



## **And Then What?**

### **Four Community Psychologists Reflect on Their Careers Ten Years After Graduation**

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## And Then What?

### Four Community Psychologists Reflect on Their Careers Ten Years After Graduation

#### Abstract

According to a recent survey of North American Community Psychology (CP) graduate programs, over half of CP graduates find employment in community practice (Dziadkowiec & Jimenez, 2009). That trend has been on the rise over the last few decades. In Canada, Nelson and Lavoie (2010) concluded that, compared to 25 years ago, “there is now a sizable number of community psychologists who are primarily practitioners and applied researchers” (p. 84). In this paper, we provide a glimpse into the career paths of 4 Canadian CP graduates, and describe how our CP training prepared us for our lives after graduation. We completed our master’s degrees in CP at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) (Ontario, Canada) approximately ten years ago. Two of us went on to obtain PhDs while the other two went straight into the workforce. We represent diverse professions: research/evaluation consultant in a hospital setting, government policy analyst, independent researcher/consultant, and Canadian diplomat. Although several of us have worked in academia, we are now primarily community practitioners. We are also mothers and active members of our communities. We will explore what attracted us to the CP program and how we have applied CP values and skills in our respective careers. By providing real-life accounts of what CP graduates do after their training, we hope to demonstrate the value that the program has had in our professional and personal lives, as well as to contribute to the ongoing discussion on building relevant CP programs.

Although there are a number of definitions of CP, there is a general consensus about its underlying values (such as social justice, collaboration, citizen participation, emphasis on individual and community strengths, empirical grounding, and prevention) (Aubry, Sylvestre & Ecker, 2010; Goldstein, 1998; Perkins, 2009). Ratcliffe and Neigher (2010) offer the following definition of CP:

“Community Psychology is a distinctive approach to understanding and solving community, organizational, and societal problems....what makes CPs distinctive is that we apply well-established psychological principles and techniques, tested and proven in practice, to improve well-being and effectiveness at individual, organizational, and community levels. We do so with an explicit concern for social justice, inclusiveness and participation, the value of diversity, collaboration, and a focus on strengths.” (p.1)

There is active dialogue among community psychologists about how we define CP, what it means to be a community psychologist, and how best to train the CP practitioners of the future (Fayter, Adamson, Beaulac & Macé, 2010; Lavoie & Brunson, 2010; Perkins, 2010; Wolff, 2009). It is not surprising to hear that over half of recent CP graduates are working as community practitioners, outside of academia (Dziadkowiec & Jimenez, 2009), and in fact a Canadian survey by Nelson and Lavoie (2010) concluded that compared to 25 years ago “there is now a sizable number of community psychologists who are primarily practitioners and

applied researchers” (p. 84). Many community psychologists have voiced their concern that current CP training programs are not adequately preparing graduates for non-academic roles (Jimenez, 2009; Kuperminc, 2009; Meissen, 2009; Wolff, 2009).

The link between CP training programs and career paths for graduates is a topic of great interest to the field as evidenced by the creation of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Practice Group and its ongoing discussions with the Council on Education Programs (Dalton & Julian, 2009). These discussions culminated recently in a special edition of *The Community Psychologist* (Fall 2009) that included commentary on the changing trend in CP careers and the need to align CP programs to meet that trend. The education-career link was also the subject of a special section of *Canadian Psychology* (2010) in which the authors looked at the broad areas in which CP graduates work, as well as current and future training needs. Both journals identified a lack of information about CP practitioners in the field, particularly those who do not publish or present in CP forums.

This lacuna is perhaps felt most strongly by graduate hopefuls, as they weigh their professional options. This dearth of information also makes it difficult for the field as a whole to track the contributions of practitioners in non-traditional CP settings (Fayter, Adamson, Beaulac, & Mace, 2010; Lavoie & Brunson, 2010; Nelson & Aubry, 2010). Finally, without knowing where graduates apply their skills and competencies, the field cannot properly assess whether CP training adequately prepares graduates

for practitioner roles. In order to determine where to go next, we need to take stock of where CP graduates are currently applying their CP values, competencies and skill sets (Jimenez, 2009; Wolff, 2009).

