

Building capacity to re-make services & systems:

Part 1
*of capacity
building
paper series*



What it feels like to shift from working at a desk to being part of a fast-paced interdisciplinary team.

Reflections on the Apprentice Role,
Burnaby Starter Project 2014

*Written by Sabrina Dominguez, Janey Roh, and Laura Cuthbert.
Introduction by Dr. Sarah Schulman.*



Rotterdam | Sydney | Vancouver

website: www.inwithforward.com

email: hello@inwithforward.com



We welcome you to use and share this publication using the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license. Read more about the license: creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Introduction

pg. 4

Background

pg. 8

The Apprentices

pg. 10

Starting Points

pg. 11

Learning Points

Diving-in

pg. 13

Blending disciplines

pg. 17

Team roles & tensions

pg. 19

Graduations

pg. 22

Revisions

pg. 24

Lessons for systems

pg. 26

What next?

pg. 28

Conclusion

pg. 30

Appendix: The Apprentice Role, explained

pg. 31

Sarah Schulman

InWithForward Founder

How do you build capacity to make, test, and tweak new services and policies from the ground-up?

There's not much empirical research on how to enable the social sector to innovate.

"Scholars have noted that little systematic information exists about the factors that influence innovation in nonprofit and public sector organizations," concludes the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society's 2012 report* on the topic.

Even the practitioner literature is scant - biased towards abstracted recommendations rather than honest reflections and real results.

This paper tries to document the transition from social service deliverer to innovation practitioner. Instead of top-level recommendations, we offer gritty portraits of a ten-week immersive learning and innovation process in Burnaby, British Columbia.

*Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair. 31 January, 2012. "What determines the capacity for continuous innovation in social sector organizations?" A Rockefeller Foundation Report produced by Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society.

We package our ten-week innovation processes as Starter Projects. Because they are designed to kickstart local partnerships and build traction inside organizational systems for continuous Grounded Change - with the people not well served by those systems.

You can read more about the approach we call Grounded Change in our draft paper: inwithforward.com/resources/introducing-grounded-change

In past projects, we've always seconded a staff member from the service system into our core project team. To work alongside us, and bring new practices back into their organization. Trouble is, they've never gone back. They've discovered they are an anomaly. A round peg trying to fit into a square hole. With skills and perspectives not widely shared.

That's why we no longer see individual capacity building as a success. For us, success isn't simply rolling out an 'innovative' product or service. Instead, success is embedding organizational capacity to develop and prototype new services & networks that bring about measurable change with people most on the margins.

But, how to generate capacity?

Most of the organizational training we've seen (and run) is devoid of rigorous applied learning. There are conferences, workshops, toolkits, camps, hackathons, and simulations. All without any mechanisms for modeling new routines in-context, reshaping or dismantling existing routines, and curating staff *teams* to link process with results.

We believe the only way to link process with results is through immersion in the messy day-to-day realities of a live project, where a more experienced interdisciplinary team can model and provide critique to a new interdisciplinary team.

Increasingly, this is what educators are realizing too. “The idea is that teachers, like doctors in medical residencies, need to practice repeatedly with experienced supervisors before they can be responsible for classes on their own,” writes Mokoto Rich in a New York Times article exploring classroom apprenticeships.**

Using the apprenticeship model

In-context apprenticeships have long been used to spread craft work. And we view innovating as change craft. Because it is all about making roles, tools, and experiences - packaged as social services, policies, and neighborhood networks - to prompt individual and systems change.

Crafts are produced in small batches. That’s how they retain their quality. We know this can seem at odds with social innovation’s focus on replication and scale. But a decade of project work around the world has helped us see that the best way to spread change is via immersive learning. In-context. Rather than mass producing the services and networks. Out-of-context.

In the Burnaby Starter Project, we designed three levels of immersive learning experiences around three key roles: Apprentices, Debriefers, and Strategists. Instead of seconding one lone person from the service system into our project team, we would bring in at least two fulltime Apprentices.

Around our project team, we would convene managers and executive directors from the service system. These Debriefers would meet regularly, and we hoped, start to cultivate organizational environments more receptive to bottom-up working. Strategists would be academics, government advisors and local leaders who could help us take a longer range view.

Of course, not everything worked as planned. Strategists met only three times over the course of the ten weeks, and were the least immersed in the day-to-day doing.

**Mokoto Rich. 10 October 2014. “As Apprentices in Classroom, Teachers Learn What Works.” http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/11/us/as-apprentices-in-classroom-teachers-learn-what-works.html?_r=0



We struggled to articulate the practicalities of their role. Debriefers convened every two weeks, in the apartment complex within which we lived and worked. They got the methods. But we never explored how their own internal organizational routines could accommodate such methods in the longer-term.

Apprentices literally took a plunge. Their own practice had to dramatically shift. Without any preparation - or foundation building. There were three Apprentices, and three InWithForward team members. We hoped lots of 1:1 pairing, modeling, feedback and sharing would ease the transition. But, as we learned, it was the transition *out* of the Starter Project and into Prototyping that we’re now re-thinking.

Moving from Starters to Prototypes

Prototyping is where we actually make, test, and revise the new social services, neighborhood networks, and policies generated during the Starter Project. It’s where we find out which of our assumptions are wrong and what might actually bring about better outcomes, for whom. To do prototyping well, then, you’ve got to be incredibly discerning - and understand what to measure and how to generate alternative interventions quickly.

