense of community support as thousands of people showed up dressed in Red to engage collectively together through support and seek new ways to heal.

When I think of beauty and courage in response to violence, I think of the various forms of healing. Some

will turn to the power of dialogue, sports, arts, gardening, culture or music to bring about strength and healing. Some will turn towards meditation, prayer and others may turn to music to draw them from the dark well of pain. The strengthening of community was the “bit of beauty” that was woven from the pain and brutality of violence through resilience to a place where healing can occur.

I feel I have witnessed a community’s ability to convert a torrent of difficult thoughts and feelings into something that, while rooted in memories of the horrific, could construct a bridge to a different set of emotions and perspectives. That creative bridge provides a way to move ahead past tragic events, propelled forward with the thought that we are all interconnected.

Moncton has utilized an integrated approach to conflict management emerging as a collective community of engagement, inspiration, collaboration, and support for each other. A new social paradigm of interaction has emerged which goes beyond that of simply being known for our hospitality. A further shift in perception has been a renewed sense of respect and appreciation for the RCMP as well as the other people who serve and protect our communities.

The road to resilience in Moncton will not be an easy road. Many obstacles will be present but transcending these will allow us to create a unique space for Monctonians to withstand the shock of the tragic experience, and convert pain into a community story that offers a sense of hope, interdependence and connectedness among all.

Darlene Doiron has served as a mediator, coach, facilitator, consultant and trainer for the past 20 years and is currently employed as an internal resource within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. She is currently working towards completing a Master’s Degree through the United Nations University of Peace in Sustainable World Peace and Conflict Resolution.