In this article, we hope to contribute to the literature by describing our career paths as four CP graduates working in different practitioner roles in Canada a decade after completing our master's degrees. We will share first-hand accounts of how our CP training has translated into CP practice, and how we are applying our CP values, competencies and skill sets.

For the purposes of this article, we will adopt Dalton & Julian's (2009) view of what constitutes CP practice: "Wherever they work...(CP) graduates engage in community practice whenever they are involved in community research, intervention, advocacy, or collaboration with community organizations" (p. 9). We will focus on commonly accepted CP skills and competencies itemized by Dziadkowiec & Jimenez (2009) for the 2008 survey of CP graduate programs and further refined by Chun (2009). We will demonstrate that our CP training has provided practitioner skills that are transferable across a variety of community settings.

We graduated from the CP master's program at WLU approximately ten years ago. Two of us continued on an academic track before moving into practitioner roles and two headed directly into community practice. Sherri worked as an independent researcher/consultant after graduation and then joined the Canadian Foreign Service based in Ottawa. She is currently director of a community renewal unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) in Ottawa (Ontario). Purnima obtained her PhD in social work at WLU, worked in a university setting for a few years, and is now an evaluation and research consultant at the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health in Ottawa. Stephanie obtained a PhD in psychology at York University in Toronto, Ontario followed by a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Ontario breast cancer community research initiative based in Toronto. She is currently working as a senior policy analyst at Health Canada in Ottawa. Theresa began her career in mental health and homelessness, was employed by two school districts as a research and evaluation officer, and is now an independent research and evaluation consultant in Madoc, Ontario, a few hours west of Ottawa.

### Narratives

#### **Sherri van de Hoef**

I discovered community psychology in my final year

of undergraduate studies at WLU. My parents had just moved from the prairies onto my grandparents' farm in Southern Ontario. At the time big business farm operations were buying up land from what had been modest family farms for generations. I was curious to know more about how the shift from small- to large-scale farming was impacting rural communities. An undergraduate community psychology elective offered the skills, value base and opportunity to explore this topic. I was hooked!

I enrolled in the CP masters program and continued my exploration of agrarian community health, particularly the perspectives of women. I began my research by experiencing it. I learned conventional farming techniques like cutting straw with a combine and bringing in hay for the winter. I explored ecological methods by interning on an organic community farm and working with a local herbalist. My thesis captures those years of discovery and the beauty in our rural communities through a series of coloured photos and narratives of women who work the land ecologically. The CP program provided me with the tools and value base to conduct my research in a respectful and creative way.

When I finished my thesis I had visions of starting my own community farm. But I was heavily in debt and I lacked the management skills that I needed to run a business. I applied for jobs that I thought would enhance my business acumen. I was offered a Management and Consular Officer (MCO) position in the Canadian Foreign Service.

As a graduate student I had developed a healthy scepticism of the government and was concerned that I would not be able to apply my CP values and skills in such a bureaucratic and political environment. On the other hand, I saw the public service as a unique and promising setting for an idealistic CP. The MCO position offered an opportunity to develop management skills, learn Canada's second official language, and explore other cultures while promoting Canadian values. My curiosity and idealism won; I took the job.

As an MCO I ensure that Canadians overseas have access to government support when they need it. Over 3 million Canadians rely on the government for assistance abroad during natural disasters, civil unrest, personal crises, or to access government services. I am also responsible for the management of Canadian offices overseas so that Canada can deliver its international activities in safe and effective working environments. Over a ten-year career I have lived in Côte d'Ivoire, India, Singapore and Canada. My CP skills were invaluable, in particular

collaboration, critical analysis, evidence-based decision making, and action research.