In November 2014, we will start prototyping Kudos, an alternative to disability day programs. Alongside Kudos, we will prototype a new way to organize human resourcing within three community living organizations. How do we set-up flexible project teams drawing on users, frontline workers, managers, and functional staff to regularly re-make services and policies?

Keep reading to find out what Laura, Sabrina, and Janey’s experience as Apprentices can tell us as we move forwards.

How We Looked For Teammates!

by Jonas · Project Burnaby Project Page · February 19, 2014



We're looking for teammates. To help us get to know folks living in the Edmonds / Kingsway neighborhood of Burnaby, British Columbia; understand what connection and disconnection really means; and come up with super concrete ideas that enable many more people to thrive. Read more about the Starter Project [here](#).

The Burnaby Starter Project started by identifying a population group (*people with a disability, seniors, refugees*), living in a particular place (*a social housing complex in Burnaby, British Columbia*), and experiencing a problem (*social isolation*) as perceived by local partners (*3 service providers & a government agency*).

You can read more about the Burnaby Starter Project: inwithforward.com/burnaby

Our first step was to recruit a local Apprentice Team who could work alongside us - in Apartment #303 of the social housing complex - to reframe the problem & co-develop solutions with fellow residents and neighbours.

In March 2014, we put out a call for Apprentices publicly on our website and local listservs, and internally within the three service providers. We created a quick-and-dirty website to show what the role entailed.

To apply, we asked candidates to talk about where they grew up and their sense of belonging; their sources of new ideas; and to invent a new

Why hello,

Thanks for wanting to become an apprentice! We're looking for a team of 3 that complements each other. In terms of backgrounds, skills, personalities, smoothie flavors. We've put together some prompt questions to help bring your flavor out.

You might write responses, or send along a sketch, a photo, a short video, an audio clip. Whatever works. We know you're busy. We're not looking for anything polished. Or the length of War & Peace. Short and sweet is great.

Sneak Peak

Give us a hint of who you are. You might write a couple of sentences (under 100 words) to respond to each question. Or put some photos together. Or even make a short video with your replies.

- Tell us a little bit about the neighborhood(s) you grew up-in. How did they shape you?
- Do you feel like you belong? To where? To whom? Why?
- Reveal 3 things that aren't on your resume. If you have a resume, send along.
- What was the last interesting thing you read? or watched? or listened to?
- What's your ideal smoothie flavor?

Real Work

We're a big fan of seeing and touching things. So we'd love to see and touch your actual work product.

Show us a piece of work you've made that you think is **good**. You could show us a photo, a document, an illustration, a PowerPoint presentation, a video, an email. In no more than a paragraph, tell us why you think it's good.

Show us a piece of work made that you (now) think is a **blatant**. You could show us a photo, a document, an illustration, a PowerPoint presentation, a video, an email. In no more than a paragraph, tell us why you think it's a bit crap. And how you would do it differently now.



T is for Team

Let's be honest: teams can be tough. And also ridiculously fun!

- Tell us about your most painful team experience. What was your role?
- On our website (inwithforward.com/burnaby-teams) we list the different parts that make up an awesome apprentice team. Which 'parts' do you think you contribute to the team?

Got Support?

We want to know more about your day job and organizational backbone. The apprentice role is unpaid. We hope you'll walk away with heaps of learning. That you can apply back in other places. If you're with an organization, tell us about it. How will they support you over the 30 weeks? And what's in it for them?

Actual Scenarios

Here's 3 real situations we've faced in our work in Apeldoorn and Adelaide. Tell us how you'd react.

- 1) We're standing in front of a grocery store, trying to meet people and invite them for a dinner to learn more about their life. We've set-up a booth, and offered free apples and bananas. Nobody is stopping. It's been two hours. What do you do?
- 2) You're having dinner with Kevin, an older man in his 70s who lives alone. You want to understand what Kevin thinks is a good life. Kevin says a good life is him being left alone. He likes being solitary. What else might you do or say to explore Kevin's conceptualization of a good life?
- 3) We've spent the last three days developing posters and materials for a community exhibition. To explain where we are in the project, and share some of our early findings. We've invited a number of local organizations and policymakers. As they read the stories of people, some of the stakeholders begin to respond defensively. "We're already doing everything you've put up here. Nothing is new." How do you respond? How might you set-up the next stakeholder experience differently?

Please send your materials to hello@inwithforward.com by 22 March. If you can make a single PDF with your responses and pieces of work, that would be helpful! Thank you!

A team briefing document sent to all applicants

smoothie flavour. We also asked them to show us a piece of good and bad piece of work, and to comment on their definitions of both. We requested they share a painful team experience, and their personal take-aways. Finally, we gave them three scenarios they were likely to face and had them problem-solve.

We received sixteen applications, and invited six of the candidates to a collective interview over breakfast. At breakfast, we facilitated three rapid exercises to gauge candidates' comfort with different kinds of data (ethnographic stories, visual maps, and academic articles), and to test how they worked in both pairs and small groups.

It was a tough call. But a mere three weeks later, we found ourselves meeting Sabrina, Janey and Laura in front of a grocery store in Burnaby for our first day together. Our inaugural team experience? Co-designing and prototyping smoothies for each other, within time and budgetary constraints.

In the pages that follow, we hope you'll get a feel for what Sabrina, Janey and Laura experienced over the 75 days that followed. In their words, not ours.



Janey Roh

is a Team Manager at PosAbilities, one of Vancouver's largest service providers of Residential and Community Living Services. She oversees 4 residential and 1 day programs - where she is in charge of hiring, training, and supervising staff. Janey's background is in sociology, education, and learning disabilities. Two things you won't find on Janey's resume? She's plays the drums and she once worked for the Pepsi Taste Challenge.



Sabrina Dominguez

is a Geographer/ Urban Planner/ Designer. In 2013, she completed the Institute Without Boundaries' Interdisciplinary Design Strategy Programme, where she was part of a team of 10 designers using communication, spatial, product and systems design to tackle public service delivery challenges for Dublin City Council. Two lesser known facts about Sabrina? She speaks Polish and plays the ukulele.

Laura Cuthbert

is a Community Connector for Simon Fraser Society for Community Living. She also works as a Freelance Aboriginal Linguist - having grown up in a home where both Haida and English were spoken. She's got a background in museum studies, linguistics, improvisation, peer mediation, and youth leadership. Laura writes zines, produces podcasts, writes songs, and teaches improv - just to name a few things.

Janey

I had been in my position as a Team Manager for a large provider of community living services for nearly two years and was feeling a bit stuck. Stuck in the sense that I didn't feel I was making enough progress or change. I had been looking for new ideas to try, and then the call for Apprentices for the InWithForward team went out.

The Burnaby Starter Project was what it was called. It seemed to be a project about trying to connect people to their community in more intentional ways. And not just people with a disability. This seemed like a good opportunity to gather some fresh resources, and look beyond our sector. I could not have anticipated what was to come, or how I would feel about the work.

Laura

I was a Community Connector for Simon Fraser Society for Community Living, focused on Asset Based Community Development. Our role is to help facilitate and build relationships within neighbourhoods. People who are living with disabilities are often isolated from their surroundings, for a variety of reasons, but Connectors work with individuals to develop their networks, places they go, people they see, and try to create less reliance on the agencies that support them.

The position was brand new to Simon Fraser, and I was actually only three months into it, when I saw the call for Apprentices. I applied. Working with people to find connections was honestly a lot of work. I had become bored, confused, and just felt like something was lacking in my own approach. Even though I had the opportunity to change up my days within Connecting, I was falling into the trap of settling. Of not pushing boundaries. I was developing a passion for helping people, and yet was losing sight of people helping themselves. That was a dangerous place to be. That's why the Apprentice role with InWithForward seemed like a good opportunity to gain some more intentionality.

I was also curious to see the differences in what InWithForward was presenting.



Laura having an ethnographic dinner with one of the families living in apartment complex.

Asset Based Community Development focuses on what is in a neighbourhood to begin with, and then works with people to become a part of that existing landscape. *In my time with InWithForward, it became apparent that there was a different set of outcomes and practices underpinning the two approaches. With the Burnaby Starer Project, we did not see community connections as the ultimate goal. Connecting*

was viewed as a means to an end - a way to enable people to live great lives. That meant we were looking at what kinds of connections help people to do that.

And we are designing more than the connections themselves. Looking instead, at interactions people had with systems and their families, and trying to activate a lot of new things in neighborhoods and organizations.



Dave showing Sabrina a photo album from his younger years during one of the many ethnographic dinners.

Sabrina

You don't learn to swim by reading a manual. You learn by jumping into the pool - even the deep end - and splashing about, kicking like you've seen others kick, venturing further away from the wall with each attempt, buoyed by confidence until you're crossing the pool with ease. This is what immersive learning is about. It starts with doing rather than thinking about doing.

From the very first week, the InWithForward (IWF) Apprenticeship was a cannonball into the deep end. There was no procedural binder to read through or on-boarding video to watch.

We started on-the-ground, in the neighbourhood where we would do our research in subsequent weeks. On our first day, we got a taste of IWF's methods and approach through five fun activities that mirrored key stages of the project to come. That first day we co-designed and prototyped smoothie experiences for each other. By the second day, we were brainstorming, designing and mocking up materials and ways to recruit residents.

We didn't have the same experience, background or conceptual grasp of IWF's way of working as the core team, but we were asked to open ourselves up to learning on the fly and trust that we would absorb the skills and knowledge we needed. Though we

learned through osmosis, the intent behind each step along the process was always explicit.

Each skill, method or phase of the project, was introduced to us through a discussion, informal mini-presentation or a write up, after which we had the chance to apply the concept ourselves and receive feedback. Whether it was recruitment, ethnography or generative writing, we had multiple opportunities to practice and improve at each activity.

When it came time for my first ethnographic dinner, I was happy to observe and take notes while Sarah led the evening. My learning

progressed quickly from observation to participation and within no time I was comfortable enough to do ethnography without a core team member. Without the immersion, increased levels engagement and constant feedback, I would not have learned as much as I did as quickly as I did.

The experience felt neither like school nor a new job, but had the best qualities of both. It was exciting. I was learning and sharing in the experience alongside two other apprentices, so I didn't feel alone. We all got to contribute our skills but also try new things. We had permission to make mistakes and not always get things perfect on the first go.

Janey

Making the shift from working in an office to working on a project like this was not easy. I like predictability, knowing what my job is and exactly what is expected. Joining the project, I never realized how much of an adjustment I would have to make in my everyday working. As a manager, I knew what each day would entail: reviewing documentation such as incident reports; ensuring proper reporting and follow-up was completed; checking to make sure schedules and budgets were aligned; addressing human resourcing activities. All of this changed when the project started.