For example, shortly after I began my first assignment in Côte d'Ivoire, civil war broke out. The international media portrayed the conflict as an internal one. I used analytical skills to dig below the surface in order to determine what level of threat existed for Canadians in the country. I monitored local media, tracked incidents in the country, and consulted with colleagues to get a broader sense of the political and cultural context. The results of that analysis confirmed a strong undercurrent of anti-colonialism directed at French citizens. Because French is a second official language in Canada, many of the Canadians in the country were indistinguishable from French nationals, which meant that our citizens were also at risk. We used this information to advise Canadians on their safety and to evacuate them from rebel-held territory.

I have led several task forces in Canada during international crises. In that role, I collaborate with other government departments and service providers to coordinate a whole of government response to affected Canadians. For example, following the earthquake in Haiti (2010) I worked closely with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), other government departments, provincial social services, our officers in Port-au-Prince, and funeral service providers. By coordinating our efforts we were able to find and identify Canadians who had lost their lives. We also ensured that families had support during the logistical and emotional challenges of bringing their loved ones home after such a large-scale international disaster.

In my current role as Director of the MCO Renewal Team I promote community development for my peers whom I have grown to respect and admire. The MCO workload is notoriously broad, demanding and complex. For historical and political reasons the MCO community is not sufficiently equipped to fulfill its mandates. The community has suffered from a chronic lack of recruitment, a lack of targeted training, and the absence of a well-defined community mandate and vision. My team was created to help address these issues.

I have made extensive use of evidence based decision-making and action research skills to help us achieve our mandate. For example, in order to identify needs, strengths and key stakeholders, we held interviews and town halls, conducted surveys, and read all the historical material we could find about the community. We used this research to target several key projects, and then we began to implement

them. We established governing and consulting bodies to represent management and employee interests and worked with partners in human resources to come up with an HR plan. We led a group of peer-elected MCO representatives to develop a draft of their community vision and mission statement. We have created and delivered training courses customized for MCOs, and are moving forward a classification project that has been idling for nearly twenty years.

Until recently, I hesitated to tell my CP colleagues that I am a Canadian diplomat. I left the CP program with the impression that practitioner work was less valued than academic work, and that work with mainstream communities was less valued than work with at-risk or marginalized communities. I rarely saw published information in the field that was relevant to the work I do and so I disengaged from the CP field. Last year a CP colleague encouraged me to take another look. I was pleasantly surprised to find a growing body of literature on practitioner work including testimonies of CPs in government and politics.

Reconciling my CP values with a career in government is a daily struggle. I credit my ability to navigate these last ten years to the foundation that I gained from my CP training. What keeps me motivated in government is knowing that the CP skills and values that I employ have a positive impact on the lives of Canadians, one project at a time.

### **Purnima Sundar**

It is hard to believe that I began my undergrad 17 years ago. I entered the psychology program in 1993 at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario and at the time I was not fully aware of its experimental focus and its intense emphasis on brain and behaviour. Although I enjoyed learning about a number of aspects related to animal and undergraduate behaviour, for some reason the program never felt comfortable. I could not see its relevance to people's everyday lives. I tried to salvage my four years (with some resistance from administration) by carving out a thesis project with a clinical psychologist and researcher in child and youth mental health. His work focused on the role of school based conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in reducing aggressive behaviours in children. I found this work enjoyable and learned a lot, but still was not sure what I wanted to do next.

I took a year off to explore my options. I looked at a number of different graduate programs, but the one that seemed most interesting was the CP program at WLU. While I was not entirely sure what

“community psychology” was, it felt more in line with my interests than the rat studies of my undergraduate years. After only one week in the program I was elated; I felt like I could “breathe” for the first time. My values were in sync with the program and the material I was learning about. While we came from very different backgrounds, I felt a real kinship with my new colleagues with whom I shared interests in health, community mental health, sustainability, diversity and equity, and a commitment to promoting social justice. I learned how to put words to things that had always just felt right (or not-so-right) at a gut level regarding inequity and marginalization. Equally important, I learned that although we all shared the goal of pushing forward a social justice agenda, it can sometimes be difficult to live our values, as these do not always line up with the conditions and constraints of real life.