I went from a structured day to unstructured, yet controlled, chaos. Chaos in the sense that there was always so much happening. From reading

academic articles on identity theory; to developing visual research tools; to creating surprising experiences in the elevator; to hanging out at Subway late into the evening with one of the residents of the building. All this could happen in just one day, and every day held something different. It was all based on what we had just learned and what we still needed to discover. What was unusual was that we weren't always sure what we needed to discover. We let this unfold as we met residents. Working in this no-agenda kind of way was something that I had never experienced. At best, I had read about this type of 'emergent research' in past sociology courses, but had not envisioned that I would be the one actually doing and living it.



Janey presenting her early ideas for a visual tool to help residents reflect on their multiple identities.

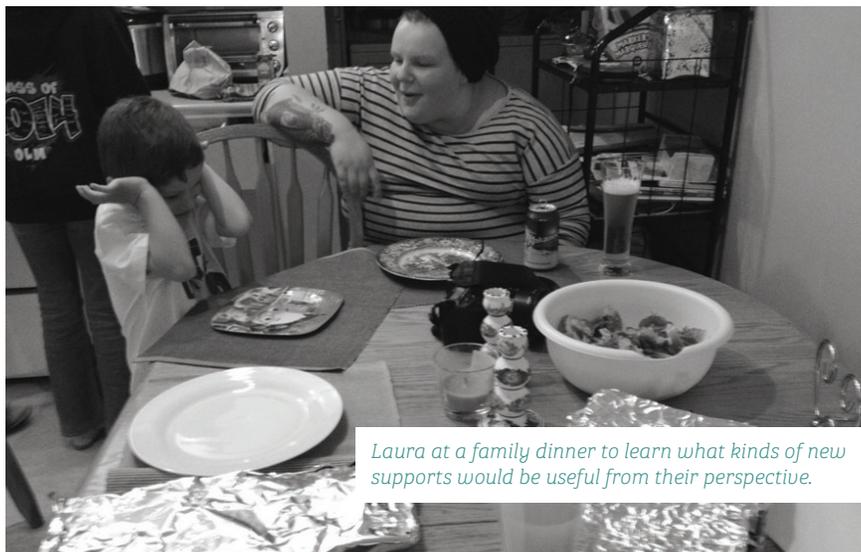
Laura

I struggled with the immediate transition into the Apprentice role. Change was already happening in my life, so to do a complete switch ended up being taxing on not just me, but on my external jobs, family, and relationships. It was manageable, but the change took more time than I expected. And in truth, more time than we had.

As a Community Connector, I largely worked on my own. So I was going from completely making my own schedule to early mornings and late evenings with the team. Before, I had only really felt accountable to myself and those I directly supported. It was a challenge to work as part of a team. We had to become close, fast. We were fast friends, but even trying to explain my schedule was difficult. I had just forgotten what

it was like to work with others, forgotten how to do my part. We were working in small sections of a bigger picture, and no matter how beautiful that picture was, I couldn't always shake the fact that it wasn't just my picture.

There was so much vulnerability in the experience. Letting people know that I have things going on is one thing, but feeling the need to share exactly what was going on was harder. I think I cried in front of the team within the first few days. I'm a private person, and was working with very little privacy. Throughout the project, it did become easier. We built a relationship and created a bond. Once we were inspired as a group, there was really no stopping the process. We could do so much, together.



Laura at a family dinner to learn what kinds of new supports would be useful from their perspective.

Sarah

The hallmark of InWithForward's approach is rigorously blending methods from design, the social sciences, and community development. By design, we mean making and testing new kinds of tangible interactions. Whether they are face-to-face interactions, or interactions between a person and an object (like a brochure, a tool, a back-end system). By social sciences, we mean drawing on evidence from sociology, anthropology, economics, philosophy, and history about what creates change for people. By community development, we mean using mobilization and outreach techniques to hit-the-ground, literally, and meet people where they are.

Janey

I hadn't really understood what role design would have in this type of project. My assumption was that designers would be on hand to make things look appealing. My assumption grossly underestimated what their real role and experience would bring to the project. Design plays a critical role in making abstract ideas concrete - and this is something I had never encountered in my years of working in service

delivery. Typically, we think about what supported individuals may want or need, but little attention is paid to the form in which information presented affects not only them, but the people who are supporting them. We rely so much on verbal information sharing without seeing how we can use imagery to provoke different kinds of conversations, and discover new insights.



Janey showing Caitlyn a set of membership cards to understand how she sees belonging and connection to community groups.

Sabrina

As a designer, what was different about InWithForward's methodology to others was the extent to which every object, material or experience we made was grounded in some kind of social science theory. I studied both social science and design, but have never really melded the two like we did in this work. *By calling it 'design research' designers often get away with loose or non-existent methodologies, relying more on intuition than rigorous theoretical backing. This approach can certainly overlook ideas, concepts, questions or insights that are supported by history & research.* For instance, if asked to design a communication material that would explore an individual's sense of self, I think many designers could end up with some kind of mapping exercise that would probe various aspects of identity. But I am not certain that many would base it on academic research like Constantine Sedikedes' self-concept model made up of the individual, collective and relational self, each of which has multiple elements that contribute to identity formation. This adds a depth to our work - and offers new starting points for generating ideas.

Laura

Something I had been lacking in my role as a Community Connector was the model of rapid making, testing and tweaking. Over our 10-weeks, our designs were so immediately put to the test that I could feel what was working and what wasn't working. That was amazing. I love producing content, mapping ideas, and just creating in general. I can't get enough, which is a good thing, because we sure had a lot!



Laura working on a stop-motion animation to illustrate an idea to the Debriefing team.

This process is what I miss most of all being back in my day job. The Starter project was so open, and I felt so inspired, that there was a distinct freedom that distracted from the intense hours. Work became worth the effort. Our creations often translated as joyful too: come for the design, stay for the content.

It may also sound a bit self-centred, but this process made me feel valued, understood, and was the fastest way to turn an independent person into a team player. I wanted to play along, even when it was hard.

Janey



The Apprenticeship required us to shift what we were used to working on, but also where we were used to working. The six of us worked in a small apartment within a social housing complex. There was no escaping each other in such tight confines. This was okay when things were going well, or when we had a hard deadline we needed to meet, but at times of conflict or tension, it could be suffocating. And yet these same conditions allowed us to become cohesive and in sync. During the project, we saw each other more than any members of our family, friends or partners. We worked alongside each other from 10-16 hours a day.

In our team of six, there was no spoken hierarchy. We were all equal, although three of us were new to the team and in learning roles. It was always made clear that all six of us had equal say in what we were doing or the direction we were moving in. On the surface, this sounds like a truly collaborative approach to working. But in practice, there is always a leader. Ours was Sarah. This was an understanding that all of us shared, but wasn't really discussed until the end, when we explored how we reacted in times

of stress and identified where our expectations came from. We realized we were often working towards what Sarah envisioned. Because the three of us hadn't worked in this way before, it was difficult to come up with alternative visions. This wasn't a bad thing. After all, it was Sarah's passion that started all of this work in the first place. She has a lot of experience, and we wanted to consult her. Now having gone through the 10-weeks and the summer, I feel I could and would offer alternatives. This shift is an important part of the learning process.

All of our skills were called upon during the 10-weeks. Whether it was Laura's talent with stop motion animation; Jonas's rapid ability to calculate the dimensions of a space and its needed contents; or Sabrina and Yani's ability to design and create effective materials within a single afternoon.

My own role on the team was to provide a system's point of view. I had worked in the social service sector for a number of years and was familiar with regulating bodies along with the day-to-day workings of being a service provider. This role also meant turning a critical eye onto myself and the sector that I had been working in for years. It meant going to meet with and shadow folks that worked within the system and to use my knowledge of systems to help guide questions, but to also be

able to act as an outside observer and to maintain some measure of discernment.

Sometimes we would adopt new team members. People from the sector that wanted to come work with the team for a day. Stephen D' Souza, Executive Director of Burnaby Community Services, was one of those people. He sent us his reflection on not just the work of the team, but also on the team dynamics. He remarked that the team had undertaken the challenge of conducting ethnographic work with as many of the people in the building that we could, but that something else was happening at the same time. The team was doing ethnographic

work on ourselves as well. He was right.

We were spending an immense amount of time together at various points of the day and in different contexts. It also wasn't always about the work. There were lots of moments of laughing and getting to know each other: a love of eggplant and healthy eating; being a grammy award winning songwriter; being baptized by the pope; growing up in a house of nine girls; going to college at the age of 16. Doing ethnographic work is an intimate process. Similarly, working together in this way allowed for us to form a sense of closeness within a very short span of time.

I am impressed by the work done. But also share the team's apprehension about the road ahead. While they have met and shared so much with many of their neighbours, there are others who avoid them in the halls and can't wait to escape from the elevator when they try small talk. They want the perspective of people from different demographics, but feel stuck in having the same conversations with the same people who are willing to talk to them. A sense of having reached a "plateau" at the mid-mark of their project looms as a cloud that soon they will have to begin prototyping new programs but don't feel they have enough information yet.

Throughout the day I can feel the building tension. An afternoon scrum helps to assign tasks and work for the next few days, but the frustration is still in the air. Sarah decides to take it head on. She explains that this is part of the process... in fact part of every process she has been a part of. This cathartic process, of laying out all of the emotion and attaching meaning to it all, is the heart of their work as they observe others, and I am watching them go through it themselves.

- Steven D'Souza, Executive Director, Burnaby Community Services

Sabrina

I made a lot of things over the course of ten weeks. Hardly a day went by when I wasn't designing or printing off materials. As one of three designers on the team, I knew this would be a large part of my role. But with so many tasks and a tight schedule, it was difficult to fully inhabit different roles when I had the chance, because there was always something that needed to be made.

Because of the constant deadlines, there wasn't much time to be stuck or overly contemplative. Everyone's creative process, whether it was for writing, designing, or ideating, was a little different and at times I found it difficult to be creative or generative at all. I wish I had taken the opportunity to remove myself from the group more and come back with work, rather than attempt everything in front of everyone all the time. Perhaps it was too collaborative. I felt that my work was always better when I created the conditions I needed, but they were difficult to recognize.

When you were wrapped up in your own piece of the puzzle, it was also easy to miss what the rest of the team was doing or learning. This came to a head mid-way through the project when our disconnection from each other proved too frustrating to ignore. It's hard to transfer knowledge and insights, even on a team of six. This raises the perpetual challenge of knowledge

sharing and transfer in general. What are the best ways to share what is learned between members of a team? How do you turn those processes into easy-to-do routines? And how do you scale knowledge transfer and learning to the scale of an agency or partnerships between agencies?