After graduating from the CP program I took a job with an independent, non-profit organization that does program evaluation and research in the human services (Centre for Community-Based Research). Here, I was able to link my CP values to what I felt was important work with people who had been marginalized based on their gender, race, mental health and/or socioeconomic status. In graduate school, I had learned about the theory and goals of a participatory, action-oriented approach to evaluation and research, and at this organization I was now able to put these ideas into practice in a number of topic areas (e.g., immigration/settlement, family support, mental health). I honed my skills in a range of methods, and enjoyed taking part in several projects. After doing this work for two years, I was ready to play a more active role in the conceptualization of projects so I began to explore doctoral programs.

At the time, there were no English language CP doctoral programs in Canada and so I made the decision to pursue a PhD in the Faculty of Social Work at WLU. The community development/social planning stream available in this program overlapped well with CP values and concepts, and it was a good fit with my interests and experiences. My interest in race equity issues and their influence on mental health culminated in my dissertation that explored how second-generation South Asian Canadian youth view themselves, both as members of Canadian mainstream and of a particular racial/ethnic group, and how these identities influence their mental health. The Social Work PhD program allowed me to learn in practical terms how to use evaluation and research as a tool for social change. I started to teach and publish, and began to explore a future in

academia.

During this time, my personal circumstances were changing. My partner and I had moved from Southern to Eastern Ontario, and our first daughter was born. Juggling motherhood, completing a dissertation and adjusting to life in a new city was both exciting and exhausting. Despite this, I took on my next challenge: an academic position at one of the local universities. I loved teaching and was starting to develop an interesting program of research, but the department in which I worked was unhealthy. I found that despite an explicit commitment to addressing racism, sexism and classism, some of my colleagues’ behaviours were inconsistent with these values. I struggled with the knowledge that people who appeared to be interested in promoting social justice values were not able to demonstrate these values on a daily basis with their co-workers and students. I tried to stay grounded, however, by connecting with like-minded colleagues and friends, and through community volunteer work.

When my term was ending at the university, I began to explore options outside of academia, specifically in the area of program evaluation, as I feel strongly that the process of research/evaluation is critical in facilitating social change. In 2008, I joined the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario as an Evaluation and Research Consultant. We are funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and work to bring people and knowledge together in order to promote the best mental health for children, youth and their families. My work is varied: I consult with child and youth mental health service organizations to support them in using evaluation and research to make their services more useful and relevant to their users; I train service providers and managers working in the field to promote the uptake and evaluation of evidence-informed practices; as well, I maintain a small program of research looking at how we might make services and supports more appropriate for racially/ethnically diverse young people with mental health challenges and their families. In all of these activities, my emphasis is on equity, health promotion, prevention and social justice, all of which contribute to the overall mental health of children and youth.

My time in the community psychology program provided me with a strong foundation in critical thinking as well as practical training in evaluation and research, teaching and facilitation. These skills have allowed me to work in a number of positions: researcher, teacher, and consultant. Moreover, it

helped me to see the importance of striving to link my values to the work that I do every day. With these tools and values, I hope to make a positive contribution to the mental health and well-being of families in our communities and the practitioners who support them.

### Stephanie Austin

I spent my undergraduate years trying to find a sense of deeper significance in the discipline of psychology. I was unable and unwilling to accept that theories of learning, for example, were limited to behavioural notions of stimulus/response alone. I was insatiably curious for more and unsatisfied with the conventional approaches to psychological theory, methods and practices.