Laura

I don't have an office in my Community Connecting role. I'm usually out, walking the streets, meeting with people. Or if I'm writing reports, I'm writing them from home. In my bed. So switching to writing from someone else's bedroom, on their bed, may seem like only a slight change, but, it was a lot. The pillows weren't as comfy, the blankets were too warm.

I like my space, and time. Being with people, and sometimes only hearing keys typing in the background made me pretty anxious. It was hard to not wonder what people were working on, whether I was working hard enough, doing my part. I would occasionally just get trapped in that cycle, I'd start worrying about what everyone else was doing, and then lose track of where I was at. At the same time, even though we worked in a small space, we could get out of the loop of one another. We had to work very hard at communication, and have moments of lightness. A picnic. A movie night. Hashbrowns and eggs late at night. A dance to Sam Smith.

Sarah

We designed the Apprenticeship as a short-term experience. Ten weeks of deep learning. From hiring and training interdisciplinary teams in the UK and Australia, I've found you can't sustain the intensity beyond three months. That's when the tension that is so necessary for creative combustion begins to give way to exhaustion and excessive stress. Roles and pacing need to shift to keep the collaborative spark alive.

Our intention was that after the ten weeks, we'd help Apprentices return to their pre-existing roles or we'd transition the Apprentices to being InWithForward team members for the Prototype. This would require us to shift our expectations - from the Apprentices as learners to them as leaders. Both scenarios have come to pass, but not without stakeholder confusion. We cannot just shift the capacities of the Apprentices - but of their colleagues & bosses to recognise and draw upon their new skills & mindsets.

Sabrina

I don't know if I ever really felt like an Apprentice. Perhaps that's the hallmark of a good Apprenticeship? Because we jumped into the project so quickly, and were contributing to the work in such meaningful ways from the start, I truly felt like an equal member of the team (most of the time). But perhaps being labelled an 'apprentice' colored my behaviours in unintentional ways? I sometimes found it difficult to voice my opinion when it differed from the majority. I wonder if being in a 'learning' role may have dampened my confidence at times when I would generally have had more of it?

And I wonder, how we were perceived by the project partners? Since I hadn't worked

in the disability space before, I felt like an outsider. And because apprenticeships are not common practice these days outside of the trades, I wonder how they made sense of this role. Did they perceive us as being any different than interns? These questions have greater implications for when Apprentices transition into full team members during the Prototype.

It's interesting and exciting to draw attention to the different kind of experience an apprenticeship offers compared to a school practicum, internship, work placement, or professional development course. The fast-paced, intense, learn-as-you-do approach asks so much more of you than a temporary entry-level role or online course

Janey



Sabrina recording "Pipeline of Ideas", a podcast about the different things staff can do with the people they serve.

might. Very few opportunities stimulate as much learning while simultaneously enabling you to practice it in a meaningful way right away.

Ideally, the learning is continuous. And it has been for us. You cannot predict what skills will be in demand over the course of the project; so, you never know what you'll be doing next. One week you might be producing a radio show for the first time and filming a web series the next. This means there's always a learning opportunity around the corner and that you'll amass skills you would not have even known existed.

Being labelled "Apprentice" definitely had some unintended consequences. It can subtly create a power differential, and lead to an external perception that we lack knowledge or expertise. At times, our partner agencies haven't perceived us of having much authority. There have been many times when we have been asked, "When does Sarah/ Jonas come back? Have you talked to them? What do they think?" It seems that the InWithForward team needs to be mentioned in order to give what we are saying legitimacy and credibility.

Despite some real moments of doubt and fear over the course of the Apprenticeship, these did not stop me from wanting to move from being an Apprentice to a full member of the Prototyping team. Working over the summer with only a portion of the team in Canada and the rest in the Netherlands has not always been ideal. However, it has given us space to carve out our own roles and gain more confidence. Not having the whole team present at all hours has meant that Sabrina and I are the decision-makers. We are the ones interfacing with staff and managers from partner agencies to test our learning materials. With this experience under my belt, I feel much more ready for the Prototype.

Janey

In our last weekend as Apprentices, we went away to a cabin in the woods. We went hiking, talked about the pacing of the Apprenticeship, and whether we would adjust aspects. In some ways, fully immersing ourselves and getting right to work was necessary. The time pressure was a point of difference with other projects in the social sector. But it also meant that during the first few weeks of the project, I was doing work that I didn't fully understand. *There was a constant feeling of being just one step behind. Perhaps this is an integral part of immersive learning? Not ever knowing what is coming, but needing to move along with whatever is happening in that moment? In this way, you end up defying your own expectations about what is possible.* I wonder if I could have been more productive at the start if I had been exposed to the theoretical frameworks and foundations beforehand. We can prototype this going forward.

Sabrina

Looking back on our project, I would have appreciated more background to the themes and theories we explored prior to starting. I really enjoyed our first day and week, but was caught off guard when the project's core theme (connections) had evolved from my initial understanding (to identity).