The CP program at WLU was the beginning of an important reclaiming of the discipline of psychology for me. In my two years in CP, I connected with the values of equity and social justice and the methodologies of community engagement and mobilization. This approach to psychology gave me a framework for understanding the world and our role as agents of change. I had the pleasure of working with one of CP's great contemporary thinkers, Isaac Prilleltensky. Working with Isaac also introduced me to critical psychology and allowed me to nurture my passion for inspiring change in a discipline that seemed to be neglecting its moral and political underpinnings thereby making it less socially engaged and useful.

I continued my doctoral studies in critical psychology in a department that had a small history and theory of psychology stream. I then went back to doing more applied research in communities when I did my postdoctoral research fellowship with the Ontario Breast Cancer Community Research Initiative (OBCCRI). Interestingly, many CP graduates from the WLU program already worked at the OBCCRI when I arrived. I was thrilled to work with like-minded colleagues to better understand and meet the needs of marginalized groups of women living with breast cancer. After 8 years away, I moved back to Ottawa to be closer to my family, friends, and the beautiful natural environment of the Gatineau Hills of Québec.

I was caught totally by surprise with an offer to do a contract at the Bureau of Women's Health and Gender Analysis at Health Canada. I have been there, on and off, for 6 years. I have also had two children during this time and have had the pleasure of spending a year at home with each of them. Since starting to work for the government, I have been fortunate to do work that is guided by the strategic

objective of reducing health inequalities and inequities in Canada. While this is a vast objective that often feels quite out of reach, it is one that allows me to sleep deeply at night and jump up with excitement in the morning. It is valuable and meaningful work that is perfectly aligned with my CP values and training.

The skills I acquired in the CP program were primarily reading, writing, analysis, and critical thinking, and I apply these every day in my work. For example, I sat on the editorial board for a publication called *The human face of mental health and mental illness in Canada, 2006*. We wanted to make sure that the information contained in this report was sex and gender sensitive and also touched on other important contextual elements that impact the experience of mental health and mental illness in Canada – income, ethnicity, Aboriginal status, etc. Working to ensure a balance of “just the facts” at a very broad national level and “deep analysis” that connects with the intimate lives of individuals, families and communities who are affected by these health issues required significant critical thinking and analysis. I was also involved in a project related to developing appropriate measures of health in order to better understand health inequalities and evaluate what interventions can reduce them. This work was specifically related to developing more gender and diversity sensitive health indicators that could tell researchers, community workers or policy makers more about the true picture of health in the population as a whole, but also within and between subpopulations of particular interest.

I have worked extensively in the area of knowledge translation; that is, translating the results and language of academic researchers into relevant, timely and enlightening information that can affect policy making. Advancing issues of women's health or equity in health in the government often takes on a community development nature. My work requires navigating many stages of trust building, communicating across different organizational cultures, and gentle, respectful awareness-raising to show how thinking about equity issues upfront, makes for better policy in the end.

Our emphasis in CP on working with vulnerable communities continues to play an important role in my work. For example, our office has worked closely with partners across Health Canada to develop guidance for industry on the inclusion of women in clinical trials that determine the safety and effectiveness of therapeutic products. Although historically the male norm in research was considered applicable to women, pharmaceutical tragedies such

as diethylstilbestrol (DES) and thalidomide have demonstrated otherwise. The Health Canada Guidance Document on the Inclusion of Women in Clinical Trials was developed in 1997 to encourage the inclusion of all female subjects in all stages of drug development. To update the document we have organized international conferences with scientists, researchers and regulators, we have commissioned a synthesis of current research, policy and regulatory work on the subject, and we have chaired a working group that has begun the revisions and updates. The equity issue that circles back to my CP training is the value of ensuring that both the risks and benefits of research on the safety and effectiveness of therapeutic products are equally shared by the populations who will eventually be using the products. Sometimes, with good intentions, we try to protect vulnerable populations. What we learn in CP, and what we need to continually learn in our working lives, is that we need to remain vigilant and critical in how we think about vulnerability because the context is always changing.

### **Theresa Dostaler**

From early on I knew that my self-concept and what makes me feel right with the world is intertwined with my involvement in my community. That being said, when I left my rural Ontario town to attend university I had no aspirations to study community psychology; I had never even heard of it! My formal journey into CP began in my last year of undergraduate studies; this also was the beginning of a continuous struggle between my CP ideals and practice in the real world. I have learned a lot throughout my CP journey.

First, I have learned that relationships are important in a community psychologist's career. By relationships, I am referring to the meaningful interactions we have with others in all academic and professional settings. For example, it was because of my undergraduate advisor that I began to volunteer with the Canadian Mental Health Association on a project working with individuals who were homeless and living in shelters. Through this project, I met others who offered me opportunities that supported my application to the CP master's program at WLU and eventually helped me obtain my first paid employment as a graduate.

Once I entered the CP program at WLU, I became engaged in reflection and collaboration with a small group of people who had the same values as I did, and were willing to think critically about the world around us. This environment helped me solidify concepts and constructs, and gather practical tools

that have been useful ever since. When it came time to complete my MA thesis, I moved back to Ottawa where I completed a participatory process and outcomes evaluation with the Youth Services Bureau's Young Women's Emergency Shelter.

The real challenges began for me after I graduated. I had learned through my studies about the deinstitutionalization process in mental health and was well versed in the paradigm shift to community integration/empowerment. Feeling a little rebellious and with a desire to fight the system from within, I took a position as a research assistant at the Royal Ottawa Hospital in the Schizophrenia Clinic. I wanted to understand the current state in traditional institutions, and how practice fit with my community psychology values. Having discovered that my values did not fit in that institution at that time, I left to become a Community Consultant with the Canadian Mental Health Association where I worked as a project coordinator on homelessness and supportive housing projects.

During this time I was a strong advocate for issues such as the rights of consumers of mental health services and the use of psychotropic medications and electroshock therapy. At the same time, I had a family member who had been a long time consumer of mental health services and whose treatments of choice were pretty much everything I had grown to be sceptical of. This became a pivotal time for reflection in my life, where black and white suddenly all blurred into gray. As a CP student I had attended a support group for families of consumer survivors where parents were adamant about their rights to have a family member unwillingly committed for psychiatric treatment. I remember feeling outraged at the possibility of consumers having their rights taken away. I thought of that meeting years later when my own family member was at risk of hurting herself or others, and my family made the tough decision to keep her safe by committing her to hospital. At work, I felt like a hypocrite. Unable to reconcile my values with the hard reality, I left research and evaluation in mental health and worked for the city of Ottawa as a training coordinator in the Social Housing Branch where I was again faced with reconciling my ideals with the reality around me. This internal conflict was impacting my own mental health and my professional identity.

I had time to think about my career path when I went on maternity leave for my first of three children. During my year off I considered professions where I could live out my values. Given my experience with action research and program evaluation, I pursued a position as Research and Evaluation Officer at the

Ottawa Catholic District School Board. The ease with which I transferred from working in mental health and homelessness to education reaffirmed my belief that the knowledge and skills obtained in CP programs are transferable to other disciplines.

I spent the next seven years working in education, eventually transferring to the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board in order to be closer to my family. My main roles included facilitating knowledge mobilization and knowledge transfer of evidence informed decision making with senior administrators and teachers. I used my networking skills to help found the first Ottawa Region Research Network and I joined the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, where I served as Vice President until 2009. During this tenure, the importance of evaluation skills was affirmed. Community psychologists are required in many fields to help build the capacity of those professionals who want to better understand the effectiveness of their programs.

After having my third child, my husband and I were forced to reflect on both of our careers. As a newly appointed school principal there would be higher demands on his time. Working an hour away from home and travelling frequently for training and conferences was no longer feasible for me. Our kids were affected by our schedules, and we were burnt out. On top of that, I found that I had no time to contribute to my community. Though I had always felt that as an independent consultant I would be selling out on my community psychology values, I left my full-time permanent job in 2009 to become an independent consultant. This most recent transition has led to my final learning, “you can live your community values anywhere!”