This led to a few weeks of feeling like I was on my back foot, always playing catch up, less able to fully engage because I was still making sense of things. Maybe a bit more time in the early stages could be devoted to developing everyone's core knowledge alongside trying out the new activities? *There's a small window between playing it too safe in an overly comfortable learning environment, and overstretching ones experimental muscles to the point where new experiences can be too overwhelming to support progression. An immersive apprenticeship can develop capacity so quickly in that sweet spot.*

Laura

What could we change? Maybe, just a place to sleep? I could have used some catnaps. The project was so ambitious, and at times, we all felt lost. If we didn't have a solid start to the week, it felt like we were constantly playing catch-up, but we didn't know the route, or the outcome, so all we could do was chase. That's part of this emergent way of working. And it takes time to get comfortable with not knowing where you will end up.

The InWithForward team was good about going back to try and find us, but sometimes, the project felt lonely. New things are lonely. *Sometimes learning has to be an individual process - not a group process - with its own timing. The conundrum is that pacing was part of the magic of the experience. It just became occasionally strange to know I was having to catch-up on the things I love most: knowledge and creativity.*



Janey

Half-way through the 10-week Starter Project, I started asking myself: Will you go back into the system? It wasn't a statement about my job. I loved being a Team Manager. I really did. The people I worked with have a true passion for making things better for persons served; they are so committed and hard working. I enjoyed program management; overseeing a day program and residential homes was satisfying in that I could see the direct impact of new practice and the potential for change. And yet still, I felt we weren't moving towards change quickly enough. I wanted to see some different results.

Having the summer to reflect and to better understand the process of prototyping has helped me land on a different question. Instead of asking, can I go back? I'm asking, how can I go back? What conditions do we need to create to embed this way of working?

Innovation too often takes shape outside of organizations and systems. Because people have found it too difficult to try and create change from within and to protect the integrity of the change being implemented. Through the project, I critiqued this approach, but towards the end, found that I was taking the same stance. It's so much easier to imagine creating something new and shiny rather than wrestling

with the way things are currently done.

During the summer, Sabrina and I worked on developing a learning platform. The purpose was to share our learning from the 10-week project and to get staff within the system thinking about how they could do things in a different way. We tested out our learning materials with frontline staff, supervisors, and managers. We found people were hungry for something different. That people wanted to try new ideas but just weren't sure where to find them or how they could implement them.



Testing learning materials with frontline staff to get their reactions to a new professional development platform.

Change needs to come from within, especially if it is meant to be long lasting and impactful. Not just for the people receiving services, but also for the people delivering them. If we always try and create something new and different outside of systems, systems won't have the opportunity to change. What this project and the summer has shown me is that learning is only good if

widely shared. It's no good to keep insights to ourselves. Innovation should not be a job delegated to a special few. It's something that is meant to be shared and starts with subtle changes: in changing the way a form looks, the way a question is phrased, how a schedule is presented.

Here's some of the routines I'd like to promote back within the disability system:

- **Placing time constraints** around a change process (10 weeks, for instance).
- **Making decisions in the context** of rapid on-the-ground work rather than in meetings.
- When we do have meetings, **spending an equal amount of time identifying what we're learning works for users**, rather than just on information updates and health and safety.
- Developing research questions and **seeking out new forms of data** before developing a plan for implementation.
- **Incorporating design and social science theory** into service development and revision. This could mean contracting a trained designer to be paired with a program manager to provide support during intensive service design and to have continued access when things aren't working at the ground level. This also

means bringing more sociology and anthropology reading into our day-to-day work.

- **Bringing together staff from different parts of our organization**, in time limited teams, to get out of the office. Trying out new things in a different context can help us see things from new perspectives. We could look at very interaction our users have with our systems - via the brochures, the forms, the conversations - and rethink what those interactions are for.
- **Establishing expectations when new staff are hired** around small-scale trial and error. Giving staff explicit permission to document what doesn't work with our users, and try new practices. Recognizing staff who are iterating their practices. We can measure number of iterations, rather than just the number of health & safety violations.
- **Measuring outcomes in a different way.** Spending time with the people who use our services to actually see if there is any change in their day-to-day lives, rather than confusing activities with change.

Laura

After the Starter Project, I went back to Connecting four out of five days a week. On that fifth day, I help out Janey and Sabrina with packaging up the learning from the 10-weeks. That way I'm still connected to the team, and to the work we did together.

It has been nice to get back to Connecting, but the process has been jarring. Over the 10 weeks, I learned a lot about the disability system and have been trying to integrate a more systemic perspective into my one-on-one work with people. But this isn't so easy. I've also learned a lot about the way I think. That the first thought that runs through my head is what I've been trained to think through culture, experience, and practice. And that the second thought is who I am, and who I'm working on becoming. I'm trying to be more attentive to both.

Sabrina

I've taken a lot of lessons from the Apprenticeship experience - some personal, organizational, and industry-wide takeaways. As a designer without previous experience in the disability sector, many of the challenges transcend the sector and highlight the need and urgency of working in new ways across all social services.

An important element of transformative change is and will be developing much wider staff capacity. The appetite for learning and changing organizational culture was abundant during the Starter project. From frontline support workers to executive directors, there is a definite hunger and desire to do things differently.

But just because a new initiative, project, program or product is launched, doesn't mean it's being done differently enough to achieve more effective outcomes. It takes a truly reflexive organization to do what it takes to sustain change - and continually asks themselves, what isn't working, for whom?

This is where designers can help. Beyond the traditional realms of graphic or web design, designers can lead and support constant iteration of service delivery models and policy development.

This means helping organizations see and understand how their

Janey

Towards the end of the project, we were at a meeting when Sarah said something that really stuck with me. It was a simple statement but had far more impact than perhaps she may have even realized. She said that we weren't just starting a project. We were starting a movement.