I started my own business, completing most of my contracts from home so I can spend more time with my children while taking on diverse projects that align with my values. In less than a year, I have worked with the Congress of Aboriginals National Youth Council to support Aboriginal Youth Staying in School, coordinated a collaborative project with two local universities and nine school boards, worked with the Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative to evaluate an initiative to help teachers improve understanding and awareness of Aboriginal culture, and continued to work with school boards to help build capacity for using data for Evidence Informed Decision Making.

Most importantly, I have had more time to be involved in my community. I have started coaching figure skating again, and am a member of the

“Friends of Centre Hastings” Board of Directors, a not for profit run by community members to raise money for the local high school. I sit on numerous local boards and committees, all aimed at improving the community in which we live. Finally, being a hockey mom myself, and motivated by curiosity and fun, I decided to test the ability of social media to create a community across Canada. So, using my CP skills, I founded a virtual community of hockey moms in Canada. We now have over 6,000 moms, the largest such community in the world.

Though I no longer have an “official sounding” title, and no one covers my expenses for conferences and training, I have never felt that my skills and my values have been more useful. By doing what I am doing, choosing projects that mean something to me, and making a difference in my community, I feel that I am making more of an impact than ever before.

### Conclusion

Meissen (2009) has said that CP attracts individuals with strong values who are passionate about their communities. We agree. We each identified a strong value fit with CP, and have fond memories of our CP training, where we articulated our values and gained skills that we could apply in different types of employment. As well, we have all experienced the challenge of reconciling our values with our jobs in the “real world”.

Our unique career paths also demonstrate that “training in CP opens doors to many and diverse career trajectories” (Kuperminc, 2009, p. 19). Our narratives show that CP Practice is as much about a community psychologist’s own passions, interests and life experiences as it is about the discipline. Overall we feel that our CP program provided us with transferable skills and experiences that led us to meaningful employment opportunities in line with our interests, even if the jobs did not initially appear to be a natural CP fit. Our respective professional experiences illustrate Perkins’ (2009) view that “CP is not only a professional and scientific discipline. It is also an intellectual/value orientation that is applicable to virtually any field or profession.” (p.2).

Of the CP competencies and skills itemized by Dziadkowiec & Jimenez (2009) and Chun (2009), we have found the following useful in our own career paths: action research, advocacy, capacity building, collaboration/consultation, communication, community development, critical thinking/analysis, evidence based decision-making, facilitation, implementation of community projects and grants, organizational assessment/development, prevention and intervention techniques and strategies,



professional judgement, program evaluation, policy development, relationship building, report writing, research, strategic planning, teaching/training, leadership/supervisory skills, resource development, and service delivery/planning/management.

Graduate CP programs would do well to continue to reinforce the intellectual/value orientation that underlies CP. They can do this by demonstrating what these values are in tangible terms. For example, providing experiences to students that demonstrate experientially what it means to *value diversity* and to promote *social justice*, how and why we do *collaborative* work, and how to *engage citizens* in their community change. In addition to the *program development* and *research skills* typically emphasized in CP programs, our experiences show that *collaboration*, *consultation*, *knowledge translation*, and *advocacy* are key skills in practitioner work. CP training should continue to promote these skills by showcasing how the skills are being used in less traditional CP settings, for example, by having CP guest lecturers speak about their work in diverse practice settings, by including practica in diverse CP practice settings, and by supporting CP faculty and students to do research that promotes CP innovation in non-traditional practice settings. Finally, CP programs would benefit from additional research on the diverse settings in which graduates apply their skills, competencies and values. The findings of such research should be linked back to training programs to ensure that the latter are dynamic, relevant, and well suited to the needs of students, communities, and organisations. Properly equipped, CP graduates will continue to make meaningful contributions toward social justice in their professional lives and in their communities, wherever they may be.

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