A movement. That was it. It captured what I was feeling during the project and still resonates with me now. That it wasn't just a project. It was more than that. That the work we were doing could have far more reaching implications than just in the community that we were working in. That perhaps, we could mobilize people in all sectors to think about how services are delivered and designed and really change how things are done both inside and outside of systems.

It's this big idea that's propelling us forward. In the prototype, I'll be helping to lead a Learning Lab to bring more and more staff into this way of working.

We invite you to join us!

users think, act and feel, and use that knowledge to design better interactions. Organizations also need to realize and treat their own staff as users of a system.

Design methods, in conjunction with social science methods like ethnography, force one to design and make things work for real people, not to hedge one's bets on hypothetical scenarios. Designers can help take the guesswork out by being on hand to make things tangible or craft experiences for people to respond to along the process. Before investing time, money and labor into an idea that would take months to plan and coordinate through traditional means, a designer can quickly mock up a learning package for staff or make a service look real to persons-served, only to learn from testing that the idea is not really desired or an incorrect fit. This leaves more time for developing a strong rationale for ideas and clearly answering all your WHYs.

Most of all, I hope more people begin to understand that design is not just about aesthetics or just about design thinking. Without the process of doing organizations and individuals can fall perilously close to repeating old patterns, and therefore replicating the same old outcomes.

At the end of the Starter Project, Laura returned to her day job as a Community Connector within a social service agency. Janey stayed on as a secondee to help us figure out how to engage many more service staff within the full Prototyping Project. And Sabrina left the team to take on a permanent position elsewhere. Starter Projects and Prototyping Projects are, after all, short-term. They lack certainty and stability.

And therein lies the rub. We want to spread and embed capacity within delivery and policy agencies and, yet, this work is more a lifestyle than a job. It requires people to give much more of themselves. To challenge their own status quo. To quickly shift course and adapt. To withstand emergence and uncertainty.

Our hunch is that it's about balance. That it's about enabling staff to work in an emergent and disruptive way some of the time. Not all of the time. How would we make short, immersive experiences the norm once a year for social & public sector staff - but stitch it together with more task-based, predictable workloads?

What if staff of social sector delivery and policy agencies had the 80-20 split? Such that 80% of their time was spent on their task-based, predictable work. And 20% of time was spent joining an agile project team around a bottom-up question with which they were struggling? These teams might be supported by folks with design & social science experience (from universities, consultancies, etc.) who could introduce interesting theories and help make physical prototypes.

This is what we'll try starting in November 2014 - as we build a Learning Lab around the Kudos Prototype.*** We'll be looking for ways to constantly recalibrate the balance between deep immersion and wide perspectives; novelty and comfort; intentionality and opportunism. Along the way, we'll be recording our experiments and the results with short stories and episodes of film. Because at the end of the day, we want to be co-constructing a new kind of reality. That's less a one-time show. And more an evolving performance.

***Kudos is what we're tentatively calling a new in-community learning & badging platform that we'll be prototyping as an alternative to disability day services. Go to inwithforward.com/burnaby to learn more.

Parts of the Apprentice Role. Not everyone needs everything!



- An understanding of human behavior, and some different levers for behavior change (from psychology, sociology, economics, etc.)
- An understanding of organizational behavior, and some different levers for policy change (from politics, public administration, etc.)
- Experience with social research, including prompting conversations & qualitatively analyzing the results.
- A love of reading varied sources - from self-help books to sci-fi - and an ability to find random connections.
- A penchant for writing down what you are seeing, hearing, and feeling.
- The swagger to pick up the phone or walk into a store and persuade people to join your cause.
- A knack for just 'being' with people - making them feel utterly comfortable & able to open-up.
- The ability to facilitate a dialogue between all sorts of folks - maybe those in business suits & orange jumpsuits!
- A mind for planning, preparing, organizing lots of different things at once - without breaking into a sweat.
- A skill for making spreadsheets, interpreting statistics, and creating maps & charts.
- The ability to transform a space - from a boring meeting room into an interactive exhibition.
- A flair for making abstract ideas concrete - by making models, visualizations, drawings, scenarios, websites, etc.
- Experience packaging ideas for different user groups - through visual identity, branding, and most importantly, content segmentation.
- Adept at InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator.
- Not bad at taking photos, video, and editing short clips together.
- The ability to problem-solve on the spot - and with some cardboard and tape, repair Ikea furniture, create a pop-up stand, make a diorama, or whatever.

The Essentials of the Apprentice Role:

- You live in British Columbia - and preferably in or around the Burnaby area!
- A deep-rooted belief that the status quo is not good enough. Injustices make you both angry, and inspired.
- An insatiable curiosity about why things are the way they are, and an ability to ask insightful questions.
- An opportunistic mindset - you're constantly looking for what's missing or what could be different.
- An ability to give and get feedback. And not take it personally (it's hard, we know!).
- Some awareness of how your own limits and boundaries - and an ability to honestly share what you're feeling.
- A willingness to draw on different resources when needed - from past jobs, friends, family members, etc.
- An openness to doing whatever is needed and picking up the slack (without having to be asked).
- A whole lot of attentiveness to quality work. And constantly redefining what quality is for the context.
- (Some) flexibility in your life. We often work into the evenings, and on weekends. This isn't a 9 to 5'ver.





© 2014